

"MORCOVE MAROONED!"

Betty Barton & Co. In a Brilliant New
Desert Island Adventure Serial

THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 370. Vol. 15.
Week Ending
AUG. 29th, 1936

EVERY 2^D SATURDAY

Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



CHAOS IN CLASS

Read about this surprising episode in the grand long complete Cliff House School story which appears inside

FOUR FINE STORIES AND FOUR PAGES OF ARTICLES

Grand Long Complete Cliff House School Story, Featuring Barbara Redfern & Co., Who Are—



Friction in the Form

Illustrations by T. Laidler

SCRATCH! Scratch! Scratch! Rarely was it that the Fourth Form at Cliff House School was so demurely industrious.

Even Miss Charmant, its usual Form-mistress, whom the Fourth really adored, might have been astonished, at that moment, at the industry of her far-from-ruly class. For once the Fourth looked as if it was really enjoying work.

And yet the Fourth wasn't. As a whole, the Fourth Formers loathed essays, which was what they were doing now. They loathed essays that concerned botany almost as much as they loathed mathematics, and yet it was a botany essay they were writing.

Amazing, too, that no one was trying to take any advantage of Stella Stone, who, so far from keeping her eye upon her class, was worriedly knitting her brows over a pile of papers at the Form-mistress's desk, with an occasional glance up to see that everyone was occupied.

But Stella was the secret of the Fourth's angelic behaviour that afternoon. If there were one person in the school the Fourth adored even above their cherished Miss Charmant—still away on a protracted holiday—it was Stella Stone.

In the Lower School, at least, the graceful head girl was the heroine, and the idol of every girl. She was always strictly fair, always just, always ready to help and lend an ear to their troubles; always ready, too, to lend a helping hand, at whatever sacrifice or cost to herself.

But there was another reason for the Fourth's placidity this afternoon. That reason was presented by the papers over which Stella was now poring. Everyone knew, to her great regret, that this

was Stella's last term at Cliff House. But everyone also knew that Stella was making a terrific effort to win the veterinary diploma at the examination which was to take place in a very short time.

The gaining or the losing of that diploma could make or mar the future of Stella Stone when she left school, and because time was precious and Stella had so many other duties to carry out as captain of the school, she was cramming in every possible moment.

She was cramming now—with Miss Primrose's special permission, of course—while the Fourth worked on.

Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth, looked at her chum, Mabel Lynn, and smiled.

"Stella's still at it," she whispered. "Must be dreadful stuff to get into your head, from the look on her face," Mabs whispered back, and plunged back into her essay as Stella swept a glance towards her.

By

HILDA RICHARDS

A HELPLESS victim of her enemy's scheming, Stella Stone is fighting a desperate battle to achieve her dearest ambition—in spite of the heart-breaking difficulties which face her. Only to Babs & Co. can she look for help—and they are determined not to fail her!

Standing BY STELLA

Bessie Bunter, in the front row, restlessly shifted her bulk to a more comfortable position, and, tucking her feet under the desk, accidentally kicked the foot of Lydia Crossendale, who sat in the desk behind her.

Lydia gave a sharp exclamation.

"You fat idiot!"

"Please!" Stella begged. "Lydia, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Lydia.

"Then please get on with your work," Lydia scowled. Not at any time did she take kindly to reprimands, though many another prefect would have "lined" her on the spot.

Some revenge seemed indicated. She had picked up her pen, and now advanced it towards the plump lobe of Bessie's exceedingly pink and tempting ear.

"Lydia!" hissed Clara Trevlyn.

But Lydia took no notice. Nearer went the pen—half an inch; a quarter of an inch—

"Look out, Bessie!" hissed Margot Lautham, behind her.

That caused it. Round like a jack-in-the-box twisted Bessie's head, jabbing against the point of the pen, which buried itself in her lobe. Up from Bessie went a howl!

"Wow, wow, wow! I'm stung! I'm poisoned! Wow!"

"Bessie!" called Stella. And then "Lydia!"

For Stella, just in the nick of time, had seen that pen as it was whisked out of sight.

"Wow-wow! Oh, my ear!" Bessie yelled. "I'm bitten! I'm deaf! Oh, crumbs!"

"Bessie, be silent, please! Lydia, stand up!"

Lydia mutinously stood up.

"That was a very unkind and very spiteful thing to do," Stella said. "Why do you do it, Lydia?"

Lydia looked sulky.
"It was a— a joke," she said.
"Indeed! Then," Stella said, "you must be taught, Lydia, to curb your sense of humour in class. Take fifty lines."

Lydia sat down and scowled vindictively at Stella.

Brenda Fallace, the slow, stolid-looking girl, three desks away from Lydia, was glaring at Lydia. Brenda positively worshipped Stella Stone.

Very sweet, very generous, had Stella been to Brenda these last few days. So sweet, indeed, that she had courted Miss Primrose's most serious displeasure for her sake.

Brenda, incapable as she was of many of the finer emotions, nevertheless felt a burning sense of gratitude to Stella, and for Stella's sake would have gone through fire and water.

Adversely, Brenda had rather fallen out with Lydia Crossendale this term, perhaps realising at last that Lydia, her former crony, was exercising an influence on her that was not to her advantage. The sight of Lydia's grimace, expressing, as it did, so much scorn and contempt for her idol, filled Brenda with fury.

"Cat!" she hissed.

Lydia, turning, made a face.

Brenda's lips set. Her greeny-grey eyes gleamed. There was a stub of pencil on Brenda's desk. She picked it up, pressing it like a dart, to fling it across the room.

Unforgotten it was, indeed, for Brenda at that moment that the classroom door should swing open, and in should step another figure—a rather angular, acid-faced girl, who wore pince-nez. The figure was that of Sarah Harrigan, the disliked prefect of the Sixth Form, Stella's most virulent enemy.

"Brenda!" she snapped. "Take a hundred lines!"

Everyone stared. Brenda, caught in the act, flushed. Stella, interrupted once more in her studies, turned with a frown.

"Just a minute, Sarah!" she said. "I must remind you that I am in charge of this class. Brenda, stand up. What are you doing?"

"But—" began Sarah, in quarrelsome tones.

"One moment, Sarah!" Stella said coldly. "Brenda!"

Brenda, flushing, stood up.
"I'm sorry!" she said. "I was going to throw a pencil at Lydia."

"Thank you! You will take twenty-five lines," Stella said, and there was a murmur. "Please sit down! Girls, get on with your work, please! Sarah, if you have anything to say—"

But Sarah had something to say. Her face was a mask of rage. Sarah knew very well she was exceeding her powers in interfering with a class that was in Stella's charge.

But that mattered nothing to Sarah. She hated Stella, and next to Stella, she hated Brenda Fallace, on whose account there had been many bitter clashes between her and the school captain these last few days.

"I gave her a hundred lines," Sarah said. "I insist that that punishment stands!"

"Brenda will take the lines I gave her," Stella returned quietly.

There was another murmur—a gleeful murmur this time.

Stella, as if the incident were closed, plunged into her work again. Sarah found herself confronted by a set of grinning faces.

But she stood her ground. Fury filled her. She saw that she had the majority of the Form against her. She caught the grin on Clara Trevlyn's face and scowled. She caught the approving nod of Lydia's head, and stood still.

Lydia was prepared, obsequiously, to back her up, and anyone who would back her up against Stella was a very welcome aide-de-camp to Sarah Harrigan at that moment. Moreover, Stella had not yet asked her on what account she had come to the Form-room.

Sarah's eyes glittered. Not now should Stella know that. Sarah, indeed, much against her own inclination, had been dispatched to the Fourth Form Room by the kindly Miss Primrose, who, out of consideration for Stella, had sent her along to ask Stella if she could be of any assistance.

Stella, of course, believed that she had just barged in to make a rumpus—well, let Stella think that. Her eyes fastened upon Clara.

"Clara, stand up!"

"Clara looked at Stella.

"Stella, am I to stand up?"

"You will remain seated," Stella left her desk. Her face was pink now; there was a hint of anger in her blue eyes. "Sarah, for the last time," she said. "I insist you leave this room! Immediately!"

"Don't you, Sarah!" cried Lydia Crossendale.

"Lydia, take twenty-five lines!" Stella snapped.

"Yes; and jolly well take that, into the bargain!" And Clara lunged a pellet at Lydia, which hit her under the ear. "Stella's in charge here!"

"Hurrah!"

Excitement was growing. Tempers were getting hot. Babs & Co., indignant, were up in arms. Lydia rose.

Deliberately she turned, aiming back

a rubber at Clara Trevlyn. It missed Clara and struck Brenda Fallace. In a moment Brenda was on her feet.

"Why, you—you cat!"
"Silence!" cried Babs. "Oh, you idiots!"

But the damage was done then. If Sarah's idea had been to create a scene in the Form-room she had most certainly succeeded.

Lydia, jumping up in her seat, wheeled round.

"Three cheers for Sarah!" she cried.

Rosa Rodworth grinned. Freda Ferriers sent up a cheer in a piping voice. Frances Frost, always on the side of anyone who was up against Babs & Co., waved an arm. Eleanor Storke added to the general din by banging with a ruler upon her desk. Stella turned desperately:

"Girls—"

And then whispers, growing to a sibilant hiss:

"Cave! Primmy!"

Miss Primrose, the headmistress herself. She stood there, scandalised, looking in at the door. As if the Form had been stricken by a spell, a sudden dreadful silence descended.

"Upon my word!" Miss Primrose seemed to be gasping for breath.

"Stella!" she cried.

Stella was pale.

"You are in charge of this class, I believe."

"Yes, Miss Primrose."

"What, then, is the meaning of the unearthly din I heard as I came along the corridor?"

A breathless, electric pause. Stella gulped. She looked at Sarah.

"I'm sorry, Miss Primrose—" She stopped. Hard it was for Stella to tell tales, even though it meant herself getting into a scrape. "You see—"

Brenda Fallace suddenly stood up.

"Miss Primrose—"

"Brenda, I am not talking to you."
"No; but I must explain," Brenda went on. "Stella won't speak because she's afraid of sneaking. Well, it wasn't Stella's fault. It was Sarah Harrigan's. It was Sarah Harrigan who caused the row!"

"What's Sarah—"



SARAH'S visitor languidly produced a five-pound note. "It's yours," she drawled, "if Stella Stone fails in her examination." Sarah's eyes gleamed. She meant to earn that money.

"That is untrue, Miss Primrose," Sarah put in smoothly. "Acting upon your instructions, Miss Primrose, I came to report to Stella. Immediately I arrived in the class-room I discovered Brenda Fallace in the act of throwing a missile across the class-room. Very properly I punished her."

Stella bit her lip. "Stella," went on Sarah, "thought fit to interfere. Stella immediately rounded upon me, counselling the imposition I had given Brenda and telling me to mind my own business."

Miss Primrose looked horrified. In bewilderment her gaze went to Stella. "Thank you!" she said, in a strained voice. She looked very agitated. "This—this—I must confess, Stella, I am surprised." She paused, looking over the class, most of whom were glowering indignantly. "Stella," she said, "will you have the goodness to go to my study? Sarah, you will take charge here till Stella comes back."

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Sarah said purringly.

And a low murmur went up from the incensed class.

While Stella, with a bitter glance in her rival's direction, followed the headmistress through the doorway.



A Visitor for Sarah

"AND now," Sarah said, with her most unpleasant smile, "I'll have a little order from you kids. Barbara Redfern, take twenty-five lines for a start for glaring at me. Clara Trevlyn, fifty for pulling a face. Bessie Bunter, you can take twenty-five for eating sweets. Jemima, if I see you fiddling with that ridiculous eyeglass of yours again, I shall detain you. As it is, take fifty lines."

In the Fourth Form class-room there was a gasp that was almost a hiss. Sarah, having vanquished Stella, obviously felt that the game was in her hands; was out to be as unpleasant as possible.

"Lydia," she said, "Yes?" Lydia asked, straightening up. "You may come out in front of the class and tidy up the mess Stella has left here."

The hiss became a murmur at that. Eyes travelled to Barbara Redfern. As captain of the Form, Babs was also head monitor. Such duties, as a rule, Sarah was not only damaging Babs' prestige in the Form, she was also striking a direct blow at her authority. Babs, her face suddenly crimson, stood up.

"Sarah, please—"
"Sit down!"
"But I must say—"
"Fifty lines!"
"Oh, chuck it!" Clara broke out angrily.

"Clara, how dare you! Take a hundred lines!"

"O.K. I'll take them!" Clara stood up now, her face suffused with wrath. "But hold on!" she cried warningly. "You may be in charge here, Sarah, but there are some things you can't do."

Sarah's lips set in trap-like lines. "Clara, you are talking to me?"
"Am I?" Clara said defiantly.
"Consider yourself detained!"
"I," Clara said, between her teeth, "consider myself nothing of the kind!

And if you want to enforce that detention, Sarah Harrigan, we'll both jolly well go to the Head. We've rights in the Fourth Form, Sarah, as Miss Primrose has reminded you. When you ignore those rights, then it's up to us to stick up for them."

"Good old Clara!"
"Be a sport, Sarah!"
"Yes, rather, you know!"

Lydia grinned. She was enjoying it. It was quite plain to the snob of the Fourth that Sarah had singled her out as a foil against Babs & Co. Well, that suited her.

"Look here—" Sarah raved.
"Yes; give her a chance!" Lydia sprang to her feet. "Dash it all!" she cried. "You talk about rights and privileges—but what about Sarah? Sarah's been put in charge of this Form."

"Booh!"
"Sit down, Lydia!"
Smack! Sarah broke the pointer with the force with which she brought it down upon the desk. Her greeny eyes were glittering.

"Barbara Redfern—all of you—you will take an extra fifty lines," she cried, "with the exception of Lydia, Rosa, Freda Ferriers, Frances Frost, Eleanor Storke and"—her eyes flickered a moment—"Diana Royston-Clarke. Now silence, please!"

The wrathful murmur grew louder, however. Sarah's eyes glinted. She looked at the faces of the girls she had named. All of them were smiling. A good move that, thought Sarah, getting the girls who were the enemies of Babs & Co. on her side.
"I tell you—" shouted Clara.
"Oh, shut up!" howled Freda Ferriers.

And then there was silence. For the door came open. Into the room came Stella—Stella looking a trifle white, her lips twitching a little. Easy to see that Stella had had a far from pleasant time with the headmistress, and Sarah, who read the signs aright, smiled sneeringly. Stella gave her just one glance.

"Thanks! You may go now!"
"Sure?" Sarah asked sweetly. "I can't do anything else? Lydia, you will clear up as I ordered! Good-morning, Stella!"

Stella did not reply. She went to her desk rather slowly, rather wearily, the tired lines in her beautiful face seeming rather accentuated since her return.

Sarah, cock-a-hoop, went out, flinging a significant glance in Lydia's direction as she closed the door. Lydia cheekily rose.

"Lydia, please sit down!" Stella said, with a sharp glance.

Lydia pouted.
"But Sarah told me I was to clear up."

Stella's eyes gleamed. She sat still. "I," she said tartly, "am in charge of this class! While I am in charge, you will do as I say! Now, another interruption from any of you girls, and I shall give you a hundred lines! The lesson will proceed!"

And the lesson, with Lydia & Co. in a decidedly ruffled frame of mind, proceeded.

But it proceeded in a troubled atmosphere. Strife was boiling up in the Fourth Form.

THERE was a smirk of almost savage satisfaction on the face of Sarah Harrigan as she walked off down the corridor.

That, at least, she thought gleefully,

had put one spoke in Stella's wheel! That, at least, had shown her that she couldn't always get her own way, head girl or no head girl! And before she had finished with her—

Sarah's frown became revengeful. Sarah had always coveted Stella's position—had been envious of Stella's popularity. They had never been friends for that reason.

But just now Sarah's hate went deeper than that. For while Stella was preparing to leave Cliff House in triumph—she shouldn't if Sarah knew anything about it—Sarah was very likely to leave it in disgrace long before the end of the term.

Those debts which she had contracted were piling up. Creditors, over-impatient for the money due to them, were beginning to write threatening notes. Unless Sarah could lay her hands on the sum of twenty-two pounds within the very near future, the bomb-shell would explode. Then—

Sarah's eyes gleamed. A few days ago that sum had been within her grasp. By pretending that she was the heroine who had saved the daughter of a certain Mrs. Briggs from drowning, Sarah had been on the point of handling a hundred pounds reward.

It was Stella who, discovering she had not the faintest right to that money, had stepped in and had prevented her from robbing Mrs. Briggs just at the time when Sarah had been congratulating herself that the cheque was as good as hers. And now—

Gloweringly Sarah entered her study. There was a letter on the table. She opened it, and then crushed it in her hand and funged it into the wastepaper-basket.

Another request for money, with the usual threat about taking the matter to Miss Primrose if settlement were not forthcoming within a very short space of time! Hang them! Hang them all!

A knock on the door. Sarah, in a temper, whirled round. Pettishly she snapped a "Come in!" and stared at the girl who entered.

A strange girl, older than Sarah—older by a year, she would have guessed, although in point of years Sarah was the oldest girl in the Sixth. Expensively, almost luxuriously dressed she was.

Sarah paused. The girl nodded composedly.

"Miss Harrigan?" she asked.
"Yes," Sarah said wonderingly; "that is my name."

And her heart beat a little faster. Was this a representative of one of her creditors?

"Thanks. Can I sit down? And would you mind," the girl asked, "shutting the door? I have a little proposition to make to you."

"My name," she went on, "is Doris Grimshaw. That means nothing to you as you have never seen me before. But I know you—or of you," she added. "You deal with Madame Judith, don't you?"

Sarah paled.
"Why—"

"Oh, don't get alarmed!" the other smiled. "I haven't come here to collect her debts or anything. Madame Judith," she explained, "is my aunt—which might tell you that I know quite a lot about you. I gather," Doris added, with a long, searching look, "that you are rather heavily in debt."

Sarah's eyes narrowed.
"Is that anything to do—"

"Please hear me out. I've not, as I said, come here to demand money. I've come," the other added, and again that curious sidelong glance, "to offer you some. I am, in fact, going to offer you

twenty-five pounds if you will do as I want you to do." She opened her bag, displaying a five-pound note. "That's on account," she said. "Apart from that, I will settle up your debt with my aunt."

Sarah's eyes glittered.

"You know Stella Stone?"

Sarah stared. She swung round. The look on her face made the other smile.

"I see," she said softly. "that you do. And you don't like her—eh? Well, listen! Perhaps you also know that Stella Stone is studying for a special examination which takes place in three weeks' time. I'm not going to give you my reasons—just yet. But I've a particular wish that when Stella Stone goes in for that examination, she should fail! You understand?"

Sarah started.

"You mean—"

"I mean," the other said, "that it's up to you! Make it impossible for Stella to win! Make it impossible, if you like, for her to study in peace! There's five pounds on account. That will help you along. The day Stella Stone loses that examination, there'll be another twenty waiting for you! Agreed?"

Agreed! Sarah gulped. She looked at Doris Grimshaw. Almost dazedly she nodded her head. Then, with a grin, she picked up the five-pound note, creasing it into folds in her slim fingers.

"You may," she said grimly, "rely upon me!"



Interruptions

"STELLA!" Stella Stone looked up. She smiled faintly.

"Yes, Barbara?"

It was ten minutes past twelve. The Fourth Form had been dismissed at noon for the midday break, but Stella Stone, working busily, with one anxious eye upon the class, had continued on.

"I—I just looked back," Babs blurted, "to—to see if I could do anything. Stella? Couldn't I help you to take your books along?"

"Thank you, Barbara! That is very thoughtful of you!" Stella acknowledged gratefully. "Would you really mind? There are rather a lot of them, aren't there?" And she smiled ruefully at the pile in front of her. "Take the Animal Anatomy there, will you, Barbara, and the veterinary encyclopedia. I'll bring the rest along."

Babs smiled willingly. Almost eagerly she took the books Stella indicated. They were heavy books, thick too. The very feel of them suggested masses of knowledge that was bewildering. Fancy poor old Stella having to wade through all this!

Together they went along to the captain's study. Stella, entering after Babs, with her notebook in her hand, smiled her thanks.

"That was very nice of you, Barbara!" she said.

"There—there's nothing else I can do?" Babs asked.

"No, thank you!"

Babs went out. Stella, shaking her head a little, sat down at her table. No time to-day for dinner. She must miss that—making up with a hasty sandwich or something later on. She had lost precious time. Every fleeting second counted now. She had so much to do—so much—

But she'd do it. She must do it!



STAGGERING from Stella's thrust, Sarah Harrigan collided heavily with someone in the corridor. A horrified exclamation told them the worst. It was Miss Primrose!

It was her one chance—her only hope. If she failed to get that diploma when she sat for the exam, then she would have lost the greatest opportunity of her life.

For other girls were in the running for that post of assistant managers to Sir Absalom Whittier. Other competitors were striving and toiling just as anxiously as she. Providing she got through, the job was hers. If not—

But "not" in a case like this was a word which did not exist for Stella Stone. She had grit. Her fierce determination to get there urged her on, banishing weariness. In a few more moments she was immersed once again in her studies. Then came a tap at the door.

Stella sighed.

"Yes? Come in!"

It was Lydia Crossendale.

"Please, Stella," she asked, "was it twenty-five or fifty lines you gave me this morning?"

"It was fifty," Stella said stiffly.

"Oh! When do you want them in by?"

"After tea."

Lydia went out. Stella frowned a little. Now where was she? But hardly had she started again than there was another tap. This time it was Freda Ferriers.

"Please, Stella, did you give me fifty or a hundred lines this morning?" Stella's eyes gleamed.

"You know perfectly well, Freda. I gave you fifty. Now, please go. I'm busy."

Freda went. Five minutes went by. Stella, a little jumpy, was working out a table of temperatures when—

Tap!

"Please, Stella—" Frances Frost purred, "when will you want my lines?"

Stella put down her pen.

"Is this," she asked, "a conspiracy?" Frances' eyes opened wide.

"A conspiracy? Stella—oh, how could you say that? You didn't give me a time, you know. I asked Sarah, and Sarah said I'd better come and see you."

"Then please," Stella said with a flash of temper, "kindly request Sarah to deal with the matter herself. She is duty perfect for the day. She has a list of all impositions. Now please go away."

Frances disappeared, and with tight lips Stella turned to her work again. Half-past twelve. She had done practically nothing.

There was another rap.

Eleanor Stokes it was this time. She looked suitably demure.

"Please, Stella, Sarah says you didn't tell her how many lines—Oh crumbs!" The last remark was cut off as Stella thrust the girl outside and slammed the door. Tight lipped and trembling she went back to her work.

But it was no good. Twice, three times more she was interrupted.

What with the need for urgency and the continual interruptions, Stella was almost trembling when she heard the sound of the gong.

Thank goodness! she thought. Now, at least, she would be able to work for half an hour in complete peace.

But Stella didn't know Sarah.

Sarah, in Stella's absence, was at the head of the Fourth Form table in dining-hall that dinner-time.

Sarah was grinning. Very pleased and very smug Sarah was feeling. The five-pound note in her pocket had reduced her worries for the time being, and the reports she had received from Lydia about Stella's baiting had given her cause for the greatest satisfaction. Her eyes fastened upon Barbara Redfern.

"Barbara."
 "Yes, Sarah?"
 "Will you please go along and tell Stella that Miss Bullivant wants her immediately after dinner."
 "But won't Stella be having dinner herself?"
 "I don't think," Sarah purred, "Stella will be in her own study. Please hurry, Barbara."

Babs rose from her seat. She glanced rather sharply at Sarah. How did that girl know that Stella would be in her study? She caught the grin on the face of Lydia as she went off, the laughing light in Rosa Rodworth's eyes. They knew, of course, that Sarah had deliberately delayed sending that message to interrupt Stella during her lunch-hour studies. But Babs didn't.

Nevertheless, Babs did not feel quite easy in her mind. Such a request during a meal was unusual, to say the least of it. Rather timidly she tapped at the door.

From inside came a sigh.
 But there was no reply.
 Babs tapped again. And again.
 A fourth time she tapped. Then, with a suddenness that was startling, the door was wrenched open. Stella, with a furiously angry look upon her face, almost trembling with indignation, confronted her.

"Now what—?" she cried, and then stopped. "Barbara, you!" she exclaimed in a changed voice. "What is it?"

"Oh, Stella, I'm sorry," Babs said hurriedly, but Sarah—
 "Sarah!" Stella's lips came together.
 "Come in, Barbara!" she said. "Sit down, please." She looked at her work, and shook her head. Babs noticed that she was twisting her fingers as they rested in her lap—a sure sign that Stella was nervously strung-up. "What," she asked, "has Sarah got to say this time?"

Babs told her.
 "I see!" Stella nodded quietly, but a little bitterly. "A message she could easily have given me before dinner," she said. "Oh, Barbara!" And for an instant there was such weariness, such hopelessness in that beloved voice that Babs' heart smote her. "No, I don't blame you," she added, meeting the Fourth Form's look, "but unless I'm very much mistaken, Sarah is working to a deliberate plan to annoy me."

"Since I left your class-room I haven't done a thing—not a single thing!" Stella went on feverishly, "and you do know, don't you, Barbara, that if I'm to win that examination it means I have to put in every spare moment of my time. It's getting very difficult. Please, Barbara, if you can prevent these girls interrupting, do so, will you?"

Babs promised. She promised almost fiercely. What a cat Sarah Harrigan was! Squared. A rather dangerous look came into her eyes.
 Sarah glanced at her when she re-entered the dining-hall.

"You found Stella, Barbara? You gave her my message?"
 "Yes," Babs said, tight-lipped.
 "Thank you! But I should," Sarah said thoughtfully, "have told Stella that Miss Bullivant will see her in her study. Miss Bullivant made a particular point of that. Mabel Lynn!"

Mabs looked up.
 "When you have finished your sweet, will you go along and tell Stella that?"
 Babs' lips compressed. If she could see Mabs' Cupid she was too near Sarah to make a whispered aside. A sudden gleam came into her eyes.

She took up the sugar sifter and sprinkled it over her pudding. But if Sarah had been watching—which she was not—she would have seen that more than a fair proportion of that sugar went, not over Babs' sweet but over the tablecloth at the side of her plate.

Very unobtrusively Babs put the sifter back. Idly, while she forked her pudding with her right hand, she traced a message in the sifted sugar with her left. That message read:

"Obey! But don't worry Stella."

Then, under the table she nudged Mabs with her foot, directing her attention with a glance at the message she had written.

Mabs glanced at it. She glanced at Mabs for a chance for explanation but the look she read in Babs' eyes told her that something was afoot. Almost imperceptibly she nodded her head. Mabs understood. Rather lingeringly she hung out her sweet while Babs, with a careless sweep of her hand, obliterated all trace of her message entirely.

Sarah glanced at her.
 "Mabel, you are taking your time. Don't forget I have given you an errand."

"No, Sarah," Mabs said.
 She rose. Again Lydia & Co. chuckled as she went out of the room. But Mabs did not go to Stella's study. She went to the Sixth Form corridor, lingered there for five minutes to stare out of the window, and then slowly retraced her steps. Sarah smirked.

"What did Stella say?"
 "She didn't," Mabs replied, "say anything, Sarah." Which, of course, was perfectly true.

Sarah's lips twisted into a sourly satisfied smile. She interpreted that statement, of course, as meaning that Stella was too fed-up and exasperated even to reply.

Actually, however, Stella had won a good twenty minutes' respite.
 The Gong heralding the end of dinner rang out. Sarah, having her own duty to attend to, rustled off. Stella also had duties, and, with a tired smile, put her work away and went off in search of Miss Bullivant, to whom she was to report.

In Study No. 4, however, Babs, Clara, Mabs, Jemima, and Leila Carroll, held an indignation meeting.

"Sarah's baiting Stella," Babs said.
 "She's just trying to make it impossible for her to get on with her swotting. Well, we know how up against it Stella is, and we've jolly well got to keep our eyes open and make it impossible for Sarah to bait Stella. Watch Lydia. Watch Rosa and the rest. Meantime—"Babs' eyes gleamed—"Stella will be free the second lesson this afternoon. Sarah will also be free. The means—"

"That means, I guess," Leila Carroll said, "that Sarah will use all her time to make herself a nuisance to Stella."
 "Exactly!"

"Then," Babs said, "how are we going to prevent that?"
 Prevent it, somehow, they had to. The suggestion came from Jemima.

"Second lesson," she said thoughtfully, "is drill, isn't it? Drill," she added thoughtfully, "in place of botany, which, by all the laws of the merry old Medes and the puffed-up Persians, our own admirable charmer should be taking, if she were here. Tush, henchmen, 'tis a shame to exchange drill for botany with all the old statements and so forth withering for a little attention."

They all stared.
 "Jimmy, what are you getting at?"
 "Just," Jemima smiled, "this! Sarah considers herself a bit of a merry old expert on botany, doesn't she? Now, don't you think if Miss Primrose asked her, that Sarah would just jump at the once-in-a-lifetime chance of conducting the Fourth Form round the rambling old countryside and pointing out the beauties of Nature, and so forth? I mean to say, somebody's only got to put that nifty notion into Primmy's old bonnet, and the thing's done. Up the captain of the Fourth Form, what? Let Barbara speak!"

Babs laughed.
 "Ripping notion. I'll go now."
 And Babs did—at once, her face exultant. She found Miss Primrose in with Stella Stone, Stella looking a little flushed and uneasy. The headmistress frowned.

"Well, Barbara, what is it?"
 "I—I came to—to make a suggestion, Miss Primrose," Barbara said, "about botany. I think Stella will bear me out when I say that the Fourth Form is not well up in botany. We—we had an essay on the subject this morning, didn't we, Stella?" Babs added meekly.
 Miss Primrose frowned.

"I am glad," she said, with a little asperity, "to hear that the Form realises its shortcomings, Barbara. But instruction in botany, I am afraid, is out of the question until Miss Charmant comes back."

Yes, Miss Primrose; that's what we've been realising," Babs replied sadly. "But a few of the girls got together during break, and if you won't think it impertinent, Miss Primrose, they've got a suggestion to offer. Second lesson is drill, as you know. But the girls all prefer botany, and as Sarah Harrigan is so well up in it, they thought perhaps you might let Sarah to take the Fourth Form for a botany ramble."

"Stella started a little. She looked quickly at Babs' cherubic face.

Babs, indeed, was looking altogether too angelic as she made that request—a fact which completely deceived Primmy, but which by no means deceived Stella, who happened to know the girls in her charge very much better than her superior. Miss Primrose, indeed, looked pleased.

"Well, that is certainly a suggestion," she said, "a very, very good suggestion. Of course—yes! I think it may be arranged. Thank you, Barbara—thank you very much indeed. You may go. Yes, Stella!" she added, as the captain made a murmur.

"I was wondering, Miss Primrose, if, as the Fourth is going on this ramble, I might have Barbara to help me during the lesson with addressing the envelopes to visitors for the forthcoming Yousers Day," Stella murmured. "Barbara is better up in botany than most of the class. I am sure that she could have very little to learn."

"Yes, of course, of course!" Miss Primrose beamed. "Most certainly, Stella, you may have Barbara. Barbara, you are excused the lesson," she added. "Thank you, Stella. Will you please send Sarah to me? That will be all now."

Stella nodded. She went out with Babs into the passage. Babs smiled.
 "Don't you think," she asked, "it is a good idea, Stella?"

Stella grinned.
 "I think," she said, "that it's a very arful idea, Barbara. 'But—' And she paused. Her smile was rather tremulous. Very lightly she touched Barbara's shoulder. "I think," she added softly, "that you're a brick!"



While Stella Slept

BABS was pleased! Stella was pleased! Babs' chums fairly chortled. But the news that they were to be taken on a botany ramble by Sarah Harrigan was received with mixed feelings by the rest of the Fourth.

Sarah herself was furious, for Sarah had been evolving means for annoying Stella during the hour which would constitute the time occupied by afternoon lessons. Several ideas, in fact, had Sarah mapped out with relish. One, of sending Stella off to Miss Primrose with a faked message. Another, for ringing her up on the telephone. Another, of telling Miss Bullivant that Stella wished to consult her about some obscure mathematical problem.

Just as far as that she had got when Stella had popped her head in at the door to tell her, very sweetly, that Miss Primrose wished to see her. The subsequent announcement of Miss Primrose's, though Sarah had done her best to wangle out of it, had banished her hopes at one fell swoop.

Sarah, of course, had to assent—as if she could have done otherwise! But she left the Head's study in a black mood, convinced in her own mind that Stella, foreseeing her schemes, had artfully arranged it. With herself out of the way, Stella would be left in peace for a whole hour.

But, she told herself, as she left the Head's study, and, in her anger, murmured her thoughts aloud, "wait till I get back, that's all! Just wait till this evening! Then I'll make her squirm!"

But Babs had already realised that Sarah would react in that way. The only way of saving the evening for Stella was to get Sarah out of the way again. How was that to be managed?

There were few problems, however, which, when she put her mind to them, were calculated to baffle Barbara Redfern, and long before a very annoyed and unenthusiastic Fourth Form set out on its "crocodile hop" with a savage and fuming prefect at its head. Barbara Redfern had formulated a plan. As instructed Babs did not go

with them. She went to Stella's study.

Stella had her work all ready for her. "Here you are, Barbara," she said. "I don't think they'll take you long to do. When you've finished them, you can cut off." And then she paused. "Barbara," she added softly, "you're glad to be here—not to be out with Sarah?"

"Oh, Stella, as if you could ask!" Babs flushed. "I guessed you'd prefer this," Stella said. "That is why I asked for you. But quiet, please—won't you? I'm going to be so frightfully busy. I don't seem," she added, with a sigh, "to have been able to make a serious start on my studies at all this term. This is the first real opportunity I've had. You won't interrupt, will you, Barbara?"

As if Babs would! Babs would rather have died than interrupt that afternoon. Quick and skilful as she was, her own task was finished in half an hour. She spent part of the latter half-hour in studying Stella as she worked.

And what frightfully difficult work it must have been to judge by the extremely worried expression on the captain's face; that haggard look which from time to time came into her eyes. That feverish searching of dictionaries and reference books.

Very quietly and unobtrusively Babs slipped out. She made herself a cup of tea and one for Stella. Stella smiled as she slipped it towards her.

"You're a good kid, Barbara," she said gratefully. "Thanks awfully. I really needed this."

"Getting on?" Babs asked anxiously.

"Thanks to you. But I fear I've a lot of leeway to make up."

"You think you—" Babs hesitated. "You think you'll get through, Stella?"

Stella smiled. "If only I'm left alone—yes," she said. "But if I have many more mornings like to-day, I may as well chuck it. Barbara, you've finished the job I gave you?" she asked.

"Yes," Barbara said.

"Good girl! Well, you can go as soon as ever you like."

Babs smiled. She did not go

immediately, however. She walked off down to the school gates. There she waited until Sarah, very hot, dusty, and exceedingly bad-tempered, came tramping through Friarvale Woods at the head of an equally bad-tempered Fourth Form.

The Fourth did not look as if it had been enjoying its afternoon ramble. It had not—most of the girls having collected more lines than knowledge of botany.

Babs slipped into the cycle-shed and shook her head as they streamed past. "Poor old Fourth!" she muttered. "But it's all for the good of the cause." What she did next was for the good of the cause, too. She waited until the crocodile had disappeared into the schoolhouse, then adroitly slipped from her hiding-place.

Sarah, she guessed, would lose no time in the commencement of her reprisals against Stella Stone, and if Stella were to be left in perfect peace, then Sarah had to be removed from the scene of action at once.

Fortunately for her, Babs knew Sarah's one great weakness, and she had planned to exploit it.

Not fifty yards along the road, at the junction, was a public telephone call-box. Thither Babs made her way.

Sarah had hardly turned into her study when Mary Buller came along. She grinned at the sour expression on Sarah's face.

"Looks as if you've been having a stunning time," she said.

"Oh, get out!" snapped Sarah. "Pleasure," Mary drawled. "But first let me deliver a message. Wanted on the phone."

Sarah stared.

A SMIRK of triumph crossed Sarah's face as she beheld the sleeping Stella. Then her hand reached for the vital index cards.



"Who-me?"

"Waiting." Mary said briefly, and disappeared.

Sarah scowled. Bother the phone! She was tired. She was hot. She was in need of a cup of tea. Then she thought—well, perhaps it was that girl, Doris Grimshaw, ringing her up. In her present penurious condition—surrounded by debts—Doris Grimshaw was not a girl to be ignored. Rather sulkily she slunk off to the telephone.

It was a sweet voice which came through:

"Is that Miss Sarah Harrigan?"

"It is!" Sarah snapped.

"Oh! I am speaking from the Courtfield Hippodrome."

Sarah's ears pricked up at that. The Courtfield Hippodrome! Sulkiness, lassitude, lethargy vanished at once, for Sarah was on friendly terms with the manager of the Courtfield Hippodrome, having taken part—without permission, of course—in several of his productions in the past.

Actually, Sarah was good at amateur theatricals, and Sarah cherished in her heart a longing one day to be among the great ones of the footlights. She held her breath.

"Yes!" she asked.

"I am speaking on behalf of the manager, Miss Harrigan," the voice went on—if Sarah had only known that it belonged to Barbara Redfern of the Fourth Form—"I am afraid I cannot give you details over the phone, but will you come along as soon as possible?"

"Is it a part?" Sarah asked breathlessly.

"Well, I am not in a position to say. But if you will come and see the manager—what time can you be here?"

Sarah made a rapid mental calculation. Ten minutes to change, five to catch the bus. Twenty minutes to Courtfield, five minutes from the bus stop to the theatre.

"Half-past five."

"Thank you; that will suit me nicely!" the voice said. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" Sarah gulped, and flew.

With great rapidity she changed. Gone, for the time being, all thoughts of Stella—all thoughts of Doris Grimshaw.

The manager wanted to see her—the manager! Another part, perhaps—with money attached to it! She hoped it would be a fat one this time. Now she came to think of it, she did remember that the Courtfield management was going to put on a series of Shakespeare. Sarah was a past mistress at Shakespeare. Supposing—just supposing, for instance, she were offered the part of Lady Macbeth!

In great haste Sarah dressed. In great haste darted back to her study. Must have her bag! Must have the money which she had left in it. She turned the knob and pushed, walking forward at the same time. Then she gave a yelp, for the door which should have yielded to her pressure, remained firmly fixed, and Sarah flattened herself against the woodwork.

"Wow!" yelled Sarah.

Three grinning faces, peering round the end of the corridor, grinned impishly at each other. The three faces belonged to Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and Clara Trevlyn of the Fourth Form.

"Go it, Sarah!" Clara chuckled softly.

"Got the key, Babs?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Get ready to scoot!"

In rage Sarah glared at the door. She shook it; she rattled it. Furiously she

twisted the knob until it was almost in danger of coming off in her hand. Then, fuming, she stamped off out of the school to find Piper and get a duplicate key.

But Babs had laid her plans well. Piper, when she reached his lodge, was not there. Piper, in fact, was hunting a fox that existed purely in Jamaica Carstairs' fertile imagination, among the lumber in the clock tower.

Ten minutes it was before he came back, by which time Sarah had completely missed the bus, and had half an hour to wait for the next. By the time it arrived her temper was almost in shreds.

Half an hour later she reached the Hippodrome, only to find the manager out at tea. Another half an hour before he came back! He stared at her blankly when she told him she had come in response to his phone message.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Somebody's having a joke, Miss Harrigan. I certainly never phoned you."

"But your secretary did," Sarah objected.

"Did she? Then that's funny," the manager said, "because, you see, I don't happen to have a secretary at the moment. No, Miss Harrigan, somebody's been pulling your leg."

If Sarah's temper had been in shreds before, it was in fragments upon the receipt of those tidings.

She had been hoaxed—she, Sarah Harrigan! Who had hoaxed her?

Stella! Only Stella would be interested in getting her out of the way—Stella, who had obviously arranged for her to take those beastly kids on a botany ramble this afternoon! Stella, who was so patently seeing through her little game! Let her wait! Just let her wait!

In a really furious frame of mind, Sarah boarded a bus back to Cliff House.

Just ten minutes before call-over the bus put her down at the gates of Cliff House School, and Sarah, humiliated and thwarted, strode in a perfect paddy up the Sixth Form corridor.

She didn't go to her own study. She went at once to Stella's. One thunderous knock she gave upon the door, and flung it open.

"You beast!" she ground out.

Stella, busily writing at her table, spun round with a start.

"That is not the way to speak to me, Sarah!"

"No? And is it the way, I wonder, for you to drag me off on some wild-goose chase?"

"I?"

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

Stella was on her feet now, face flushed, eyes angrily glistening.

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

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

"Then," Stella flared, in a burst of 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 towards the table.

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!

The headmistress gasped.

"Sarah! Stella! My goodness gracious, are you two girls quarrelling again? What is the meaning of this?"

Stella quivered. Sarah Harrigan, making an immediate recovery, bit her lip.

"Stella!"

"I'm sorry!" Stella gulped. "Sarah was insulting me."

"Sarah!"

"Miss Primrose, that isn't true," Sarah said. She threw a reproachful glance at Stella. "I merely went in to ask Stella a question. Stella, apparently, was at work, and resented my coming in. She told me to get out. Well, I couldn't leave her until I had this matter cleared up, and—and so she pushed me out!"

Miss Primrose's lips compressed.

"Thank you, Sarah! Please do not create a scene here. I am displeased, and not only displeased, but greatly disturbed! I understand, of course, Stella, that, as you are so desperately anxious to win your diploma, that you must study, but I really must insist that your private work does not interfere with your duties as head girl. Also,"

Miss Primrose went on, "I must also request that you and Sarah come to a better understanding. It is intolerable that my two senior prefects should be continually at loggerheads!"

Sarah sighed, Stella looked grim.

"In the meantime," Miss Primrose said, "I must ask you, Stella, to abandon your studies for the time being. I have just discovered that the new term indexes are incomplete, and as I am expecting a visit from the chairman of the board of governors to-morrow, they must be attended to at once. That, Stella, is in your charge. Please get on with it," she added icily, "and do, please, let me hear of no further friction between you and Sarah. If I do hear—"

She shook her head. "But I will not make threats. I rely upon you both, as two very sensible girls, to adjust your differences."

She swept away. Sarah grinned. Stella looked at her grimly, sharply, then, going back to her study, closed the door.

For a moment she stood contemplating her work, a bitter look indeed upon her face. That work which, even pursued so industriously in the absence of Sarah Harrigan, was still such a long way off being up to time. Would she ever do it? Could she ever get through?

Study at Cliff House was becoming more and more difficult.

Rather heavy at heart, Stella picked up her papers and books. Then she got out her typewriter and indexes. She felt tired, weary, but resolutely she put her own studies out of her mind and got on.

Tap, tap, tap! With monotonous and insistent regularity the sound reached Sarah Harrigan in the next study, and Sarah, realising how Stella was feeling, grinned maliciously. But she hadn't finished with Stella yet. Not by a long, long way!

Supper bell rang. Call over. Then dormitory bell, and a great noise and clatter as junior school tramped off to bed.

Tap, tap, tap! Still Stella worked on. Monotonous work. Dreary work it was, but it had to be done. Her head nodded once or twice, now and again her weary eyelids drooped.

Lights out. Still she worked on. Ten, eight, six more to do. She paused a moment, the typewriter dancing and misty in front of her heavy eyes. A sudden fit of trembling, out of her very

weariness and the cramped position in which she had been sitting, assailed her. Just a minute's rest. Only five more then.

Stella almost dragged herself from the typewriter. Sarah, in the other room, pricked up her ears. With a grunt Stella sank into a chair, running a trembling hand across her head.

She fought the temptation to close her eyes, but weakness and weariness won, and in two seconds she was sound asleep.

She did not see the door open, did not see the sharp, ferrety face, adorned by the gleaming pince-nez, which peered through the crack in the door.

But Sarah, to whom that face belonged, grinned, her green eyes lighting up.

Stella was asleep—fast asleep. She looked so pretty, so helpless, somehow, as she sat there, her pretty face surrounded by its mass of tumbling curls, one helpless arm flung round the arm of the chair, the other having fallen into her lap.

Sarah's mean face hardened, however. Her eyes, ranging from Stella, followed up the pile of index cards upon the table, neatly stacked by the side of the typewriter. With sudden decision she stepped into the study. With one eye upon its sleeping occupant, she snatched up the pile and furtively, guiltily, tiptoed back towards the door. The door closed softly behind her. Sarah, chuckling, went back to her own study.



Stern Words for Stella

SOMEWHERE in the small hours. Stella, dead weary, awakened with a start to glance quickly at the clock on the mantelpiece.

Cliff House was asleep, its silence was as profound as the tomb. Out of the question then to start tapping a typewriter again, even if she had the heart to do so—which she hadn't.

She felt that she loathed the very sight of those depressing indexes, and, in any case, she assured herself, as, half-asleep, she undressed, she could polish them off in the morning. Just another quarter of an hour's work there was on them.

So Stella climbed into bed. Almost before her head had touched the pillow she was asleep.

But what consternation next morning when she found those precious indexes gone! Feverishly, frantically, she searched. Bewildered, she stopped where Miss Primrose came to inquire where they were. She stared, amazed and astounded, when Stella told her that they were missing.

"Missing! Missing!" The headmistress' voice was incredulous. You mean someone has stolen them?"

Stella nodded.

"I'm afraid so."

"But how—when you say you have never left the room?"

Stella merely shook her head.

"I—I must have fallen asleep," she said.

Miss Primrose's face became rather hard.

"It sounds," she said, "rather unconvincing, Stella. You are sure," she said, with a bluntness unusual in her, "that, in devoting attention to your own studies, you did not forget to do them?"

Stella flushed.

"I did not, Miss Primrose!"

"But it's ridiculous, is it not, to sug-

gest that anyone should steal them? They have no value at all, except to the school records. At the same time, I cannot imagine anyone taking them for a joke. Especially when, all the time, you were in the room yourself. It is very, very annoying," she added, "and very exasperating. I am expecting Major-General Mabbeson this afternoon, and the first thing he will do is to ask for those indexes. Please have another hunt round, Stella."

She went out, leaving Stella biting her lips. What the dickens could have happened to the indexes? She agreed with Miss Primrose. They were not things one would wish to steal. They were hardly likely to appeal to the humorous sense of practical jokers—besides, who would play a practical joke of this nature?

For a moment, unbidden, the thought of spiteful Sarah rushed through her mind. Had she anything to do with it? But no! Even Sarah would hardly stoop to a trick like that. She was feverishly hunting again when Sarah came in.

"Found them?" she asked.

Stella wheeled.

"Your indexes, I mean," Sarah said, with false sympathy. "Miss Primrose has sent me along to help you find them."

"Thanks!" Stella said shortly.

"You mean you don't want me to help?"

"No."

Sarah shrugged. She went out. She went first to her own study. Then she went to Miss Primrose's. Miss Primrose gazed at her.

"You have found them, Sarah?"

"No, Miss Primrose," Sarah bit her lips. "I've just been talking to Stella," she said. "I—I'm a bit upset about her, really. She's not the girl she was, Miss Primrose."

Miss Primrose glanced at her sharply. "Exactly, Sarah, what do you mean by that?"

"Well"—Sarah shrugged—"you've seen something of it yourself, Miss Primrose. Stella is so frantically busy studying for her diploma, and there appears to be such a lot of work in connection with that that she's getting altogether neglectful and bad-tempered. Mind you," Sarah added hastily, "I'm not saying that to her detriment. But—well, Miss Primrose, those indexes were a very hefty job, weren't they? And Stella, as we know, could hardly afford the time from her studies. I think," Sarah added, "that she really meant to get up this morning and do them, but, being so tired from overwork last night, rather overslept herself this morning."

Miss Primrose pursed her lips. "You infer, Sarah, that Stella hasn't done them?"

"Well—yes," Sarah said reluctantly. It was a bold stroke—this maligning of Stella before the headmistress. Until a few days ago Miss Primrose's faith in her head girl had been unshaken, but Stella's actions bore out Sarah's words.

No doubt that Stella had been irritable these last few days. No doubt, either, that she had neglected her duties. Obviously, as Sarah hinted, Stella had much too much to do to keep abreast of her head girl's duties, and to keep up with her private studies at the same time.

Miss Primrose herself had had experience of overwork. She knew how forlorn and irritable one could become. Reluctant as she was to lose her faith in Stella, she felt now that Stella was rather becoming a victim of her own circumstances.

She sighed.

"Perhaps," she said, "you are right,

Sarah. All the same—" She paused. "You are friends with her again?" she asked.

"Oh, Miss Primrose, I've never really been her enemy!" Sarah said sincerely. "I'd like to help her—really, I would. I don't like to see her so worried and so haggard, and—and—" And here Sarah shook her head with such a convincing falsity that Miss Primrose was completely taken in. "I can't very well do her studies for her," Sarah went on; "but if you'd like me to do those indexes, Miss Primrose—well, I'd really be overjoyed. I know it's Stella's job, but there's no need to say anything to Stella, and it would help, wouldn't it?"

Miss Primrose revised her opinion of Sarah Harrigan.

"You think you can manage them, Sarah?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Primrose!"

"Well, it is kind of you to offer—yes, indeed!" Miss Primrose said. "As the indexes very obviously have not been done, I should be obliged if you would do them, Sarah. I do not wish to worry Stella unduly. All the same, I cannot approve of her covering up her neglect by telling me falsehoods!" she added, with a frown. "I will speak to Stella later. Thank you, Sarah!"

And Sarah, smiling triumphantly, went away. En route to her own study she met Lydia Crossendale.

"Oh, Lydia, a word with you!" she said. "Come to my study."

"Yes, Sarah," Lydia said brightly.

And when they had got there—

"Stella," Sarah said thoughtfully, "will be taking both first and second lessons in the Fourth this morning, Lydia. And Stella," she added, "will, as usual, be busy with her own job. I want to speak to you because I think you're about the most sensible girl in the Fourth."

"Yes, Sarah," Lydia smirked. "About Stella?"

"Well, about this private studying of hers," Sarah looked up artfully. "I don't think myself that it's fair a girl should be allowed to cram for a private examination in the school time, do you?"

"No, Sarah."

"And to be left alone to do it," Sarah added, with a ponderous shake of her head.

Lydia grinned.

"You mean—" But Sarah in words did not reply to that. Her eyes lifted. They met Lydia's, and for a moment the two stared at each other.

The grin on Lydia's face became an expansive smile.

"I get you!" she said, and winked.

"**P**OOOR OLD Stella!"

"Doesn't she look washed-out?" "Wish we could do something to help her!"

"Please, girls, silence!" Stella Stone said, from the mistress' desk in the Fourth Form class-room. It was the first lesson of the morning, and Stella, who had brought her notes and her books with her, certainly did look strained and almost ill. "I am sorry," she apologised, "to have to give you another essay; but, as it is Miss Primrose's wish that Miss Charmant's curriculum should not be interfered with until she comes back, I am sure that you cannot spend your time better than by writing up what you have already been taught. The subject," Stella added, "is the Roman conquest of Britain. Get out your books!"

The girls began. Stella buried herself in her notes.

Ten minutes went by. Then up shot Lydia's hand.

"Please, Stella—"

Stella looked up.

"Yes, Lydia?"

"Did you say the conquest or the invasion?"

"I said," Stella replied, "the conquest, Lydia. Now please get on with your work!"

Five minutes went by, then up stood Freda Ferriers. Stella, biting her lip, looked at her.

"Please, Stella, can you tell me if Hadrian is spelt with an 'e' or an 'i'?"

"Oh, sit down!" said Barbara Redfern disgustedly.

"You have your books with you, Freda. They should surely supply the answer." But Stella looked a little short-tempered. "Please refrain from asking ridiculous questions!"

The lesson went by, but it was obvious that Lydia & Co. had set out that morning to bait Stella. Rosa Rodworth was the next. She wanted to know if Julius Caesar was pronounced Emperor or King of England.

Frances Frost wanted to know how to spell Londonium. Eleanor Storke, not to be outdone, rose in her seat, and asked Stella if she could have more ink, though her well was almost full.

Then somebody—Diana Royston-Clarke—threw a pellet, causing further commotion and interruption.

And so it went on, Babs & Co. seething and furious, Stella growing more and more distraught as vainly she endeavoured to get on with her own work.

Babs & Co. were seething, but, like Stella, were helpless. Short of causing a row in the class-room—and that might bring Primy on the scene—there was no way in which they could prevent this irritation to their idol, and the legullars of the Form had it all their own way.

Meantime, Sarah, having spent a very pleasant hour browsing through some old play in her study, finally collected the work she had stolen from Stella last night, and took it to Miss Primrose. Miss Primrose started as she came in.

"Good gracious, Sarah! Have you finished already?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose. I think," Sarah purred, "that you will find those to your satisfaction. Will you go through them, please?"

Miss Primrose did go through them. She went through them with a deepening sense of gratitude to Sarah. The work was neatly, excellently done.

"Thank you, Sarah! This is very good indeed! You have taken a considerable weight off my shoulders. I congratulate you," she said, "upon an extremely expert and neat job."

And Sarah, feeling that she had won a higher reward in Miss Primrose's pleasure, as a result of that cunning robbery from Stella's study, went.

But she did not go far. Sarah's mind was still busy.

Presently the door of Miss Primrose's study came open again, and the headmistress emerged.

Sarah dodged into a doorway. She watched the Head as she swept off towards the Second Form class-room, and she grinned a little to herself, knowing full well that Miss Primrose was commencing her round of class-room inspection for the day. She paused a moment, then went on to the Fourth Form class-room.

Her lips parted in a sour smile as she peered through the glass panel of the Form-room door.

For it was obvious at a glance that the Form was seething. Stella, looking quite white, was in the act of

speaking to Lydia. Lydia was standing up, the grin on her face showing how much she was enjoying herself.

Near her, Barbara Redfern was looking daggers towards her. Clara Trevlyn, with a rubber half-poised in her hand, was preparing to throw it. Stella looked almost distracted.

"Lydia," Sarah heard her say, "if you ask me that foolish question again, I shall punish you!"

"Yes; sit down!" came Jimima Carstairs' voice.

"But—"

"Please sit down!" Stella said sharply.

Lydia sat down, winking at Rosa Rodworth. Under the desk, Clara flicked the rubber towards her. Sarah's eyes gleamed.

She went to the door; knocked upon it. Then she said:

"Stella, please come to my study at once! You may leave Barbara in charge."

So realistically like the tones of Miss Primrose were they, that Stella started round. The whole Form, starting at it, was hushed into instant silence.

Stella gazed at the door.

"That was Miss Primrose, Stella," Joan Charmant spoke up.

"Yes, yes; but—" Stella frowned.

"Ode it was for the headmistress not to have shown herself. Stella concluded that the must have been in a hurry, and had called out in passing.

With a sigh she rose from her seat.

"Barbara, take charge," she said.

"Yes, Stella."

Barbara stepped out in front of the class. Stella, still rather wondering, disappeared through the class-room door.

And then at once the feeling that had been buzzing all the morning in the class-room found its vent—when Brenda Fallace, who had quiveringly held herself in, relieved her feelings by flinging a ruler at Lydia.

It was a signal for an outbreak of pandemonium.

"Booh!"

"Down with the sneaks!"

"Girls!" shrieked Babs.

But Babs' voice was lost in the uproar which broke out. Every girl was standing up suddenly, everybody shouting.

Desk lids banged; a book flew across the class-room, hitting Bessie Bunter as she rose in her seat.

Something went whizzing past Barbara Redfern's head, and hit the glass of the door with a smack. Somebody yelled; Bessie Bunter spluttered.

"Oh, my hat! Girls!" Babs shrieked again.

"Who wouldn't let Stella get on with her work?"

"Traitors! Who's currying favour with the school captain?"

At that moment Miss Primrose stepped out of the Second Form class-room. She heard the din.

"Goodness gracious!" she cried.

"What on earth is happening?"

And then down the corridor came racing Sarah Harrigan. Her face was white.

"Miss Primrose, will you come, please? The Fourth Form—they're utterly out of hand, behaving like a gang of little wooligans!"

"But Stella—where is she?"

"I don't know. She has left the class-room."

Miss Primrose's lips pursed.

"Come with me," she said.

She rustled along. Like a storm she whirled into the Fourth Form class-room. As one, the Form stopped.

Girls, flushed and wrathful, and a little scared, dropped into their seats.

Miss Primrose glared round.

"Where is Stella?"

"Please, Miss Primrose—" Barbara began.

And then at that moment the door came open. Stella herself appeared.

"Stella"—the headmistress was almost shaking with fury—"Stella, where have you been?"

Stella stared in amazement.

"Why, Miss Primrose, to your study!"

"What did you go to my study for?"

"You asked me!"

"I?" The headmistress stared. "I asked you?" she said. "Why, my goodness! Please be silent, Barbara, and you, Clara! Stella, I think," she said, "that you need a rest. It is becoming more and more apparent that you are trying to do too many things at once. Sarah, will you take charge here? Stella, please collect your books, and then come and see me."

"But—"

"Thank you; that is enough!"

And Miss Primrose, with stern dignity, rustled out of the room. While Stella, slowly, bewilderedly, like a girl recovering from some stunning blow, collected her books, and with slow, weary steps trailed along to her study.

On the table she placed them, and then went to see Miss Primrose.

The interview which ensued lasted half an hour.

"It is apparent," Miss Primrose said, "that you are doing too much, Stella. Overwork brings worry, worry brings forgetfulness and absent-mindedness. Those preying upon your mind might very well cause you to imagine things.

I must tell you for the very last time that unless things improve, I shall most certainly have to consider the question of taking some of your responsibilities from your shoulders. As it is," she added kindly, "I will leave you free this afternoon to catch up with your studies. After that, Stella, I shall expect to see you behaving somewhat differently."

Stella nodded. She hadn't the heart to argue, to protest.

She went out, to be met by the sympathetic glances of Babs & Co., who, dismissed lessons, were congregated at the end of the corridor.

Faintly she smiled as she passed them.

Still, good had come out of evil. She had the afternoon to herself. That was something to be thankful for.

She entered her study. Mechanically her eyes travelled towards the table on which she had placed her books and her notebooks. And then she started.

Quickly she crossed the room, turning over the books there.

The encyclopedia, the anatomy, the other volumes which she had been working from were still there.

But her notes—her notes! Those precious notebooks which she had spent so many strenuous hours in copying, and without which she could make no possible further progress—where were they?

Stella's eyes dilated. Her breath came quickly as feverishly and frantically she searched among the papers on her desk.

Shaken, pale, she stood up, confronted by the hideous truth.

Her notes had gone! Like the indexes of yesterday, they had vanished!

How could she work now? How—how? For without her notebooks she was helpless. It seemed that her studies, and with her studies her great ambition, was utterly doomed.

IN THE next study, Sarah Harrigan, with a sly and crafty smile, was ramming notebooks under the cover of her armchair. With glee she listened to the frantic sounds that came through the wall as Stella desperately quested for her treasures.

Ten minutes went by. A quarter of an hour. The sounds had ceased by then and the dinner-gong was clanging. The door of Stella's study came open. She heard the captain going off down the corridor.

Not till then did Sarah move. There was a spiteful, crafty expression on her face as she retrieved the notebooks. She went to the door, opened it and looked up and down the corridor, then slipped into Stella's study.

Quickly she opened the door of Stella's food cupboard; quickly placed the notebooks on the bottom shelf.

Then, a satisfied expression on her gloating face, she tripped off to join the prefects in the dining-room.



The Head's Decree

"I DON'T suppose," Barbara Redfern said thoughtfully, "that old Stella even stopped to think of tea. Supposing, Mabs, you and I go along and get some for her?"

Characteristically kind of Babs was that thought.

Babs & Co. were gathered in Study No. 4 after afternoon school.

None of them knew, as yet, of the disaster which had befallen their beloved captain.

"Perhaps," Bessie said, looking up from the fire where she was toasting bread, "she might like to kikkome and have tea with us, you know?"

"Well, we could ask her," Babs said. "If not, Mabs and I will make her tea in her own study. All right, Mabs?"

Mabs at once agreed, as eager to lend a helping hand as Babs. Together they tripped off to the Sixth Form corridor, and, reaching Stella's door, Babs raised her hand to tap. At the same moment from inside the room came a distressed muttering.

"I'll never do it! I'll never—I can't! I can't!"

The two juniors glanced quickly at each other.

"Oh crumbs!" Mabs said in dismayed consternation. "Babs, shall we—"

But Babs' eyes were gleaming. That mutter was not intended for their ears. But it was enough to tell them the highly strung and exhausted state into which Stella had worked herself. Tell-tale enough signal that Stella was reaching a point that was dangerously near collapse.

She knocked boldly.

For a moment no reply. Then Stella herself came to the door. The white face she presented to Babs' vision shocked her.

"Stella, you're ill!"

"No, no! Come in," Stella said.

"We—we, Mabs. What do you want?"

"We—we came to see if we could make you some tea."

Stella smiled mistily.

"That is very kind of you, Barbara, very, very, kind," she said. "But— and she shook her head. "Do you mind—if I sit down?" she said, and threw a hopeless glance at the litter on her table.

"Stella," Babs said.

"Yes, my dear?"

"Won't you stop studying and—and just have a rest?"

"But," Stella said surprisingly, "I have stopped studying. I had to stop studying. Barbara, because, you see—"

and then haltingly she explained. "Somebody has taken my notes."

she caught sight of a thin exercise-book.

"Mabs, look at this!" she breathed. Immediately she pounced on it. At the same moment there came a warning whisper from Mabs, peeping through the chink of the door.

"Cave! Sarah!"

In a flash Babs was out of the room, the book in her hand. But it was too



STELLA drew up with a cry of dismay. Her notes—those precious notes which meant everything to her—were gone!

Babs glanced quickly at Mabs. Instant suspicion that flamed to her mind.

They made the tea, left Stella gratefully sipping it, and went off. Outside, however, Babs turned and faced Mabs.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" she asked.

"About Stella's notebooks, you mean?" Mabs breathed. "Sarah!"

"Yes, Sarah!" Babs' lips came together. "She took them, of course. That's why she hasn't been baiting old Stella this afternoon. She knew jolly well that she's helpless without those books. The mean cat must have taken them and hidden them." Babs paused.

"Mabs, we've got to get hold of those."

"But how?"

"They'll be in her study."

"But she won't be," Babs said quickly. "As Sarah's taken over Stella's duties for the afternoon, it will be her job to superintend tea in the dining-hall."

It was true. Together Babs and Mabs dashed to Sarah's study. There Babs turned.

"Quick, shut the door, Mabs!"

Mabs shut the door. She could not lock it as there was no key. Babs' eyes flew round the study. She went to the bookshelf, the bureau. She looked in the table drawer.

On the floor, half-under the settee,

late then. Sarah, having deputed Mary Buller to her duties in the dining-hall, had returned rather sooner than expected, and she had seen Babs rushing out with the notebook in her hand. Babs gave a gasp as Sarah, from along the corridor, shouted:

"Barbara, what are you doing in my study?"

Babs paled. She was caught. And then, before anyone could think of the next move, the door next to Sarah's opened.

Stella, looking a little refreshed after her tea, looked out.

"Stella, I—I found this," Babs gasped. "In Sarah Harrigan's study."

Stella jumped.

"One of my notebooks!" She snatched it from Babs' hand. Her face went crimson suddenly, darting points of light came into her eyes. Sarah Harrigan came up.

"Stella—"

"Wait a minute!" Stella said. "Oh, wait a minute! Sarah, this was found in your study."

Sarah started.

"It is one of my notebooks. The whole set of them is missing." Her eyes regarded the prefect. Contempt, scorn was in their depths, and also a flash of the hate which Stella at that moment felt. "Sarah, what did you do with my notebooks?" she asked. Sarah spluttered.

"I haven't seen your notebooks!"

"Then how is it that this one was found in your study?"

"How should I know?" Sarah retorted in an insolent tone.

Stella took one furious step forward. Her patience was gone. All the bitter wrongs she had suffered at this girl's hands came surging upon her. One she shot out, fiercely gripping Sarah by the shoulder. At the same moment came a voice:

"Stella! Stella, what on earth are you doing?"

And Mabs gasped and Babs almost cried out. For rustling on to the scene came Miss Primrose. She stared at Stella in horror.

"Stella, how dare you—how dare you! Unhand Sarah this moment!"

"I—" gasped Stella.

"What is the meaning of this? But wait! Barbara, Mabel, go to your studies!"

"But, Miss Primrose—"

"Go!"

"Yes, please go!" Stella muttered. The redness had receded from her face all at once. "Please go—do! I'm sorry, Miss Primrose," she added.

"I—I forgot myself for the moment. But I—I am upset. Please go, Barbara," she said.

And Babs and Mabs went, though they would fain have remained.

And then, of course, came explanations. Miss Primrose, justly indignant, demanded them. Now, however, was Stella in no mood to shield Sarah Harrigan. She had put up with enough.

She told Miss Primrose how someone had taken her notebooks; how Barbara had found one in Sarah's study. How, balked of her afternoon's work because of the disappearance of those notebooks, she had lost her temper with Sarah.

The headmistress looked grave.

"This is a very serious charge, Stella. I do most sincerely hope," she added, "that you are not allowing your very obvious hostility towards Sarah to influence you? Sarah, what have you to say?"

But Sarah was prepared. Sarah had herself in hand. She shook her head.

"I can only say, Miss Primrose," she purred, with a hypocritically sorrowful glance at the captain of the school, "that Stella is making a mistake. I do not deny that that notebook might have been found in my study. But I do deny," she added, "that I had anything to do with it. If Barbara Redfern didn't make the story up, then I can only conclude that Stella herself must have left it there on some occasion that she came to see me. You know, Stella, you are getting forgetful," she said, "and you do leave things about, don't you?"

Stella drew a deep breath.

"But that," she flashed back, "doesn't explain what has happened to the rest of my notes."

"Now, Stella, please!" Miss Primrose put in sharply.

"Have you looked in your own study?" Sarah asked quietly.

"Of course I have!"

"Perhaps," Sarah gently suggested, "you haven't looked in the right place, Stella? Would you like me to help you look?"

Miss Primrose glanced at Stella. She glanced at Sarah. Really, she thought, that was very nice and very friendly, after the way in which Stella had accused her. She herself interposed.

"Yes, Stella. I think you might do that," she said. "It is very kind of Sarah to make such an offer. Look

now, please. I will remain here while you do so."

Sarah smiled—a slow and crafty smile—as she stepped into the study.

Miss Primrose, standing at the door, watched as the two commenced the search. Not at once, however, did Sarah go to the cupboard in which she had put those books. Here and there she searched, until at last even she seemed at a loss. She paused.

"Well, it seems they have gone," she said. "Oh, but wait a minute, Stella. Have you looked in the cupboard?"

"Why should I look in the cupboard?" Stella asked. "I only keep my food there."

"All the same in a moment of forgetfulness you might have put them there," Sarah insisted. "When your mind is occupied, you often drop things in funny places and forget all about them afterwards."

Stella glared. But she went to the cupboard. She flung open the door, and then she stopped, staring in baffled amazement.

For there on the bottom shelf were her notebooks!

For one moment Stella stood looking at them. The colour came and went in her face. She knew she had not put them there. Before dinner, during her search, she had looked in that cupboard. They had not been there at that time, she could vow.

And then she caught the look from Sarah—the sly, triumphant smile—a look which told her plainly as anything the plot of which she had been made a victim.

For a moment Stella forgot that Miss Primrose was there; forgot everything in the sudden burning realisation of the disastrous wrongs this girl had heaped upon her head.

She flung round.

"You put those there, Sarah Harrigan!" And she took a step forward. "Get out of this study!"

"Stella!" cried Miss Primrose.

Stella gulped.

"Stella!" Miss Primrose was angry, indeed, now. "I order you to apologise at once—at once! This really has gone too far. Stella, I am reluctant to believe evil of you. I have always liked you; I have always admired you. But Sarah is right. The stress you have been

under in trying to manage both your studies and carry out your captain's duties have been too much for you. It has made you neglectful and inefficient. It has made you tired; it has also made you forgetful. It is obvious," Miss Primrose went on, calming down, "that you are in no fit condition to carry on both labours with equal efficiency, Stella."

Stella mumbled something. "If," Miss Primrose added, "I did my duty, I should relieve you—temporarily, at least—from your mistress's duties altogether. Your conduct, Stella, has warranted it. But I am still mindful of your prestige, even though you seem to have such little regard for it yourself. It is apparent, however, that this state of affairs cannot exist much longer, and until this examination of yours is done with, my duty is obviously to relieve you of some of your worries."

"Stella, from this moment you will share your school duties with Sarah Harrigan here, who, as your senior prefect, is very well fitted to relieve you of your greater responsibilities, and I only hope," she added tartly, "that the co-operation will force you to become better friends."

Stella stood rooted to the spot. Sarah's eyes flamed. She to share the captaincy—the to rule the school with Stella Stone! Even Sarah had not hoped for such supreme triumph as that.

Stella stood dumbfounded.

"Miss Primrose—"

"That is enough! That," Miss Primrose said icily, "is my last word!" And with stiff dignity she rustled away. Stella, crimson, humiliated, stood facing Sarah. Sarah laughed softly.

"And how," she chuckled, "are the mighty fallen. What a blow in the face for you, Stella Stone! What's the betting," she mocked, "that before the week's out, I shall have superseded you altogether?"

But Stella did not reply. She took one step forward. Her hand clutched at Sarah's shoulder. Sarah was twirled round and sent stumbling into the corridor.

When furiously she turned, it was to see Stella's door slamming in her face.

THE END.



By
HILDA
RICHARDS

COMPLETE
NEXT
WEEK

STORMCLOUDS over Cliff House—stormclouds of bitter enmity. Two captains—Sarah and Stella—in rivalry; tyranny; a feeling of growing rebellion—at first only an angry murmur, then flaring into sudden dramatic action! Tense and swift are the events which follow, and about which you will read in next Saturday's brilliant long complete Cliff House School story, the title of which appears above. Do not miss this absorbing story.

STARTS TO-DAY: An Epic New Serial of Mystery and Adventure on a Desert Island, Starring Betty Barton & Co.



Morcove Marooned!

Into the Blue

"OH, Polly dear—we're off!"
 "Hurrah — yes, Betty!
 We're off—we're off!"
 "And so — good-bye to
 Africa!"

"And home, now—back to school, um!"
 "Oh, pretending!" laughed Form captain Betty Barton, now that her best of chums, Morcove's madcap, Polly Linton, had made that mock-glum allusion to school.

"Not so sure!" Polly grimaced. "But there—four days' air travel won't be so bad as a finish off to the hols!"

"No, we ought not to grumble!"
 Those two schoolgirls, sharing a window of the air liner, were by no means the only pair to be exchanging excitable remarks, now that the huge machine had made such a splendid take-off from the landing-ground at M'Geya, in Central Africa.

Every seat in the spacious saloon was occupied, for it was a large holiday-travel party of Morcove girls and Grangemoor boys, with a few grown-ups in charge of them, that was now en route for Croydon by air.

"I'd love to come out here again, Betty! There are worse places than Africa for a holiday!"

"Worse, but a bit safer, perhaps!" chuckled Betty. "Now and then things did look a bit ugly for us, didn't they?"

"Marvel is, in fact, that we're still all together!" voiced Polly.

She spoke lightly. All the same, it was with genuine thankfulness that she looked round to see so many who were near and dear to her "all present and correct."

Polly's roving gaze rested fondly for a moment upon her own fun-loving brother Jack, where he sat next to his special Grangemoor pal, Dave Cardew. And she particularly noticed that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, gabbling away to pretty Paula Creel.

The whole jolly company, girls and boys, to which she and Betty belonged,

did the madcap glance at just then, and some of the grown-ups. With two or three she exchanged a few shouted remarks; and then she heard Betty exclaiming:

"Only four days, Polly—and we'll be at Croydon! That's faster than we came out."

"But we shall do it," was the confi-

By

**MARJORIE
STANTON**

dent response. "This machine is just marvellous!"

"Oh, and besides, look who's piloting her. Mr. Somerfield is the man to get the very best out of such wonderful engines."

"Rather!"
 And, still watching together from their window, Betty and Polly talked of the peculiar bit of luck which had attended this air-voyaging back to the Homeland.

The Morcove Expedition, as the holiday travel party called itself, had returned to M'Geya after a most thrilling time in the wilds of equatorial Africa, expecting to make the passage by air to Croydon by one of the regular liners.

But at M'Geya, when the whole crowd of adventurers turned up there last evening, had been that famous airman who was so well known to all of them, he being a brother of Morcove's headmistress, Miss Somerfield.

Bigger surprise than ever, on the landing-ground was a very mammoth of an air liner, flown to M'Geya by Mr. Somerfield for the special purpose of taking the Morcove party, and those few adults in whose charge they had been, back to home and school!

An airman during the War, handsome Jack Somerfield had kept to flying as his hobby ever since.

Hearing that his young friends and three or four parents of theirs would be due to leave M'Geya for Croydon on a certain date, he had done the nice thing by flying out to meet them.

And now, with him shut away from them all, in his own pilot's "pit," they could sense his cool, unerring handling of the giant craft.

Higher still the liner climbed, roaring on at more than a hundred miles an hour.

And Morcove and the boys, after roughing it of late, could sit back in great enjoyment of the comfort offered.

Even the makeshift accommodation of M'Geya's one enterprising hotel had seemed a big treat to these sun-bronzed girls and boys who had endured the hardships of genuine pioneering. But this air liner—it was as good as being at home again!

Certainly it carried no stewards for this trip, and the passengers would have to make their own use of the marvellous kitchenette.

There was Mrs. Cardew, the young widowed mother of Judy and Dave, who was to be cook for this first day's run.

She had gone into the kitchenette as soon as she came aboard, and presently some very appetising odours assured the juniors that midday dinner would be both tasty and prompt.

Sure enough, just before twelve o'clock Betty and Judy were called away from their seats to take duty as waitresses—great honour for them! The gangway between the seats was necessarily narrow, and so not more than two girls could be employed.

Even as it was, Betty and Judy were rather inclined to collide now and then—with Jack Linton and Tom Trevor, always a boisterous pair, ready to go off into great guffaws at the shooting of various portions all over the floor.

No such catastrophes attended this bustling to and fro of the much-bantered pair, although it was no,

groundless belief of theirs that the liner's progress was just then not so good.

The wind, in fact, had become tiresomely gusty, and there were other changed weather conditions which might have caused some glum predictions about running late, only there was all this jollity over the meal.

Even when a really unpleasant bit of rolling occurred, the joyous lunchers only set up a loud "O-o-r" in fun.

Apart from the amusement afforded by Betty and Judy's uncertain movements, Polly and the other girls had quite a sideshow to enjoy, in the non-sense provided by Jack and his chums.

Grangemoor felt "small" over not being allowed to do the waiting. Hence a good deal of pretended impatience with the two Morcove waitresses by Jack and Tom.

"What about those coffees, miss!"

"Miss! Five minutes ago we asked if we could have ices?" Jack growled. "I shall report it to the management!" he stormed at laughing Betty. "There has been a deliberate neglect of us generally."

"Turn 'em out!" Polly led some of her Morcove chums in the scornful cry. "Yes; you I mean!" she directly addressed her scandalised-looking brother. "I don't know where you hoodlums go to school—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But an hour later all such spontaneous "jollity" had to be abandoned. There was excusable anxiety now about the liner's still harder conflict with the elements.

Most unfortunately, they seemed to have encountered one of those bad patches of weather which so often take long-distance air voyagers quite by surprise.

Good-bye to M'Geya had been said in perfect weather for flying; but hundreds of miles had been covered since then.

Now it was not so much the "bumpy" wind that bothered Morcove & Co., but the frequent squalls of rain and periods of flying through cloud.

Sometimes it was lashing rain which blurred the saloon windows, making it useless for the juniors to look out. Then there would be perhaps even ten minutes of white fog, creating a horrid sense of blind flying.

And then, presently, just a few moments' emergence from such bad visibility produced a sensational surprise.

Betty it was who, being the first to see clearly again through one of the rain-whipped windows, shouted in amazement:

"Why, look—look! Over there, girls—another plane!"

Moment by Moment

"WHAT! Never!"

But it was so.

No more than a mile away, upon the air liner's port side, and flying in the same direction as the liner, was a plane of very much smaller build.

They could see her clearly, as suddenly as this, thanks to a break in the driving clouds.

She, too, was having to put up a stiff fight against the tempestuous weather. They saw her dipping and rising, and even banking now and then.

"Powerful enough, though she is small," the juniors heard Mr. Willoughby remark to Mr. Minden. "Wonder whose she is?"

"Somebody trying for a record-breaking flight from the Cape," Jack hazarded, where he sat amongst Polly and other juniors.

"Not nice to have found her as close to us as that," Dave Cardew gravely murmured. "She can't have known—and neither could Mr. Somerfield. Let's hope she—"

There was an interrupting cry from at least six of them.

"Oh!"

Again the liner had white fog all about it. They felt the machine rising instantly to get higher, and in a few moments there was brilliant sunshine once more, and sunlit cloud to look down upon—a most beautiful effect.

There was just time for watchers at the saloon windows to look in vain for a glimpse of that other machine, and then—had they themselves lost height a little that they were down in the clouds again?

At any rate, it was a case of more blind flying through dense clouds that discharged their moisture upon the liner in heavy sheets of rain.

Voices had to be raised, to be made audible above the penetrating noise of the storm. Only some switched-on lights saved the passengers from being in a darkness like that of night.

"You know," Betty said, after a little while to Polly, for they had side-by-side places in the saloon, "I believe we're right off our course now. It was such a plain, due-north one, and now I fancy we're going almost west."

"So long as we are not quite 'going West,' the madcap grimaced. "But surely, this can't last much longer!"

Betty laughed at a cheering reply, but at heart she was far from sure that disaster was not threatening.

The adults of the party were doing their best to make light of the nerve-straining ordeal, but Betty could tell! And so, very likely, could all her chums.

Last it did, this strain upon the nerves of all. If Betty or any of the others had, as it were, disarmed the experience of the next few hours, the jottings must have read something like this:

3 p.m. Out of the clouds again, after more blind flying. All feeling very sorry for Mr. Somerfield. He must be nearly all in. Pam's father says we have been right off our course this last hour. Thinks Mr. S. will have to make a forced landing any time now.

3.30. Have all had some tea. Everybody keeping jolly, but poor Paula and N. looking very scared. In the clouds again.

4. Feel that something may happen any minute. Heard queer sounds like engine trouble. Don't wonder. They think we may be over the sea!

4.10. Bumping badly. Saw the sea just now. We were very low. No ships in sight. Mr. Willoughby thinks, Gulf of Guinea.

5. Still up, but another engine gone dead. Have all been reminded about parachutes. Such sudden bad weather most unusual at this time of year, Mr. W. says.

5.15. Awful thing just now. Saw that other plane again, and suddenly someone jumped out, using parachute. It looked to us like a girl falling into the sea. Land, but only a tiny island. We lower than ever, and—

And there any such diary must have broken off.

At that very minute—after nearly two hours in the air—the great machine stalled for the first time, badly.

It was such a violent side-slipping that many of the passengers lost their

seats and found themselves asprawl upon the floor.

But the brave liner recovered herself; she flattened out again. Two only of her four engines were functioning now, and yet she came right.

Quickly then did the thrown passengers scramble up, and Betty and a few of her chums were now able, like some of the boys, to peer out again from the saloon windows.

They were in the rich light of a sun that was going down like a ball of fire upon the wide horizon of the sea.

Inky clouds and torrential rain were all done with at last. As the labouring machine fetched round in a wide circle, some of the juniors noticed how half the sky was all blotted out; in that direction there was still a black pall of stormcloud, but it was going away before the wind.

Those who peered out, however, were far more concerned with what the plane was now doing than with what it had battled through.

She was circling about before being forced down; that was beyond all doubt. Possibly the petrol was giving out. The island was below—and not very far below, either.

A tiny, rocky one it was, and if the pilot hoped to spot a promising place for landing, then he was doomed to disappointment. His circling right round the island seemed to mean that he was searching its rugged area with most anxious eyes.

Suddenly Polly gave a great gasp. "Betty—all of you! Oh, look—down there, in the sea!"

"What—where—where?" the excited clamour was starting, and then others saw what Polly had just made out, as a tiny object floating upon the sunset-reddened waters.

"That girl!" was Betty's recognising yell. "The one who jumped out of the other plane. Oh, poor girl—"

"But she's swimming!" Jack shouted. "She may save herself yet! I shan't close in to the shore!"

"Don't see the other plane!"

"There may be a tide to help the girl."

"Yes!"

These were a few of the panted comments which were being voiced, in great excitement, when, all in an instant, they seemed to see the ocean leaping up to meet them.

Falling! The engines were suddenly silent.

"Look out, all!" was someone's last wild shout. "We're down!"

From Sky to Sea

A VIOLENT shock; a mixed noise that could be best described as a hissing crash!

Down they were in the sea, and nearly all of them were tumbled together after the violent impact.

Even the three or four who found themselves, by some lucky freak, not involved in this terrible mix-up, were for the moment too dazed and shaken to make a movement.

There was some distressful calling out by victims who had others helplessly lying atop of them. But these few unhurt passengers—one of them Betty, and another Pam—were silent, except for a hard gasping for breath.

It was a moment for them to feel that, if the end for them had not already come, then it was coming now. Down in the sea, and the whole lot of them shut up in the saloon, which at this very instant seemed to be—sinking! Then appalled minds got to work

again, and the power to act was regained.

Quick-wittedly, Betty snatched up something with which she could smash out one of the windows whilst it was still above the waves.

She had no sooner achieved her purpose than Pam was there, half-supporting a bewildered chum.

"Yes, go on, kid," Betty said to Naomer—for she it was. "Swim for it! You must, and best of luck! There's the shore. Keep your head, and look sharp! Wait though!"

"What so diggings?" jerked poor little Naomer, in greater bewilderment than ever now that Betty had suddenly changed her mind. "Bekas—"

"Keep still instead, Naomer! Don't move!—Hi, it's all right!" Betty shouted towards all those who were beginning to sort themselves out; and Pam joyfully shouted as well:

"We're not going to sink! We've stopped rocking!"

"We're aground in the shallows," Betty guessed. "Anyone hurt?"

No. In a few moments it became known that not a soul had suffered anything worse than a good shaking up, coupled with some severe bruising, and in a few cases, a wrung ankle, or shoulder muscles. So the final extrication was done to the accompaniment of some quite jocular, if breathless, cries.

Such a general escape from death-dealing injuries could never have been the case, had the machine dropped, plummet-wise, into the sea.

But they were to find out afterwards from Pilot Somerfield that he had managed to plane down to the water, so that there had been only a final sliding impact.

He was suddenly with them all during the ensuing scramble to get away from the wrecked air-liner. A scramble it had to be, but that is not to say that there was anything like a panic.

Betty's smashed-out window offered a handy exit for some, and a doorway let the rest out into the running waves after the door had been forced open.

In the saloon itself sea water was washing about to the depth of a couple of feet; but who was going to mind that?

It was warm sea water, anyhow, through which they went swarming away in twos and threes, first swimming for a few yards, and then finding they could wade to sandy shore.

All those bruises and twisted elbows and ankles were forgotten. In every mind there was the same thought, causing a reaction to jollity. When there might have been death for every soul on board—this instead!

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" puffed Paula, just as she touched ground after her own very wild bit of swimming. "Owch!" And she fell over—splash!—so that Polly, close to hand in the creaming waves, thought she had better make a grab at her.

But Paula, for once, was not going to be the tiresome defier who so often annoyed impatient Polly. Up bobbed a pretty head, streaming water from its fair hair, and to Polly's hasty, "You all right?" came the answer:

"Y-y-yes, wuv-wather, bai Jove! Fine, thanks!"

"Zen come on, queek!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas, look out for crabs!"

Polly was going to flounder the rest of the way to dry land, when she became aware of somebody else who, like Paula a few moments ago, was in difficulties. Again the Madcap plunged aside in the water, to extend a helping hand to some chum of hers, as she thought.

But as she took hold of the half-float-

ing figure, which drifted almost helplessly, a white face became upturned to meet her eyes, and it was a face she had never seen before.

The girl from the other plane!

It was she, her used parachute badly hampering her now that she was in the water.

"Oh!" Polly gave her cry of ready sympathy. "You poor thing! But you'll be all right now! Here, let me—"

"I—Thanks so much," came the

"Just let me carry you—"

"Oh, how good of you—but please, when you must be so—"

The grateful cry could not be completed. Lips that had faltered it remained parted in a gasping way, whilst those tragic eyes into which Polly was staring closed slowly.

Then it was the water-weighted form of an insensible figure which she was struggling to bear on to the beach



POLLY turned to wade back and help the exhausted girl, only to give an amazed gasp as she saw her face. The girl was a stranger! It must have been she who had jumped from that other plane.

half-exhausted response. "I'm sorry, but—I've had to swim and swim—"

"I know you have! I was seeing you from our plane. You were quite a good way from the beach then. We had even seen you jump from your plane. They ordered you to, did they?"

"No, that wasn't it," the girl gasped back, as she and Polly waded to land, apparently unnoticed by others in the general excitement. "But I saw there was an island, and I—I made up my mind to jump out, to get away from them."

"Do what?" Polly stared, stopping dead, hip-deep in the surf.

"They were carrying me away against my will!" the other girl panted. "And so I took the chance—to escape."

Morcove Has Met Mystery

POLLY instantly shouted to those chums of hers who were already clear of the water:

"Here! This girl!"

"What? Oh, great goodness!"

Only vaguely was Polly aware of prompt action by those who answered her calling-attention cry. It had become a moment for her to save the Mystery Girl from-sinking down in the shallows. So far gone she was, after all her exhausting efforts, that even now she might be drowned.

when Betty and others were suddenly with her to help.

To the top of the shingly rise they carried that dripping, lifeless-looking form, and there laid her down. After doing so, every one of them had thoughts only for her.

Their own and their friends' thrilling, escape; what they were all to do, with night so close upon them; the name of the island, if name it bore when it was so tiny—all this failed to engage their minds for the present. The girl—who was she, brought so strangely into their lives?

Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby came hurrying to the astounded group of juniors, and then Polly repeated exactly what the now unconscious girl had blurted out at the moment of the rescue.

Even whilst Polly was saying what little she had been told, the best was being done for the half-drowned sufferer. One of the boys swam back to the wrecked air-liner where she wallowed in the surf, and returned with a restorative that he had been told to seek in the kitchenette.

A little of the bottle's contents, skillfully administered by Mrs. Willoughby, took splendid effect upon one for whom so much else had already been done in timely manner.

After a few moments the girl opened her eyes, sighed loudly, and tried to

rise upon an elbow. But Mrs. Willoughby gently prevailed upon her to lie still.

"You will feel much better and stronger in a very little while, my dear. And you are safe—safe."

"Safe!" the girl echoed, in a husky whisper. "Oh, thank you so much for—*for everything!* Safe!"

And, sighing on, she closed her eyes again.

The sun had set. With the swiftness of a tropical clime, darkness was rushing down upon island and sea. Already the first stars were flashing.

Sudden darkness, when there had been no time yet to make any preparations for the twelve-hour night that it would almost be!

Every one of them drenched, too—not that that mattered. There was no risk of after effects; it only meant being about in a most uncomfortable state.

There was immediate talk of getting a fire going on the beach—several fires, so that clothes could be somehow dried in portions.

Great activity there would have to be in other directions, and next minute Betty and Polly found themselves being left to keep an eye upon the poor girl as she lay getting some restorative sleep.

Mrs. Willoughby and Mrs. Cardew were going to return presently to see how she was going on. Meanwhile, those two ladies went away to make themselves useful, with Morcove girls eager to do as advised, whilst the boys took instructions from Mr. Willoughby, Madge's father, and Airman Somerfield.

A silvery radiance came to the eastern horizon, and then the full moon rose. By the incandescent light which began to illumine their surroundings, Betty and Polly alternately studied the face of the girl whom they had been set to watch, and peered around, seeing many active figures.

Then the first fire was started on the beach, and from it a burning brand was taken to start another blaze. When Mrs. Willoughby came stepping to take a fresh look at the Mystery Girl, Pam was with her.

"How is she now, girls? Hasn't stirred? Yes, well, I will be back again in a minute. We have got some useful things ashore from the air-liner. There'll be coffee soon!"

Mrs. Willoughby hurried away again, and Pam, after exchanging a few half-words with Betty and Polly, also withdrew to resume her activities.

A few moments later, Betty excitedly nudged Polly, who looked and saw that the girl beside whom they both watched had opened her eyes once more.

"Better, eh?" Betty smiled, kneeling beside her.

"Yes, thank you. But what about all of you? Tell me, please—many hurt, killed?"

"None! Oh, we're all right, and we shall manage!" Betty hastened to set at rest a mind that was accustomed, evidently, to think of others. "We were bound for Croydon. And you?"

"Oh, I! I don't know a bit where they meant to take me; haven't the faintest," was the strange reply, to which Betty and Polly paid eager heed.

"This place—an island, isn't it?—must be hundreds and hundreds of miles from where they seized me."

"When you say 'they'?" Polly could not help asking.

"The man and woman—the ones who kidnapped me this morning."

"Kidnapped you? Kidnapped? Oh, but why? What for?"

"Polly dear!" Betty demurred, for she saw how such anxiety to be told

more was bringing a distressed look to the pretty face. "We mustn't—"

"But I—I can understand your wanting to know," the girl herself broke out, in an anguished way. "And I suppose I'll have to tell you—"

"Nobody belonging to our party will want to force you to say what you'd rather not," Betty tenderly put in. "I think I'll let them know that you have quite come round, and then—Hark, though!"

In the act of rising to her feet, she stared at Polly, receiving a very startled look in return.

The unmistakable hum of a plane was coming down to them from the night sky.

The Mystery Girl heard it, and instantly she sat up, looking more than startled.

Her eyes, in the moonlight, were enlarged with terror as she looked up to the starry sky.

"But that," she quavered—"that is their plane! Oh, I'm positive! The sound—just the same as I heard at dawn, at home, an hour before they took me away!"

Betty and Polly gazed down at her, then looked at each other again.

Every moment the plane was coming nearer, as a louder drumming of its engines proclaimed. But it was at a good height, and could not be seen yet in the moonlight.

All who were so active on the beach had noticed the tell-tale noise, and Betty and Polly now heard some joyful conjecturing that it was a plane scouting to find the wrecked liner! But this girl—at home at the dawn of the day which had just ended, and now she was here like this!—she knew better.

Betty was staring up to the night sky, trying to make out the plane, when she felt her wet skirt being plucked.

"They are looking for me!" she and Polly had the poor girl whispering up to her as they returned their eyes to her. "They'll not let me escape!"

"Sh! You are safe with all of us." "Oh, but you don't know why they took me away, and what desperate people they are! They won't care what they have to do, so long as they—"

She broke off, whilst Polly voiced a sharp:

"Goodness!"

The plane had switched on a searchlight. A rod of strong light, striking down from sky to sea, went roving this way, that way, finding only the open water for the first ten seconds.

Suddenly, the dazzling beam made a searching sweep that left it picking out their derelict air-liner, just off the shore.

All of the wreck that was above water became brilliantly revealed. Then the ray moved on slowly, lightening first with the creamy surf, and so finding the beach itself.

It was a dazzling glare which made that patch of the island's shore almost as light as day.

Betty and Polly came in for it, and felt suddenly blinded. They had instinctively looked up, and now they had to close their eyes for a moment. Opening them again, they looked down at the girl who was kneeling between them.

Like some tragic figure in a spotlight during a drama of the stage—so she appeared to them.

"They can see me!" she moaned. "Oh, they know—they know!"

At that instant the searchlight was turned off.

And then, as the darkness came again—relieved only by what seemed such faint moonlight, after that blinding

glare—the noise of the plane's engines ceased.

"They've shut off!" the girl said tensely. "They must be coming down! To get me—to take me away from you!"

"No, no!" Betty said soothingly. She was making full allowance for the girl's terror-stricken state. "How can they possibly come down—except in the sea? Then they'd lose their plane. And even if they swam to land they would have all of us to—"

"I'm sorry!" the poor girl faltered. "Don't think me a coward. Since this morning there has been so much to—"

"Yes, we can imagine!" Polly exclaimed comfortingly. "But now—listen again! The engine have restarted. Those wretches will be going away, after all."

Yet, even as that was said, to give still greater comfort, the renewed roar of the plane sounded, if anything, more overhead.

It grew quickly to a deafening roar, and then it seemed to Betty that she only just heard, amidst such a din, a faint, metallic sound as of something hitting the shingle quite close by.

And then once again the searchlight stabbed down through the darkness. Wildly the silvery beam of radiance swung in wide circles until it once again picked out the little party of cast-aways. The plane itself was circling away.

"Are they—are they going?" came the frightened girl's voice in a tremulous whisper.

But much as Betty would have liked to console her with an affirming "Yes," she could not. The plane was once more zooming back—roaring overhead again.

But the searchlight went out. A darkness which was all the blacker by contrast engulfed the island beach.

As soon as her eyes grew used to it, Betty remembered the metallic sound she had heard.

Peering to see if anything had fallen from the plane as it passed right above their heads, she saw a tin tobacco-box lying open on the stones. It had obviously flown open when it struck the ground, allowing a folded paper to fall out.

Next moment that paper was in her hand; but although the distant firelight enabled her to see some scrawled writing, she would not read it. She felt sure that the dropped message was intended for the Mystery Girl, and she handed it to her.

The plane was now roaring away—whether to be off altogether, or to hang about—how could anyone tell? This, at any rate was no moment for Betty and Polly to pay attention to its course in the darkness.

Their eyes were upon the escaped girl, observing the tragic despair which was hers as she read the message.

"See what a warning they have given me!" she whispered at last.

And Betty and Polly read, what was scrawled on a leaf torn from a notebook:

"Reveal nothing, or those you love will suffer all the more!"

Cast away upon an unknown island—plunged into a baffling mystery—threatened with perils on all sides—what an amazing adventure has befallen the Morcove chums! You will undoubtedly be eager to rejoin them next week on this Island of Strange Secrets, so on no account must you miss your copy of next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL.

The Impostor Unmasked . . . Thrilling Chapters of This Vivid Mystery Serial



FOR NEW READERS.

CATHERINE STERNDALE and her cousins, MOLLY and CHARLES, are staying at a queer Chinese house owned by their UNCLE GERALD. Catherine makes a friend of a little Chinese girl, KWANYIN, who suspects that her father is a prisoner somewhere in the house. He is the victim of the villainy of a crafty Chinaman, KAI TAL—who is carrying out some mysterious scheme.

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

Later Catherine overhears a conversation which tells her the truth. Uncle Gerald is an impostor! He is carrying out some mysterious scheme which involves keeping Kwanyin's father a prisoner. She also overhears a plot to kidnap her cousin Charles. She rushes off, determined to warn him.

(Now read on.)

On Their Guard

"CHARLES, stop!"

Catherine Sterndale ran on in panic through the bead curtain of the dining-room in Pagoda Place.

Her Cousin Charles was only a few paces ahead of her, following a Chinese servant, and he stopped as soon as he heard her voice, and turned.

"What on earth's the matter, Cath?" he asked, in surprise.

Catherine's face was strained and colourless. She knew she must stop Charles at all costs.

"Never mind me. Where are you going now?" she asked.

"To see uncle."

"But where?"

"Wherever he is," said Charles. "Where this fellow takes me. And, believe me, I shall say something about our not being given any supper—just sawdust and stuff!"

The Chinaman, who had been leading the way, turned back.

"If admirable nephew of illustrious employer would condescend to follow this altogether inferior person, it would be satisfactory to all."

Catherine, made a contemptuous gesture.

"You run along!" she said.

The servant bowed his head, with a smile, and folded his arms.

"Admirable and estimable Uncle Gerald," he said, "has suggested matter most urgent. Attention necessary. No refusal possible, I think."

Charles frowned at Catherine as she took his arm very firmly. He could not make her out.

"Let go my arm, please!" he said. "I really can't be bossed about by you! If uncle sends for me—"

"There's something more urgent!" said Catherine sharply. "If we must argue about it, argue about it in the dining-room!"

Short of struggling violently with a girl, which was not the kind of thing Charles ever did, he had to do as Catherine wished.

He turned back, rather sulkily, to the bead curtains.

"Now, what is all this fuss about?" he demanded.

Molly was waiting by the bead curtains.

"Yes? What ever has happened, Cath?" she asked.

Catherine looked at the Chinese servants; they were expressionless, motionless, but, as she knew, quite capable of hearing and understanding what was said.

"Well, you know that big star I showed you once?" she said impressively. "It's ten times the usual size."

It was the only thing she could think of on the spur of the moment to get them out of this room into the garden.

By
ELIZABETH
CHESTER

Illustrated by E. Baker

Charles took her seriously, and started to argue; but Molly was quicker on the "uptake." She realised that it was merely an excuse to give them a chance of going into the garden.

"My goodness, yes! I remember the thing," she said. "Of course I do! Oh, let's go and look!"

Catherine and Molly went into the garden through the french windows, and at last Charles followed.

"Now, look here—" he began.

But Catherine cut him short. "Charles, I've just saved you from being kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped—by whom?" he said.

"Sh! Talk in whispers! By uncle—or, rather," said Catherine slowly, "the man we thought was uncle!"

Then Catherine told them exactly what she had seen—how she had found the movable tapestry in the corridor, and had seen "Uncle Gerald" talking with Kwanyin's father.

"And Kwanyin's father—the old man with the beard," resumed Catherine—"accused uncle of being an impostor. Uncle did not deny it. He said, though, if it leaked out—if we came to hear of it—he would blame Kwanyin."

Charles was impressed at last, especially when Catherine explained about the kidnapping.

"Gosh!" he gasped. "But it—it's pretty well unbelievable, Cath! You mean that uncle—that man isn't our Uncle Gerald? Then where is our uncle?"

The cousins were silent. The thought was a staggering one. The little Chinese girl, Kwanyin, had warned them when they first arrived at Pagoda Place that the man they thought was their uncle was an impostor. But the idea had seemed too wild. They had not believed her.

But now they had no choice in the matter; the facts had to be faced. Where was the real Uncle Gerald?

"My goodness!" said Catherine. "A prisoner! They've got him tied up! Remember the man we saw being carried aboard the junk to the island?"

Charles looked about him in the darkness.

"Better not stay here chattering," he said. "They may suspect that we know—"

"And they mustn't, if only for Kwanyin's sake!" cut in Catherine. "Uncle will blame her—I mean, that awful villain will blame her and punish her!"

"And, besides," said Mollie, in alarm, "if he suspects we know, he'll certainly—"

She looked at a bush which rustled slightly.

Someone was crouching in the bush, listening!

"Look out!" said Mollie, through her teeth. "A spy in that bush!"

Charles strode towards the bush, and a man moved out. Charles gave chase, and in a moment was lost to sight.

In great anxiety, the two cousins hurried to the bushes amongst which Charles had disappeared. Right and left, they hunted in vain. Charles had disappeared, and the Chinaman, too.

"Charles is probably still chasing him," said Mollie.

Then of a sudden there came a strange, startled cry:

"Help!"

It was Charles' voice.

Catherine stood for a moment as though paralysed, and then she ran her hardest to the spot whence the voice came.

Her response was so quick that she arrived before Charles could be kidnapped.

She saw him in the clutches of a Chinaman. Charles was being twisted round, one arm bent strangely. His face was pale, his lips tightly compressed.

The Chinaman did not see Catherine. He was too busy with Charles.

It was not a time for hesitating. Action was needed. If Charles were carried off, they might not trace him; he might be hidden too cleverly.

Catherine saw the Chinaman's swinging pigtails, and made a jump. It was the man she had foiled once before.

She caught the pigtails and hauled as though she were pulling a bell rope. It was not a moment for squeamishness.

The Chinaman gave a wild yell. His grin Charles relaxed, and he wheeled in fury.

When Catherine saw him turn, her own daring frightened her.

The Chinaman raised his arms as though to make a dive at her. But Charles, infuriated by his pain, was only too ready to give the Chinaman what he needed.

Charles swung round his fist with all his strength and weight, catching the Chinaman between the eyes.

He drew up, spun round, and crashed down like a felled ox.

"Run!" gasped Mollie.

Catherine and Mollie took hold of Charles and dragged him, protesting, through the bushes.

They ran for the house as fast as they could, and dashed inside.

"Now what?" said Mollie.

"Supper," said Catherine, without hesitation.

"Huh! A lot of supper we shall get here!" said Charles.

"Not here—in the village," Catherine said. "As soon as we start to go, there'll be something done about it."

For a moment they discussed it in low tones, and then Charles and Mollie agreed that it was a wise plan.

Darkness was falling, and Charles' motor-cycle could only hold two. But there was a bicycle in the garage, and

one of them could use that, starting ahead of the other two.

Catherine did not believe, however, that they would really be allowed to go.

They made not the slightest effort to hide their plan. In fact, they talked openly about it in front of the Chinese servants who might understand English.

When Catherine and Mollie had put on coats, they were ready. In case Charles might be kidnapped, they had kept together.

They reached the garage without seeing anyone.

"It'll be locked," said Catherine suddenly.

"What fools we are! Of course it will be. They're bound to lock it," said Mollie.

"All the better," said Catherine. "We want them to know we're going. Then they'll tell uncle, and he'll have to do something about supper. I can't help calling him uncle still."

The room over the garage had lights on, and they could hear a wireless set in operation. All the garage doors were locked.

"Hi!" called Charles. "Hi, there!"

"Ho Hi!" said Mollie. "Hop Hi, and open inferior doors!"

A window above opened noisily, and a Chinaman in a blue velvet cap looked out. It was the Chinese chauffeur.

"Who there?" he asked.

"Wantee much motor-cycle," said Mollie.

"All right. Me come."

They heard his steps on the staircase. A light shone below, and a door opened.

The Chinaman appeared with a bunch of jingling keys, bowed, and touched his forehead with his right hand.

Without a word, he walked to a small door, unlocked it, went in, switched on the light, and beckoned them.

"Looks as though we're going, after all," said Catherine.

Charles followed the two girls in and marched to the motor-cycle.

Then he paused, an extraordinary expression on his face. Deep dismay competed with anger.

"Look at the sparking plugs—the insulation's all cracked. The head's bent—"

The sparking plug had obviously been dealt a violent blow, and Charles knew that it was damaged beyond repair.

"Who did that?" he asked the Chinese chauffeur.

The chauffeur shook his head.

"Many mice," he said. "Bad mice. Bitee much things."

Charles looked at him wincingly.

"A mouse couldn't do that."

"Lat, plaps," said the Chinaman, meaning a rat.

"Oh, don't talk sheer rot!" exclaimed Charles furiously. "Anyway, I've got another in the tool kit, so if you think—"

He broke off as he noticed that the petrol gauge on his tank registered nothing.

The tank had been nearly full when he had last used the machine.

"Gosh—who's drained my petrol away?" he gasped.

"Mice," said Catherine sarcastically, with a scornful look at the Chinese chauffeur.

"Make big hole," was the bland answer, and the Chinaman, stooping, pointed out a large hole in the bottom of the tank. "Petrol lun away plenty quickie," he said, shaking his head sadly.

Charles did not speak; his heart was too full for words. It would cost him weeks of pocket-money to have that tank

repaired. And until the job was done the cycle was quite unusable.

"It's a caddish trick—it's just hooliganism!" he said through his teeth.

His hands clenched, and for a moment the girls thought he was going to send his fist into the bland face of the Chinese chauffeur.

"I'm not going to let this drop," Charles added. "They can't smash my bike up without a whole lot of trouble. And if uncle doesn't see that the whole thing's looked into, and really try to find the culprit, then—"

"Then?" questioned Catherine.

"What then? What could they do? They could make a scene; they could voice their suspicions! They could face the mystery man with his imposture. They could accuse him point-blank of not being their uncle at all.

But not even Charles was prepared to go as far as that.

"No sense in staying here arguing," said Catherine uneasily. "Let's get outside and decide something."

Charles reluctantly left his motor-cycle, and the three went into the garage yard, and conferred in whispers.

"The motor-cycle was damaged to prevent our using it, obviously," said Catherine, in a low, grave tone. "And if we tried to get out of the gates, even, we might find the way barred. If the man we've called uncle knows we suspect him—"

"My goodness! He'd make us prisoners, too—like Kwanyin's father," whispered Mollie. "My word! Let him try to make me prisoner—"

"Slush!"

Catherine cast an uneasy glance about her. Everything here seemed to have ears—the very walls, the bushes.

"I don't think he suspects," said Catherine softly. "And we've got to go on fooling him for Kwanyin's sake, for our sakes... We've got to trap him—find out where our uncle is hidden."

"You mean I've got to put up with this?" demanded Charles sharply.

"Why, that motor-cycle—it—I—you don't know what it means to me, Catherine."

Catherine knew quite well.

"I do know, Charles. And I don't mean you've got to take this lying down. For that would only make him think that we suspect him. We've got to act as though we think he really is our uncle; we've got to be very angry about the supper and about the motor-cycle."

They were silent. And because of the silence, they heard footsteps.

Close together they stood, listening.

It was a hard, firm step, unlike the soft tread of the Chinese. Catherine took out her pocket torch and waited.

Listening carefully she judged where the walker must be by the sound of the steps.

Suddenly she flashed on the torch.

Its rays cut the darkness, and shone upon a tall man in a raincoat and wearing a cap. He looked up as the torch rays fell upon his face. Blinking slightly, he stooped.

His hand dived into his coat pocket.

"Who's there?" he snapped aggressively.

It was the man they had thought was their uncle!

Catherine spoke, the first to find her voice.

"Just us, uncle."

"Oh!" His aggression vanished.

"Oh, you three, eh? What on earth are you doing there?"

It was a difficult part that the cousins had to play now. They knew that they were dealing with a dangerous man. He had kidnapped their uncle, and installed himself here in

another's house. These Chinamen were in his pay! He had kidnaped Kwanyin's father. Relentless, daring and unscrupulous, he was no man to be dealt with lightly.

"Charles' motor-cycle, uncle—it's been damaged. We can't go out now," Catherine said.

He looked at them keenly. Catherine kept the rays of the torch from his face naturally, but even so she could see his expression—and he was clever enough to give nothing away.

"Go out? Why ever are you going out?"

Catherine quickly explained about the supper, and how they had thought that he was out.

"Disgraceful," he said sternly. "The damage to your machine shall be repaired, Charles, at my personal expense. I can only say I am extremely sorry. As for the supper—well, someone shall suffer for that. Come back to the house all of you. You shall have the best meal that they can provide."

The three cousins exchanged furtive looks. They could not help admiring his acting.

"Thank you, uncle," said Catherine. "You should be blaming me. I really do owe you an apology. But the fact is, that my Chinese servants feel that you are unsympathetic. I am sorry to say this, but they resent your being here."

Catherine knew the answer that he expected. They would have to say that they were prepared to go.

"Oh dear!" she said.

"Fancy being objected to by the servants," said Mollie daringly. "I suppose we shall have to go."

"We will discuss that after supper. Perhaps I can suggest a delightful seaside holiday for you to fill out the time that you should have spent here—at my expense, of course," said their "uncle."

He turned towards the house, and asked them to go with him. And once again he apologized.

Catherine was in a quandary. She could see through his pretence—knowing what she did. But he had placed them in a serious quandary.

He had told them in so many words that they were unwelcome in the house. They were to go. Obviously he wanted them out of the way. They knew too much. But he did not think they knew enough to create suspicion by what they could say outside!

"Well!" whispered Charles to Catherine.

"Wait!" she whispered when Mollie was chattering to their "uncle," and so preventing her from hearing what they said. "Whatever we do, we must not desert Kwanyin. We must not leave this place. If we do, we may never find uncle."

Charles demurred, and then finally agreed. For if they could only find their real uncle, then Kwanyin would be safe; and this impostor would be reinstated and their impostor defeated.

But if they went now, who would believe their story? How could they bring help?

To stay was the only course they could adopt. But all three knew that it meant danger. They would stay as spies—as enemies.

And if ever that fact became known, Kai Tal would strike.

Mystery Message

KAI TAL stood with folded arms. His eyes had an ugly glitter. The bogus Uncle Gerald, and Kwanyin were seated at the table in the small, secret room which Catherine had discovered.

Kwanyin would gladly have risen to make her escape, but she could not move. Her tiny feet were tightly bound. If she had stood she would have fallen.

Kai Tal looked at her in mocking triumph.

"Kwanyin has worked but little evil," he said. "This humble person is far superior in cunning." Kwanyin shivered. She dreaded Kai Tal. It was at his cruel suggestion that her feet had been bound in the traditional manner of old China.



CATHERINE had no time to think. She only knew that Charles must be rescued. She sprang forward and hauled at the Chinaman's pigtail.

"Master, you speak wisely," said Kai Tal. "These young English people must go. Their estimable but foolish behaviour is likely to make them a source of grave danger to the workings of our most urgent plans."

Kwanyin listened and her heart beat with sympathy for Catherine and her cousins, who had shown her such great kindness and friendship.

"If you do evil unto them," she said, speaking Chinese as the others were, "then may it be upon your heads. My illustrious ancestors who for ever guard and protect me shall be their guardians too, and time will come when Kai Tal shall writhe in the bitterness of regret, as the tiger emmeshed in a net, or the dragon trapped by noble knights."

The bogus Uncle Gerald turned upon Kwanyin then, his expression angry. "If you betray our schemes, if you awaken suspicion in the minds of these young people that I am not their uncle, it is they who will suffer. You understand."

"I understand," said Kwanyin very softly and heavily. "She listen to voice of serpent, but illustrious ancestors please to understand Kwanyin do all for best."

"Never mind why you do it," snapped the bogus uncle harshly. "You know what you have to do. To-night you shall go into the room which the two girls are sharing. You will have

the appearance of a statue, an idol. Your lips will be sealed so that you cannot betray us. Your arms will be tied, but your hands free. You will frighten the girls."

Kwanyin nodded her head slowly. "I will do so," she said. "Although for ever more I shall be worthy only to have the yellow dogs bark at me in the street, and the ill-bred urchins of the gutter hurl stones of contempt!"

"You must take your chance of that," said "Uncle Gerald," with a sneer. "Obey us and you need not fear us."

Kwanyin understood. She watched Kai Tal, and he slid away in his noiseless manner. He returned a moment later bearing a strange cloak of thin leather. It was of a colour and a superficial treatment that made it like wood in appearance.

It hung stiffly, and on Kwanyin would reach right to the ground.

"Put it on," said the bogus Uncle Gerald.

Kwanyin rose and tottered. She had to grasp at the table to save herself from a fall.

Kai Tal held it out, and she put her arms into the sleeves.

The elbows and shoulders were very stiff, and when Kai Tal had fastened some small loops, Kwanyin had to stand with her elbows close to her sides and her hands sticking out in front of her.

She looked exactly like a statue, save only for her head.

Kai Tal walked away and returned. This time he carried a small, wooden, carved head, that was incredibly light. It was smaller than the head Kwanyin had been forced to wear before.

The evil Chinaman put the head in position, and Kwanyin looked exactly like a wooden idol.

Last of all came the thin leather gloves. They fitted so stiffly that her fingers were hard to move.

"There," said "Uncle Gerald," leaning back and drawing at a cigar, "now you are a wooden statue. The girls have had a wonderful supper—such a supper that they cannot fail to have nightmares."

"The highly imaginative young people will not know," said Kai Tal, "whether they dream or see what there is before them to see. They shall have respect for Chinese gods."

"They will fear to break a promise," nodded "Uncle Gerald." This Kwanyin will not only frighten them, but overawe them, too. They must not know that it is you."

Kai Tal smiled maliciously. "Kai Tal will endeavour to make it impossible that Kwanyin shall utter words of any kind to reveal that it is she."

"Uncle Gerald" rose. "All is well," he said. "Kai-Tal, you are in charge. Do not lose sight of Kwanyin."

Then, with cautious tread, he went from the secret room, and humming to himself to give an appearance of lightheartedness, he reached the dining-room.

Catherine, Mollie, and Charles were just finishing their supper.

"Well, well!" exclaimed the impostor, as he strolled in. "Enjoying yourselves?"

"Yes, thank you, uncle," said Catherine.

"No more complaints?"

"None—unless we've eaten too much," said Mollie, with a smile.

"That won't hurt you. Chinese food never gives indigestion," said the impostor smoothly. "But I should think you'd do well to listen to the dance music before going to bed. Stay up until, say, half-past eleven."

"Fun!" said Catherine. But she wondered what reason he had for suggesting it—what ulterior motive!

"Do just as you like. I have some letters to write. One of the servants will give you any help, and Charles can manage the wireless set."

He stayed for a moment or two longer, talking to Charles about wireless, and then wished them good-night.

Catherine watched the curtains after he had gone, and then came to from her reveries with a start, to find a Chinese servant offering her another ice on a gold platter.

She turned to say that she would not have another, and then gave a start.

There was something besides an ice on the tray—a slip of paper. A message was written on it in large, easily read capitals:

"THE ISLAND. ROPE HANGS FROM YOUR WINDOW. KWANYIN."

Catherine read it, and had the hardest task in the world not to look at the servant who held the tray. His hand was shaking. He was afraid of someone.

"Oh, thank you!" said Catherine, and took the ice.

The servant whipped back the tray, keeping his thumb on the slip of paper.

Then Catherine knew that he did not want the other servants to see the message.

She remembered that there had been one servant who had been loyal to Kwanyin. This must be the man!

Or else—was the warning message a trap?

Catherine finished the message in a perplexed mood. And no certainty came to tell her cousins of the incident until the dance music was playing.

"It's a trap," decided Charles worriedly. "Kwanyin did not send that message. If we go to the island, it means that they get us there without a struggle. We are cut off from escape. We'll be prisoners."

For half an hour they managed to control their impatience to examine the rope; it would not have done for them to hurry too eagerly to bed.

Eventually, however, they were all really yawning, and Charles turned off the radio.

He went with the two girls to their room, and when the door was closed they crept to the window.

It was partly open at the bottom, and Catherine, pulling back one curtain, gave a gasp.

"Yes—look!"

A short, thick stick was at right-angles to the window-ledge and window-frame, and wound round its middle was the loop of a stout rope. The other end of the rope trailed down in the garden!

"The rope was there!"

"Don't use it," warned Charles.

And before the girls could stop him, he had hauled it in.

Charles thought that he had convinced them, as they did not argue, and after a moment or two he wished them good-night and returned to his own room.

It was ten minutes later when Mollie, thoroughly sleepy, was in bed, and Catherine was writing a letter home, that a soft step sounded in the corridor—far too soft for them to hear.

Outside the door stood Kwanyin in her frightening garment, listening, waiting, hating the thing she had to do, yet not knowing how to do otherwise.

She waited. She heard the window open. Catherine was putting the rope into position.

"Catherine! My goodness, you're not going to use the rope—you're not going to the island—"

"Sh! Yes."

Kwanyin heard and trembled. The island! She knew the peril. She knew that the bogus uncle and Kai Tal intended going there. If Catherine went, she would be trapped.

"I'm going!" she heard Catherine say.

The little Chinese girl reached out a hand and operated a switch which plunged the whole floor into darkness. Then she opened the door.

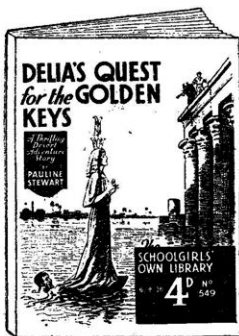
What will happen now? Can Kwanyin possibly save Catherine from the trap which awaits her? You'll be longing to know the answer to that question—and to read the dramatic sequel to this powerful situation, so on no account miss next Saturday's magnificent instalment of this enthralling serial.

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