

THE SCHOOLGIRL SPEED STAR— One of the 6 Exciting
Stories Inside.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{2^D} WEEKLY



**"WEAR THIS —
THEN NO ONE
WILL SUSPECT!"**

*Read how Princess
Yasmin helped
Stella to disguise
herself as an Eastern
girl. Their adventures
in a strange
desert palace will
enthrall you.*



Penelope's Page

full benefit of the colour in the pictures, and she was wearing a red skirt with a green jersey.)

Next it was your Penelope's turn to have her picture taken. We stopped at a little cottage for tea—rather early and had it out of doors. There were big coloured sunshades over the tables, so we thought this would make a good colour-snap.

So your Penelope smoothed her bright blue frock, adjusted her yellow scarf, and stuck out her brown walking shoes. Seating myself in a green deckchair, beneath the red and white umbrella and beside a table laid with pink crockery—there was certainly no lack of colour.

Click—that was snap number three.

There are only six on the spool, so Nora and I decided we really ought to take the others quickly, for we were dying to see the results.

As it happened a crowd of horses and riders came by, and made a colourful picture, so we snapped them. (What a pity we hadn't run into a colourful hunt!)

Two to go, so we persuaded the buxom country woman who had provided us with tea to pose outside her cottage.

One more. This we didn't take ourselves. We stood ourselves by the flowerbeds that trimmed the little country station where we waited for our train back, and asked the porter to snap us both—which he did.

All gone. You can imagine how I rushed them off to the chemist—only to learn to my horror that they would take at least a week to develop, for these colour-snaps have to be sent away to the firm that specialises in them. That was over a week ago—and at last I have the colour pictures.

Now I must tell you the truth—just in case you should try out the idea sometime and be disappointed.

You do not receive coloured "prints" or snaps. What you receive are coloured transparencies—rather like the negatives you receive as a rule.

But the colours were really so beautiful that I wasn't disappointed after the first flash of surprise.

Each "transparency" was mounted in a little frame. You hold it up to the light—and are really thrilled at the beautiful picture it makes.

Two of the snaps, I'm ashamed to say, weren't very good—two that I had taken. The one of Nora seated on the gate and the one of the horses. All the others were ripping. I just adore showing them to people, and they're always absolutely thrilled with them.

It really is amazing the extra "life" that colour gives to a picture.

I'm going to save up and buy another colour-

film very soon. Then Nora and I are going to Whipsnade Zoo one Saturday and take pictures of the animals. You can imagine how the vivid parrots (those real toffee parrots, that are all colours) will come out. The zebras, the elephants with their red covers, and the tigers will also lend themselves beautifully to colour-photography—don't you agree?

Goodness, what a lot I have written about myself and my colour-snaps. You'll be wondering when I'm going to tell you about how to make the picture: here.

TOYS FOR THE TODDLER

This cuddly cat and elephant are two toys you clever ones could very easily make for a younger brother or sister.

The puss you can make from an old black stocking. Cut the stocking to shape first, and then stitch it around, leaving an opening so that you can stuff it.

Use any odds and ends of material for the stuffing, and use plenty to make the puss nice and plump.

Then stitch up the opening you have left. Sew a bow of ribbon at his neck, and mark the whiskers with strands of wool—black or white. A tiny piece of cord, or thick carpet wool makes the tail.

The elephant is made in just the same way. A piece of thick grey woollen material would be best for this. With an eye on the picture here I'm sure you could sketch the elephant's outline first on to paper, and then, using this as pattern, you can cut the animal from the material.

Stitch and stuff as before. Sew two boot buttons on for the eyes—mark the legs and ears with plain stitches. Use a piece of thick wool for the tail, and sew on a piece of ribbon, braid, or tape, for the saddle.

Here's a little story that will amuse you.

It was little Tommy's first day at a new school. He was very good all the morning, but he would keep sniffing.

"Have you a handkerchief, Tommy?" asked his teacher at last.

"Yes, teacher," said Tommy promptly. "But mother doesn't like me to lend it to anybody!"

Cheers till next week!
Your own,

PENELOPE

HALLO, EVERYBODY!—This is your Penelope feeling quite excited—and now I'll tell you why.

I expect you've read about colour-snaps, haven't you? Advertisements have appeared in several newspapers, telling the reader that colour snaps can now be taken with any ordinary camera.

"Goody," thought your Penelope. "I'll be reckless and buy one of those films and try it out in my old camera."

I confess I was rather dismayed when I heard the price of them—but still! I couldn't let myself down before the chemist, now could I? So I paid out the money, and at the same time resolved to give up my next half-dozen whipped cream walnuts. (Which you know I adore, as long as they are the plain chocolate ones.)

Following the instructions very carefully, I inserted the "colour-film" and then looked around for brightly-hued things to snap.

First I took a picture of my handsome black cat, Mister Sin. I posed him on his orange cushion, and placed this on the veranda outside the window of my little flat.

The background of chrysanthemums would be jolly effective, I decided.

Click! Bang went one snap—and two whipped cream walnuts at the very least.

Because of the expense I vowed not to waste the rest of the pictures, just snapping at random. I tend to do this, as a rule, you know, because I'm always so anxious to see how they come out—the big baby!

Patiently I waited until the week-end, when I went for a long walk with my friend Nora.

It was a lovely sunny day, and I took one of her sitting on a gate with the blue sky and trees behind her. (I had already told Nora to wear something colourful—so that we could get the



SCAMP, THE SCOTTIE





The MYSTERY OF HOLLYHOCK COTTAGE

A Thrilling
Story of Noel
Raymond,
Detective.

By
PETER
LANGLEY

MICKEY WILSON'S KNIGHT

NOEL Raymond slipped from his sports two-seater and beamed boyishly at the little old-world cottage.

"Topping!" he enthused. "That shed will hold the old car. Noel, my lad," he told himself decidedly, "the idea of hunting fish instead of the elusive criminal is good—definitely!"

Cheerily the young detective hauled his suit-cases and fishing-rods from the car, pushed open the low wooden gate, and marched up the mossy path towards the ivy-fringed front door of Hollyhock Cottage.

A fishing holiday in this very remote spot in South Wales—four miles from the nearest village, and no other dwelling within a mile—was a change Noel had keenly looked forward to.

"Jove, it's quiet," he murmured, appreciatively sniffing the fresh, after-rain air.

The key he had collected from the agents on the way down, he inserted it now into the lock and entered the little hall, with its low, oak-beamed ceiling. "And now," he added cheerily, gazing about him, "for some tea—providing Mrs. Wilson has got some in for me!"

He dropped his cases, and then paused, gazing towards the narrow staircase in some amazement.

"Noel, you're hearing things!" he decided.

But no. As he listened intently, to his ears came once more the sound that had arrested his attention. Someone on the floor above—was softly crying.

"Now what on earth—" murmured Noel. There certainly should not be any one else in the cottage. The agent had told Noel that a Mrs. Wilson would clear up for him in the mornings, and order any food he required. But, as the young detective intended doing his own cooking, Mrs. Wilson would have returned to the village by now.

Intrigued, he mounted the staircase. The old wood gave forth a series of sharp, explosive cracks. Instantly the soft sobbing ceased. Then a young, rather timid voice called tremulously:

"Who—who's there?"

The staircase curved sharply, and at the turn Noel paused, seeing a tiny landing in front of him, on which, by the head of the stairs, stood

a large wooden chest. And on the floor beside the chest—

Noel's surprise increased.

A girl of about thirteen—though she was small for her age—sat there. One hand held a handkerchief up to big brown eyes—now moist with tears—and a mass of dark hair framed a very attractive little face.

Her gaze was wide and doubtful as she eyed Noel.

"Ha-hallo," she gulped.

"Good afternoon," returned Noel gravely. "Do you mind if I join you? There doesn't seem to be any chairs."

He sat on the top of the staircase conscious of the girl's rather wondering, perhaps rather fearful gaze, and then smiled at her—a very boyish smile.

"Well, here we are," he said cheerily. "First of all I'm not a burglar, or an ogre. Simply, I'm the tenant, just a spot surprised to find I have a visitor who seems a little sad."

His smile was tremulously answered, and the girl suddenly flushed.

"You—you must think I'm awful," she faltered shyly. "I'm—my name is Mickey Wilson, and—as my mother wasn't very well this morning I came along to make your bed, sir—" she hesitated.

"Noel," said the young detective chummily. "Sir Noel?" and her eyes widened tremendously. "Oh, are—are you a knight?" she breathed. "I—I thought—"

Noel chuckled, and noted with approval that

Little Mickey Wilson was dismayed when she saw the sheets in the oak chest. They were covered with mud and grass. But why should anyone want to deliberately spoil her mother's washing? Noel was as eager as Mickey to answer that question, for he knew that that spiteful act was the key to an amazing mystery.

the tears were far away from the piquant little face now.

"No, Mickey," he smiled. "I meant that you should call me Noel, but—" and he threw out one hand grandly—"Sir Noel it shall be, Lady Mickey. After all, I find you in distress, and a good knight should come to the rescue. Now," he added gently, his expression encouraging, "what's it all about?"

Her eyes, beginning to sparkle in fun, abruptly clouded, and Noel saw with some concern the trembling underlip.

"I'm afraid you—you're going to be very cross," she faltered.

"Cross?" echoed Noel, puzzled and vastly intrigued. "Why should I be cross?"

She hesitated. With her big eyes fixed anxiously on Noel's face, she slowly raised the lid of the big chest beside her.

"This is the linen-chest," she explained haltingly, "and—the sheets—they're—" she half sobbed—"They're ruined again—"

Noel craned forward. His eyebrows raised in wonder as he looked at the untidy pile of sheets crammed carelessly into the chest. They weren't only untidy; there were great splashes of mud all over them. In fact they gave the impression that someone had purposely dragged them over damp earth.

"H'm, they are pretty grimy," murmured Noel. "But," and his look was inquiring, "are you supposed to have washed them?"

The girl spread her hands despairingly. "But they were washed!" she burst out. "This is the second time we have found them like this. We—mummy and I—wash them and iron them and put them back here, and—and then we find them like this! Goodness knows how it happens. Mummy's the only person with a key to the cottage."

Noel stared blankly. Here was something very strange.

"Tell me all about it," he suggested quietly. "And believe me I'm not the slightest bit cross—only anxious to come to the rescue."

And so Mickey, much re-assured by Noel's manner, told him.

In the first place the cottage was owned by Mr. Digby Lennox, a wealthy financier who owned a mansion some miles away. The cottage was part of his estate, and Mrs. Wilson, Mickey's mother, was more or less the caretaker. Also part of her duties was to see that everything was in ship-shape order for any tenants of the cottage.

"It was Mrs. Lennox, inspecting the cottage yesterday, who found the sheets dirty—although they had been perfectly clean the day before," explained Mickey. "She was furious with mummy, and said that if she couldn't look after the cottage better she would have to get someone else to do it, and that's what's so worrying, because—because—"

"Because the money is rather necessary?" prompted Noel gently. "You have no father?"

"N-no," faltered Mickey. "And then mummy wasn't very well to-day, and so I came along instead, and—and found the sheets like this again, with no time to get them clean before you came, and I thought that you—"

Noel smiled as she hesitated.

"You thought that I'd be some ferocious old thing who'd bark: 'Disgraceful! Scandalous!' and rush off to complain to the agents or Mrs. Lennox, and to cause trouble for your mother?" She nodded dubiously.

"Well," and Noel rose and gave a majestic bow. "Gadzooks, it is not so, fair Lady Mickey," in tones deep and gruff. "Take my hand and rise. Then, since there seems to be no more rain in the offing—you and I will tackle these sheets together. And for that you shall bestow upon me the Order of the Wash-tub! What-ho, Rise!"

Mickey scrambled up with Noel's helping hand, and stared at him, her eyes suddenly dancing.

"Oh," she breathed. "It is good of you to take it like this. But you don't mean you're going to help wash them?"

"Don't I indeed!" cried Noel. "Just try to rob me of this opportunity to splash with soap. Come now, fair lady, and help me. I'll take this sheet—you have t'other!"

And ten seconds later, with Mickey's laughter ringing out, Noel was following her down the staircase towards the little kitchen.

But beneath his mask of banter, the young detective had serious thoughts. He was intrigued, puzzled.

How had the sheets come to get in this state, not once, but twice? Could it be spite on the part of someone who wanted the job of looking after the cottage? Someone who disliked Mrs. Wilson and wanted to see her dismissed?

While Mickey put on kettles of water, Noel whipped out a small, folding magnifying-glass and examined closely the corner of one of the sheets. "H'm!" he murmured thoughtfully.

"Is that anything, Sir Noel?" asked Mickey eagerly.

"Perhaps, Lady Mickey—Hi, look out!" he exclaimed, springing up. "The kettles! Come on—water's hot! Let's get down to it!"

And they "got down to it"—with such success that half an hour later both sheets, clean once more, were whipping in the fresh breeze from the clothes line in the cottage's rear garden.

"Stout work!" approved Noel, slipping into his coat. "And now, Lady Mickey, what about a spot of tea with your knight?"

Her eyes brightened, but she smilingly shook her dark curls.

"I'd love to, Sir Noel, but—I must get back to mummy."

"Of course. I forgot. But you mustn't worry, either of you, and if you look in to-morrow perhaps—only perhaps—I may have some news for you concerning these sheets."

Mickey's lips parted as she smiled good-night.

Noel set to work to prepare his supper. He had just sat down to eat it when—

Thud!

Noel stiffened.

Something had hit the front door of the cottage.

Noel, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully, walked swiftly from the kitchen, along the hall, and whipped open the front door. Then he paused with a little intake of breath.

At his feet lay a heavy stone; tied to it by string was a folded piece of paper.

Noel scooped it up. So it was the stone which had hit the door.

He whipped the paper free. It was cheap stuff, and bore a message, printed in pencilled block capitals, a message that made Noel's eyes widen as he scanned it.

"PLEASE COME TO THE POND BY THE CROSS-ROADS AND WAIT THERE FOR ME. IT IS MOST TERRIBLY URGENT. PLEASE COME."

There was no signature.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" breathed Noel. "Now, who on earth—Mickey!" he exclaimed, light dawning. "It must be. The kiddie's struck some trouble again."

Noel made a rapid decision.

He locked the cottage, and a minute later was roaring off down the road behind the wheel of his car. He didn't pass a soul on the lonely road, and in the dim light he eventually drew his car to a halt by the grass verge near a small weed-covered pond.

The place was deserted as yet. Noel lit a cigarette and leant back.

The minutes ticked by, and he was still alone. It was very quiet. For fifteen minutes the silence was unbroken, save for the occasional call of a night bird and once when an aeroplane passed high overhead.

Twenty—thirty minutes.

Noel stubbed out his second cigarette.

"Queer," he frowned. "Mickey must have sent that note; couldn't be anyone else, unless—it was a hoax—"

A hoax! Noel experienced a queer sense of shock as he said the word. Supposing it was a hoax—to get him out of the way? But why—

"By Jove!"

The exclamation slipped sharply from Noel's lips, and he moved into action. He switched on the engine, engaged first gear, whirled round the car, and boomed down the road in the direction of Hollyhoek Cottage.

In under five minutes he braked outside the cottage. Leaping out, he pushed open the gate and hurried round the little building to the rear garden.

Although he had half expected it, the sight which met his gaze came as a shock.

"The third time," breathed Noel, in amazement.

The two sheets he and Mickey had washed and hung from the line now lay in a crumpled heap some distance away on the little lawn! The whiteness of the linen was marred by thick streaks of mud, smeared by damp grass.

NOEL AND MICKEY INVESTIGATE

"ONE thing is certain," muttered the young detective, as he strode across the little lawn towards the bedraggled sheets.

And that certainty was that here indeed was a mystery with something big behind it. No one would go to the trouble of luring him out of the way merely to dirty a couple of sheets for spite.

He knelt beside them, reaching once again for his pocket magnifying-glass. But before he could bring it into use—

"Good gracious! Those sheets again! How simply disgraceful—scandalous! Mrs. Wilson must certainly go this time!"

Noel hurriedly rose.

Even as he turned he guessed that the owner of that rather harsh, loud voice must be Mrs. Lennox, wife of the cottage-owner.

And instantly jumped to Noel's mind a picture of Mickey Wilson, sitting with tear-filled eyes beside the linen chest, Mickey telling him that the job of looking after the cottage meant so much to her and her mother.

Then and there Noel made an inward resolve that the activities of the unknown sheet-spoiler should not affect the Wilsons.

"Ah—er—you must be Mr. Raymond?"

Across the little lawn waddled a short, elderly woman, who appeared to be hiding in a huge fur coat rather than wearing it.

Noel instinctively disliked the woman's rather flabby, heavily powdered features, but—

"And I am sure I am addressing Mrs. Digby Lennox," he murmured, smiling and bowing over her outstretched hand. "How charming of you to call."

She smirked.

"Oh, I simply had to!" she gushed. "I do like our tenants to be comfortable. I hope you don't mind me walking round, but I heard you in the garden, and—"

The woman paused, her gaze turning towards the sheets upon the ground, and she moved forward, walking over them in her effusion.

"That dreadful woman, Mrs. Wilson!" she snapped. "How very disgusting! I am so sorry, Mr. Raymond. That woman shall be attended to." She turned and blinked rather short-sightedly back towards the cottage. "Linda—Linda," she called shrilly, "I want you!"

"But, Mrs. Lennox, I assure you," said Noel smoothly, "that I am—"

"Please, Mr. Raymond! That woman has had her chance."

Noel's mouth set a little. But before he

could speak a young girl dressed in well cut tweeds appeared.

"My husband's secretary—Miss Farrell," announced Mrs. Lennox importantly. "She strolled over with me. Now, Linda, I want you to make a note—"

She broke off with something approaching a snort.

Another figure had followed Miss Farrell into the garden, a rather shy little figure, who paused and stared in consternation as she saw Mrs. Lennox, who gave a little cry as the crumpled, dirty sheets came within her range of vision.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Lennox unpleasantly. "Come here, girl! The Wilson woman's daughter," she told Noel contemptuously and unnecessarily. "Now, girl, hurry up when I speak," she added harshly, for Mickey was hesitating, her eyes very tragic and appealingly fixed on Noel.

The young detective, who had already decided the course he was going to take, now took a hand.

"Please, Mrs. Lennox," he said firmly, "you perhaps think that Mrs. Wilson, or her daughter here, is responsible for these dirty sheets?"

"I know it, Mr. Raymond. This has happened before, and now Mrs. Wilson must pay for her carelessness—"

Mickey's hand flew to her mouth.

"Oh!" she choked.

"But, Mrs. Lennox," continued Noel gently, "I'm afraid that I'm the person to blame!"

"You?"

The woman stared at him, her fat chin dropping. A little exclamation came from Mickey, while the secretary, a rather pretty girl, regarded Noel with new interest.

Noel chuckled.

"Yes!" said Noel in a voice that brooked no contradiction. "But allow me," he added politely, "to run you home in my car."

"Thank you—no, Mr. Raymond," the woman replied rather stiffly. "We shall walk. I hope you will be comfortable. Come, Linda."

And Mrs. Lennox, her back expressing disapproval, with an unpleasant stare at Mickey, waddled from the garden, followed silently by Miss Farrell.

Gravely Noel watched them go. But when he heard the garden gate bang, he turned to Mickey, and bestowed upon her a very large wink.

"Oh—oh—it was good of you!" Mickey said, and her little face was alive with gratitude and admiration. "But—but—how—"

Her gaze fell to the sheets. Noel's face became serious instantly.

"Yes, it happened again, Lady Mickey," he said quietly. "Who did it—and why—I don't yet know, but I mean to know! But you, Lady Mickey," he added cheerily, "what brought you back?"

She flushed.

"I thought I'd try to help," she said awkwardly. "Mummy was better, so I've been searching round fields where hay has been to—to see if I could find a clue—"

Noel stared. Jove, the little sport, trying to help him.

"Any luck?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I'm afraid not," she replied rather sadly.

"There are so many fields—"

"Whoa, just a sec," interrupted Noel.

"There's something I might have told you. Look here a minute."

He bent beside the sheets.

"Look there," he instructed. "Here, have this magnifying glass. You'll see them more easily. 'Well?' he asked smiling, as Mickey peered.

She turned a puzzled face to his.

"They're little thorns, aren't they?"

He nodded.

"Yes, Lady Mickey. I saw them first when I was brushing the mud off the sheets in the kitchen. And I happened to recognise them as blackberry thorns. Now, this is where you can help. Is there a field near here where one might find hay, and also plenty of blackberry bushes?"

Mickey thoughtfully chewed her under-lip and then clapped her hands.

"Why, yes—yes!" she cried gleefully.

"Potter's field! That's near here, you know—"

the biggest field for miles, and—and there are lots of blackberry bushes in the hedges—

"Grand!" exclaimed Noel. "Then can you direct me? I'll get along there with a torch straight away—why, what's the matter, young lady?" He broke off, staring at Mickey gave a little disappointed pout.

"Couldn't I come with you?" she asked pleadingly.

Noel smiled.

For a moment he hesitated, and then nodded. For, although this affair was becoming more and more mysterious, he did not see any dangerous side to it—yet!

And so five minutes later Mickey was leading the way along a narrow lane, the beam of Noel's torch dancing on the rough road ahead, for it was now dusk. As they walked, and Mickey chattered brightly, he thought again of that hoax message. Drawing it from his pocket, he flicked the light upon it. But the cheap paper, the writing, gave no clue in themselves.

"Hallo, though!" murmured Noel, pausing, holding the message to his nostrils. "Lady Mickey, there's a faint scent adhering to this paper. You don't by any chance recognise it? You know more people about here than I do, and it's rather an unusual perfume I should say—"

Mickey looked interested. The sniff she gave at the folded piece of paper was appreciative.

"Mm, nice!" she murmured. "Sort of—"

She wrinkled her brow. "You know," she added slowly, "I seem to know this. It's familiar somehow. But where—oh, dear!" she burst out, half angrily. "I'm sure I've smelt it before, but—"

"Don't worry," Noel smiled. "It may not be very important. I have an idea of my own. But if you do remember, let me know, will you?"

She nodded, still wracking her brains.

For a quarter of a mile they followed the lane, and then Mickey paused.

"There!" She pointed. "That's the gate to the field—Potter's field."

Noel's torch moved round, illuminating a very high hedge, thick with the thin branches of wild blackberry. He moved the beam on, shining it on to a barred gate. Stepping forward, he opened it.

"Now, Mickey," he murmured as the gate swung to behind them. "Here is a grass meadow—ah, and over there the remnants of a hay-stack! Good—"

Abruptly he stooped, reaching for a little oblong of cardboard which lay on the grass three or four yards inside the gate.

"Recently dropped," he murmured, half to himself. "See, not stained by damp at all. Jove!" He whistled. "What do these mean?"

The bright beam showed four signs on one side of the cardboard. Drawn neatly in ink, they were made up in each case of two squares. Beneath the first diagram was written: "A.YES." Beneath the second: "B.YES." The third: "C.YES." And beneath the fourth: "TO-NIGHT."

"Let me see, Sir Noel," breathed Mickey, and took the slip of card. "Why, whatever do they mean!" she exclaimed, frowning at the signs. "Do you think—"

"I think," said Noel slowly, "that the person who took the sheets brought them to this field on each occasion, and that to-night, when hurrying out, that person dropped this piece of cardboard."

"But why? Perhaps someone else dropped it. After all, Sir Noel—"

Noel smiled slightly.

"Look, Lady Mickey. Do you see that any one of those signs could be made with two sheets if they were laid upon each other—"

Noel jerked off and whirled, very tense. From somewhere in the darkness of the field behind them had sounded a thud, followed by a rustling in the long, damp grass. His torch beam swivelled—but revealed nothing.

"Wait there," snapped Noel. "Stay by the gate."

He raced across the field, the torch beam dancing before him. As near as possible he estimated the spot whence the thud had come. The grass was very tall. It was just possible that someone might be crouched in hiding there—

Ready for action, Noel reached that spot. But there was nothing—ah, wait! Flattening the grass, lay a piece of broken bough. And if that piece had been thrown from a distance it would have made just such a noise as Noel had heard.

"Sir Noel!"

Faintly Noel heard Mickey's voice in the distance—and then it snapped off abruptly.

Noel jerked round, throwing forward the torch beam. It faintly illuminated the gate, and—Mickey! Mickey lying on the grass!

Noel ran—hard. Something had happened to his little partner.

But a surge of relief ran through him the next moment. For as he raced up, Mickey staggered to her feet—her face a little muddy, her eyes a little wide and startled—but obviously unhurt.

"Mickey," panted Noel. "What happened?"

"I—I hardly know," she answered breathlessly. "I was standing by the gate, and then

"Lady Mickey," he asked suddenly, "tell me—what do you know of Mr. Digby Lennox?"

"Mr. Lennox?" Her voice was puzzled. "Why, he's a very important man! His house—Red Gates—is about a mile away. He has another house in town, but he's down here with some business men. There is a big conference or something—"

"A big conference?" mused Noel. "H'm! And I suppose, Lady Mickey, that Mrs. Lennox would have a key to Hollyhock Cottage?"

"Why, yes; but—"

"No questions now, Lady Mickey!" Noel smiled. "I'm not certain about things myself yet. But to-morrow I'm going to call on Mr. Lennox, and if I learn what I believe I shall learn, then the signs on that piece of cardboard are going to help me clear up the mystery of the sheets. Now, there's the cottage. Come and wash your grubby little face."



"But, Mrs. Lennox," said Noel, "I'm afraid that I am the person to blame." The young detective did not mean little Mickey Wilson to be blamed for the damage to the sheets.

someone leant over, snatched at that piece of cardboard, and gave me a terrific push."

But Noel had leapt lithely over the gate. Up and down the narrow lane he swept the light. He stood still, listening. No sound. Down went the beam to the surface of the lane. But it was hard gravel—and showed no footprints.

He frowned. He knew now that he had been right. That piece of cardboard, with its mysterious signs, was important—vitally so. And now it was gone. Those signs—could he remember them?

Mickey joined him, looking crestfallen and anxious.

"Sir Noel, I—" She paused. "I'm terribly sorry," she burst out rather miserably. "That cardboard was important, wasn't it?"

A smile swept over Noel's face. He patted her shoulder.

"My fault entirely, Lady Mickey," he assured her. "Someone tricked me by throwing a piece of branch into the field, making me leave you unprotected. My fault for being taken in. But somehow I don't think we'll find anything else of value in that field," he finished thoughtfully. "So we'll return to the cottage. You can have a wash there."

As they walked back, Noel was thinking hard.

THE SECRET SIGNALS

BANG, bang, bang!

"Sir Noel—Sir Noel—"

Bang, bang, bang!

Noel came hurrying out of the little kitchen of Hollyhock Cottage.

He had barely finished his breakfast, and, although it was only eight o'clock, here was Mickey Wilson banging on the front door, obviously in a state of excitement.

"Whoa—whoa! Where's the fire, Mickey?" cried Noel cheerily, as he whipped open the door. "By Jove! Is it your birthday or something?"

For young Mickey was nearly dancing on the doorstep with excitement and impatience, her face alive with animation.

"Oh, Sir Noel," she gulped triumphantly, "I've remembered! I've—"

"What, Lady Mickey?"

"That scent on the message!" panted Mickey. "I remembered just when I awoke this morning. It was a week ago when I was shopping. I stood near her in the chemist's. It—it's"—she took a deep breath—"it's Linda Farrell, Mr. Lennox's secretary! There, I told you I'd remember!"

And, her eyes wide with anticipation of his answering excitement, she stared eagerly at the young detective.

Noel nodded slowly.

"I thought it would be," he murmured, half to himself.

"Oh!" Mickey's face fell. "Oh!" she repeated slowly. "Then—then you knew all the time?"

"Eh?" Noel jerked out of his thoughts, and saw her disappointment. "Oh, forgive me, Lady Mickey!" he said swiftly. "You really have done splendidly! Yes; I very strongly suspected Miss Farrell, and now you've brought the final proof."

"But how did you suspect?" she asked wonderingly.

"Well, Lady Mickey," Noel smiled, "in the first place, the person who entered the cottage must have used a key. There were no signs of anyone breaking in. Then who had a key beside your mother and the agents? Only Mrs. Lennox. And, although I don't find Mrs. Lennox a very agreeable person, I could hardly suspect her. Therefore, the secretary was just a possibility. She could easily borrow the key without Mrs. Lennox's knowledge. Agreed?"

"Y-yes, but—"

"And when she called with Mrs. Lennox last night," continued Noel, "I noticed that her shoes and part of her stockings were very damp, while Mrs. Lennox's were not. In fact, it suggested that Miss Farrell had been walking in long, damp grass—the grass of Potter's Field. No doubt, if I had asked, we would have discovered that Mrs. Lennox had met Miss Farrell out walking."

Mickey took a deep breath.

"Then—then she's the one—"

"Who's been damaging the sheets? Yes," Noel nodded. "Last night she came to take them again, found me here, so on the spur of the moment sent the hoax message. It fits in perfectly."

But Mickey was looking utterly bewildered. Noel smiled.

"You want to know why she has done all this—eh?" His face grew a little thoughtful, a little stern. "Well, I can assure you, Mickey, that is isn't because she has a spite against you or your mother. No; there's a far deeper reason, and that's why I'm going off to see Mr. Lennox."

Mickey looked at him rather pleadingly.

"Sir Noel, when will you know what it's all about?"

He hesitated, and, as he looked at her bright face, he decided.

"Now, listen, Mickey! I'll see you about an hour before dusk to-night," he promised, "and then, if everything goes as I think it will, you will be able to see for yourself. O.K.?"

"Oh, rather!"

MR. DIGBY LENNOX was an important man, and a very busy man. It was with some reluctance, therefore, that he conceded Noel Raymond an interview some half-hour later.

Noel came straight to the point.

"The last three days you have spent here with big men in the world of finance," he stated rather than asked. "During that time you have had to decide three very important questions, and in each case the answer has been 'Yes.' Am I correct?"

Digby Lennox started up.

"Are you telling me, sir, that you have been spying upon me and my associates?"

"Hardly," Noel smiled slightly. "If you will hear me out, you will understand. Remember, I am here to help you. Now, may I assume the following points: Firstly, that your secretary, Miss Farrell, was not allowed to be present when these important decisions were made; secondly, that it would benefit quite a few people if your decisions were made public before the right time; thirdly, that Miss Farrell has not been in your employ very long?"

The financier was staring at Noel as if he were slightly hypnotised. He took a deep breath.

"You're right in each case, sir," he said slowly. "How the dickens you know is beyond me. But as you do know—" He paused, and then continued: "Yes, the three decisions had to be kept secret; certain people would do much to learn the answers before we make them public. And Miss Farrell was not present for the simple reason that she has only been

with me for three months. And, although I have found her completely reliable—well, I doubt whether I would have allowed any outside person to know our decisions."

"Nevertheless," said Noel quietly, "Miss Farrell—obviously listening in upon your meetings—has heard your decisions, and passed on the information in a very clever manner."

"What?"

Noel's announcement shook the financier like a blow. He sat rigid for a second, and then, a sudden alarmed light springing into his eyes, he rose and stepped swiftly across to a wall safe. The combination dial moved jerkily under his agitated fingers.

As the safe door swung open at last he whipped out a small drawer, and then sighed with relief. He turned, holding up a thick envelope.

"By gad, that worried me!" he exclaimed. "If these papers got into the same hands as the person who now has the information, it would be the final blow!" He paused, staring at Noel in sudden suspicion. "Young man," he said slowly, "you have startled me, and now I'd like a little proof of your story."

Noel, his eyes fixed very thoughtfully upon that thick envelope, answered:

"You shall have it, Mr. Lennox. And then I shall want your aid in unmasking a very clever plot and a very clever plotter, for I warn you that Miss Farrell will almost certainly attempt to steal those papers as well!"

AN hour before dusk.

In the shade of the tall hedge of Potter's Field, and on the opposite side to where the gate was situated, stood two over-coated figures—Noel Raymond and Mickey Wilson. They were suddenly joined by another

WONDERFUL NEW STORIES COMING SOON

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Details

figure who came striding up. It was Digby Lennox. He frowned inquiringly at Noel as he saw Mickey.

"Miss Wilson is the daughter of the woman who has been blamed for the damage done to the sheets," Noel explained. "She is here, as you, Mr. Lennox, to see the clearing up of that mystery—or so I hope. Now, what has happened?"

Digby Lennox drew a thick envelope from his pocket.

"I have done as you instructed," he replied. "I put the papers back in the safe. Miss Farrell worked in the library alone most of the afternoon for me. After tea I opened the safe again and took out the envelope as you said. Here it is."

Noel took it, and calmly slit it open. He withdrew the contents, and Lennox's eyes bulged.

Just a folded newspaper!

"You see," said Noel quietly. "She has stolen the papers. As I thought, she opened the safe, and substituted this for the real papers. But don't worry. We shall catch her—ah."

Noel stiffened. Through a gap in the high hedge he had a clear view of Potter's Field and the gate opposite in the distance. A figure had just entered through that gate.

"Miss Farrell," said Noel quietly.

They saw Linda Farrell hurry swiftly, with many an anxious glance about her, to the centre of the large field. Then she undid her parcel and shook out the contents.

Mickey gasped.

"They—they're sheets," she breathed.

They watched tensely. They saw the girl lay out one sheet, and then spread the other over the top of it, so that the whole formed a star-shape. Then Linda Farrell stepped back, looking at her watch.

But Mickey's eyes were blazing now.

"That shape," she breathed. "She's made the last sign that was on the piece of cardboard—the sign with the word 'To-night' underneath it."

"Correct, Lady Mickey," Noel nodded. "And doubtless," he added with a grim chuckle, "she's using her own sheets to-night. After to-night it wouldn't matter what was found out."

Lennox stared at him.

"What's it mean? What is she waiting for? Why the sheets—that sign?"

"That last sign," Noel told him, "was the only one I couldn't account for—until you told me about the papers. Incidentally, she must have your papers with her now."

Mickey looked curiously, wonderingly at him. The detective smiled.

"Won't be long now," he told them confidently. "The light's getting bad, and they aren't leave it too late."

Linda Farrell paced up and down.

Suddenly Noel's gaze lifted and raked the darkening sky. Ah, there it was!

A dark speck, rapidly becoming bigger. An aeroplane, flying high above the field. It passed over, and then suddenly banked, and came swooping back, losing altitude rapidly.

The power note from its twin engines sounding thunderously now. Lower—lower, it swooped, down to the field. The landing-wheels touched—bounced, and then the machine came taxi-ing across the grass, stopping exactly beside that sheet-formed, star-shaped sign.

Linda Farrell dashed forward. From her pocket she whipped the papers, triumphantly waved them.

"Got them, Dick!" she cried. "But we'd better get clear—quickly."

From the cockpit swung a man whose features, as he lifted his goggles, strikingly resembled Linda's.

"Grand work!" he exclaimed. "And your other news, too! Gee, won't old Lennox be mad when we get into the market first—"

"But I'm afraid you won't, eh—Mr. Farrell. I imagine," cut in a cool voice. "Ah, yes," murmured Noel, an automatic pistol steady in his hand. "You are remarkably alike. Brother and sister—yes?"

Shocked, tongue-tied, the two conspirators turned as one.

Noel had raced up in the gathering darkness. Lennox behind him, with Mickey, wide-eyed in wonder and excitement, a little to the rear.

The surprise was complete.

"Undoubtedly this is the gentleman who has been using your business decisions to great advantage, Mr. Lennox," said Noel, looking at the stunned pilot. "I think they had both better accompany us to the village police station—on a charge of robbery."

"I T was quite simple, Lady Mickey. By means of the sheets, Miss Farrell was able to signal the answers to those three very important business questions to her brother passing in a plane overhead. I remember one passed last night when I was lured out of the way by the hoax message. Doubtless if the answers had been 'no' there would have been no signal."

Noel smiled down into the wide eyes of the girl walking beside him.

They had left Linda Farrell and her brother in the police station, where Digby Lennox was formally making a charge against them.

"It—it's amazing," breathed Mickey. "That explains that piece of cardboard with the signs on which you found!"

"Yes. We knew Miss Farrell was using the sheets to make signs. Then we knew that Mr. Lennox was taking part in a big business conference. The whole riddle began to fit together. But I had to trap them to-night in the act of getting away with stolen papers—otherwise it would have been difficult to prove any direct charge against them."

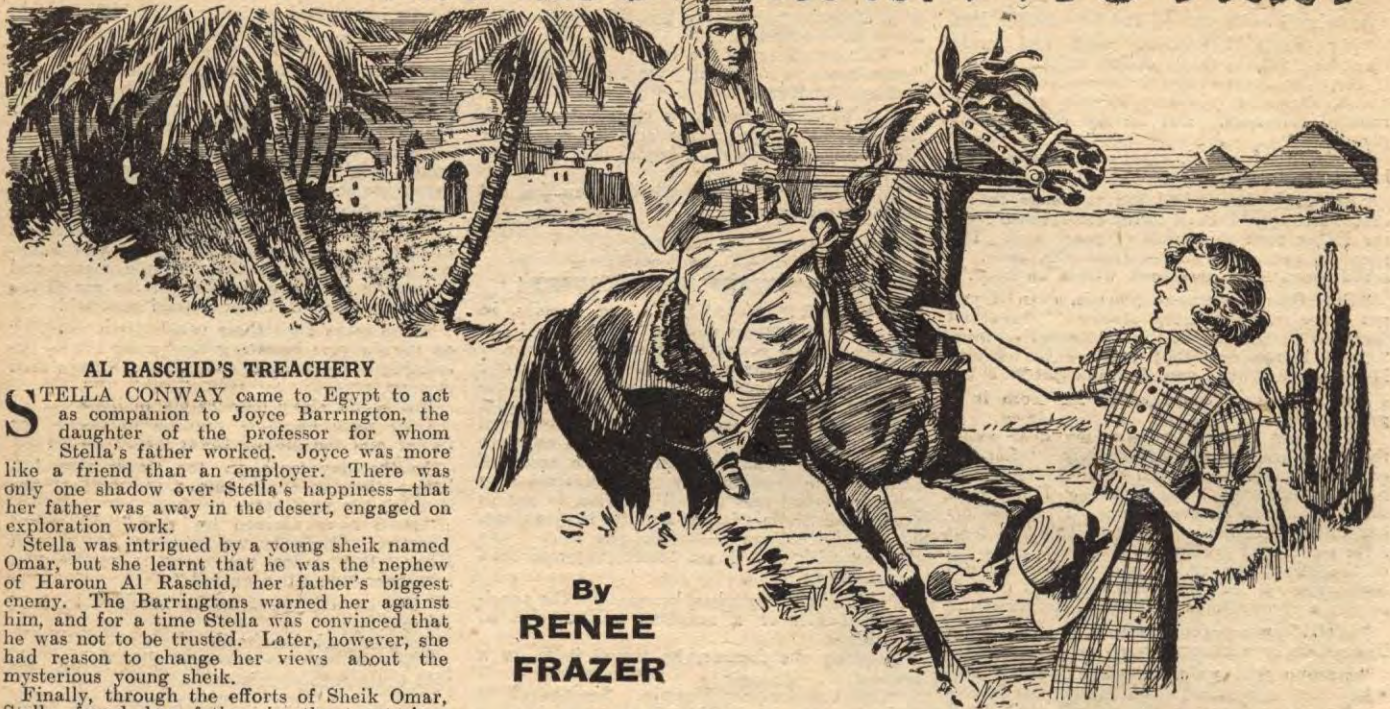
Mickey drew a deep breath, and looked up with admiring eyes at him.

"Yes, it was awfully clever of them," she nodded. "But you were cleverer, Sir Noel!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

THE SIGN OF THE BLACK DIAMOND— that is the title of next Friday's grand detective story. Whatever you do don't miss it!

STELLA and the SHEIK of MYSTERY



By
**RENEE
FRAZER**

AL RASCHID'S TREACHERY

STELLA CONWAY came to Egypt to act as companion to Joyce Barrington, the daughter of the professor for whom Stella's father worked. Joyce was more like a friend than an employer. There was only one shadow over Stella's happiness—that her father was away in the desert, engaged on exploration work.

Stella was intrigued by a young sheik named Omar, but she learnt that he was the nephew of Haroun Al Raschid, her father's biggest enemy. The Barringtons warned her against him, and for a time Stella was convinced that he was not to be trusted. Later, however, she had reason to change her views about the mysterious young sheik.

Finally, through the efforts of Sheik Omar, Stella found her father in the mysterious Serpent Tomb in a desert valley.

Professor Barrington and Joyce joined the party, and to Stella's horror she learnt that Al Raschid had tricked the professor into thinking that he was his friend, and that his nephew, the young sheik, was the real cause of all the trouble that had occurred.

Despite Stella's protests, Joyce's father accepted the escort of some of Al Raschid's men. Certain that the escort would prove treacherous, Stella went to consult the boy sheik, but when on a cliff-top she heard the ominous sound of rifle shots. Her worst fears had been confirmed. Her father and the others had been attacked!

STELLA'S heart seemed to stand still as she heard the rifle shots. Surely they could have only one meaning! Al Raschid's men were attacking her father and the Barrington's! Her worst fears had been confirmed.

In her anxiety to see exactly what was happening, she stepped right to the edge of the cliff and peered over. Too late she realised the treacherous nature of the ground.

Without warning the cliff edge crumbled and broke. One startled cry Stella gave, then down she plunged. Desperately she flung out her hands, grabbing at the face of the cliff, snatching at the stunted bushes that grew there.

And almost by a miracle she managed to break her fall. Her hands lodged in a crevice and there she swung, her feet dangling in empty space.

Dazed and breathless she clung on with frenzied fingers and then she received a pleasant surprise.

"All right, Stella! I'm coming. Don't be afraid."

The shout came from above her and Stella's heart leapt, for the voice was the voice of Omar, the boy sheik. Then she heard Yasmin, his sister, shouting:

"Omar, quickly. This way!"

Stella gave a sob of relief, yet there was terror in her heart, for the crevice to which she clung was crumbling under her weight. She was losing her grip. The young sheik would arrive too late!

Almost fainting, at the end of her strength, she sought another hand-hold, and then, unexpectedly, she felt a powerful hand fasten like a vice on her wrist—other, gentler hands grasping her beneath her armpits.

Dazedly she realised that Yasmin and her

brother were holding her, then something seemed to snap in her brain and she fainted.

It was several hours before she recovered consciousness, and even then she found herself weak and feverish—prostrated by the series of shocks she had received. Vaguely she was aware of a shadowy figure tending her, but it was not until next day that she recognised her nurse.

"Yasmin!" she whispered.

There were tears in Yasmin's dark eyes—tears of relief.

"You are better?" she whispered. "We have been so anxious for you—Omar and I."

"Omar?" Stella moved restlessly, trying to recapture elusive memory. And gradually it all came back to her—the events of the valley.

With a gulp, she sat up.

"My father," she cried. "And Joyce and her father! What have become of them?"

Yasmin's soft hand closed over hers.

"Do not worry, Stella! You must not try to think. My brother will return soon—and he will tell you all. You must trust in Omar!"

Stella sank back, conscious of a vague feeling of relief.

The time passed more swiftly after that. She was able to take an interest in her surroundings. She found herself lying on a soft bed in a vaulted cavern—the secret cave that Omar had prepared for her father and herself!

There were ample provisions. Omar had seen to that. Yasmin brought her fruit, sweet bread and coffee—and ice-cold water from the spring that bubbled in the centre of the cavern.

As Stella felt better, Yasmin told her more. She explained how she had reached Omar in time to put him on his guard—how the two of them had escaped from Al Raschid's camp.

To enter Al Raschid's desert stronghold was dangerous. Yet Stella had to take the risk—for the sake of Omar, the boy sheik to whom she owed so much.

and endeavoured to warn Professor Barrington of the chieftain's intended treachery.

But they had been too late, the party had already set out.

"But, thanks to Allah, we were in time to save you, Stella, from those dreadful cliffs."

"And I'll never forget it, Yasmin," Stella whispered, "as long as I live. But—" her voice faltered—"my father and the others—do you think they are in danger?"

"I cannot say—until my brother arrives. He has followed them—hark!"

She stiffened, raising a finger to her lips.

To their ears came the muffled thud of approaching hoofs.

Yasmin clapped her hands, her face lighting up.

"It is he—it is Omar!"

She sprang to her feet, darting to the entrance of the cave.

Stella lay there, in the grip of cold suspense—mingled hope and fear holding her silent.

And then Yasmin reappeared—accompanied by a tall, slim figure at the sight of whom Stella's heart gave a sudden leap.

"Omar!" she whispered.

The boy sheik dropped to his knee at her side, his slim brown hand clasping hers in a reassuring grip.

In vain Stella tried to read the truth behind his dark, inscrutable eyes.

"Stella," he said huskily, "I have news for you. It—it is not good news—but do not fear! Your father and the Barringtons have been trapped by their escort and taken to some secret place in the desert—by my uncle's orders."

Then, as a choking cry escaped Stella's lips his hand tightened more firmly on hers.

"But do not fear, Stella; I have a plan! We shall rescue them. Within twenty-four hours I vow that they shall be free!"

Swiftly he outlined his scheme.

"My uncle, Haroun, has made a final desperate bid to gain his purpose," he said quietly. "He realised, Stella, that to attempt to force the secret of the tomb from your father alone would be unavailing; he had tried once—and failed."

"Your escape from his clutches deprived him of his last weapon. But—there were still two people who might speak. Professor Barrington and his daughter! They were his final hope. By means of a cunningly worded message, he contrived to put himself in the light of a friend

—and Professor Barrington walked unheeding into the trap."

"I warned him," whispered Stella. "I gave him your message, Omar, but he wouldn't listen."

A twisted smile curved the boy sheik's lips.

"My name has been well and truly blackened, thanks to my uncle's wiles. I doubt if there is anyone who believes in me now, Stella, excepting you and Yasmin and a few faithful followers. But let me come to my plan."

He leaned forward, his hands clasping his knees, his dark eyes intent.

"My uncle has taken his prisoners to his desert stronghold, built in the cliffs, hewn from the living rock thousands of years ago. The place is but a few miles from this cave. I could reach it on horseback within an hour."

"But, Omar, what can you do, even if you get there without being stopped?" breathed Yasmin, catching at her brother's arm. "Uncle knows now that you are his enemy. He—he would have you shot at sight!"

For an instant Omar bared his teeth in a grim smile.

"I do not propose to give my dear uncle that pleasure," he rejoined dryly. "Let me explain. There is one man in Egypt—a nomad like himself—with whom Uncle Haroun is anxious to keep on good terms. I refer to his old rival, Mohammed Khan. The two men have never met personally, yet each is jealous of the other's power. I have heard that old Mohammed is travelling this way, and intends to pay a ceremonious visit on Uncle Haroun."

"Well?" whispered Yasmin, while Stella listened in breathless silence.

"Haroun will welcome his old rival, and take the opportunity to demonstrate his wealth and power for the other's benefit, in order to impress him. I know my uncle well enough for that."

"But how can that help us, brother?" asked Yasmin, looking puzzled. "Mohammed Khan is no friend of yours; in many ways he is as big a scoundrel as our uncle. He would not help us—"

"Not knowingly," put in Omar, with a grim smile; "but he will help us, none the less. When he receives a sneering challenge from Al Raschid, he will change his mind about his friendly visit, and return to collect a strong body of men to encounter his rival."

Yasmin stared in bewilderment, but Stella half-raised herself on her arm, enlightenment in her eyes.

"You mean that message has already been sent?"

"By me," replied Omar, his eyes flashing. "For desperate needs, desperate measures are necessary. I care not what happens afterwards; Al Raschid is well able to take care of himself. My purpose is to delay Mohammed's visit. While Uncle Haroun is still expecting him, another will come in his stead, and will receive the welcome due to a powerful chieftain. This visitor will take the opportunity of getting in touch with Al Raschid's prisoners—"

A faint cry escaped Yasmin's lips.

"Omar," she gasped, "you mean—"

"Wait!" Omar rose suddenly to his feet, a daredevil smile on his lips. "Reserve your judgment until you have seen this man. He is here now, in this cave. Wait while I send him to you."

Like a noiseless shadow he had gone, leaving the two girls staring at each other in blank bewilderment.

"Yasmin," whispered Stella, the first to break the silence, "what—what does he mean? Who is this man?"

Yasmin shook his head.

"I know not. At first I thought—" She broke off, with a shrug. "But it is useless to surmise. My brother has ever been secretive. He will reveal everything in good time. Ah—"

She broke off, with a faint cry, catching at Stella's arm. A tall, bearded figure had appeared from the shadows, and was standing motionless in front of them, his arms folded.

Stella's heart seemed to miss a beat as she stared up at the new comer.

He was a magnificent figure of a man, his

haughty, arrogant mien and rich attire revealing his exalted station. He wore a burnous of yellow silk, embroidered with crimson. At his waist gleamed a jewelled scimitar.

Half-concealed by his drooping hood, a pair of fierce black eyes gleamed menacingly above his bushy beard.

"Fair daughters of the desert," he remarked, "permit me to introduce your humble servant, Mohammed Khan!"

And while the two girls stared, transfixed, too startled to speak, the stranger's manner changed miraculously. A boyish laugh escaped his lips.

"So, Yasmin," he remarked, "you did not know your own brother!"

YASMIN'S STARTLING DISCOVERY!

"OMAR!" gasped Stella and Yasmin, in incredulous chorus.

The young sheik smiled broadly.

"If my sister and my friend did not know me, then I am confident of hoodwinking my uncle!" he remarked gaily. "Have no fear, Yasmin"—as he encountered his sister's appealing glance. "I run no more danger than I have encountered a score of times when pitting my wits against our scheming relative. I shall contrive to get in touch with Stella's father and the Barringtons. Then"—he shrugged—"well, you may leave the rest with me. I am better prepared than you imagine."

Pulling back his robes, he revealed the pearl-mounted hilt of a revolver and a belt of cartridges.

Drawing the former, he tossed it on to a cushion.

"Oil that for me, Yasmin. See that it is fully loaded. I shall start as soon as it is daylight. Meanwhile, I must see to my horse."

He smiled reassuringly at Stella, and his firm brown hand closed for a moment on hers.

"Have no fears for your father or your friends. I pledge my word that, ere another dawn, they shall be safely with you!"

He left the cave, and, while Yasmin busied herself in oiling and loading the pearl-mounted revolver, Stella, chafing at her own helplessness, went over in her mind the details of the young sheik's reckless plan.

Would he succeed? Could he hope to outwit the scoundrelly Al Raschid and free the unfortunate prisoners?

Her father's and Joyce's safety—and two other lives as well—lay in Omar's slim, capable hands.

And the young sheik had never yet failed to keep his promise!

After a while, Stella dozed in spite of herself; even her tortured thoughts were insufficient to keep her awake.

She awoke to the sound of howling wind, to see the grey dawn creeping into the cave—and Yasmin standing alone and motionless at the entrance.

"Yasmin!" called Stella weakly.

In a moment, the other girl was at her side; there were tears in Yasmin's dark eyes—tears that she tried vainly to fight back.

"He—he's gone," she whispered. "He insisted on starting out, in spite of the storm."

"The storm?" whispered Stella, with a sudden catch in her breath.

Yasmin nodded.

"Hark! The wind is rising; out in the desert the sand will be blowing in clouds. But Omar hopes that the storm will assist his plan."

"How?" asked Stella.

"It will enable him to give the excuse that he has been separated from his men, who are following behind. He will tell Al Raschid that they are a thousand strong—just in case Uncle Haroun has any thought of treachery. But, Stella—I'm afraid!"

Yasmin caught impulsively at Stella's hand, as though seeking reassurance.

"I know my uncle so well; he is as pitiless as he is cunning. Omar is clever and brave—but he would be no match for uncle's men if once he were discovered; Stella, I'm certain something dreadful will happen! Omar laughed at me when I told him of my fears; he said they were girlish fancy—but I fear it

is an evil dawn. Oh, Stella—what shall we do?"

Stella raised herself on her elbow, slipping a comforting arm round the other girl's shoulder.

"Perhaps it's just fancy, Yasmin," she said reassuringly. "Your fears have been excited by the sound of the storm. Don't think any more about it. We can trust Omar to carry out his plan!"

She spoke confidently, for Yasmin's sake; but at heart she shared the other girl's fears.

Omar's venture was hazardous in the extreme, and the storm coinciding with his departure seemed like a sign of ill-omen.

Stella felt considerably stronger in herself; in spite of Yasmin's protests, she insisted on getting up and helping in small tasks about the cave—preparing their simple meals and arranging beds and couches for the use of the rescued party—if Omar should succeed!

Those tasks kept their minds from dwelling on the dangers besetting the young sheik—the seeming hopelessness of his self-appointed mission.

But Stella clung desperately to hope.

If it were humanly possible to rescue her father and the others, Omar would do it!

As the day wore on, the storm abated a little; the sun shone like a red ball of fire through the sand-haze.

"He'll have arrived by now," whispered Yasmin. "He'll be welcomed as Mohammed Khan. But he does not intend to put his plan into operation till nightfall."

"Did he tell you what he intended to do?" asked Stella.

Yasmin shook her head.

"No; he was secretive on that point. He said that much depended on fate."

She was moving restlessly about the cave, seeking any task that would occupy her hands.

"Come and sit down, Yasmin," urged Stella. "You'll be tired out."

She moved a cushion on one of the makeshift divans; something slipped from beneath it, clattering to the ground.

As Stella bent to retrieve the object, a horrified cry escaped Yasmin's lips.

"It is his pistol!" she gasped. "Omar's pistol! He—he has gone without it!"

The blood drained from Stella's face as she picked up the pearl-mounted revolver—the weapon Omar had drawn from his belt and given Yasmin to clean and load.

How had he come to leave so vital a thing behind?

It was Yasmin who provided the explanation, her voice choked with anguish.

"He left hurriedly, in an attempt to race the storm; I saw that the pistol had gone, and imagined he must have taken it. It must have slipped beneath the cushion. Oh, Stella—when he discovers the loss—it may be too late!"

OMAR MUST BE WARNED!

STELLA'S heart turned cold at the thought; she was thinking swiftly—desperately.

She imagined Omar, surrounded by his enemies, his dark eyes alert and watchful as his hand crept beneath his robe. Then the sudden shock of discovery—the realisation that he was unarmed, at the mercy of his foes!

"Yasmin—how far is this place?" she asked.

Yasmin shook her head.

"It cannot be far; yet the way is treacherous—through dark ravines and over shifting sand. My uncle has chosen his stronghold well."

"If only we could get in touch with Omar," said Stella desperately.

Yasmin looked up quickly, her dark eyes flashing.

"I will follow now—on horseback! Perchance I may be able to warn him, ere it is too late. Give me the pistol, Stella; if the worst comes to the worst, at least I shall be at Omar's side—and shall sell my life dearly!"

Stella caught the other girl by the arm.

"Yasmin—you're not going alone!" she declared breathlessly. "I'm coming with you!"

Yasmin gave a little cry of protest.

"But, Stella, you have been ill—you are weak; you cannot ride—"

"I'm better," declared Stella emphatically.

And though Yasmin protested, she insisted on accompanying the Eastern girl.

The Arab horse Stella had "borrowed" was tethered outside the cave, with Yasmin's own horse. Quickly they mounted and in silence they rode out of the valley of caves—Yasmin leading.

An hour's ride, Omar had said; but that was in favourable circumstances, to one familiar with the way, and mounted on a swift horse.

With the wind buffeting them, and the sand stinging their faces, they made slow progress. Yasmin had only visited the stronghold once before, and she could only dimly recollect its exact position.

It seemed an endless journey as they rode on in the teeth of the gale. Stella, her head bent to the wind, was almost blinded by the stinging particles of sand.

Yasmin, who wore a heavy veil, was only in a slightly less unfortunate plight.

"Stella," she called at length, her voice broken with anxiety, "I fear we have missed the way—I do not recognise that great rock on the left."

Stella felt her heart sink.

To be lost in this wilderness—when Omar desperately needed their help! It was a final, cruel stroke of fate.

"We must ride on, Yasmin!" she urged. "Perhaps the storm will abate. We can't turn back now."

Yasmin nodded urging her horse into a gallop. Mile upon mile they rode till Stella, weak from a recent fever, could have collapsed in the saddle.

But she fought against her weakness—think- ing of Omar and his peril.

The boy sheik was unaware that he was un- armed; he had set out to rescue her father and her friends—risking his life.

At all costs they must reach him—to warn him of his danger.

Then, suddenly, Yasmin gave a little cry of joy.

"Allah be thanked!" she gasped. "We are on the right path, Stella! The fortress lies just beyond that hill. Pray heaven we are in time!"

The shadows of the evening were falling across the desert when they came in sight, at length, of the great ridge of sandstone from which Al Raschid's fortress was chiselled.

At one time the site of an ancient city, the valley was now a barren waste of rocks, intersected by the dried-up bed of a river.

In the red glow of the setting sun, it was strangely impressive—and sinister.

"Look!" cried Yasmin, pointing.

They had dismounted from their horses and were crouched behind a boulder, looking down into the valley.

Following the direction of her companion's finger, Stella had her first glimpse of the strange, desert stronghold.

It was a palace—a fortress—hewn from the living rock. It possessed carved pillars, doorways and windows; courtyards, and dungeons. The toil of countless generations must have gone to its construction.

For centuries it had stood desolate; but now all that was changed. White-robed Arab sentries stood at the doors; from within came the sounds of music and feasting.

Al Raschid was entertaining a distinguished guest!

Yasmin's hand tightened on Stella's arm. "You hear?" she whispered. "Perhaps, even now, we're not too late!"

Stella nodded eagerly, her pulses racing. She caught a glimpse of white, flitting figures at one of the windows—the figures of women-folk.

She drew Yasmin's attention to them; the other girl nodded.

"My uncle employs dancing-girls to enter- tain him, when visiting his fortress; and there are other women, too—the wives and daughters of his lieutenants."

The girls left their horses tethered behind the rocks, then they crept towards the fortress, keeping in the shadow of the gigantic boulders.

Yasmin admitted that she had no definite plan.

"I hope to catch a glimpse of Omar," she whispered, "and signal to him. But you had better disguise yourself, Stella. It wouldn't do for any of the guards to see you in that costume."

She had brought with her a parcel, and as they reached one of the palace's deserted gardens, she undid it and displayed an Eastern costume and a long silken veil. Stella gazed at the robe in delight, and Yasmin smiled.

"Wearing these, it will not matter if you are seen," she said. "You would only be mistaken for one of the girls of the palace."

In a leafy arbour Stella changed, rolling up her own clothes and stuffing them under a bush out of sight. Then, hearts beating anxiously, they strode forward.

A gateway in the ancient wall that surrounded the outer garden, gave entrance to an oasis of palms, and soon they found themselves in the shadows of the actual fortress.

"We must try to enter, unseen by the

She broke into a run, dragging Stella with her. A moment later they reached a dark opening in the sandstone wall, apparently unguarded.

Her heart thudding, Stella followed Yasmin through the low doorway and along a dim, echoing passage hewn in the rock.

Behind them she thought she could hear padding footsteps.

"Quickly!" whispered Yasmin.

The passage twisted and turned, till Stella had lost all sense of direction; then abruptly it widened into a kind of hall, with queer, carved figures on the walls—and a flight of rough-hewn steps directly in front of them.

"Come!" urged Yasmin. "Or would you rather wait for me here—while I seek my brother?"

"No," whispered Stella. "I'll come with you!"

Yasmin pressed her hand. Together they mounted a flight of winding steps. At the top Yasmin halted, raising a finger caution- ingly to her lips.

"This part of the palace seems deserted,"



Dazedly Stella listened. "Stella," Sheik Omar said, "I have news for you. Your father and the Barringtons have been trapped!"

guards," whispered Yasmin. "I stayed here once, for a few days. Hist!"

She broke off suddenly, her fingers closing on Stella's arm.

Behind them sounded the measured tramp of the armed guard.

"This way!" breathed Yasmin urgently.

But they were too late!

Even as they started to run, they heard the guard's warning shout to his fellows.

"Quickly!" gasped Yasmin, catching Stella by the arm, and dragging her towards a mound of stones. "We must hide!"

Face down behind the pile of boulders they flung themselves, hoping against hope that they would escape detection.

They heard the footsteps of their pursuers approaching; gruff voices rang out.

"They are searching for us," whispered Yasmin agitatedly. "They suspect we are hidden."

Hand clasped in hand, the two girls crouched there—expecting any moment to be dragged from their concealment.

But the footsteps passed by; the voices died away in the distance.

Yasmin drew a sobbing breath of relief as she peered from behind the boulder.

"They've gone, Stella!" she whispered. "Now's our chance!"

As she spoke, Yasmin rose to her feet.

she said. "The Fates are on our side. We shall be able to lie here, in hiding, until we can make our plans—"

She broke off with a faint gasp as a door opened unexpectedly in the wall—and they found themselves confronted by a giant Nubian servant, wearing a turban and carrying a flaming lamp.

The whites of the man's eyes stood out terrifyingly against the ebony blackness of his features as he barred their way, his teeth bared in an unpleasant smile.

He rapped out something that Yasmin seemed to comprehend; a moment later he had seized them by the shoulders, and thrust then, struggling, into a room hung with silken tapestry, and thickly carpeted.

An excited hubbub of voices greeted them as the door slammed behind them.

A dozen veiled Eastern girls surrounded them, all talking at once.

"Yasmin, what does it mean—what has happened?" gasped Stella.

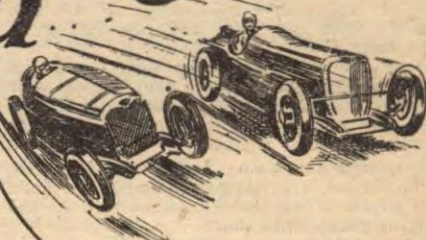
Yasmin's voice shook as she replied.

"We have been mistaken for dancing girls—members of the palace troupe. We have been ordered to dance before Al Raschid and his guests!"

What a shock for Stella and Yasmin! How can they possibly hope to keep up their im- posture now? See next Friday's thrilling instalment.



The Schoolgirl Speed Star



THE NEW HEADMISTRESS

PAT SUMMERS, head girl of Ivydale School, had a great ambition to be a racing motorist. So she was thrilled when wealthy Joshua Fingleton offered her the chance to race his car, the Crimson Comet, especially as Miss Clifton, the headmistress, gave her permission, as this was Pat's last term at school.

Mr. Fingleton made his generous offer on one condition—that Pat should be responsible for his daughter Julie, a new girl at the school.

Gladly Pat promised to do this, little guessing what a wilful, troublesome girl Julie was.

She made things very difficult for Pat at times, but Pat stuck by her promise, and eventually, after Pat had rescued Julie from almost certain death, the two became firm friends.

Pat won several races in the Crimson Comet; but things were difficult at the school, for Alice Smailes, who wanted to be head girl herself, turned most of the prefects against her. Alice also plotted with Bert Preedy, a villainous motor-mechanic, to prevent Pat from achieving further success on the track.

Miss Clifton, the headmistress, had a breakdown, and while Pat was away racing, news came that a Miss Sharples had been appointed to the vacant position.

Alice Smailes was delighted, for the new headmistress was an old friend of hers and was likely to back her up in her campaign against the Schoolgirl Speed Star.

PATRICIA SUMMERS, head girl of Ivydale School, knew nothing of the conversation that was taking place in Alice Smailes' study—did not for a moment dream that Alice was an intimate friend of the new headmistress who was to take over at Ivydale School.

Pat, serene, confident as usual, went her own quiet way.

She heard the rumours that were going round, of course. She smiled at some, frowned at others, shook her head at the rest. Generous as always, she pointed out that it was not fair to judge Miss Emily Sharples before her arrival. That there was absolutely no sense in anticipating trouble, and that she, for her own part, was very ready to welcome the new headmistress.

It was up to all of them, Pat said, to back up the new headmistress when she arrived, and, because Pat's words carried such a great deal of weight among the juniors, they promptly agreed.

But, meantime, Pat was a-thrill herself at the thought of the nearness of her next race.

That race—then another. And if she won only one of them she would have qualified, by the contract into which she had entered with Joshua Fingleton, to race in the Grand Prix itself. And if she won the Grand Prix—

Every time Pat thought of it she was conscious of a delicious little shiver. One more to win, and then for the greatest race of all—the race which would establish her as a racing

motorist! The race which would make her very own the powerful Comet which had served her so well in the past.

Saturday morning arrived, still without the expected new headmistress. Crowds of juniors swarmed round the garage in the school grounds as Pat tuned up and adjusted the Crimson Comet preparatory to setting off for the track.

As before, whole crowds of girls were travelling over to see the race, and Julie Fingleton, who had managed to secure no fewer than twenty free tickets from her father, had distributed them liberally.

Immediately after dinner the juniors bundled into the coach which Mr. Fingleton had thoughtfully ordered. Pat followed more leisurely in the Comet.

"And Comet, my pet," she breathed, as the great, shining, crimson-and-chromium car slid through leafless lanes, "we've got to win!"

The Comet seemed to purr its pleasure and confidence in answer. Pat laughed. As always just before a race, she had left all worries and problems behind her. She was thinking only of the task in hand.

The Ivydale Stadium, with its twin white centre towers, came into sight, and as she passed through the tunnel into the park two figures came out deep in conversation.

Pat saw them, recognised them. A little pucker appeared on her brow. For the figures were those of Bert Preedy and Russell Sayers.

Mr. Sayers—the motor manufacturer whom she knew was Joshua Fingleton's greatest rival!

Only that glimpse had Pat of them, then she had whizzed past. She did not see the two stop, turn round, watching her progress until she had disappeared up the centre track that led to the racing park and the dressing-rooms. Nor did she see that slow, significant smile of Sayers, or the sly, crafty grin which overcame Preedy's face.

Sayers looked meaningfully at Preedy.

"If she wins this afternoon that puts the

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

Comet in the Grand Prix," he said. "And if the Comet's in the Grand Prix, Preedy, you've got the fight of your life on!"

Preedy smiled sneeringly.

"If she wins!" he said. "It's a big 'if.' But I'm not afraid, Mr. Sayers—don't you worry. Pat Summers shall never beat the car I'm driving for you—either in this afternoon's race or the Grand Prix. I'll see to that!"

They passed on, while Pat, having brought the Comet to a standstill outside the pits, looked back. But at that moment there was neither sight nor sign of Bert Preedy and his confederate. There was a sudden shout, however, as Jim Mace, her faithful mechanic, dashed up.

"Cheerio, Miss Summers!" he greeted beamingly. "I say, doesn't the old Comet look splendid? Your friends from the school have arrived," he added. "I've got Jimmy Walsh to show them to their seats in the stand. But I say, Miss Summers, I've got a surprise for you—or, rather, Mr. Fingleton has. He wants to see you now—in his private room."

Pat gazed at him.

"But what's the surprise, Jimmy?"

"Go and see Mr. Fingleton," Jimmy advised, with a chuckle. "He'll show you."

Pat laughed.

"A secret, eh?" she said. "O.K., Jimmy! Look after the old bus."

"Trust me!"

And Pat excitedly took herself off to Joshua Fingleton's luxurious room. The millionaire's own voice bade her enter.

She turned the handle and went in. And then she stopped, something catching in her throat, joy in her eyes.

Joshua Fingleton was there, smiling as he looked up from his desk. And next to him, his blue eyes so very marvellously like Pat's own, was—

"Father!" Pat choked.

Her father it was!

"Pat girlie!" His eyes lit up as she came forward, such pride, such joy, such love in their depths. "Pat dear!" he said huskily, and stooped as he kissed her, stroking her glossy head. "Pat!"

"Father!" breathed Pat; and then, tearing herself away, laughed. "But why are you here?"

"To see you," her father said. "Mr. Fingleton invited me. I'm aching, too, to look over the Comet. Mr. Fingleton here tells me that if you win the Grand Prix he's going to give you the car. Well, Pat, I want to make an adjustment or two. Think I've got a new carburettor which will give you at least another five miles an hour, and that should knock all your other competitors cold. But it's a secret, mind," he added warningly. "Not a word!"

"Silly old daddy," Pat laughed. "As if I would say a word! But, oh, isn't it just

A new headmistress at Ivydale. What a difference that meant to Pat, for Miss Sharples disapproved of motor-racing. And she meant to withdraw all the Schoolgirl Speed Star's privileges!

delicious to see you! Are you going to stop for the race?"

"I am!" Mr. Summers nodded. "I want to see how you handle her, Pat. Apart from that—" He looked at Joshua Fingleton. "Shall I tell her, Mr. Fingleton?"

"No, let me," Fingleton smiled. His eyes twinkled. "I've just been telling your father, Patricia, that if you win the race this afternoon you need not run in the Charity Cup next Saturday. Because, you see," he added smilingly, "if you do win this race you'll have fulfilled the conditions, anyhow."

Pat laughed again. If she had required any spur to her confidence, to her determination, surely that was it. Her father, as well as her Fourth Form admirers, would be spectators at the race this afternoon. If she won her testing-time was at an end.

Well, she'd make sure of it, she told herself grimly.

Happy Pat! Humming a tune, she changed. Feeling as if she were walking on air, she went on to the track. Quickly her eyes roved over the cars at the starting point. Shrewdly she judged their powers and their merits. And then she smiled again—with quiet confidence.

Half the cars in the race she had already competed against and beaten. The only dangerous-looking newcomer was a long, low, dart-shaped green car, which its owner had named the Shooting Star.

She wondered vaguely whose it was. It looked powerful.

From all sides of the track went a roar of cheering as she stepped into the Comet's cockpit. Pat, looking round, saw Grace Campbell & Co. leaning out of the stand waving hands, hats, and handkerchiefs. She saw her father and Joshua Fingleton just behind them, and with Mr. Fingleton his daughter, Julie, who, not satisfied with waving her hand, had hoisted a crimson and white handkerchief on her father's walking-stick and was brandishing it in wild enthusiasm.

Pat laughed as she gaily waved back.

Now other drivers were climbing into their cars. Pat watched with interest to see who the driver of the new Shooting Star would be.

Then out of the tunnel which led from the track came strolling Bert Preedy again—dressed in a suit of green overalls, adjusting his goggles as he came.

Oh, so Bert was riding in this race, Pat thought—and received quite a shock when Preedy, with a half-insolent grin, passed her and leisurely climbed into the Shooting Star.

Pat's lips compressed. Preedy riding in this race against her! For whom? She hardly needed to be told however—for Mr. Sayers!

If her determination to win before had been strong, it was tenfold now. The Shooting Star, obviously, was an unknown quantity. It looked a record-breaker—but then, Pat reflected, so did the Comet.

She saw Preedy staring at her, saw that still insolent smile, the half-mocking light in his eyes. The expression on his face was sneering, scoffing. It seemed to say: "Beat this if you can!"

Pat turned her head away.

Up in the stands the girls were still cheering; the crowd excited.

Everybody was watching Pat—this girl who, a short three months ago, had been unknown on the racing-track.

There came a warning shout, the flag from the starter's box dropped. And then—

Whoosh! Whoomp! R-r-r-r!

They were away!

And again, as if she had not another consideration in the world, Pat became the ice-cool driver again. Up in the stands her father was watching; Joshua Fingleton, and her chums were watching! If she won this race, the door to the Grand Prix and a glorious future were wide open.

She must win!

Into second gear she slipped. The needle quivered. Into third. Now, half-way down the straight—into top gear. Five cars were in front of her then, the big green Shooting Star leading the field.

Pat settled down earnestly to her driving; blind now to everything save the track in front of her, sensitive only to the vibrating pulsation of her engine; deaf to all save the roar of the car's exhausts.

Not until she had negotiated the first bend did she let the Comet flat-out.

Then—

Seventy—eighty—ninety—

The Shooting Star was hurtling along also, making the other cars look almost stationary. When Pat was half-way down the straight it was cornering at the far end of the track. Pat did not care. Her eyes were shining now, every nerve in her vibrating. She knew the staying powers of this car beneath her.

Preedy was out to win—no doubt about that. But Pat had different ideas. No car could stay at the speed at which Preedy was hurtling the Shooting Star, and there was plenty of time yet. While she coaxed the Comet up to maximum, Preedy was overtaxing the engine of his steed from the start.

First time round—the Comet going strong now. Second time round, and the Comet settled down to show its paces. One by one she began to overhaul and pass. Six, seven, eight laps, and she was in the second position.

The Comet was zooming now—smoothly, swiftly it was hurtling along the track. Half a lap ahead the Shooting Star shot on, and Pat smiled grimly.

Now ten laps had been covered—with the distance between them lessening, but not appreciatively. Grace & Co. in the stands were dancing on tip-toe of anxiety, and Julie wildly yelling: "Come on, Pat!"

Eleven—twelve laps gone.

"Wow, look!" shrieked Julie. "Look at the Comet!"

Pat's expectations were being justified now. The Shooting Star, going all out from the start, was incapable of faster speed. The Comet, having kept something in reserve, was catching it up.

Thirteenth lap—the fourteenth—with less than two hundred yards between the two cars. Fifteen—sixteen—the two hundred yards gap had become one hundred. Eighteen—nineteen—and then at the bend Pat caught up with her rival.

With the Comet's nose glued to the Shooting Star's tail they whizzed down the straight towards the bend, the Comet gradually overtaking. Bert Preedy was furiously going all out.

But no good. Slowly, but relentlessly, the Comet was drawing level.

The twentieth lap—now they were bonnet

to bonnet. Preedy's face was white, his eyes beneath his goggles glaring.

Then there was a yell.

"Look! Look! Pat's pulling away!"

Pulling away Pat was. There was a foot between her and Preedy now. She looked as she passed him, saw his face filled with fury. She saw his hand suddenly leave the wheel and dart towards the seat on which he sat.

Then—

Nobody saw it except Pat—which was as well for Preedy, otherwise his motor-racing career would have ended there and then.

Some instinct warned Pat, however, as she saw that hand come up. Just for a second she glimpsed the spanner which flew into the air. Just in the nick of time she ducked.

The spanner—a vicious weapon—went flying past her, to shoot up the banking and disappear over the rim.

Then she was past. And up from the crowd went a great terrified shout.

"Look, look, look! The Shooting Star—"

For disaster, swift and sure, overtook Preedy. Preedy was discovering, too late, that you cannot drive a car at nearly a hundred miles an hour and take your eyes off the track for even one second.

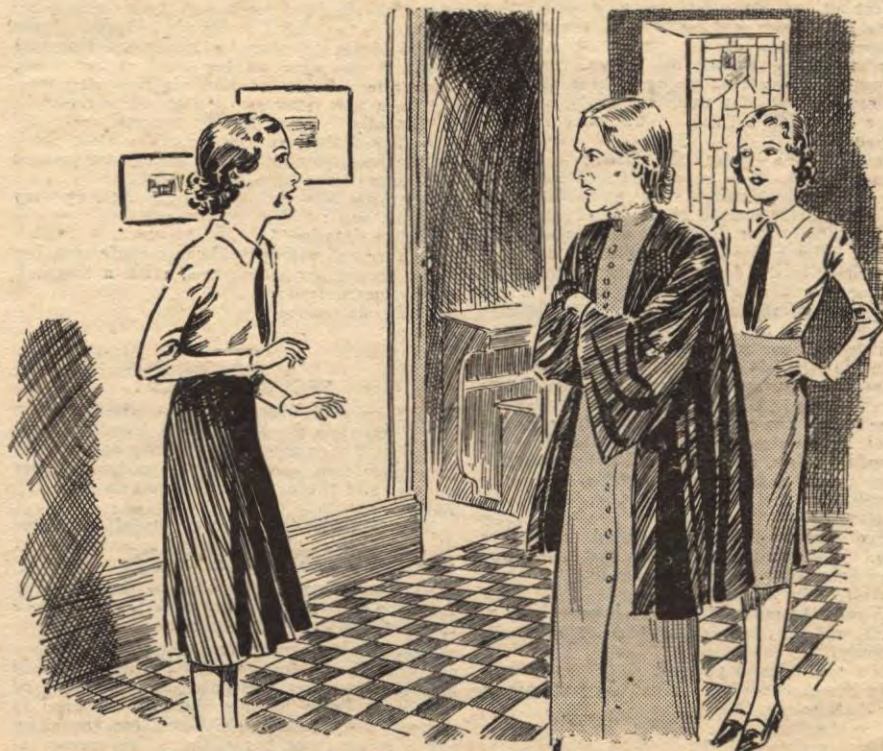
That hate-inspired action which had caused him to make that cowardly attack upon Pat had just diverted his attention just sufficiently to cause him to lose control.

Too late he desperately grabbed at the wheel, as the car went into a shrieking skid, shot down the banking and raced on to the soft turf of the arena, where it overturned, shooting the scared Preedy through the air in an unconscious heap.

Pat did not see that. She was well away now. Even as the alarmed mechanics rushed out of the pits to Preedy's and the Shooting Star's assistance, she was whizzing round the bend, then down the straight in a really magnificent burst of speed, eating up the last lap—to flash home an easy winner!

It was only when she pulled up that she saw the Shooting Star stranded and derelict in the middle of the arena, and saw Preedy, unconscious, but otherwise unhurt, being taken off the field on a stretcher.

"And that," Pat thought grimly as she was besieged by her admiring father and the whole crowd of Ivydale juniors, led by the bubbling Julie, "is the reward of treachery."



"Ivydale has a new head girl, Patricia Summers," Miss Sharples said tartly. "Alice Smiles!"

Alice Smailes' Triumph

MEANTIME, Pat had won the race. No need now for any further anxiety about her entry for the Grand Prix. "A great race, Patricia!" Mr. Fingleton delightedly told her as he wrung her hand. "I take back all I ever said about girls not being able to drive—at least, one particular girl," he added, laughing. "Sidney, boy," to her beaming father. "You should be proud of your daughter!"

"I am," Mr. Summers laughed—"by Jove, I am! Magnificent, Pat—magnificent!" he added. "If you race in the Grand Prix like that—"

Pat laughed. She was happy then—happier still when, with the silver trophy beside her, she drove back to school, promising to see her father on the morrow—for Sidney Summers was remaining for a short while as the guest of Joshua Fingleton.

Her eyes were dancing, her lips smiling, as she thought of this dear old Comet which, with one more race won, might be her very own for keeps and for all time.

One more race! An easy task, it seemed, but only Pat knew how hard it was likely to be. Stern as some of her previous fights had been, they would prove mere child's play in the exciting, exhilarating, and arduous Grand Prix on a course which totalled more than two hundred miles.

There would be at least thirty cars in that race, each of them the best that the workshops could put out, each of them driven by men who had made their names by-words in the motor-racing world.

A great test—a magnificent test! Would the Comet come through that?

Pat smiled. The Comet could, and would, she told herself. In the meantime, she would devote every minute of her spare time to the Comet; make it her business to see that it was kept thoroughly tuned up and tried out. With the new carburettor her father had promised her, the Comet would be as good as, if not better, than any other car in Britain. Pat had faith in her father; for had not he designed and made the Comet with his own hands?

"Dear old bus!" she breathed affectionately. The "dear old bus" travelled on, purring with sweet pleasure. Presently the school gates and the red roofs of Ivydale School came in sight. Pat stared a little as she observed it, wondering at its desolate air, wondering vaguely why she saw no girls in the playing fields—why none of the junior school girls were clustered round the gates ready to welcome her, eager and agog to hear the news and congratulate her upon her victory.

Her heart fell a little. What on earth had happened?

Through the gates she drove the car. Nobody about. She paused outside the tuck-shop—strangely deserted for a half-holiday. Even the porter seemed absent from his lodge.

Wonderingly Pat drove the car towards the garage. She opened the door and pushed it in. Carefully she draped the dust sheets over the Comet's shining bodywork, and, with the fond look of the ardent mistress who says "Good-night!" to her sleeping pet, tripped towards the door and closed it.

Outside the dying rays of the sun still gleamed on empty fields and deserted building. Strange! Uncanny almost!

She locked the garage and went towards the school. She entered the hall, deserted like the grounds outside, and then pulled up abruptly as she heard a footstep. A girl was coming towards her—the sallow-faced Alice Smailes.

"Alice!" Alice was smiling, a satisfied, malicious smile. It struck Pat even then that there was a new jauntiness in her attitude.

"Well?" she asked. "What's the matter? Where is everybody?" "Oh, in the class-rooms!" Alice said off-handedly.

Pat's eyes almost popped. "In the class-rooms? What do you mean? On a half-holiday?"

Alice chuckled. "They're detained!" "Detained? The whole school?"

"Not quite. The Sixth aren't detained, of course; they're in their rooms. But perhaps"

—Alice looked over Pat's shoulder—"I'd better leave Miss Sharples to explain."

And Pat, whirling round, stared as she saw coming towards her the woman about whom she had completely forgotten in the excitement of the afternoon and the mystery of her return.

A thin, hard-faced woman, with piercing black eyes and iron-grey hair mathematically parted in the dead centre, a rustling black gown draping from her shoulders—that was Miss Sharples.

She stopped dead in front of Pat, looking from her to Alice with quick inquiry.

"Well, girl, who are you?"

"I am Patricia Summers," Pat said, faintly nettled by her attitude and her expression, "the head girl."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," Pat returned. "Are you our new headmistress?"

The woman folded her arms.

"I am."

"But I cannot believe," Pat went on, "that the whole school is detained, Miss Sharples. It is their half-holiday."

"This," Miss Sharples said, grimly and icily, "is the school over which I now preside, Patricia Summers! It is for me to say, in future, which are holidays and which are not! The girls—especially the girls of the junior school—are altogether too unruly!"

Pat stared.

"But, Miss Sharples—"

"Girl, do not interrupt when I am speaking!" Miss Sharples said, with thin-lipped asperity. "I repeat, the girls—especially the junior girls—do not even seem to know the meaning of discipline! I am going to change that, and, just to let them know that I am in earnest, I have detained the whole school! And please do not stare in that rude manner, Patricia Summers! I want you to understand that, now I have taken over the headmistresship of this school, I shall stand none of the nonsense Miss Clifton so weakly tolerated!"

Pat's eyes goggled in her head. Great goodness, what sort of a headmistress was this?

"I understand, of course, Miss Sharples, that your methods may be different from those of Miss Clifton," Pat said; "but I really must point out, as head girl—"

The woman's lips wreathed in a sour smile.

"Get that notion, Patricia Summers, out of your mind at once!" she said tartly. "You are no longer head girl! It was because I announced that you were no longer head girl that this disorder for which I was compelled to punish the school broke out! Ivydale," she added, while Pat stared at her, wondering suddenly if she were on her head or her heels, "has a new head girl, Patricia Summers!"

"A—a new head girl?" Pat stammered.

"Exactly!" Alice Smailes sneered.

And then Pat received the culminating shock in the succession of shocks which had greeted her since her return to the school.

For Miss Sharples, drawing herself up very sharply, said:

"Alice Smailes!"

And Alice, with a malicious smile, put her hand across her chest, and, with a mocking curtsy, murmured:

"At your service!"

Trouble Ahead!

IT seemed absurd, but it was, alas! true.

Patricia Summers could hardly believe it all, even after half an hour had elapsed since that meeting between herself, her enemy, and the new headmistress in assembly hall.

Miss Sharples had been at Ivydale a matter of four hours only, but what a succession of changes she had made in those four hours!

In those four hours she had deposed Pat from the captaincy without a word to Pat; had set Alice Smailes in her place.

Amy Hemmingway had been made vice-captain—Lena Grange, Pat's trusted friend and head prefect, relegated to the ranks of the Sixth Form because she had ventured to protest that Pat shouldn't have her captaincy taken away from her without first being informed.

And because of that, something like a riot in the ranks of the junior school had ensued—

ending in all the mistresses being put back on duty and the whole school confined to bounds for the rest of the afternoon.

It sounded like a fantastic dream. That all that could have happened in a few short hours!

Pat still felt bewildered. "But who," she wanted to know of the glum-looking Lena Grange in her study later, "gave her the power? Who told her—?"

Lena shrugged. "She says the governors gave her the power."

"But what made her give Alice Smailes the captaincy?"

Lena sighed.

"Why ask me?" she requested hopelessly. "I don't know! She seems to know Alice, though. The first order she gave when she got here was that Alice be sent to her study. Well, Alice went. I fetched her. They greeted each other like long-lost sisters. Alice was with her a quarter of an hour, and came out bright, beaming and jaunty. After that Miss Sharples called a meeting of the whole school—even interrupting the matches on Junior Side."

"And—and then?" Pat asked.

"Then"—Lena looked at the wastepaper-basket—"then she told the school that she was the new broom sort of thing. She was going to clean up the school, and all that, and as a start she was revising the prefect system. When she announced that Alice was to become captain, something like a riot broke out. All the kids started shouting your name."

"And so," Pat sighed, and her pretty face became very troubled, "she detained them?"

"Yes!"

Pat bit her lip. If she had foreseen trouble in the past, it was as nothing to the strife she foresaw now. The juniors, high-spirited crowd that they were, would never tolerate that sort of treatment for long. Only with difficulty, all through the long and bitter strike of the prefects, had she kept them in hand—and that was only because she had used her authority as head girl. Now she no longer had that authority.

The two girls looked at each other grimly.

"There are going to be ructions," Pat prophesied.

"Yes!" Lena gloomily agreed.

"If Miss Sharples thinks she can clean up the school by these methods, she's going to find out her mistake," Pat went on. "Oh, it's beastly! It's rotten! And Alice, above all people, for captain! Well"—and Pat took a turn up and down the study—"there's nothing we can do," she said. "Anyhow, I'm bothered if I feel I'd like to be head girl under Miss Sharples!"

Lena managed the first smile of the afternoon.

"And I'm bothered," she said, "if I want to work under her as a prefect. Perhaps, Pat, it's just as well. Oh, let Alice and her crowd get on with it," she cried. "After all, Pat, what does it matter to you? It leaves you free, anyway. You'll have all your work cut out now in getting ready for the Grand Prix. You'll want every bit of time you can get. Perhaps it's a blessing in disguise," Lena went on thoughtfully.

Perhaps it was. Pat, trying to think of it like that, cheered up. The captaincy was an honour—the greatest honour that any girl in the school could obtain. Under a headmistress like Miss Clifton it had been a pleasurable duty, in spite of its many difficulties.

But who really could feel it was an honour to be Miss Sharples' head girl? Who wanted a position that could be snatched away from one with one hand and given to another with the other? And in any case, as Lena said, it freed Pat and relieved her of responsibility, especially at this moment when she must so earnestly concentrate upon the forthcoming Grand Prix.

All the same, there was a rather anxious tightening at Pat's heart. Knowing the school as she did, loving the school as she did, she was worried.

"Well," she said, and then stopped. "Well," she repeated, but this time looking towards the

(Please turn to the back page)



When SUSIE kept House

By
**ELISE
PROBYN**

A QUEER WELCOME FOR SUSIE

"YOU enjoy your holiday, Jenny, and don't worry about anything. I'll look after your brothers and the house all right."

Susie Bowling spoke with hearty enthusiasm as she said those parting words to Jenny Robins on St. Pancras platform.

They both worked together in the sewing-room of Spollard's, gown and mantle manufacturers; but whereas Susie slept on the premises, Jenny lived with her two orphan brothers at Brixton and kept house for them. It was a big tie for Jenny, and, as she kept saying gratefully from the train window, she couldn't have snatched her little holiday away but for the fact that Susie had promised to look after the house in her absence.

"Bless you, I'm going to love doing it, Jenny!" laughed Susie.

But she was thinking how tired Jenny looked, and how much in need of a holiday. Jenny Robins was a gentle-natured girl, apt to worry and be over-anxious at her work, and just lately Susie had noticed that she was looking utterly worn out.

"Take it real easy on this holiday, ducks!" Susie urged her.

"Yes, I will," nodded Jenny; and then added in her anxious little way: "Of course, I love going to my uncle's, but I'm not really going just for a holiday, Susie—I mean, I ought not to be leaving Albert and Percy and the house like this. But, you see, uncle's got an idea of coming to live with us at Brixton, and I simply couldn't manage it. It would be too much for me. That's why I want to see him, and—sort of put him off in a nice way. I'd love having him—he's such a dear—only I couldn't make him comfortable."

"It would be a worry for you, dear, I know," said Susie, and gave her hand a last squeeze through the window. The guard's whistle was blowing. "Cheerio, Jenny love! Happy journey!"

The train jerked forward, a cloud of smoke belched out from the engine, and when Susie saw Jenny again she was just a dot waving from the vanishing window.

"Poor old Jenny! I don't believe she's had a holiday for years!" murmured Susie.

Giving up her platform ticket, Susie sailed out of the station and boarded a bus bound for Brixton.

She felt happily excited over the task she had undertaken. It was going to be fun, playing housekeeper for a few days. She had met Jenny's brothers, Albert and Percy, once before, and she remembered now that Albert was the elder one—he was seventeen—and

Percy was two years younger. Both of an age to be jolly good company, thought Susie.

The journey to Brixton was a little slow, because it was Saturday midday, and the streets were congested with traffic bringing City workers home for the week-end.

Susie got off at Trimbody Road, where all the little houses were as like as peas in a pod, and she knocked at the door of No. 96a.

"Hallo, Albert! Here I am! Come to take Jenny's place!" sang out Susie, as the elder brother opened the door.

She couldn't mistake Albert. He had a round, plump face, and he was as stout as Jenny was slim; but he bore a sort of resemblance to Jenny, although he hadn't her worried expression.

"Come right in, Susie!" he cried heartily. "You're just in time."

"What for?"

"Dinner, of course!" gloated Albert.

"Good!" said Susie.

Albert stared at her as she stepped into the hall, and his plump face dropped.

"Where is it, Susie? Why, you haven't brought any grub in!"

It was Susie's turn to stare. She was a stranger only just setting foot inside the house, and Albert had been at home all morning—he didn't work on Saturdays—yet, apparently, he had expected her to bring in something for dinner.

"D'you mean to say you've got nothing in, Albert?" blinked Susie.

"Of course not!" Albert said, astonished. "I thought you'd see to that, Susie, the same as Jenny does."

Susie blinked again, but before she could say anything Albert had a bright idea.

"I tell you what, Susie. Pop round to the butcher's and get some sausages. You can cook sausages, can't you? And while you're about it, you can bring in some tomatoes and lettuce, and then you can make a salad."

Susie looked very hard at Albert. She was

Albert and Percy expected their sister to wait on them hand and foot. They didn't realise how selfish they were—until Susie arrived to keep house for them. Then what a change there was! For Susie meant to give them a much needed lesson.

beginning to see the reason for Jenny's tiredness.

"D'you know where the butcher's is, Albert?"

"Oh, yes! You take the second on the left, and go—"

"Then you might cut round and get those sausages," Susie said in a queer voice; "and don't forget the tomatoes, Albert—"

"Me?" he gasped.

"Or the lettuce! Don't be long, Albert! I'm peckish!"

Leaving him gaping, Susie sailed upstairs to Jenny's room and deposited her things there. She had only brought a few possessions in a hat-case. And it struck her with surprise that there wasn't much to borrow here in Jenny's room. The place looked very bleak and comfortless.

Feeling curious, Susie crossed the landing and looked into the boys' room.

What a difference! Here was where the comfort was! A lovely eiderdown on Albert's bed, another on Percy's. Nice rugs for their feet. Hot-water bottles hanging on each bedstead. Fresh flowers on the mantelpiece, and the whole place newly scrubbed out by Jenny before she had gone off on her little holiday.

"H'm!"

With a puckered brow, Susie went down to the kitchen. A clothes-line was strung across the room, and hanging from it were Albert's shirts and Percy's vests, all spotlessly washed, with three pairs of socks for each of them.

A key sounded in the front door, and young Percy came clattering into the kitchen.

"Hallo, Susie! You're here, then? Jolly glad to see you, and—What!" His voice changed. "What! No dinner ready?"

Susie looked at Percy, and he was a smaller edition of Albert.

"Albert's gone to get some sausages, Percy," murmured Susie.

"Albert has?" echoed Percy, astonished.

"Yes. I'm waiting for them now."

Susie hoped that her tone wasn't a little metallic; but if it was, Percy didn't notice it.

"Well, I'm going to footer this afternoon, Susie," he said; "so while you're waiting, you'd better clean my boots. Jenny didn't have time before she went off this morning!"

And Percy took his footer boots from under the table and calmly handed them to Susie.

"You'll find the cleaning stuff in the scullery," he added. "And mind you make a good job of it; I'm a bit fussy!"

Susie carried the boots into the scullery without a word, and Percy didn't see the glitter in her eyes. He heard her take the box from the shelf, and he heard the swish of the brush.

No wonder Jenny was tired and worn-out, Susie was thinking. She really deserved it, the dear, silly chump—spoiling her brothers like this, letting them put upon her, and make a drudge of her. They wanted a lesson, and they were jolly well going to have it. Expecting people to clean their boots for them, indeed!

And Susie brushed away so fiercely that Percy—who perhaps liked the sound of other people working—popped his head round the scullery door to watch her.

"Ow!" A howl burst from his lungs, and never had Percy moved himself faster. "Stop! You fathead, Susie—you're doing 'em with blacking instead of with dubbin!"

Susie looked up with a pretence of innocence.

"Does it make any difference, Percy?"

Difference! Percy danced from one foot to the other with rage. He knocked the blacking-tin out of Susie's hand.

"You've ruined them! They'll never come the right colour again! They're my new footer boots, and you've ruined 'em with that rotten blacking!"

"Oh, I say, what a pity!" lamented Susie. "Hadden't I better rub some more in, so as to—"

"No, you won't!" roared Percy. "Give those boots to me!"

He wrenched them out of Susie's lap. He pushed her out of her chair. He plumped himself down. He snatched the dubbin brushes and the dubbin out of the box, and with ferocious energy he began scrubbing away at the boots—working like a slave to remove all trace of the blacking.

He was still working away for dear life when Albert returned home with the sausages. The sight stupefied Albert. He gaped at his brother through the scullery door as though he couldn't believe his eyes.

"Great Scott! What's Percy doing?" he gasped.

"Bringing his weight down!" said Susie.

Percy almost exploded.

"She's pretty well ruined my boots for me, Albert!" he cried. "This comes of letting Jenny go away. I knew what it would be—we're going to be in the dickens of a mess without her!"

Susie smiled to herself, and she felt that Percy had never spoken a truer word. She put the sausages on the pan, and glanced across at Albert—who was reading the paper they had been wrapped in.

"You can be laying the table, Albert."

"Eh?"

"And then I can do with some more firewood. Don't chop too much!"

Albert didn't seem to hear this last injunction; but in a dazed sort of way, he laid the tablecloth and groped clumsily for knives and forks. He and Percy were very quiet when they sat down to their meal. They looked at each other in suffering gloom. Susie could see that they thought it very selfish of Jenny to have gone away like this.

"What time's your game to-day, Percy?" Albert asked heavily, when he could eat no more.

"Kick-off at three—plenty of time!" muttered Percy.

"H'm! Not much fun staying at home—I'll come with you!"

Susie looked at him brightly.

"You won't forget that firewood first, will you, Albert? You can be chopping it, while Percy gives me a hand with the washing-up."

The brothers exchanged smouldering glances. Susie expected them to flare up, and she would have welcomed a good, plain-spoken row with them. But they stifled their feelings.

With gritted teeth, Albert took the chopper from the corner and carried it out into the garden. Fuming under his breath, Percy told Susie that he'd be down in a few moments, and upstairs he went to change into his footer togs.

Susie felt that it was a good beginning.

She sat back in her chair and enjoyed a cup of tea; the minutes passed, and it struck her suddenly that she could hear no sound of chopping from the garden.

She went through the scullery and peered outside.

The garden was deserted. The chopper lay on the path, and it was quite obvious that Albert had sloped out through the back door.

In that same instant Susie heard the front door close.

She rushed back through the house. She wrenched the front door open. Too late!

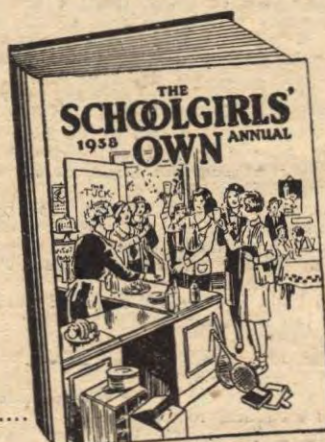
There was Percy hurrying away down the street, accompanied by his brother Albert who had joined him at the corner.

"The mean wretches!" cried Susie. "A pair of fat, lazy slackers, that's what they are—and it's all Jenny's fault! I'll teach 'em! If Jenny can't, I'll teach 'em something!"

Susie washed up the dinner things herself, and when the brothers returned they found a nice tea awaiting them. But not a word of thanks did Susie get. Albert grumbled because there was only currant cake, instead of cherry, which he preferred. Percy complained about the jam. And neither of them even thought of helping Susie with the washing-up. Utterly selfish they were. They seemed to think that she was their servant, instead of their sister's friend who had good-naturedly offered to help them.

Susie had just finished tidying up when there came a knock on the front door. Percy answered it, and Susie heard him call to his brother:

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3/6

"It's a telegram for you, Albert—from Uncle Claude!"

Susie heard Albert read the telegram out aloud:

"Jenny arrived safely. Shall bring her back, myself Wednesday. Expect us tea-time."

Both boys seemed tremendously excited over this news.

"I say, Percy, that's topping! Uncle's paying us a visit himself!"

"On Wednesday, too! We can both get the afternoon off, Albert! Gee, this is a bit of all right!"

Susie looked up as Albert and Percy both came barging into the kitchen, their faces smirking with satisfaction.

"Look here, Susie, we've had important news!" gloated Albert. "Uncle Claude's coming to tea on Wednesday, and Percy and I always reckon on getting a fat tip out of him—especially this time, when he's giving Jenny a decent holiday while we're left to take pot-luck at home. You can see what it means, can't you? You've got to make things jolly comfortable for Uncle Claude when he comes!"

"Cook him a swell meal—soup and fish and chicken and everything!" burred Percy. "Put up the poshest feed you can!"

"And not only that, Susie," rattled on Albert. "You'll have to get the house extra shipshape, 'cause uncle notices things like that. It might make the difference of a quid to Percy and me, if uncle felt he was in a slovenly place. What you must do is to put a real shine and polish everywhere—give the house a proper doing-out!"

"A sort of regular spring-cleaning?" suggested Susie in a queer voice, getting a word in edgeways at last.

"That's it! Scrub the place out like a new pin! Polished floors—polished banisters—clean curtains in the windows—everything you can think of, Susie! You'll know how to do it; Jenny does!"

Susie nodded sweetly. She knew exactly what she was going to do, and she couldn't have wished for a better chance. Albert and Percy had handed her the chance on a plate.

SUSIE MEANT THEM TO DO THEIR SHARE!

AT seven o'clock next morning, Susie tapped loudly at the door of the boys' bed-room.

Sleepy sounds came from within—a grunting and yawning—then Albert's voice: "Wotisit? Wassatime? Hey!" He was suddenly and indignantly wide awake. "It's only seven o'clock, Susie! We don't want our tea at this time on Sunday!"

"I haven't brought your tea, Albert! I've come to call you!" shouted Susie.

"What?"

"I want you to get up!"

"Eh? Have you gone off your chump?" gasped Albert. "We never get up before twelve on a Sunday!"

"Yes, but your room's got to be done out, Albert. The whole house has got to be done. You want everything to be nice for your uncle on Wednesday, don't you?"

Susie heard angry splutters going on inside the room, but she hurried promptly downstairs, and it saved her the difficulty of answering Percy's peevish question—as to why their room shouldn't be left till last.

Half an hour passed; then the boys' steps sounded on the stairs. For the first Sunday in their lives, Albert and Percy walked into the kitchen at seven-thirty.

"Give us that teapot—" began Albert, before he was properly in the room. And then he broke off with a gasp.

There was no sign of a teapot. No sign of a kettle, either.

The stove was loaded with pails of water—the chairs were piled up on top of the table—Susie was taking up the mats—and never had any kitchen looked so comfortable.

Albert and Percy simply gaped with disgust.

"Great Scott!"

"What a place to come down to!"

"Mind that broom, Percy!" warned Susie, a little too late.

The broom was leaning against the table, and as Percy inadvertently trod on the sweep-
ing-end of it, the pole came forward and hit him a resounding thwack on the forehead.

Susie couldn't pacify him whatever she said. "It's your fault for leaving it there!" howled Percy, nursing his brow. "I've never met such a fathead as you, Susie. Can't you clean a room without upsetting everybody else's comfort?"

"Well, I'm a bit new to the work," admitted Susie meekly, "but I shall learn. I had my breakfast early so that I could get some practice in!"

"What about ours?" demanded Albert.

"I'm just waiting till those pails are warmed up—it's the scrubbing water," Susie said brightly. "Then I'll put the kettle on for you boys!"

She picked up the mat and carried it out in a businesslike way to the garden. But once there, Susie tossed the mat down, and curled herself comfortably in a deckchair under the trees. It was a lovely autumn morning—just the morning for a mike—and Susie had remembered to leave a book under the chair.

She read pleasantly for about twenty minutes; then she crept round to the kitchen window and peeped inside.

Albert and Percy couldn't see her. They were stamping round the room—hungry and fuming—and at last Albert could stand it no more.

"Look here, I'm not waiting any longer!" he cried. "Hang Susie and her pails, too! Help us shift them off this stove, Percy! We'll shove the kettle on, and the saucepan, and we'll boil ourselves some eggs!"

Albert carried out his threat, too—and Percy helped him. Susie loved watching them. They made the tea too weak, and they boiled the eggs too hard—but the fact remained, those lads cooked their own breakfast!

Susie gave them time to eat it; then she picked up the mat and carried it back into the kitchen.

"I say! What have you done?" And Susie gave a shout of pretended indignation. "You don't mean to say you moved my pails off the stove?"

"Of course we did! Think we were going to wait for our grub any longer?" flared Albert.

"You've put me all behind time!" accused Susie. "That water will never be warmed, the scrubbing will never get done to-day, and that means the place won't be ready for your uncle on Wednesday! I was relying on doing the bulk of it to-day. You ought to have known better, Albert!"

"Look here, Susie—"

"It's your look-out, Albert—not mine! If you want your uncle to come here and find the place like a bear-garden, you and Percy are the ones who'll lose by it—not me!"

Albert and Percy jumped up quickly and made a grab at the pails, to put them back on the stove.

Somehow, Susie got in Percy's way.

Percy bumped against her, and the pail he was holding went flying out of his hands, spilling the water in a flood all over the kitchen floor.

"Oh, Percy! Look what you've done!" wailed Susie, wringing her hands.

Albert called Percy all the fatheads under the sun, and declared that it would take a week to swab up the water.

"I've never seen anything like it!" moaned Susie helplessly, swaying from side to side. "I don't know what to do! Oh, if only Jenny were here! If only—"

"Fat lot of good you are in a house!" hissed Albert.

"It wouldn't have happened if she hadn't barged into my way!" fumed Percy.

The sight of Susie's helplessness was more than they could stand. They both grabbed hold of her, and at a gallop they rushed her out of the kitchen.

"You keep out and stay out!" ordered Percy.

"And don't come back till we've finished!" cried Albert. "We've got one clumsy ass here; we don't want two!"

Susie felt very pleased with her little ruse. Once or twice during the morning, she took a sly peep through the kitchen window. It

was a wonderful spectacle. Albert and Percy were both on their knees, swabbing away at the floor as hard as they could go.

It took them hours. When the job was almost finished, Albert knocked the pail over, and they had to begin all over again. But it was all practice for them, Susie told herself blithely. It was all leading up to the energetic climax she was preparing for Albert and Percy.

At twelve o'clock Susie tapped at the kitchen door.

"May I come in now?" she asked meekly.

The floor was dry at last, and looked splendidly clean. Albert and Percy looked limp. While they stamped upstairs to take a bath Susie cooked them a good dinner of steak and onions.

There seemed no pleasing the brothers, however. They grumbled all through the meal. Only when they thought of Uncle Claude did they brighten up.



"Stop!" panted Percy. "You're blacking my footer boots!" Susie looked up with pretended innocence. "Does it make any difference, Percy?" she asked.

"Mind you don't let us down on Wednesday," frowned Albert. "If uncle isn't pleased by the look of the place there'll be trouble."

"I'll do my best," said Susie. "Tell you what, I'll take the afternoon off from work so as to be about when he comes."

It was going to cost her a half-day's pay, but Albert and Percy didn't offer to make it up to her. They were used to such sacrifices from Jenny, and they took it for granted. As Albert said, with a gloomy frown, by what they'd seen of Susie's work it would take her a full afternoon to get through it, and he didn't mind admitting that he was disappointed in her.

"I know I'm not like Jenny," sighed Susie. She had many examples of Jenny's long-suffering patience during the next couple of days. It was astonishing the amount of work Albert and Percy made. They were not only selfish and lazy—they were the most untidy pair Susie had ever met. Every room in the house was soon littered with their rubbish; but Susie didn't clear it up.

"I'm leaving everything till Wednesday afternoon!" she said brightly.

At two o'clock on Wednesday, Susie let herself into the house with her latchkey. Albert and Percy were not yet home. All was still and peaceful, and it was just the afternoon for a thorough job of housework.

With a twinkle in her eye, Susie put on an apron, went into the front parlour, and—got busy.

First she kicked the wastepaper-basket over

and emptied the ashpan all over the floor. Then she turned the chairs upside down, and the table, and began to turn the room into worse disorder than even Albert and Percy had ever achieved. Susie went to work enthusiastically, and at the end of ten minutes the parlour looked as if a wild elephant had been let loose inside.

Then she got to work on the other rooms. By the time she had finished the house looked like a servant's nightmare. But Susie had a reason for all this. For Jenny's sake she meant to cure the selfish brothers of their laziness. She also hoped to arrange things so that in future Jenny would not have to be a household drudge, but would be able to lead a happier and less laborious life.

Susie had hardly finished her queer preparations than Albert and Percy arrived. They stared at her smudged face and dirty apron.

"Coo, look at her!" jeered Percy, who was

carrying a large parcel of provisions. "You don't half look a guy, Susie!"

"We'll keep out of her way while the housework's on!" grinned Albert. "And I say, Susie, you might give my best suit a sponging and pressing, will you? I'll get it!"

He hurried through the scullery, followed by Percy. Next second Susie heard a howl from both boys.

"What the dickens! Did you ever see such a mess? L-look at it!"

"I'm in a bit of a muddle with the kitchen!" Susie admitted meekly, from the doorway.

But now Albert and Percy had seen the hall. Their eyes started out of their heads. They gaped at the disorder, and they roared with dismay.

"What have you been doing? Have you gone potty, Susie?"

"Do you call this cleaning the house up for uncle?"

They went floundering and skidding over the oily tiles, and, with a howl, they stopped at the open door of the parlour. The sight turned Albert faint. Percy had to hold on to the hall-stand to steady himself.

"I know the place is in a muddle!" Susie said cheerfully. "I'm not like Jenny; I told you I'm new to housework!"

"You're—you're hopeless!" gasped Albert. "Uncle'll be here at four! He'll have a fit! He won't stop in this pigsty! He'll call it an insult!"

"And I shouldn't wonder if he walks out

without giving you boys a bean!" stated Susie in a hollow voice.

"Eh?" Albert and Percy gasped at her. A horrid suspicion came into their eyes, and their faces went a sickly green.

"You d-did this on p-purpose!" palpitated Albert.

"You've p-played a p-practical joke on us!" spluttered Percy.

Susie looked from one to the other with a calm smile.

"You boys have had a lovely soft time, with Jenny waiting on you hand and foot—and she'll be home at four. Your uncle's bringing her. You can leave the place for her to tidy up when she comes in if you like; you always do, don't you, Albert and Percy? But if you take my advice," Susie added meaningfully, "you'll roll up your sleeves and get to work yourselves—to make everything spick-and-span for Uncle Claude!"

PREPARING FOR UNCLE CLAUDE

SUSIE didn't wait to hear what Albert and Percy had to say. What she did was to run out to the kitchen and find them each an apron. Albert dared her to come near him; but, nevertheless, Susie helped him off with his coat, and she tied the apron round his waist. Then she did the same for his brother.

"It's nearly three, Albert!" Percy howled suddenly. "Uncle'll be here soon!"

"You boys will certainly have to look slippery!" urged Susie.

They did, too! Albert grabbed the broom and rushed like a

madman into the parlour. Percy slithered out to the kitchen and spun round in circles, not knowing where to begin. Susie thrust a scrubbing-brush into his hand and planked down a pail of soapy water.

"I should do your floor first, Percy—the same as you did last Sunday!" she said.

"Get out of my sight or I'll pulverise you!" hissed Percy.

Down he went on his knees, and, with one frantic eye on the clock, he began scrubbing the floor as though his life depended on it.

Susie sailed into the parlour to see how Albert was getting on. He was making frenzied headway with the broom, though she could hardly see him for dust.

"Doing your carpet, Albert? Good lad!" said Susie. "But you ought to have your windows open!"

Smiling sweetly, she left him to get on with his work. But though Susie meant to teach the brothers a much-needed lesson she did not intend to stand idly by herself. She waited for a while, then good-naturedly buckled to herself.

"Stick it, boys!" she said. "If you don't slack we'll have everything shipshape in time."

Albert and Percy scowled. They were not grateful for the help she gave them. But they were too busy to express their feelings aloud. The thought of Uncle Claude's fat tip drove them on. At last most of the cleaning had been done, and Susie gave the gasping, exhausted brothers an approving smile.

"Good boys!" she said. "I always knew you could work if you tried. Now, Percy, you must blacklead the kitchen grate. And you, Albert, had better wash out the hall."

"I'm hanged if I will!" spluttered Albert. "Same here!" snorted Percy. "That's a job you can do, Susie! I've finished!"

"Sorry, but I've got to get the tea," said Susie. "I'm sure you'd like Uncle Claude to have a proper tea when he comes."

The mention of Uncle Claude put new vim into Percy. He began working ferociously at

the grate, while his brother sullenly picked up the pail and scrubbing-brush. Susie washed and changed, then took pains preparing a dainty meal. The boys had brought in plenty of food—cold ham, a large tin of asparagus that only required warming up, and a fat cooked chicken, which also improved by warming.

Susie was just prodding it as it sizzled in the oven when a latchkey sounded in the front door.

"It's uncle!" gasped Albert, in the hall.

Frantically he tried to jump up from the soapy floor and escape, but he was too late. Susie brushed past him, pushing him back on to his knees, and at the same moment the front door opened.

Jenny stepped in, accompanied by a plump, bald-headed bachelor, who was obviously her Uncle Claude. Susie had to guess that, for Jenny was too flabbergasted to introduce her.

"Oh!" Jenny gasped faintly. "Oh! L-look at Albert!"

She swayed back on the doormat. She was gazing at the paralysing sight of Albert, with an apron round him and a scrubbing-brush in his hand, kneeling beside a pail on the soapy floor.

"Albert wanted to get his scrubbing done before you came in, Jenny," Susie said brightly. "But he's nearly finished, so's Percy."

"Wh-what's Percy doing?" gaped Jenny.

"Percy's doing his blackleading!" said Susie, throwing open the kitchen door. "Your uncle won't mind the place being not quite ready, will he?"

"Not at all," said Uncle Claude, who looked positively awestruck.

They could see that Uncle Claude was profoundly impressed, and so could Susie. The only one who remained unconcerningly flabbergasted was Jenny. Susie pressed her foot gently on Jenny's toe, warning her not to butt in, and brightly she turned to Uncle Claude.

"I understand you were thinking of coming here to stay, sir?"

"I wanted to," Uncle Claude said eagerly; "but Jenny's afraid she couldn't manage."

"Not single-handed—of course not!" laughed Susie. "But she's got Albert and Percy to help her. They take a regular share of the work, as they told you. I'm sure they wouldn't mind a little extra trouble, Uncle Claude, for the pleasure of having you here—if you're keen on staying."

"There's nothing I'd like better!" enthused Uncle Claude. "Besides, now I've seen how Albert and Percy roll up their sleeves to it, I'm man enough to do the same!"

"D'you hear that, lads?" cried Susie to the boys, who were looking a bit blank all of a sudden.

"I don't say I'm as domesticated as Albert and Percy," hurried on Uncle Claude eagerly; "but they can teach me the ropes, and I'll do my share in the house and enjoy it, the same as they do, if Jenny will put me up!"

"Of course Jenny will!" enthused Susie, and she squeezed Jenny's arm meaningfully. "Many hands make light work, ducks. You'll make room for your uncle, won't you? And then you'll have three menfolk helping you instead of two. It'll be a grand thing all round. And you can be sure of one thing," added Susie waggishly—"Albert and Percy will keep uncle up to the mark!"

"And I'll see that they don't shirk!" laughed Uncle Claude.

"Then that settles it, doesn't it, Jenny?" beamed Susie.

"Yes," said Jenny, in a dazed understanding. "I'll get the spare room ready for uncle now, and he can send for his cases to-night."

"Percy will see to that when he's finished his blackleading!" whooped Susie. "How's it going, Percy? Nearly finished? How about you, Albert? Nearly through with your scrubbing? Don't be long, me lucky lads! Tea's ready!"

The only answer from Albert and Percy was a combined grunt. Even now they hadn't quite grasped all that had happened—or all that was going to happen in the future!

And Susie gave them no time to think it over.

They finished off the cleaning in double-quick time, had a wash and brush-up, and then sat down to Susie's really delicious tea. And then the lads felt a little more at peace with the world, for it was one of the best teas they had ever had, and they'd finished all that work, and Uncle Claude really was going to stay with them in the future.

"Jolly good tea!" they said. Uncle Claude beamed on them.

"You deserved it, my boys!" he replied.

JENNY looks a different girl nowadays. She's lost that worried, overworked look, and both Albert and Percy have lost a lot of their superfluous weight. Susie passed the house the other day, and she saw Albert sweeping the front area, and Percy helping his Uncle Claude clean the windows. What's more, those lads grinned at Susie with friendly good will, and Susie winked back.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

What a cheery chum Susie is! She will entertain you again next Friday. Order the next **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** now and make certain of reading what happened when Susie inherited an unexpected legacy.

A COSY CHAIR AND ONE OF THESE FINE ANNUALS—

That would be a treat for any schoolgirl.



3/6

"THE GOLDEN ANNUAL" is the all-story annual, containing tales of mystery, adventure, fun, "long-ago," school and sport. It's the ideal present for you to give to a chum or for your chum to give to you.

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2/6

"The boys have been absolute jewels!" rattled on Susie. "I don't know how I could have got on without them. Albert did out the parlour before he started on the hall, and he's done it beautifully! And look at this kitchen! Isn't it a treat? Percy scrubbed it, and did everything!"

A dazed smirk came over Albert's face and Percy's. Their sister was too stupefied to speak, but Uncle Claude was loud in his admiration.

"Splendid fellows!" he cried. "I take my hat off to you, Albert and Percy! I know there's a lot to be done in the house, because Jenny told me, but I didn't know that you chaps went down on your knees and did your share like jolly Jack Tars!"

"Oh, rather!" exclaimed Susie. "They got the afternoon off specially to do it—didn't you, boys?"

Percy was beaming all over his plump face, and Susie could almost hear him purring.

"Oh, yes, uncle! We always do it!" fibbed Percy.

"We make it our regular job, uncle!" lied Albert, dipping his brush enthusiastically in the pail. "It's not for any reward, you know; we do it because we like it—don't we, Percy?"

"Yes, Albert!"



The Happy-go-lucky Hikers

This Week:
**THEIR CARAVAN
ADVENTURE**

By
ELIZABETH CHESTER

WAS IT A GHOST?

"**W**ERE lost. I'm sorry to have to admit it, but we are certainly lost."

Wendy Topham came to a halt. Darkness was falling over the distant countryside—and all the landmarks she knew were obscured. Even they were known to her only from the map, for this was strange new country to Wendy.

Wendy, Fay and Jill were hiking. Hiking was their hobby, and whenever they were free from their office, they hiked.

Few girls had seen such varied scenery as Wendy, Fay, and Jill, and every girl who had ever accompanied them on their expeditions had enjoyed herself.

This week-end they were alone. Wendy had written to a farmhouse and fixed accommodation for themselves for Saturday night. A motor-coach had taken them to within fifteen miles or so of the farmhouse, and they had hiked that distance according to plan.

Wendy had a map and a compass, and by this time was experienced enough not to go far wrong. But the route had seemed so easy, and landmarks so clear, that they had put the map away and just walked on.

Most regretfully then they had taken a side lane that seemed to head in the right direction. But like so many others, it wound and turned, and twisted until they had very little idea whether they were going north or south.

Wendy had used her compass, and had found that they were now going in the opposite direction from the one required.

"Here's a stile," yawned Fay. "Let's sit down."

She tested it, wiped it with a hanky and sat down. Fay was fastidious, and very careful where she sat, especially as she was wearing her best shorts.

"I'm hungry," said Jill heavily.

She was a girl with a hearty appetite, and even the fact that she had eaten all her own sandwiches and half Wendy's had not stilled it.

Wendy went to the stile and perched beside Fay, opening the map.

"It's Appletree Farm we want," said Fay helpfully.

In silence Wendy studied the map, seeking a lane that wound about as this one did, and which started at the point where this one had started—so far as she could remember.

Wendy was cross with herself. She did not like being in charge of an expedition, and then losing it; for the story would reach the office,

and those girls who were always ready to laugh at the hikers, would have some reason for doing so.

The wind rustled the leaves from the trees, and the stile creaked a little as Fay swung her feet. But they were the only sounds.

And quite suddenly they heard the scrunch of feet on the hard, gravelly surface of the lane.

"Hallo, someone coming," said Wendy eagerly.

"Whoops," cheered Jill. "Now we can ask the way."

Fay jumped down from the stile, and they all got ready.

But the footsteps were heard no more. Silence fell.

They listened intently, but heard only the rustle of the wind in the trees, and the distant lowing of cattle.

Wendy stepped forward.

"Hallo, there," she called.

There was no answer, so she walked a little way down the lane. But Fay called her back.

"Wendy, come back," she said sharply. "Don't be silly."

Her tone was anxious, so Wendy turned, a little surprised nevertheless.

"Why is it silly?" she said in surprise. "If there's anyone about, we've got to ask the way. We can't remain lost, you know."

"I know we can't," agreed Fay uneasily. "But I don't think that was anyone."

"Footsteps can't make themselves, and we can't all be wrong," argued Jill. "It was a sound, and we all agree it was the sound of footsteps."

"Certainly," said Wendy.

The Happy-Go-Lucky Hikers were thrilled at the thought of spending the night in a real gipsy caravan. And what a night of surprises it was—thanks to the secret that lay hidden in the old caravan.

They were silent again, and the same thought was in every mind. The footsteps had come suddenly without warning, and they had ended suddenly. It was odd. It was ghostly.

"If I were fat-nutt'd enough to believe in ghosts—" began Wendy.

"Oh, don't," begged Fay, getting nearer to Wendy and looking over her shoulder. "If you start talking about ghosts, I shall get the jitters."

Wendy braced herself. As president and leader of this expedition, she had to do more than lead as regards route. She had to keep up their spirits. The night was only just beginning, and this ghostly talk was a very bad start.

The best thing to do, Wendy decided, was to make fun of it.

"Mr. Ghost!" she called. "Please can you direct us to Appletree Farm?"

Her voice echoed faintly.

"Farm—" it mocked her.

"If you tell us we'll carry your chain for you," offered Wendy.

She pulled out her flashlamp and shone it. It was powerful, and she had taken care that the battery was a new one, and the bulb sound. The bright rays cut the swiftly gathering darkness, and revealed a hedgerow, an elm, and a broken fence opposite.

Wendy, whistling to keep her own pecker up, strolled forward, Fay keeping close to her, and Jill, who had found a piece of chocolate she didn't know she had, loitering a little.

Wendy flashed the torch down the lane.

"No ghost, you see," she said. "But—hallo—"

"What?" said Fay anxiously, drawing in her breath.

Wendy focused the rays of the torch ahead on to a patch of hard ground that stood out like a small lake in the grass at the roadside.

"A patch of earth," mused Wendy. "And if someone were walking on the grass there, they'd go off it for a moment. We'd hear the sound of steps on the earth. Then they'd be on the grass again. The steps would stop."

"Oh," said Fay, understanding. "Then there was someone after all—"

Jill had munched her chocolate, and now joined them.

"Why should anyone hide from us? And it means that, or else they are deaf," she said.

"Yes," admitted Wendy, turning. "It must mean that someone is hiding from us, because I heard a sound then—"

She swung the torch round suddenly, and, for a fleeting moment it lit up a pale face that was hidden immediately behind leaves!

THE GIPSY WOMAN'S BARGAIN

"THERE she is—"
"A girl—"
"I say—"

The three spoke all at once; but there came no reply from the girl.

Wendy, still using the torch, tried to find the girl again; but apparently she had gone into hiding.

"That's pretty peculiar," she murmured. "She must be afraid of us, surely! I mean, we can't harm her. She must know we're girls by our voices, and not armed bandits. I say!" she called.

"Can you direct us to Appletree Farm?" called Jill.

"Please!" added Fay.

They waited for the answer. It did not come. Wendy ran for the hedge behind which the girl had disappeared. There came the thud of scurrying steps, that told without doubt that the girl was now on the run, eager to get away from them.

"I call it fearfully unkind!" said Fay indignantly. "It wouldn't hurt her just to answer."

Wendy had now nearly caught up with the girl, and held her face for a moment in the rays of the torch. The girl, blinking, dazed, raised her arm, and backed.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm a stranger here, like you."

"Well, don't run away; we shan't hurt you," said Wendy, in a friendly tone. "But we're lost—and I suppose you are lost, too?"

"No—I'm not," said the girl, and lowered her arm. "Have you seen this place in daylight, though?"

"Yes—some of it," said Wendy.

The girl hesitated, but obviously had something important to say.

"Promise to do me a favour if I help you," she said.

"Anything in reason," said Wendy, who did not believe in promising blindly.

"It's just to hold your tongues," said the girl, in a rather harsh voice. "If so be a gipsy should ask if you've seen me, don't say—don't say anything about me."

It was an odd request, but Wendy supposed that the girl—who spoke like a gipsy, yet hardly looked one—was running away.

"None of my business, and I shan't tattle," said Wendy.

"Promise?" asked the girl.

"Yes, promise," said Wendy, Fay, and Jill together.

The girl seemed to be very greatly relieved, but still wanted to make sure.

"Nor to anyone else?" she added anxiously, giving Wendy a shrewd, measuring look.

"I can't promise not to tell the police," said Wendy.

"The police—hub! I'm not worrying about them," said the girl. "It's only gipsies—and an old woman's the one who'll care. Have you seen her?" she ended eagerly. "Old—bent—stoops. She's got grey hair, and dark eyes that seem to burn through you?"

"Ugh!" said Fay, who did not like gipsies.

"No—not here anywhere," answered Wendy. "But there might be some, I suppose. Anyway, now that we have promised, can you tell us where Appletree Farm lies?"

The girl considered for a moment, but as she had said that she was a stranger, there was little hope of her being helpful. Then, to their surprise, she gave a nod.

"Yes, I can tell you," she said. "It's about seven miles from here. Keep on to the top of the lane, turn left by the white house, straight on until you reach the main road—go towards Danwick, and it's on one side or the other of the main road. Got a notice-board outside."

Wendy, Jill, and Fay nearly skipped with joy at the news.

"Thanks a lot," said Wendy.

The girl, without another word, hurried away, and Wendy switched off the torch.

"Seven miles," said Jill. "Oh, golly!"

Wendy braced her shoulders. The prospect of seven miles in the dark, when she could not see the countryside, and might as well be walking in a city, did not appeal to her. But whether it was seven miles or ten, they had to plod on. So, hoisting her rucksack higher on to her shoulder, she put her best foot forward.

"Come on," she advised. "Here we go!"

They sang to cheer themselves up, but their steps presently lagged, for they had had a hard day, and they were tired.

"Wonder if that girl knew what she was saying," said Jill. "Or did she just make it up?"

"Oh, no; she knew!" said Wendy, but she did not feel as confident as she sounded.

In silence they trudged on, until suddenly Fay gave a murmur of excitement and stopped.

"A light—look—a cottage!" she said.

They saw the light, and it was obviously from a window. Never had any light seemed more welcome.

Wendy looked across at it. It showed up brightly in the darkness, and was almost cheery to look at. As she stared, she thought of hot tea, of crumpets.

"A cup of tea would go down well," she murmured. "And these cottagers are kind-hearted, you know."

"We might even buy a meal," nodded Jill eagerly.

Wendy led the way. They did not prospect for a path, but, guided by the torch, made their way across the dark field.

They were almost on top of the place before they realised the truth. Their eyes were now better accustomed to the darkness, and they could see the dim outline of the building.

"My goodness—it's a caravan," said Jill.

Wendy flashed on her torch, and a shape materialised just to the right of them.

The sudden rising of a dark mass close beside them, was too much for Fay's strained nerves, and she squealed.

"A horse—that's all," said Wendy.

And then a voice came from the caravan, husky, but loud:

"Who's there?"

"Hikers," said Wendy, and flashed the rays of the torch on to herself and the others.

They stood there uncertainly, and Fay tucked herself between Wendy and Jill.

"A gipsy!" she said. "Ugh!"

"What do you want?" called the gipsy; for that she was one they could see now that she had opened the door of the caravan and the lamp within shone upon her.

She stood there, a bent, figure, with a lamp held high, casting a black shadow across the grass. And all three girls instantly remembered the description given by the girl in the lane.

This was the woman she feared!

"We're lost—we're looking for Appletree Farm," said Wendy. "I suppose you don't happen to know it?"

Fay nudged her.

"No, no—let's run!" she urged.

"Of course not," said Jill. "How silly! She might know."

The woman called back reply.

"I'm hard of hearing. Come nearer. I won't harm you. I'm an old woman, and alone."

Wendy, who never lacked nerve, led the way, and walked right up to the caravan fearlessly. But she did feel a slight squeamishness. There was nothing about the woman to instil fear, and yet they had heard so many odd stories about gipsies.

Yet Wendy, looking at the woman's face closely, found it kindly. She was dark skinned and dark eyed; her hair was almost raven black, and her fingers were long and slim like talons.

"Lost?" she said when Wendy had repeated her statement. "And hungry likely as not, and tired."

"We certainly are," said Wendy. "But if Appletree Farm is anywhere near, we must push on and find it."

The gipsy woman clucked her tongue.

"There are many farms hereabouts," she said. "And mebbe one of them's Appletree Farm. I couldn't rightly say."

Wendy explained the directions the girl had given her, and the gipsy listened intently.

"It was a fool told you that," she said.

"For there's no main road at the top, but a railway—and the lane ends there."

Wendy grimaced.

"I see—we were fooled," she said, a little bitterly.

"It's shelter for the night you want, not a long walk," said the gipsy. "Come inside."

Fay hung back, although Jill joined Wendy at the foot of the caravan steps.

"So your young sister is afraid of gipsies, is she?" said the old woman in a soft tone. "More's the better; she's a wise girl. Tell me—what is the time?" she ended suddenly.

Wendy looked at her watch.

"Half-past eight," she said.

"Half-past eight—and the train's in fifteen minutes. It's an act of Providence it is that guided your steps here," the woman said in excitement. "Come inside—and make yourselves at home here."

Wendy looked back at Fay.

"Oh, come on," she urged.

Fay shook her head, and then as she saw the warm interior of the caravan, and a kettle singing on a stove, she stepped forward.

The caravan seemed cosy inside—it was snug and tempting. Moreover, as Fay saw when she entered, it was spotlessly clean and tidy.

"Could you all three sleep here now?" mused the gipsy woman.

"Well, we three might," said Wendy, looking round and smiling. "Are you thinking of giving us the caravan while you sleep with the horse?" she asked jestingly.

The gipsy woman was putting her alarm clock right.

"No," she said. "But my son is ill—miles away, and there's a train that leaves in fifteen minutes. But I'll not go and leave my caravan empty, for there are the birds to feed."

She indicated some covered cages suspended from the caravan's roof.

Wendy was so surprised that she could not at once grasp the situation.

"You mean that you want to go away—and leave us here in charge of the caravan?" she asked.

"I do. Yes—that is what I want. I shall be back before midday to-morrow. Until I come make yourselves at home here, my dear."

To three tired, homeless girls, it was a magnificent offer. Often they had wished to hire a caravan, and here was one being offered them for the night—and they wanted one only for the night!

Wendy's eyes shone. She loved adventure, and this certainly savoured of it. Jill, who had seen sausages on a shelf, was more than tempted, and only Fay hung back.

"If I were not a gipsy," the old woman said, "I would not offer it, for I should not be sure of knowing the honest from thieves; but that's a thing a gipsy can tell at a glance."

Wendy looked at the clock. The hands were moving on noticeably. If the woman were to catch her train, they must not waste time deciding. It was yes or no—quickly.

"It's very kind of you," she said. "Have you any valuables—anything we should need to take special care of? And how should we arrange about food?"

"Or cancel the rooms at the Appletree Farm?" added Fay.

"They'll be abed before you could get there," said the old gipsy. "Come, stay the night, and let me repay—"

Wendy was surprised.

"Repay us—for what?"

"For the evil I have done," said the old gipsy. "No, not to you. But maybe I haven't been as honest myself as should be. And now my son is ill—my only son. It may be a judgment. Let me go—Say you'll guard the caravan—just for a night."

She was very deeply disturbed in mind, as Wendy saw, and eager to go by train.

"If you really want to go, we'll stay," said Wendy. "We'd like to stay in any case. It's so cosy, and we're dog-tired."

Fay looked down her nose, and then shrugged, and resigned herself as Jill, with permission, started the small stove to fry some sausages.

"All I ask is you leave some of the food you do not use to-night for me to-morrow," said the old gipsy woman.

There were certain cupboards kept locked, but anything else they could touch and use.

"Then good-night, and bless you," the old gipsy said. "And may I be forgiven my sin of long ago."

Before they could say any more, she was gone, wrapped in a long shawl, a small parcel under her arm.

"We're fools—fools," said Fay. "And mark my words, you'll regret it."

THE CARAVAN'S SECRET

"DELICIOUS. I say isn't this wonderful!"

Wendy looked up from her fried sausages and sighed. She had known that she was hungry, but her hunger was even greater than she knew. Jill had fried enough sausages for four healthy appetites, but they were all finished now. Not even a part of a sausage was left.

"Hot in here, though," yawned Jill, lounging back on a narrow bed. "Couldn't you open the window, Fay?"

Fay could, and after a struggle did so, looking out.

"Cold outside," she said. "Thank goodness we didn't go on. Wasn't it mean of that girl—"

She drew in her head, leaving her sentence unfinished—bobbed her head back so quickly that she bumped and bruised it.

"Now what?" said Jill sharply.

Fay was pale.

"That girl's outside!" she exclaimed.

Wendy herself looked out of the window and was just in time to see the girl dodge back.

"Hallo, there!" called Wendy. "Here we are, thanks to you, at Appletree Farm!"

The girl stepped out into the open, staring.

"So you gave me away? You broke your word—you told her, eh?" she said hotly.

"Not a word," said Wendy. "She's gone by train. Come right inside and have some tea!"

The girl looked in astonishment, then laughed, and her laughter grew.

"Well, if that isn't rich!" she said. "Asking me in!"

What was rich about it, Wendy could not see.

It was Fay who opened the door for the girl, but she did not give her a welcoming look. Shabby, tired, and with her shoes muddy, the girl stepped into the caravan, and at once went to the stove for warmth.

"So you're in charge?" she said. "It's queer. Do you know if the old thief took anything with her?"

"A parcel," said Wendy curtly.

"I wonder," mused the girl. "I just wonder if—"

She turned to a cupboard which was locked, and then picked up a knife.

"What are you going to do?" said Wendy sharply.

"Open it!" said the girl coldly.

Wendy snatched the knife from her, and frowned in anger.

"We asked you in to give you shelter, and warmth, not to steal!" she said. "I'm in charge, and nothing is going to be taken from this caravan!"

The girl pursed her lips, and shrugged.

"All right," she said. "Have it that way. But you don't know what you've let yourselves in for. Do you know what is underneath this caravan? Suppose the police arrived—eh?"

It came to Wendy, then, that the woman had said that she had sinned, and wished to be forgiven. Had she stolen something very valuable, and hidden it?

"Let's go," said Fay anxiously.

Wendy shook her head decidedly.

"No. We agreed to stay. We've had the food, and we're keeping our bargain."

"I think you're just a pack of fools," said the girl grimly. "If only you knew what was under this caravan!"

Her tone was one of ringing scorn, and Wendy went pink.

"Whatever is there, can stay there!" she said.

"Well, just take a look yourselves," said the girl. She picked up the lamp. "Come on. You'll have a shock!"

By this time, even Wendy was growing seriously alarmed, while Jill was quite shaky, and Fay in a panic.

The girl walked out with the lamp, and Wendy & Co. followed. Then, stooping, the girl held the lamp low.

"Look there!" said the girl.

Wendy went down on her hands and knees,

and Jill and Fay stooped low, staring in perplexity. For there was nothing under the caravan except two petrol-cans and a broom! Slam!

Wendy looked up. Then she jumped up, and, with a muttered exclamation, rushed to the caravan door. It was closed, and the key clicked on the inside, locking the three out. At the window, as Jill and Fay scrambled up, the girl's face appeared.

"Hallo, go on looking," she said. "I've got some looking to do inside!"

And then, while Wendy, climbing up on to a wheel, stared in through the window, the girl started searching.

"Stop that! Stop, I say!" commanded Wendy angrily. "How dare you! We're in charge. If anything is stolen—don't you see, we shall be blamed!"

The girl turned from the small cupboard she had just burst open.

"I'm not stealing. I'm looking for something that belongs to me, that's all!" she said.



The panel suddenly fell open, and out of it fell a folded newspaper. "Can this be the proof the girl was searching for?" said Wendy.

Wendy dropped back, and faced Jill and Fay in desperation.

"I'll trick her back," she muttered.

"Hurrah—hurrah!" she cried, in forced exultation. "Here's the gipsy—she's missed her train—"

"Where—where?" said Jill eagerly.

"Wave to her!" said Wendy.

The door of the caravan was burst suddenly open, and the mystery girl jumped down, looked right and left, and then ran for cover.

"Where's the gipsy?" said Jill, who had not yet tumbled to Wendy's trick.

"Goodness knows," said Wendy, smiling. "But I paid that little trickster back in her own coin. Come in, and shut the door."

They shut the door, and this time locked it. Then they studied the caravan. The doors of two cupboards had been burst open. They saw cheap jewellery, letters that the girl had hurriedly examined, papers, books, and money—all scattered on the table.

"She wasn't after money, then," said Jill, in wonder.

"Looks as though it was a letter she wanted," nodded Wendy.

They put the money, the jewellery, and the papers back into the cupboards carefully, and there was no hint of interruption from the mystery girl.

"She can't get in through the window, that's one thing," said Jill. "Hallo—draughts—game of draughts. Who says?"

"Take you on, rather!" said Wendy promptly.

Fay had found a magazine, and settled down to read it. But they were destined not to be left long in peace. The draught board was only just in place, and Fay had read no more than the opening sentence of her story when there came a wild cry from outside.

"Trying to fool us again!" said Wendy grimly, as she listened. "She'll probably yell for help, and expect us all to rush out."

It was not a moment later that they heard the yell.

"Help—let me go—let me go!"

Wendy rose, but Jill held her.

"Don't be a duffer, Wendy!" she said. "You said yourself it's a trick—"

"It might be," admitted Wendy. "I suspected it; but she can't be clever enough to imitate men's voices—and hark!"

They all listened. On the still night air, the voices came to them clearly.

"You'd better come quietly. We've been trailing you all day. There's no escape now. You're under arrest."

It was a man's voice, and another man spoke.

"Resisting arrest won't help you."

Then came the girl's last shout.

"Oh, if I could only have got that proof, but those girls ruined it. It was all planned, and they ruined it. Now nothing matters—nothing—"

Her voice grew faint, and Wendy stood stock still, her face like chalk. She rushed to the door of the caravan and opened it, but she knew, as she did so, that she was too late, for the sound of a car moving off came, and the bright glow of headlamps lighting the trees.

"She's gone," said Wendy. "Under arrest. And somewhere in this caravan was proof—something that would have saved her."

"Why didn't she say so?" demanded Jill.

"Why didn't she tell us?"

Wendy shook her head worriedly, as she looked around the ransacked van.

She made another effort to close one of the cupboard doors that the girl had forced open.

"Steady! The whole thing's coming to bits," warned Jill. "The panel there's bulging—"

Wendy saw the panel Jill referred to, and pressed it. But instead of closing it suddenly flew open, and revealed a space large enough to conceal a newspaper folded in four, which fell to the ground.

"Hallo—o—" said Fay.

Jill snatched it up, and turned it over.

"Can this be the proof the girl was searching for?" she asked.

"Hardly—it's about fifteen years old. Look at the date," said Fay. "My goodness—let me look. What a quaint hat that woman is wearing!"

There was the photograph of a woman on the front page, but the letterpress that had surrounded it now was missing. Wendy leaned over Fay's shoulder, and studied it. She did not feel now that she was spying; for the girl's urgent cry made it imperative that they should do what little they could to help.

Wendy tapped the paper after a moment's study.

"There's nothing else on this page that would need this picture to illustrate it. It says 'Mrs—' and the rest is torn, and so is the article that was here."

Fay gave a little gasp as Wendy finished. "My goodness—that girl. It isn't her—but it's like her all right."

"Her mother," said Wendy in a tone of suppressed excitement.

"Wendy—what a guess," laughed Jill.

"Guess or not," said Wendy. "I say it is. The girl was only two then, or something like that—"

Wendy turned the paper over quickly, putting it on the table.

"Someone tore this article out," she said. "But not all of it. They forgot that front page articles usually carry over to another page—ahah!"

She had found the continuation from page 1.

"Got it—got it. Listen," she cried in excitement. "Every resource of Scotland Yard is being utilised, but so far without avail. The theory that the child may have been kidnapped by gipsies is being considered, but Superintendent Blane attaches little importance to it—"

Wendy's eyes gleamed as she looked at her friends.

"And Superintendent Blane was wrong," she said. "Because the child was kidnapped by gipsies—and the child is the mystery girl. And the proof she wants is her mother's identity. She needs her mother's help now—and I'll see she gets it. I'll see she finds out who her mother is—who this woman is."

Jill and Fay hardly breathed with excitement.

"But how Wendy—how?"

Wendy shook her head. At the moment she did not see the solution, but as she could not do anything until morning, she had time enough to think.

THE old gipsy woman looked at Wendy

measuringly. She had returned soon after ten o'clock on the following morning, just after

the girls had returned from an early morning ramble through the near-by woods. They were cooking late breakfast.

Wendy, in her straightforward way, had explained about the girl, and her search of the caravan, but was saving mention of the newspaper.

The old gipsy's eyes narrowed.

"So she's under arrest, is she?" she said.

"Well—poor lass. Fate has been against her all along. And do you know why she came here searching—searching on a fruitless errand, what's more—"

Wendy nodded, unable to pretend.

"Yes—she wanted proof—proof of her mother's identity."

The old gipsy was not surprised.

"Oh, she told you? She tells everyone. But she's not believed. For there's no proof. No one knows I don't know, except one thing—but keep it to yourselves—it's my belief she was kidnapped and her mother's some rich woman. That's all."

Wendy's expression hardened.

"And you don't know who her mother is? You haven't even a photograph of her?" she asked.

"I! Not a clue," said the old gipsy in surprise. "There's only one knowned that, and she's dead. Drasena. A nasty, cruel woman. Sometimes I can feel her spirit in this caravan. It was hers once."

Wendy heaved a sigh.

"I'm so glad; for it means that that paper was hidden by her, and not you—look!" she cried, and to the old gipsy's obvious astonishment, she opened the secret panel.

"Well! All these five years I've lived here and not knowed it," said the gipsy in wonder. "And how did you find it?"

"Oh, because when the girl forced the cupboard, she strained the whole panelling. It's not very well made," said Wendy. "But, my goodness—then we have really found the secret, known to no one else living. The woman in this photograph is her mother."

The old gipsy shrugged her shoulders.

"And no name. How will you find the woman who is like that—"

"Pretty hopeless," agreed Jill.

"Rubbish," said Wendy. "We have the date of the paper—and the newspaper people have a copy of this paper on their files. They can pretty soon tell us this woman's name—and besides, we can trace Superintendent Blane."

In highly excited mood they sat down to their breakfast, sharing it with the old gipsy, and then, after thanking her and compensating

her, they departed, taking with them the old newspaper.

First they hiked to a police station, across country, a distance of six miles. The officer in charge of the station heard their story, and soon had things moving by telephone.

"Leave it to me," he said, "it'll take a few hours to get it all settled; perhaps not before to-morrow. So if you leave your address we'll let you know just what happened."

Having done all they could to help, Wendy & Co. left the matter in his hands, and finished their day according to plan, finding the Apple-tree Farm and making their apologies. The Sunday meal they had ordered was prepared, and they ate with keen enjoyment. Then out they went again, this time making sure that they did not lose their way.

It was two days later that they received a letter from a Mrs. Marshall, offering fervent thanks for the part they had played in tracing her daughter, who now was returned to her having been acquitted on a charge of breaking into a house. She had thought to find there a clue to her mother's identity—and the woman owner of the house proved to be her own aunt!

When Wendy, Jill, and Fay again met Dulcie Marshall—as the girl proved to be—they hardly recognised the happy, smiling girl who greeted them. Dulcie, after years of misery, poverty and drudgery had come into her own.

Gratefully she smiled at Wendy.

"I'll never forget what you've done for me," she declared. "But for you—" She broke off, her lips quivering, and impulsively she gave Wendy a hug.

"Oh, I didn't do much!" declared Wendy. "It was chance, really!"

"Bosh!" put in Fay. "It was your clever deductions, Wendy, and your keen eyes that solved the riddle of the paper. You deserve all the credit."

Wendy blushed. She hated being thanked. Then Jill, sensing her chum's embarrassment, chipped in with a chuckle.

"If you ask me," she said, "hiking deserves the credit. If we hadn't taken up hiking—"

"Exactly," nodded Wendy. "Come on, girls, three cheers for hiking—the best sport ever invented."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Jill and Fay.

The cheers were given with a will, and you can be sure that Dulcie Marshall joined in!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

You'll meet Wendy, Jill and Fay again next week, girls—in another breezy story of the great outdoors. Don't miss it. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.

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DRAMA AT THE DOG SHOW

EVER SINCE she had left school, Kitty Graham had wanted to establish her own kennels, and when she inherited ancient Lorne Abbey, she was able to do so.

With Bridget, a cheery Irish girl, she went to live in the partly ruined abbey, which was supposed to be haunted by a phantom monk. They saw the sinister Green Friar on several occasions, and it seemed clear that he was no friend.

Kitty adopted Remus, a homeless retriever, and in his collar she found a message from her grandfather, which said that riches would be hers if Remus won the Lorne Abbey Cup.

Judith Bligh, a neighbour, who also ran a kennels, was jealous of Kitty, especially when Mrs. Fergusson gave charge of her two greyhounds, two Pekinese, and her little Scottie, Pogo, to Kitty.

Kitty entered Remus in the county show. If he won the local championship he would be eligible to compete for the Lorne Abbey Cup.

While waiting for the show to start, Kitty heard two men talking in the secretary's office, and she was convinced that one of them was the rascal who had been posing as the legendary phantom monk.

KITTY'S heart thumped excitedly. At last she would learn the Phantom Monk's real identity.

Her hand on the door knob quivered with eagerness, but even as she made to push open the door a voice hailed her from the other side of the hall:

"Good-morning, Miss Graham! Just a minute, please!"

It was one of the stewards. Kitty turned reluctantly away from the ante-room.

"Yes?" she asked.

"It's about your dog. I see you've put him in a box under the gallery, but that section is reserved for Airedales. Will you move him to the opposite side? If you'll come this way, I'll show you exactly where."

Fuming with impatience, Kitty followed the official, but in less than a minute she was back again, having promised to shift Remus in a moment or two.

As she approached the ante-room, she strained her ears anxiously. Faintly she

heard the murmur of voices. So the two men were still in there—and one of them was the Green Friar!

She grabbed the handle, turned it, and swept open the door. On tenterhooks of expectancy, she darted into the room, only to pull up in dismay.

For, except for a slender figure, bent over a desk in the far corner, show catalogue in hand, the room was now empty.

The two men had gone, and a door at the other end of the ante-room showed how they had left.

Eager to follow them, Kitty stepped forward. The girl by the desk turned at the sound of her footsteps, and Kitty gave a cry of recognition.

"Judith!" she exclaimed, and her eyes rounded with surprise. "What are you doing here?" she gasped.

"What's that to do with you?" Judith Bligh demanded haughtily. "I suppose I can wait for the secretary without asking your permission?"

"Of course you can." Kitty was quick to make amends. She realised that her impulsive question might have seemed impertinent. "I'm sorry," she apologised. "I didn't mean to be rude, but I didn't expect to find you here. I thought Mr. Jarrold and—another man were in here."

Judith sniffed.

"Oh, they left just before you came in!" she said.

"Then—then you actually saw them!" exclaimed Kitty, and in her excitement she forgot how unfriendly Judith had been in the past. "You can tell me whom Mr. Jarrold was with?" she added.

Judith surveyed her curiously.

"I could if I wanted to—certainly," she agreed. "But why should I? What concern is it of yours whom Mr. Jarrold was with?"

"But it does concern me—honestly it does. You see—" Kitty stopped, uncertain whether to confide in Samuel Bligh's

daughter. "Oh, please tell me who it was!" she urged.

But Judith shook her head and picked up the catalogue she had laid down on the desk.

"You do your own spying!" she retorted. "I'm not going to help you."

And she turned her back and concentrated all her attention on the book in her hand. For a moment Kitty regarded her in dismay, then running across to the far door, she opened it and looked out into the yard beyond. She was in time to see Mr. Jarrold, one of the biggest dog exhibitors in the county, open the rear door of a saloon car that had just drawn up.

Except for the driver of the car and Mr. Jarrold himself, the yard was empty. Kitty was seized with a sudden suspicion. She had taken it for granted that Mr. Jarrold's companion had been a man, but what if she had been mistaken? What if his companion in the ante-room had been a girl—Judith Bligh!

Kitty caught in her breath.

She hadn't forgotten how Judith disliked her—she hadn't forgotten how eager the haughty girl's father had been to buy Phantom Abbey! Suppose one of them was the mysterious rascal who had been posing as the Green Friar? Suppose it was Judith herself who was her unknown enemy?

It was a staggering thought, and somehow Kitty could not accept it. She remembered all the other evidence she had discovered. That seemed to point to Mr. Jones, her solicitor, being the culprit. Then there was Ralph Tyler, the surly cottager—he disliked her also. He might well be the Phantom Monk!

With a sigh, Kitty shook her head. It was beyond her. She still could not decide which of the three suspects—if any of them—was her secret enemy.

As she stood there disappointed and non-plussed, there came a deep bark from the saloon car, and Mr. Jarrold led out a magnificent black retriever.

She recognised the dog instantly. This was Tinker, a thoroughbred whose photograph had often appeared in the various dog papers. And this was the animal Mr. Jarrold and the unknown Green Friar had been discussing—the dog who was to be Remus' chief rival in to-day's show!

Anxiously Kitty surveyed him as he jumped down off the running-board and let his master snap on a lead. He was a magnificent specimen, there could be no mistake about that.

Her eyes wandered over him, looking for weak points, assessing the length of his tail, the shape of his head, and his stance. But she

Proudly Bridget pointed to the cake she had made in Remus's honour. Kitty did her best to smile. But how could she enjoy the Celebration Tea now that she had received the Green Friar's note? A note that threatened to take away her beloved dogs!

looked in vain for any fault. Tinker was a champion if there ever was one.

Despite herself, Kitty felt her heart sink. What chance would her beloved Remus have against this famous rival? Surely he could not hope to beat him! Yet beat him he must, if he were to become eligible for the Lorne Abbey Cup Competition!

At that moment Mr. Jarrold turned and saw her. He was a big, bluff man, with a beefy face and shrewd grey eyes. Seeing that she was surveying his dog, he grinned.

"Not so bad, eh?" he said. "It'll take a mighty good dog to beat him."

Despite her fear for Remus' chances, Kitty smiled, and, walking forward, she laid an admiring hand on Tinker's black head.

"He's a lovely chap," she agreed. "I would wish him luck, but—well, you see, I've got a retriever entered for the same competition, and naturally I want Remus to win."

"Remus!" Mr. Jarrold's shrewd eyes narrowed. "So you're Kitty Graham from the Abbey, are you?" he muttered, and his voice became less friendly. "Well, I'm afraid you're wasting your time. You'd better withdraw your dog and save your entrance fee. He doesn't stand a chance against Tinker."

And with a rough laugh he walked on, leading Tinker with him. Kitty watched him go with a flush on her cheek. His contemptuous words had stung her.

Then, as she watched the rival dog-breeder lead his entry away, she forgot her fears. For Tinker was not as faultless as she had first thought. Perfect in shape and stance he might be, but he walked badly. That would lose him points in the ring.

Kitty felt hope returning. Excitedly she rushed back into the hall. As she prepared to move Remus to his right box, she gave him a hug.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself for ever doubting you," she told him. "Of course you will win! Why, there's not a finer dog in the county!"

Fondly she kissed him, then, as she led him across the hall to the corner the steward had pointed out, she watched him with keen eyes. Head up, tail nicely arched, he walked like a king, and Kitty's heart filled with pride.

"That's how you'll win," she whispered. "You walk like a champion and before the day's out you'll be one!"

Nevertheless, it was an anxious morning she spent, waiting for the signal to take her pet into the ring.

The smaller dogs were judged first, and a big crowd watched them being paraded. Aristocratic Pekineses were followed by frisky, excited fox-terriers, then there was a procession of perky poms, led into the ring by the fond owners.

It was not until midday that Kitty received the signal she had so long awaited. With trembling fingers she snapped on Remus' lead. Eagerly, appealingly she whispered to him as she gave his gleaming coat a last brush down.

"Don't forget what I've told you, old lad," she said. "When you step into the ring keep your head up and your tail arched. And whatever you do, don't bark!"

Remus' brown eyes surveyed her affectionately, and he gave a little nod, as though to say: "You can trust me."

There came a burst of clapping as she and Remus entered the ring. Most of the other retrievers were already there, sitting down beside their owners. Amongst them was Tinker, and, despite herself, Kitty knew another moment's fear.

What a picture Mr. Jarrold's dog looked! A perfect specimen, if ever there were one—and, unlike Remus, he was not recovering from the after effects of a flu cold.

The judges stepped into the ring. One by one they examined the seven rivals, opening their mouths, examining their ears, lifting their paws. Then they conferred, and Kitty saw that they were pointing and looking at Tinker. Evidently he had impressed them.

Then came the signal for the dogs to parade. In a long line they paced the sawdust, first on the lead, then unattended.

Tinker headed the procession, and, as she watched, Kitty took new hope. Surely the judges must notice how awkwardly he walked. Surely they must see the difference between him and Remus!

YOUR EDITOR'S CORNER



"Girls' Crystal" Office,
The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street,
London, E.C.A.

HALLO, GIRLS.—Can you picture your Editor surrounded by a group of, say a hundred or so, secretaries? I'm afraid I can't, myself—but it looks as if that is what will have to happen.

And now I'll tell you why. Those letters of yours. By every post they have been pouring in! From the British Isles, and from the whole Empire—and some from places that you'd never dream of!

But you don't think I'm grumbling, do you? You know me too well for that. In fact, I've simply loved every single letter, for they've been such charming—and helpful ones.

POSTMAN'S KNOCK

Last time the postman came to my office, I went to the door to open it in response to his knock.

"Afternoon, sir!" he said. "More letters for you. My, but you must be popular!"

Modestly I shook my head, and at that moment Penelope appeared.

"Or perhaps it's the young lady," the postman said.

"She certainly has got lots of admirers among our readers," I told the postman.

"I'm not surprised, sir!" said the postman gallantly, and I've an idea that Penelope was so delighted at the compliment that she actually blushed.

SECRETS

Now I must peep into my book of secrets and tell you about the stories that are coming in your favourite paper next week.

What shall we start with? I know—it shall be "Stella and the Sheikh of Mystery," just for a change.

Next week's chapters of this story will be the last, and you will be saying good-bye to Stella, to Sheikh Omar, to the Barringtons, and to all the others you have met in this story.

Sad as it is to lose a favourite story like this, there's always something about getting to the end of a story—when mysteries are cleared up and everyone is happy—isn't there?

So look forward to these final chapters next week, when I shall also have something to tell you about the story that is to follow. You can start looking forward to the new serial right away, as a matter of fact—for Renee Frazer is the author. I know that's enough to make you impatient to know more about it.

Noel Raymond, our popular young detective, will feature in another mystery story next week. "The Sign of the Black Diamond" is the title.

Susie will feature in another delightful complete story, and so will those three light-hearted chums, Wendy & Co.

Our serials, "Kennel Maid of Phantom Abbey," and "The Schoolgirl Speed Star," will continue as entrancingly as ever.

So you've got a wonderful story-programme to look forward to.

Good-bye until next week.

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR

Her eyes went to her pet. How proud she was of him! Without once turning his head, he strode round the ring, tail arched, muzzle held on high, oblivious of the spectators, calm and cool, never once faltering.

The judges conferred again. Two of the dogs were ordered out of the ring. The survivors were paraded again. Two more owners were signalled to lead their pets away. Another circuit, then another retriever was called out, and only two were left—Remus and Tinker.

Kitty held her breath. The crucial moment had come. The next time round would decide Remus' fate. As she waited for the signal to parade him again, she suddenly felt him stiffen in her grasp. For a moment he stood there, the hair on his neck rising, then a low growl escaped him, and he tugged at his collar as though to go bounding away.

"Remus!" Kitty gave a horrified gasp. What had come over her pet? Why was he struggling so wildly? Desperately she clung to him.

"Remus," she whispered. "Keep quiet! Down, you silly! Oh, please don't spoil everything now!"

She looked agitatedly around, wondering if the judges had noticed anything. This unruly behaviour might lose Remus a valuable point. Fortunately the judges were talking together, but some of the spectators were surveying Remus in surprise. It could only be a matter of moments before everyone's attention was attracted to Tinker's rival.

"Remus," whispered Kitty desperately, "what's the matter? Oh, please sit down! Please don't get excited!"

But for once her pet seemed to be deaf to her entreaties. He gave another low, rumbling growl, and made another frantic tug at his collar, struggling wildly to free himself of her restraining grasp.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MONK

THIS was not the first time Remus' manner had undergone such a startling transformation. Always it had been the same reason that had been responsible for his uncontrollable agitation.

The Phantom Monk!

Even as she struggled to calm her pet, Kitty looked up sharply. Was it possible that the Green Friar was here, in this crowded hall?

Swiftly she scanned the rows of spectators. Suddenly she caught in her breath. For there, on the other side of the ring, she glimpsed two familiar figures.

Nathaniel Jones, the elderly solicitor, and Rupert Blake, his young confidential clerk.

Kitty's eyes filled with suspicion. She could not forget that she had found an incriminating message in the lawyer's wastepaper-basket. Though it seemed incredible, yet surely this proved that he was the dreaded Green Friar?

She looked down at the agitated Remus, and saw that he was looking straight across at Nathaniel Jones. Plainly his object was to leap across the ring; hurl himself at the grey-haired, benevolent lawyer.

"Is that him—is that the Green Friar?" Kitty whispered.

Remus' curly tail threshed the air, and he seemed to give a whine of assent.

More and more of the spectators were gazing in surprise at the black retriever. The judges had finished their whispered discussion; they were turning back towards the ring.

"Remus!" cried Kitty desperately, forgetting the Green Friar for the moment. "Behave yourself—at once!"

Her voice was unusually sharp, and she did a thing she had never done before. She gave him a cuff over the ear. Remus gave an astonished whine. Abruptly his struggles ceased and he sank on his haunches, to slowly turn his head, his brown eyes looking up at her resentfully.

Tears in her own eyes, she dropped to one knee, put her arm around him.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, "but—oh, please behave! Please!"

A tear dropped on Remus' uplifted nose, and he gave a plaintive whine. His concern for the young mistress he loved made him forget his excitement. He licked her hand,

and Kitty, looking round, saw with relief that the lawyer and his clerk had moved away. There was now no sign of them.

Then came an order from the judging-box: "Once round again, please."

Mr. Jarrold confidently led his dog forward. But Kitty's heart was in her mouth. Suppose Remus caught another glimpse of Mr Jones; suppose he started to growl and struggle while she was leading him round the ring!

Once she felt him falter, and with her eyes she signalled him. To her relief he obeyed, and on he strode, once more as good as gold.

As the judging-box was reached, the speculative murmuring of the crowd died away. The judges compared notes; there was a moment's suspense, then the senior judge strode forward.

Notebook in hand, he smilingly surveyed the spectators.

"There is no need for me to discuss Mr. Jarrold's Tinker," he said. "He has been here before, and I think you will all agree that he is a magnificent specimen. Miss Graham's Remus is also a dog to be proud of, though to-day, unfortunately, we do not see him quite at his best. He has, I understand, just recovered from a feverish cold. That is a pity, for that fact has lost him marks. Leaving out points for parading, Tinker has been awarded 94 marks, while Remus has secured 91."

There was a burst of clapping and the judge paused. Kitty's heart sank. It seemed as if her pet had lost. Thanks to his recent illness, he had not looked his best.

But the judge had not finished yet.

"Although we sympathise with Miss Graham for the fact that, through no fault of her own, her exhibit is not in perfect condition, the judges cannot take his illness into consideration. On the other hand six marks are set aside for behaviour while parading. Here there can be no doubt as to which is the better dog. Remus paraded like a real champion, while Tinker was a little stiff and awkward and inclined to pull at the lead. Therefore, we have decided to award full marks for parading to Remus, and two marks to Tinker. That means—"

But another burst of applause interrupted him, and suddenly Kitty felt the blood rushing back to her cheeks. 91 and 6 made 97 marks in all, while her rival had only 96. Remus had won—won by a single mark!

His behaviour in the ring had turned the tables!

Never would she forget that moment. She was unconscious of Mr. Jarrold's scowling glance. She did not see the angry glare Judith Bligh shot at her across the ring. She was only aware of the judge's warm congratulations; only conscious of the applause that greeted her pet as he walked forward to have the coveted red and white rosette pinned to his collar.

Remus was county champion!

As soon as she could she got on the telephone to Bridget. The Irish girl nearly went wild with delight when she heard the news.

"Begorrah, but what did I tell you, me darlint!" she cried. "Of course Remus won! Shure, and 'tis not even the three-headed dog of Donderry could beat him! But hurry up and get home, me darlint. 'Tis a celebration tea we must have, and a fine cake I've already put in the oven."

But before Kitty left the hall she made inquiries about the show at which the Lorne Abbey Cup was to be presented. It was as well that she did, for she learnt that the closing date was only a few days hence.

She wrote out her application right away, and sent it off to the secretary of the Shires show. Then she went to collect Remus. On the way across the hall a familiar voice hailed her:

"I would like to congratulate you, my dear. Considering his recent illness, Remus did very well indeed."

Turning, Kitty found herself confronted by Nathaniel Jones. The elderly lawyer looked more benevolent than ever. Nevertheless, Kitty eyed him rather coldly. She couldn't forget her suspicions.

"Thank you," she said, and made to walk on, but he stopped her by putting a fatherly hand on her arm.

"Just a minute, my dear. I have a letter for you," he said.

"A letter?"

Kitty regarded him in surprise.

"Yes. It was brought to my office just now, and my clerk, thinking it might be important, brought it straight round here."

As he spoke he felt in his pocket and produced a sealed envelope. He handed it to Kitty, and with another smile, left her. She gazed at the letter wonderingly. It bore her own name, but the lawyer's address, and across the top had been written: "Please forward."

There was something vaguely familiar about the handwriting, and for some reason she could not understand, Kitty felt a sense of uneasiness as she ripped open the envelope and extracted the folded sheet of notepaper it contained.



Proudly Bridget pointed to the special tea she had prepared. Kitty smiled tremulously. "It's lovely," she murmured. Bridget was so happy, Kitty could not tell her about the warning note she had received—not now!

The message it contained was brief, but Kitty's eyes filled with horror as she read it.

"If you have any affection for Pogo and the other dogs at the Abbey Kennels, cancel Remus' entry from the Shires Dog Show immediately. You have only until to-night in which to act!"

There was no signature, but it was obvious who had written that menacing ultimatum—

The Phantom Monk!

Furious at Remus' success this afternoon, the mysterious Green Friar had acted with lightning swiftness. By fair means or foul, he meant to prevent the black retriever from winning the coveted Lorne Abbey Cup!

THE LAST WARNING!

"THE wretch! He's come out into the open at last! He's frightened lest I should learn the cup's secret. That means that he's after the riches granddad hinted at himself!"

Kitty set her lips grimly. This threatening letter made the Green Friar's objective plain. All along he had been out to cheat her of the mysterious treasure that the Lorne Abbey Cup could reveal. At first he had tried to frighten her away from the Abbey. When that had failed he had tried to disgrace

Remus and make it impossible for the dog to be shown.

And now, desperate, he had been reduced to making threats. Unless Kitty submitted to his demand he would strike at her through Pogo and the other dogs in her charge.

But never for a second did Kitty think of agreeing to this rascally ultimatum. No matter what happened, Remus should compete for the Lorne Abbey Cup.

"The Green Friar is only trying to scare me," she told herself. "He wouldn't dare harm any of the dogs."

Nevertheless, there was a worried look in her eyes as she set off for home in the taxi she had hired. While Remus curled up on the floor, one silky paw lying across her foot, she studied the Green Friar's note again. Suddenly a startled gasp escaped her lips.

She knew now why the writing had seemed

so familiar. It was identical with that on the scrap of paper she had found in Mr. Jones' office. But that had been written by the solicitor himself. Rupert Blake, his clerk, had told her so himself.

Kitty gave another gasp. An amazing suspicion occurred to her. Suppose the letter had never been brought to the dog show at all! Suppose Mr. Jones had written it himself, and had only pretended that it had been handed to him by his clerk, so as to lull her suspicions!

She gave a weary sigh. Right from the first she had taken a strong liking to her grandfather's solicitor. She found it hard to believe that he could be the grim apparition who haunted the abbey.

At that moment the taxi slowed down, and a boisterous, excited figure came rushing down the carriage drive to meet it. Bridget! Her round face red with excitement, the Irish girl swung open the taxi door and hurled herself at the peacefully snoozing Remus.

"Ye darlint!" she cried, and, gathering the surprised dog up in her arms, she almost hugged the life out of him. "Begorrah, but 'tis myself who always knew you'd win!"

Still clutching him, she grinned across at Kitty.

"Come along!" she urged. "Tea's all ready, and 'tis a spread that wouldn't disgrace the king himself."

Her excitement was infectious, and eagerly Kitty jumped out of the taxi, but when she

had paid off the driver her anxious look returned.

"Are Pogo and the others all right?" she asked.

Bridget chuckled.

"Shure they are! Pogo's munching a bone as big as himself this very minute. Bedad, but I had to give it to him. The little spalpeen gave me no peace until I took it out of the pot. And there's one for you, me darlint!" She gave Remus another hug. "A juicy beef bone, straight from the butcher's!"

Remus pricked up his ears. He gave a delighted bark, wriggled free of her grasp, and, like greased lightning, went charging up the drive to the abbey.

Bridget watched him go with a smile, then she turned to Kitty.

"And 'tis hungry you must be, too!" she said. "Come along! 'Tis crazy I am for you to see the cake I've made."

So proud was the Irish girl of her celebration preparations that Kitty hadn't the heart to dampen her high spirits.

Smilingly she let herself be led into the oak-panelled lounge, but in the doorway she stopped, her eyes widening with surprise and delight. For Bridget certainly had been busy. The room had been decorated with paper chains and great vases of chrysanthemums. The great oak table looked as if it had been prepared for a wedding reception.

There were home-made buns, delicious-looking trifles and jellies, and in the centre a two-tiered iced cake, decorated with little sugar dogs, and an inscription reading:

"WELL DONE, REMUS!"

"Oh, Bridget, it's lovely!" Kitty clapped her hands with delight. "But you shouldn't have done it. It must have taken you hours and—"

"Shure, and it was a pleasure preparing it, me darlint," cut in the Irish girl. "But 'tis nothing to the celebration we'll have when Remus wins the Lorne Abbey Cup. Now seat yourself, me darlint. I'll just give Remus his bone, then we'll have tea."

Crossing to a side table, she picked from a dish a huge bone, that looked like a Sunday joint. It was decorated with a bright blue bow, and as she lifted it up there came an excited bark from the doorway.

Remus had arrived on the scene. One sniff of anticipation he gave, then he launched himself across the room. Kitty raised a reproving finger.

"Steady on, my lad!" she said. "Don't forget your manners."

"Manners nothing!" laughed Bridget, letting the excited retriever take the huge bone from her. "'Tis no need for manners a broth of a bhoys like him need have. Go on, me darlint, tuck into it. 'Tis deserve every ounce of it you do."

Remus didn't need telling twice! Carrying the juicy bone to the hearthrug, he settled himself down and got to work in earnest.

Kitty seated herself at the table, Bridget made the tea, and soon they were all busy celebrating.

The Irish girl was at the top of her form. Her jokes and laughter made Kitty forget the

Green Friar's letter. Bridget also had a piece of news, which, in the excitement, she had forgotten to relate.

"A Mrs. Cartwright called while you were out," she said. "Tis keeps spaniels she does, and she's thinking of letting you have charge of them."

"Oh, won't that be lovely?" Kitty cried; then she smiled and shook her head as the Irish girl made to cut her another slice of iced cake. "I couldn't manage another crumb! Now, if you'll sit still, I'll clear away!"

"That be hanged for a tale!" retorted Bridget. "'Tis myself who'll look after the ruins. You've done your bit to-day, helping Remus win the County Championship, and 'tis yourself who'll take things easy."

But Kitty wouldn't agree to that, so in the end they did the work between them. Then, leaving Remus happily gnawing his bone, they went to make the other dogs comfortable for the night.

They also had received bones, and piled-up plates of special tit-bits, so, full up and sleepy, they were ready for bed. Looking at them, lying in a heap around their empty dishes, Kitty had to chuckle.

"It's a good job Mrs. Fergusson didn't see what they ate," she commented. "She'd have had a fit! Still, it's only for once. But to-morrow the poor dears must go back to their proper diet, otherwise, they'll get so fat that they won't be able to waddle. Come on, Pogo, my lad, time for bye-byes!"

The comical little Scottie blinked open one eye. Usually, at this time of night, he was full of mischief. Generally, Kitty and Bridget had to chase him all round the garden before they could get him into his box, but even he to-night was feeling drowsy. Bridget's celebration tea certainly had been on the generous side!

It was as they were padlocking the various doors of the stables, where the five dogs were housed, that Kitty remembered the letter she had received. Her happy smile disappeared, and with a worried sigh she took the note from her pocket and held it out.

"Read that, Bridget," she said. "I received it this afternoon."

The Irish girl obeyed, and gradually her cheery face took on a flush of angry surprise. "The spalpeen!" she cried. "The varmint! Bedad, but 'tis boiled in oil the fellow ought to be!"

She glared at the threatening note, and then impulsively put a sturdy arm around Kitty and looked at her anxiously.

"'Tis not yourself who's going to take any notice of this letter, is it?" she asked. "Shure, and the spalpeen's only trying to frighten you. He wouldn't dare harm Mrs. Fergusson's dogs. Besides, devil of a chance he'll get! They're all locked up—and there's Remus, who sleeps as light as a cat!"

"Then—then you don't think there's any danger?" asked Kitty.

"Bedad, and I don't say that, me darlint. But 'tis not carry out his rascally threat the spalpeen will—Remus and I'll see to that. We'll never let Pogo and the other darlins out of our sight. Now, don't you worry, Miss

Kitty." Her sturdy arm gave Kitty a comforting squeeze. "We'll give the Green Friar more than he bargains for if he does dare show himself around here."

Bridget's Irish optimism gave Kitty new courage. But Bridget had more than her tongue to help her fight the menace that overshadowed the kennels.

"'Tis an alarm bell we'll fix up!" she declared.

"An alarm bell?" echoed Kitty, in surprise.

"Yes, me darlint. We'll fix it up in our bed-room and connect it with the kennels. Then, if anyone tries to force his way in, the bell will give us warning. Now, don't you worry. I know how to rig it up. Shure, and wasn't my own brother an electrician in Dublin? Come on, me darlint! I'll show you how to trap the spalpeen of a ghost!"

Cheerfully she led the way back into the house. But at that moment from the lounge came a series of frantic barks, followed by an agitated scratching on the door.

Bridget gave a concerned cry.

"'Tis Remus! We must have shut the door, and the poor darlint can't get out!"

Rushing through the kitchen, she ran down the hall and opened the door.

"There you are, then!" she said, as Remus emerged.

But the black retriever did not even look at her. With another deep bark he brushed past her and went charging into the kitchen, there to go running round in circles, snuffling at the door and whining.

Then there came a startled cry from Bridget as that girl re-entered the kitchen.

"My cake! Look at it!"

With a furious finger, she pointed to the dresser, where they had left the remains of the iced celebration cake. The silver stand was still there, but the cake itself lay on the floor, broken and spoilt, as though some vengeful hand had deliberately knocked it to the ground.

Kitty stared at it in bewilderment and dismay.

"Oh, what a shame!" she cried. "But how did—"

She broke off, for Remus was now sniffing and whining among the remnants of the fallen cake, and suddenly Kitty noticed something that stood propped against the empty stand.

It was a small card, with a few words printed on it. Darting forward, she snatched it up, and then her face went deathly pale, for this is what she read:

"You have just time to catch the post. This is my last warning. Do as I ask, or by morning you will regret it."

There was no signature, but none was needed. Despairingly Kitty held the threatening card out for Bridget to read.

"It's from the Phantom Monk!" she gasped. "He's been here—perhaps he's hidden here now—and unless we obey he means to carry out his threat. He means to kidnap Pogo and the other dogs!"

Will the Phantom Monk be able to carry out his threat? You mustn't miss next Friday's enthralling chapters of this dramatic and appealing story.

door on which a rather imperious knock had sounded. "Come in!" she added.

The door opened. Alice Smailes, herself came in. Her face wore a feline grin of malice. Loftily she looked round the study.

"Well," Pat asked, "what do you want?"

"That," Alice said, "is not the way to talk to your head girl, Patricia. I must remind you now," she added maliciously, "that you are only an ordinary girl. Which brings me to the point," Alice said with relish, "that as you are no longer entitled to occupy the captain's study, I shall expect you to clear out!"

Pat's eyes gleamed.

"You mean you are going to move in here?" "Precisely!"

Pat shrugged.

"And who'll do the clearing out?" she wanted to know.

"I," Alice said with a loftiness which made

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Pat somehow feel sick. "I will attend to that, Patricia. As soon as the juniors are dismissed from their detention I will get half a dozen of them to help me. And—er—meantime," she paused, smiling a tantalising smile which made Pat clench her hands, "meantime," she added purring, "I have other orders for you, Patricia!"

"Oh!" Pat said grimly.

"Yes," Alice nodded. "You know, of course, that Miss Sharples thinks your motor-racing activities bad for the school—or didn't you? I am instructed by Miss Sharples to tell you, Patricia, that you are to give up this foolish

craze at once! That, in fact, if you dare enter for another race, it will be against Miss Sharples' wishes, and you will be expelled!"

And then, while Pat stared in utterly flabbergasted amazement, Alice paused and coughed.

"That means, of course," she added sadly, "that all the privileges Miss Clifton granted you are withdrawn. And it means, also," she added as she toyed with the handle of the door, "that Miss Sharples expects you to remove the Comet from the school to-night!"

And while Pat, with clenched fists and burning eyes, tried to think of a suitable retort, Alice, with a bright smile, quitted the study.

So Alice has her triumph at last! At last she has Pat in her power. But what is the motive underlying this spite of hers? It cannot be only her dislike of Pat. Don't miss a word of next Friday's splendid instalment of this serial.