

THE GIRL WHO GAVE UP LUXURY **ONE OF THE 7 FINE STORIES INSIDE**

GIRLS' CRYSTAL

WEEKLY

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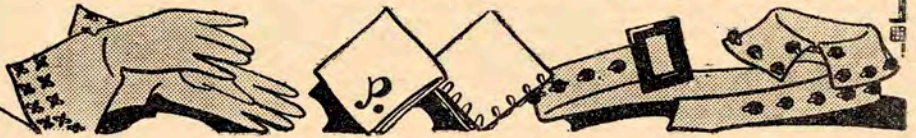


"QUICK! NOW IS YOUR CHANCE TO GET AWAY!"

A thrilling moment in "An Impostor Against Her Will"—inside.



PENELOPE'S PAGE OF NOVELTY NOTIONS



HALLO, EVERYBODY!—Here's your Penelope again. I won't make the joke about turning up like a bad Penny, or you'll probably boo me right off the page as a punishment!

And then you'd be sorry, for you'd miss knowing all about the latest and quite the most attractive hiking jersey I spotted for you the other day.

It's absolutely ideal to wear over your shorts—or skirts—this weather, and you who're knitters will love to make it yourselves, 'cause it needs no directions, no increasings, no decrasings. In fact, no brain-fag at all.

Just knit two attractive squares in subdued or vivid colours, according to your temperament, one to fit your back and one to fit your front.

Sew them together on the shoulder and leave space in the middle to get your head through.

Behold, you'll have the fashionable high neck all for nothing.

You'll find, too, that you have a very tiny sleeve—or perhaps it should be called a sleevelette. Then, by knitting two more strips, fourteen inches wide and about three inches deep, you'll have two baby sleeves that you can stitch into the armholes.

Sew up the rest of the jersey and you're ready for your twenty miles—or is it a modest two?

I confess I'm not very good at tennis. In my vain way I like to think I'm decorative on the court—but even that doesn't win games for myself or my partner.

Still, in my humble opinion, it's better to be inefficient in a picturesque way, than to be neither ornamental NOR useful!

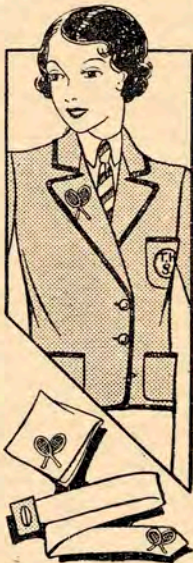
(But that's only my opinion, mind! My partners might think differently, and be too polite to say so!)

My cousin Kathleen, by the way—you know, the schoolgirl one, who's always wishing her name was something different from what it is, and Pearl is the latest choice—is a perfect little wizard with the tennis racket.

Very sweetly she often gives me a game, and doesn't seem to mind a bit when I serve double faults without turning a hair.

She's of a frightfully sportive turn of mind, so was terribly thrilled when I made some little tennis "motifs" for her to decorate her on-the-court outfit.

So pleased was she, in fact, that I began to think the idea might be one that would appeal to you, as well.



It's illustrated here, but I must just describe it to you as well in order to make sure you realise how simple it is.

A hankie decorated with tennis rackets, crossed, is sure to meet with your approval. And your friends', too, if you've any that are expecting to add a sudden year to their age very shortly.

These can be embroidered straight on to the hankie itself if you're clever with a "cruel" needle—are they still called that?—and embroidery silk.

First sketch the rackets in pencil—very simple ones, I need hardly add—and then embroider them in any easy stitch.

Satin-stitch would be very simple for the handle part—which as you know is only an over and over stitch—and chain or stem stitch for the string part.

You won't want to embroider the motif straight on to your precious school blazer, though, so if you like the notion, you must make it detachable.

A piece of felt, or fairly heavy material will do beautifully.

Sketch on this in chalk or coloured pencil the outline of the rackets. Then mark the strings with chain stitch, straight on to the felt.

A pin will hold the smart little trimming in place on the lapel of your coat.

Even neat sewing stitches won't be out of place, and will certainly make it "sit" flatter, for you can always undo the stitches when tennis-time is over.

Not only your blazer, but your tennis jersey, your tennis belt, and your hair bandeau, will look all the brighter for this decoration.

And if such tennis racket inspiration doesn't improve your game—then I'm afraid you're not destined for Wimbledon (any more than I am!).

Have you got your last year's bathing suit out of mother's secret winter store yet?

As soon as you do, don't forget to give it a thorough look-over for unexpected moth-meals and mysteriously dropped stitches will you?

If it's still a little stiff and salty from that glorious summer holiday by the sea, don't hesitate to give it a wash in warm, soapy water, will you.

Oh, and if it is one of those which tends to drop and sag, just where it shouldn't, you can shrink that part, you know!

Place it on the ironing board and press it there—hard, under a damp cloth. That'll do the trick.

And while you're about it, you might as well give the whole of it a press—on the wrong side. It'll perk it up wonderfully if it has to see another summer through.

Mine's got to do duty again this year. When I dug it out the other day, I'd quite forgotten that one of the straps had gone.

(Which was rather important, for it's one of those that fastens around the neck, horse-collar fashion!)

I had lain it on the beach towards the end of last summer to dry, and a friendly puppy—with admirable taste for one so young—had picked on mine of all the bathing suits there, to invite it to play!

The result was disaster to one strap. So now I've just made another—a red one.

You see, they were plaited straps—one green

and one red—the two colours in the suit itself, in addition to white.

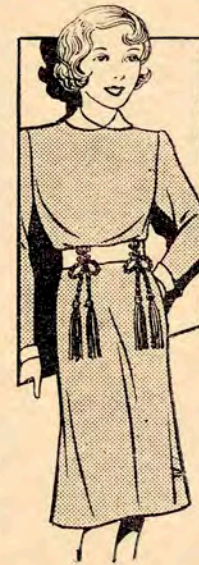
It was easy to do, too. I just toddled into my very favourite shop, went up to the wool counter and selected one penny skein of scarlet wool. Opening it out, I just plaited the whole lot and sewed the strap on. Easy!

Don't you love blinds and curtains at home that have those gorgeous big cords with tassels on the end.

We haven't got them at our home; but I must confess they're a luxury I long for. They always give such a rich appearance to a window somehow.

But if you can't have them on curtains for a variety of reasons, you can still have them—

On the newest belts!



How often you must have realised that a smart belt can absolutely "make" a frock that's inclined to be dull.

To make the one here, you'll want a length of ribbon to fit your school-girl waist, and a length of cord—anything from half to one yard, to be rather vague.

Make the belt, and stab eight eyelet holes—four in two places—as you can see from the picture.

Buttonhole these around, and then thread your cord through—half

through one set, and half through t'other.

Tie in a bow, and then fluff out the ends of the cord to make tassels, tying the cord in a knot just above the fluffy fraying.

We played such a jolly game the other evening at a party I went to.

You really must try it one wet playtime when you sit in the hall, or if you're one of the gang that has dinner at school. It's called "Buzz."

Any number can play. And all it consists of is counting. The first girl says "one," the next "two," the next "three," and so on until you come to seven.

Instead of saying seven, that girl says "Buzz." And so the game goes on—no number containing a seven, or being a multiple of seven being said aloud. "Buzz" must be said instead.

It sounds terribly easy, but you'll be astounded how many girls will trip up, saying seventeen when it should be "Buzz," or twenty-eight, when that also should be "buzz."

Each time a girl misses saying "Buzz" at the right time, she loses a mark, and after losing three, must drop out of the game.

Oh, and remember that each time a girl loses a point, the game must start again from "One," with a different girl leading from the time before.

And the swifter the counting, the merrier!

See you here again next Friday, pets—which is only a week hence after all! Meanwhile, don't forget your friend,

PENELOPE

GIRLS' CRYSTAL
25/4/36



AN IMPOSTOR AGAINST HER WILL

By SYLVIA MACRAE



SALLY LEARNS A LOT

FACE to face with her own double! Sally Blythe had suspected that this secret room under the Priory was occupied by a girl; but the fact that she and this stranger were identical in looks came as a staggering shock to her.

Wide-eyed she stared, and then like a lightning flash the truth dawned on her. This must be the real Sally Blythe; this must be the girl whose place she had unwittingly taken.

"No wonder no one ever guessed I was an impostor," she told herself. "No wonder no one ever suspected that I wasn't the real Sally."

Sally had lost her memory; the past was a complete blank to her. That was why it had been so easy for George Hunter to deceive her into thinking that she was his ward.

But why had he given her a false name? Why had he caused her to become an impostor?

That was a question Sally did not attempt to answer now. Impulsively she took a step forward.

There was terror in the other girl's eyes. Her white face was desperate.

To Sally it was obvious that some secret dread had engulfed her.

"Don't be frightened, please," she said gently. "I'm not an enemy; I'm a friend."

At the sound of her voice her double started violently. Until this moment she had not realised that the intruder was a girl. Sally had been standing in the shadow; her double had only seen her as a dim, vague form.

But now as Sally advanced smiling in friendly fashion, the tenseness went from the other girl's face.

"Who are you?" she gulped. "What do you want here? If the Jarvises see you—"

She broke off, staring in amazement. For the first time she realised that Sally was her double. The striking resemblance between them made her gasp.

"Mary!" she exclaimed. "Mary Staines!" Sally nodded. She had already discovered her real name.

"And you are the real Sally Blythe, I suppose?" she said.

"The real Sally Blythe," echoed the other girl, in bewilderment. "What do you mean? Is there another girl with the same name?"

It was Sally's turn to be surprised. So her double did not know of her imposture. What then was she doing down here, living in secret? Surely she could not be a prisoner?

And then Sally remembered the cuttings from the American newspapers that had caused her so much unhappiness. They related to the disgraceful exploits of a girl who was wanted by the police. Sally had been convinced all along that the cuttings did not relate to her; now she had proof.

Her double was the person the American authorities sought. She was the fugitive from justice, and that was why she was in hiding. She feared arrest.

"This looks like some more of George Hunter's rascally work," Sally told herself grimly.

What a scoundrel the man was! Not content with deceiving her, he had deliberately played on the real Sally's fears; kept her hidden in this gloomy room, while he foisted another girl off in her place.

What a cunning scheme! But what had been his object? What was the solution of all this mystery?

Sally didn't know, but she meant to find out. What was more, she meant to help her double. Though she had heard only bad of the real Sally, her heart went out to her.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, impulsively Sally stretched out a hand and pulled the other girl down beside her.

"We're going to be friends," she said. "I feel it in my bones. I'd like to help you. You do need a friend, don't you?"

The real Sally nodded, though all the suspicion had not left her eyes.

"I never see anyone except the Jarvises," she whispered, "and I hate them! It seems years since I last went out, except for a walk through the garden—and that's only at night."

Sally patted her sympathetically.

"You poor thing! No wonder you look pale, and are a bundle of nerves. But why don't you go out? Surely they aren't keeping you here against your will?"

"N-no; it isn't that. It's that I'm afraid. I daren't go out. I daren't tell you. If I did—"

UNLESS SHE DID HER RASCALLY GUARDIAN'S BIDDING HER SICK BROTHER WOULD SUFFER

She broke off with a shudder, and lapsed into trembling silence. Sally nodded understandingly.

"It's the police, isn't it?" she said. "That's who you're afraid of. Oh, you needn't worry! I won't give you away. I'm sorry for you. I want to help you."

She pressed her double's arm soothingly, and then leaned excitedly forward.

"Listen!" she whispered. "It's time we two had a long talk. There's a lot I want to know, and a lot you ought to be told. If we only stick together, I am certain we can clear up all this mystery, and once we learn the truth, I'm positive you'll find you've nothing to fear. There's no need for you to hide here. Those scoundrels are tricking you. For their own ends they're scaring you. Now listen to me a minute!"

She paused, and then stared, for without warning her double had leapt to her feet and rushed across to the door. There she stood, quivering from head to foot.

"What is it?" asked Sally. "There is no need to be frightened—really there isn't. Now come and sit down and let's exchange confidences."

But the other girl did not move. Her face white and anxious, she crouched there, listening apprehensively. Suddenly a panic-stricken gasp escaped her lips.

"They know you're here," she faltered. "They're coming down. I can hear them on the stairs. Quick—you must hide!"

Darting back, she clutched Sally by the arm and pulled convulsively.

"Hide, hide," she urged. "If they see you here there will be trouble. They are ruthless—without mercy. Quick—oh, quick!"

Though she tried to seem calm, Sally herself was quivering. She also could hear the thud of descending feet now. Either George Hunter or the Jarvises were approaching the secret bedroom.

With a sudden start Sally remembered that she had left the upstairs door open. That would arouse their suspicions. It would tell them that someone had ventured down here, and if they found her here—

Plucky though she was, Sally shivered. Already the rascally trio had gone to grim lengths to preserve their secret; if they learnt that she had stumbled on the truth their anger would be terrifying.

Yet she could not leave her innocent double to bear the brunt of their fury. Despite her palpitating heart, she dragged free her arm.

"No, I am going to stay here," she said. "We'll have things out once and for all. We'll force them to tell us the truth."

"No, no! You must hide—please!" The other girl's agitation was pitiful. "I shall be all right," she panted. "But you must hide. You can steal down again. I would like to see you again. I—I like you, and I want to have that talk. But not now—not now. Please, hide; please do as I ask!"

She plucked frantically at Sally's arm, and that girl, as she heard the harsh voice of George Hunter and Slim Jarvis, also grew panicky.

Without further protest she allowed herself to be hustled across the room. Against one wall stood a clothes cupboard. Agitatedly

THAT SCAMP SCOTTIE



pulling open the door, Sally's double pushed her in.

"Quick—quick," she gasped.

Next moment the door was shut, and Sally, blinking in the stuffy darkness, heard the two men enter the bed-room.

"Where is she? Where is that girl?"

It was George Hunter who barked out the question.

Then came the real Sally's tremulous, frightened voice:

"Who—who are you talking about?" she asked quaveringly. "I've seen no one. Is—is there another girl in the house?"

The two men eyed her suspiciously. Her innocence seemed so real that for a moment they began to doubt. It was Slim who answered her.

"You know who we mean right enough," he snarled. "The spying impostor who—"

He broke off in confusion as Hunter nudged him. For their own reasons the rascals did not want the real Sally to learn the truth. If she hadn't seen her double, then it would be foolish to arouse her suspicions.

Hunter covered up the awkward silence with an irritable laugh.

"It's the new maid," he declared. "A regular

little Nosey Parker, she is—always ferreting around. We saw the upstairs door open, and so naturally we assumed she'd come down here. And you realise that she's your enemy? You know the English police have taken up the case; you know they're searching for you. And if they find you—"

He finished with a significant shrug, and Sally, hiding in the cupboard, felt her eyes blaze with indignation. The shame of it! How could anyone be so cruel as to terrify this already frightened girl?

"I don't believe the police over here are looking for her at all," Sally told herself. "It's all a trick—a plot to keep the poor girl down here out of the way."

She was tempted to fling open the cupboard door and denounce them. Only the memory of her double's pitiful terror restrained her. Besides, it would be foolish.

No, her strategy was clear. She must try to slip upstairs unobserved and await another opportunity to have a talk with the real Sally.

That talk, she felt convinced, would clear up the whole mystery—would help them both to smooth out their worries and troubles, and for ever put them out of the reach of this scoundrelly household.

Sally's pulses raced. The thought that this other girl could help her to regain her memory, help her to recall the past was wonderful.

But she must be patient. To be discovered now would be disastrous.

Anxiously she crouched there in the darkness; but to her relief George Hunter seemed to be satisfied.

"Leave the girl alone," he told his crony. "I believe she's telling the truth."

But Slim was obstinate.

"I'm not leavin' here until I've had a good look around," he snarled. "And what price tryin' that cupboard for a start?"

There came the thud of approaching footsteps, and then a vicious hand clutched the old-fashioned latch of the cupboard door.

Sally cowered back in alarm. Discovery seemed inevitable.

GEORGE HUNTER'S CRUEL THREAT

FROM the bed-room came a terrified gasp. Sally's double, her face white, rushed frantically forward.

"You leave that cupboard alone," she panted. "I won't have you touching my clothes."

But Slim ignored her. His eyes glinting suspiciously, he tugged at the latch. To his surprise the door refused to open. He tugged again savagely, furiously. Still the door remained closed.

Sally's double felt as though some monstrous weight had been taken from her mind. Incredulously she stared. She could not understand what was preventing the door from opening. She did not realise that Sally, quick to recover from her dismay, had grabbed down one of the metal coat-hangers and rammed the end above the latch, preventing it from being raised.

Desperately the other girl made the most of her chance.

"The door's jammed, so you're only wasting your time," she gulped. "It's—it's been like it for days. I complained to Mrs. Jarvis about it only this morning."

Slim gave the latch another angry tug, then reluctantly turned away, to cross the room and fling open the door of an adjoining room.

"Perhaps she's in here," he grunted. "Come on, Hunter; don't stand gaping there. Help me to find her."

Both men disappeared into the other room, and hardly had they gone than the cupboard door swung stealthily open and Sally's anxious face peered out.

There was her double holding open another door and waving Sally frantically towards it.

"Quick—before they come back! Now's your chance to escape!" she whispered.

Silently Sally stepped out of the cupboard, but for a moment she hesitated, doubtfully regarding the other terror-stricken girl.

"You're sure you'll be all right?" she asked.

"Yes, yes—only go, please go!"

"Right-ho!" Sally nodded. "But I'll come again to-morrow night. Good-bye for the present."

Flashing her double a quick smile, Sally took to her heels and fled—up the cellar steps, along the hall, and up the main staircase.

In a few minutes she was in bed. But Sally did not sleep at once. Her mind was a whirling riot.

Not much longer now need she keep up her imposture. To-morrow night, providing the coast was clear, she would steal down to that secret bed-room again. She was certain that the other girl would be able to help her to regain her lost memory.

"Why, she may even be able to tell me what's become of Charlie," she told herself.

Her eyes glowed at the thought. Charlie was her sick brother. At the moment he was a patient in some sanatorium, but where Sally did not know. Deliberately her rascally guardian was trying to keep her and her brother apart.

But not for much longer. At last she was on the track of the truth. Very soon now—perhaps before another night was over—she would have solved the whole mystery.

Her lips curled into an excited smile, and it was happily that she went to sleep.

Little did she suspect the startling events

that were to happen before she saw her double again!

"MORNING, my dear! Have a good night's rest?"

Affectionately George Hunter greeted Sally when she appeared in the breakfast-room next morning. There was no trace of suspicion or anger on his face.

"Yes, thank you."

Sally nodded curtly, and took her place at the table.

"That's right—and I'm glad to see you're getting the colour back to your cheeks, my dear. I've been very anxious about you, you know. All those suspicions you've harboured—you've no idea how they've upset me."

He shook his head sadly.

"But that's all forgotten now. From now on we're going to be friends—have a good time together, eh?"

Sally made no comment, but in her heart was contempt for this smiling rascal's duplicity. Friends! As if she would ever be friends with a person like him!

He frowned as he saw how little impression his words had made, then smiled.

"Oh, by the way, there's a letter for you," he said.

"A—a letter?"

Sally's heart leapt. For a moment she thought the missive might be from the Swiss hospital porter who had promised to write and tell her where her brother had been taken to in England.

But as she took the letter and glanced at the envelope she knew disappointment. The envelope bore an English stamp. She surveyed it curiously, for she had no friends in the country.

"Who can it be from?" she ejaculated.

"Why not open it and see, my dear?" Her guardian laughed. "But, as a matter of fact, I can tell you. I recognised the handwriting. It's from Lord Chesterham."

"Lord Chesterham?"

"Yes—you know, the fellow we met when we were staying down at Eastbourne with the Van Dells. Don't you remember he half promised to invite us to his country house for a week-end. He was very taken with you, my dear."

Sally nodded. She remembered now the dear old man with the iron-grey hair, stooping figure, and monocle, who had taken such a sympathetic interest in her lost-memory troubles.

She tore open the envelope, and covertly her guardian watched her as she read the enclosure.

"Well, my dear?" he asked, and the suppressed eagerness in his voice made Sally look up sharply.

Why was he so excited? What was the reason for his amazing amiability this morning?

Puzzled, she glanced at the letter again.

"It is from Lord Chesterham," she said. "He wants us to go down to the castle to-morrow and spend the week-end with him."

"Good—good!" George Hunter could not keep the pleasure out of his voice. "An excellent opportunity for you to make some friends," he declared. "You will have a wonderful time. Chesterham Castle is one of the show places of the country, and the old chap's hospitality is proverbial."

He rubbed his hands, and Sally gave a gasp. Like a dagger-thrust, alarming suspicion rocketed across her brain.

The reason for her guardian's delight was obvious. He wanted to bring off another coup. He wanted to get inside the Castle in order to steal its treasures!

The very thought made Sally feel sick. Looking at him, surprising the cunning glint in his eyes, she felt it difficult to refrain from leaping up and hurling the truth in his face.

Ten to one he had schemed for this invitation—like he had done the one from the Van Dells. Possibly that was the reason why he still kept her here. He wanted to use her to gain entrance to rich men's houses.

Thanks to Mrs. van Dell, the American woman who had befriended her, Sally had made the acquaintance of a number of wealthy people. They had all felt sorry for her; that,

probably, was why this present invitation had come.

And her scoundrelly guardian intended to turn it to his own advantage.

With a numb feeling of horror Sally remembered what had happened when they had been staying down at Eastbourne. The house of one of the Van Dell's friends had been robbed and the stolen property had never been recovered.

Though she had no proof, Sally was certain that George Hunter had been the thief. He also had been responsible for the robbery at the Van Dell's own house. Fortunately Sally had been able to recover and restore the precious heirlooms that had been stolen then. But that didn't lessen her guardian's guilt.

And now he was planning another of his scoundrelly coups!

Too stunned to speak, Sally stared helplessly across the table. Her guardian frowned. He sensed what was passing through her mind. "Of course you will accept," he said.

Sally shook her head.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she retorted, and stormily rose to her feet. "You must think I'm simple!" she gasped. "Don't you realise that I know what your game is?"

"My—my game?"

He stared in mock surprise, his shaggy eyebrows meeting in anger.

"Yes, you want to rob Lord Chesterham like you robbed all the other people you visited, but you're not going to use me to help you. I won't go to the castle. I shall write refusing the invitation. What is more, you shan't go, either."

Sally's eyes flashed fiercely. Like iron was her determination.

"Do you hear?" she cried. "You shan't set foot in Lord Chesterham's house—nor in any other, either, if I can stop it."

Very calmly George Hunter took out his cigarette-case. Very deliberately he pulled out a cigarette and put it to his lips. As he lighted it, he surveyed her sardonically.

"Finished?" he asked.

Sally ignored his jeer. Heart palpitating, she stood there, contempt in her eyes, but dawning dread in her heart. He seemed so sure of himself. His very deliberation carried with it a touch of the sinister.

He took a puff at the cigarette, blew out the smoke, then softly crossed the room to where, quivering, she stood.

"You've had your say; now I'll have mine," he declared. "I'm not going to argue with you. I'm not even going to attempt to deny your absurd accusations. I'm just going

to warn you that you won't be allowed to refuse that invitation."

"What do you mean?" Anger replaced her apprehension. "You can't force me to go!" she cried. "You can't stop me writing a refusal."

He smiled maliciously.

"Oh, yes, I can!" he retorted.

"How? How? Tell me if you can! How can you make me do what I don't want to do? I'm not a child. You can't beat me. You can't scare me and you can't bluff me, either. I say I won't go, and that's the end of it."

Defiantly she stood there, but his smile did not fade. Rather did it deepen.

"You forget one thing," he said quietly.

"And that is?"

"Your brother!"

The two words stabbed Sally like knives. Instantly all the lurking fears that had laid dormant within her rose to the surface. Her cheeks blanched; her eyes dilated with horrified surprise.

"My brother!" she gasped. "You would not dare harm Charlie! He's in a sanatorium—being looked after by decent people." She caught in her breath. "You're only trying to frighten me," she declared. "How can my brother help you to force me to accept this invitation?"

"In this way. Your brother is terribly ill. He's had a bad relapse. He's pining for you. According to the matron if he does not see you within the next week or so he will die. Do you understand? Die!"

As he hissed out the words his hand shot out and closed with cruel strength around her flinching wrist.

"If you accept Lord Chesterham's invitation you will be allowed to see your brother," he said. "Refuse—and you imperil your brother's life!"

SHE MUST GO THROUGH WITH IT

THE cruel ultimatum held Sally paralysed with horror. She had always known that her guardian was ruthless, but that he should go so far as this made her gasp.

The tears welled in Sally's eyes as she pictured her brother tossing and turning in feverish worry, fretting for the sister who never came to visit him.

And then anger fought to replace her distress. Through her tears she glared at the scoundrel who stood there by the breakfast



Scared lest her rascally guardian should turn round, Sally crept towards the grating—just as her double flung out a crumpled-up note. What did this secret message contain, she wondered.

table, calmly smoking, a jeering smile on his lips.

A desperate appeal rose in her throat, but she choked back the words. Useless to appeal to her guardian. There was no mercy in his heart. All he cared about was his own rascally plans.

"Well?" he asked. "You'll accept?"

Dumbly Sally nodded.

"And you will be sensible?"

At first Sally made no reply to that. The idea of submitting was unbearable, and yet how could she continue to defy him? He would keep his threat; she was certain of that.

Her only chance to save her brother lay in agreeing to his scoundrelly proposal.

Then, all at once, a new fear struck her. Suppose she did agree, what proof had she that her guardian would keep his part of the bargain?

As though he could read her thoughts he plunged his hand again into his pocket.

"You were expecting a letter from Switzerland, weren't you?" he asked. "From the porter at the hospital at Bernine?"

Sally was shocked out of her despair.

"How—how did you know?" she gasped, staring in amazement.

He grinned.

"Never mind about that. The only thing that matters is that I do know. What is more, I've got his letter here."

Whipping something from his pocket, he held it up. Sally's eyes widened as she saw the foreign stamp mark; saw the foreign handwriting on the envelope.

Undoubtedly it was the letter she had daily expected. How her guardian had managed to gain possession of it she did not know, but as she realised how he had tampered with her private correspondence, she leapt furiously to her feet.

"Give it me!" she cried. "How dare you steal my letters! Give it me at once!"

With a vicious gesture he flung away his cigarette.

"If you're sensible I'll hand you that letter," he said between his teeth. "That means you'll discover where your brother is, and will be able to visit him."

"Give it me, then—give it me now!" gasped Sally, but he shook his head.

"Oh, no! Not until Sunday do you get it. You've got to keep your part of the bargain first."

Sally's resistance was over. Her brother must come first. No matter what rascality this villain was planning she must secure Charlie's address.

"But how do I know whether you'll keep your part of the bargain?" she asked.

"Very easily. I will readdress this letter to Chesterham Castle. You shall go with Slim and see that he posts it. Then, when you get to the castle, you will find it awaiting you there."

Sally eyed him suspiciously, but the conditions seemed fair enough. As far as she could see there was no possible way of him tricking her.

"Well?" he asked. "Do you agree?"

Dully she nodded. She had no option in the matter.

"You promise to accompany me to Chesterham Castle, and you promise not to breathe a word of these ridiculous suspicions to Lord Chesterham?"

Again she nodded listlessly.

"I promise," she said.

"Good!" His scowl vanished; his whole manner changed. Smiling, he patted her in fatherly fashion. "Good girl! I knew you would be sensible. Now, hurry up and write that letter, then you and Slim can go and post the one from Switzerland."

White-faced and trembling, Sally went to the table. She wrote accepting the invitation, then miserably she watched her guardian readdress the envelope that contained Charlie's address.

A few minutes later Slim entered the room, grinning as though he knew what was afoot. Hunter handed him both letters, and silently Sally accompanied the manservant down the drive, and watched him drop both missives into the letter-box outside the entrance gates.

Even then she was not satisfied. She had

paid a heavy price to secure the prospect of visiting her brother, and she did not intend to be cheated.

The next collection was in ten minutes' time, and there she stood, waiting and watching, until the postman loomed into sight, to open the box and scoop the letters into his bag.

Then listlessly she returned to the house, to seek her own room and throw herself down on the bed.

The knowledge that it would be her action that would admit a scheming robber to Chesterham Castle horrified her, and yet what else could she do?

"Nothing," she faltered. "I had to agree—I had to agree."

And the tears welled up and ran saltily down her pallid cheeks.

DESPITE the anxiety that possessed her, Sally did not forget her promise to visit her double.

That night, when all was quiet, she stole downstairs, only to find the cellar door open and hear the mumble of voices coming up from below.

Her guardian and Slim Jarvis were down there, and, though she waited for over an hour for them to depart to bed, her vigil proved in vain.

At last she abandoned her mission, and herself returned upstairs.

"I'll sneak down before breakfast," she told herself; but, though she got up before seven o'clock, once again she was doomed to disappointment.

On reaching the hall she was dismayed to find Mrs. Jarvis on her hands and knees near the cellar door, engaged in scrubbing the floor.

Going into the study, Sally seated herself near the door and picked up the morning newspaper; but, though she pretended to read, covertly she was watching Mrs. Jarvis.

Would the woman never return to her kitchen? Soon Slim Jarvis and George Hunter would be down. Unless she acted quickly she would never get a chance to visit the cellars.

"And I simply must see her," she told herself. "I promised her I would pay her another visit, and if I don't go down she'll start worrying. Besides, she can tell me heaps of things I want to know."

Desperate, she jumped up and went out into the hall. Mrs. Jarvis looked up, with a scowl. "What do you want now?" she asked. "Don't you start worrying me. I'm busy."

"I want my breakfast early this morning," returned Sally coolly. "The hall can wait. Please start frying the bacon. I'm simply starving."

"Then you'll have to starve," was the surly reply. "Breakfast isn't until eight o'clock."

Sally's lips set tightly.

"You seem to forget whom you're talking to!" she snapped. "I'm mistress here. Please start getting breakfast ready at once!"

A defiant gleam crept into the housekeeper's eyes, but after a moment she nodded sullenly.

"All right. I suppose I'd better do as you say," she mumbled, and, getting to her feet, picked up her pail.

Sally could hardly conceal her triumph. Excitedly she watched the woman disappear into the kitchen, then eagerly she darted across to the cellar door.

But her efforts had been in vain. To her dismay, she discovered that a new lock had been fitted. Her key would not even go in, and so she was forced to turn dismally away.

She could not have that vital talk with her double, after all. Not until she had discovered some other way into the cellars could she keep her promise.

The day passed all too slowly for Sally. She dreaded the time to come for them to depart for Chesterham Castle. The thought of accompanying her guardian to that ancient house of treasures horrified her. But it was too late to draw back now. At all costs she must go and collect that vital letter.

"But I'll keep my eye on him!" she vowed. "I'll watch him every minute he's there—I'll see that he doesn't get up to any rascality!"

They had arranged to set out by car at four

o'clock. This would enable them to reach Lord Chesterham's country estate in good time for dinner.

Sally, spent the afternoon in packing. The sight of her lovely evening frocks gave her no pleasure. In the ordinary way she would have been thrilled to the core at the very prospect of visiting Chesterham Castle.

There were bound to be crowds of guests there—the pick of Society. There would be dancing in the famous ball-room, swimming in the newly built, covered-in swimming pool, tennis, walks through the woods—everything that could possibly make a girl happy.

And yet Sally shivered when she heard the clock strike the hour, and knew the time had come for her to embark upon her journey.

She carried her own bag downstairs. The garage was at the back of the house, and as she made her way along the gravel path she was surprised to hear a shrill whistle from near by.

Pulling up, she looked around, but could see no one. Puzzled, she was about to stroll on when the whistle rang out again.

"How extraordinary!" she ejaculated. Where ever—

Her voice trailed away, and she stared in startled surprise. Set low down in the ivy-covered wall of the house was a tiny grating, and through a hole in it a white, slender arm was protruding.

"It must be my double!" Sally told herself, with a gasp. "It was she who whistled!"

The grating, she realised, must help to ventilate the cellars, but what did the mystery girl want with her?

She started eagerly forward, only to look round in dismay as she heard her guardian's voice hail her:

"All ready, my dear?" he asked pleasantly.

Sally nodded, her heart palpitating. She was scared lest he should see that outjutting arm; but, pulling on his gloves, he walked unsuspectingly past the grating.

Sally's double waved once more, then her fingers released a crumpled note, and were withdrawn from sight.

Sally cast one anxious glance at George Hunter's broad back, then excitedly she bent and snatched up the note that had rolled on to the gravel path.

It was a sheet of paper, crumpled up. Dreading every moment lest her guardian should turn, Sally smoothed it out. Her eyes dilated with surprise and apprehension as she read the few lines that her double had hurriedly scrawled:

"Don't go to the castle. I overheard them talking last night. They are plotting against you. There is danger for you at the castle."

"S. B."

Sally stared blankly at that cryptic message; then hurriedly she stuffed it in her pocket as her guardian called to her. He was standing by the car, holding open the door.

"Come along, my dear, we're late starting already," he said.

Sally stood undecided. What should she do? What exactly did her guardian intend to do at the castle, and how did he hope to trick her?

Should she go, or should she back out of her bargain while there was yet time?

Danger, said that cryptic note. Danger for herself!

And then she thought of Charlie—of her brother, lying desperately ill in bed, fretting for her, needing her. No, no! She could not back out. No matter what the cost, she must go on with this hated adventure.

Her mind made up, Sally allowed her rascally guardian to help her into the car.

He got in beside her, with assumed friendliness tucked the motor-rug around her legs, then nodded to Slim, resplendent in a brand-new chauffeur's uniform.

The manservant let in his clutch, and forward swept the car—whirling Sally off to keep her promise.

What has Sally let herself in for now? There are excitements in plenty in store. So order your next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.

THE MADCAP FORM MISTRESS



THIS WEEK
THREATENED
WITH
EXPULSION

By
JEAN VERNON

MISS MURDSTONE'S STARTLING THREAT

"THIS can't go on!" declared Miss Vera Desmond, her face a trifle pale, as she scanned the notices on the school board. "Five girls have been expelled in less than two months! At this rate, St. Kilda's will have to close down—unless something's done about it. And something must be done about it!"

For once, the Madcap Form-mistress' eyes were grave and troubled; for once the familiar, cheery smile was absent from her lips.

Vera Desmond's blood was boiling—and justifiably so. She had come to love St. Kilda's in the short time during which she had been the mistress of the Fourth Form; and now it looked as though the old school was on the verge of closing down, thanks to the tyranny of Miss Murdstone, the new head-mistress.

Miss Desmond alone suspected that there was a purpose behind the headmistress' tyrannical methods—a deliberate plot to ruin the school.

"The Fourth Form is the only one that has escaped expulsions," the Madcap Form-mistress murmured. "And Miss Murdstone had better lay off my girls. If she starts—"

She broke off, as from the direction of the prefects' room across the corridor there came a sound of scuffling and a sharp, protesting cry.

"Leave go, Ada! I tell you it's a private parcel to me from mother—"

"You've no right to receive parcels!" grated the harsh tones of Ada Fengrove, the head prefect. "Hand it over at once, or I'll give you something to squeal about!"

Miss Desmond's eyes glittered as in two noiseless strides she crossed the passage and threw open the door.

She took in the scene at a glance.

Pat Derwent, the young captain of the Fourth, was clinging to a large parcel, loyally aided by her chum, Lucy Granger.

Ada Fengrove, a vindictive smile on her sallow face, grasped the other end of the parcel—while a group of her cronies stood by, grinning approvingly.

In the general commotion Miss Desmond's entrance was unobserved.

The Madcap Form-mistress picked up a heavy brass bell, used for summoning the juniors in to classes, and clanged it vigorously close to Ada Fengrove's ear.

The bullying prefect spun round with a startled yelp, releasing her hold on the parcel.

"W-what—" she gasped.

"Half-time!" said Miss Desmond cheerfully. "What's the new game, Ada?"

Pat's face cleared with relief.

"She tried to confiscate my parcel from home, Miss Desmond!" she declared indignantly.

"Really?" Vera's eyes flashed. "I suppose," she remarked, still smiling, "that poor Ada was feeling a little jealous because she hadn't received a parcel herself."

Ada scowled, biting her lip, as she encountered the young Form-mistress' smiling gaze with insolent defiance. As Miss Murdstone's niece, she felt pretty sure of her position.

"Aunt—I mean, Miss Murdstone has given orders that no juniors are to be allowed to take parcels into their studies or Common-rooms, unless previously inspected by a senior," she sneered.

Miss Desmond's eyes glinted, but she continued to smile. The regulation was typical of Miss Murdstone's methods to crush the juniors' spirits!

"Is that so?" she murmured. "It is the first

**Already Five Girls Have Been
Forced To Leave St. Kilda's, And
The Tyrannical Headmistress
Means Pat & Co. To Be Next On
The List—But Miss Desmond
Thinks Otherwise**

I have heard of the rule. I suppose it does not apply to prefects themselves?"

"Of course not," rejoined Ada, with a toss of her head. "Prefects can be trusted to obey school regulations."

"Splendid!" smiled the Madcap Form-mistress. "Pat—please hand your parcel over to Ada."

Pat's face fell, and the prefects exchanged smirking glances.

"At once, please!" said Miss Desmond briskly.

Reluctantly Pat complied.

"Thank you," said Miss Desmond. "Ada, you can be trusted to obey school regulations. You will therefore use your privilege as a prefect and carry that parcel into the Junior Common-room—where you will hand it over to Pat. Immediately!"

It was the turn of Ada & Co. to gape—while the two juniors nudged each other delightedly.

"Look—look here—" began Ada, her face crimsoning.

"You will please not argue with a mistress!" rapped Miss Desmond sternly. "That, too, happens to be a school regulation. I shall give you exactly two minutes in which to make up your mind—"

She reached for a pointer.

Ada bit her lip. She realised that Miss Desmond had the upper hand. The Madcap Form-mistress might have carried the parcel herself—but she had chosen this way to visit the prefect's tyranny on her own head by making her look foolish in the eyes of the girls she had tried to bully.

It was also a warning to the other prefects that their turn might come!

It was by methods such as this that Vera Desmond had managed, up till now, to combat Miss Murdstone's tyrannical rule. But with every day her task was becoming increasingly difficult.

Her face crimson with chagrin, Ada Fengrove marched down the corridor, carrying the bulky parcel, with Miss Desmond walking closely at her heels.

Reaching the Junior Common-room, Miss Desmond motioned Pat to enter and receive the parcel from the scowling prefect—thus cleverly evading the new and unfair regulation!

"Thank you, Ada," smiled Miss Desmond. "Now you may go!"

She closed the door in the prefect's scowling face—and turned, smiling, to face her class.

"Miss Desmond," blurted out Pat, "you—you're a gilt-edged sport! Mother has sent me some of her home-made chocolates, as well as a chocolate cake!"

"Splendid!" smiled Miss Desmond, as she perched herself chummily on the edge of a desk, her eyes twinkling. "I'm quite partial to chocolate cake myself—thanks, I'll have a slice, if I may!"



SPARKLING EYES

Make a solution of boracic lotion—just by adding boracic powder to cold water. Dip two tiny pads of cottonwool in this, and lay them on your closed eyes.

Rest in a darkened room for five minutes or more, then finish with an eye-bath of the lotion—and you'll feel invigorated all over, so rested will be your eyes.

Eye-exercises sound rather funny, but they have been proved to be definitely beneficial to the strengthening of weak eyes.

Lots of blinking, eye rolling—upwards, downwards, and sideways—are honestly good for you—especially if you wear glasses!

Some girls never seem to get those nasty little styes on the eye, do they? While others seem to have more than their share.

This is often because a girl is run-down, and attention to diet, with sometimes more food like porridge, is often what is required.

But the stye must be persuaded to go away, even while the striving to prevent its re-appearance goes on.

A QUAIN CURE

I have heard it said that rubbing with a wedding ring is a wonderful cure, and while I don't vouch for it myself, many people I know, are prepared to swear by it.

(It sounds rather like a superstition, but it's very likely the massage with a smooth, pure metal that does the trick!)

A touch of golden eye ointment along the lids at night-time is your best cure for styes—and this is the same for red rims, too.

Golden eye ointment costs only threepence, and since it is also good for the growing of longer lashes, is well worth it, I'm sure you'll agree.

Vaseline smeared along the lashes at night is another beauty-aid, for it darkens as well as encourages their growth. And if you smear it on with an upward sweeping movement of your fingers, you'll also persuade your lashes to curl!

REST FOR TIRED EYES

Tired eyes are a common complaint, and not very serious unless it occurs frequently. (An oculist may be required then.)

Vigorous splashings of cold water over the lids of closed eyes will soon invigorate them, and if you can repeat the treatment with the eyes open, so much the better.

But if eyes are exceptionally tired after a long day out of doors, with dust and wind in your face, there's an even more beautifying cure!

She was appreciatively sampling the cake, and Pat was in the act of giving the other girls a share of the tuck parcel, when the door was flung open, to admit a tall, hawk-featured woman with a prominent nose, and thin, cruel lips.

It was Miss Murdstone, the headmistress. Behind her skulked Ada Fengrove, an unpleasant grin on her face.

"So," remarked Miss Murdstone, regarding the light-hearted scene from a pair of narrow, vindictive eyes, "the girls are eating unwholesome sweets and cakes in school hours!"

The juniors' faces fell, and Pat tried hastily to conceal the cake and the box of chocolates.

Miss Desmond rose quickly to her feet.

"Pardon me, Miss Murdstone, morning school has finished," she pointed out, smiling calmly. "The juniors are surely at liberty to do as they please in their spare time—"

"When I wish for advice from you, Miss Desmond," rapped out the headmistress, her eyes glittering. "I shall ask for it. I have already prohibited the juniors from purchasing sweetmeats, and that applies also to receiving them. Ada, please confiscate that box of chocolates!"

"Certainly!" said Ada, stepping forward with a malicious smile at Pat.

"Ada, you will do nothing of the sort!" put in the Madcap Form-mistress; and she picked up the box.

"How dare you!" gasped Miss Murdstone, her face paling with anger.

After you have attended to their punishment, you will kindly come to my study."

With a final menacing glance the headmistress strode from the room, followed by Ada.

A stifled groan went round the class. The juniors looked at one another hungrily.

"No—no lunch!" breathed Pat Derwent mournfully.

"And it's four hours to tea-time," added Lucy Granger, with a groan.

Miss Desmond rapped on her desk for silence. The indignant gleam in her eyes had given place to an unfathomable twinkle.

"Girls," she said crisply, "we must not question the headmistress' orders. I have instructions to see that you occupy your lunch-hour with some useful task. I intend to carry out those instructions to the letter."

The juniors' faces became even longer. The Madcap Form-mistress could barely suppress a smile as she rose to her feet.

"I require a new set of exercise-books from the town," she said crisply, "and you girls will occupy your lunch-hour in going to fetch them. Er!"—she opened her purse, producing a pound note—"this is for your fares, and there will be approximately fifteen shillings change. The Cafe Dresden, in the High Street, should put up a very good meal for that."

"Miss Desmond!" came the delighted gasp. "S'sh!" The Madcap Form-mistress raised a warning finger. "As it's a half-holiday, there'll be no need to hurry back. I think there's quite a good film on at the local cinema."

It was with difficulty that she suppressed the delighted exclamations. Gathering up her books, and adjusting her mortar-board, she waved a smiling good-bye.

"See you at tea-time, girls!" A suppressed cheer followed her as she left the room, echoing pleasantly in her ears as she made her way to the headmistress' study.

When her class was happy, Miss Desmond was content.

Miss Murdstone received her with a thin, acid smile.

"You have seen that the juniors are usefully occupied for the lunch-hour?" she inquired.

"Rather!" agreed the Madcap Form-mistress. "They've got their hands full."

"Excellent!" Miss Murdstone leaned back, her thin lips tightening. "Miss Desmond, you are constantly attempting to undermine my authority," she added coldly. "But I warn you, sooner or later, you will go too far."

Miss Desmond raised her eyebrows slightly, conscious of an uneasy tightening at her heart.

"Really?" she asked quietly. The headmistress' eyes glittered, one bony hand clenched on her desk.

"I have no intention," she went on gratingly, "of allowing any foolish opposition to stand in the way of my tightening up the discipline in this school. You understand?" She fixed the young Form-mistress with a basilisk stare. "Your girls are among the chief offenders, and I propose to turn my attention to them particularly from now on."

"Really!" demanded Miss Desmond, her cheeks flushing. "What have my girls done now?"

"Don't answer me back!" rapped the headmistress. "I have had numerous bad reports of the Fourth's conduct from Ada Fengrove and others, and I've come to the conclusion that the punishment I inflicted on them just now is not sufficient. In addition to being deprived of their lunch, the Fourth Form will be detained at school this afternoon, and study for the forthcoming examinations."

Miss Desmond caught in her breath sharply. "But, Miss Murdstone," she protested, "that isn't fair!"

"Enough!" exclaimed Miss Murdstone, her eyes narrowing. "Do you dare to presume to instruct me how to run my school? I say the Fourth Form shall be detained in class this afternoon, and you will see that my instructions are carried out! In an hour's time," she added, glancing significantly

at the clock. "I shall myself visit the classroom, and if any girls are absent, those girls will be expelled! That is my last word, Miss Desmond! You may go!"

The Madcap Form-mistress bit back the indignant protest that trembled on her lips. She knew that it would be a mere waste of breath. Her face white, she turned on her heel and left the room.

She knew from the expression in Miss Murdstone's eyes that the headmistress intended to carry out her threat. Already five girls had been expelled from the school in less than two months. And now—

Miss Desmond, throwing dignity to the winds broke into a run. At all costs she must stop her girls from going to the town. It would be a bitter disappointment; but better that than expulsion.

Breathlessly she flung open the door of the junior Common-room.

"Girls—" she began.

Then her voice trailed away, and the blood drained from her face. The room was empty. So were the pegs that usually contained the girls' out-door things.

The juniors had taken her at her word, and departed gaily for the town—all unaware of the threat of expulsion that hung like a cloud over their heads.

"I must fetch them back!" breathed the Madcap Form-mistress, a little catch in her voice. "My goodness, there's no time to lose!"

THE MADCAP TAXI-DRIVER

TRIM and alert, only the slight pallor of her face revealing her secret agitation, Miss Desmond hurried out of the school gates.

There was a train from Stonebury Halt in ten minutes. With any luck she'd just be able to catch it.

Out of sight of the school, the Madcap Form-mistress broke into a run.

As she ran she was thinking of the girls—unaware of their peril—enjoying their lunch at the Dresden Cafe.

It would be a shame to spoil their enjoyment; but there was no other way.

Thank goodness their departure had not been suspected by the headmistress or her satellites!

Miss Desmond halted suddenly, a slight frown crossing her face. From the other side of the hedge bordering the school grounds came a low mutter of voices.

And the voices belonged to Ada Fengrove, the head prefect, and one of her cronies.

"Are you sure?" demanded Ada, her voice harsh with eagerness. "The Dresden Cafe, you say?"

"Positive!" came the terse reply. "I went to the station to ask about some luggage, and the kids came trooping in, talking about their treat. It seems that Miss Desmond had given them the money. I took care not to let them see me. I thought you'd be interested—"

Ada gave a sharp, unpleasant laugh.

"My goodness, Sylvia," she breathed, "we've got them this time! I'll phone up Fraser's garage and get a taxi to Medwood. I'll just catch them nicely—"

The voices trailed away as the two prefects departed.

Miss Desmond's hands were clenched at her sides; her face was pale, and her mind working swiftly.

Going by car, Ada would probably get to Medwood before the slow local train—even supposing she were able to catch it. The unfortunate juniors would be caught unawares and Miss Desmond felt that she was to blame.

The Madcap Form-mistress bit her lip. Then abruptly her face cleared, and a familiar, reckless gleam flashed into her eyes. She might beat Ada even now—if she were quick.

The next moment she had left the main road, and was racing along a narrow, muddy footpath—a short cut to Fraser's garage.

Flushed and out of breath, she reached the little local garage as a young man in

chauffeur's uniform was cranking up a rather ramshackle car.

That was Jim Fraser, the young garage proprietor. He touched his cap with pleased recognition as Miss Desmond approached. The young Form-mistress had done him a good turn on more than one occasion, and Jim Fraser was not a chap to forget.

"Afternoon, Miss Desmond!" he said. "I've just had a call from one of the young ladies at your school. She wants me to run her into Medwood."

Miss Desmond gave a little sigh of relief. Thank goodness she was in time!

"As a matter of fact," she said, smiling, "I wanted to see you about that. We've a little joke on at school, and I want you to help me."

The young man grinned. He knew Miss Desmond's madcap reputation.

"Of course, miss," he said promptly. "Anything I could do—"

Miss Desmond beckoned mysteriously, and whispered something in his ear.

The young man looked surprised.

"Well, miss," he said, "if you're sure it'll be all right—"

"I'll take full responsibility, Jim," said

Ada, fuming, snatched up the speaking-tube.

"Faster!" she ordered. "Can't you go faster than this?"

"Are you sure you want to go faster, miss?" came the muffled inquiry.

"Of course I'm sure, you idiot!" shouted Ada, through the tube.

The young driver bent over the wheel, ramming a shapely foot on the accelerator. There was another even more startling jolt. The ramshackle taxi, unused to this sort of treatment, snorted, and spluttered, and tore down the narrow lane like a mad thing, jolting finally along a disused cart track.

Ada, pitched from side to side, clung desperately to the seat for support.

"Stop you idiot!" she shouted, grabbing the speaking-tube. "This—this isn't the way!"

But the young driver appeared to be deaf—or perhaps the rattling of the taxi prevented Ada's voice from being fully audible.

On rattled the taxi, out into the open country, miles from anywhere.

The scheming prefect by now was feeling sick and faint.

"Stop!" she pleaded faintly, clinging to the speaking-tube. "I—I want to get out."



Ada glared as Miss Desmond whipped off her cap and she realised how she had been fooled. "Good-bye!" smiled the Madcap Form-mistress and drove off. It would do the bullying prefect good to walk home.

Miss Desmond, "and, naturally, I'll pay you for the hire—and your trouble."

A crisp note changed hands.

"If you'll step into the cottage, miss," said the young man, grinning broadly, "I'll get mother to fit you out."

Meanwhile, Ada Fengrove was waiting impatiently at the school gates, with her crony.

"Did you tell him it was urgent, Sylvia?" she demanded.

Sylvia nodded.

"He said he'd come right away. Hallo, that sounds like his old boneshaker!"

A moment later the taxi swung round a bend in the road and drew up a few yards away, with a protesting squeal of brakes.

The uniformed driver, muffled to the ears, as though suffering from the cold, sprang out briskly and opened the door.

Ada swept past him with a sniff and climbed into the taxi.

"The Dresden Cafe, Medwood—and get a move on!" she ordered.

The young chauffeur gave an exaggerated bow, and, slamming the door, sprang into the driving-seat.

The taxi started with a jerk that almost flung Ada out of her seat, and moved off down the road at a snail-like crawl.

The taxi stopped abruptly, with a jolt that sent Ada slithering to the floor. The young driver sprang out and threw open the door, assisting the shaky prefect to alight.

"All change here!" remarked a familiar voice, stifled with laughter.

Ada sat down heavily on a bank, her eyes goggling.

"You—you!" she stuttered.

The Madcap Form-mistress smiled down at her as she took off her chauffeur's cap and prepared to drive off.

"A brisk walk back to school, Ada," she said coolly, "will give you an appetite for lunch. It may also teach you that even juniors must have regular meals, to keep up their strength. I'm sorry to have brought you all this way for nothing, but you asked for it, you know."

With a bright nod she sprang into the taxi and released the clutch.

Her face pale with fury and chagrin, Ada attempted to stagger to her feet.

"I'll—I'll tell aunt about you when I get back," she threatened.

"That won't be for an hour or two," returned Miss Desmond cheerfully. "Good-bye!"

And with a cheery wave of the hand, she drove off.

She knew there was bound to be trouble when the story came out, but by then she would have the juniors safely back at school, and the bother would be hers, not theirs!

She would not have felt so easy in mind had she been aware that in a near-by farmhouse lived a certain crony of Ada's—and that the farmhouse possessed a telephone!

As it was, she had her work fully cut out. The ramshackle taxi commenced to jolt violently as it reached the Medwood Road, and Miss Desmond realised, to her dismay, that it had sprung a puncture!

That meant jacking up the car and affixing a spare wheel—a sufficiently daunting task at the best of times. But Miss Desmond, who possessed her own little car, and was used to running repairs, emerged triumphant—if a trifle dishevelled and greasy—to continue the breathless journey.

But precious time had been wasted, and it was two o'clock before the taxi appeared in Medwood High Street and drew up outside the palatial entrance of the Dresden Cafe.

Even as Vera brought her taxi to a halt and climbed stiffly out of her seat, another car drew up noiselessly at the kerb—a big, pretentious car, with a uniformed chauffeur at the wheel.

The car seemed vaguely familiar to Miss Desmond, and even as she took a second glance at it the door was opened, and there emerged the tall, gaunt figure of Miss Murdstone, followed by Mr. Ponsonby, the chairman of the school governors!

They passed within a few paces of the dishevelled Miss Desmond, who stood stock still, her heart in her mouth, her face white beneath the peak of her chauffeur's cap.

"My niece telephoned me that the misguided girls were actually lunching at this restaurant!" declared Miss Murdstone. "A disgraceful breach of school regulations. If it is true, I shall certainly expel them!"

Miss Desmond, her hands clenched, stepped quickly across the pavement to the entrance of the restaurant.

Through the glass swing-doors of the restaurant the Madcap Form-mistress had already spotted Pat Derwent & Co., seated happily at a corner table, tucking into their long-delayed lunch—all unaware of the bomb-shell that was about to burst!

A DESPERATE RUSE TO SAVE THE GIRLS

NEVER in her life had Miss Desmond had cause to think more quickly.

In another moment Miss Murdstone would have passed through the swing doors—to pounce on the unsuspecting girls.

But in that fraction of a minute, the Madcap Form-mistress had devised a reckless, if rather hazy plan. Quick as thought, she stepped forward, barring Miss Murdstone's way.

"Excuse me, ma'am," she said huskily, touching her cap.

The headmistress started, her gimlet eyes scanning the slim, uniformed figure from head to foot. A frown of annoyance crossed her face.

"Well?" she demanded curtly. "What do you want?"

Miss Desmond held her breath, her heart thumping. The headmistress had not recognised her—yet; but she would have to be very careful!

She coughed, raising a hand to her mouth, as though suffering from a severe cold.

"Did I understand that you were looking for some young ladies from St. Kilda's School?" she asked huskily.

Miss Murdstone's manner changed; her eyes glittered.

"Yes," she said eagerly. "Yes—have you seen them?"

Miss Desmond nodded.

"If you'll come this way, ma'am," she said, "I think I can find them for you."

"Thank you, my good man," returned Miss Murdstone affably, rubbing her hands. "I am in a hurry."

Miss Desmond smiled grimly behind her muffler.

"So am I!" she thought. Aloud, she added: "This way, ma'am—please mind the step."

Avoiding the lift, she led the way towards

the winding stairs that gave access to the upper floors.

Miss Murdstone followed, vigorously keeping pace at first, but gradually lagging behind as the unwonted exercise began to tell on her wind.

"Is it much farther, my good man?" she panted.

"Only a couple of floors up, ma'am," replied Miss Desmond, biting back a smile as she strode springily ahead. "Keep smiling—"

"I—I beg your pardon?" gasped Miss Murdstone.

"Ahem! I said, 'stiff climbing,'" returned Miss Desmond, realising that she must keep a curb on her sense of humour.

"Very," panted Miss Murdstone.

The top floor happened to be occupied by a firm of solicitors; in the outer office sat an elderly clerk.

"Well?" he demanded, peering over his spectacles.

"Where are they?" demanded Miss Murdstone, staring round her.

"I beg your pardon, madam?" inquired the clerk. "Do you wish to consult Messrs. Heslop, Twist and Heslop?"

"I do not," snapped the headmistress, reddening. "I am looking for some school-girls—"

"There are no schoolgirls here," put in the clerk, stiffly.

Miss Desmond sneezed.

"Sorry, ma'am," she said huskily, "they must have gone downstairs again. If you'll come this way—"

"I refuse to walk down all those stairs," snapped Miss Murdstone, angrily. "Is there no lift?"

Miss Desmond's eyes glinted.

"Yes, ma'am—just round the corner."

She halted to throw open a door she had observed on the way up. The door was marked: "Store Cupboard"—but Miss Murdstone hadn't noticed that!

All unsuspecting, the headmistress stepped into the dark compartment.

Miss Desmond's eyes gleamed as she stepped back and slammed the door, shooting the bolt into place.

There came a violent thumping on the panels, and Miss Murdstone's muffled tones demanded instant release. But the Madcap Form-mistress ignored the shouts. Now to warn the girls and help them to escape unseen!

She turned, intending to make for the stairs; but just then her attention was drawn to a torn scrap of a letter lying on the ground at her feet—apparently dropped by the headmistress.

She would have treated it to no more than a passing glance—but a certain phrase seemed to leap out at her.

"... the eventual closing down of St. Kilda's School ..."

Miss Desmond bent quickly and snatched up the torn letter, thrusting aside any misgivings she might have possessed.

"... am sorry," she read, "that I have not been able to bring matters more quickly to a head. There has been much opposition. However, I am glad to report that the new campaign of wholesale expulsions is having its effect, and will lead to the eventual closing down of St. Kilda's School ..."

Her eyes wide and horrified, Miss Desmond stared at the paper; then, drawing a deep breath, she crushed it in her hand and sped swiftly downstairs.

"I SAY, that was a topping lunch!" breathed Pat Derwent as she leaned back in her chair with a little sigh. "Miss Desmond's a sport!"

Then all the girls stared in surprise as they saw the muffled figure of a taxi-driver approaching their table.

"Excuse me," began the newcomer huskily, bending over Pat's chair, "are you young ladies from St. Kilda's?"

"Why—yes," returned Pat, looking suddenly anxious. "Is—is anything wrong?"

Miss Desmond raised her peaked cap a little, and Pat gave an amazed start.

"S'sh!" breathed Miss Desmond warningly. "Careful, girls. Have you all had a good lunch?"

Speechlessly the girls nodded, staring transfixed at their disguised Form-mistress.

"No questions," breathed Miss Desmond. "Miss Murdstone's here, with Mr. Ponsonby, the school governor. I want you to slip out by the palm court—and hail the first taxi to take you back to St. Kilda's!"

She slipped a ten-shilling note into Pat's hand.

"Hurry, girls!" she breathed. "I'll join you—later."

Bewildered, but unquestioning, the girls rose and slipped away.

The Madcap Form-mistress waited until they had made good their escape, then she gave a gasp of relief.

"Now to make myself scarce," she murmured.

But, even as she made for the Palm Court, there came a shrill shriek from the other end of the cafe.

"There he is! That's the scoundrel who locked me up!"

Miss Desmond turned in dismay. Standing in the doorway was the headmistress, looking very dusty and dishevelled. And with her was Mr. Ponsonby and the cafe manager.

Realising what would happen if her real identity were discovered, the Madcap Form-mistress made to bolt. In her blind haste she barged into a waiter, and there came a crash as a pile of plates went avalanching to the floor.

"Stop the rascal—stop him!" screeched Miss Murdstone.

The cafe was in an uproar. Waiters were dashing to intercept the supposed taxi-driver. Diners were staring in horrified surprise, and then, just as she gained the entrance to the Palm Court, Miss Desmond slipped and went sprawling on her face. Before she could recover, one of the waiters had grabbed her, and in the struggle her peaked cap fell off, revealing her curly hair.

Miss Murdstone took one startled look, then her lips set with vicious satisfaction.

"Miss Desmond!" she snapped. "I might have guessed as much!"

Vera tried to hide her dismay. She had saved Pat & Co. from expulsion, but it looked as if she were doomed to be dismissed. Her hand went to the scrap of paper in her pocket, but she did not draw it out. That would not help her. The note was written in a disguised hand and unsigned.

"What does this disgraceful masquerade mean?" demanded Mr. Ponsonby. "Return to the school at once. A special meeting of the governors shall be held to deal with you, young woman!"

The headmistress smiled. She knew that meeting could only have one result—dismissal for the Madcap Form-mistress!

THAT evening a white-faced, anxious group of juniors loitered in the school corridor, their gazes fixed on the door of the headmistress's study.

Behind that door their beloved Miss Desmond was undergoing a grilling cross-examination—though exactly what it was all about they didn't know.

Suddenly a little whisper went round the group as the door opened—and the Madcap Form-mistress stepped into view.

Miss Desmond's face was pale, but her eyes were smiling as steadily as ever.

They clustered round her, plying her with breathless, whispered questions.

Miss Desmond looked at them, her lips trembling slightly.

"Well, girls," she said, "I—I'm going."

"Going!" echoed a dozen agonised voices.

The Madcap Form-mistress raised her finger to her lips; there was a strangely familiar gleam in her eyes, as she bent towards them.

"Yes, I'm going, girls," she repeated. "I've been fired. But—between you and me—I'm coming back again! Don't worry—you haven't seen the last of Vera Desmond!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"AT SCHOOL IN SECRET." That's the title of next Friday's fine story. In it you will read how Miss Desmond returned to St. Kilda's and of the amazing happenings that followed. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL to-day.



WHY IRENE WAS SCARED

"IF you're quite sure you're not going to arrest me, I'll let you see my ring!" Irene Merlin spoke lightly, half jokingly—but the little break in her voice betrayed to Noel Raymond's ears that she was secretly afraid.

The young detective's interest had been aroused by the Egyptian ring—almost as much as by its wearer. Auburn-haired, violet-eyed, Irene Merlin was certainly the most beautiful girl at the Carruthers' party.

And the ring of heavy gold on the third finger of her right hand—its crest shaped like a cat's head with two gleaming emeralds for the eyes—seemed strangely incongruous on such a lovely wearer.

"Do you like it?" asked the girl, as she held out her hand with an almost defiant movement.

Noel smiled quizzically.

"Like? It's hardly the word I'd apply to Bast, the cat-headed goddess of ancient Egypt," he replied gravely.

The girl shuddered and drew her hand away quickly.

"I know," she breathed. "But, you see,"—her eyes became suddenly tender, her lips tremulous—"daddy gave it to me before he died. I feel I must wear it—for his sake."

"I see," said the young detective, not venturing to press the matter further.

And yet the girl's manner and obvious uneasiness intrigued and baffled him.

Of what was she afraid?

The question was destined to be answered in a manner as startling as it was unexpected.

Noel saw the girl shiver, as though from the cold, reaching for her evening cloak which hung over the back of her chair.

The young detective leaned forward to assist her—and, in spite of himself, a startled ejaculation escaped his lips.

With a swift movement he attempted to hide his discovery from the girl's eyes—but she had seen, and the blood drained from her face, leaving it as white as death.

For scrawled in crimson across the white silk lining of the cloak was an amazing inscription:

"To wear the Ring of Bast means disaster! Be warned in time!"

With a little, choking cry, the girl clung to Noel's arm.

Another Exploit of
Noel Raymond,
Detective—Written
By
PETER LANGLEY

"That's the second time!" she sobbed. "What—what does it mean?"

The young detective, his eyes narrowed, was examining the lining of the cloak. The inscription was quite dry to the touch. He looked up sharply at the girl's broken words.

"The second time?" he demanded. The girl nodded; groping in her handbag she thrust a crumpled scrap of paper into Noel's hand.

"This—this came this morning," she whispered. "I thought at first that it was a hateful joke."

Noel scanned the message written in crimson ink on the scrap of paper:

"Wear the Ring of Bast to-night at your peril! Be warned!"

Simply that, and nothing more; no signature or mark to show from whom the note had come. The young detective took a small lens from his pocket and scrutinized the paper closely; but who ever had written the note had taken care not to leave finger-prints.

His expression was grim, as he folded the note and slipped it into his cigarette-case.

"I think I had better keep that for the time being, Miss Merlin," he said gravely. "Whoever wrote that note was not joking!"

His eyes became grave.

"Miss Merlin, excuse my asking—but are you any relative of Professor Merlin, the well-known Egyptologist, who died two years ago?"

The girl nodded, her eyes filling with tears.

"He—he was my father," she whispered. "He—he gave me this ring just before he went on his last journey to Egypt. Oh, Mr. Raymond," she burst out, clutching at his sleeve, "it was some evil thing in those dreadful tombs that killed him—I know it! And it's trying to kill me—"

The young detective caught her hand reassuringly in his. The girl had got a fanciful

idea into her head—an idea that must be banished at all costs.

"Pull yourself together, Miss Merlin," he said firmly. "You're far too sensible a girl to believe that. Your father's death was perfectly natural—and as for these messages, they are the work of some scoundrel who is acting for some rascally motive best known to himself."

The girl made a plucky effort to regain her composure; she glanced at Noel apologetically.

"I know," she whispered. "I—I'm acting stupidly. I think it was the ring that put the idea into my mind."

Noel nodded; he could quite believe it. The ring with its cat's head and green eyes was a sinister thing.

And the girl was determined to wear it—in memory of her father. The young detective could understand that, too—and he admired her pluck.

"Miss Merlin," he said gravely, his hand tightening on hers, "I want you to trust me. Solvin' mysteries is my job y'know. Had your father any enemies?"

The girl shook her head quickly.

"Oh, no!" she said. "I'm positive he hadn't. He—he was so kind and considerate. I miss him—terribly."

"Have you any relations?" asked Noel.

"Only—only distant ones. I live with a guardian—an old friend of daddy's—Mr. Lucas. He's ever such a dear—but dreadfully fussy. I haven't dared to tell him about—about these messages."

"Why not?" asked Noel quickly.

Irene smiled.

"You don't know my guardian, or you wouldn't ask. He'd call the police in, and have a special guard to watch me night and day. I'd hate that!"

Noel, with a glance at the speaker's determined little chin, could well believe it.

"For all that, Miss Merlin," he said gravely, "I think you ought to take precautions. I wish you'd tell me more about yourself—your friends—and so on."

The girl smiled, a slight colour creeping into her pale cheeks and enhancing her prettiness.

"Of course—if you really want me to; there's not an awful lot to tell—" She broke off, her hand closing on Noel's sleeve. "Here's my guardian," she whispered. "Please don't say anything in front of him."

Noel glanced up, to see a stout, jovial-looking man in evening dress coming towards them, a cigar between his lips. He glanced at Noel shrewdly from a pair of twinkling grey eyes, and his glance turned to his ward.

"Well, well," he remarked heartily, "how's our little ward enjoying herself—eh? Not tired yet?"

Noel had risen to his feet, and Irene rose with him.

"Not a bit," she declared. "I'm having a lovely time."

"I've just asked Miss Merlin for the pleasure of the next dance," said Noel.

**"AT EIGHT O'CLOCK I SHALL
STEAL THAT RING!"**

**Will The Unknown
Enemy Dare Keep His Threat?**

"Splendid!" chuckled Mr. Lucas. "Young people should have a good time while they've the chance. When you get as old as I am, it'll be time to sit down and take life seriously."

Noel smiled, and led his partner on to the dance floor. As they danced, Irene told the young detective all about herself. It seemed that at the time of her father's death she had been at a finishing-school in France. She had left there to make her home in Mr. Lucas' London house.

Her father had left a small income to provide for his daughter's needs; but Mr. Lucas had augmented this generously from his own purse, in spite of Irene's protests. He declared that nothing was too good for the daughter of his old friend.

As for friends—Irene had many, among the smart young set with whom she moved. Enemies, she had none; and among her wide circle of acquaintances there was only one person whom she disliked.

That, she admitted a trifle shamefacedly, was her father's Egyptian servant—Abdul Shan—who had taken up the post of butler in Mr. Lucas' house.

Noel's blue eyes glittered. "An Egyptian, eh?" he murmured. "Have you any reason to distrust him?"

The girl shook her head. "No," she admitted. "It's just—just prejudice, I suppose, and the way he seems to follow me about, and watch me." She laughed a trifle apologetically. "You must think I'm an awfully stupid person, Mr. Raymond."

"I don't," said Noel gravely. His active mind was following a certain train of thoughts. "Tell me, Miss Merlin—have you met anyone recently who knew your father?"

The girl stared at him, her eyes widening. "It's strange you should ask that!" she said. "I haven't—but I'm supposed to meet a gentleman here this evening. A Professor Gratton, who was with daddy when—he died. He wrote to me, asking me to meet him here—but he hasn't arrived yet."

The young detective was thinking quickly, piecing together the information he had received.

He might have been inclined to put the warning messages down to a foolish and cruel practical joke—had it not been for the Ring of Bast.

There was something gruesome about that ring—gruesome and uncanny; it gave the messages a suggestion of sinister purpose.

Why had Irene Merlin been warned twice not to wear the ring on this particular evening?

The lilting tune of the waltz was drawing to a close; and then, with dramatic unexpectedness, every light in the ball-room was suddenly extinguished.

Noel heard the girl's frightened gasp as she clung to him involuntarily; around them sounded startled shouts and cries.

"It's all right, Miss Merlin," he said reassuringly. "Probably just a failure of the current. I've got a torch somewhere—"

For an instant he released the girl, to grope in his pocket; and just then something brushed past his face—something soft and furry.

A piercing scream rang through the hall. Noel recognised it as Irene Merlin's voice, and he blamed himself for not having kept closer to her.

A cold hand seemed to clutch at Noel's heart as he flung himself forward, to catch Irene in his arms as she fell.

"Lights!" he shouted. "See to the lights, someone!"

He snatched out his torch as he spoke, flashing the light on his motionless burden.

Irene Merlin was unconscious, her face deathly pale; her lips were moving.

"The ring!" she whispered. "The Ring of Bast!"

Noel's gaze darted swiftly to the girl's hand; he drew in his breath with a sharp, incredulous hiss.

For the Egyptian ring had been wrenched from the girl's finger, and now lay on the floor, its emerald eyes glinting wickedly.

And on the girl's white wrist was an ugly red mark—the imprint of a cat's paw!

ANOTHER THREAT FROM THE UNKNOWN!

THE young detective dropped to one knee, supporting the fainting girl in his arms.

With an effort he thrust from his mind the fantastic implication of that crimson mark, and concentrated on the bare facts.

The girl had been attacked in some extraordinary manner in the middle of the crowded ball-room; the attacker's motive seemed to have been the purloining of the Egyptian ring—and in the general confusion he had dropped it.

But if theft was the purpose of the attack—why the two messages warning the girl not to wear the ring?

It did not make sense. Noel's mind was grappling with the elusive mystery as the lights suddenly flashed up, revealing the white-faced girl in his arms and the scared circle of guests.

Two figures pushed their way through the crush; one was Freddy Carruthers, the host—the other was Irene's guardian.

Mr. Lucas darted forward, his face pallid. "Irene!" he ejaculated huskily. "Great heavens, what has happened?"

Noel looked up, encountering the other's agitated, questioning stare.

"Miss Merlin has had a slight shock, sir," he said calmly. "She has fainted. There is no cause for worry."

"No cause for worry!" ejaculated Mr. Lucas. "There is every cause. Someone has frightened my ward. I demand an explanation!"

He stared from Noel to the agitated young host. Freddy Carruthers spoke up apologetically.

"Fearfully sorry an' all that, Mr. Lucas—jolly old fuses blown out, or something. Accept my apologies."

Noel was not listening. He was bending over the girl as her eyelids flickered and her lips moved.

A faint, horrified whisper escaped Irene's pallid lips.

"The cat! The cat!"

"Eh? What's she talking about?" demanded Mr. Lucas, frowning.

Instinctively, Noel glanced at the girl's hand—seeking the crimson mark of the cat's paw. He stared, his eyes narrowing incredulously.

The girl's hand was smooth and white, and devoid of a mark of any kind!

Had he been suffering from hallucinations? Had the sinister mark been some curious trick of his eyesight?

The young detective refused to believe it. He was convinced that the mark had been there—the imprint of a cat's paw.

There were such things as stains that faded when exposed to the air—

His thoughts were interrupted as Mrs. Carruthers, the hostess, bustled forward to take charge of the fainting girl.

Irene's guardian made to follow, but Noel plucked him by the sleeve.

"I'd like a word with you, if I may, Mr. Lucas," he said.

"Well? Well? What is it?" demanded the other testily, his nerves obviously on edge.

The young detective drew him aside. "Does your ward dislike cats, as a rule?" he inquired.

Mr. Lucas stared. "Cats?" he echoed. "Not that I am aware of. Irene's very fond of animals. Just what are you getting at, young man?"

Noel shrugged. "It was a cat—or something masquerading as a cat—that scared her just now," he said quietly.

"Ridiculous!" snorted Mr. Lucas. "I know for a fact that the Carruthers don't keep a cat."

He made to move away, but Noel detained him.

"Just one more question," he said. "I'm workin' in your ward's interest, Mr. Lucas." He produced his card, watching the other's expression. "Your Egyptian servant—Abdul Shan; is he quite trustworthy?"

Mr. Lucas whistled, a peculiar expression crossing his face.

"So that's the way the wind blows, is it?"

he muttered. "You suspect Abdul Shan of trying to scare my ward? I'll admit I know nothing about the fellow, except that he was employed by poor old Merlin—Irene's father. The chap's always struck me as being a bit peculiar, but I kept him on for old time's sake. Come to think of it, he keeps a cat—a sleek, black brute of a thing."

The young detective's eyes narrowed with interest as he made a mental note of the fact.

"Is there any chance that your servant could have been here to-night?" he asked.

Mr. Lucas shrugged. "He's supposed to be at home," he said.

"But you can never tell with these natives. I'll make inquiries when I get back."

He moved away, and Noel frowned thoughtfully.

"The feller responsible for this is as cunning' as he's unscrupulous," he muttered. "It's not goin' to be easy to bring him to book. The question is, did he actually mingle with the guests, or did he get in from the outside?"

As most of the guests were known personally to Noel, he decided to explore the latter possibility first. A brief search of the now deserted ball-room brought him to an open window—which he was certain had previously been closed.

With the aid of his glass, he scrutinised the window-sill—seeking for traces of mud or other indications of an intruder. But he drew blank.

Perplexed, but still convinced that the open window had some significance, he leaned out, flashing his torch on the ivy that grew thickly below the sill. Suddenly he stiffened, and, reaching out his arm to its full extent, he pulled up something that had been caught up in the ivy.

It was a jagged piece of fur—that might have been cut or torn from a fur coat, or the lining of a glove.

His eyes glinting, Noel rubbed it lightly against his cheek.

"So that's it!" he muttered. "The blighter used this to give colour to his scare. When he'd done with it, he threw it out of the window. But what's his game? What—"

Thud!

He ducked instinctively as something whizzed past his head, embedding itself in the oak vainscoting.

It was a knife, a knife with a curiously carved bronze hilt!

Noel spun round, glaring across the deserted ball-room. In two bounds he reached the doorway opposite, and peered out along the carpeted corridor.

There was no one in sight—but there were several windows by which an intruder might have entered, or escaped.

His face pale and grim, the young detective returned into the ball-room, and, carefully covering the hilt of the knife with his handkerchief, jerked it out of the wall.

His first impression that a deliberate attempt had been made to murder him gave place to another.

The knife had been flung as a warning—a threat to dissuade him from investigating.

Noel smiled grimly as he wrapped the knife in his silk handkerchief and slipped it into his pocket. If anything could have increased his determination to solve the mystery it was this.

Irene's secret enemy meant business, and so did Noel.

As coolly as though nothing unusual had happened, Noel went in search of Irene, finding her at length in the drawing-room, surrounded by a cluster of anxious and curious guests.

She greeted Noel with a wan, apologetic smile.

"I'm so sorry to have scared you," she said. "It was awfully silly of me. It was the lights going out so suddenly, and I thought I felt something furry touch my face. It reminded me—"

She broke off with a faint shudder. Noel knew she was thinking of the warning messages.

Noel held out the Egyptian ring which he had rescued from trampling feet in the ball-room.

"By the way you dropped this, Miss Merlin," he said, smiling.

The girl's face lit up, though she shrank a little as the ring touched her hand.

"I don't like it," she whispered, "but it's all—all I've got left to remind me of daddy. It would break my heart to lose it."

Just then Mr. Lucas came into the room. He had recovered his jovial manner.

"The car's waiting, Irene," he said. "We'd better be getting along."

On a sudden impulse, Noel stepped forward. "I wonder if you would mind giving me a lift, sir?" he asked. "My car's hors-de-combat at the moment."

"Pleasure, my boy!" returned Mr. Lucas heartily. "Pleasure!"

By the swift, grateful glance from the girl's violet eyes, Noel knew that he had done the right thing.

The brief journey was made practically in silence. Then:

"Here we are," remarked Mr. Lucas, as the car drew up outside a detached house on the outskirts of London. "Care to step in for a parting drink, Raymond?"

Noel accepted promptly. Not that he required a drink, but he was particularly anxious to meet Abdul Shan.

The Egyptian servant himself opened the door—a tall, magnificent figure of a man, with dark, inscrutable features. He wore native costume.

He bowed, stepping aside to allow them to pass. Noel saw his eyes, dark and watchful, following Irene. Merlin as she walked down the hall, holding to her guardian's arm.

Mr. Lucas evidently shared his late friend's taste for antiques. The house was a veritable museum of Egyptian and Assyrian curios. Mr. Lucas led the way into a magnificently furnished library, and, waving Noel to a chair, rang for drinks.

Abdul Shan came into the room, bearing a card on a salver. It had just been delivered by hand. Irene glanced at it in obvious trepidation, then her face cleared.

"It's from daddy's friend, Professor Gratten," she explained. "He says he was sorry not to have been able to attend the dance to-night, and he will give himself the pleasure of calling on me to-morrow evening at nine o'clock. He particularly wishes to see my—my ring."

Noel raised his eyebrows with sudden interest, and Mr. Lucas granted.

"It strikes me, young lady," remarked the latter, "that too many people are interested in your ring. You're foolish to insist on wearing such a valuable ornament."

"But I promised daddy I'd wear it," protested Irene.

"Is it very valuable, Lucas?" inquired Noel casually.

"Speaking as an expert," replied Mr. Lucas, leaning over to tap the ring, "I'd say it's worth a cool thousand—possibly more. But there you are," he added bluffly. "What's the use of talking? Irene's made up her mind she'll wear it, and wild horses won't stop her. No; don't go yet, my boy," he went on jovially, as Noel rose. "I've got some good cigars in the next room."

He stepped from the room, leaving Irene and Noel alone.

"You mean to wear that ring, in spite of everything, Miss Merlin?" inquired Noel.

"In spite of everything!" replied Irene.

Just then the telephone bell rang. Irene reached out and lifted the receiver. Her face turned ghastly pale, and she staggered, clutching at the table for support.

In a bound Noel was at her side. The rasping crackling of the voice at the other end of the wire was plainly audible.

"Allow me!" he breathed, and, taking the receiver from the girl's nerveless fingers, he raised it to his ear.

"I repeat," grated the distant voice. "To-morrow night, at eight o'clock, Bast will strike. You have disregarded my warning. You insist on wearing the ring, so I must take other steps to end your defiance. At eight o'clock I shall steal that ring!"

The voice ended, and there came a click as the unknown man at the other end of the wire hung up the receiver.

WHEN EIGHT O'CLOCK STRUCK

"I WANT you to leave everything to me, Mr. Lucas," said Noel tersely, "and I promise you no harm will come to your ward."

It was the following evening, and, having told Mr. Lucas of the telephone threat, Noel had taken charge.

"It's an amazing business!" muttered Mr. Lucas, glancing hastily at his watch. "In twenty minutes' time this—this mysterious scoundrel threatens to strike at my niece. Yet the house is locked up, my servants have been given orders to watch all windows and doors, and you say you have taken special precautions. The man must be bluffing."

"We'd be wise not to underestimate the cleverness of our opponent," returned Noel gravely. "I fancy he's a man who'll stick at nothing to gain his ends. For all that, I flatter myself he'll find that he's bitten off more than he can chew. For instance—"

He crossed the room and touched a small switch concealed behind a curtain. The young detective had spent several hours in the house that afternoon, preparing for the audacious intruder.

"Open the door, Mr. Lucas," he instructed dryly, "but don't cross the threshold."

Surprised, the other obeyed. There was a blinding flash of light, and he stepped back hastily, covering his face with his hands.

"Electric wiring," explained Noel grimly. "If anyone attempts to enter the room by door or window while the switch is on, they'll receive a shock sufficient to stun them. Now"—



The tension grew as the minute hand approached the hour. It seemed impossible for any intruder to enter the room, and yet Noel was filled with a great anxiety. Would his precautions be sufficient to safeguard Irene?

he turned off the switch—"I think we had better prepare Miss Merlin. She will wait in here with us till the danger's over."

Mr. Lucas nodded agitatedly.

"I'll fetch her," he said. "She is in her room."

He departed hurriedly, and Noel, taking something from his pocket, made his way swiftly to the kitchen quarters.

On the stairs he encountered the Egyptian servant, prowling in his usual noiseless, cat-like manner.

The Egyptian bowed stiffly, stepping aside for Noel to pass.

"One minute, Shan," said the young detective. "I want a word with you."

The Egyptian glanced at him inquiringly. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Noel produced

something from behind his back, partly wrapped in a handkerchief.

It was the bronze dagger!

"Ever seen this before, Shan?" he demanded.

The Egyptian nodded, gravely and composedly.

"It is mine, effendi," he returned, holding out his hand. "I had mislaid it. I thank you for finding it."

Noel, though taken aback, retained his hold on the dagger. It seemed incredible that Abdul Shan should be standing there, calmly admitting the villainy.

The other's fingers had closed on the blade, and, struck by a sudden thought, Noel drew it back. While the man stared at him in puzzlement, the young detective took out a magnifying-glass and swiftly compared Abdul's finger-prints on the blade with the prints he had already discovered on the bronze hilt.

They were quite different.

"That seems to let you out, Abdul," Noel remarked.

"I beg the effendi's pardon?"

"No matter," Noel smiled grimly. "I'm taking precautions, for all that. Please come with me, Abdul; you are wanted in your master's study."

Followed by the inscrutable Egyptian, he led the way back to Mr. Lucas' study.

Irene, rather pale, was waiting there with her guardian. Noel noticed that she was still wearing the Ring of Bast—and his eyes gleamed admiringly. That girl had spirit—and pluck!

"It only wants a few minutes to eight," he declared hoarsely. "We haven't long to wait now."

Abdul tensed himself, and for all her pluck, Irene's face went pale. The suspense was agonising. Everyone kept their eyes fixed on the clock. Slowly the minute hand moved, and then, suddenly, the light in the chandelier overhead commenced to flicker.

"What—what the dickens is the matter with those lights?" demanded Mr. Lucas, glaring. "Stand by the window!" rapped Noel.

Even as he spoke, the lights gave a final flicker, and were extinguished.

There came a stifled cry from the girl; Noel could hear Mr. Lucas breathing heavily.

"Everyone keep quite still!" rapped Noel. "Flash your torch, Lucas."

He pressed the button of his own torch—but nothing happened. He heard the futile click of Mr. Lucas' torch.

"There's someone else in the room!" shouted Mr. Lucas hoarsely.

Noel, conscious of a movement close to him, reached out and seized Abdul Shan as the Egyptian brushed past him.

"No, you don't!" rapped the young detective grimly.

"Effendi—let me go!" exclaimed the Egyptian. "My young mistress—"

His words were interrupted by a horrified scream and a thud.

Noel sprang to the door and flung it open. There was a blinding flash and a brilliant glare as a set of emergency lights sprang up at the touch of a hidden button.

Irene Merlin lay across her chair, her face deathly white; sprawled on the carpet, groaning, was Mr. Lucas. The Egyptian was crouched in a corner, glaring round him and muttering threats.

In an instant Noel was at the girl's side. His face was pale and drawn. He had set out to trap the girl's enemy—and had failed.

Except for himself, the groaning Mr. Lucas and the terrified Egyptian, the room was empty!

The thing was fantastic—incredible.

Incredulously, Noel was staring at the girl's white hand. The ring on the third finger had vanished!

Having assured himself that the girl was uninjured, Noel groped in his waistcoat pocket for the real Ring of Bast! The ring that the girl had worn had been substituted by Noel at the last moment for a cheap imitation!

The mysterious attacker had escaped—without gaining his purpose!

There was still time to bring the villain to book.

HALF an hour later, after spending some time on the telephone, Noel called at an old-fashioned house in Kensington, and was ushered into the presence of the well-known Egyptologist, Professor Gratton.

By now he was convinced that the professor's visit to England was connected, in some vital way, with the attacks on Miss Merlin.

On the two occasions on which Irene had arranged to meet her father's old friend, she had received the threatening messages.

Professor Gratton, grey-haired and scholarly, rose to his feet, motioning his visitor courteously to a chair.

"I understand by your phone-message that you have something of importance to communicate with me, Mr. Raymond—with regard to my old friend's daughter, Irene Merlin."

Noel nodded, coming swiftly to the point. "Professor Gratton," he said bluntly, "may I suggest that your main reason in wishing to see Miss Merlin is connected with the Ring of Bast?"

The professor started slightly, adjusting his spectacles.

"I do not deny it, young man," he said, "but how—"

Noel leaned forward, his eyes gleaming earnestly.

"Professor," he said, "it may seem an impertinence from a complete stranger to ask you to divulge the reason for your interest in this ring. But I assure you I have only Miss Merlin's interests at heart. The girl is in

danger—her happiness menaced; and the cause is the Ring of Bast!"

"Great heavens!" ejaculated the professor, paling. "I had no idea that anyone suspected that—"

"The truth, professor!" exclaimed Noel. "Of what value is this ring?"

"Of incalculable value, young man," replied the professor. "In itself it is of no intrinsic worth; but there are certain hieroglyphics inscribed inside the ring—the significance of which were only discovered by my old friend a few days before his death. He entrusted the secret with me in a letter which, by an oversight, I only received a few weeks ago. I came post-haste to England to visit Miss Merlin—but purposely did not divulge the reason for my visit."

The young detective's eyes glittered; his mind was working swiftly.

"Is it possible that anyone else could have been aware of the significance of those markings, professor?" he inquired.

"I had not imagined so," replied the professor; "but your words seem to throw a fresh complexion on the matter."

"And the meaning of the hieroglyphics?" demanded Noel.

The professor hesitated; then he leaned forward.

"They are the clue, young man, to a fabulous treasure—buried in Egypt. Though the treasure would be forfeit to the Egyptian Government, a proportion of its value—amounting possibly to a small fortune—would accrue to the finder, the late Professor Merlin, or his heirs. It was the professor's dying wish that this money should go to his only daughter. But might I ask, Mr. Raymond, what is the purpose of these questions?"

"You might," replied Noel, and slipping his hand into his pocket, he produced the Egyptian ring. "Do you recognise this, professor?"

Professor Gratton started violently as he held out his hand.

"The Ring of Bast!" he exclaimed. Then, abruptly, his expression changed. Picking up a large magnifying-glass from his desk, he examined the ring more closely.

Noel, watching eagerly, encountered the professor's puzzled stare.

"What is this, young man? This is not the Ring of Bast. It's only a fake—"

"A fake!" ejaculated Noel. "Are you sure?"

"Positive," replied the professor.

For an instant the young detective seemed thunderstruck. Then abruptly he sprang to his feet, nearly overturning his chair in his haste.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed. "I see it all now. The heartless scoundrel! Professor Gratton—he turned to the bewildered savant—"I need your help to expose a cunning plotter and to safeguard the rights of an innocent girl."

"MY ring's been found, after all!"

"Eh?" Mr. Lucas stared up from his paper-littered desk, as his ward burst unceremoniously into his study the following evening. "What's that? The Ring of Bast—found?"

Irene nodded, her eyes sparkling.

"Mr. Raymond has just phoned to say that he has the ring, and will hand it to me if I go to his flat. I am to take it to Professor Gratton, who particularly wants to see it."

Mr. Lucas bit the end off his cigar before replying.

"H'm!" he commented. "It's a queer business—but I suppose the young man knows what he's about. You'd better go along."

Irene thanked him breathlessly and hurried from the room.

It was the postscript of the letter that particularly intrigued her.

"Wear a long raincoat and a scarf—important. Keep this to yourself.—N. R."

Unquestioningly, Irene obeyed instructions. Attired in a long raincoat that reached almost to her ankles, and a scarf that practically concealed her face, she stepped into her guardian's car and was driven swiftly to Noel's flat.

Barely had she entered it, than another car drew up on the other side of the road.

A muffled figure sprang out. Seeing that Irene's chauffeur, who was none other than Abdul Shan, had descended and had his back to the car, the unknown stealthily opened the door and crept into the limousine, there to crouch out of sight.

A few minutes passed; then the door of Noel's flat opened—the young detective's voice was heard.

"All right, Miss Merlin. Drive as fast as you can to the professor's house; I'll meet you there. Take care of the ring."

"I'll remember!" came Irene's breathless tones. "Good-bye—and thank you so much!"

A slim figure in raincoat and muffler hurried quickly across the rain-swept pavement and jumped lightly into the car.

The car commenced to move.

And then, from a dim corner opposite, sprang the muffled intruder.

"You little fool!" he hissed. "You dare to defy Bast—and you will pay the penalty!"

A pair of sinuous hands groped for the other's throat.

But the attacker was due for a surprise. The rain-coated figure sprang to its feet, flinging off its scarf—to reveal, not Irene's pretty features, but Noel Raymond's grim face! Aided by the darkness, and thanks to the long raincoat and scarf, the young detective had been able to impersonate the girl.

Before he could recover from the shock, the attacker's wrists were caught in a vice-like grip.

"We meet again, Mr. Lucas!" drawled Noel Raymond. "All right, Shan!"

The car purred to a stop.

Struggling furiously, Mr. Lucas attempted to wrench himself from the detective's hold.

But Noel was more than his match. He dragged the struggling man out of the car, and the impassive Abdul Shan came to his aid.

Then the door of the flat was flung open, and Irene raced out, her face white; she was followed by the grey-haired figure of Professor Gratton.

Irene gave a horrified cry as she recognised her guardian.

"I'm sorry to say, Miss Merlin," said Noel grimly, "that your guardian is a heartless rascal. For months he has been planning to rob you of a fortune—the clue to which was contained in the Ring of Bast."

"The real ring he substituted, without your knowledge; for months you have been wearing a worthless imitation."

"But why—why?" gasped Irene, tears in her eyes.

"I think Professor Gratton will be able to explain," said Noel. "We have traced the real thing. It is in the hands of experts who had been paid by Mr. Lucas to solve the hieroglyphics. He thought he was perfectly safe—till he heard that Professor Gratton was coming to England to see you."

"Then he knew that the fraud would be discovered, and he tried to prevent you from wearing the fake ring. The mysterious messages came from him! When these failed, he tried to steal the duplicate by means calculated to terrify you, and disarm suspicion from himself."

"Abdul Shan has suspected his new employer all along, and has done his best to guard you. I think, Miss Merlin, that that is all."

MR. LUCAS, scoundrel though he was, escaped the full penalty he deserved. At Irene's earnest request, Noel did not call in the police. But the plotter was given three days to leave England, and Irene saw no more of him.

The fortune accruing from the discovery of the Egyptian treasure passed eventually to its rightful owner—Professor Merlin's daughter—and Abdul Shan stayed on in England as the girl's trusted bodyguard.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"THE PLASTER PIERROTS THAT VANISHED!" That is the title of next Friday's thrilling detective story. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.



I WILL BE A LONDON STAGE STAR

By
JUNE TURNER

BACK TO ENGLAND

KAY FORRESTER huddled down, panting with relief, amongst the coals in the grimy ship's bunker.

She was a stowaway! She was smuggled in the stokehold of a cargo boat. But the vessel was under way, now, the shores of France were fading in the night, and she was on her voyage home to England at last.

Kay thrilled under the oilskins that covered her thin frock.

She was going back to England—to pursue her stage career once more, to take up the broken threads again and make a fresh fight to win success before the London footlights. It was not only her life's ambition. A fortune awaited her the day she achieved her goal!

That fortune went to Philip Slade, should she fail.

It was Slade who had got her out of the country by a trick. But his short-lived triumph was over, and she was going to beat him yet. The fight was to begin again.

The swaying of the vessel brought the coals toppling down upon Kay, but she shook the dust from her clothes and just laughed for happiness.

An hour went by, and all Kay could hear was the throbbing of the engines and the rattle of the stoker's shovel. That stoker had proved her friend and deliverer. Then at last the door opened, and she saw his good-natured face beaming at her under the coal grime.

"You all right, missy?" he asked hoarsely.

"Never felt better in my life, thank you!" breathed Kay.

He nodded approval.

"You're a plucked 'un, you are! A gel with grit like yours will get through anything. But you ain't out of the wood yet, missy! They're mighty hot on stowaways in England. You've got to get ashore somehow without being copped, else you'll finish up in gaol!"

"That won't suit me a bit!" Kay said emphatically.

"We'll see what we can do for you—me an' my mates. You'll have to make a quick get-away out of Dover, anyhow. Where you aiming for?"

"London!"

"Got your train fare?"

"Not a bean!" sighed Kay. "But if I once get a free foot in Dover, I'll—"

"Arf a mo'!" murmured the stoker.

He shuffled away across the iron gallery to his mates in the boiler-room adjoining. Kay

remained hidden in the bunker. Then presently the stoker came back, a pleased grin on his face, and a grubby slip of paper in his hand.

"Here y'are, missy!" he said, thrusting the paper into her palm. "I guessed one of my mates 'ud have one, and he says you're welcome."

Kay stared down at the paper, and her heart gave a leap. Her eyes shone.

It was a railway pass from Dover to London.

"Garn, forget it!" said the stoker, when she tried to thank him. "You be ready to make a quick hop out, see, missy! We're jest getting into Dover now. The Customs blokes will come aboard to look over the cargo. You've got to dodge 'em and slip ashore; but how you're going to do it is another story. We can't help you, matey—more's the pity! It's up to you!"

"I'll manage it!" breathed Kay. "Thanks a million times for all you've done!"

She waited alone in the bunker, tense in every limb, as she felt the ship breasting the harbourside.

The engines stopped; the vessel was at anchor!

High up on the deck above Kay could hear the gangways being fixed; then authoritative voices, and the tramp of the Customs officers coming aboard.

If those officers discovered her they would arrest her—they would lock her up!

Kay crept out of her hiding-place along the iron gallery, and up the companionway to the next deck. It was a cargo deck. She heard two of the Customs men descending the steps from above. She dived into hiding under the steps and huddled there, scarcely daring to breathe.

The men passed on at last, and Kay crept up to the top deck. She concealed herself behind a capstan, her heart panting. She could see the gangway only a dozen yards away. It led straight down to the landing-stage, but a dozen officials were standing at

the foot of it, and the lights of the quay were burning brightly.

Kay made a desperate decision. It must be now or never. She would have to run the gauntlet of those officials, whatever happened. She was still wearing oilskins, leggings, and cap, and this disguise was her only hope, so long as she could act up to the role of a ship's boy.

And Kay hadn't been on the stage without learning a great deal about acting.

Grabbing up a coil of rope, she hoisted it on to her shoulder, and with an imitation of a sailor's gait, she walked boldly across to the gangway, whistling shrilly.

She marched down the gangway, and she brushed right by the sleeve of the harbour-master. Her shrill whistling pierced his ears like a knife.

"Hi, not so much row, you young scallawag!" he roared.

He aimed a cuff at her. Cheerily Kay ducked and fled for her life. She was out of sight across the quay before the harbour-master had time to state his opinion of ship's boys.

Behind the wall of a warehouse Kay dropped the rope coil, threw off her oilskins and cap, and passed into the railway station—free, safely ashore, and panting with relief.

In another moment she was mingling with the passengers at the platform barrier. Her railway pass was quite in order. The inspector clipped it and hustled her along.

Kay sank into the waiting London train—hungry, travel worn, grimed with coal-dust and deliciously happy.

She slept through the whole journey.

At some time in the small hours of morning Kay climbed the steps of her old digs and knocked up the landlady. She had nowhere else to go.

And the landlady stared at her in the dawn, rubbed the sleep from her eyes, leaned against the doorpost, and just couldn't believe that this

**A PROGRAMME SELLER IN THE THEATRE WHERE
BY RIGHTS SHE SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE STAR**

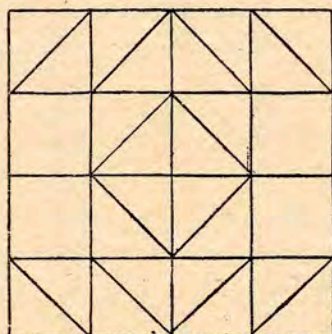
TRIXIE'S TRICKS



AND still they come! Here's yet another selection of tricks for you to sharpen your wits on. Just in case they aren't quite sharp enough, I've put the solutions on page 22. Right, let's go!

A SQUARE DEAL

There are a considerable number of squares in the diagram below. What I'm asking you to do is to count just how many there are:



(1)

When is the half of 8 three? And if that doesn't stump you, when is it O? (2)

CLUE-WORDS

Just another variety of a crossword—without the squares. The name of a certain CRYSTAL contributor has been numbered off—first letter is number 1, second letter number 2, etc. There are eight letters altogether.

Replace the figures underneath by the correct letters—and you'll get the result.

Letters number 123 mean something useful to authors.

Letters number 567 mean to curtain.

Letters number 7654 mean a rod or perch.

Letters number 167 mean to burst.

Letters number 6783 mean not shut.

Letters number 783 mean the same as 123.

What is the name I'm after? (3)

Just try saying these tongue-twisters quickly:

"The cricket critic's gig whip snapped."

"The city sweep shook his sooty sheet in the city street."

"Ten tiny toddling tots trying to train their tongues to trill."

A SOLEMN THOUGHT!

What is it that men love more than life, Fear more than death or mortal strife.

The poor man has, the rich man wants,

The miser spends, the rich man saves,

And all men carry to their graves? (4)

And now for a "Letter Bridge." Change LAND into SEAS by altering one letter at a time—each alteration must make a complete work. You're only allowed four changes. (5)

HOW SILLY!

A girl wanted change for a shilling. For some reason of her own she asked that she should be given twelve coins to make up the amount, but that none of them should be pennies. What was she given? (6)

When do your teeth do what your tongue is intended for? (7)

was Miss Forrester, the dainty leader of Kay Forrester's Dancing Four!

"Bless my soul, Miss Kay! You look as if you've been rolling in a coal-hole!" she gasped.

"I have!" laughed Kay.

She smiled and passed on into the house, but she knew that her struggles now would be no smiling matter. She had come back to London friendless and penniless, with nothing but the poor ruined clothes she was wearing. And she had got to seek work in a profession where appearance counted for everything!

KAY snatched a brief sleep and a bath, then set to work cleaning her frock. Nothing could bring back its newness.

Her coat had suffered still more. She gave that a thorough cleaning. She took the collar off, and turned it, and put a bright gloss on her shoes. But she sighed when she gazed at herself in the mirror.

The truth was not disguised. Her clothes told their own tale of poverty.

Kay held up her head and went out to make the round of the theatrical agents. She had to walk all the way to the West End. When she came to the first office she paused outside

the doorway and rubbed the dust off her shoes with her handkerchief.

Inside, the waiting-room was crowded with chorus girls and dancers seeking engagements. Kay took a seat. One by one the others were called into the inner office, and the better-dressed ones came out with smiling faces and a contract in their pockets.

Kay's turn came at last.

The agent was glancing at her card, and didn't look up.

"Oh, yes; I remember your name! I booked you before, when you had a dance quartet of your own," he murmured. "You've broken away now, have you, to do a solo act. Well, that's usually the best thing—"

He broke off.

He had raised his head, and Kay saw him looking her up and down with fading interest. "H'm! Had a spell of bad luck, haven't you?"

"I've been abroad. I only came back last night," Kay said stoutly.

"Couldn't get any bookings there?"

"Yes, heaps! I was in work all the time. But not the sort I wanted. You know my act, Mr. Willis," Kay hurried on, "you saw me when I was playing the Jubilee Cinemas, and you said—"

"Doesn't matter what I said then," put in the agent. "You were flourishing, and you know what it is in this game, miss. Prosperity makes for prosperity. You don't look prosperous now. If I were to send you round to any of the theatres on my books they'd turn you down on sight without giving you an audition."

And he gave Kay a look that was sympathetic, but brusque.

"Take my tip and get hold of some smart clothes, young lady. Anyone to see you now can tell that you've had a rough time out of work. They'll say to themselves: 'Others didn't want her, so she can't be any good.' Afraid I can offer you nothing. Good-day!"

Kay had the same experience at every other agent's that day. By the time evening came she was famished and utterly worn out. She told herself that her luck would soon change; but it was hard to keep up her spirit—and her pride—when she had to return to the digs and beg a meal "on tick" from the landlady.

The latter had been proud to have her lodging there in the past, when Kay's Dancing Four had been flourishing and popular, but her manner changed sharply now.

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" she said. "Well, I'll send some dinner up to you, miss, but I want my money at the end of the week, or out you go!"

Next day Kay began the weary round all over again, with the same heartbreaking experience at every agent's. In the theatrical profession pro's had to pretend to be thriving, even when they were not; and none knew it better than Kay. But how could she hire pretty finery when she hadn't even the price of a meal in her purse?

Four sickening days like this made a difference to Kay. Worry and lack of nourishment told their tale, and her cheeks grew pale, her eyes ringed with dark shadows. She ceased hankering for a proud place in the high-lights. She was just desperate for work—any work, any job she could get.

It tortured her to remember how Dan Warwick had offered her a place in his London show at the time that she was held bound to that fraudulent contract for South Africa. It had cheated her from accepting his offer.

She inquired everywhere, but she could find no trace of Dan Warwick now, when she so desperately needed his help. In any case, Kay realised dully that he would long ago have found another dancer to fill the place.

One weary morning Kay called at a fresh agency. It was an employment bureau for every sort of work connected with the theatre.

A dozen lucky chorus girls were engaged, right under Kay's eyes, for a new West End revue. That was all for to-day, the agent said, and then he saw Kay lingering in the room, and he looked her briskly up and down.

"What's your line, miss?"

"Dancer."

He opened his mouth to speak, and Kay couldn't stand it.

"Oh, I know what you're going to tell me!" she said. "My clothes are shabby, I look as if I've been out of work a long time; and so I have. But I can still dance; I can still put up a show—and a good one—and I can do any job that's given me, and thankful to get it!"

The agent blinked at this unexpected outburst; but Kay's frankness seemed to please him, and his eyes softened.

"Any job will do?" he asked gently.

"Anything!"

"Well, let's see."

Kay watched him turn over the pages of a ledger on his desk. She held her breath till he spoke.

"They're wanting a girl at the Mayfayre Theatre," he said, looking up at her. "You're attractive enough, and as regards clothes, they'll be provided for you if you'll take the job. It's for a programme-seller."

Kay didn't hesitate.

"I'll jump at it!" she cried.

It was a living! It would earn meals and new clothes for her until she could work her way back to the footlights again.

Kay went straight along to the Mayfayre Theatre.

It stood in the heart of the West End. It was the theatre in which Kay, in happier days, had dreamed of playing the lead. Now, in

letters three feet high, she saw the name of the star blazoned across the walls:

"DORIS MAYNARD,
In
'LILAC LADY'."

Kay gazed at that name with irony, but without envy. Without even the bitterness to blame Doris Maynard for her own ill-fortune. Doris had been her enemy, because Doris was Philip Slade's fiancée—just a puppet doing his bidding. Kay felt contempt for her, but not jealousy of her stage success—that, at least, was honestly earned.

A life-sized portrait of Doris stood in the beautiful vestibule.

Kay passed it by and walked up to the house-keeper's office. She was fitted with a blue uniform and a little, short apron, with a cash pocket in it. She was put to work at once, taking the dust-covers off the seats in the auditorium.

And at the matinee that afternoon Kay played her humble role in the front of the theatre. A programme girl!

KAY'S BIG CHANCE AT LAST

"**W**HERE'S that new girl—Forrester, or whatever her name is?"

It was the staff manageress speaking. Kay had been a week now at the Mayfayre Theatre, and she had learnt to answer that woman's every call like a soldier obeying orders.

Leaving her post beside the pit entrance, Kay hurried out to the lobby where the manageress was standing.

"Let me see, Forrester, you've been on duty in the pit all the week," the manageress said, looking at her thoughtfully. "I think I'll change you. You've got nice appearance. I'll put you on the stalls and fauteuils to-night. Off you go!"

"Thanks ever so!" Kay breathed.

She hastened away eagerly to the stalls entrance. The people who booked those higher-priced seats gave handsome tips sometimes, and Kay dearly needed the extra money. Her wages were small, and she was saving hard—saving to buy new clothes and a stage outfit for her return some happy day to the footlights.

Fashionable ladies and gentlemen came flocking in. Kay sold them their programmes, and showed them smilingly to their seats—tip, or no tip, and under her breath she hummed the tunes from "Lilac Lady."

She had learnt all the words, the tunes and the dances off by heart. She watched every performance. And in particular she watched Doris Maynard, and admired her experienced technique. But Kay had never made her presence known to Doris; and as she had been stationed always at the back of the pit, she had never been seen by Doris.

"Programme? Chocolates?" Kay chanted, from her new position at the stalls entrance.

Till presently the band struck up, the lights went down, and the show began. Hovering by the entrance, Kay led the late-comers softly to their seats.

She had been standing back against the wall, watching the show for some little time, when a man's steps sounded on the corridor outside.

Kay lifted the curtain and shone her torch. Then she gave a little gasp—so did the man.

"Kay!"

"Philip Slade!"

Kay spoke the name grimly. With a glinting eye she was gazing at a tall, sandy-haired figure in dress suit and opera hat—Philip Slade, the man who had decoyed her abroad—the man who stood to inherit his legacy of five thousand pounds unless, by a miracle, she yet achieved success on the London stage.

"How the—how the deuce do you come to be here?" Slade was spluttering.

The meeting had startled him more than it had Kay. He had heard of her flight from the boat at Cherbourg, and obviously he had believed that she was still stranded in France, nicely out of his path.

"I've got back, after all, into a London theatre," Kay said steadily.

"As a programme girl!" he sneered.

"That's just the first step," Kay answered.

"Will you come this way, please, sir?"

She laid scornful stress on the "sir" as she took his ticket, and began guiding him across to his seat in the front row of the stalls.

At that very instant the scene changed. Doris Maynard came tripping on to the stage to do her principal solo number.

She ran towards the footlights, her arms held out as if to embrace the audience, that being a favourite gesture of Doris'.

Then suddenly Kay saw her face go pale under its make-up.

Doris had seen her. And Doris was staring at her in sheer panic. It was unmistakable. Only the orchestra pit separated them, and Doris was gazing at her over the footlights in sheer panic.

Kay paused, gazing back at her blankly. She saw Doris dart a frenzied look towards the back of the theatre. In these few seconds Doris seemed to have forgotten her lines and lost her nerve. The band conductor rapped his baton sharply to call her to her senses.



Kay started forward excitedly. "Dan!" she gasped. "Do you mean that—that you're going to give me a chance?" Dan Warwick nodded. Instead of selling programmes, to-morrow night Kay should be starring in the show!

Doris tried to recover herself; she moved forward, but in her confusion she had stepped too close to the footlights. Her foot caught the rail; she staggered.

"Mind!" Kay cried out.

But it was too late.

With a thud, Doris pitched headlong over the footlights, and fell into the orchestra pit, with her foot doubled under her.

Her scream was echoed by the women in the audience.

Kay dived under the curtain and rushed to her side. Doris was lying by the foot of the conductor's chair, holding her ankle, and moaning with pain.

"It's a sprain! Help me get her to her dressing-room!" Kay panted.

Philip Slade came pushing his way into the orchestra pit.

Another man followed him, hurrying into the midst of the scene with an air of authority. And at sight of that man Doris covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

Kay looked up, spellbound.

That man was Dan Warwick! It was Dan, her friend, who had once offered her a London engagement.

"Shall I fetch a doctor, sir?" one of the bandmen was asking him.

"Yes; hurry! The rest of you get on with the show! Strike up the next number!" Kay heard Dan Warwick saying.

She realised, in a dazed sort of way, that Dan must be the head of the show. But Kay didn't stop to think about that now. Doris was hurt, Doris was in pain. She helped the stage hands lift her, and she followed them as they carried Doris away to her dressing-room.

"Don't get panicky; you'll upset her more!" Kay said sharply to Slade, who was simply livid with agitation. "She'll be all right."

But Slade still hovered in the dressing-room, looking like a ghost, while Kay and Dan did what they could to ease Doris' pain.

A doctor came hurrying in, summoned from the audience, and administered treatment and restoratives.

"It's a severe sprain, and the only thing now is rest," he said, at the end. "I'm afraid the young lady will not be dancing for many weeks."

He advised that she be taken home immediately, and then he departed.

Kay moved out of the room with Dan Warwick, leaving Slade alone with Doris.

"I say, Dan, this is rough on you!" Kay sympathised with Dan, when they were in the corridor. "It's your show, isn't it?" Dan nodded, and Kay noticed that he didn't seem nearly as perturbed as she would have expected. He was looking at her eagerly and animatedly.

"Yes; it's my show, Kay. But what a bit of luck meeting you like this! I can't get over it! You—here, as a programme girl!" He threw a dazed look at the uniform she was wearing. "Do you know, I've been searching everywhere for you?"

"Why, Dan?" Kay caught her breath.

"Because I wanted you. Because I intended you, and not Doris Maynard, for the part!"

"Dan—" Kay's voice trembled and stopped. She thought she hadn't heard aright. But he hurried on:

"The part's absolutely made for you—it's you to the life, Kay. I knew it as soon as I bought the play. I could see you in every touch—the character's your own natural self. I got into touch with Doris Maynard, hoping that you'd cancelled that other contract, and that she could find you for me. But she swore you were in South Africa. She said she'd had a letter from you there."

"She was lying—" Kay heard herself saying in a daze.

"I believed her. I was terribly disappointed. And that's how I came to give her the part instead. She's out of it now, Kay, but you've turned up in the nick of time!" And Dan gazed down earnestly into Kay's face. "I'm depending on you, little trouser!"

Kay's head was whirling.

"Dan! Do you mean that—that you're going to give me a chance—"

"I mean that you're going to take over the part, you're going to carry on the show—and you're going to pull it through!" Kay—he crushed her two hands in his—"since leaving the 'Will o' the Wisp' company and getting over my accident, my old father has died and left me a little bit of money. It's all that I sunk in this show. I wanted you in it from the beginning, and I want you now. I know you can do it. To-morrow night you're going to play leading lady. And you're going to justify my faith in you, aren't you?"

Tears of joy swam in Kay's eyes. She tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come. She could hardly realise that this wonderful thing was true—it was true! Her great chance had arrived. She was to play the lead in a West End theatre.

Fame was within her grasp—a fortune was within her reach. The chance was hers at last. Dan had faith in her. Upon her own ability depended success—or failure!

Kay's heart pounded under the little uniform she wore, and the tears were glistening on her cheeks—but only because this was the gladdest moment of her life, and not because her confidence faltered or feared. Dan understood.

"The public will love you, Kay—they couldn't help but love you." And he pressed her hand tightly. "You must go home now—I've sacked you from the staff. I want you here for rehearsal to-morrow morning"—he said softly—"sharp at ten!"

And when Kay tried to speak, Dan was gone, and through a mist she could see the silver star on the door of Doris' dressing-room. The star that symbolised the fame and success which at last might be hers.

ON the other side of that door Doris Maynard lay sobbing on the couch. Over her towered Philip Slade, white with passion and fury, the veins standing out purple on his forehead.

"You fool! Oh, you fool!" he raged at her. "You've ruined me! You've ruined everything! To-night, of all nights, you go and lose your head—you crack up like this! You fool, you've pitched the show into Kay's hands—and my money, too!"

"You only think of your money—not of my pain!" Doris sobbed wildly. "It was seeing Kay that threw me off my balance. I saw her there—in the theatre—right under my very eyes. I told you that Dan always wanted her for the part. I could see her. I could see Dan, too. I was frantic. I didn't know what I was doing. I—"

"I'll tell you what you've done!" blazed Slade. "You've robbed me of five thousand pounds. You've given it to Kay—flung it clean into her hands. You know it was coming to me if Kay failed to become a London stage star. Now she's getting her chance—through you. If Kay walks on to that stage to-morrow night, the money is as good as hers."

His eyes blazed. Doris shrank from him with a shudder. She watched him pacing the room.

And suddenly Doris covered her eyes with her hands. Once she had loved Philip Slade—but at this moment she was afraid and repelled by him. She dared not ask herself what evil purpose was in his mind.

WHEN SUCCESS WAS SO NEAR

"GOOD-MORNING, Miss Forrester! Best of luck!" the stage doorkeeper greeted Kay, as she arrived at the theatre for rehearsal next morning.

"Us staff wants to see you make the 'it of the show, dearie!"

"Thanks, Tom! It won't be for the want of trying if I don't!" breathed Kay.

Dan Warwick was already waiting for her on the stage. The entire company was there—the full orchestra was present.

Kay felt a thrill at being in the presence of all these London artistes—their new leading lady. But she wasn't nervous.

"I shan't want the script, thanks, Dan," she said, with a laugh, as he offered her the written part. "I've been watching every performance, you see, and I've learnt every line in the piece."

"Good girl!" Dan was delighted. "That's taken a whole load off my mind, Kay! Say, we can snap right into it now!" He leaned over to the band-conductor. "Cut the overture, Rex, and strike up the first number, Scene One."

Kay hurried off into the wings, to await her cue. She watched the chorus go through the familiar opening scene. Then, remembering every line and movement of Doris Maynard's part, she made her own entry and put over the first song-and-dance number.

It went without a hitch. Orchestra and chorus backed her up superbly, as only the first-class London pro's could.

From that moment Kay had the part at her finger-tips. She forgot the theatre—she threw herself heart and soul into the role, she lived it, and she sang and danced as if inspired.

From first scene to last the whole show was rehearsed, and at the finish Kay felt as if she were coming out of a rapturous dream.

She blinked her eyes. And there was the whole company clamouring round her, hugging and kissing and congratulating her. And Dan was rescuing her from the crush and shouting for three cheers.

"Didn't I tell you she was a great little trouser?" he cried. "Didn't I promise you she'd keep the show going, and double the business for us? And here's another thing. I told Kay last night that the public's going to love her. Was I right, folks?"

"All London's going to love her!" roared the company.

Kay wanted to laugh and to cry, and she knew that they weren't saying this just to encourage her, or because they hadn't liked Doris Maynard. These were experienced London pro's, and they had faith in her, otherwise they would never have trusted their fate to her leadership.

They believed she was going to be a success. They believed the public would like her.

"I'd like you to have a good rest this afternoon, Kay," Dan Warwick said earnestly, when she rejoined him in his office. "The one thing I shall be wanting is some new photographs of you, but I'll leave that till the last minute if I can. Say six o'clock. The show doesn't begin till eight-thirty, and that would give the photographers over two hours to do the prints. But you'd better leave me your address, in case I want you before."

"Here's my card, Dan. I'll come the moment you want me!" Kay breathed.

And Dan laughed as he glanced at the address.

"You'll be changing this before long, Kay, my little trouser! You'll be moving up to a posh flat in Knightsbridge, where the stars live—oh, yes, you will!"

Dan chuckled, and he made her take a pound-note, insisting that she did all her travelling by taxi that day, in order not to tire herself out.

"I'm banking everything on you for to-night's show, Kay!" he said fervently at the end. "Last night we had to carry on with an understudy after Doris' accident. It was a disappointment to the public. If anything went wrong to-night—well, it would just about wreck the show! But I'm relying on you, my dear, and I'm reckoning on making a new star in London to-night, Miss Kay Forrester!"

They gripped hands.

"Six o'clock this evening, Kay, unless you hear from me before!" Dan said, with a deep intake of breath.

Kay went back by taxi to her digs. She took a light lunch, and then wisely she lay down on her bed. She relaxed gloriously and tried to doze. But that was impossible.

Three o'clock had just struck when Kay heard a sharp rat-tat at the front door. She

sat up alertly. There was a moment's pause, then the landlady came into her room with a telegram.

"Very urgent," Kay read. "Please meet me immediately at Vernon Buildings, West Lane, N. Am waiting."

"DAN WARWICK."

Kay jumped up eagerly from her bed. "No answer, thanks!" she said to the landlady, and hurriedly reached for her shoes.

The telegram meant, of course, that Dan was waiting for her to be photographed—the photographers required longer time than he had expected. Kay told herself. She didn't know where West Lane was, but she had her cab-fare, and she hailed the first taxi outside her digs.

"Ay—North London, I know it!" the driver said, when Kay gave the address.

"Quick as you like!" Kay bade him.

She watched the streets flash by, till presently the taxi came into the north suburbs. It sped for some little way along the main road, then turned into a quiet side-turning—a cul-de-sac, occupied almost entirely by derelict workshops. Kay caught a glimpse of the name-plate on the wall: "West Lane, N."

It occurred to her that the best photographers were usually to be found in these out-of-the-way places.

Then the taxi pulled up with a jerk behind a car that was waiting at the roadside.

"Here y'are, miss! Vernon Buildings!" the driver said.

Kay paid him off, and walked through the doorway into the building.

She found herself in a dark, musty passage. She gazed about her, looking to see a name-index before walking up the stairs in search of Dan Warwick.

A quick movement sounded behind her. Something flapped across Kay's face. A scarf blindfolded her! She threw up her hands; she tried to cry out. The scarf was drawn tightly, nearly suffocating her. Brutal hands gripped her arms, digging into the flesh.

Kay kicked out frantically.

"Hold her! Get her into the car—quick!" a thick voice gasped.

Her feet were seized. Kay had the hideous sensation of being lifted and dragged along by unseen hands. She heard the engine of the waiting car start up with a roar.

"All right, guv'nor—I've got her!" a man's voice grated.

Kay felt a wrench at her arms, then she dropped like a log, and she knew she was lying on the floor of the car. The thing was moving—it was driving away with her!

Frantically Kay wriggled her face free of the suffocating scarf. She gazed up wildly. She saw a brutal-looking ruffian pinning her down on the floor. She tried to scream out, but another hand smothered her lips, and she saw Philip Slade's eyes glaring down at her.

They were the eyes of a desperate man—a man who would stop at nothing.

"One sound from you and it will be your last!" he snarled. "It's you or me for the money, Kay—and it's going to be me! Understand? You've probably forgotten the date, but I haven't. The will expires to-day. After midnight you can go hang for all I care! But you don't set your foot on the stage to-night! You won't be within a hundred miles of the Mayfayre Theatre!"

Kay's brain spun frenziedly. She had been tricked. She understood now—she understood why. It was Slade's last desperate throw to cheat her of her fortune! He was smuggling her out of London—kidnapping her to prevent her appearing on the stage that night! To-morrow it would be too late—the fortune would be already his!

"Step on it, Greer!" she heard him say hoarsely to the ruffian at the wheel.

The car accelerated till its vibration shook every bone in Kay's body.

The streets flashed by. London was left far behind. Kay choked for breath. The car sped on!

However can Kay escape in time to make good—for fame and fortune? Next Friday's chapters are full of enthralling developments. Don't miss them!

TONY THE SPEED GIRL



THIS WEEK:
**THE PARTNER
SHE COULD
NOT
TRUST**



By
**GAIL
WESTERN**

MILLY WAS A BIG DISAPPOINTMENT

I WONDER why she suggested meeting me here instead of at the racing club?" Tony Farrell asked herself the question as she parked her car, the Silver Phantom, outside the Gare du Nord.

The Speed Girl had come to Paris to take part in the big six-hour race that was to be held in the French capital the following week. At the moment she was waiting to meet Milly Rizla, the American motorist who was to partner her in the contest.

Though she had heard a lot about Milly, Tony had never actually met her, but, on hearing that she was staying in Paris, she had written to suggest that the pair of them should join forces to try to win the big money prize in the six-hour race.

Milly had replied enthusiastically, and it had been arranged that they should meet at the French Racing Club. The previous day, however, Tony had received a telegram altering the meeting-place to the Gare du Nord.

Now, as she clambered down from the driving-seat, she looked eagerly around the busy station square, wondering what kind of a girl the American was.

Though the American girl had not raced much on the Continent she had brought a 'big reputation with her, and with her valuable help Tony knew the Silver Phantom stood an excellent chance of winning.

"It'll be a real feather in our cap," Tony told herself. "I only hope—"

She broke off and turned round as a girlish voice, unmistakably bearing an American accent, hailed her.

"Say, are you the girl who's waiting to meet Milly Rizla?" asked the big, broad-shouldered girl who came striding across the square.

Tony nodded.

"Good! Then let's shake. I'm your new partner. Pleased to meet you, Tony. I guess we'll get on swell together."

Breezily Milly thrust out her hand, and as she took it the Speed Girl eyed her covertly. Milly was a bigger girl than she had expected to see, more brusque and less dainty than the newspaper descriptions had led Tony to expect, but her boisterous breeziness was captivating, and Tony smiled.

"I'm sure we shall be friends," she declared. "By the way, this is the Phantom." She indicated her beloved racing car with a proud hand. "I do hope you will like it."

"Sure I will. It looks a real dandy car," returned Milly heartily. "But let's get along to the speedway office and hand in our nominations. No time like the present, you know."

The American girl's hustling manner rather

took Tony's breath away, but the other seemed to take acceptance for granted.

"Then let's be going," she said breezily.

"The speedway offices close at two, so we'd better get a move on. Then we'll drive off to the little place I've booked for us until the race. Don't mind if I take the wheel, do you?"

She didn't give Tony any chance to reply, but calmly slipped behind the Phantom's wheel. Frowning slightly, the Speed Girl got up into the spare seat, and hardly had she shut the door than her new partner let in the clutch.

Forward whirled the Silver Phantom, so swiftly that Tony was knocked off her balance. She fell sprawling across the seat, and before she could recover her breath the American girl was threading her way in and out of the traffic at reckless speed.

"I like to get a move on," Milly explained casually. "Nothing riles me more than these traffic hold-ups. Hold tight. I can just squeeze between those two buses."

Br-uum-m!

Down went her foot, and the Phantom leapt through the narrowing gap, but so dangerously that Tony gulped.

"Not so fast, please!" she gasped. "I don't want the Phantom smashed up before the race!"

Milly flushed, but reluctantly she nodded and eased her foot off the accelerator.

"O.K.!" she said. "But it's not like an experienced motorist like you to be scared."

It was Tony's turn to flush, and for the rest of the journey neither spoke. Tony was beginning to wonder if her first impression was the correct one. Some instinct made her wonder whether she had been wise to rush into this partnership. After all, she knew nothing about Milly except what she had read in the French newspapers.

She seemed a reckless driver, and recklessness didn't pay in motor-racing. Also she seemed to have appointed herself the boss of the partnership. This place where they were to stay until the day of the race, for instance—Tony felt a little resentful that her wishes had

**Instead Of Helping Tony
To Get Ready For The
Race Her Partner
Thought Only Of Having
A Good Time.**

not been consulted. After all, it was her car they were going to drive.

But it was not like the Speed Girl to harbour resentment for long. When they had handed in their joint nomination at the speedway offices she turned, with a smile, to her partner.

"Now, what's this about you having booked a place for us?" she asked. "I thought we'd arranged in our letters to stay at the racing club."

Milly snorted.

"Not likely. The club's a stuffy hole. I hate it," she declared. "No, we'll be better off at the little farmhouse at Roche—that's just outside Paris. We'll be on our own there, able to prepare for the race without folks butting in. Don't you worry. I've fixed it all up—rooms, a garage, everything."

Tony's smile faded a little. She had been looking forward to staying right in the heart of the French capital. She had wanted to see the sights, to enjoy herself, as well as prepare for the race.

Still, it was no use making a fuss. Though she still felt Milly should have waited to consult her, the arrangements had been made and it would only cause resentment if she raised objections now.

"Right-ho," she said. "I'm game to stay anywhere, and I'm sure you've chosen a nice place."

"You bet I have. Leave things to me and you won't go far wrong," said the American girl, and again she calmly took her place in the driving seat. "Hop in, my dear, and we'll get going."

Though she had chosen an out-of-the-way village for their headquarters, the American girl appeared to have no intention of staying in it herself—as Tony discovered during the next few days. On every possible occasion Milly slipped away to friends, parties, and other social functions—often as not using the Phantom as a means of travel.

The climax came two days before the race. Tony, after a hard morning's work tuning up the car's engine, had returned to her farmhouse lodgings for a much-needed wash when to her surprise she met Milly attired in a flowery spring frock on the point of going out.

The American girl nodded coolly at her partner.

"Just the girl I want to see!" she cried.

"Sorry, my dear, but I shan't be able to help you clean down the car this afternoon. Got a date with a boy friend."

Tony stared blankly, a flush of indignation colouring her cheeks. This was about the last straw. For days she had put up with Milly's selfishness without complaint, but now had come the time to speak frankly.

"Look here," she said, "I hate to be unfriendly, but don't you realise that the race is the day after to-morrow?"

"Of course I do. But what of it?"

Tony held herself in check with an effort.

"And yet you can calmly go off and leave me to it!" she gasped. "Don't you realise that it will take hours to get the Phantom in racing trim? Yesterday we arranged that the car should be all ready by Tuesday morning and here it is Monday midday and you have not done a stroke!"

Milly scowled irritably.

"Oh, for goodness' sake cut it out," she cried. "Guess I'm getting fed-up with you. Always nagging you are!"

"Nagging—me! Well, if that isn't the limit!"

Tears of indignation spurted in Tony's eyes. For a moment she could hardly believe

her own ears. Why, this was the first time she had uttered a word of complaint.

But it was quite clear that Milly was in no mood to see her point of view, for without another word she brushed by Tony and went striding down the garden.

Tony gazed after her ruefully. How she wished she had never asked the American girl to partner her in the race! But it was too late to think of that now. Jointly they had entered the Silver Phantom and jointly they must drive the wonder-car.

For better or for worse the Speed Girl had to keep Milly Rizla as a partner, but, worried as she was now, she did not even suspect the truth; did not dream of the trouble and treachery that lay ahead!

IMPOSSIBLE TO BE FRIENDS

"COME and look at the Phantom," Tony called cheerfully to her partner the next morning. "It's all ready for to-morrow and—Milly!"

"Well?"

"What about running into Paris together? We could have a lovely time looking at the shops, and I've got tickets for the matinee at the Opera this afternoon!"

"Sorry, but I'm booked."

"B-b-booked?"

Tony's disappointment was so great that Milly had the grace to look conscience-stricken.

"Yes, sorry, kid, but those pals I was out with yesterday fixed up another date. But don't worry. You'll enjoy yourself just as much without me. Anyway, let's take a look at the car."

Trying to stifle her disappointment, Tony led the way across to the barn which served as the Silver Phantom's garage. Proudly she showed the results of her efforts.

The car certainly did look a picture. Its chromium-plating shone like silver, its tyres had been whitewashed, and it looked as if it had just come fresh from the works.

"It's fine!" Milly said casually; and then added: "Well, I can't stay chinwagging here. I want to get ready to meet the boys. They're calling for me at eleven."

She darted away, and, after another fond look at her beloved car, Tony also returned to the house. Though Milly's refusal to accompany her had taken all the edge off her enjoyment, she decided to go into Paris on her own.

The Phantom was all ready for the race; it must not be driven until the time came to take it down to the motor-drome, so Tony decided to walk down to the village station and take the train.

Unfortunately, she misjudged the distance, and, as a consequence, missed the train by a good two minutes. There not being another for nearly two hours, she decided to return to the farmhouse and wait. As she took the short cut through the orchard she heard laughing voices come from the farmyard.

"Milly's friends, I suppose," she told herself, and peered curiously through the trees.

There were two young men and a girl congregated outside the farmhouse. Plainly they were waiting for Milly to put in an appearance. But Tony only gave them one look, then her startled glance went to the car around which the trio stood.

The Silver Phantom!

But what was it doing there? Surely Milly didn't intend to use it for her pleasure trip? In the first place, the car was not built to take four; in the second, it was all tuned up in readiness for the race.

Clearly the laughing trio's voices reached her, and suddenly Tony realised they were discussing her.

One of the young men, a foppish individual wearing flannels and a gaudy-looking cap, seemed particularly amused.

"The little fool doesn't suspect a thing!" he declared. "Janet has got her eating out of her hand!"

He spoke in French, but Tony understood, though she was puzzled. Who could Janet be? She didn't try to answer the question. Instead she started angrily forward, for the foppish

youth had lighted his cigarette by striking his match on the Phantom's gleaming bodywork. Even at that distance Tony could see the ugly scratch the match had made.

Her cheeks burning redly, she went forward.

"Excuse me, but that's my car when you've finished with it!" she cried. "And I don't allow it to be used as a matchbox!"

The trio swung round, staring, then the foppish youth sniggered.

"Your car!" he said. "I like that! Janet's invited us to take a trip in it!"

"Janet?" echoed Tony, in bewilderment.

For some reason the youth seemed confused.

"Er—I meant Milly," he mumbled. "She's the boss here, and so don't you start butting in, young lady. We're going for a ride in this old bus, whether you like it or not!"

Tony just stood there gasping. His insolence took her breath away. But it was Milly she was angry with. The deceit of the girl. To commandeer her car as soon as her back was turned—and the day before the race, too!

"Going for a ride, are you?" she managed to gasp out at length. "We'll soon see about that!"

And with an angry toss of her head she strode past the sniggering trio and charged into the farmhouse. She found Milly standing in the sitting-room, engaged in burning something in the fireplace.



Girls' Crystal Office,
The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street,
London, E.C.4.

HALLO, GIRLS!—Did you have a jolly Easter? You bet I did! For three glorious days I basked in the sunshine on the coast. True, the sun was a little on the weak side, and on my particular part of the coast we did have a spot of rain—but who cared? Certainly not me! I was too busy enjoying myself.

I hope you all had a good time, and that, despite the excitement of holiday-making, you did not forget to get your GIRLS' CRYSTAL nice and early.

I think you will agree that all the various stories are getting more and more thrilling. I wonder which one you like best? Hard to decide, isn't it? Still, I'd like to know, so when you write—and I hope you are going to drop me a line—please tell me which is your favourite.

NEXT WEEK'S STORIES

And now for a word about next Friday's issue. Neel Raymond solves the mystery of "The Plaster Pierrots That Vanished," while Tony the Speed Girl strives pluckily to outwit two unscrupulous rivals who scheme to prevent her from driving in an important road race.

Poppy Binks, as usual, will provide you with many a laugh, and in the next Madcap Form-mistress story you will learn how Miss Desmond returned to school in secret, determined at all costs to unmask St. Kilda's tyrannical headmistress.

In addition, of course, you will read more about "The Girl Who Gave Up Luxury," "An Impostor Against Her Will," and "I Will Be A London Stage Star!" Make certain of your copy by ordering it in advance.

And now I must close. Cheerio till next Friday!

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR

As she heard someone enter, the American girl swung round guiltily, and when she saw Tony the colour ebbed from her face.

"Y-y-you!" she stuttered. "I—I thought you'd gone to Paris!"

Tony eyed her scornfully.

"Yes—that's why you told your friends not to call until after eleven!" she snapped. "You hoped I'd be safely out of the way, didn't you? Well, luckily, I missed my train."

With an effort she mastered her indignation. There was appeal in her eyes when she spoke again.

"Milly, what's come over you?" she asked. "Anyone would think we were enemies instead of race partners. Surely you must know that it's crazy to go harrying around the country in the Phantom. It's all ready for the race, and if you take it out to-day—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, cut it!" interrupted Milly angrily. "For two pins I'd give myself the sack. I'm fed-up with you. Any more of it, and I'll drop out of the race!"

"Drop out of the race?"

Tony stared at her in horror. It was unthinkable. Why, if Milly backed out now she would not be able to enter at all.

"You don't mean that—you can't mean it!" she gasped.

Milly tossed her head and gave a harsh laugh as she snatched up her handbag.

"Don't I!" she sneered. "You just try to stop me taking my pals out for a drive, and see!"

And off she stalked.

Weakly Tony sank down into the nearest chair. All her instincts urged her to rush after her selfish partner—urged her to forbid her to drive off in the Phantom.

But Milly held the whiphand.

It had cost Tony a lot of money to prepare for this race—money she could ill afford to waste—and she knew that the American girl would keep her threat. If Tony tried to stop her taking the Silver Phantom out to-day she would sever the partnership, and that would mean that Tony would be unable to race to-morrow.

As she sat there, white-faced and quivering, still hardly able to realise that any girl could behave so abominably, she heard a screech of laughter from the yard outside, then the roar of the Phantom's engine.

Milly and her friends were departing on their jaunt.

And then, abruptly, Tony pulled herself together. It was not like her to mope for long. Besides, a puzzling thought had occurred to her. What was the reason for the American girl's treacherous behaviour? Surely she wasn't acting just out of malice? Surely if she hadn't been really keen to win the six-hour race she would never have bothered to join forces with the Speed Girl?

A dark, startling suspicion flashed through Tony's brain. Had some rival bribed Milly to let her partner down?

Tony's heart began to thump wildly. Despite herself, more and more startling suspicions were rioting in her brain, and, as she remembered Milly's furtive movement when she had entered the room, she jumped up and crossed to the hearth.

A few scraps of half-burnt paper lay there. The scraps were the remnants of two envelopes.

Impulsively she bent and snatched up the scraps of the other envelope. The name and part of the address were still discernible.

"Mademoiselle Janet Hare," Tony read, and her lips set grimly.

Why had Milly received a letter addressed to another girl? Her face whitened as the probable explanation occurred to her.

"It can't be true! She wouldn't be so mean!" she gasped wretchedly; but she could not put the thought out of her mind, and, not waiting for the next train, she rang up the nearest garage and ordered a taxi.

She meant to put her suspicions to the test!

Tony spent all the day in Paris, but not shopping. Several hours she spent in the chief daily newspaper office, then she paid a visit to the racing club.

When she returned to Roche her eyes were ablaze with indignation. Not even the sight

of the Silver Phantom, standing neglected in the yard, covered with mud and one dumb-iron bent, could distract her attention.

Grimly she entered the house. Milly was in her bed-room, and, running upstairs, Tony angrily confronted her.

"Look at that!" she cried, and, producing a newspaper cutting from her pocket, held it out.

Milly peered at it curiously, then, as she saw it related to herself, she gave a sudden gasp of alarm.

"Here, what's the idea?" she gasped again.

In cold contempt Tony surveyed her.

"The idea is that I've learnt the truth!" she snapped. "You're not Milly Rizla. You're an impostor! Your real name is Janet Hare. This newspaper cutting proves it. The real Milly has a scar on her arm, and I've seen your arms enough in your summery frocks these last few days to know you haven't!"

Accusingly she flourished the cutting she had got from the newspaper office.

"You trickster!" she cried. "To try to fool me like you did! No wonder you wouldn't help me to get the Phantom ready for the race! No wonder you sneaked off whenever you could! You never intended to help me win! You wanted the Phantom to lose!"

THE TRICKSTER'S REVENGE

BEFORE Tony's impassioned attack, the girl who called herself Milly Rizla recoiled, but she quickly recovered her self-possession. Sneeringly she faced the angry Speed Girl.

"Very clever, aren't you?" she drawled. "Well, I may as well own up, I suppose. Yes, I am Janet Hare, and I was paid to trick you!"

She seated herself, and calmly took a cigarette out of her case.

"Ever heard of the Hare Auto Company?" she asked, as she blew out the match and tossed it carelessly on the floor. "Well, I'm John Hare's daughter!"

Tony drew a deep breath. The truth was out now with a vengeance. The Hare Auto Company had a car entered for the six-hour race. If it won, it would mean big business for its owners.

Plain enough now the reason for this cruel trick. The Silver Phantom was the one rival the Hare car people feared, and so by means of some clever trick they had got rid of the real Milly Rizla—possibly sent her a telegram in Tony's name to tell her that the Speed Girl had changed her mind and didn't want her to partner her, after all—then they had bribed John Hare's daughter to pose as the American girl.

No wonder Janet had not wanted Tony to go to the racing club. She was known there. Her deception would quickly have been spotted. That was why she had persuaded Tony to come out to this out-of-the-way village, so that they should never be seen together.

Aghast, the Speed Girl stared at the calmly smoking cheat.

"How could you be so mean?" she gasped. "And you don't even seem sorry!"

Janet calmly flicked the ash off her cigarette.

"Why should I be?" she sneered. "The truth would have been bound to come out to-morrow; for, of course, I had no intention of driving that tin-can of a car of yours! It's not me who has cause to worry—it's you! Whether you like it or not, the Phantom's out of the race!"

What she said seemed true enough. Only the real Milly Rizla would be allowed to partner Tony. If she tried to secure a fresh partner, she would be disqualified.

For a moment despair engulfed Tony, and then fiercely, determinedly, she swung round on the mocking Janet.

"I will beat you yet!" she stormed. "Your cheating shan't lose me the race. The Phantom shall turn out to-morrow!"

Janet laughed.

"You little fool! How can it? The real

Milly Rizla is over two hundred miles away—thinking you don't want her services, she's holiday-making at La Weiner."

"La Weiner! So that's where she's to be found! Thanks very much; you've given me just the clue I needed!"

Tony gave an excited gasp, and Janet laughed. She realised she had been indiscreet. To cover her confusion she sniggered.

"Poof! You'll never be able to find her, and even if you do, there's no time for her to get to Paris."

"There is—she shall come! I know she will—when she's learnt the truth. And I'm off to tell her this minute. You haven't won yet, you cheat. You wait—wait until to-morrow—wait until the Phantom comes in first. Then you won't feel so cheerful!"

And, turning, Tony dashed out of the room. Before her she had a long run of over two hundred miles, and even if she found the real Milly, and persuaded her to race to-morrow, there would be another exhausting run back to Paris.

Could she possibly do that double journey in the time? It would mean driving all night, but Tony didn't care. If it was humanly

round corners, hurtling over hump-backed bridges.

On and on, with Tony crouching fiercely over the wheel; but the church clocks were striking midnight before the red roofs of La Weiner loomed into sight.

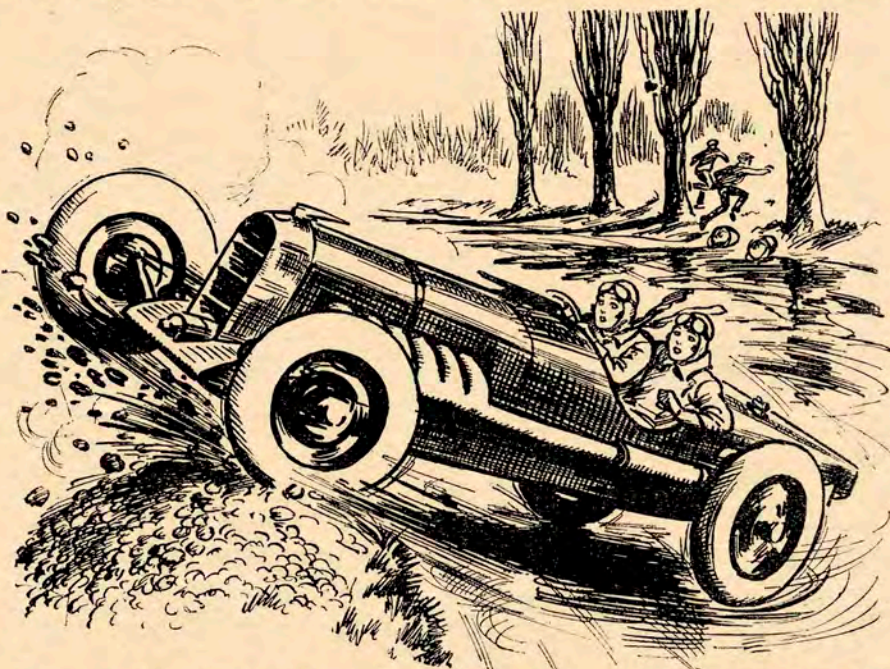
Now the hardest part of Tony's task faced her. How was she to discover where Milly Rizla was staying? There were scores of hotels in this busy watering-place. She tried four of the biggest without success, and she was beginning to despair when she had an idea.

"The police!" she gasped. "They would know!"

She knew that all foreigners had to register with the police. French laws were very strict on that point, so surely the authorities would be able to supply the vital information she needed?

She inquired from a passer-by where the police station was, and anxiously drove there. The kindly inspector she interviewed proved charming, only too ready to help. He searched the records, then wrote an address on a slip of paper.

"You will find her there, ma'mselle," he said. "Hotel d'Anvers—just round the corner.



Desperately Tony clung to the steering-wheel. Thanks to grease having been flung over the road the Silver Phantom was out of control. Madly it plunged over the pile of stones.

possible, she meant to outwit the girl who had cheated her.

Hearing the Speed Girl depart, Janet Hare scowled.

"I'll make sure that she doesn't get back in time for the race," she muttered, and darting across to the phone, savagely dialed a Paris number.

Not satisfied with her treachery, Janet had still another rascally card to play!

ON through the darkness Tony drove, the Silver Phantom's powerful headlights slashing the night like two gigantic swords.

For nearly four hours the Speed Girl had been at the wheel, and still she was fifty miles from the inland resort of La Weiner.

It had taken her ages to work her way through the busy streets of Paris, and even when the open country had been reached she had not dared exceed the fifty mark, for the broad national road was at times blocked by lumbering farm-wagons, bringing vegetables to the Parisian markets.

But for several miles the road stretched empty and wide. Down went Tony's foot. Forward leapt the Phantom. Faster and faster, on and on, shooting through wayside villages like a rocket, slithering perilously

You can't mistake it. A big Gothic building on the right."

"Oh, thank you—thank you ever so much!" said Tony gratefully, and hurried off.

When she reached the Hotel d'Anvers the wail of saxophones and the blare of trumpets met her. Evidently a dance was in progress.

"What a bit of luck!" the Speed Girl told herself. "That means that she won't have gone to bed."

"Mademoiselle Rizla is in the ball-room," the porter said, in reply to Tony's question. He broke off as a dainty, rather elf-like girl emerged from the ball-room and started to cross the foyer.

The girl, seeing Tony, stopped and stared, too; and then the Speed Girl gave a sudden cry of relief.

"Aren't you Milly Rizla?" Tony gasped excitedly, darting forward. "Aren't you the American girl motorist?"

The other girl nodded, frowning slightly. "Yes; but who on earth—Why, if it isn't Tony Farrell! I thought I'd seen your picture somewhere. But where've you sprung from? I thought you were racing to-morrow in Paris?"

"So I am if— Oh, but I had better explain! Please spare me a minute. I expect you're angry with me—asking you to be my



By
DIANA MARTIN

PAM MAKES AN ACCUSATION

WHILE Jenny Bright, the girl Pamela Drake had rescued from the slums, was lying unconscious on the pavement of a Wrenborough street, a hundred miles away, Pamela herself was reading the pathetic message which Jenny had sent to her before running away from London. "Jenny! Jenny!" her heart cried out. "Oh, Jenny, you silly!" Jenny, believing that she was a handicap to her, taking all the blame for the disaster in John Arnold's office that afternoon, had fled, asking Pam to make no effort to find her.

Jenny, with no luggage, with very little money, with no friend in the wide world except herself, had deliberately taken herself out of her life.

No, no, it couldn't be true! It couldn't be! In her distress Pam turned to John Arnold. John Arnold, this kind editor of the "Modern Magazine" who had taken such a liking to Pam and had hinted only a short hour ago that Pam might be that baby daughter who had been kidnapped and lost so many years ago.

Greta Winch, his niece, who, if Pam only knew it, was responsible for all Jenny's troubles, stood by, biting her lip.

"Oh, Mr. Arnold, I've got to find her—I've got to find her!" she cried.

"Oh, she'll come back!" Greta said. "But she won't—she won't! You don't know Jenny; I do. She means this."

John Arnold bit his lip.

"We'll have to tell the police," he said. But Pam hopelessly shook her head.

"No good. Jenny would do anything rather than let the police get hold of her. Mr. Arnold, don't you see? She believes she spoiled that sketch in the office. She was terribly upset when you were annoyed with me. She thinks that she made trouble for me."

John Arnold bit his lip. Greta shook her head in false sorrow. But Pam was not looking at her, was not looking at her editor friend. Her thoughts were frantic, her mind filled with strange foreboding.

Where had Jenny gone?

"Pam," Mr. Arnold said, "don't look so upset. Just calm down a minute." He put his arm around her. "Pam, come into my study—no, Greta, not you. I want to talk to Pam alone." And as Greta, who was preparing to follow, stopped with a scowl, he conducted Pam into his cosy den and very gently placed her in a chair. "Pam!" he exclaimed.

Dully Pam looked up.

"Pam, I—I'm sorry," John Arnold said sincerely. "I—I had no idea, of course, that Jenny would take it like that. But I do so hate to see you upset, Pam."

Pam gulped.

"Mr. Arnold, I've got to do something."

"We will do something," he said. "I'll phone an advertisement to all the leading papers this evening, Pam. Cheer up, we'll find her, never fear! And—when we do find her, Pam—" He paused. "My dear, you remember our conversation in the car?"

Pam looked at him.

"Pam, the more I think of it the more convinced I am." And then he shook his head. "No, Pam, I won't hold out false hopes—but you do know what I feel about you now, don't you. I do so want you to be happy, Pam. I want Jenny to be happy, too. I realise now that perhaps it was a mistake to give her a job in the house, and when she is found again, Pam, I want her to come back here—not as a servant, but as your companion."

He saw the start, the wide-eyed look of surprise she shot at him, and faintly smiled.

"Pam, you have no parents, to your own knowledge, have you? You are a girl alone in the world. What would you say, my dear, if I asked you if I might adopt you, and allowed Jenny to live here with you—as your companion?"

Even in her distress Pam blinked. She couldn't get hold of that all at once.

But there was another girl who, ear to key-hole, got hold of it, and Greta Winch gave a start that almost gave her position away. Into her face suddenly flashed a venomous hate. She trembled. For in that instant Greta Winch recognised the death knell of all her own

SEARCHING FOR JENNY

In Carrying Out Her Quest For Her Vanished Friend Pam Runs Into Deadly Danger

ambitious hopes as far as Uncle John Arnold was concerned.

She listened more intently.

"Pam, I would love it to happen," John Arnold said gently. "Even if—if it turned out that you are the daughter I lost so many years ago. It would be so lovely to have you here. You remind me so much of my dear wife. Your voice, your looks, yes, even your gestures, all remind me of her. And you would be happy, wouldn't you, with Jenny here?"

Pam could not reply. No, she couldn't. She felt stunned, robbed of breath. A sudden wave of happiness surged within her. To live here with Jenny, to be a daughter to this man who so curiously and strongly had attracted her. But Jenny—she must find Jenny first.

Her voice was tremblingly unsteady as she replied.

"I—I don't know what to say, Mr. Arnold, but I would love it—I would! And Jenny would, too. I can hardly realise it at the moment. It seems—it seems—" She halted, shakily, unsteadily. "Oh, but Jenny!" she burst out. "Mr. Arnold, I must find Jenny! I must find her more urgently than ever now—to break this news to her!"

"But, my dear, how?"

"I—I've got an idea," Pam said. "I believe that Jenny's gone to Wrenborough. I don't know, but I can find out. If she has, I'm going there. I'm going to fetch her back! No," as he made a suggestion, "I don't want you to come with me. It will be better, I think, if I meet Jenny alone and tell her the news, and bring her back myself. You do understand, don't you?"

He nodded gravely.

"Yes, Pam; and you're right. No, perhaps I should only be in the way. But I can't let you go to Wrenborough all by yourself, you know. Somebody must go with you. Take Greta."

Greta, outside, straightened up. A sudden, intense expression came into her face.

"But Jenny—"

"Pam, listen! In Wrenborough you have enemies. I don't feel easy. I don't want you to go unaccompanied. I want to feel easy in my mind while you're away. Now, please, Pam," he added pleadingly.

So Pam gave in. Anything—anything, she thought, as long as she was doing something.

She missed the peculiar look in Greta's eyes when she was asked if she would go. But Greta, pretending to jump at the idea, professed herself delighted.

In the car on the way to Euston, Greta, cleverly disguising the hate and jealousy which she now felt for Pam, pretended to be

sympathetic and concerned. She made no reference whatever to what she had overheard, but her mind was busy.

Until Pam's arrival she had been her uncle's favourite niece. Though nothing had ever been said about it, she had always believed that Uncle John would make her his heiress.

Now Pam had arrived. Pam was going to be adopted as his daughter, which meant that Greta would never stand a chance of gaining anything through her relationship.

But wouldn't she? Not if Greta Winch knew it! Somehow, in some way, Pam had got to be got rid of.

Euston was reached at last. John Arnold gave Pam money—more than sufficient to meet her needs, and she hurried into the booking-hall. The clerk behind the counter peered at her.

"Yes, miss?"

"I—I want first to make an inquiry," Pam said. "Have you been on duty here all the afternoon?"

"Yes, miss," the clerk said, with some surprise.

"Then—then perhaps you will remember. I am searching for a girl—a girl about my height, but slighter, dressed in a brown tweed costume. I've an idea that she booked to Wrenborough this afternoon, somewhere between three and four o'clock. Do you remember her?"

"Why"—the clerk stared—"why, yes, miss, I do remember a girl answering to that description. I remember her distinctly, because she looked as if she'd been crying. She booked to Wrenborough on the four-ten."

"Thank you so much!" Pam gulped. "Two tickets, please."

So she was right. Breathlessly she hurried back to Greta. Almost trembling, she boarded the train.

Two hours later, in the darkness, she was stepping out of Wrenborough Station.

Now where would Jenny be likely to have gone? And immediately the answer came. Well, where would Jenny go but to Mrs. Sales, their old landlady? She called a taxi and hurried there.

But Mrs. Sales, met and interrogated, shook her head.

"No, Miss Drake, I haven't seen Miss Bright since the day you and she went away."

Dashed, Pam turned away. Where now? And then she stopped as, joining Greta on the pavement, a voice spoke:

"Why, Miss Drake?"

Pam spun, smiling involuntarily, as she recognised the thin, faded form of her first landlady—Mrs. Crowther.

"Why, Mrs. Crowther!" she cried, and gripped warmly the hand that was extended. "How are you? And how's Mary?"

"Mary is in the hospital," Mrs. Crowther said tremblingly. "There's no infection in the house now, Miss Drake. But, oh dear, we have missed you—the children and me, I mean. I had an idea you were back in Wrenborough, because I saw Miss Bright this afternoon. I didn't get a chance to speak to her, because she was with a lady and gentleman."

Pam started.

"A lady and gentleman? Who were they?"

"Why, Miss Drake, you know them! I believe they were called Sam and Ella."

Sam and Ella! Pam's eyes opened wide. Sam and Ella had got hold of Jenny again, then—her Jenny! Jenny would never, never willingly have gone back to those two who had so ill-treated her during her childhood. That vicious Sam and brutal Ella, who all these years had passed themselves off as her parents.

The breathlessness of her reply made Mrs. Crowther stare. She clutched convulsively at Greta's arm.

"Come on!" she cried. "Mrs. Crowther, I'm sorry, I'll have to rush! I'll look you up later."

"Why, Miss Drake, I'm sure I should be very pleased if you did!"

Into a taxi Pam and Greta bundled again, and as the car bowled off she explained to Greta Winch who Sam and Ella were; drew a picture of Jenny's previous existence with the precious pair. Greta looked sympathetic.

"Oh, poor kid!" she said feelingly but

falsely. "I do hope, Pam, that we shall find her there."

At the end of Rents Court she stopped the taxi, paid the driver, and consulted with Greta.

"Keep out," she whispered; "they might play tricks. If I'm not out of the house in ten minutes—with Jenny—go for the police. You understand?"

Greta nodded, and Pam strode on to Jenny's old house. She raised her hand to knock, and then, thinking better of it, peered through a rent in the blind which shuttered the lighted window.

She saw Sam at once, she saw Ella; she saw a third figure, a thick-set man with haggard eyes. At sight of him an electric thrill ran through Pam. For the flabby one was, of course, her uncle, the arch-villain of the whole piece—James Thorpe himself.

Pam did not even trouble to knock. With a quick turn her hand seized the door knob, and the door went crashing inwards.

Three heads turned like jack-in-the-boxes on a spring to stare alarmedly at her entry. Three pairs of eyes goggled as one, and Pam, standing there, the handle of the door still in her hand, eyed them contemptuously.

"And what," she asked, in biting accents, "have you done with Jenny Bright, you scoundrels?"

JENNY'S DREAM COMES TRUE

AT that very same moment Jenny Bright, the runaway urchin over whom all the discussions were raging, was bewilderingly opening a pair of right blue eyes in a rose-coloured bed-room.

Jenny couldn't understand it. She lay for a moment staring at the carved ceiling. Then gradually a disjointed medley of memories began to piece themselves together. Pam! Her flight from London! Her strange terror at seeing the face of the nurse of her dreams at Walford Lodge! Her capture by Sam and Ella!

And finally the bus!

But—well, here she was. This wasn't hospital.

Wonderingly Jenny turned her head. There came to her ears a soft footfall. A soft, cool hand reached out. A voice, low and gentle, spoke.

"There, my dear. Feel better now?"

Jenny, as she heard, lay rigid in her bed. Oh, what was this? It was a dream! It was—it was! That voice—the voice she had heard so often, the voice of her nurse.

"My dear!"

Tremblingly, almost afraid to look, Jenny opened her eyes. A woman was bending over her—that sweet-faced woman of her dreams, changed, a little older, but nevertheless Jenny found that strange sensation overwhelming her.

She did not realise what she said as she closed her eyes. She just said it.

"Nurse!"

And at that word a most extraordinary expression came over the face of Mrs. Walford. She stared, her lips parted. For one moment she, like Jenny, seemed to be afraid, and then suddenly, compassionately, she rustled forward. A low cry broke from her.

"Pamela, my little Pamela! It—it cannot be!"

Jenny twisted her head. She smiled.

"I—I—" she said, and found herself flushing crimson. "Oh corks!" she added, with a lapse into the old urchin slang, which quickly she remembered, and added panic to confusion in trying to put it right. "I—I—mean, oh dear! You see—I feel all queer, like," she added in confusion. "I thought you—you were—"

"My dear!" And there was the woman leaning over her, staring down into her face.

"I—I seem to dream about you so—so often," Jenny said. "I was on a ship—"

"My dear," the woman cried. She was trembling now, her face was wet with the tears which unbidden ran from her eyes. "But you—what is your name?"

"My name's Jenny Bright. At least," Jenny said, remembering, "that's the name I was known by. But Pamela Drake—you know Pamela, don't you?"

The woman nodded.

"Yes, yes!"

"But Pam always says that my name is her name—that I am Pamela Drake," Jenny got out, feeling more at ease. "She says that I'm her, and she—well, she doesn't know who she is. Which all sounds jolly muddled. There's such a lot of mystery about it—Oh, I don't know! But Pam knows. She's got it all pat, you know."

The woman was silent, then:

"Jenny!" she said, "can I look at your right shoulder? No, wait," she said, "I'll tell you why. Oh, my dear girl, I can't understand this—I can't! But I will tell you now. Many, many years ago—long before I met Mr. Walford, I was a nurse."

"Yes?" Jenny said tremblingly.

"I was nurse to the baby of a Dr. Drake and his young wife. We were out in Cuba. The baby was about nine or ten months old, Jenny, when suddenly there was an outbreak of cholera—a dreadful disease. Mrs. Drake wouldn't leave her husband, but as the doctor himself was afraid for Pamela's sake, he sent me off to England with the child on the Silver Castle. I was to have reported in England to the child's uncle—a Mr. James Thorpe."

"Yes?" Jenny said, almost afraid of her own voice.

"On the way the ship hit a rock. It was wrecked. Oh goodness, will I ever forget that dreadful night! I was in the cabin with you—with the baby, I mean—when suddenly the water came in. Something fell down hitting me on the head, and I knew no more until I found myself in a hospital in France. They told me that my baby had been drowned."

"After months of illness, Jenny, I got back to England, there to be met with the news that Dr. Drake and his wife had fallen victims to the cholera outbreak in Cuba. I went to see Mr. Thorpe. Then picture my amazement when I found that he had the baby—my little Pamela with him."

"He accused me of neglect, he wouldn't allow me to see the child. I went away and then I became a nurse in the hospital where I met Mr. Walford, who was a patient of mine, and we came back to Wrenborough, here to discover that Mr. Thorpe, who had been only a poor clerk when he received my Pamela into his household, was a rich moneylender."

"Here in Wrenborough my own little daughter Peggy was born. She grew up. She went to school. Picture, Jenny, my amazement when one holiday she brought home with her a girl who called herself Pamela Drake—the niece of James Thorpe."

Jenny stared dazedly.

"But Jenny, she was not my Pamela. She was a lovely girl. I liked her and I loved her. But she wasn't my Pamela, although she had grown up. I knew it. I felt it. And one day, Jenny, just to make sure, I watched my Peggy and this Pamela as we were bathing. I was looking for a certain tell-tale mark. A heart-shaped mark beneath the right shoulder. This Pamela hadn't got it. Jenny—"

"Yes," Jenny said faintly, "I have." And she turned over and tore down the nightdress in which she was clothed. At which Mrs. Walford gave one great sobbing cry.

"Pamela!" she cried. "Pamela! My—my Pamela! My baby!"

GRETA'S TREACHERY

IN the disreputable shack in Rents Court, defiantly Pam faced her uncle and his confederates.

"What have you done with Jenny Bright?" she repeated.

Perhaps had she been less angry than she was at that moment, she would have noticed the quick look that passed between James Thorpe and Sam Bright. She might have noticed that Sam's hand dived suddenly under the table as he met that look with an understanding, though barely perceptible, nod of the head.

James Thorpe, almost green with fear, desperate now as never before, was in a mood to take risks. The sudden apparition that Pam presented as she had crashed through the door, coming on top of the news he had just heard concerning Jenny Bright, had

shaken him to the depths. He straightened up, fingered his collar.

"Well, Pam," he said.

"Tell me!" Pam rapped.

"But what should I know about Jenny Bright?" Thorpe asked, and signed to Sam Bright. "I haven't seen her, Pam."

"No?" Pam's lips curled contemptuously. "Where is she?"

Thorpe watched Sam Bright, who, one hand under his waistcoat, had positioned himself near the door that led upstairs. There was a gleam in his eye.

"I tell you we haven't seen her," he mumbled. "Really, Pam, it's a bit thick rushing in like this. I came down to see Sam, to discuss something I want him to do up at the Hall."

"To discuss what you shall do with Jenny, you mean?" Pam said scathingly. "You're afraid that Jenny might get in touch with the Walfords, and that, in some way, would mean your downfall, wouldn't it? Well, I say you've got Jenny here. You're hiding her here."

Thorpe shrugged.

"O.K., have it your way," he said. He waved a negligent hand towards the stairs. "I can see you won't be satisfied until you've proved the contrary. Search the house, Pam, there's the door."

"Yes, search the 'ouse," Sam invited.

"I will!" Pam snapped.

Three steps she took towards the door. Sam obligingly held it open.

Meantime, outside, Greta Winch, consumed by a fierce curiosity, quivering still with the hatred of this girl who had supplanted her in her uncle's affections, had crept to the window and inserted one eye to the crack in the blind.

She saw Pam as she stepped forward. She saw the quick, agitated signal which Thorpe made to Sam. She saw the movement that Sam made. His hand went up.

Greta almost screamed as the blow descended, and she shut her eyes.

A thud. And then—there was Pam lying on the floor, her face buried on one arm. And there was Thorpe, face as white as a sheet, blundering forward like some great agitated whale.

She heard his voice.

"Sam, you didn't—"

"No, I didn't!" Sam said sullenly. "But better get her out of here. Here, Ella, give us a hand to cart her upstairs."

Eyes glittering with horror, Greta watched, shaken despite herself, but thinking no more of lifting a hand to help Pam than she would have thought of flying to the moon.

In her curiosity she leaned forward farther. At the same moment there came a footfall behind her. Greta half-screamed as she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Here—"

"Spying, eh?" a man's voice cried.

"No."

"No, then we'll see." And Morrim, the shady solicitor and friend of Thorpe, pushed her through the doorway into the room, starting as he saw Sam and Ella in the act of lifting Pam's unconscious form and disappearing up the stairs.

Thorpe, licking a dry mouth, jumped at sight of Greta.

"Who's this?" he asked hoarsely.

"Don't know. Found her snooping around outside," Morrim said. "Who are you?" he added. "Friend of Pam?"

"Friend!" Greta sneered. "I'm no friend—no. Think I'd have stood and watched if I'd been her friend?"

"Then what—"

"I came," Greta announced calmly, "with her—from London. From my uncle, John Arnold. Oh, don't worry," she added, with a sneer, as she saw Thorpe shaking. "I'm not going to say anything, if that's what you're afraid of. I owe her one, and I'm jolly glad she's got what she asked for. But what are you going to do with her now?"

Thorpe gulped.

"What's that to you?"

"A lot!" And Greta, disengaging herself from Morrim's detaining hand, sauntered into the room. "Say, don't all stare at me as if I was something from another planet," she

said. "I think I know your crowd—I've heard about you often enough, goodness knows. James Thorpe—that's you, isn't it? And Ella and Sam. This gentleman—is it Mr. Morrim?" she asked, with a mocking lift of one eyebrow.

"Look here—" spluttered Thorpe.

"I'm looking!" Greta said calmly. "May I sit down?" Her brain was working—swiftly, feverishly. She thought she saw a way to achieve her own end. "Mr. Thorpe," she added, "I want to tell you something first. Did you or did you not snatch Pam out of her perambulator when she was a kid in arms?"

Thorpe's face turned livid.

"And is," Greta went on calmly, "Jenny Bright—and not Pamela Drake—your real niece? Don't answer if you don't want to. I'm just asking you these questions to tell you that I, too, know something of this business. Now sit down," she added. "I've an idea that we can help each other. Mr. Thorpe, you want Jenny out of the way, don't you?"

Thorpe blinked.

"Right! I want Pam out of the way. Let's strike a bargain!" And callously Greta

"Shall I put all my cards on the table?" Greta asked. "Right—ho, then here goes!" She grinned. "I want the girl we know as Pamela Drake out of the way because she happens to stand between me and a future fortune. It's in my interest that Pamela Drake should disappear, just as it's in your interest that Jenny Bright should disappear. Now do we understand each other?"

Another quick look from Thorpe to Morrim. Then Morrim nodded.

"Yes," he said, "and—listen! Jenny Bright at this moment is in Walford Lodge."

"I've heard of it."

"It's necessary she should be decoyed from Walford Lodge. As you say, the only thing that would decoy her is a message from Pam."

"And I," Greta simpered, "am the one to take that message. As far as dear Jenny knows, I am the only friend that Pam has besides herself. Now"—with swift cunning—"I'll go there, tell her Pam wants her—urgently!"

"Yes?"

"I'll say it's something to do with Pam's investigation into her past life, so she must come alone. I'll bring Jenny, and have a car



Thorpe and his two scheming companions stared in dismay as the door opened and in walked Pam. She faced them grimly. "And what have you done with Jenny Bright?" she demanded.

laughed. "You realise, Mr. Thorpe, don't you, that if Pam ever gets away from here, it'll be the end of you."

Thorpe clutched at his collar.

"Right—ho, then!" Greta said. "I'm with you. You've got to get her away from here. You've got to get her somewhere where she'll never meet the people she knows again. You understand?"

"But what—"

"I'm doing the talking," Greta went on arrogantly. "Hear me out. Your idea is to get hold of Jenny Bright, I take it? Well, perhaps I can help you there. I happen to know Jenny Bright. She was with Pam in London, and we were all sort of friends together, though Heaven knows I hated that little gutter-snipe. Tell me where Jenny is—if you know—and I'll go to her and tell her that Pam wants her. Perhaps you know what a soft little fool she is where Pam's concerned. She'd come like a shot."

There was a pause. Morrim and Thorpe exchanged swift glances.

"You mean it?" Thorpe asked.

"Of course!"

"But what—"

outside the gates of Walford Lodge. You'll supply that, of course. Now, listen—and listen carefully, because all this will have to be done swiftly, and in the dark. I'll approach the car with Jenny walking on the left side of me. You'll do the rest."

Thorpe heaved a great breath of relief.

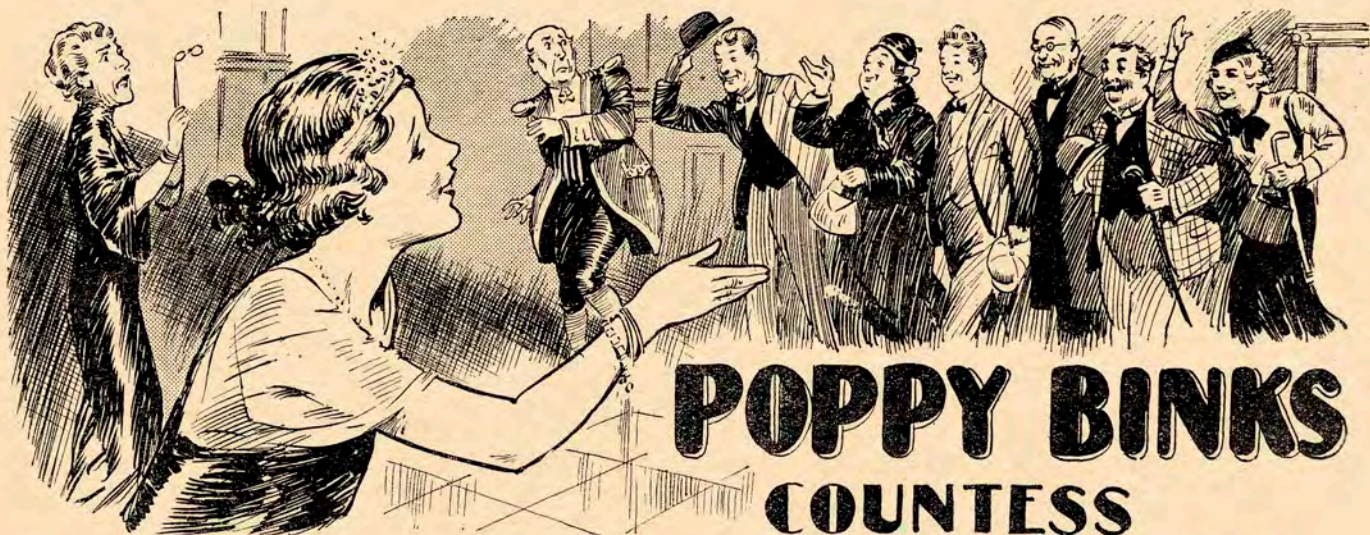
"Sam, you and Morrim be there."

"Right!" Morrim said. "Then it's a deal. Right—ho, young lady! Then off we go. We'll meet the car at the end of the road. And afterwards—"

"Afterwards—" said Thorpe, and his flabby face took on a lowering look. "But never mind that now. I've got my yacht. We'll take those two out to sea—a long way. They'll never be heard of again. But get going."

And then the three—the suave, still-smiling solicitor, the sly and treacherous Greta, and the bullying, surly Sam, quitted the house on each other's heels.

What ruthless scoundrels these enemies of Pam and Jenny are! Don't miss the dramatic developments in next Friday's chapters. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL right away.



POPPY BINKS COUNTESS

By MAY STEVENS

POPPY MAKES FRESH PLANS

POPPY BINKS was terribly excited. It was her birthday on the morrow, and she had fixed up a really super party to celebrate.

Once a factory girl herself, Poppy had not forgotten her old friends, and she had planned something that would ensure a good time being had by all!

The castle lawns were gay with fairy lights and bunting. There was a coconut-shy, an Aunt Sally, a greasy pole, and an ankle competition.

"We'll have a marvellous time," Poppy told Herbert, the footman, as together they looked around the arrangements made. Then a little frown crossed her brow. "When is her ladyship expected, Herbert?" she asked, for the dowager countess, Poppy's aunt, who was rather stiff and starchy, had been away for several days, and it was during her absence that Poppy had fixed up the party.

Herbert was just about to reply when a silvery toot from a motor horn made him turn. It was the dowager's car, and the toot had been the signal for the castle gates to be opened by the lodgekeeper.

Happily—but with a little doubt in her eyes—Poppy ran to meet her aunt.

"What—what on earth is all this—this pantomime?" the dowager asked before Poppy had time to speak, and she cast a withering look over the gaily decorated lawns.

"It's a party, aunt—my birthday party," Poppy said, her eyes brimming with fun.

"Poppy!" The dowager was scandalised. "I had already arranged a party for your birthday to-morrow. That is why I returned early."

"Oh, aunt!" In sheer delight, Poppy hugged her.

"But not such a party," went on the dowager. "Your guests will not enjoy such—such—er—frolics—"

"But, aunt"—Poppy swung her aunt round—"we could have such fun here—such a crowd. All my friends from the factory. My aunts, my cousins—"

The Dowager Lady Sarfield did not give a skip of joy and clap her hands. She stiffened.

"What! Factory girls—your relations? Certainly not, Poppy! I have already issued the invitations. Only the most select people are coming. It will be a dignified party. Factory girls! Impossible!"

There was no hint of uncertainty in the dowager's tone. She meant what she said, and there was to be no shilly-shallying or changing her mind at the last minute!

So that meant Poppy's party was off!

In vain Poppy protested. She took the dowager to see the coconut-shy and the other sideshows. But that did not help the matter. Quite the contrary! For the dowager only became fiercer and more determined than ever.

"The tents will be taken down. You must cancel your invitations, Poppy. How many times have I told you not to take steps of this kind without consulting me, Poppy? You

will have a party to-morrow, a quiet, sedate party, and you will enjoy it—"

Poppy's face was pale.

"Enjoy it, or know the reason why, eh, aunt?" she said, half to herself. "Well, that isn't the kind of party I like; besides—"

But the dowager had turned aside.

Poppy might be the nominal mistress of the castle, but the dowager still held the power! And if she said that Poppy's party was "off," then "off" it was, unless—

But Poppy Binks was a girl not easily defeated. And, besides, she did not let her friends down. Although she had intended to keep things dark until the last possible moment, she had already issued one or two invitations, and she knew that her friends were looking forward to the fun.

Besides, there were her relations! They had been invited, and they were not going to be disappointed just because of the dowager!

"It's my birthday," Poppy told herself, "and it's my party—and I'm going to have it as I like it."

Despite The Dowager's Stodgy Plans, Poppy Meant Her Birthday Party To Be A Success

But the Dowager Countess of Sarfield was already giving instructions to dismantle the shies, the booths, and the tents. And her orders, as usual, were obeyed!

POPPY BINKS was not usually easily persuaded to do as the Dowager Lady Sarfield required. In fact, the dowager regarded Poppy as obstinate—stubborn as a mule.

But, oddly enough, Poppy seemed to be taking the banning of her party very quietly.

In fact, when Poppy entered the dowager's room half an hour after their little argument in the castle grounds she was looking particularly meek.

That alone ought to have put the dowager on her guard. But she was a little too ready to believe in the power of her own authority to suspect Poppy's meekness.

"So you quite understand that we have the dignity of our position to consider, Poppy?" she asked.

"Yes, aunt," said Poppy meekly. "We want only the best people. Nothing less than an admiral or a knight."

"The rank does not necessarily matter," explained the dowager, "so long as the family is good. I would like to see you making friends in the right circles, Poppy."

Poppy Binks' eyes glimmered. She was not

just giving in, as the dowager seemed to think, she had an idea in her mind.

"Quite," she said. "But look here, aunt. I can't see why I shouldn't invite my own friends amongst the nobs—"

"The—the what?" asked the dowager, startled.

"Nibs, nobs, nuts," said Poppy, with a grin. The dowager frowned heavily.

"There is no need to be facetious, Poppy."

"Me? Facetious, aunt? Goodness, no!" said Poppy. "But what I mean is I'd like to get someone extra snappy at the party—you know, make it a real social success. A famous film actress, or some foreign princess, or something—"

Poppy was just putting out feelers, very gently.

"A famous film actress," said the dowager, thinking it over. "Well, I see no objection to that, but the difficulty is issuing the invitation and getting it accepted. As to a foreign princess—how many do you know?"

"There's the Princess Patzia," said Poppy. "I don't suppose she'd condescend to visit a place like this, though," she added artfully.

The dowager had never heard of that princess, but she swallowed the bait whole.

"Not come here?" she said indignantly. "What nonsense! This is one of the most famous homes of England. Kings have stayed here—princes, presidents. Good gracious, the Princess Patchy—"

"Patzia," said Poppy. "You've heard of her, I suppose, aunt?"

Poppy knew the dowager! She was a woman who had to know everything, and did not like being told.

"Of course I have heard of the Princess Patzia," she said, with asperity.

"Then we'll ask her," said Poppy.

The fact that there was no Princess Patzia, and that she had just made up the name, was a trifling detail, of course.

"By all means, if you happen to know her," said the dowager. "Better a princess than a factory girl, and I hope you realise that your factory girl friends, although, no doubt, very charming, and good-hearted, would feel embarrassed at being asked to meet Royalty."

"That's so," assented Poppy, and looked towards the door.

It was about time that an interruption came in the form of Herbert the footman, with a message that she was wanted on the telephone.

For Poppy had asked her friend Lil to telephone her.

Lil was punctual. There was a knock on the door, and Herbert looked in.

"A telephone message for your ladyship," he said to Poppy.

"For me?" said Poppy. "Oh, who is it?"

The footman braced himself for an important announcement.

"Her Highness the Princess Patzia."

Poppy leaped from her chair and clapped her hands.

"The princess, aunt. What do you think of that?"

The dowager tried not to show surprise, but Poppy, taking a look at her face, chuckled as she hurried from the room, to take the call at the telephone in the hall.

"Hallo, princess!" she said.

"Hallo!" came Lil's voice. "What's the idea of me being a princess, Poppy?"

"So nice of you to telephone," said Poppy, knowing that the dowager was at the head of the stairs casually strolling about, but with her ears pricked up.

"It's my birthday to-morrow. I'm having a party, and I'd like you to come—"

"I know that, silly," said Lil's surprised voice.

Poppy's answer surprised her even more.

"Oh, princess, how glad I am!" she said, in chirping tones. "Then you really will come to my little party—yes, yes, bring the baroness by all means, yes! Just a minute—"

Poppy turned, and called upstairs to the dowager.

"Aunt—aunt, can Prince Axel come, too?"

"Prince Axel? Certainly, certainly," said the dowager.

"Yes, bring Prince Axel, do," said Poppy.

"Prince Axel—back or front axle?" asked Lil.

"What are you babbling about, Poppy? Or is this a joke?"

"Yes, princess."

"Oh, and I'm a princess?" asked Lil.

"Yes, it's a very select party, very select," said Poppy. "We've decided that everyone who comes must have a title—"

A giggle came from Lil.

"Oh—right! I get you—and old Fred, too? What's he got to be? Grand duke?"

"Yes, fine," said Poppy, with a chuckle, and called back to the dowager: "And the grand duke, too, aunt?" she asked. "The princess thinks it would be rude to leave him. They usually sort of run around in a gang, these foreigners, you know—"

The dowager did not hesitate. She was a competitive hostess, and liked to have guests who did not appear at her rivals' parties. The prince, the princess, the baroness, and the grand duke would be acquisitions.

"Of course, of course!" she said.

Poppy hooked up the receiver. She could have a more detailed talk with Lil later, and decide just what rank and status other guests were to have.

"Oh aunt, just think—a princess!" she said.

The dowager smiled.

"I am glad you are at last coming to realise who are the right people to cultivate. I am a little surprised that the princess accepted the invitation so readily. However, I cannot pretend that I am not glad."

Poppy looked glad, too, and the dowager was so pleased to see it that she did not bother to inquire any more closely into the princess' antecedents and particulars.

Besides, she did not wish to seem at all excited that a princess was coming to the party. She liked to treat it as a very normal happening.

Nevertheless, she rang up Mrs. Martelbury-Gillwake to tell her, and, of course, she, too, pretended to know all about the princess.

"You remember, Laura," she said to the dowager. "That is surely the princess who arrived with an amazing entourage, and was so extraordinarily wealthy?"

"Of course," said the dowager.

It was quite another princess, but she did not remember that, and didn't care to take the risk of correcting someone who might know.

Whoever she was, she would make the party a roaring success, and, as the dowager saw things, would be a very good friend for Poppy Binks.

So far, so good. But, as Poppy knew, there was many a slip between the cup and the lip.

The dowager was, so far, very amiable and well pleased; but if things went wrong there might be another story.

"They haven't got to go wrong, that's all," mused Poppy. "And we've got to end with a real rousing party."

Just to make quite sure, Poppy got into touch with Freddie Clitheroe, her cousin, and always a friend in need. If Freddie pretended

to know the princess, it might carry some weight.

It did; for Freddie, when in London, moved among the Young Things, and knew most people in the limelight.

Freddie duly telephoned the dowager to ask if she had a five-pound note that she just couldn't think what to do with, as he knew what to do with one, but hadn't got it!

Then the dowager mentioned the party and the princess.

"Not old Patzia?" said Freddie. "Well, well. Shockingly uppish. Goes very few places, aunt. How did you manage to rope her in at Sarfield?"

That settled it. All the dowager's doubts were dispelled, and Poppy, hearing the good news, went about the place skipping, and then became very busy indeed.

She had to arrange a smart frock for Lil, and someone to act as the baroness. Then there were odd titles to choose for members of her family who would be arriving.

She fixed everything beautifully. True, there was a snag, but she hadn't thought of that, so it didn't worry her.

THROWN OUT OF THE CASTLE

"LORD WARDLEUPPE!"

Thus Herbert the footman, as a stout figure swept into the hall of Sarfield Castle.

Poppy Binks, leaning out of her window, just finishing her dressing, had seen the ancient car arrive. She had heard it first, for it was a very ancient car, bought by her Uncle Alfred for five pounds.

And it was Uncle Alfred who was arriving as Lord Wardleuppe.

Uncle Alfred was a fishmonger by trade, but he had decided against wearing a straw hat at the party, and had a grey bowler hat with a curly brim.

The man next door to Uncle Alfred was a waiter when he was anything, and so owned a dress suit. For a mere five shillings, he had hired it to Uncle Alfred for the evening, and, in spite of differences in height and build, the fit was quite good, here and there.

"Lord Wardleuppe," said the footman, looking across at a man in black coat and striped trousers.

"Wotcher," said his lordship, looking at the man, and, under his breath to the footman: "Oo is 'e? One of the nibs?"

"That, my lord," said Herbert, "is the detective."

"Wot? Oo'er?" said Lord Wardleuppe, with a nasty jolt. "Detective—"

The detective strolled across.

"You are Lord Wardleuppe?" he asked.

"That's right, me," said Uncle Alfred, with not overmuch confidence.

The detective was a man with a piercing, glittering eye. He was employed at the castle whenever there was a social gathering, in order to prevent gate-crashing.

"I see. Your lordship's name has been omitted from the book," said the detective, tapping a little book he carried, wherein the names and a brief description of the personal appearance of all the members of the nobility were arranged for easy reference.

"What of it?" said Lord Wardleuppe truculently. "Oo wants to be in a book like that, anyway? The cover's torn."

The detective stiffened his back. Then he eyed Uncle Alfred's dress suit, which could be seen below the overcoat.

"You'd better scram," he said, "and as quick as you like, my man!"

Poppy Binks, leaning out of the window, heard sounds of argument.

"Jones," she said to her maid, "for goodness' sake skip down and ask what the row is—"

Jones the maid left what she was doing and skipped down, but before she reached the bottom of the stairs, Uncle Alfred reached the bottom of the steps. Two strongly built men had come from nowhere, and in skilled manner just pitched him out of the castle.

Poppy saw him sprawling on his back.

Slam! went the door.

"Uncle!" cried Poppy. "Uncle!"

Uncle Alfred scrambled up, charged the door, and fell back, shaking his fist. Then he glared up at Poppy.

"Making a joke of me, eh?" he said in fury. "I've bin chucked out—me—chucked out—"

"But why?" asked Poppy. "What happened? I'll have you chucked in—I mean, taken in—"

"I've bin taken in," said Uncle Alfred, in shaken rage. "Nice way to treat an uncle, I don't think! You put me up to it—told me



The princess slapped the dowager on the back, then produced an orange. "Take it," she invited. "It will do you good." Poppy chuckled. What a row there would be if her aunt ever discovered who the princess really was!

to say I was Lord Wardleuppe—and they say I ain't! All right, what of it—"

Poppy called to him earnestly and in entreaty, deeply upset. She was very fond of Uncle Alfred, and she knew his hot temper.

"Wait—I'll explain—"

Poppy ran across the room, struggling into a dressing-gown, and opened the door. At the same moment the maid Jones arrived and they collided.

Poppy lurched back, and fell with a thud, and before she could struggle to her feet she heard the sound of Uncle Alfred's car in motion again.

She reached the window just in time to see him driving off.

"Stop—come back!"

Poppy, still in her dressing-gown, went hurrying out on to the landing, but the dowager did the same thing, and stopped her.

"Where are you going, Poppy?"

"Something's happening downstairs," said Poppy, thinking that she could not explain in a moment just what had happened.

"Merely a gate-crasher being flung out," said the dowager. "Somebody tried inventing a title. They do not realise that we have cheek in every way. Anyone else will be treated similarly—"

Poppy, completely dashed, could not reply. But she thought of her other relations, and the welcome that awaited them, and her heart sank. A nice way for her relations to be received! They would think it was just a joke; that she was fooling them, tricking them!

No; Poppy wasn't going to have her relations treated in this way!

She hadn't expected Uncle Alfred as early as this. He was the only one she had not been able to tell to arrive later than she had at first said.

"All right, aunt," she said, and turned aside, thinking hard.

One of the castle cars could catch Uncle Alfred easily enough in his old creak, and she could explain to him.

But what of the others? She had to make quite sure that they were not chucked out.

Poppy had planned what to do with them, provided they did the right thing—the thing the factory girls had been asked to do.

So, finishing her dressing in record time, and asking for a car to be at the door, Poppy hurried out.

Uncle Alfred's car was easily overhauled about three miles from the castle, and Poppy discussed the matter with him.

"All right," said Uncle Alfred at the end of it. "If it's going to be a real party, I'm on, Poppy, me gal. And I don't care if the dowager ain't there or any footmen, believe me. But just give me ten minutes with that detective and his book, and I'll make him eat it, starting off with the dukes as hors d'oeuvres, and finishing off with a few common sirs as the cigars and nuts!"

"Well, we'll see about that!" soothed Poppy. "Anyway, come back and do what I've told you."

Mollified, Uncle Alfred said that he would. But Poppy Binks, when she returned to the castle, was not so easy in her mind!

Suppose Lil failed—suppose the whole party were a gigantic failure, after all?

THE PARTY MUST NOT FAIL

POPPY'S birthday had so far gone well; she had had some wonderful pearls from the dowager, a fountain-pen from Freddie, and presents from a few other friends and relations.

Most of the day had been spent in preparations for the party. It was a beautiful spring evening, and if things went as Poppy had planned, there would still be time for an open-air party and dancing on the lawn.

If things went as she planned!

One thing, at least, had gone according to plan. Cousin Bert, the milkman, was on the scene. A manager now, instead of a roundsman, thanks to Poppy's aid, Bert was doing some managing. His job was to waylay the

arriving relations, and do as Poppy had explained to him. And Bert could be trusted.

It was at a quarter to seven that Lil arrived.

A magnificent car, hired specially for the occasion, swept up the drive, and the footman, swinging wide the doors, took one look at Lil and guessed the answer.

Poppy managed to be descending the staircase at the time, and she galloped forward. The Princess Patzia and the baroness had arrived.

Lil's face was slightly—very slightly—tinted, and her hair was drawn back and skilfully dressed. Some priceless-looking ear-rings dangled effectively, and, with a cloak draped about her, she looked a million dollars, at least.

The baroness—a forewoman at the factory most of the week—seemed a little nervous, but, like Lil, she was a member of the amateur dramatic society.

"The Princess Patzia," she said to the footman, "and the Baroness Zumtahir."

Poppy greeted her with outstretched hands. "Ah, princess! How glad I am that you should come—"

"Ahahah!" said Lil, with a sweeping gesture at the castle. "An old English baronial hall. Ahaha! It is good, yes?"

The dowager came into view and looked the princess over. She seemed real enough.

"Charming!" said the dowager. "No wonder I have heard so much about you, princess," she added.

"Of you, also," said Lil, with a gay little laugh.

"Now, now!" said Poppy, and prodded her in the ribs.

The dowager recoiled.

"Poppy!" she exclaimed, in rebuke.

"Ouch!" said the princess, and prodded Poppy back. "The English ways—so free! I like them, me," she said to the dowager.

"It is not usual, nevertheless, to prod the guests, I assure you," said the dowager.

"Well, well, ze cheer up to you!" said the princess merrily, and slapped the dowager on the back. Then she produced an orange from a brown-paper bag she carried. "Take it," she said. "It will do you good!"

The dowager was badly taken aback, and blinked. The princess had odd ideas about English customs.

"The princess is a real sport, aunt," said Poppy. "The life and soul of London parties. Ask Freddie. Wherever she is things go with a zip."

"My father, the King, say so," nodded Lil. "Always fun wiz me. The romp, that is me! The romp!"

"Be calm, princess," said the baroness, frowning.

Other guests were arriving, and the dowager had to leave the princess to attend to them. There were Admiral Wough, Sir Digby Walmsley—pronounced Wunisy—and soon half a dozen other famous and exalted personages.

They found the princess charming.

"Many, many happy returns to Lady Sarfield—Poppy!" said the princess. "Ze factory girl countess, yes?"

"H'm—er—yes," said the dowager. "But—er—Poppy is—er—no longer a factory girl."

Poppy nudged Lil. This little scene had been rehearsed.

"What, no longer factory girl? She shun her old friends?" asked the princess. "Ah, it is bad!"

And she scowled at Poppy and at the dowager.

Poppy lowered her eyes.

"I—I am a lady now," she faltered. "I—I—you see, it would not be nice to know the factory girls."

"Wha-a-t?" cried the princess. "So? You shun the ladder by which you climb? It is bad! Oh, I am ashamed! My cheeks burn. It is bad. So un-English—"

The other guests looked a little embarrassed and the dowager was wriggling.

"Poppy is—er—not ashamed of her former friends," she said.

"Oh, of course not," said Poppy.

The princess brightened.

"And zey will come, too? Ah, how glad I am! And you have brothers, sisters?"

"My aunt doesn't like them," said Poppy.

"I?" said the dowager hotly. "I like them very much. I am only too sorry they cannot come."

"Hear, hear!" said Sir Digby.

And Freddie Clitheroe, who had arrived at that moment and shook hands with the princess, warmly agreed, too.

"Well, why not send for them now?" said Freddie.

The dowager made rapid calculations. Poppy's relations lived a good distance away.

"Yes, yes; I will send cars for them," she said eagerly.

The princess clapped her hands.

"How glad I am!" sighed the princess. "We must wait for them until they come before we eat—"

Poppy chuckled softly to herself, and then looked startled.

"But suppose they are not here? Let us give them twenty minutes. How's that, aunt? If they're not here in twenty minutes—"

The dowager heaved a sigh of relief.

"Very well. If they are not here within twenty minutes we sit down to dinner. Splendid! I hope they will come!" she said, with tremendous fervour, that deceived no one but the princess, apparently.

"Ah, a good, kind woman!" said the princess, kissing her impulsively. "You hope they will come?"

Poppy jumped to action.

"I can get them here in twenty minutes."

She rushed to the telephone, and rushed back. Five minutes passed—ten minutes. And then there came peeling at the bell, and much commotion.

Herbert swung wide the door, and then into the castle streamed the guests. The dowager heard them, and appeared with some of her friends.

"Oh!" she gasped. "An invasion! Good gracious!"

"Wotcher, Poppy!" shouted a voice—Uncle Alf's.

"Many happy returns—"

"Good old Poppy!"

Poppy's relations—a dozen of them—factory girls and fellows—another dozen—they swarmed in in their best clothes, with radiant faces, and bearing gifts.

"Bit of a rush, but we did it!" said Aunt Flossie, a fat, cheery woman, looking at the dowager. "And who's that, Poppy?"

Poppy made introductions, and the princess came on the scene, delighted, hugging and kissing, and receiving secret congratulations from the other factory girls.

"Now for a real English family party, yes?" said the princess. "And all of us, we owe it to the Dowager Lady Sarfield—she invite you all. She do not think you could come in twenty minutes, but you do. Hurrah!"

And from the guests arose wild cheers. Hurrah! They had certainly done it.

The dowager swallowed hard, tightening her lips, and making the best of a bad job. But the princess was right. It proved to be a real family party. Poppy Binks was in her element. She soon made the stiff and starchy guests less starchy, and before long everyone was hobnobbing with everyone else, and Uncle Alfred forgot about the detective!

Unfortunately, the princess had an urgent telephone call, to say that the Prince Axel was ill. She returned later, when the party had moved on to the lawn, and took part in the fun as herself.

Poppy herself won the ankle competition, with Sir Digby as judge, and the dowager won the best-dressed hair competition.

Uncle Alf won most prizes at the Aunt Sally, with Freddie Clitheroe a close second, and the evening ended with dancing on the lawn by fairy lights.

It was not the kind of party that the dowager had planned, but even her own carefully selected guests enjoyed it, and Poppy's family and guests really let themselves go and had the time of their lives.

"The happiest birthday of my life!" sighed Poppy, at the end of it.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

You mustn't miss next Friday's mirthful story of Poppy Binks if you want a good laugh. Make sure of reading it by ordering your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.

A pulp magazine illustration. On the left, a large tiger with its mouth open, showing its teeth, is lunging forward. In the center, a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a light-colored shirt, is holding a long-barreled rifle, aiming it towards the tiger. To the right, a woman with blonde, wavy hair is looking up with a shocked expression, her hands near her face. The background shows a dense jungle with trees and a mountain range in the distance. The artist's signature 'PAUL STAHR' is visible in the bottom left corner.

UFIKUS SCAN

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