

FOUR FINE STORIES : FOUR PAGES OF ARTICLES

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



LOCKED IN—

While The School Searched
For Her

Read about this dramatic incident
in the long complete Cliff House
School story which appears inside

Babs Redfern & Co. Feature in This Grand Long Complete Story of Cliff House School



CAPTAINS IN CONFLICT

STORMCLOUDS over Cliff House—stormclouds of bitter enmity. Two captains in rivalry; tyranny; a feeling of growing rebellion—at first only an angry murmur, then flaming into sudden action! Dramatic and swift are the events which follow then!

Cliff House is Startled

"**R**UBBISH!"

"It's a joke!"

"Primmy must be out of her senses!"

"We can't have two captains of Cliff House!"

Yet, if the notice which now confronted the crowd of bustling and bewildered juniors in the Big Hall at Cliff House was to be taken seriously, Cliff House had indeed got two captains. For that notice read:

"In order to relieve Stella Stone, head girl of the school, of her more pressing duties, Sarah Harrigan, senior prefect of the Sixth Form, will from this day onwards act in co-operation with Stella as joint captain of the school.

"(Signed) PENELOPE PRIMROSE,
Headmistress."

Girls blinked.

Some gasped; some were filled with dismay, some with fury; some, plainly, were elated.

Of the dismayed ones, Barbara Redfern & Co., leaders of the Fourth Form, formed a bewildered coterie. For the sixth time Babs read that notice, just as if she could not credit the evidence of her own senses. For the fifth time Clara Trevlyn, the Tomboy of the

Form, read it, and Clara frowned grimly.

Jemima Carstairs read it and shook her sleek, Eton-cropped head, putting her monocle into her eye as though hoping that her better vision with its aid would change the thing altogether.

From Bessie Bunter came an explosive

"Well, you know, I think it's a bit thick," she said. "And I'm jolly sure, you girls, that Stella never agreed to it."

"Hear, hear!"

"But," Lydia Crossendale, the sneering, overbearing snob of the Form, unpleasantly chimed in, "there it is! No getting away from Primmy's own handwriting. Anyway, I for one am jolly glad. We've had enough of Stella lately."

"Why, you—"

"Oh, pax!" Babs cried. "Don't start a row. We all know that Lydia's toadying to Sarah. We jolly well know that Sarah's been down on Stella, and that Sarah would like to get her job altogether. But this—it's not fair!" Babs broke out. "What has Stella done that she should be deprived of half her captaincy?"

"Yes, rather: We ought to see Primmy about it!"

"We know that Stella's studying jolly hard to win her veterinary diploma, and we jolly well know," Babs went on, "that Sarah Harrigan, cat as she is, has been making it as difficult as she can for old Stella. She practically persuaded the Head that Stella is neglecting her captain's job because of her studies."

"Good old Babs!"

"And Sarah, sneak that she is—"

"Whoa! Whoa!" Jemima muttered.

"Steady! Here's Sarah herself!"

Sarah Harrigan it was. But Sarah had overheard those last few remarks. She stepped forward now with a glint in her hard, greeny eyes, her lips set in straight lines across her sallow face. They noticed, too, with indignation, that she was wearing the captain's badge. Straight up to Barbara Redfern she stepped.

"Barbara!"

Babs stiffened.

"So," Sarah said, in a grinding voice, "I'm a sneak, am I? I've been making things as difficult as I can for Stella?"

Babs flushed. A murmur went round.

"Is that?" Sarah asked bitterly, "the way to talk about your school captain?"

Babs said nothing. But from Clara Trevlyn went up a scoffing laugh.

"School fiddlesticks! Stella's captain!"

"Who said that?" Sarah snarled.

By

HILDA RICHARDS

"I did!" Clara said boldly. "Then," Sarah said between her teeth, "you will take a hundred lines. Clara, Barbara, for your insolence and your mutinous attitude, you will be detained on the next half-holiday. And if any other girl here," she added, flashing a glance round, "has anything else to say, they can say it now—in front of me!"

"O.K. then!" cried Leila Carroll recklessly. "Here goes! I guess I, too, agree with Babs. We don't jolly well want you sharing the captaincy!" "Yes, rather! Hear, hear!" piped up Bessie Bunter valiantly.

"Leila, you will go to Miss Primrose," Sarah said. "Bessie Bunter, you will take fifty lines. And if," she added, a furious gleam coming into her eyes, "I have more cheek and back-chat from this Form, I'll gate the whole lot of you!"

There was an angry murmur. The Fourth, as a whole, liked Sarah even less than she liked them. Sarah was a spitfire, a mischief-maker. Sarah, when she wielded the rod of authority, wielded it with tyrant's hands.

Stella, on the other hand, was a girl most of them admired, and would have done anything for. Everybody knew how Sarah had set out to annoy Stella; how she had misrepresented her to the headmistress; how she had schemed and plotted to get the position which she held at this moment. There could be precious little respect for a prefect with a record like that.

"You will kindly remember," Sarah went on gratingly, "that in future you take your orders from me. Now, all of you, clear: out of this hall at once."

"Why, is it out of bounds?" Brenda Fallace asked.

"I order it!" "And why," a quiet voice put in, "do you order that, Sarah?" And everybody wheeled round; everybody stared at the graceful, rather pale-faced girl who now stood on the scene—Stella herself.

"Because," Sarah said, "they're causing a commotion."

"I don't see it." Stella's eyes travelled over the group. "I heard no commotion. In any case," she added to Miss Primrose herself, "no one expects Miss Primrose herself has the authority to order the girls out of Big Hall. You are rather exceeding your authority, Sarah."

Sarah gritted her teeth. Hate was in her eyes as she stared at the cool, composed figure before her. Somewhere at the back of her there was a titter. A voice, plainly intended for her ears, muttered:

"That's jolly well put her in her place!"

She frowned savagely. "Wait a minute," she said, "let's get this straight. Am I acting captain, or am I not?"

"You," Stella told her calmly, "are acting captain, yes; but do not forget, Sarah, that I am still captain."

"You mean that you have the power to order me about?"

"I have the power," Stella stated calmly, "to do what I think is in the best interest of the girls of the school."

"Even to the extent of countermanding my orders?"

"Even to the extent," Stella told her, "of putting right anything you do wrong, Sarah. But please do not quarrel in front of the girls."

Sarah drew a deep breath. Her little eyes glittered. But Stella, ignoring her, just calmly strode past her and halted in front of Barbara Redfern.



UP jumped Lydia, giving Brenda a spiteful thrust. There was a crash of falling crockery, mingled with cries of concern, as Brenda collapsed on the floor.

Her face was very tender as she spoke to the Fourth Form captain.

"Barbara, will you go to my study, please? I'd like to speak to you."

"Yes, Stella," Babs said joyfully.

"And—perhaps you, too, Mabs," Stella added, addressing Babs' golden-haired chum, Mabel Lynn. "Will you come, too?"

Babs and Mabs exchanged a smile. With graceful dignity Stella turned on her heel. She ignored the venomous look which Sarah, standing amid the wreckage of her own authority, darted at her as she went past, and led the way to her study in the Sixth Form passage.

A neat, snug little apartment it was, but, unusual for Stella, littered and untidy at this moment. The table was piled high with books, notebooks, and scraps of paper. There were more scraps of paper on the floor.

"You don't mind," Stella smiled, "giving me an hour of your time, girls?"

"Oh, no, Stella!"

"But I'm rather pressed for time, you see," Stella made a vaguely distracted gesture in the direction of the table. "There are fifty letters to be sent off by to-night's post, and if you two would be good enough to address the envelopes, I should be grateful."

"You know?"—and Stella sadly smiled as she looked at the heaped-up table—"that I'm studying for my veterinary diploma. The examination comes off in a fortnight's time, and if I'm to get through I shall require every scrap of time I can cram in. There's the letters, Babs. Here are the addresses. You can work on the desk over there."

Babs and Mabs smiled. To be sure, it was not a very interesting job. But any job in Stella's company, executed at Stella's request, was just sheer pleasure.

And they were glad—very, very glad to be able to do something to lighten

Stella's burden, for each of them knew of the terrific importance attached to Stella's winning that diploma. And both of them knew that if Stella didn't win, this, her last term at Cliff House, was rather likely to be the biggest disappointment of her career.

For, providing Stella won the diploma, she had been offered the post of assistant manageress in Sir Absalom Whittier's private zoo. It was as Stella had already told them, the chance of a lifetime.

"But there's such keen competition for the job, that I don't stand an earthly if I don't get the diploma," she said now.

Babs and Mabs knew that. Very quietly they sat down. Very industriously they began their labours, while Stella, seating herself at the desk, immediately plunged into her work.

Five minutes went by, then there was a tap on the door.

Stella laid down her pen.

"Come in!"

The sallow face of Sarah Harrigan looked in.

"Oh, hallo—busy?" she asked, with a scowl. "What are those kids doing?"

"They are working," Stella told her, "for me. Anything you want, Sarah?"

"Yes. Jessie Cranston of the Third Form wants to know if she can have a pass-out to-morrow."

Stella clicked her exasperation.

"Then surely," she said, "that is a matter to which you can attend, Sarah? Please don't bother me with those trifling things."

Sarah scowled.

"Well, you're at such jolly keen pains to make it known that you're still captain, that I thought you might like to be consulted," she said, and, with that, shut the door and went out.

Stella breathed hard. Babs and Mabs exchanged a meaning look. Again, Stella

became immersed in her work. Another five minutes, and then—tap!

"Sarah it was again.
"Did you give Brenda Fallace lines this morning?" she asked.

"Must you keep interrupting?" Stella asked. "Can't you see I'm trying to get on? If you look on the imposition sheet you'll see."

"Again Sarah went out. Again the atmosphere became charged with industry. Just another five minutes. Then—

Tap!
Lydia Crossendale looked in.
"Please, Stella, Sarah says will you lend her your fountain-pen?"

"Hasn't Sarah a fountain-pen of her own?"

"Well, I suppose not."
"Then tell Sarah," Stella said between her teeth, "that I'm using mine. That she must know!"

Lydia grinned. She threw a look at Babs and Mabs. Babs' face flushed, her eyes glowed a little.

Obviously it was that Sarah was deliberately causing the interruptions. More plainly obvious was it that Stella was becoming more and more distracted. When the next tap came at the door, Babs herself slipped from her seat.

It was Freda Ferriers.
"Here, I say, Babs, I want to see Stella!"

"Do you? Then Stella can't be seen."
"But Sarah says—"

"Never mind what Sarah says," Babs said, between her teeth. "You scoot, this minute! Stella's busy!"

"But, Sarah—"
Babs paused. There was a step down the passage. Clara Trevlyn hove in sight. She beckoned her.

"Freda wants to worry Stella," she said. "We don't want Stella worried. Kindly remove her, Clara."

"Look here—", Freda yelled.
But Clara was already looking there. One hand closed upon Freda's spindle-like neck, and Freda found herself being marched down the corridor. Babs returned.

For two minutes the silence was unbroken. Then footsteps in the passage outside. Thud! came a bang on the door, which flew open. The furious face of Sarah Harrigan looked in.

Stella put down her pen with an exasperated sigh.

"Look here, Sarah, can't—"
"I don't want you," Sarah snarled. "I want Barbara Redfern!"

"Well?" Babs asked.
"It'll do you mean by not allowing Freda to deliver my message?"

"And what," asked Stella, with a worried glance at the notebook in which she had been writing, "was the message, Sarah?"

"I told her to come and tell you that the Fifth Form blackboard's cracked!" Stella bit her lip. Her face was angry. "And is that anything to do with us?" she asked angrily. "That is a matter for Miss Bland. Sarah, will you please go away?" she asked, a dangerous note in her voice.

"But Barbara Redfern—"
"Barbara is in my charge. I will attend to that."

Sarah left with a sulky glower. But outside she grinned. The swift glance she cast at Stella's table told her very well that Stella had done next to nothing. That pleased Sarah. Not if Sarah knew it, was Stella Stone going to study in peace. Not if she could help it should Stella win that diploma, or get anywhere near winning it.

She grinned as she ambled down the corridor, cudgelling her brains to think of some other scheme to interrupt.

She had allies, several of them. Lydia Crossendale & Co. were enjoying this baiting of Stella almost as much as she herself. Rosa Rodworth was an ally, and so, in a more aloof way, was Diana Royston-Clarke. They would—and had been—useful! They should be more useful in the future.

But it was not merely to annoy Stella that Sarah was making that girl's studies impossible. No! Sarah had a bigger, a deeper motive than that. Though Stella was unaware of the fact, Sarah was playing another girl's game—a girl named Doris Grimshaw, who was Stella's biggest rival for the post of Sir Absalom Whittier's assistant.

If, in the examination for the diploma, Stella could be made to fail, then Sarah would benefit from Doris Grimshaw to the extent of twenty-five pounds.

Hard up, heavily in debt, with creditors pressing heavily, and threatening to report her to Miss Primrose, Sarah was in urgent need of that twenty-five pounds.

She reached the end of the corridor and rounded the corner, almost colliding with a breathless, fluttering figure which, at the same moment, whirled round it. Just in time, Sarah bit back the savage exclamation that came to her lips as she stared into the face of Miss Primrose.

Miss Primrose looked agitated.
"Oh, Sarah!" she cried. "I was coming to see you and Stella. Is Stella in her study?"

"Why, yes, Miss Primrose!"

"Very good! Come along!"

"I hope," Sarah said, "it is nothing serious, Miss Primrose."

"I am afraid it is terribly serious," Miss Primrose replied, with some agitation.

Sarah stared a little. She fell in by the side of the headmistress. Together they sped back up the corridor, and Miss Primrose knocked on Stella's door. Stella herself opened it.

"Stella, I must see you—at once!" Miss Primrose said. "May I come in? Barbara, and you, Mabel, kindly wait outside for a few moments, will you?"

Mabs and Babs regarded her wonderingly. What had happened?

They stepped outside. There, in the corridor, they waited. But Miss Primrose, in her agitation, had completely forgotten to close the door, and every word came plainly to their ears. They started as they heard the news.

"Stella—Sarah," Miss Primrose said breathlessly. "I have just received a message about Miss Fields." She paused a moment, evidently struggling with emotion. "Miss Fields," she announced, "died yesterday morning at her villa in Brittany."

Babs and Mabs almost cried out.
For Miss Fields, Cliff House's oldest girl, who had spent her fortune on the school, who was Cliff House's greatest benefactor, was an old lady loved and respected by all of them.

"Oh, my goodness!" Stella said.

"Apparently," Miss Primrose went on, "Miss Fields, on her deathbed, expressed a wish that I, and all the mistresses of Cliff House, of whom she was so fond, should attend her funeral. It is unfortunate," Miss Primrose continued, "that the funeral should involve such a long journey; but I have been in conversation with the chairman of the board of governors, and it is his desire that Miss Fields' last wish should be observed. To-morrow, therefore, we shall go."

Complete silence. Babs felt herself tingling.
"We shall probably be away a few

days—I do not know exactly how long," Miss Primrose went on. "But, in the meantime, you realise what it means—do you not? It means that Cliff House during this time will be without mistresses. It means that you, Stella, and you, Sarah, will have to look after the whole school. It is a great responsibility—especially at such short notice, and I must confess to some perturbation."

"Stella," she said, "I know that you don't regard Sarah with favour these days; but I must ask you now, for the sake of the school, to do all in your power to co-operate with her. As senior girl you have, of course, the last word, though Sarah shares your duties. Sarah, I must ask you, too, to co-operate with Stella."

Babs bit her lip. Mabs looked a little contemptuous as the reply came.

"I'm sure, Miss Primrose, that I've always done my very level best to remain on good terms with Stella, and, naturally," Sarah said virtuously, "I shall try even more now than—that this crisis has developed."

"Thank you! Then I leave things to you," Miss Primrose said. "I hope when I come back to find the school in the same orderly state as that in which I leave it. Stella, you will do your best?"

"There will be no disorder, if I can help it," Stella said.

"Thank you! Perhaps," Miss Primrose said, "it is just as well, Stella, that you have Sarah to share your duties. I do not wish you, of course, to give up your studies, but I must impress upon you that for the next few days the school must come first. That will be all, I think."

She came fluttering out, hardly noticing the existence of Babs and Mabs. After her came Sarah, a sour, crafty smile upon her face. Babs knocked at the door.

"Stella!"

"Oh, Babs!" Stella stood for a moment in the centre of the room. "You may come in," she said quietly. "Please finish the envelopes, and then go. And would you mind," she asked, with a rueful look at the table, "just putting my things away for me? I shall have to call the prefects together at once. Did you hear?"

Babs nodded.
"Poor Miss Fields!" Stella said.

And that was all. No reference she made to the responsibility which Miss Primrose's sudden announcement had placed upon her shoulders. Duty, with Stella, always came first, and Stella now must face that duty.

But Babs and Mabs looked at each other. As if by common consent they looked at the wall which separated Stella's room from Sarah's. They had seen the crafty smile on Sarah's face as she came out. Knowing, as they knew, how bitterly, how vindictively she was up against Stella, they feared the worst.

Obvious it was to Babs that Stella was going to have no easy job in controlling Cliff House. It would not have been easy at the best of times, but now, with Sarah against her, with her own studies, already seriously behind, to be considered—

Babs set her lips.

"We've got to stand together," she said. "We've got to back up old Stella for all we're worth. And if Sarah starts any nonsense—"

She did not finish, but her lips set in rather a fierce line.
While Sarah, in the next room, chuckled to herself. She thought she

had the game completely in her hands now.

If Sarah knew anything about it, these next few days would mean not only the ruin of Stella's hopes, as far as her veterinary ambitions were concerned, but also the finish of her career as captain of Cliff House School. She would make things so jolly hot for Stella Stone that swotting, study, examinations, or anything else would be utterly out of the question.



The School Without a Mistress

BEFORE that night was out, Cliff House was seething.

First came Miss Primrose's notice on the board.

Then it was whispered that Stella had called a prefects' meeting. The prefects were to act as mistresses. Stella and Sarah in the role of head-mistress.

For the next day Cliff House was to be deprived utterly of its usual mistresses. The prefects were to carry on in their places.

Then call-over—with Stella's more detailed announcement; Stella, very pale as she stood on the dais, but standing very upright as if diffusing to the great responsibility which had fallen upon her shoulders. In a calm voice she gave out orders.

"Until further notice," she said, "the Sixth Form will be presided over by myself and Sarah Harrigan. Frances Barrett will take charge of the Upper Fifth. Dulcia Fairbrother will assume responsibility for the Lower Fifth, and Lady Patricia Northanson for the Fourth Form." Here the Fourth

almost cheered. "Connie Jackson will be in charge of the Upper Third; Grace Camperhill in charge of the Lower Third. Myra Brownlow will look after the Second Form. The remainder of the prefects will share the school duties between them as ordered."

There was a nodding of heads. That arrangement met with everybody's approval. The only fly in the ointment was Sarah Harrigan.

"Captains of Forms," Stella went on, "will be given special duties each day. I want them to see that those duties are faithfully carried out. If you have any complaints, bring them either to Sarah or me. I look to every girl," she added warningly, "to back up Sarah and myself. Because the mistresses are absent, that does not mean that discipline will be relaxed."

There was almost a cheer. Faces flushed. Strong was Cliff House for Stella, though Sarah also had her following. Every girl there realised the importance of the issue at stake. They would back Stella up.

As if to prove that, Cliff House was on its best behaviour that night. Stella herself presided at supper. It was Stella, also, who came to put out the lights.

Sarah, for the time being, was lying low, apparently, though, she need hardly have worried, for in the sudden flood of duties which devolved upon her, Stella had no time even to think about her own studies.

The next morning before breakfast the mistresses left, Miss Primrose calling Stella and Sarah together once again, just for a last word of instruction and warning before she went.

When Cliff House came down to breakfast, the mistresses had departed. The prefects, headed by Sarah Harrigan and Stella Stone, were in charge.

And almost at once things began to happen.

It started at breakfast, with Lady Patricia Northanson as acting Form-mistress in charge of the Fourth.

That morning Stella had got up earlier than usual. She had attended to her duties, and was sitting in her study snatching a brief hour at her studies before assembly.

A letter, reminding her that the veterinary examination was to be held in a fortnight's time, had awakened Stella to a frantic realisation of the leeway she had to make up.

But she had made up her plans. Having delegated duties, she fancied she could pull through. But hardly had she sat down to write than the door came open. The caller was Sarah. She smiled unpleasantly.

"Are you, or am I, taking the breakfast round?" she asked.

"Sarah, if you will only read orders for the day, you will find that you are," Stella said.

"But don't you think you ought to come, too?"

"Why? Are you incapable of dealing with it?"

"But you're jointly responsible."

Stella made a gesture of irritation.

"Will you please allow me to get on with my work?"

Sarah scowled. She went out. Stella, under no delusion, pursed her lips. She knew Sarah's game. Sarah, for some unfathomable reason, simply could not leave her alone when she was studying.

Sarah went out. She paused outside the junior dining-hall. Puffed by her new authority, anxious to embark upon the campaign she had mapped out against her enemy, Sarah was out for trouble that morning, and perhaps it was hardly surprising that her



WITH many a subdued chuckle the "search" for Stella began—while Sarah, realising that the juniors were mocking her, grew white with rage. But she could do nothing to stop the joke.

thoughts should turn to her old enemies, the Fourth.

For a moment she locked through the glass panels of the door, and then went in. There was a great deal of cheerful noise going on, a great deal of chatter and merry laughter as the girls consumed their meal; it did not stop when Sarah entered the room. Sarah's brows knitted.

"Less noise in here!" she called peremptorily.

"Eh?" asked Clara Trevlyn in astonishment.

"I said less noise!" Sarah repeated.

"But, Sarah, we're allowed to talk," Clara objected.

Sarah frowned.

"Clara, don't answer me back! Do you realise to whom you are talking?"

"Eh? Of course," Clara said—"to you."

"Then please stand up when you address me."

"But I'm having my breakfast," Clara pointed out.

"That," Sarah retorted icily, "is neither here nor there. Do not forget, Clara, that you are not addressing me as a prefect now. You are addressing your acting headmistress."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Babs.

"And for not standing up when you speak to me, you will take fifty lines!" Sarah said.

"For being insolent, you will take a hundred, and you will hand them to me, Clara, before lessons this morning, otherwise I shall detain you for the rest of the week."

There was a murmur at that—an ominous mutter. A hundred and fifty lines—to be done in about half an hour! It was silly, of course! Just impossible! Clara's face flushed.

"Are you trying to be funny?" she asked.

"Clara, stand out!"

Rosa Rodworth giggled. Lydia Crossendale, sure of Sarah's support, openly and sneeringly laughed. Others continued to stare at Sarah, however—not really believing even she could be in earnest. But Sarah's eyes were glittering.

"Stand out!" she cried.

Clara set her teeth. Up in a moment were all Clara's mutinous instincts. She stood her ground.

"Clara, act your headmistress—"

"As my what?" Clara scoffed.

"Your headmistress—"

"Oh, stop giving yourself airs!" cried Leila Carroll in disgust.

"Leila, you are detained to-morrow!"

"Bow-wow!" said Leila.

"And you are detained the next day. Another word, and I shall send you to Stella!"

"But why?" Leila asked innocently, "if you're headmistress, send me to Stella!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sarah's face became brick-red with wrath. It was obvious in that moment that, however she regarded her authority, that regard was not shared by the majority of the girls in that room. She clenched her fists.

"Leila, come out here!"

"When," Leila coolly replied, "I've had my breakfast."

"Patricia, you are acting Form-mistress. Tell Leila and Clara to stand out."

But Lady Pat, a flush on her cheeks, rose in her seat.

"As acting Form-mistress," she said tartly, "I must refuse, Sarah."

"Why?"

"Good old Pat!" cried a delighted voice.

"Patricia, you dare—"

"Yes, I dare!" Lady Pat spoke coldly, even contemptuously. "As acting Form-mistress, I, too, have duties to consider, and that duty is to see that the girls in my charge get fair play. There is no rule at Cliff House to stop girls talking during breakfast. It is, too, rather preposterous to give a girl a hundred and fifty lines to do in half an hour!"

"Hurrah!"

Sarah stood still. She gazed at Lady Patricia as if she could hardly believe her ears. It is almost certain that if Sarah had had something in her hand she would have thrown it at that girl, as Lady Pat, ignoring her, sat down.

Sarah quivered.

"This is rank insubordination!" she cried. "Patricia, you forget yourself! Barbara Redfern, take fifty lines for laughing! Mabel Lynn, another fifty for daring to nudge Barbara in my presence. But we'll get this cleared up!" she cried. "We'll get it cleared up, right away. Lydia Crossendale—"

"Yes, Sarah?"

"Fetch Stella. Stone at once—at once!"

"Oh, leave Stella alone!" Babs protested. "You know she's busy!"

But Lydia, with a grin, had already left her place. The Form waited in grim silence. Presently Lydia returned. After her, looking rather worried, came Stella. Her eyes at once travelled to Sarah.

"Well, Sarah, what is it?"

"As," Sarah said grudgingly, "acting headmistress—"

"Are you referring to me?"

"I am referring to both of us!"

Stella smiled a little.

"Don't you think," she asked, "you are rather presuming, Sarah? I don't remember Miss Primrose giving either of us such an appointment."

There was a titter. It stopped at once when Stella frowned round, however.

"Well, as—as the person in authority, then," Sarah got out between her teeth, "it is my duty to report Lady Patricia Northanson."

"What for?"

"For insubordination."

The curl on Stella's lips grew a little more pronounced in the contempt it expressed for the speaker. But she nodded.

"Well, what is it?"

Sarah explained. Stella shook her head. She turned to Lady Pat.

"Patricia, what have you to say?"

"Only," Lady Pat said, "what I have already said—that Sarah was acting quite outside her rights."

A breathless pause.

"And that," Stella decided, "is exactly what I think, Sarah. Clara, sit down. Sarah, you have no right to interfere—none at all."

Sarah's eyes flamed.

"Who's captain?"

"I am," Stella stated calmly.

"Oh, you are, are you?" Sarah retorted. "You think you're going to rule the roost while Miss Primrose is away! But I'll remind you, Stella Stone, that Miss Primrose also put me in joint charge of this school, and I protest against having my orders overruled."

"In that case," Stella asked, "why did you send for me?—And, in any case," she added, a glitter coming into her eyes, "Miss Primrose never meant that injustices should be done when she was away. You had no right to punish anyone in this room. Those punishments are withdrawn now. Your duty, Sarah, as well as mine, is to maintain order in this school. Nothing more and

nothing less is asked of you. Not," she added bitingly, "to go out of your way to deliberately make trouble. Girls, proceed."

There was a cheer, swiftly dying into silence as Stella swept a glance round. Then she went out, leaving Sarah standing there, her eyes gleaming, her face brick-red with wrath. Lydia Crossendale stood up.

"It's not fair!" she cried.

"Nonsense! Sit down!"

"I won't sit down! Fair play!" Lydia shouted. "We all know Primmy put Stella and Sarah in joint charge. Stella had no right to override Sarah when—Here, Clara—Ow, wow!"

There was a roar, a yell of laughter; for under the table Clara, who sat next to Lydia, had furtively hooked one foot round her ankle and had tugged. Lydia, caught off her balance, went reeling backwards.

Brenda Fallace, next to her, with remarkable presence of mind, whirled her chair away from under her at the same time, and Lydia, yelling, went sprawling on the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sarah's eyes glittered.

"Girls!" she stormed.

Up jumped Lydia in fury. Revengefully she turned upon Brenda. Vicious the push she gave that girl, and back went Brenda, catching at the tablecloth to save herself. There came a yell.

"Look out!"

"Brenda!"

"Oh, my hat!"

With a clatter and a crash, dishes, cups, and saucers rained upon Brenda.

"Oh goodness! Girls!" cried Lady Pat.

"Girls!" shrieked Barbara Redfern. Pandemonium then. Sarah's eyes glittered. She stood still—grimly, gloatingly satisfied—making no attempt to interfere. The row, she knew, would bring Stella back on the scene, and that meant that Stella once again would have to tear herself away from the work which meant so much to her. This was the sort of thing that Sarah was working for, the sort of crisis she was only too ready to help on. While scenes such as this were rife in the school there would be no rest for Stella Stone.

Stella heard the din. Stella, just getting down to work again, pricked up her ears. Once more she put down her notebook; in an angry frame of mind indeed, strode back to dining-hall; then she stared.

"Girls!"

As if by magic, commotion ceased.

"Girls—" And then Stella became aware of Sarah. "Sarah," she cried sharply, "why didn't you stop this?"

Sarah shrugged.

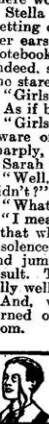
"Well, whose fault was it that I didn't?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Sarah answered sneeringly, "that when I did attempt to put down insolence in this Form, you stepped in and jumped on me. Well, here's the result. This is your mess—and you can jolly well clear it up!"

And, with a sneering smile, Sarah turned on her heel and quitted the room.

The Campaign Continues



The Campaign Continues

NOT a very auspicious start that, and not a very happy augury for the days that were to come. Obvious it was at once that Stella and Sarah were bitterly opposed;

obvious, too, that Sarah intended to make things as difficult as possible.

Stella saw at once that work, as far as that morning was concerned, was once again doomed; for no sooner had Stella put matters right in the junior dining-hall than it was time for Assembly.

Assembly over, it was her duty to call the prefects together; and after that there were classes, with Stella in charge of the Sixth for the first morning session. Not until eleven o'clock would she be relieved.

And then, perhaps, if she was lucky, she might pursue her studies uninterrupted until twelve, which was the hour at which the school dismissed for the morning.

If only Sarah would leave her alone! But Sarah did not leave her alone. Sarah, of course, knew just what times were available for Stella's studies.

She waited until the second session of the morning, and then strode into the Fifth Form class-room. Girls working there under Dulcia Fairbrother, the popular games captain of the school, glanced up at her inquiringly, saw that it was only Sarah, and plunged into their tasks again.

An audible snort from Sarah brought their attention back to her with a jerk.

"Don't you know," Sarah asked unpleasantly, "that when your headmistress comes into the room you must stand up?"

"But our headmistress is on her way to France," Flora Cann said.

"Your headmistress, for all practical purposes, is here," Sarah said grimly, and indicated herself. "In the absence of Miss Primrose, I am headmistress, sharing the duty jointly with Stella Stone. You will all stand up!"

But the Fifth stared; they blinked, wondering, perhaps, if Sarah was out of her senses. Stella Stone had already been in, but Stella most certainly had not insisted upon such an outrageous recognition of her authority. Not many things had the Fifth in common with the Fourth, but general dislike of Sarah Harrigan was certainly one of them. Contempt for any girl who gave herself airs was another.

Dulcia looked taken aback.

"But, Sarah—" she protested.

"Thank you, I don't want any interference from you!" Sarah snapped. "Well, stand up!"

One or two girls nervously stood up; the majority, however, remained seated.

"Flora Cann!"

"Well?"

"Take five hundred lines!"

"Wha-at?" gasped Flora.

"You heard what I said! Dulcia, call your Form to its feet."

But Flora glared. Very much of the Clara Trevlyn temperament was Flora. Five hundred lines was an unheard of punishment, and Sarah had no more power to order that than anyone else. A murmur went up. It was a murmur which had a note of rage, of menace in it. Sarah recognised its timbre and smiled.

The Form sat tight.

"Dulcia, order your Form to stand up!"

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind!" Dulcia said indignantly.

"Very well!" Sarah's eyes glittered. "Obviously," she said, "you are incapable of running this Form. You will go, Dulcia, I will take charge here."

Dulcia stared at her. Contemptuously she shrugged. She went, while wrath flamed into open mutiny in the Fifth Form.

Straight to Stella's study Dulcia went, and in five minutes Stella, inter-

rupted again in her studies, was on the scene.

Another short, sharp battle of words there was between her and the overbearing prefect in the Fifth Form Class-room. Sarah flared.

"Well, as you seem so keen on disputing everything I do, perhaps you will take charge yourself," she said.

Stella did. But that meant no more study that morning. At break she went back into her room. Sadly she gazed at the table.

What was the use? she told herself. How could she possibly make up her

had no use for Barbara in that moment. She called to Lydia.

"Oh, Lydia, will you do something for me—and you, Frances, and Freda?"

"With pleasure," Lydia replied.

"I want you to move the bookcase near the door in my study to the opposite wall—the wall adjoining Stella's study," Sarah said thoughtfully. "It means, of course, that you will have to move all the books on the shelves."

"Yes, Sarah," Lydia grinned. "But won't it make a noise?"

Sarah shrugged.



HER face flaming with anger, Clara leapt at Sarah and tore the pointer from her hand. "You bully!" she panted, and the fierce cry was taken up on all sides.

leeway with all these disturbing influences at work? Not like Stella was it to be disheartened; but she was very, very disheartened at that moment. Still—

She gritted her teeth. She must get down to it. Wearingly she pulled her notebook towards her, knitted her brows in an effort at concentration.

The door opened, and Sarah looked in.

"Oh, hallo! Busy?" she asked pleasantly. "About the dinner—"

Stella's eyes gleamed.

"What about the dinner?"

"Will you or I take the rounds?"

"Sarah, will you please get out?"

Stella asked exasperatedly. "You know very well I shall take dinner, after the rumpus this morning."

Sarah went out, smothering a grin. She went off down the corridor and into Big Hall. Several girls were there, Lydia Crossendale, talking to Freda Ferriers and Frances Frost near the notice-board, turned to give her a friendly grin.

Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and Clara Trevlyn, standing near the entrance, turned and stiffened as they found her eyes upon them. But Sarah

"Noise," she pronounced, "cannot be helped. It is a necessary alteration. Will you go along now?" She smiled. The smile was intended for Lydia alone. It expressed perfectly the message Sarah wished to convey, but unfortunately for Stella, perhaps, it was also seen by Barbara Redfern.

Very plainly that look said "Make as much row as you possibly can." Mabs glanced at her quickly. Clara, too, made a half-step forward as Lydia & Co. strolled off. Babs plucked her arm.

"In a minute," she said.

"The beast!" Clara got out. "See her little game?"

"Yes, I see it!" Babs looked round. Sarah, with a covert smile, was strolling out through the door now. "Another nasty little scheme," she said, "to upset Stella."

"Well, we're not jolly well going to let them upset Stella!"

"Rather not!" Babs chimed in. "Come on!"

Rather grimly the three nodded. Sarah was out of the way then. Stella, getting down to it, did not hear the chuckles that came from next door; did not hear that door open, and Lydia & Co. enter Sarah Harrigan's room. But

she jumped when suddenly from Sarah's study came a thud.

What was that?
Then crash! Thud again, followed by a high-pitched laugh in Lydia Crossendale's voice. Stella set her lips. A crash that shook the floor and brought a howl from Freda Ferriers followed.

Stella frowned. Sternly she looked towards the door. She had no doubt that Sarah was in these superintending operations. She had no doubt, either, that this was another scheme of Sarah's to deliberately upset her. Sarah wanted to create another scene, of course, and scenes were so bad for the discipline and the harmony of the school. Well, this time she wouldn't fall into the trap.

She continued with her work. Crash again! Then suddenly the door of the next study opened. Stella did not know that Babs, Mabs, and Clara opened it. She did not see those three champions of hers as grimly they walked into the study. They said no word. Right up to Lydia Crossendale Babs walked, and, with one swift movement, pinioned her arms behind her back. Before Frances could guess her intention, Clara had treated her in a similar way. Mabs just caught hold of the weedy Freda and lifted her bodily off her feet.

"Look here—" yelled Lydia.
"This way!" Clara said grimly.
Outside the three were propelled. In the passage they stood in a fuming group. Babs very quickly locked Sarah's door, withdrew the key, and put it into her own pocket.

"Well, are you going?" Clara asked. Lydia glared.

"Sarah told us—"
"Yes, we know!" Clara's lips curled scornfully. "Sarah told you to annoy Stella, but you're jolly well not going to annoy Stella!"

"But Sarah's captain—"
"Sarah's my grandmother! Scoot! March!"

"But—"
Clara's lips set tightly. Her hand stretched out. Five strong fingers coiled about the back of Lydia Crossendale's neck. Lydia, fuming and furious, was forced along the corridor. Frances and Freda hesitated. But Babs and Mabs were looking grim.

"Beat it!" Babs said tersely.
So off they went, followed by the watchful chums. Reaching the end of the corridor, they came face to face with Sarah. Sarah glared.

"Lydia, what are you doing here? Why aren't you doing what I asked you to do?"

"Because," Frances Frost broke in furiously, "Babs and Clara chuckled us out of your study. They had some piffing idea that we were trying to annoy Stella."

"Oh!" Sarah's eyes gleamed. "So," she fumed, "you interfered, eh, Barbara Redfern? Lydia, go back at once!"

"But Barbara's got the key!" Lydia glowered.

"Barbara, how dare you! Give it up at once!"

Babs paused. But there was no help for it. Sarah had authority, and Sarah must be obeyed. Reluctantly she handed it over.

"Thank you!" Sarah said. "Lydia, here is the key. Get back. And since, Barbara Redfern," she added spitefully, "you are so fond of locking up studies, you and Mabel and Clara shall be locked in the class-room for two hours after afternoon lessons, with a special detention essay to write. That, perhaps, will teach you not to interfere," she added sourly.

Babs & Co. glowered, but Sarah meant it.

They had matched their wits against Sarah's—they had failed. Sarah, for the moment, at least, was triumphant.



Fourth Form Justice

SARAH was!

Useless for Stella to try to work with the din which ensued from the adjoining study. Goaded beyond distraction, she went to see what it was all about. She found Sarah's room in uproar, three very dusty but victoriously happy girls shifting everything that could be shifted. When she went to complain, Sarah arched her eyebrows.

"Well," she said surlily, "I can make alterations in my own study if I like."
Stella retired. She had no answer to that. Sarah, of course, was perfectly within her rights. Useless then to think of going on with her work. She abandoned the project as far as her study was concerned, and taking some of her books, found a convenient seat in the cloisters.

But alas for Stella! It seemed as if the very elements were against her in the terrific fight she was making to win her diploma. Hardly had she commenced, than it came on to rain.

"Oh, my goodness!" Stella cried.
In a hurry she picked up her books. With a sad and worried shaking of her head she wended her way back into the school. It wanted ten minutes to the afternoon lesson then—which, of course, meant that she would not be able to proceed with her studies until after tea.

In Hall she paused. Sarah Harrigan was there laying down the law to Lydia & Co. Near them, in an angry group, were Babs, Mabs, and Clara.

"I don't like it," Sarah was saying.
"No, I don't! On second thoughts, I'll have the books back where they were before." Lydia, you might attend to that as soon as afternoon school is over. You—and then she glanced up, caught Stella's frown, and grinned. "And this time, please don't hurry the job," she added sternly.

"No, Sarah!" Lydia said meekly.

But she grinned. Stella compressed her lips. Babs, furious, frowning, happened to look up and see the captain's face in that moment. Her heart smote her at the expression of despair and anguish that was plainly to be read upon it. She glanced quickly at her chums.

"Wait a minute," she muttered.

"Why—"
But Babs did not stop to explain. As Stella hurried off, she hurried after her. She caught her up at the corner of the Fourth-Form corridor.

"Oh, Stella!"
Stella turned slowly. A faint smile crossed her lips.

"Hallo, Barbara! You want to see me?"

"Yes, please, Stella," Babs gulped.
"I—I—wouldn't if—perhaps you could give me about two minutes of your time. In Study No. 4?"

Stella looked mystified.

"Why, Barbara?"

"It—it's something confidential, Stella."

"Oh!" Stella's face lightened. She threw a quick, suspicious look at the captain of the Fourth, reading there the anxiety on her face. "Very well!" she said.

Babs gulped. She tripped along the corridor. Eagerly she threw open the

door of Study No. 4, where Bessie Bunter was snatching a pre-lesson nap in the armchair. Bessie blinked.

"Bessie, old thing, go to the tuckshop and get me some chocolate," Babs said eagerly. "Some of that new stuff you know. Here's a shilling. But hurry, old Bessiekins. Lessons are due in ten minutes."

Bessie smirked. She took the shilling Babs handed over with alacrity, and dodged out of the room. Stella regarded Babs queerly.

"Why, Barbara, is this so terribly secret?"

"Stella, please," Babs said, and flushed, hardly knowing where to begin. "Stella, I hope you won't mind anything I say," she added. "But—but—well, we can all see how you're placed. How are you getting on with the studying?"

Stella's lips twisted.
"I am afraid, Barbara, I can't say I'm getting on at all," she replied.

And yet it's terribly, frightfully urgent!"

"Very!"

"Well—" Babs drew a deep breath. "Stella, I must tell you," she said quietly, "we're your friends in the Fourth, as you know. I hate to have to say it, but it's as plain as anything to everybody that Sarah is deliberately trying to mess things up for you. We all want to see you get through your examination."

Stella sighed.
"Thank you, Barbara—but—but what am I to do?"

"That's what I've been thinking," Babs said. "Why not change out of your study to somewhere else—at least, for a while, for purposes? If, for instance, you came in here—"

She paused.
"Sarah would never think of looking for you here, and we shan't want the study," Babs went on valiantly. "We can dig in with Clara & Co. for the time being. If nobody knows where you are, then nobody can annoy you, can they?" she stammered, but she saw that the suggestion fell upon fruitful ground.

Stella's eyes brightened a little. That enchanting smile, so long absent when she smiled recently, reappeared for one transient moment again. Her lips quivered with the gratitude she felt. She shook her head.

"Barbara, you are a dear, kind girl," she said softly.

"Then—then you'll come?" Babs asked eagerly.

"Thank you, I should love to come. But"—and Stella looked at her—"you will not tell anyone?"

As if there was any need to ask the question! Babs laughed. Stella's whereabouts, and all things connected with Stella, were dead secrets from that moment.

LOYAL BABS! So loyal, so utterly anxious that Stella should not be involved in any further scene of friction with the obnoxious Sarah, that she, Clara and Mabs willingly suffered themselves after lessons that afternoon to be locked in the class-room for two hours.

Had they complained to Stella, Stella, of course, would have revoked Sarah's punishment, but not without a row would Sarah have yielded the ground, and out of consideration for Stella, they were anxious that that row should not take place.

That afternoon Stella removed her books and her papers to Study No. 4, and immediately after lessons, while Lydia & Co. went noisily to Sarah's study to re-alter the alterations of the

morning, she quietly let herself into Study No. 4.

Nobody except Babs & Co., and Bessie Bunter—Bessie, as the third sharer of Study No. 4 had, of course, to be made aware of what was happening—knew anything about that.

But Bessie, fiercely, strongly loyal in her friendship to Stella, vowed that she would not breathe a word—and for once Bessie stuck to that resolution.

And so while Babs & Co. groaned under the tyrant's rule in the Fourth Form class-room, and Lydia & Co. made merry havoc in Sarah's study, believing all the time that Stella was in the adjoining room, Stella, with a freedom from care and worry she had not known for many, many days past was quietly pursuing her studies in the quietude of Study No. 4.

For an hour Lydia & Co. banged noisily and crashingly about the study. They were dusty and tired. No sound, either, from the captain's study. No furious Stella intruding at the door. Lydia frowned.

"My hat! What's happened to her? She's lying quiet."

"Throw something at the wall," Freda suggested maliciously.

They threw a book at the wall. It shattered the plaster. Still no protest.

Sarah came in. She blinked. "Here, who made that mess on the wall?" she cried. "Has Stella been in?"

"No," Lydia said. Sarah frowned. She looked sharply at Frances; then she went out. In a moment she was back, her face black and sulky.

"Stella isn't there," she said. "What's more, all her papers and her books have gone with her."

"Oh! Do you mean to say we've had all our trouble for nothing?" Lydia Crossendale exclaimed indignantly.

But Stella wasn't thinking of Lydia's troubles. She was thinking furiously of Stella's artfulness. The very fact that Stella's papers had gone with her, proved that the school captain was studying in secret. Sarah set out to find where.

She wandered round all the absent mistresses' studies, almost confident that she would find Stella occupying one of those. Blank! She went to Miss Primrose's study. Blank again!

In fury she turned to the governor's room. She even went to the gym, the music-room, the laboratory and the library, hoping that Stella might have tucked herself away in some corner.

Again no Stella! Stella, indeed, seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth.

In a savage frame of mind Sarah made her way to the Fourth Form Common-room.

The Common-room was fairly crowded at this time of the evening. Babs, Clara, and Mabs, having finished their detention tasks, were among the girls who had gathered there.

Babs was playing lexicon with Mabs and Jimma Carstairs; Clara was thoughtfully oiling and polishing her hockey-stick, which she had dug out from among the gear in the bottom cupboard.

Lydia was there, too, sitting in one corner of the room, immersed in the latest Parisian fashion magazine, with Freda Ferriers leaning over the back of her chair, and idly scanning the paper as Lydia turned the leaves.

One and all looked up as the door was flung open.

"Where's Stella?" snapped Sarah.

"Gone to the lions!" murmured Jimma Carstairs.

"Jimma, don't fool! Take fifty lines! Has anybody here seen Stella?" Sarah snorted furiously.

"What—have you lost her?" chuckled Joan Charmant.

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A TREAT IN STORE

"Joan, fifty lines! Barbara Redfern—"

"Here I am, Sarah!"

"Have you seen Stella?"

"Oh, yes!" Babs replied brightly. "I've seen quite a lot of her this term."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Sarah gritted her teeth.

"You know perfectly well what I mean. Stella has not been here since afternoon classes. Does anyone know where she is?"

There was a murmur. Girls glanced at each other. No, nobody had seen Stella, though most of the girls were rather glad that Stella, for once, seemed to have eluded obnoxious Sarah's vigilance.

Clara chuckled. "Perhaps," she said brightly, "she's gone out."

But Sarah had already made inquiries of the porter. She paused. She faced a roomful of grinning faces. Very sharply she looked at Barbara, remembering all at once that Babs had been Stella's most faithful henchman during her persecution of the school captain. Babs' face at that moment was one of angelic innocence.

"Barbara, find Stella," she said. "Certainly!" agreed Babs, and looked round. "I think we all ought to try to find Stella," she agreed. "I mean to say, it's a jolly serious matter when the captain of the school disappears! Lydia, you might turn out your pockets. Bessie, look in the cupboard. Mabs, you look in the drawers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the joke caught on. At once the Fourth rose to the bait. Finding Stella from that moment became a highly entertaining and diverting game. Owingly, seriously, drawers were turned out; girls crawling on hands and knees looked under tables, upturned chairs. Sarah grew furious.

"Look here—"

"Where's Stella?" went up the cry.

"Stella—Stella, where art thou?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sarah's lips compressed. Her eyes flashed. These girls were making a mockery of her—her! So fond of ridiculing others, Sarah hated to be ridiculed herself. And another thought occurred to her suddenly. Stella, she was sure, was within earshot in the

school. If only she could cause a sufficiently noisy demonstration, that would bring Stella on the scene.

"Barbara Redfern!" she hissed.

But Babs, on hands and knees, owlishly peering into the corner, pretended not to hear. Sarah's face grew savage. She poised the pointer.

Swish!

"Ow!" yelled Babs. In a moment she had flamed round, rubbing her shoulder. On her feet she was in a moment. Sarah, her eyes flaming, poised the pointer again. Again she made a stroke; but this time Babs, neatly dodging aside, avoided the impact, and Clara Trevlyn, her face suddenly brick-red with passion, caught the pointer, and tossed it into the far corner of the room.

Up from the Fourth went a howl:

"You bully, Sarah!"

"Yes, bully, Babs!"

Sarah turned livid.

"Look here—"

"Chuck her out!" cried Brenda Fallace recklessly.

"Lydia," Sarah cried, "get me that pointer. And the next girl who utters a sound," she said threateningly, "will be caned! Lydia!"

"You dare!" Clara grunted.

But Lydia, with cool contempt, was walking towards the corner where the pointer had fallen. She stooped to retrieve it. Then Brenda Fallace, who was near her, pushed her. There was a howl as Lydia flopped over.

"Brenda!"

"Don't mind Sarah!"

"Make her get out!"

To settle matters, Leila Carroll picked the pointer up. Into three pieces she broke it across her knee. Sarah flamed.

"Leila, I will deal with you! Go to my study!"

"Shan't!" Leila said calmly.

"What?"

"I said," Leila retorted, "shan't! Caning, Sarah, isn't allowed! I guess as part head of this outfit you ought to understand that! I—Here! Hold off!"

But Sarah was beside herself then. She ran forward. She caught Leila by the shoulder. Her arm struck out. Very obviously, it was Sarah's intention to smack Leila's face. But she didn't. Clara, springing forward, caught the arm as it swung round.

"No you don't!"

"Put her out!"

"Look here!" shrieked Sarah.

"Lydia—Freda! Rescue!"

"Stand back!"

But Lydia & Co. came forward. Half a dozen girls had Sarah in their grip now. Pandemonium there was. The Fourth, incensed by this tyranny, meant to nip it in the bud—meant, at any cost, to stand up for its rights. Perfect or no perfect, Sarah had no right to hit and cane girls, and Sarah, too late, saw that she had gone too far.

June Merrett sprang towards the door, flinging it open. Sarah, in the grip of half a dozen sturdy juniors, found herself, kicking and struggling, propelled towards it.

"Throw her out!"

"The cat!"

"Bully!"

"Down with Sarah Harrigan!"

Then—Stella!

Stella it was—Stella standing there by the doorway, looking in with an amazed frown.

"Barbara! Clara! Unhand Sarah at once! What is the meaning of this?" Babs set her teeth.

"Sarah caned me!"

"What? Sarah!"

Sarah gritted her teeth.

"I didn't cane her! She provoked me!" she said. "I had to keep order!"

Stella's lips pursed.

"Do you call this order?"

Sarah showed her teeth.

"Considering," she said bitingly, "that you chose to absent yourself when the Fourth Form was getting out of hand, you should chip in now, shouldn't you? I had to maintain discipline. Lines and gatings were no good, so what was I to do?"

"You know that caning is against the rules."

"I know that causing any unearthy din is against the rules!" Sarah said venomously. "And, in any case, I don't see what you want to interfere for now. If you'd been here attending to your duties, as Miss Primrose told you, this would never have happened. Where have you been for the last two hours?"

Stella flushed.

"That," she said quietly, "is my business, Sarah. Please remove yourself from this room at once!" She shook her head. "Every girl who took part in this fracas will take fifty lines!" she said.

"Fifty lines? You mean to say you're letting them get off?" Sarah spluttered.

"Sarah, this is my affair!"

"Is it? Then where do I come in?"

"I said," Stella replied, "that this is my affair. Please do not interfere, Sarah! I said fifty lines," she added. "The punishment is adequate, considering that you most flagrantly abused your authority, Sarah! Now please let us have no more disturbances," she added. "Barbara, as captain of the Fourth, I entrust you with the task of seeing that order is maintained. Sarah, will you come with me? I'd like to talk to you."

Sarah, with a hateful, sulky glower, followed the captain out.

anything else, it was any offence against its privileges.

Rather serious was Stella when, the school safely in bed, she returned to her own study. It was ten o'clock then. Time, she considered, for another two hours' hard work before she went to bed.

Books and papers were still in Study No. 4, and thither, taking care to make no sound, Stella took her way.

But Stella did not know that in the next room Sarah Harrigan was listening for every sound. Sarah was desperately determined to mess-up Stella's studies. She guessed her intention, and, meaning at any cost to find out her hiding-place, had been alert ever since lights-out.

Cautious as Stella was, she could not prevent the faint creaking of the door as she closed it, into the corridor Sarah had stepped out into a moment. She saw Stella turn towards the Fourth Form passage, and silently followed. She watched as she went into Study No. 4.

"So that's her hang-out!" she thought bitterly. "Barbara Redfern's study! I might have guessed it!"

She tiptoed up the corridor. Stella was in there. She stooped, applying her eye to the keyhole; but the key was in the door, and she could see nothing. She heard papers rustling, however, and she frowned darkly as she visualised the captain working at her studies.

How to get Stella out? How to make it impossible!

Sarah stood for a moment in thought. But only for a moment. The next she chuckled. Into Study No. 3 she vanished then, the study occupied by Marcelle Biquet, Leila Carroll, and Jamaica Carstairs. A very fine old vase, belonging to Jamaica, who was a collector of antiques, stood on the mantelpiece. Sarah grabbed it, crept out into the corridor and, raising her arm, hurled it as far as it would go.

Crash! In splintering fragments the vase hit the wall with a crash that woke the echoes.

From inside Study No. 4 came an exclamation.

Quick as thought Sarah raced back into Study No. 3. She heard Stella's chair scrape back, heard the footsteps of Stella as she crossed the floor. The door of Study No. 4 was flung open. Stella for a moment gazed up and down the corridor, and then breathed:

"Who's there?"

"There was no reply of course."

Stella's lips compressed. Who was monkeying about in the corridor at this time of night? In the direction of the crash she wended her way, while Sarah grinned. After two minutes Stella came back, very puzzled, carrying the fragments of the broken vase in her hand.

Sarah waited.

A quarter of an hour slipped by. By that time Stella would be getting well into her studies again. This time Sarah crept out and rang the burglar alarm at the end of the passage.

Again Stella came out—so, too, did girls of the Sixth Form who were near enough to the alarm to be aroused by it. A merry hunt and hue and cry there was, which was finally half an hour, before it was actually discovered that no burglar was on the premises.

This time Stella did not go back to Study No. 4. Rather tired and weary, she went back, her studies incomplete, to her own room.

Sarah grinned. That had settled Stella.

It had! Stella, very tired, undressed and went to bed, promising herself that

she would get up in the morning. An hour before rising-bell saw her in Study No. 4 again. But not, alas, for long. She had barely sorted out her notes when the door opened and in stepped Sarah.

"So," Sarah snarled, "this is where you're hanging out? I thought, Stella, even you would have considered your dignity as a Sixth Former."

Stella's eyes gleamed a little.

"Is it any business of yours where I study?"

"Well, it's a bit thick, isn't it, when you've got a study of your own, to rob Fourth Form kids of theirs?"

Stella's lips compressed. She stared for a long moment at Sarah. She was bowled out! Back to her own study she went. But if Stella, during the day, thought that she was going to make up her studies, she was mistaken. Sarah Harrigan saw to that. From daybreak till nightfall Stella was harried and worried.

After afternoon classes she received a visitor. It was Barbara Redfern. Babs was frankly upset.

"Oh, Stella, why aren't you using our study?"

"Because," Stella said, with a sigh, "Sarah found me out."

Babs' lips compressed. She went back to join her own chums. To them she broke the news. Stella, more desperately up against things than she had ever been before, was just at her wits' end. They'd got to do something for old Stella. And as Sarah had found out her old hiding-place, it was up to them to find another—one, this time, which even the wily Sarah would not discover. Babs it was, who suggested the attic at the very top of the school.

"We'll clear it out and fix it up for old Stella," Babs said. "And when we've fixed it up we'll introduce her to it. What say?"

They all said, "They were fed-up with Sarah. The feeling against Sarah in the Fourth, indeed, was growing to a dangerous point of hatred."

All that day Sarah had bullied and angered the Fourth. On the most trifling pretexts she had thrown out lines, gatings, black marks, until now, with the exception of Lydia Crossendale & Co., there was hardly a girl in the Form who was not richer by a quantity of lines which would last her until the end of the term.

On the other hand, they were deeply sympathetic towards the poor, harassed Stella, all anxious and eager to help her.

So upstairs, in a happy, joyous band they rushed. Vigorously, they attacked the attic. Mabs swept and dusted, Clara and Babs moved the cases and trunks it contained to the next room.

Jemima, who was in the secret, laid the fire. A table and chair were not hard to secure, and at last it was all finished. Babs grinned.

"Now, you'll tell Stella?"

"Why, you!"

So Stella was told, and Stella, her heart overwhelmed with gratitude, was shown her new quarters.

It was a matter of days only now to the examination, and Stella realised that if she was going to pull through she had to study as she had never studied before.

Unaccountably, again that afternoon Stella disappeared, and all the energies of tyrannical Sarah could not discover her. Tea came, and then gates were closed. In frantic fury Sarah went the round, from study to study, classroom to classroom.

She glared when, five minutes before call-over, Stella, looking happier and a great deal more contented than she had



Rebellion

NOT very pleasant was that interview between the rival captains. Stella had many biting things to say, and she said them. But Sarah naturally did not allow the argument to be all one-sided, and Stella was feeling rather shaken when finally the interview closed with Sarah flinging herself out of the study, and closing the door with a crash that almost broke its hinges.

For the rest of that evening, at all events, there was no further opportunity for settling.

But Stella did not greatly mind. In the two hours she had spent in Barbara's study she had recovered quite a lot of lost ground. That night she took call-over and supper herself. She made the rounds of the dormitories to see that lights were out.

She returned from those duties with a rather apprehensive sense, however, that all was not well.

The Fifth was murmuring; the Fourth was patently ripe for mutiny. Even the Lower School seemed to be affected.

The story of the caning in the Common-room had spread abroad. If there was one thing Cliff House resented more bitterly and more rigorously than

done for many days, came into Big Hall.

"Where have you been?"

Stella just ignored her.

Sarah set her teeth. She knew Stella would be on her guard, however. Not again would Stella allow her hiding-place to be spotted so easily. Stella would have her eyes upon her; would be watching her. But Stella was not watching Lydia Crossendale, however. After call-over Sarah called that girl to her.

"Lydia, a minute!"

"Oh, certainly, Sarah!" Lydia simpered.

"Stella's got another hide-out?" Sarah said savagely. "I want to know where it is. Savvy?"

Lydia closed an eye.

"Leave it to me!"

And Sarah did leave it to her. Lydia took counsel with her cronies. From that moment, though she did not know it, Stella was marked. Four girls shadowed her wherever she went—Lydia, Freda Ferrieres, Frances Frost, and Eleanor Storke.

Meanwhile, Sarah, savagely on the look-out for fresh means of disturbance, was prowling around the school, and, in prowling, came upon Piper, the porter. Piper had a letter in his hand.

"Which this is for Miss Stella, Miss Harrigan," he said.

Sarah took it.

"Thanks, I'll give it to her."

"Yes, Miss Harrigan!"

Piper strolled off. Sarah glanced at the envelope. From France! The post-mark was distinct. She thought of the absent mistresses, her heart thudded a little faster. It was in Miss Primrose's handwriting—yes, addressed to Stella!

A scowl marred her face. She hesitated no longer. She ripped the envelope open. And then her whole face lit up.

"Dear Stella.—This is to tell you we are leaving France this evening, and shall probably arrive at Cliff House about three o'clock to-morrow afternoon—"

Three o'clock! Sarah scowled. Quite suddenly and furiously she was thinking. Stella knew nothing of this. Stella, as a matter of fact, would not be expecting the mistresses back for another two days, at least. Miss Primrose had written to Stella, showing very plainly that she still regarded Stella as the head of affairs, even though she had delegated half her responsibilities to Sarah.

Sarah showed her teeth. Well, that meant, she told herself vindictively, that Stella was still considered as having the major share of responsibility. Right!

Lydia, at that moment, came running back. Her face was excited.

"We've tracked her down!" she said breathlessly.

"Where?" Sarah quickly asked.

"In the attic—the big one!"

Sarah's eyes glittered.

"Good girl!" she said. "But keep that under your hat."

"Why? Aren't you going to turn her out?" Lydia asked, disappointedly.

"Not yet—not yet!" Sarah shook her head. A new scheme was dawning there—something which, for the time being, at least, was far more important than disturbing Stella. "No," she said.

"But don't let on. Don't tell a soul that you know where her hiding-place is. That's all."

"O.K.!" Lydia grinned.

She departed then. Very carefully Sarah folded Miss Primrose's note, put it in her pocket and went to her own study. There, for a long time, she sat

and thought matters out, and at last a gleam came into her eyes. She thought she saw her way at last to settle Stella for good and all.

Nothing that night did Sarah do. To-morrow was a half-holiday. That meant, of course, that Stella would be free for the afternoon when Miss Primrose arrived. It meant also that Stella would be free for the second session of the morning, having delegated her duties to Lady Patricia Northanson.

Assembly came. The girls filed into classes. While Stella took the first session Sarah went up to the attic.

There, very carefully, she transferred the key from the inside to the outside of the lock.

Eleven o'clock. Stella, anxious, and happy at last, stole away to her retreat. At half-past eleven, Sarah sneaked up to the attic, high above the school buildings, very infrequently used. Very carefully she turned the key in the lock, and, putting it in her own pocket, went down to the Fourth Form class-room. Dulcia Fairbrother, who was, at the moment, in charge, turned as she came in.

"Right, Dulcia, you can go," Sarah said surlily.

"But—"

"I'll take the Fourth."

Dulcia paused.

"But Stella—"

"I said," Sarah said impatiently. "I'll take the Fourth. Bother it, Dulcia. I am your superior. Don't argue."

Dulcia flushed. Up from the Fourth went a murmur. They all liked Dulcia—especially Clara Trevlyn, whose face flamed at that insult to her heroine. Dulcia, cheeks red, went out.

Sarah's eyes glittered.

"Now, you kids," she said aggress-

sively, "we're going to have some order. Clara Trevlyn, take a hundred lines for glaring at me!"

"I wasn't glaring!"

"Clara, you are detained for this afternoon!"

Clara started up.

"But look here—"

"Sit down! I shall report you to Miss Primrose. Well, Barbara Redfern?"

Babs, her eyes gleaming, was standing up in her seat.

"Sarah, is that fair?" she asked quietly. "As captain of the Form, I really must protest."

Sarah's eyes glinted through her pince-nez. She put her hands upon her hips.

"As captain of the Form, eh?" she sneered. "As captain of the Form! You rather fancy yourself in that role, don't you, Barbara Redfern? You're rather fond of reminding others about it. Well, supposing that you weren't captain of the Form? Would you protest then?"

Babs flushed hotly.

"I should think that any decent girl—"

"Thanks, that's enough!" Sarah snapped. "Barbara Redfern, I am going to make an example of you. The rule of this school decrees that a headmistress, if she thinks fit, may suspend a Form captain and appoint another in her place. Right! For all practical purposes, I'm headmistress. I'm going to use my authority. From this moment, Barbara Redfern, you can consider yourself no longer captain of the Form!"

"What?"

A gasp went up from the whole Form.

"And you, Lydia, will take



"FROM this moment," Sarah snapped, "you are no longer captain of the Form, Barbara Redfern!" She turned to Lydia. "And you, Lydia, will take Barbara's place! I appoint you captain of the Fourth!"

Barbara's place. I appoint you captain of the Form!"

If a bombshell had burst, the Fourth could not have been more utterly flabbergasted. But Sarah nodded grimly. She meant what she said. Then it seemed that the truth dawned upon the Fourth. There was a roar.

"Oh, my hat!"
"We don't want Lydia!"
"You can't do that!"
"We'll appeal to Stella!"
Sarah laughed.

"Well, go and appeal to Stella!" she cried. "Appeal to her! But that's my ruling!" Lydia Crossendale, who are captain from now on, and—

But what Sarah intended to say or do was drowned in the roar which shook the room. It was a roar of fury. Babs stood up, pale and shaken. From every side went up a howl. Sarah stood up, still turning not a hair, smiling, indeed, until the storm had passed.

Then she nodded.
"Thanks," she said calmly; "I am much obliged for the display of manners. As you are so incapable of reacting to authority, you will be taught a lesson. This afternoon, instead of enjoying your holiday, you will all come back here and do special mathematics. Now"—as the bell rang—"go!"

The Fourth went, fuming, wild, indignant. Where was Stella? And immediately a rush was made for her study. But Stella, locked upstairs, was not there.

In the corridor, they foregathered in seething fury. They weren't going to be overriden like this. Sarah was behaving altogether too outrageously. Sarah was just acting the spiteful tyrant.

"We'll go on strike!" roared Clara Trevlyn.

"Hear, hear!"
"This afternoon!"
"Hurrah!"
"Babs for captain!"

Rebellious was the Fourth now. Babs stood aside. Where was Stella? Obvious it was that strife of the most turbulent nature was going to burst out at Cliff House School.

It did!
Incensed, the Fourth held a mass meeting. They were joined by the Fifth and some of the Third. It had needed just one spark to set the fires of rebellion roaring, and the fire flared up with a vengeance then.

Lesson-bell rang, but the Fourth did not heed. Sarah, accompanied by Lydia, came out.

"Are you girls going into detention?"
"No!" came a shout.
"I order—"

"Booh!"
Then somebody cried "Pelt her!" and Sarah beat a hurried retreat.

Somebody else suggested a demonstration. A demonstration was immediately organised. Banners were hurriedly, feverishly prepared. In seething procession, the Fourth paraded beneath Sarah's window, calling up to her to come out, to face the music. Quite a hullabaloo there was, the old quadrangle re-echoing to the cries.

And then, just when the strike was at its height—

Up the drive swept a magnificent saloon car. Out of it stepped Miss Primrose, Miss Bullivant, Miss Drake, and Miss Bland. They stared in horror at the scene.

"Barbara!" Miss Primrose cried in a quivering voice. "What is the

meaning of this? Where is Stella? Where is Sarah?"

"Stella," Sarah said, coming to the door, "is not to be found, Miss Primrose. Stella has left me to deal with this situation, which has been largely brought about by her own neglect of her duties, and by her countermarching my orders. The school, as you see, is in rebellion."

"But, Miss Primrose—" Babs protested.

"Silence, Barbara! I perceive," Miss Primrose said, her eyes glittering, "that you are one of the ringleaders. Please find Stella. Sarah, in the meantime, come to my study."

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Sarah said.



"Owing to the Resignation of—"

"WHERE'S Stella?"

"Stella must be somewhere in the school."

"Stella! Stella! Stella!"
Everybody was shouting for Stella, fervently calling her. In Miss Primrose's study Sarah was in conference with the headmistress; Sarah was getting her first word in.

Babs, stricken and shaken, looked at Mabs and Clara.

"Is—she in the attic?"
"Come and see."

They went, the three of them; they reached the attic and knocked on the door. Stella's voice—trembling, emotional—reached them from the other side.

"Babs, is that you? I'm locked in."

"Oh, my hat!"
"Who locked you in?"
"I don't know."

But Babs & Co. perhaps could guess. In a moment Babs had slipped along to the next attic. The key of that was still in the lock. By great good fortune it fitted. Stella, shaken and pale, was rescued.

Her face whitened when she heard what had happened—how Babs had been deposed in favour of Lydia.

"Where is Sarah now?" she asked.
"She's with Miss Primrose," Babs said. "And Miss Primrose wants to see you." But Stella, remember, if it comes to a question of backing you up, don't forget to call upon us."

Stella nodded. She went off. In Miss Primrose's study she found the headmistress; near her, shaking her head. Sarah. Miss Primrose's smile was not friendly.

ALTHOUGH Sarah Harrigan has triumphed in her artful plot against Stella Stone, Babs & Co. are resolved that her success shall be short lived. They are determined to stand by Stella—she is determined that Stella shall be reinstated. How they set out to achieve this object is vividly told in next week's brilliant long complete Cliff House School story, the title of which is:

IN THE
Ex-Captain's Cause

By
HILDA
RICHARDS



COMPLETE
NEXT
WEEK

ONLY JUST STARTED: Brilliant Serial of Desert Island Adventures, Featuring Betty Barton & Co.



FOR NEW READERS.

BETTY BARTON & Co., of Morcove School, together with members of Grangemoor, are, on their way home from Africa by airliner, when they have to make a forced landing on a tiny island. With them is a mysterious girl named

MURIEL who has jumped by parachute from another plane. She tells Betty & Co. that she was escaping from people who had kidnapped her. She is about to say more when the plane from which she jumped drops a message threatening danger "to those she loves" if she tells what she knows.

(Now read on.)

Crusoes All!

"REVEAL nothing, or those you love will suffer all the more!" The wording of that threatening message, as Betty

Barton and Polly Linton pondered it, seemed to be as cruel a thing as they had ever known.

A sliver of the scribbled sheet of paper had to do with this unknown girl who was so suddenly and so strangely in their midst, the two chums felt none the less sure; it was all going to take big effect upon "Morcove & Co."

How could it prove otherwise? The girl had been most fatefully thrown upon their hands—at such a time, and in such a place as this!

"Reveal nothing," the message warned her; yet already she had revealed the amazing reason for her having used her parachute to jump from that aeroplane, when it was over the wide sea. To escape from kidnappers—desperate characters who, twelve hours ago, had spirited her away from her own home.

A mercy for her that she, managing to swim to the shore of this tiny island, the sight of which had tempted her to make the jump, had found herself instantly amongst friends. But it was a mercy, evidently, which the man and woman of the plane did not mean her to enjoy for long.

Seize her again, they could not contrive to do—at any rate, not to-night.

So they had flown the plane just once across the island's beach, dropping that cruel message for her to take warning!

Suddenly the mother of Pam Willoughby came hurrying back to the three girls. She was returning alone to them, there being so much to keep the others very busy.

Now that the plane had hummed away into the night-sky, Betty and Polly saw what a scene of resumed activity it was that the new-kindled fire of driftwood illumined.

"I can stay with this poor girl now," Mrs. Willoughby remarked, bestowing the very kindest of smiles upon their strange waif.

"Mrs. Willoughby, there is—this," Betty said, and handed her the message. "They dropped it just here, in a tin."

"What! Ah, I see!" came instantly from Pam's strong-nerved mother, as the firelight enabled her to scan the pencilled lines. "Yes, well! I think that can all be left until the morning. Betty, dear—and you, Polly; go now and do the best for yourselves. There will be some sort of a shelter for you and the rest of the girls, for the night."

"Oh, we don't mind!" Polly laughed. "We're in the tropics still, aren't we?" "Somewhere in the Gulf of Guinea, it appears," Mrs. Willoughby shrugged.

"But the name of the island—if one so small has a name—goodness only knows!"

"Er—shan't we be seeing anything more of this girl to-night, Mrs. Willoughby?" Betty felt bound to ask.

"I expect not. She needs to be looked after very carefully, and I and Mrs. Cardev are going to take turns. Leaving all you girls to look after yourselves."

"We can do that all right," grinned Betty. "Good-night then," she spoke down to the escaped girl, where she still reclined on open ground at the top of the beach. "Mustn't ask your name, I suppose! The message warned you to—"

"I'm Muriel," came the faint yet spirited response. "I don't see why

By

MARJORIE
STANTON

I shouldn't tell you that. Oh, I don't care if they have threatened me—"

"Yes, my dear; but not to-night," Mrs. Willoughby gently interposed; and on that, Betty and Polly turned away.

One full look they exchanged, eloquent of their mystified state of mind, and then they scampered to where some of their fellow-castaways were doing the best to provide a "shake-down" for the night.

"Oh, I say—splendid!" That was Betty's admiring outburst as she and Polly found how quickly and ingeniously one make-shift shelter was being rigged up.

This particular working-party seemed at first to comprise only Judy Cardev and her "brainy" brother Dave, a Pam Willoughby who was as serene as usual, a Bunny Trevor in her habitual live-wire state, and always-quiet Madge.

But Betty and Polly, whilst they were lending a hand—at the same time telling these chums of theirs about that sensational message—became aware of two more helpers, whose task was to supply material.

Polly's jovial brother Jack, and Bunny's hearty brother Tom—they had paired off to do strenuous work amongst a clump of tropic vegetation growing just above the shore.

There would be a tremendous clashing and crashing of foliage-laden branches, as a well-applied axe lopped them off; then both boys would come struggling this way, so immersed in their leafy loads that they looked like Jacks-in-the-Green.

As for the actual builders of the leafy shelter, they carried on with ever-increasing enthusiasm. This was due

to their building so much better than they had planned—if they had planned at all!

The girls and Dave, starting to build a mere palm-leaf wigwam, were now going on to do wonderful things.

Soon they had added what Bunny called "the veranda," and an extra wing, as it were, was being built on to one side of the first structure—"where we can all dine under cover on wet days."

All such jocular comments were seasoned with a light-hearted belief that Morcove & Co., marooned by Fate itself on this tiny, uninhabited island, would not soon be rescued.

It mattered not that grown-ups of the party had made confident predictions about their slight soon becoming known. These girls and boys really preferred to regard the entire party as being in for a Crusoe life that would go on for weeks—even months, so they hoped!

Suddenly that dusky imp, Naomer, came across from the driftwood fire, bringing a big aluminium jug of hot coffee for the building-gang.

And behind Naomer came "Tubby" Bloot, looking supremely happy at carrying various emergency rations in two large biscuit-tins.

"Gosh, Tubby, is that the best you can do—become a waiter?" Jock scornfully snorted, arriving with another load of palm-leaves, mimosa-branches, and sprays of eucalyptus.

"Mine's a stone ginger, anyhow, with a slice of lemon in it—off the ice, Tubby!"

"Spello!" Betty gaily suggested, for some of her chums were not at all inclined to take a rest. "And what do you think of the Beach Hotel, Naomer?"

"Ooo, gorjus!"

"Running water in all rooms—when it rains." Polly jested, whilst helping herself from a biscuit-tin that had come her way. "And the latest system of ventilation. All you have to do—proud a hole in the wall, and there you are!"

"With a fine sea view!" Bunny sparkled.

"It's great!" Tubby gave his admiring opinion on the hastily constructed shelter. "As far as it has got, at present—"

"You'll see how far it goes when a wind sets up!" Tom chuckled, champing biscuits. "She'll be away to the other side of the island in no time."

"But that isn't so very far," Betty laughed. "We saw all over the island before we flopped into the sea. It is no size at all. No sign of anybody ever having lived here, either. Just fancy!"

"And I doubt if there is any anchorage. In which case," Dave soberly remarked, "even small ships must prefer to give the place a miss."

"We are alone!" Polly said dramatically, and Jack promptly took the cue.

"Alone!" he shuddered aloud. "Did I ever tell you the story, sir?" he recited, impromptu. "Then listen to me, all! We are homeward bound to England, sir, but we ended in a squall!"

"And there on that lonely island"—Bunny jumped to an imaginary last verse—"we lived for many a day! With only grass skirts to wear, sir—and they soon turned to hay!"

"Kid"—Polly's commanding voice addressed Naomer—"go and find Paula, and tell her that she is to come to bed now. Her room is all ready."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tell her," Bunny supplemented, as the dusky one jumped up to be off, "that there is nothing to be afraid of. Six, seven, eight other girls to take care of

her, all within call. In fact, tell her, all packed in with her."

Another moment and the talk was becoming just as serious as it had been nonsensical. The chums always were like that when "up against it."

At this time, the Morcove and Grangemoor party would have felt it a disgrace to speak anxiously about their own immediate future.

But they were not forgetting the girl Muriel, and of her they were bound to talk in the very gravest manner. She was "Muriel," but what else was she?

That was what they wondered, with very little hope of her setting their curiosity entirely at rest.

She had implied that the coming of another day would find her ready to flout that cruel warning. But it was not going to surprise the chums if, come morning, she kept silent, after all.

For that threat of revenge, if she did make disclosures, was not a threat directed against herself. "Those you love will suffer!"

In other words, her own parents would suffer, and she was assuredly a right-spirited girl, who, at all cost to herself, would want to see her mother and father spared.

Betty did not say so, but whilst the talk went on she found herself inclined to listen for the hum of a plane—the kidnappers' machine—returning in the darkness to hover above them all again.

But no such ominous sound ever came. As it was, during a further hour of strenuous activity, so it remained after the girls had at last settled down to get what sleep they could.

The ocean's waves kept up their loud pounding along the beach, and that was the only sound except when those keeping watch in the night gave attention to the fire.

Betty, just before she slept, wondered what after all could have become of that plane. Had it found its way to the mainland? How far off was the mainland? In any case, it must be one of the most inhospitable parts of tropic Africa.

She awoke to such dull daylight that it was as if this were the very first glimmer of dawn. Her girl chums were still sleeping heavily.

Rising carefully, so as not to disturb them, she left the leafy shelter, and then she saw that a very lowering sky accounted for the poor light.

Dave Cardew was out and about—the only one in sight to Betty, although she felt sure that there must be two or three others sharing his early morning activities. He had been collecting more driftwood, and was just then casting down big arnuffs at the camp-fire.

Betty stepped to speak to him, and as she traversed the strip of shingle, her eager eyes took in the whole strange scene for the first time by daylight.

Perhaps it was the gloomy sky, but all her youthful happy-go-luckiness was suddenly dashed.

There seemed to be everything to stress the appalling nature of yesterday's disaster, and the desperate plight in which they now all stood.

Castaways, indeed! And, altogether apart from that special anxiety connected with the girl who was upon their hands, how to fend for themselves was going to be a big problem, taxing to the limit the fortitude of all.

The Island in the Dawn

"HALLO, Dave!"

"Oh, hallo, Betty! Sleep al' right?"

"Fine, thanks!"

"Didn't hear the rain in the night?"

"Rain?"

"It shtted several times. Nasty squalls."

"And not a drop came in at our shelter!"

"We made a good job of it because we all worked hard," Dave soberly commented. "Jack and Tom kept us well supplied with stuff, too."

"They're not about now, Dave!"

"No, Jimmy and I relieved them an hour ago. The night has passed off quite all right. Coffee, Betty? Better have a sip, anyhow."

"I will," as he picked up the metal jug that stood close enough to the fire to keep its contents warm. There was an aluminium mug as well, and he half-filled it with the steaming coffee.

"Then I must get busy!" Betty smiled, starting to sip.

"We'll all have to do that," he smiled back. "The weather is rotten, and that makes it worse for us."

"Oh, tropical rains, Dave—nothing!" "Oh, not thinking so much of drenchings. Anybody out searching for us all—because it will have become known that our air-liner crashed somewhere—may easily be beat by such weather as this."

"Yes, there's that, of course."

Betty stared for a few moments at the derelict air-liner, wallowing in the surf.

"It's drifted more inshore during the night, Dave."

"By a little bit—yes. And so we'll be able to get at her all the better presently—get a lot more stuff out of her," he predicted cheerily.

Suddenly, then, Betty was herself again.

"Oh, we'll manage! At present firewood is wanted. I'll get some in."

So Betty wandered off to find firewood, and Dave went with her. They kept along the shore, which was plentifully strewn with all manner of serviceable material, drifted in by the waves.

One find was a still sound wicker-basket, lost overboard from a vessel, and, in addition to bits of bamboo and seaweed scraps of broken wood, they came upon a fine long plank.

Dave set it beyond the tide's reach, for him to shoulder on the way back presently, and then he and Betty went on again, loading up the basket which they carried between them.

Not a sail was in sight; but then visibility was very poor this cloudy morning. Some gulls winged over the yeasty surf, crying sadly, as if to say to the castaways: "No place for you—this!"

"And that girl Muriel!" was Betty's sudden exclamation, whilst she and Dave, with the set-down basket nearly full, stooped about to pick up some last bits to make a load. "Has she had a good night, I wonder?"

"Slept like a log, so Jimmy and I were told when we got up an hour ago. I knew that the mater was with the girl just then, so I thought I might go to their bit of shelter and ask how she was. The mater came out to me. I had some of that coffee for her. She whispered that Muriel was fast asleep—had been all night."

"I'm so glad, Dave! Poor girl! It's surely the cruellest thing we have ever known!"

"But, Betty, what a jolly good job for her it was—that she did get away like that! A tough, stop-at-nothing lot—that's obvious, from the way they went about the kidnapping." Dave gravely muttered. "And it all points to there being some big motive."

Betty, jamming some last pieces of

driftwood into the basket, nodded reflectively.

"What it must have cost them, Dave! The preparations, too—everything planned so carefully, as it would have to be, when the girl was to be carried off by a plane. Then who is the girl? Her home—where would that be?"

"Africa. I don't see how otherwise," he said. "For we saw the plane that had her on board, flying pretty much on the same course that was ours yesterday—that is, until we got blown about."

"The kidnapers must have been blown off their course, too, Dave. Oh, I can't expect you to be able to guess, of course. But I wonder where they were taking her?"

"Not to Croydon, anyhow," he said, with a frowning smile. "They were to come down where there'd be not a soul to know, except those in the pay of the kidnapers. That place may have been somewhere still in Africa. In fact, unless the plane was able to carry a really enormous load of petrol—"

"Oh, Dave!" would have been Betty's interrupting cry at this instant; but he had already abruptly stopped speaking.

"What's happened?" she jerked. For, of a sudden, they could hear a loud outcry going up at the seashore camp.

It was as if someone had shouted to wake up all who, after the exhaustions of yesterday, were still sleeping heavily.

Back ran Betty and Dave, leaving their load of firewood to be fetched along later. The curve of the island's foreshore had taken them round so as to be out of sight of the camp.

But they had only to take swift, clashing steps over a couple of hundred yards of beach, and then they could see the part where there had been such a makeshift settling-down overnight.

Some of Betty's girl chums were only now swarming out of the shelter which had slept them for the night.

But the rest, who must have been just getting up when the alarm sounded, were already with Mrs. Cardew, where she stood excitedly gesticulating, in front of another shelter—the one where the girl Muriel had been put.

"Something to do with her!" Betty gasped, dashing on with Dave.

"Yes; it's my mater who was calling out. And she's been with Muriel this last hour or so, as I told you."

The menfolk of the hapless party were in evidence; so, too, was Mrs. Willoughby. There were Dave's four chums also, and their consternation was, as Betty and Dave could tell, as great as the girls'.

Even Mr. Willoughby, Mr. Minden, and Airman Somerset were all looking staggered by what Mrs. Cardew was now making known.

Then Betty and Dave, as late-comers upon the scene, had Polly and several others rushing to meet them with the news.

"That girl Muriel—she's vanished!"

"What—never!"

"Clean vanished!" The incredulous cry was answered by Judy Cardew.

"Mother dropped off to sleep, Dave, and—"

"Ah!" He was biting a thumb. "That coffee. She said it would help to freshen her up—and it did just the opposite."

"But even if Mrs. Cardew did fall asleep—why should that girl make it



WITH thumping hearts the watchers saw the two men slowly stagger up the beach, the heavy box between them. Then came Jack's whisper: "When they're out of sight we'll collar their boat!"

a chance to slip away?" Betty struck in.

"Yet that is what she has done," Polly insisted. "Mrs. Cardew woke up from a doze—and she was alone in the shelter."

"Here; but this is an island, and only a little one at that!" Jack suddenly broke out. "Dash it all, the girl can't have gone far! How can she?"

"Why has she gone at all—that's what I can't make out?" cried Bunny. "When she must have understood how sorry we were for her—how we were ready to do anything for her!"

"But isn't that just the very reason why?" Betty argued. "Oh, the poor girl! She seized that chance to creep away and hide somewhere, I suppose, because she didn't want us to have to bother about her."

"Then find her—that's the thing now!" Polly cried out impetuously. "Search until we do find her."

"Yes, come on, chaps!" Jack shouted. "If we have to search the whole island!"

"Come on, girls!"

That was Polly, appealing to the rest of Morocco not to let Grangemoor get a start of them all. There was, however, to be no impulsive setting off, either by Betty & Co., or the boys. The grown-ups were soon having something to say about a properly organised search.

But within five minutes at most, those who could be spared were setting off in various batches that would each take an agreed-upon direction.

Betty and Polly were together, with

Judy, Jack, and Dave to make the party up to a useful size. Their instructions were to go "North-about," along the island's rounded shore, searching ground lying immediately behind the beach.

Those juniors whose search would take them inland, had one or another of the men with them. The hilly centre of the island was thickly wooded, and there, perhaps, dangers lurked.

But if some of those other searchers were to run special hazards, Betty and her companions were to have the biggest thrills.

Only a half-mile had they worked round the curve of the beach when there was an excited shout from Polly:

"Hi, come and look!"

From here and there dashed Polly's chums, to find out the cause of her great excitement. She was halted in front of a mimosa thicket, pointing to a spot over which the luxuriant foliage draped, looking as if some strange creature lurked there which held her fascinated.

But it was no living thing, after all, which the others saw, in the very instant that they got to her.

There, stowed away like a bundle that someone had hoped would never be found, was a rolled-up object which they recognised at first glance.

A parachute! Polly pounced, now that her companions had seen just how it was lying there, and snatched up the find. She held it out, and her excited eyes invited comment.

"By Jove!" her brother Jack exploded, "the kidnappers' plane! It landed someone last night!"

"The woman, perhaps? There is a woman, you know," Betty exclaimed. "She took a jump—and came down on the island."

"Landed safely, too," Dave frowned, "or the parachute would never have been found like that—folded up again, and carefully stowed there to be out of sight."

"She's about, then—on the island!" And Polly, as she said that, gazed around. "Oh, and don't you see what it means now? Muriel's vanishing!"

"She didn't go off of her own accord," Judy murmured. "She's been carried off—again!"

Daring Does It!

SEIZED again—and this time snatched from their very midst!

Such a staggering instance, it was, of the kidnappers' audacity, that for a few moments these five juniors stood struck to silence.

In the minds of all, a certain thought was present, causing bitter humiliation to mingle with an intensified anxiety. The kidnappers had got hold of their victim again—in spite of her having been befriended and even watched over during the night!

Dave ended the great pause. He said that this discovery must be made known as quickly as possible. So, by agreement, he and Judy set off at once to fall in with other search parties. It was a certainty that they would soon do this.

As for Betty, Polly and Jack, they resumed the search in the direction assigned to their party, and now it was with far greater haste that they explored the seashore and its vicinity.

Up to a minute ago, there had been more eagerness to trace a girl who was believed only to have gone off of her own accord. Now there was this frantic longing to rescue her from fresh captivity.

It wrung their hearts to think of the poor girl's renewed terror, now that she was again in enemy hands!

"But we shall get her!" Betty fiercely predicted. "The island may be full of hiding-places, but it is only an island!"

"And whoever was landed by parachute last night can no more get away than we could," was Polly's swift rejoinder. "That makes me wonder what use it has been, to seize the girl again! She can't be taken off the island—such a tiny island, too."

"Unless," Jack qualified, "it has been arranged to send a boat here in secret—after dark to-night."

"But we shall all be keeping a lookout," Betty said. "That is, if we haven't rescued Muriel before then."

They pressed on, at a few yards apart from one another, their eyes searching every bit of the ground traversed.

There might be footprints, or a trail where Muriel's captor had trampled clumsily through some undergrowth, being burdened by the captive's weight. They could imagine the girl having to be carried along—insensible.

Not a clue, however, not the slightest bit of "sign" did this scouting round the island's shore afford the trio.

Soon they reckoned they had worked half-way round the island, and there was now a noticeable difference in the state of the sea.

They had come to a part where the wind was off-shore—robbed of a good

deal of its strength, too, by palms and other tropic vegetation, growing thickly behind the beach.

There were no long rollers coming in just here, to tumble with a booming note upon the churned-up sand. The sea was comparatively placid.

"But wait—listen!" Polly whispered tensely.

Instantly her brother and Betty knew why, in the act of moving on again, she had checked sharply, throwing up a finger, whilst she sent an excited stare out to sea.

A sound was coming to them over the small area of quiet water—a faint sound, like the throb of a motor-boat.

"Gee! Down—here, out of sight with me!"

That was Jack, in tremendous excitement, as he doubled low, and then writhed aside to obtain cover.

"I could see her," he breathed, meaning a boat, as Betty and Polly came stooping to share the hiding-place. "A thing like a motor-launch."

They were crouching together just behind the top of the beach, amongst palms and cacti. With the sky as thickly overcast as ever, the morning was still dull and misty. At less than a couple of miles from the shore sea and cloud seemed to blur together.

But the boat was much nearer in than that. Betty and Polly could just make her out now, bearing towards the island.

Several minutes crept by whilst the concealed watchers observed the motor-boat drawing ever nearer to this sheltered bit of the shore.

At last the boat was gently grounded in the shallows. A very vigilant lookout must have been kept—very likely with the aid of glasses—for at once a man rose up. After throwing out a small anchor, he let himself over the side into knee-deep water.

But, having got down into the shallow water, he now stood at the boat's side, waiting to receive a box-like load which his companion was preparing to pass to him.

Finally, that other man got down into the sea, and between them the pair brought the box to land. Very slowly and carefully they came plashing in with it, as if fearful of a mishap.

They rested for a "breather," then their feet clashed in the shingle as they came struggling up the beach, still carrying the box.

By now the watchers had noticed with amazement that both men, although they wore rough, seafaring clothes, had anything but the looks of sailormen. Given a turban each, they might have been Hindus!

Another minute and the sinister pair were far enough in amongst the wild growth of the island as to render their uneasy movements almost inaudible to Jack and the girls.

He gave them an excited, meaning look, then lurch up to peer in the direction taken by the men. He stood up, and still, as Betty and Polly could tell, he could get no glimpse of them.

So, without a sound, the girls also rose up.

Jack instantly turned to them. "Collar the boat!" he said, under his breath. "They've both had to leave it. Get to the boat, the three of us, and then she's ours!"

A DARING plan, calling for courage and resource! Will it succeed? You will want to know the sequel to this dramatic episode, so make sure of reading next Saturday's enthralling chapters of this powerful new *Morcove* serial. Order your *SCHOOLGIRL* at once—and make sure!

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MY DEAR READERS,—Knowing how much you have all enjoyed Elizabeth Chester's fine story

"The Pagoda of Peril," I have asked her to write for you a new serial. Isn't that thrilling news?

"The Pagoda of Peril," you will be sorry to learn, will end in our next number; but your disappointment will be somewhat tempered, I'm sure, when I tell you that Elizabeth Chester's latest story will begin in the following issue—in two weeks' time.

This new serial is something of a novelty, for it recounts in thrilling fashion the amazing adventures of an up-to-the-second heroine in a house of bygone days.

Lynchester Grange, a romantic old mansion in the heart of the country, has not changed for half a century; Sylvia Grant's grandfather has preserved to the smallest degree the quaint but colourful atmosphere of Victorian times.

And Virginia, Sylvia's cousin, brought up in this old-world setting, is a true Victorian girl. But Virginia is menaced by a mystery which threatens to ruin all her happiness—and which may even shatter the serene life of the old grange.

Then to Lynchester comes Sylvia Grant—gay, modern, carefree, a typical action-loving girl. Plunged into the romantic atmosphere of the old house, Sylvia is thoroughly happy—until she realises that it is up to her alone to save Virginia.

And so Sylvia gets busy—with what result you will see when you come to read this powerful and unusual serial.

Next Saturday I shall tell you more about this grand new story, and in the meantime I do hope you will remind all your chums about the treat which is in store for all readers of *THE SCHOOLGIRL*.

The "star" story in next week's issue is certainly the long complete Cliff House School tale, the title of which is:

"IN THE EX-CAPTAIN'S CAUSE,"

By Hilda Richards.

As you may guess, it features Barbara Redfern & Co., who are fighting a stern battle on behalf of the deposed head girl, Stella Stone. Their activities make thrilling reading, so on no account fail to read this gripping tale.

The concluding chapters of "The Pagoda of Peril," a further enthralling instalment of "Morcove Marooned!" Marjorie Stanton's great new desert island serial, and another sparkling complete tale starting "Her Harum-scarum Highness" complete the story features in next Saturday's issue.

But I must hasten to add that Pat's four pages will be brighter than ever—and packed with novel ideas for you!

With best wishes,

YOUR EDITOR.

Exciting Chapters of a Vividly Dramatic Thrill-and-Mystery Serial



THE PAGODA OF PERIL

FOR NEW READERS.

CATHERINE STERNDALE and her cousins, MOLLY and CHARLES, are staying at a queer Chinese house owned by their UNCLE GERALD. Catherine makes a friend of a little Chinese girl, KWANYIN, 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.

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. Later, Catherine finds a rope outside her window and determines to use it to get out of the house to search for her real uncle. Kwanyin, whom Kai Tal has forced to dress as a hideous idiot in order to scare the cousins, knows that Catherine is walking into a trap. But, being gagged, she cannot save her!

(Now read on.)

Plot Counter Plot

AS Kwanyin opened the door, Catherine Sterndale was part way through the window.

She did not hear the bed-room door open; for her whole mind was occupied by the difficult and dangerous task before her.

The night was dark, and she could not even see the ground below. But she knew that the rope was long enough, and that if only it held tightly at the top, she was safe.

Mollie, her cousin, reckless though she was herself, sprang from her bed in dismay.

"Oh, Catherine, don't go," she begged her cousin. "What can you do alone? Wait for me, and we'll both go."

"Shush—sh," urged Catherine. "We may be heard—"

She paused on the sill, listening carefully.

The success of her whole scheme depended upon its secrecy. If the villain, Kai Tal, or the man who pretended to be her Uncle Gerald, guessed that she intended going to the island, she would be caught.

And then she, too, would be made a prisoner.

It was not a risk lightly to be undertaken in this strange Chinese house. She would be shown no mercy!

Catherine knew all the risks that she was taking; but duty compelled her to act. Somewhere in the grounds of this house—most likely on the small island in the middle of the lake—their real uncle was a prisoner, a victim of an impostor's scheming.

They alone knew that—they alone could rescue him.

And action must be instant. For if the Chinese were warned, they might move the kidnapped uncle to some safer place—somewhere where he could not be traced.

Kwanyin, the little Chinese girl, shaking with dread, stood in the doorway of the room, unnoticed as the two cousins leaned from the window, listening and watching.

She knew what they intended doing—and she knew that they were about to walk into a trap. Their capture was a certainty.

But although her heart beat for Catherine, although she regarded the cousins as friends, she could not warn them. Even though she was gagged, she might have made some sign clear enough to tell them of the dreadful risk. But she had promised not to betray Kai Tal's plan; she was in his power.

If she broke that promise, her aged father would suffer. She, too, would be punished, but it was not on her own account that she hesitated.

She thought of her father.

Never had the little Chinese girl been faced with such a dreadful problem as this.

She forgot for the moment how hideously she was arrayed. She forgot that she was a "ghost" sent by Kai Tal to scare the cousins.

"I'm going," said Catherine. Kwanyin's heart jumped. Her indecision wavered. She pushed the door wide.

In another moment she would have moved forward. Though she could not speak, she could get their attention. Knocking over a small table would do that surely enough.

By
ELIZABETH
CHESTER

Illustrations by E. Baker

But the warning was never given. In the darkness behind Kwanyin crept a sinister figure.

Kai Tal had given her her orders. But he did not trust her to obey them. He had followed her.

Now stealthily, making no sound, he crept up to her.

The merciful darkness hid the venom of his face, the cruel, tight lips, the evil, slanting eyes.

Without a sound he reached Kwanyin. As she moved forward, he stretched out a skinny hand and his long, sharp finger-nails touched Kwanyin's back.

Kwanyin pulled up. A cold horror froze her veins! Not a sound had been uttered. She had felt nothing but the cold touch of fingers. But it was a warning.

"Move back," warned Kai Tal in a whisper.

Kwanyin moved softly back, her heart pumping with fright.

Kai Tal's lean fingers stretched out and closed the door of the cousins' room. Then, taking Kwanyin by the wrist, he dragged her along the corridor.

Outside Charles' room he stopped. Charles, Catherine's cousin, was asleep. The cunningly mixed food that the bogus uncle had arranged for their supper was taking effect.

Charles, in a hideous nightmare, writhed and groaned and tried to call out. He dreamed that he was in a dark, lonely corridor which was gradually filling with water.

Spashing towards him, head swaying from side to side, was a dragon, with flames issuing from its mouth, its great eyes bulging, its long claws rustling through the water.

The great jaws twitched hungrily. But Charles could not move. The eyes never left his. His legs seemed turned to lead. Invisible chains held him. There was no escape.

Kai Tal opened the door, and flashed two pocket torches fitted with pale green glass filters.

He shone the light on to Charles' eyes. In his dream Charles thought them to be the dragon's glaring eyes. With a convulsive start he woke up.

But, seeing that greenish light, he could not believe that he was actually awake. He stared at the bright, shining torches and struggled to rise.

But as he sat up in bed, shivering, the torch lights moved back.

They had gone behind Kwanyin. The rays shone upon the hideous costume that she wore, and she seemed as Kai Tal had planned her to do—an idol carved from solid wood.

Charles clutched the bedclothes and his scalp twitched with horror; it tickled, as though his hair were standing on end.

He no longer believed that he was dreaming. He knew that he was awake, and in his own room.

But what was this horrid figure—this wooden idol that moved, that nodded its head, that fixed him with its glaring eyes?

Charles groped for the light and at the same moment yelled.

The eerie glow that lighted the wooden idol vanished. The idol seemed gone, too. But Kwanyin, led by Kai Tal, was still backing through the doorway, while Charles in vain flicked at his light switch.

As Kai Tal closed the door, he also operated the light switch that was in the corridor outside Charles' door.

Instantly, light flooded Charles' room. He sprang out of bed and hurried into his dressing-gown. Then he stared round the room, blinking. It was a minute or two before he recovered sufficiently from shock to go to the door and look out.

The corridor was deserted. There was no sign of anyone at all.

He rushed at once to his cousins' room, and hammered on the door.

"Catherine, Mollie—quick!" he called.

Catherine was part-way down the rope. Mollie was leaning over the sill, but she heard Charles call.

"Catherine—it's Charles calling for help," she said.

She rushed to the door, and opened it. Charles, paler than she had ever seen him before, stumbled into the room, badly shaken.

"Oh, my gosh! Did it come here?" he said.

"It—here—what?" asked Mollie, her eyes wide. "Great jumping dragons, what's happened?"

"Dragons! Don't mention dragons!" exclaimed Charles imploringly. "I had a horrid dream—a nightmare! And then I woke up."

Catherine now returned to the room. The light was on. Her attempt was ruined, anyway. And when she saw Charles' state, she was glad she had returned.

"Oh, Charles, what ever is it?" she said.

"They listened to his explanation, and Catherine's eyes glinted as she came to the part about the rays of light."

"Kai Tal," she said. "Remember the time when I wore the idol's head? That time he sent Kwanyin with it to scare us? He's done something of the sort again—"

"But this time's he's succeeded," said

Mollie. "Anyway, he's scared old Charles."

Charles, in the bright light, and in the company of the two girls, felt that he had made an ass of himself. The memory of his awful dream still haunted him, but he did not care to admit it.

"I—I was scared by the dream. At least," he added stiffly, "just as anyone is. A nightmare is a nightmare, and it's pretty awful."

Catherine's eyes glittered.

"Kai Tal is trying to scare us out of the place. Very well, we've got to be scared."

"Ought to be easy," said Mollie, trying not to smile.

Catherine spoke in a whisper:

"No. Listen both of you. We've got to trick them as they're tricking us. At all costs they mustn't know that we suspect that anything is wrong. Very well—let's be scared. Let's report it to uncle. Let's behave as though we didn't know Kai Tal was behind it, and then—"

"Then?" said Charles.

"Then we can hunt for our real uncle. They'll plan more scares, but we shall know what to expect."

Charles frowned heavily; but he could not see a real flaw in the argument. If they denounced Kai Tal, they might be made prisoners.

Very well, I've got to pretend I think I saw a ghost?"

"Yes."

"And if you see it, what?" asked Charles.

"We're coming with you to search the corridor," said Catherine.

"What ever for?"

"Because," Catherine explained, "when I see that ghost, I'm going to scream and run—run my hardest out into the open, just as anyone else scared might do, and then—make for the island."

Charles demurred; he argued. But Catherine was firm. Her mind was made up, and at last, against what he called his better judgment, Charles agreed, and returned to his room to change.

Mollie, too, slipped on her clothes.

Their minds made up, they went out into the corridor.

There was a rustling sound farther down, faint, and yet, to Catherine, whose ears were pricked up, sufficiently audible to warn her that someone else was in the corridor.

"Now—we'll find this ghost," she said in a normal tone. "I'm sure it was only nightmare, Charles."

"Quite sure," said Mollie, with a shiver. "But if there is a ghost here, I couldn't spend another night in this place."

Catherine led the way down the corridor.

At any moment she knew that they would see the "ghost." After Mollie's remark, Kai Tal would do his worst. And when he did, Catherine would rush off, screaming—apparently in wild terror, but really with a purpose.

The Prisoner of the Punt

KWANYIN was like a prisoner in that costume of imitation wood. She was hot, and near to fainting. She could only walk in little, hobbling steps, and her arms were pinioned at the elbows.

She knew how fearful she looked; and she had heard Mollie's remark. Naturally, little Kwanyin had been deceived by it. She could not realise that Charles had been genuinely scared, so why not Mollie?

In vain she tried to appeal to Kai

Tal. She could not speak, and there was no way of conveying her thoughts.

Even if she scared the girls, if she sent them into a fit of screaming-terror, she had to play her awful part. There was no way out.

Kai Tal took her arm. By pinching and pressure, he steered her where he wanted her to go.

The cousins, talking excitedly, and pretending to be in a highly nervous state, crept along the corridor, switching on the lights as they went.

But when they reached the small hall, the lights failed to work.

"Perhaps it's a burglar. Are you sure it was a wooden idol, Charles?" asked Catherine artfully.

She knew that Kai Tal was somewhere, listening, and she wanted an excuse for opening the main door that led out into the garden.

If she were to rush in seeming panic, she could hardly stop to unbolt doors.

So she unbolted the door in advance. "No—couldn't have been anyone from outside," she said loudly.

"Of course not; it was a wooden idol," said Charles.

Suddenly he gave a gasp of horror. It was not pretended. He had a chilling shock.

At the end of the long corridor was the wooden idol. It stood against the wall, quite still.

"There—there!" he muttered.

"That's the idol!"

Catherine and Mollie stood together, staring.

"It's an ordinary idol. I'm sure I've seen it somewhere," said Mollie, "and so have you, too, Charles. In your nightmare you remembered it, that's all."

Catherine began to wonder if she had misjudged Kai Tal and Kwanyin. They could see the idol only dimly by a faint light that came through some bead curtains. But none of them doubted that it was an ordinary wooden idol. There was nothing ghostly about it.

But just as Catherine had that thought in mind, the light that had revealed the idol to them suddenly paled and waned.

Darkness reigned for a moment, and then was lightened.

Instantly Mollie gave a sharp gasp.

"It's moved!"

The idol, which had been sideways, was now facing them. And, what was more horrifying, it seemed to move towards them. Its legs were stiff—the feet seemed stiff and wooden—yet it moved relentlessly nearer and nearer.

"Oh!" said Mollie, drawing back, hand to cheek.

"It's the ghost!" choked Charles.

"I'm not dreaming now."

Catherine's heart pumped faster. She told herself that it was a trick. Yet she was scared. And for a moment, so fascinated was she that she forgot her plan.

But only for a passing moment. Then suddenly she screamed. It was a deliberate scream, but Mollie, a little unnerved, screamed, too.

"Run!" cried Catherine.

There was a crash.

The idol crumpled and fell forward.

Kwanyin had fainted!

But Catherine was already rushing through the main door into the open and both Mollie and Charles had turned their backs to the idol.

Out in the open, Catherine ran her hardest, knowing where the grass and bushes were, being careful to avoid the paths which might reveal her whereabouts, for she could not run lightly on the gravel.

Amongst the bushes she stumbled and

slipped. She tore her frock and her stockings, but still she rushed on. Only when she was short of breath did she pause. But by that time she was near to the edge of the lake.

For a moment or two Catherine sat down at the water's edge. A faint breeze was blowing, and she could hear the hiss of the water as it lapped the bank.

Gradually her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and she could trace the shadowy outlines of near-by trees. But even so, walking near the water was a dangerous business.

Very cautiously she crept along the river bank, and with every step she found herself liking her self-imposed task less and less.

She was seeking first the small boat that was moored as a rule at the water's edge.

For several minutes she wandered cautiously up and down, sometimes, despite her wariness, tripping over a trailing root, or stepping into a rabbit hole. It was when she had almost abandoned hope that an odd little noise came to her.

She listened, stock still. Then gradually she made sense of the sound. It was the movement of a boat on the water—a boat riding at anchor.

Eager, excited, Catherine crept forward, directed by the sound. On all fours she groped to the edge of the lake.

She found the mooring-post of the boat by accident. Her knee bumped against something as she crawled forward, and she gave a stifled gasp.

Groping to find what had hurt her, she found a block of wood. Wound round it was a rope.

Gradually she hauled in the boat, alarmed, at every sound it made.

The gunwale was actually to hand when from behind her came the sound of voices and the glow of a lamp.

"She wouldn't run to the water, surely!"

It was the voice of the impostor Uncle Gerald.

A voice answered in Chinese—Kai Tal's, and in Chinese the impostor responded.

Catherine crouched low on the bank. If they came only a little nearer and flashed the torch they would see her.

But if she could get into the boat and slip away—

Catherine had only a moment in which to decide. She knew that capture faced her if she lost, whichever way she decided; but if she went in the boat they would have to find another boat themselves to give chase.

She pulled the boat slowly nearer and crawled into it. It was a punt, flat-bottomed, and did not rock.

Her entry made no sound. The painter, unhitched, trailed in the water, and Catherine pushed away from the bank.

She was afloat, adrift, and for all she knew there might be no paddles, nothing at all with which to propel the boat.

Thinking of the crocodile, which she knew was kept in the lake, Catherine shivered with dread. Very cautiously she groped in the bottom of the punt.

There seemed an inch, at least, of chilly water at one end of it.

"Leaking!" she gasped, round-eyed. She pictured herself drifting out into the middle of the lake in a boat that sank deeper and deeper into the water until it was completely awash with the still, dark, sinister water.

In desperation Catherine groped for paddles. She became frantic. She wanted now to paddle back to the shore. Her hand struck an object, but it was not a paddle.

Her heart almost stood still as she realised what it was. A felt Catherine slipper. And it was not empty. Her hand went numb as she realised that it was a human foot.

Someone else was in the boat, someone in Chinese slippers, someone whose ankles, she found, were tightly bound with rope! A prisoner—a Chinaman! Catherine crouched, trembling.

And then her horror waned; a sudden enlightenment came.

A Chinaman, made prisoner, would be a friend! The bogus uncle and Kai Tal would not make prisoners of their own evil allies.

This man must be on Kwanyin's side—a friend of hers! Even, perhaps, her father!

From fear, Catherine's emotion changed to excitement.

"I am Catherine Sterndale. Who are you?" she whispered.

There was a movement of the bound man, but no words, and Catherine instantly guessed that he was gagged as well as bound.

Any doubt as to his identity was settled when she found that he had a long beard. Round his mouth was a cloth, tightly tied at the back.

With trembling fingers she unfastened it, while the punt drifted out to the middle of the lake.

On the shore behind her voices could be heard, and a light was flashing. But its beam was not long enough to reach the punt from where the seekers stood.

Now the gag was free, and a soft voice spoke to Catherine.

"I am the father of little Kwanyin, a miserable, unhappy man, the victim of betrayers of trust. Do not fear me, for if you are indeed Catherine Sterndale, then I am your friend, and will be a faithful and loyal helper."

Catherine felt an immense relief. For fear and anxiety were gone.

"I will be helpful, too," she whispered.

"I am Kwanyin's friend. I know Kai Tal is her enemy and evil. But how can I free you?"

"In the left sleeve of my garment," whispered Kwanyin's father, "is hidden a thin but strong knife in a leather sheath. Please find."

Catherine found it without difficulty, and in a moment was cutting the cords that bound his wrists and ankles. While she worked to free him, he talked.

"My despicable enemies left me here. They planned that when the black cloak of night covered their movements, they would move to the island once more and rob me of light, and even of air, in the dark and miserable dungeon which has for so long been my prison."

Catherine's eyes gleamed.

"They shan't do it again," she vowed.

"I'll put the boat ashore. We'll go to the far side of the lake. Are there paddles?"

He eased his sore and aching wrists, and told her where the paddles were kept. Finding them, Catherine moved the punt forward as quickly as she could.

"My real uncle is a prisoner?" Catherine asked. "Is he here?"

"Yes, he is a prisoner. But even I, his most loyal, admiring friend, who have sought him, cannot tell you where he is hidden. I would that I knew. For when he is found, all this unhappiness will end."

"I'll find him," said Catherine, grimly.

She turned the boat to the shore of the lake. To go to the island now was impossible without being instantly pursued. She wanted to give Kwanyin's father a chance to get away and hide.

"Go now—hurry," she urged.

He pressed her hands.

"Devoted servant of Miss Catherine go," he said, his voice shaking with emotion. "But again we meet—in the



SUDDENLY the idol became lit up with an eerie glow. And then from Mollie came a cry: "It moved!" Even Charles was scared. "It's the ghost!" he muttered.

It's Here, There and Everywhere

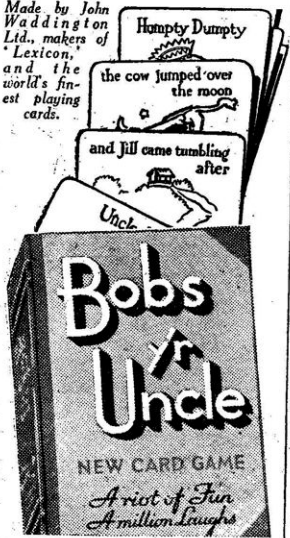


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morning. We meet at eleven o'clock in the morning, where the weeping tree leans down in sorrow over the twisted brook."

Catherine remembered the willow and the brook.

"Amongst the rushes?" she asked. "Without fail, honourable and admirable miss. So brave a heart in one so young gives an old man courage."

He pressed her hands again, urged her to help Kwanyin, his daughter, and then crept away through the bushes.

Catherine, listening, watching the flashing torches, waited.

From somewhere near at hand, in the direction opposite to that taken by the old man, she heard movements.

Turning the Tables

CHARLES and Mollie had rushed back to their own rooms the moment Catherine had disappeared. Both were still in slippers, and could not very well rush into the grounds without shoes.

Both were agreed that they could not possibly allow Catherine to make this adventure alone, unaided. If there were risks, they must be shared.

When they reached the small hall they found it deserted.

A light was on, the door was open, but not a Chinaman was in sight.

Mollie looked down the corridor where they had seen the idol. But it was no longer there.

"Shall we rush straight out?" she asked Charles.

He hesitated, looking about him, a worried expression on his face.

"I can hear a groan, or something of the sort."

Mollie listened, and then turned towards the corridor. It came from there distinctly, and it was an unmistakable groan. She hurried forward, with Charles at her side.

They were a few yards short of the bead curtains through which the light had shone to illuminate the wooden idol, when they saw a small foot protruding.

Mollie drew up, Charles, stepping forward, pulled aside the bead curtains.

Stretched on the floor, was the wooden idol. But—its feet were small and human. It groaned in human way.

The cousins were for a moment shocked and startled by the sight, and then Mollie suddenly dropped to her knees. An idea had come to her.

"Kwanyin," she whispered. "Kwanyin."

The groaning ceased for a moment. "Charles, it's Kwanyin—I'm sure of it," gasped Mollie. "Quick—let's get her out of this—"

Together they worked at the strange costume. At first it baffled them, and then Charles found a way of opening it. Once found, they very quickly freed Kwanyin.

The little Chinese girl was paler than usual; her breathing was uneven. With the pad over her mouth, and with her head enclosed in a wooden carving that gave little air, she was almost suffocated.

But freeing the pad was not easy. Mollie did it as gently as she could, peeling it off, and Kwanyin, opening her mouth painfully, gave a gasp that really startled them.

She opened her eyes and looked in wonder from Mollie to Charles.

"Escape—much angly—bad Kai Tal," she whispered. "Please to go—"

"Not without you," said Charles grimly.

The pad over Kwanyin's mouth was

"The Pagoda of Peril!" proof enough that she had not played her part willingly, and the brutality of Kai Tal made Charles' blood boil. At that moment, he wanted nothing more than to get at close quarters with the Chinaman and pummel him.

Kwanyin, freed, struggled up with their help, and Mollie unbound her feet. While she did so she explained what had happened to Catherine.

"She goes to lake—she find illustrious father of Kwanyin," said the little Chinese girl in an excited whisper.

"Kai Tal take him prisoner—leave in boat—"

The cousins exchanged a look. "To the lake," said Charles grimly. "Kai Tal's gone there, and a crowd of others—after Catherine. We've got to go, too. It may mean a scrap."

They wasted no time. In the darkness they made their escape from the house by a window, lest by going through the doorway, they might be seen in the light.

They saw no one on the way; but as they reached the lake they heard voices and saw lights.

"This way," breathed Kwanyin. "Other boat—quick—"

She led them to the side of the lake, and it was as they hurried softly along that they heard the movement of paddles.

"A punt coming ashore," breathed Charles.

They pressed on towards where it seemed about to land, and then heard soft whispers—Catherine's voice, and another's.

"Illustrious father, said Kwanyin. But Kwanyin's father did not hear; he had turned away. Kwanyin, as she saw that, left Charles and Mollie and ran after him.

At the water's edge, Catherine heard the sound, and listened with alarm. But Charles' voice sounded in her ears.

"Cath—it's us," he called. "Ssssh!" she warned.

Charles and Mollie crept to her through the darkness.

"Quietly—quietly," breathed Catherine, staring into the bushes. "I saw a light—for a moment—coming this way."

"Into the boat," said Charles. "No. It's leaking. Into the bushes, and watch," decided Catherine, and she herself hurried to a dark shape near by.

It was well they followed, for a rustling sound came from only a few yards distant. And then, in the darkness, they saw a dark shape, a crouching figure.

Suddenly, a torch flashed. The creeping man had seen the punt and flashed his torch on it for a moment. But in its rays he had revealed himself—Kai Tal.

Charles clenched his fists, and moved forward, but Catherine grabbed his arm.

"Quietly," she whispered in his ear. "Now we can turn the tables—make him a prisoner. The cords and gag are in the boat—"

But it was a boy's job, not a girl's, and Charles crept forward stealthily towards the unsuspecting Chinaman.

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