

Packed with Christmas Stories and Features For Schoolgirls

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EVERY FRIDAY.

Week Ending December 17th, 1938.



FUN AND THRILLS FOR
DOREEN AND JEAN C
THEIR GRAND SWI'
HOLIDAY

from the
g them!

Read of their enthralling adventure.
Quest at the Winter Sports"—inside.

JUNE'S ADVENTURE in FAIRY CAVE



ON THE "WONDERLAND EXPRESS"

NOEL RAYMOND glanced at his watch, and a quizzical smile crossed his boyish face.

"Ten minutes late, June!" he murmured. "Wonder if you've forgotten our little appointment?"

He scanned the throng of Christmas shoppers swarming through the gift department of Bentrledge's great West End store, but he looked in vain for the slim, fair-haired figure of his school-girl niece.

It was not like June to be late for an appointment—especially when that appointment was connected with the exciting purchase of Christmas presents! "Wonder if we've missed each other in the crowd?" thought Noel. "P'raps I'd better scout round and look for her."

There was a thoughtful expression in his eyes as he made his way through the jostling, good-natured throng.

Unofficially, the young detective was there on business—having received an urgent communication from the manager of Bentrledge's only that morning.

But his business, though strictly confidential and important, was not of a nature to interfere with keeping the appointment with his young niece.

He halted for a moment to watch the crowd queuing up outside one of the novel Christmas attractions; an attendant, attired as a railway guard, was calling through a megaphone:

"Take your tickets here for the Wonderland Express! The thrill of a lifetime! Sixpence all the way!"

Noel smiled and made to move on; then abruptly he stiffened, his eyes narrowing, as he observed a surprising episode that had seemingly escaped the notice of the attendant and the light-hearted crowd.

The entrance to the "Wonderland Express" was by way of a turnstile; the miniature train itself was drawn up at the platform behind a canvas barrier.

As Noel turned, he saw a furtive figure squeezing through a gap in the canvas, with the apparent intention of boarding the "train" without paying!

"Well, of all the cool cheek!" breathed Noel.

With a flicker of a smile, he stepped forward silently, his hand falling on the other's shoulder.

"That's all this?" he demanded, assuming the tones of an irascible attendant.

His intention was to give the other a well-deserved scare—without causing trouble.

In this he succeeded; but the young detective himself received almost as big a shock.

With a startled gasp the young intruder turned—revealing a flushed, attractive face, framed by a school hat; a pair of challenging grey eyes were raised to his.

"Oh!" came the astonished gasp. "June!" exclaimed Noel incredulously. "What on earth—"

"S'sh!" June raised a finger warningly to her lips. "Don't interfere, uncle; you—you don't understand!"

"That's a fact," agreed Noel, regarding his niece curiously. "Trying to get a free ride, June—or what?"

He spoke jokingly, but his eyes were puzzled.

"Don't be silly, uncle!" breathed June. "Please let me go! I'll—I'll explain afterwards."

"Wait a minute!" said Noel, endeavouring to speak sternly. "You're supposed to be meeting me—and I can't let you run into any scrapes."

A bell clanged loudly, and, with a loud rumbling, the miniature train vanished into the canvas tunnel.

"There!" exclaimed June reproachfully. "Now I've lost it!"

"You can go on the next journey," Noel replied, as he drew her away from the throng of onlookers. "I want to talk to you. To start with, why didn't you meet me, as we arranged?"

June looked momentarily abashed. "I'm sorry, uncle, I forgot the time," she admitted frankly. "You see, I was interested in something else."

"So it appears," said Noel dryly. "Now, about this train affair. What

To visit a big stores with Uncle Noel was a thrill indeed for June Gaynor—especially at Christmas-time. June went, prepared to have an exciting time, but little dreaming of the thrills and mystery that she was to encounter.

By PETER LANGLEY

was the idea of trying to board it without a ticket?"

"But I've got a ticket!" declared June, producing it.

"Then why didn't you go through the turnstile?" asked Noel, more puzzled than ever.

A mysterious gleam crept into June's grey eyes.

"I wanted Seat No. 6," she whispered.

"Eh?" demanded Noel, frowning. "But, surely—"

"I couldn't get it, in the ordinary way," went on June breathlessly. "I've been trying for the last half hour. Every time it was taken by the same girl." June's voice was indignant.

"Twice she pushed past me in the queue, and made me drop my money. I meant to get one over her this time—but you interfered."

"Sorry!" Noel grinned in some perplexity. "You must admit your actions appeared a little curious. The attendant might have spotted you—and that would have meant trouble. Why were you so keen to get Seat No. 6? Wouldn't Seat No. 5 have done as well?"

June shook her head, glancing cautiously over her shoulder.

"You don't understand," she breathed. "I tried for that seat, to start with, because one of my friends told me that it was the best one in the train—to see the views. But that's not all. Uncle, I'm certain there's some mystery connected with it!"

"Ah!" Noel's eyes twinkled. "Now we're getting somewhere. Another of your little mysteries, eh?"

"It's not a joking matter!" said June earnestly. "Why should the same girl travel by the train five times in succession, and insist on having the same seat every time?"

Noel whistled softly, his eyes narrowing.

"It certainly seems curious," he admitted. "Look here, June, I've got a little time to spare. Suppose we have another shot at getting that seat for you? I'll travel with you on the train."

June's face lit up.

"Uncle, you're a sport!" she declared. "Come on—quickly! We'll get in front of the queue!"

A queue was just beginning to form, but June and Noel were practically the first to arrive. The elderly couple in front of them took their tickets—numbers one and two; then Noel stepped forward.

"Two seats, please," he began briskly. "I'd like numbers—"

Ere he could complete his sentence, a breathless figure squeezed in front of him—a tall, dark-haired girl, smartly dressed.

"Excuse me," she gasped. "I lost my place in the queue!" She thrust a coin over the counter. "One seat, please—No. 6!"

June nudged her uncle violently.

"Just a minute, young lady," cut in Noel, frowning as he addressed the flustered stranger.

But the girl had snatched up her ticket, and with a half-defiant, half-frightened glance, made a dash for the waiting train.

Noel's lips tightened, and his eyes were frankly bewildered.

"We'll look into this, June!" he muttered. "That girl's certainly not here for fun." He turned to the bored ticket clerk. "Two seats, please—Nos. 4 and 5."

The clerk handed over the tickets, and Noel took June's arm, hurrying her towards the waiting train.

The Wonderland Express consisted of a number of small, decorative coaches, linked together and drawn by an electric engine.

As Noel and June entered their coach—the last in the train—they found the mystery girl already ensconced in her seat, and staring defiantly in front of her, as though determined to retain it at all costs.

Noel could see at a glance why Seat No. 6 had been recommended to June. It was the only single seat in the compartment, and it commanded a view from two windows—one at the side, and one at the rear of the train.

"What are we going to do?" whispered June, under her breath.

"Watch her," replied Noel softly. "You needn't look round. Use the mirror in your handbag."

June's eyes sparkled; this was real detective work!

The coaches filled up quickly; a bell clanged. With an eerie rumble the Wonderland Express plunged into the dim-lit tunnel on the first stage of its journey.

For a few moments nothing could be seen except the walls of the tunnel, painted to resemble rock, and hung with cardboard stalactites. Then, as the train wound more slowly on its way, other views appeared like magic—strange, dim-lit caverns where busy, mechanical dwarfs were at work with pick and spade; a fairy castle rising from roseate clouds; an underground lake of real water from which, at the train's approach, a strange "monster" reared its terrifying head!

The various exhibits were greeted with laughter or murmurs of pleased surprise; but Noel, his eyes puzzled, was waiting for something else—something—he could not say what.

The motion of the train became slower; a dim glow was revealed at a bend in the tunnel.

"The Witch's Cave!" called the guard.

The train came to a stop in a realistic cavern lit by an eerie red light; over a smoking cauldron crouched the witch—a dummy figure of frightening appearance.

And just then June grabbed Noel by the arm.

"Uncle!" she gasped. "The girl in Seat No. 6—she's gone!"

Noel turned sharply, and an incredulous ejaculation escaped his lips; for the eerie light revealed that the seat behind them was empty!

The young detective sprang to his feet, as the train started with a jolt. Its loud rumbling almost deadened another, more ominous sound.

A girl's stifled scream!

At the same instant the train plunged again into the dark tunnel.

"Uncle—did you hear?" June gasped, above the rumble of the train. "That cry!"

The train was slowing as another scene burst into view—an even larger cavern, brilliantly lit, and ringing with the sound of hammers.

"Fairy Cave and Santa Claus' Workshop!" called the guard. "All change here for Christmas presents!"

The train came to a stop, amid a burst of laughter and applause.

A life-sized replica of Santa Claus smiled benevolently from his throne, surrounded by mechanical gnomes, elves, and hob-goblins.

In the foreground stood a young girl, attired as the fairy queen. It was her task to distribute parcels to the lucky passengers of the Wonderland Express.

But Noel paid no attention to the scene; he had stepped quickly down the gangway, and was bending over the empty seat at the rear of the car.

He struck a match, and bent to examine the floor under the seat.

His keen eyes spotted a crumpled scrap of paper.

He picked it up, smoothing it out. In the centre of the paper was pencilled a figure 6. Beneath it were the words:

"Seven-thirty—do not fail!"

Noel glanced quickly at his watch, and a noiseless whistle escaped his lips. It was exactly half-past seven!

June was tugging anxiously at his arm.

"They're all going out, uncle," she whispered. "Oughtn't we to tell someone—about that girl?"

Noel nodded, as he hurried his niece towards the exit. He addressed the uniformed man at the gate.

"Was this train full when it started?"

"Yes, sir," came the surprised reply.

"Well, there's a passenger missing now," jerked Noel.

"Impossible, sir!" The official stared.

"There were twenty people on board—and I've counted fifteen. You and the young lady make seventeen. Here's two more—that's nineteen; and this other young lady makes twenty!"

Noel started involuntarily, and a stifled gasp came from June.

For the last passenger to emerge from the gate, holding tightly to a parcel like the rest—was a dark-haired girl!

She caught sight of Noel and June—and with a frightened glance made a dive into the crowd.

Noel drew in his breath sharply; he was almost convinced, from the fleeting glance he had obtained, that she was the same girl!

"Wait here, June!" he ordered tersely. "I shan't be long."

Leaving his niece standing by the gate, he raced in pursuit of the mystery girl.

For a moment he lost sight of her in the crush—then he saw her making her way towards the main staircase. He followed swiftly, but the girl saw him coming, and sprang into the service-lift.

It was of the self-operating type, and before Noel could reach it the gate was slammed in his face, and the lift rose swiftly upwards.

Noel made a dive for the stairs, but by the time he reached the floor above he found the lift standing empty. The girl had escaped!

The young detective bit his lip. It seemed as though the puzzle of the girl in Seat No. 6 was destined to remain a mystery.

There was a thoughtful gleam in his eyes as he made his way back to the gift hall, where he had left June.

A curious point had just occurred to him, though it might be of no significance.

The paper in which the girl's parcel had been wrapped was of a pale green shade, while the parcels that had been handed out to the other passengers in the Wonderland Express had been wrapped in ordinary brown paper.

Then where had she found that parcel? He was convinced that she had not been carrying it when she entered the train.

Puzzled, he threaded his way through the crowd, looking out for June. She was not standing where he had left her, despite his instructions.



Noel's face was white as he watched the passengers alight from the "Wonderland Express." His niece, June, was not among them! What could have happened to her?



He heard the attendant's stentorian-voice bel-
lowing through the megaphone:

"Take your tickets for the Wonderland Express! Last train this evening! Hurry along for the last train!"

Noel looked round casually, and a swift, startled ejaculation was torn from his lips.

For streaking towards the turn-
stile was June, and even as Noel
shouted to her and broke into a run, he
saw her leap into the rear car and
ensconce herself in Seat No. 6.

She waved to Noel triumphantly as
the train vanished into the tunnel.

The young detective's face was white
as he came to a halt at the turnstile.
June didn't realise her possible danger—
she couldn't have realised!

Grimly he hurried round to the exit,
awaiting the train's reappearance. He
heard the low rumble of its approach,
and saw the official approach to open
the gates.

Noel pushed his way through the
opening as the train appeared from the
tunnel. A handful of passengers
alighted, carrying their parcels, but
June was not among them!

An uneasy premonition gripping his
heart, Noel raced the length of the
train and stared into the rear coach.

It was deserted, but beside Seat No. 6
lay something crushed and battered
almost out of shape.

The young detective sprang forward
to snatch it up, and a stifled groan
escaped his lips.

It was June's school hat!

THE CLUE OF THE CLAW

NOEL'S worst fears were con-
firmed. He blamed himself
bitterly for having left his ven-
turesome niece on her own.

Springing out of the compartment, he
stared along the tunnel.

The guard was making his way to-
wards the exit, turning out the lights as
he went. Noel stepped quickly back
into the shadows, and waited till the
man had passed. He heard the other
close and lock the gates; the last dim
light in the tunnel was extinguished.

Whipping out his torch, Noel sprinted
into the eerie gloom of the tunnel.

"June!" he called.

His own voice came back in hollow
echoes from the darkness.

He was convinced that she had not
emerged with the rest of the passengers.
Then she must still be in the tunnel,
unless—

His anxiety quickening, Noel hurried
on. He reached the Witch's Cavern—
the grotesque cardboard figure of the
witch bending over the empty cauldron.

Then a stifled ejaculation escaped the
young detective's lips as he sprang for-
ward, dropping to his knees by a
motionless form that lay huddled on
the floor near the cauldron.

"June!" he exclaimed huskily.

He raised her in his arms. Her face
was pale, and there was an ugly bruise
on her forehead.

She moaned, and opened her eyes in
a bewildered fashion.

"Thank heavens!" breathed Noel.

June sat up unsteadily, raising a
hand to her head.

"Oh crumbs!" she ejaculated, in a
tone that banished the last of Noel's
fears. "My head! I say, uncle, what—
what's happened?"

"That," rejoined Noel guardedly, "is
exactly what I'd like to know. The last

time I saw you, you were boarding the
train."

"Oh!" Sudden recollection flashed
into June's eyes; her hand tightened on
Noel's arm. "Uncle," she breathed,
"Seat No. 6—there's something queer
about it!"

"What happened?" asked Noel
gently.

June tenderly felt the bruise on her
head.

"We—we were just stopping in the
tunnel, by the Witch's Cavern," she
whispered, "when—when I saw some-
thing gleaming on the track. I thought
it might be a clue. The guard and the
other passengers weren't looking, so I
slipped out on to the track. Then the
train started suddenly, and I was left
alone in the tunnel."

June shivered slightly. Noel's hand
tightened reassuringly on her arm.

"Well?" he asked.

"I felt scared," admitted June, "and
started to run. Then—then I think I
must have tripped or something; the
next thing I knew, you were talking to
me."

She smiled at Noel tremulously, but
the young detective's face was grave.

"Wait a minute!" he breathed. He
rose to his feet, flashing his torch over
the floor of the tunnel.

Then he bent swiftly, his lips tighten-
ing. He was staring at the object over
which June had tripped—a length of
black-painted wire, secured from the
witch's cauldron to the canvas wall of
the tunnel.

Had it been placed there deliberately
to trip up any unwary person entering
the tunnel? It was only by a miracle
that June had escaped falling across the
electric line!

The young detective's eyes were grim
as he rose to his feet. He was con-
vinced that the mystery on which June
had stumbled was more far-reaching
than even he had first supposed!

There was danger—danger for anyone
whose curiosity might prompt them to
interfere.

He took his niece by the arm, assist-
ing her to her feet.

"Come on, June," he said lightly,
"we've been probing this mystery for
long enough. The tunnel's shut down
for the night, now—so your mysterious
friend won't take any more rides. I
suggest we go and have tea!"

They climbed over the low barrier at
the end of the tunnel, and mingled
almost unnoticed among the now thin-
ning crowds.

During tea—which June ate with a
hearty appetite, unimpaired by her
strange adventure—Noel asked to see
the clue she had discovered.

June showed it to him. It was a
curious brass claw, attached to a screw.

"It's certainly a strange object to
find in a tunnel," Noel agreed. "I've
an idea it may be useful—in more ways
than one."

He made to slip it into his pocket,
but June held out her hand.

"Uncle—please! It's my clue. I'm
going to see if I can discover anything
about it."

Noel smiled good-humouredly as he
returned it. Then he stiffened.

An agitated-looking man had just
hurried past their table, and was
beckoning an attendant.

The man was holding a bulky parcel
under his arm—a parcel wrapped in
paper of a greenish hue that Noel re-
cognised instantly.

"I must speak to the manager—at
once!" declared the stranger urgently.

Noel rose to his feet, his eyes glinting.

"I'm afraid I'll have to leave you,
June," he said tersely. "I'm here on
business, as you know—and I fancy my

presence is required in the manager's
office." Then, as June's eyes widened
in swift disappointment, he added
quickly: "Listen—are you free to-
morrow evening? Right! Then I'll
meet you here, at seven, and we'll see
if your mystery girl appears again. We
can do our shopping then."

June nodded, pluckily hiding the
tremor of her lips.

"Very well, uncle," she said. "In
the main hall to-morrow, at seven!"

Noel squeezed her hand, leaving a
ten-shilling note pressed between her
fingers.

"That's for chocolates!" he said, with
a smile. "Don't forget to-morrow, and
keep away from that tunnel," he added
gravely. "Promise me that!"

June nodded, smiling in return; but
her blue eyes were a little wistful as
she watched Noel stride away through
the crowd.

Then, with sudden determination, she
rose to her feet. Noel had paid for
the tea, and she was free to do as she
wished—with ten shillings to spend.

June took the little brass claw from
her pocket and stared at it.

She felt convinced that it was con-
nected with the mystery of the girl in
Seat No. 6—but she racked her mind
in vain to discover the connection.

Earnestly she attempted to apply her
uncle's methods when confronted by a
mystery.

From what object could a little claw
like this have fallen? Something in the
brass or curio line? Perhaps something
sold in the store?

Following up this line, June made
inquiries from an attendant, and was
directed to the brass-ware and curio
department.

It was very quiet in there; only a
few customers remained. June made
her way slowly round the department,
glancing at the objects displayed for
sale.

Brass trays and candlesticks, statuettes
in metal and ivory; a glass case con-
taining several hand-carved ebony ele-
phants with solid ivory tusks. The
prices took June's breath away.

Her glance wandered to the cheaper
goods on sale—brass toasting-forks, ash-
trays and other knick-knacks. It was
as she glanced at these that June gave
a sudden, violent start.

She was staring at a pair of expand-
ing brass tongs—known as "lazy tongs"
—priced at five shillings. The tongs
worked on a kind of trellis, with two
brass claws at the end; June's gaze was
riveted on those claws.

They were identical with the little
brass claw she had found in the tunnel!

For the moment, she could not grasp
their significance—but one thing was
certain; she would buy a pair for her-
self, and experiment. Uncle Noel's
parting gift would come in useful!

A few minutes later, her strange pur-
chase in a parcel under her arm, June
hurried out of the department.

Her face was flushed, and her eyes
shining. By this time to-morrow even-
ing she might have a surprise for Uncle
Noel!

NOEL shook hands with the
managing director of Bent-
ridge's.

"I'll do my best for you,
Mr. Danesford," he promised.

"Before I go, let me get a
few points quite clear. That
ebony elephant that the cus-
tomer brought back
to you this evening
—it was a fake?"

"A palpable
fake!" declared the
manager, his



face rather pale. "And it's the fourth time the same thing has happened; that's why I sent for you. If the rumour gets round that we are selling fakes as genuine articles, Bentrige's will be ruined!"

Noel nodded gravely. "The elephants on sale in your show-room are genuine native workmanship?" he asked. "You can guarantee that?"

"Absolutely!" replied the manager. "Our expert examines them every morning, before they are put in the show-case. Since this scare started, we have had the case kept under constant surveillance by the store detective—and the assistants have been watched and searched before they leave the department at night. How the fakes come into the hands of our customers we cannot understand."

Noel thoughtfully lit a cigarette. "How many assistants are employed in the department?" he asked.

"Four," replied the manager. "Three are our regular assistants—expert sales-girls, with a knowledge of antiques. The fourth girl is an extra hand taken on for the Christmas rush."

"And what are her duties?" inquired Noel.

"The fourth assistant merely wraps the parcels as the goods are handed to her. She occupies a small desk at the rear of the stall. Naturally, she has been questioned and searched; but she appears completely blameless."

The young detective's eyes narrowed. "Just one other point," he said.

"The green paper in which that parcel was wrapped—is it, generally used in the store?"

"No—only in that department," replied the manager, staring. "Why do you ask?"

Noel shrugged. "Just an idea of mine. Well, I won't keep you any longer, Mr. Danesford. Thanks to a young friend of mine, I have obtained a rather surprising clue. I think I can promise you that the mystery will be cleared up within twenty-four hours."

Noel left the manager's office and made his way down the wide staircase. The store was closing for the night; by now all the customers had departed, and most of the lights had been extinguished.

Noel made his way quickly to the curio department. It was deserted and in darkness; all the more valuable objects had been locked in the strong-room for the night.

The young detective made his way round the room, peering behind the counters and tapping on the walls.

With a tape-measure that he took from his pocket he made various measurements.

One thing was puzzling him; a small, yet vital link in his chain of reasoning was missing—and he was annoyed to think that it baffled him.

He left the department and stepped out on to an iron balcony that ran flush with the building outside.

Taking out his tape-measure, he proceeded to check his calculation of the distance between the curio department and the gift hall adjoining.

He was bending down, intent on his task, when he heard a furtive movement on the grating behind him.

The young detective spun round, as a shadowy figure leaped at him from the gloom, flinging him backwards across the railing.

Below him the muffled roar of the traffic sounded more ominously; the blood throbbed in Noel's temples and his senses reeled as he fought for his life.



From one Girl to Another

Cheery Christmas Chatter and Helpful Hints by Penelope

I suppose my young schoolgirl cousin, Kathleen, loses about one fountain pen a year. (She'd do it oftener, if she had more pens.)

When I asked her what she'd like for Christmas this year, she said:

"A fountain pen, please—a blue one like yours!"

"Oh, no you don't!" I said in triumph. "I gave you one last year. Where's that?"

"Lost it," said Kathleen flatly. "All the same, I'd forgotten you'd given it to me, or I wouldn't have dared to ask for another."

KATHLEEN'S PRESENT

So I told her, as a punishment, I was going to work my brain overtime to think up a nice, prim, dull, and uninteresting present for her this year.

Perhaps a sewing-apron (very serious), or a pin-cushion, or half a dozen very plain and very thick handkerchiefs. I might even give her a sensible wool vest that would tickle, I told her, or a dictionary, as she spells so badly.

Kathleen shuddered and said I wouldn't be so mean, would I?

I told her I certainly would, the careless child! And I didn't tell her that I had actually bought her a pair of fur-backed gloves—which she's always been longing for.

Hallo, My Dear Everybody.—And a very special hallo, too, from your own Penelope, in honour of our Christmas Number.

Now—are all those Christmas presents of yours ready? (Yes, Penelope chips in virtuously, mine are—or nearly!) If not, I hope you're going to find the suggestions of mine on page 243 a spot useful. They are certainly inexpensive, for I had an idea that funds must be pretty low in schoolgirl exchequers just now. But I expect they'll jump up with a leap on the great day itself!

I expect you've bought all your Christmas cards, and I hope you've prepared a list of all the people who will love one from you.

Don't forget to save an odd penny or so for buying pretty paper and tinsel ribbon for the wrapping of presents, will you? It does make such a difference to the charm of the gift!



FRILLING SO DAINTY

You've already looked out your best party dress to see if it will stand up to another "season," I expect

—and I do hope it's as pretty as it seemed last year.

If it isn't, it's amazing what a bit of frilling and a few deft stitches will do to it.

As you can see from the picture just above frilling can turn a plainish frock into one just right for a homely party.

You can buy this frilly stuff at sixpence a yard from our favourite shop. Some sewn around the neck, and more across the bodice and round the sleeves, so that it looks as if the bodice and sleeves are in one—would look sweet. (This frilling, by the way, is sold in white, coffee, pink, blue, and green.)

LONGER—WITH RIBBON

Some of you will be wearing full-length, to-the-ankles party frocks this year—and I know you'll look sweet in them.

But if it is a last year's frock, there's just a possibility that it will be a spot short.

Two rows of ribbon let into the hem of a long frock will very quickly add two inches in length—and I'm sure you haven't grown more than that this year.

A sash to match, and a bow on one shoulder would quite take away that "altered" look, and make you feel as good as new again.

I want to be the first to wish you a Merry Christmas, but perhaps it's just a bit early yet, so I'll save it!

Cheers, until next week.
Your own,

PENELOPE



JUNE'S DARING PLAN

THE desperate struggle was over swiftly; Noel felt himself slipping backwards, his opponent's hands at his throat.

With a final, despairing effort, he employed an old ju-jutsu trick—and

contrived to wrest himself from his assailant's murderous hold.

He caught at the other's collar, but the man twisted himself free and dived for the fire-escape, with Noel at his heels.

Down the iron staircase they sped;

but Noel's quarry was fleet of foot and had the advantage of knowing the twists and turns of the stairs.

The young detective reached the yard—to find that his quarry had given him the slip.

Noel bit his lip as he made his way slowly back to the iron balcony.

The scoundrel must have kept watch on him and determined to put an end to his investigations.

His narrow escape confirmed his belief that he was up against a desperate and unscrupulous gang.

He flashed his torch over the grating, and abruptly he bent down, picking up something that glinted dully against ironwork.

It was a piece of gold braid. "I might have guessed it!" Noel breathed. A grim smile curved his lips. "To-morrow night—at seven!"

"TEN-PAST seven!" murmured June, glancing up at the clock. "Uncle Noel, you're late!" She shook her fair head, more in sorrow than annoyance. It was the first time Uncle Noel had ever kept her waiting.

"I suppose it serves me right—for keeping him waiting yesterday," she murmured, a faint dimple appearing in her cheek. "But I do wish he'd hurry. I've got such a gorgeous plan!"

The merry throng of Christmas shoppers surged past, laden with parcels—but still Noel did not appear.

"Twenty-past seven!" breathed June. "He must have forgotten. If I wait for him any longer, it will be too late!"

With sudden decision she turned and hurried towards the crowd surrounding the entrance to the Wonderland Express.

But June did not make for the booking-office; instead, she hurried towards the exit.

A girl was waiting for her there—a fair-haired, rather tired-looking girl, arrayed in the tinsel garments of a fairy queen.

Her face lit up as June approached.

"So you really meant it, miss?" she asked. "I thought you were joking."

June smiled, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Of course I meant it! You'll take half an hour off to do your shopping—and I'll take your place. Don't worry about getting into a row; Uncle Noel's a friend of the manager's. He'll fix it—when I tell him! Come on, quickly!"

Together they entered the tunnel.

Five minutes later June stood alone in the fairy cave, arrayed in her borrowed attire, and surrounded by mechanical gnomes and elves.

The benevolent figure of Santa Claus himself beamed at her from his throne at the rear of the cave.

June's heart was beating quickly; everything depended on her now.

A faint, eerie rumbling reached her ears. The Wonderland Express was approaching!

June tried vainly to master her nervousness. Quickly she bent down, picking up the oblong package she had brought with her.

The lazy-tongs!

She had practised with them on the

previous night till she was expert at their use.

The rumbling came nearer. The headlights of the train appeared, and it screeched to a stop in the cavern.

"Fairy Cave and Santa Claus' Workshop!" called the guard. "All change here for Christmas presents!"

The laughing passengers dismounted to take their gifts; June deftly handed them out from the pile of parcels at her side.

Anxiously June stared into the train; one passenger had not yet appeared.

Then she caught sight of a stealthily moving figure; the dark-haired girl from Seat No. 6 was hurrying past, in the shadows, making for the gate.

Under her arm was a parcel wrapped in green paper!

She hurried quickly past June, making for the exit.

The lazy-tongs shot out, grabbing the parcel, and whisking it back to June.

With a startled cry, the girl turned, staring round her wildly.

Frantically she ran towards the gate, vanishing into the crowd.

A Christmas Card to You All

—From Your Editor and the Authors of
The GIRLS' CRYSTAL.



The gate slammed; June was alone—with the parcel.

Her hand shaking, she started to unwrap it. Then a broken scream escaped her lips.

For a figure was creeping towards her from the shadows—a dim, crouching figure—which, to June's over-excited imagination, looked like the figure of the Witch, in the adjoining cavern.

The figure sprang at her. With a choking cry, June shrank back.

Then an amazing thing happened.

From his throne at the rear of the cavern leapt the benevolent figure of Santa Claus! His fist shot out, and June's assailant was sent crashing to the ground.

"All right, June!" said a gruff, familiar voice from Santa Claus' beard.

"Uncle Noel!" gasped June.

Noel whipped off his beard, and stared down into his niece's white face, his eyes gleaming admiringly.

"Good work, June!" he said. "I didn't suppose that the scoundrel would attack you—or I'd have revealed myself earlier!"

He flashed his torch into the face of the prostrate man.

The guard of the Wonderland Express!

"Uncle, what does it mean?" gasped June.

"Look in the parcel," suggested Noel. Hastily June unwrapped it—bringing to light an ebony elephant!

"A cunning trick to substitute valuable curios for worthless fakes!" explained Noel crisply. "The genuine elephants were slipped through a partition in the canvas wall by an assistant in the curio department—a girl employed to wrap the parcels. In exchange, your dark-haired passenger—the girl in Seat No. 6—returned a parcel similarly wrapped, and containing a fake elephant!"

"Seat No. 6 was chosen as it was nearest the concealed opening. No one suspected the girl, as every passenger alighting from the train would be carrying a parcel."

"The guard had concocted the plot, and took care to stop the train at the right moment. He apparently recognised you in your borrowed robes, and realised you were investigating his trickery."

"Goodness!" breathed June, her eyes wide with bewilderment. "To think that I stumbled on a mystery as big as all that! But—why did the girl scream?"

"An accident," said Noel dryly. "I think she must have brushed against the electric rail. She was lucky to escape!"

June passed a hand unsteadily over her forehead.

"But—what about the lazy-tongs?" she asked.

Noel's eyes twinkled, as he took the tongs in his hand and expanded them to their full length.

"These explain the one thing that puzzled me. There's a three-foot gap between the wall of the curio department and the tunnel. I couldn't understand how the assistant could have reached through—but these tongs provide the solution!"

June's eyes sparkled. "Then everything's solved!" she exclaimed.

"Everything," said Noel, smiling. "And now, before I introduce you to the grateful manager, what about a little treat—to make up for my being late for our appointment?"

June laughed.

"All right, uncle," she said. "I think I'd like to go for a trip—on the Wonderland Express!"

June had, not only one, but many enjoyable trips on the Wonderland Express that evening.

And when at last the big store closed, and they made their way to the doors, escorted by the grateful manager, Noel smiled down at his young niece.

"You know, June," he remarked, "there's just one thing we've forgotten—and that's our Christmas shopping!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

There will be another exciting Noel Raymond detective story in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL. So that you won't miss this grand tale, order your copy to-day!

SECRET FRIENDS *of* the SPEED GIRL



LINDA IN A TIGHT CORNER

LINDA HALE, Terry O'Dare, and Mary Walton, Fourth Formers at the Abbey School, formed themselves into a secret society—the Secret Three—in order to help Miss Nemo, a mysterious girl racing motorist.

They were also out to defeat the bullying of Florrie Mears, a prefect, who was an enemy of the speed girl.

Later, Linda realised that Miss Nemo was really Eileen Grange, the headmistress' own niece, and Florrie Mears was, for some reason, her enemy.

Then the Head met her niece, and, not realising that she was Miss Nemo, she appointed her junior mistress at the school.

Florrie Mears was furious, and determined to expose the new mistress. She sent an anonymous note to the Head, telling her to search inside her niece's cupboard. Miss Nemo's racing overalls were hidden there!

Linda, discovering the plot, went to Miss Nemo's study and took the key of the cupboard door, so that Miss Grange would not be able to open it.

Before she could leave the study, Miss Grange and Florrie appeared. They were disappointed to find the cupboard locked, but Florrie suggested searching for the key. And Linda was holding the vital key behind her back!

ANXIOUSLY Linda watched Miss Grange cross to the desk. She was frightened that the headmistress might become suspicious. The key she was hiding behind her back seemed to be burning a hole in her hand, and desperately she tried to get rid of it.

Behind her there was a bureau. One of its drawers was slightly open, and cautiously Linda's fingers groped for it. But Florrie Mears was watching her like a cat does a mouse, and suddenly she took a step forward.

"What are you fidgeting about for?" she demanded.

"Fid-fidgeting about?" stammered Linda.

"Yes, I believe you're trying to hide something. Let's see your hands!"

"My hands?"

"Yes, both of them!"

Slowly Linda obeyed. She held out

her right hand, then her left. Both of them were empty, for she had managed to slip the key into the drawer of the bureau.

As the prefect frowned with disappointment, the headmistress turned away from the desk.

"The key doesn't seem to be here," she announced. "My niece must have taken it with her. We had better go and ask her for it." She walked to the door, then looked across at Linda. "Hurry up and find what you want, Linda, then return to your Form-room."

"Yes, Miss Grange."

Though Linda spoke calmly, her heart was still thumping. She was frightened lest Florrie should stay on in the room. The prefect was not to be deceived. She guessed what had really brought Linda to the junior mistress' study.

There was a malicious grin on Florrie's lips, but it disappeared as the Head turned to her.

"You will come with me, Florrie," she announced.

Linda gave a gasp of relief. Good old Miss Grange, she thought. Now she could remove the incriminating overalls without fear of discovery.

The prefect flung her a savage glare, but she dared not disobey, so reluctantly she followed the headmistress out of the room. Linda waited until their footsteps had gone echoing down the corridor, then she retrieved the key from the bureau and darted across to the cupboard.

The first thing that met her gaze when she swung open the door was a big globe of the world, also brown paper parcels containing books and other school requisites. Then, at the back of one of the shelves, she found what she wanted—Miss Nemo's mask and bundled-up overalls.

Demurely Linda walked out of the study, the globe of the world in her hands. If only Florrie Mears, who stood watching her, had known what that globe contained!

By GAIL WESTERN

Eagerly she seized them, but before she could hurry away with them she heard an ominous sound outside. Footsteps! Someone was approaching the study!

"Oh golly, suppose it's Florrie!" she gasped. "Suppose—"

The footsteps came steadily nearer and a minute later the door handle rattled, then the door was flung open and a triumphant voice exclaimed:

"Caught you, red-handed!"

It was Florrie Mears herself, and the prefect's eyes glimmered with mocking delight as she saw the brown paper parcel that the startled Linda clutched. Striding forward, she grabbed the Fourth Former by the shoulder and swung her round.

"Come along!" she ordered.

"But—but where to?"

"To the Head, of course!"

"But—but what for? I haven't done anything wrong!"

Linda seemed really bewildered and indignant, and Florrie gave an angry laugh.

"Oh, chuck it!" she snapped. "It's no use you trying to act the innocent now. I've caught you red-handed, and I'm going to see you get what you deserve. I expect you'll be expelled for this!"

"Ex-expelled?"

"Yes, expelled—sent home in disgrace! That'll be a fine end to your precious Secret Three, won't it? Well, it serves you right! I warned you not to poke your nose where it wasn't wanted. I warned you not to have anything to do with that speed girl!"

Florrie almost rubbed her hands with glee. Gloating was her expression. But Linda still looked bewildered.

"You must be crazy!" she declared. "How can I be expelled for carrying out Miss Tibbs' orders? What is there wrong in my borrowing Miss Eileen's school globe?"

"Globe! What globe?"

Linda nodded to the big globe that stood on the bottom shelf of the cupboard. For a moment Florrie surveyed it scowlingly, then she gave a sarcastic laugh.

"So that's what you came for, is it?"



"You didn't come for that parcel at all!" she jeered. "You grinned down at the package to which Linda still clung. 'I suppose you don't even know what it contains!'"

Linda shook her head. "As a matter of fact, I don't. You see—"

"Oh, shut up and come along! I've something better to do than to listen to your lies!"

And impatiently the prefect gave Linda's arm a tug. But Linda resisted. "I won't come with you!" she declared. "You've no right to act like this!"

With a savage snort Florrie flung her arms about Linda and tried by sheer force to get her out of the room. Linda resisted, and so intent were they both on struggling that they did not hear footsteps approaching, nor did they hear the study door open.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed a scandalised voice. "And, pray, what does this mean? Florrie, release Linda at once!"

Hot and flushed, the prefect obeyed, staring in embarrassment at the two figures that stood in the doorway, staring in frank disapproval—Miss Grange and her niece!

The headmistress took a stern step forward, then, as she noticed the open cupboard, she gave a cry of surprise.

"Why, you have found the key after all!" she ejaculated.

Florrie, recovering from her confusion, darted a malevolent glance at Linda.

"She did. That's what all the trouble was about, Miss Grange. I suspected all along that she was deceiving us—I suspected that she knew where the key was. That is why I returned here—and I found her in the act of sneaking away with the Secret Three's robes!"

The headmistress gave a horrified gasp, and her grim eyes went to Linda. "Is this true?" she asked.

Linda shook her head.

"No, it isn't, Miss Grange—honestly it isn't. I didn't come for the Secret Three's robes. It's true I found the key after you'd gone. It's true Florrie found me rummaging about in the cupboard. But I wasn't after any robes. I was only after that globe." And she nodded to the big globe of the world that stood on the bottom shelf.

Florrie gave a scoffing laugh.

"That's a likely story. It was that parcel she was taking out, not the globe. Ask her to undo it. You'll soon see then, Miss Grange, whether she's lying or not. Linda belongs to the Secret Three. That's why she came here. She knew you meant to search the cupboard, and she was scared you'd find her robes."

The prefect knew that the Secret Three's robes had never been in the cupboard. She knew that what had actually been hidden there was Miss Nemo's overalls and mask, but she was too cunning to say so. She meant to let the headmistress discover that for herself.

Eileen Grange, the Head's niece, gave a start as she saw the brown-paper package Linda clung to. Her face went pale, for it seemed to her that her secret must come out. If her aunt insisted on opening that parcel, then surely she must discover that her own niece was the notorious masked speed girl!

Miss Grange pursed her lips, then sternly she regarded Linda.

"You will please be good enough to open that parcel, Linda."

Before Linda could obey Florrie had snatched the parcel from her.

"I'll undo it," she cried, and with eager fingers she tore off the string, and with savage zest wrenched away the brown paper. In fact, so excited was she that the paper split and part of the contents of the package went tumbling to the floor.

But it was not a black robe that fell out. It was not a pair of white overalls. It was a couple of glass bottles—bottles that contained ink. One broke and spilled red fluid all over the carpet. The stopper came out of the second, and Miss Grange recoiled in alarm as a jet of blue ink splattered against her shoes.

"Look what you're doing!" she gasped.

But Florrie was so taken aback that the rest of the parcel slipped from her nerveless fingers, to fall with a crash to the floor. Helplessly she stared at the pools of ink at her feet.

Linda, covertly winking at the amazed Eileen, pretended to look disapproving.

"Dear, dear," she gasped, pretending to be shocked.

Florrie caught in her breath in a furious hiss. Savagely she whirled on the Fourth Former.

"This is a trick!" she howled. "But you can't fool me! You must have switched over the parcels. The one you came to get must be still in the cupboard!"

And diving forward, she dropped to her knees, dragging out the contents of the cupboard, tearing open packages, flinging out books, ransacking every shelf.

For a minute or two the headmistress stood and watched, then she tapped an impatient foot.

"Well, Florrie," she said acidly, "have you discovered anything?"

Reluctantly the prefect shook her head.

"N-no!" she muttered.

"Then be good enough to replace everything as you found it," ordered the Head.

"Yes, and please mop up all this ink," added Eileen. "Really, Florrie, you seem to be a strange person to be a prefect. Utterly irresponsible your behaviour has been!"

Florrie went first red, then white. Never had she been so humiliated before.

"Irre-irre-irresponsible," she choked. "Surely—surely you aren't blaming me for what's happened?"

"Of course I am. But for your obstinacy my aunt would never have taken any notice of that anonymous note she received. It was obviously a hoax. As if the Secret Three would dare to hide their robes in my room!"

The headmistress nodded.

"You are quite right, Eileen. The suggestion is absurd, and but for Florrie's persistence—" She turned and frowned at the furious prefect, then checked the reprimand that trembled on her lips. "But I will talk to you privately," she said. "When you have cleaned up this mess, be good enough to come along to my room."

And, making it obvious that the coming interview would not be a pleasant one, she stalked out of the room. When she had gone Linda faced the junior mistress with a demure smile.

"I think I ought to be getting back to the class-room," she said. "Miss Tibbs will be wondering what's become of me. Do you mind, Miss Eileen, if I borrow your globe?"

"Of course not, my dear."

Linda picked up the globe, then, as she daintily picked her way through the broken bottles and pools of ink, she

smiled down at Florrie, who, duster in hand, had flopped down on her knees.

"Mind you mop it all up, won't you?" she said.

Florrie nearly choked. Speechlessly she watched Linda depart. She was boiling with fury.

But if she had guessed the truth, she would have boiled right over. For, hidden in that hollow globe, were the missing overalls. Linda was smuggling them out under the glaring prefect's very nose!

FLORRIE DOES SOME SPYING

"WHERE ever have you been, Linda?"

Miss Tibbs, the Fourth Form mistress, looked up disapprovingly as the door opened and Linda marched in, still clutching the big globe.

Linda smiled disarmingly.

"So sorry, Miss Tibbs," she said, "but I ran into Miss Grange and she detained me." Then, conscious that the mistress was staring at the globe in surprise, she smiled again. "Miss Eileen gave me this," she explained. "Knowing our old globe is out of date, she offered to lend us hers. Isn't it nice of her?"

And, putting the globe down on the table, she returned to her desk, but during the rest of the lessons she never took her eyes off that globe, and afterwards, when the class was dismissed, she lingered behind. Mary and Terry surveyed her curiously.

"What is it you've been up to, my darlint?" asked the Irish girl.

"Yes, why did you ask permission to leave the room?" added Mary.

Linda explained with a chuckle, and her chums gasped as they realised how narrowly Miss Nemo had escaped detection.

"Bedad, 'tis a medal you deserve!" exclaimed Terry. "But how did you manage to smuggle the overalls away?"

Linda gave another chuckle.

"When I heard footsteps approaching I guessed it might be Florrie, so I slipped the overalls in here." As she spoke, she undid a nut and lifted off the top of the hollow globe, revealing the bundle it contained. "Poor old Florrie, she was taken in properly."

She took out the mask and overalls and tucked them under her blazer.

"See if anyone's about," she urged. "I mustn't risk anyone spotting me with this little load."

Mary and Terry slipped out of the class-room and went to reconnoitre. Anxiously Linda waited, then, as there came a soft whistle, she hurried along to Eileen Grange's room. The speed girl was seated at her desk, reading a letter; but she looked up with a smile as Linda entered.

"Just the person I wanted to see," she declared. "I've had wonderful news by the midday post."

She waved the letter excitedly, but Linda could take no interest in anything until the incriminating overalls had been hidden away.

"For goodness' sake put them where Florrie won't dream of looking," she urged. "We may not be able to trick her next time."

"That's true"—Eileen gave a nod—"and we shouldn't have tricked her this morning if it hadn't been for you. You were splendid, Linda. But don't worry, dear. The overalls will be safe enough in my desk



—and this time I'll take good care I don't leave the key lying about."

She locked up the bundle, then, with eager fingers, picked up the letter she had been reading.

"Guess who this is from!" she invited.

Linda, catching sight of the stamp on the envelope, gave a thrilled gasp.

"Don't say it's from—*from Jack Naylor!*" she cried.

Eileen nodded, and a faint blush suffused her cheeks.

"Yes, it's from Jack, and he says if only I can win the Championship Race, he'll be made for life. Not only will his old firm take up his car, but"—she paused, and the colour in her face deepened. "He will also be able to clear up all that—that horrid business about the missing money," she went on huskily. "He'll be able to prove his innocence!"

Linda gave a whoop. This was wonderful news, indeed. Then a puzzled frown narrowed her eyes.

"But how will the race help him to prove he never stole that money?" she asked.

Eileen shook her head.

"I don't know; he doesn't say. But he seems very sure of it, and—oh, Linda, won't it be lovely if all that old scandal is cleared up! Won't it be lovely if Jack can come and live in England again!"

"Rather!" There was no mistaking Linda's enthusiasm. "Then he intends coming back from Canada?" she asked.

"Yes; he's already sailed. I don't know exactly when his boat docks, but he hopes to arrive in time for the Championship Race."

"Oh!" Despite herself, Linda could not suppress that sudden exclamation. "Then—then you won't want me to ride as your passenger?" she asked.

Though the thought was a bitter one, she tried to speak casually. Eileen, however, noticed the dismay in her eyes, and, jumping up, she put an affectionate arm around her.

"Of course I'll want you, silly," she said. "I promised you should ride in the race—and ride you shall! And that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Before Saturday we must have a practice run. Do you think you could manage to spare the time on Wednesday afternoon?"

"Of course!" Linda replied. "I—" She broke off, and they both swung round in alarm, as from the corridor outside came a heavy bump, followed by a yell.

"What ever's up?" gasped Eileen.

Together, she and Linda rushed to the door. Opening it, they looked out, to stare in surprise. For, lying spread-eagled on the floor was Ada Wilkes, Florrie Mears' fag. Terry O'Dare had hold of her shoulders, while Mary Walton clutched her around the ankles. Even as the amazed Eileen and Linda watched, the wriggling, yelling junior was lifted on high, then dropped back to the ground again.

"Maybe that will teach you not to listen at other folks' doors, you spalpeen!" declared the Irish girl.

"I—I didn't. I—I only stopped to tie up my shoe-lace," wailed the Third Form sneak. "I wasn't listening at all. I was only—"

She broke off as she saw the spectators in the doorway, and scrambling to her feet, she went plunging wildly down the passage. Linda turned anxiously to her two breathless chums.

"Do you really think she was eaves-dropping?" she asked.

Terry gave a wrathful snort.

"Well, she had her ear against the keyhole, anyway," she answered, then, seeing how worried both Linda and

Miss Nemo looked, she grinned. "But don't fret, my darlins. She couldn't have heard much for, faith, we didn't give her much time to listen in."

"That's right, Linda," added Mary.

Linda and Miss Nemo heaved a sigh of relief. Their plans were safe after all. But if they had realised that Ada had rushed straight to Florrie Mears' study they wouldn't have been so easy in their minds.

The prefect bit her lip in disappointment when the fag had blurted out her story.

"You are sure you didn't hear any more?" she asked.

Ada shook her head.

"No, there wasn't time. Those two girls took me by surprise," she gasped.

"I only heard Eileen Grange say something about going for a drive on Wednesday afternoon."

"Going for a drive, eh?"

Florrie's face became thoughtful, and slowly a malicious grin wreathed her lips.

"Right-ho, Ada, you can buzz off!" she said. "But mind you keep your eyes and ears open. I think I can guess what Linda and that upstart of an

nothing of their plans, yet they had decided to take no risks.

Instead of using the main door, they had decided to slip out of the window—and it was a good job they had been so cautious, for now, as they peered across the quad, they saw two familiar figures standing there by the entrance steps.

Florrie and Ada Wilkes!

"Hope they didn't spot Miss Nemo," said Mary.

Linda shook her head.

"Not a chance. She told me she was going to sneak across to the ruins before lessons were over. She's gone to collect the car. But I hope that precious pair aren't really keeping watch. If they do suspect—"

She stopped, and the anxious frown faded from her face, for suddenly both Florrie and Ada had started to walk off in the direction of the school tuckshop. Faintly the prefect's voice reached them:

"Don't be so mean, Ada," she was saying. "I only want you to help me carry back the cakes for tea. I've got a party on."

Linda & Co. exchanged gleeful glances. Apparently Florrie wasn't



"Caught you, redhanded!" came a triumphant voice. Linda turned in dismay, for it was Florrie Mears there, and she had seen the parcel that the startled Fourth-Former clutched.

Eileen are up to—but I'll be glad of any more details."

She gave the fag sixpence, then, when the door had closed behind her, she gave a soft chuckle.

"It must be the Red Star in which they're going driving," she muttered. "That means they'll both try to sneak but unseen. But this time they'll find themselves unlucky. Even if I'm not there to watch them—Ralph will be!"

"LOOK out, they're both hanging about outside!"

Linda gave her chums a warning nudge as she peered through the open Common-room window.

It was Wednesday afternoon, and all the rest of the Fourth had flocked to the school hockey field to watch the match between the First Eleven and a visiting team from the Hanthorpe High School.

But Linda & Co. had something much more exciting to do. Linda was to take part in a practice spin with Miss Nemo, and Terry and Mary were coming along to take the time. Although they were convinced that Florrie Mears knew

keeping watch after all. They waited until the prefect and her fag had vanished into the shop, then Linda swung a leg over the sill.

"Follow me—and make it snappy," she whispered.

Down to the quad they dropped, to fling one apprehensive glance across at the tuckshop, then to hare across the quad as hard as they could run. Gaining the shelter of the trees, they cast a look over their shoulders, then grinned gleefully. The quad was empty. There was no sign of either Florrie or Ada.

"O.K.," panted Linda. "We're safe now."

Confidently she led the way through the ruins, to wave her hat and give a delighted whoop as she saw, drawn up on the near-by road, a long, red racing car.

Eileen Grange was at the wheel, but not even her own aunt would have recognised her now, for she wore her white overalls and disguising mask.

"Ready?" she asked.

"Rather!"

"Then hop aboard. I'm going to take you all to the Hanthorpe track. There we'll really put the Red Star

through her paces—see what she can do. But we'd better not stay too long, for to-night I want to give the darling a bath and get her all ready for Saturday."

"You mean you're going to garage her here?" Linda nodded towards the ruins. Miss Nemo nodded, and Linda frowned. "Do you think it's safe—now that Florrie suspects?" she asked.

"Oh, it's safe enough. Florrie knows nothing about that secret room, and once I've put the car away I shan't visit it again except after dark."

As she spoke, the speed girl held open the door. Linda climbed in beside her and her chums clambered into the dicky seat at the back. There came a vibrant hum from the engine and the Red Star went speeding off down the road. And as it went the tall figure that had been crouching behind a near-by heap of fallen masonry rose to its feet.

It was Ralph Mears—Florrie's brother!

When the car had disappeared from sight, he crossed to the wicket-gate and gave a shrill whistle. From the direction of the tuckshop came an answering whistle, and soon Florrie's lanky form could be seen making her way through the trees.

Reaching her brother's side, she clutched excitedly at his arm.

"Well, did it work?" she asked.

He gave a sly chuckle.

"Of course it did! Thinking you and Ada were safely out of the way, they never gave a thought to danger. They never dreamt that I might be keeping watch!"

"And what did you hear?" persisted Florrie, her eyes a-glitter.

"A lot! First of all, I learnt they're going to the Hanthorpe track. That speed girl means to make sure her car is in racing trim for Saturday."

"But who's going to ride with her in the race? Not one of those three kids?"

Ralph shook his head.

"Dunno. And it's not that what's worrying me. What I can't make out is where Miss Nemo keeps her car. She says she's bringing it back here—

to the ruins. And she babbled something about a secret room!"

"A—secret room!" Florrie gave a startled gasp. "My hat, that would explain a lot! Of course, these old ruins are bound to be riddled with underground passages and things. What a fool I was not to guess it before! But come on!" She gave his arm another tug. "Let's get busy! Let's see if we can find this secret garage!"

Eagerly they both set to work, but it was a difficult task they had set themselves, for they had not the slightest idea where to start their search. They burrowed into old musty cellars, they pulled aside ancient slabs of stone, they ferreted here, there, and everywhere. But all they succeeded in doing was exhausting and dirtying themselves.

At last Florrie sank breathlessly down on a fallen pillar.

"It's no good!" she gulped. "We'll never find it unaided. All we can do is to wait!"

"Wait?"

"Yes, wait until those wretches come back, of course!"

At that moment the school bell clanged out for tea, but Florrie had no thought of tea. She didn't even budge when it began to rain. Grimly she sat there, determined this time to discover Miss Nemo's secret.

Ralph, his coat collar turned up, his hands stuck in his trouser pockets, walked restively to and fro, the water streaming from his slouch hat.

At last, losing patience, he swung round sharply on his sister.

"Isn't it about time they got back?" he demanded.

"Be patient, Ralph!" snapped Florrie. "They'll turn up."

The rascally young motorist grunted, and resumed his restless, uneasy pacing.

"This is getting past a joke!" he muttered. "For all we know—"

He broke off, and Florrie leapt to her feet, for from the distance had come the faint purr of a motor.

"They're coming back!" she panted. "Quick—out of sight! Hide!"

And she almost dragged him down behind the crumbling masonry.

The purr grew louder—louder still—and at last through the rain loomed the sleek shape of the Red Star. Miss Nemo and the chums had no protection from the rain, but as they drove off the road and nosed their way through the ruins they looked happy and carefree.

"Oh, it was lovely!" exclaimed Linda, as the car came to a halt. "Talk about a thrill! Oh, I can hardly wait till Saturday! The very thought of riding beside you in the race—"

Behind the heap of masonry Florrie and her brother caught in their breath. The prefect's lips were pressed into a thin, vicious line. So Linda actually meant to take part in the championship race, did she?

"Not if I know it!" muttered Florrie. Then her heart gave a leap and wonderingly she stared, for both Miss Nemo and Linda & Co had clambered out of the Red Star and were now beginning to push it over the bumpy ground.

Where did they mean to hide it?

The hidden pair waited eagerly, and Florrie's eyes bulged in amazement as she saw the car go sliding into the old refectory.

"Surely they can't intend leaving it there!" she exclaimed. Then she gave her brother a warning nudge. "You stay here. I'll go and see what they're up to!" she whispered.

Cautiously she rose to her feet and on tiptoe she stole across to the ancient archway. Linda and her two chums were all in the huge vaulted chamber known as the refectory, but to Florrie's stupefaction both Miss Nemo and the Red Star had vanished from sight.

"Where the dickens—" she began; then she caught in her breath in a startled hiss, for, as her eyes got used to the gloom, she noticed the massive fireplace at the far end of the room—the fireplace that now stood wide open. The masked speed girl's secret was out!

What plans will Florrie make now that she knows the secret hiding place of the Red Star? You mustn't miss next Friday's chapters of this exciting serial. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.

Find Father Christmas

Here's a puzzle to work out with your chums and a pencil. Just see how long it takes you to reach Father Christmas in the centre of the maze—without leaping over any hedges.





Kaye of the Kennels

By
IDA
MELBOURNE

Kaye called. "Is that your dog, sonny?"

The boy seemed about to run away, but hesitated.

"No, he's not mine, miss," he said.

"Do you know whose dog he is?"

Kaye asked.

The boy shook his head.

"I don't know."

Kaye climbed over the fence, and the boy made as though to run, thinking that she was going to chase and nab him.

"Don't run off," said Kaye. "I'm not going to eat you or the dog. What's his name?"

"I don't know," said the boy, but he looked down at the ground, kicking at snow.

Obviously he did know the dog's name, and Kaye could not help smiling, at his feeble attempt to deceive her.

"You called him Patch," she said gently.

The boy reddened a little, and then met her eyes challengingly.

"I was just guessing," he said gruffly. "His name might be Patch—or Spot." Then he added, "Are those sausages yours?"

"They were," said Kaye smiling. "They're his, now. No one wants them after he's been trailing them. It's funny I've never seen him before, for I know most of the dogs around here."

"Well, he's only been—" the boy began and then closed his mouth, as though he had been forbidden to say to whom the dog belonged.

Kaye frowned at him quite sternly.

"Now listen," she said. "The poor dog is hungry, or he wouldn't steal. He must be lost, or else his own people don't feed him properly. And it's my business to find out. Is he making for his home?"

But the boy was not to be drawn. He refused to say anything about the dog, and time and time again denied that he knew him.

Further argument being useless, Kaye turned to follow the dog's tracks. In the soft snow, it would be almost impossible to lose the trail, unless heavy snow fell very rapidly, which, by the present looks of things, Kaye thought might be possible.

At a steady trot, she followed the dog's clear trail.

And after her went the boy, running hard.

"You're not to catch him!" he said fiercely. "Leave him alone—"

Then he broke off, glancing down the

"The dogs are all shut up except Brutus, and he's been here with me," she said. "Do you mean that there's a stray wandering about—"

"Wandering about is right, Miss Kaye. And he tried to get our turkey—and he did catch hold of the leg, what's more! I was in time—but only just."

"Poor thing!" said Kaye. "He must be ravenous. Where is he? Which way did he go?"

Kaye saw the girl draw up, staring, and then she pointed. But pointing wasn't necessary. Kaye saw what the maid had seen—the dog!

There the thief was, slinking along, tail between legs, and carrying with him a string of sausages.

Kaye ran forward, calling to him, but the dog did not, as many would have done, drop the sausages in fright. He held on to them and ran.

Kaye felt sure he would hide first and eat his trophy, but to her surprise she saw that he was not listening. Instead, he hurried at once to make his escape by a gap in the fence, made in the recent gales, and not yet repaired.

Kaye ran after him and was just in time to see him wriggling through the gap.

Then came a boy's voice, low, as though he did not wish to be overheard.

"Patch! Here—here, Patch!"

Kaye reached the fence, and climbed on to it. Perched on there she was able to see into the field beyond, across which, leaving tracks in the snow, the dog hurried.

Calling to him, fifty yards away, was a boy whose age, Kaye judged, was something like nine years.

"Hallo. Happy Christmas there!"

Kaye had no thought for herself when someone needed her help. She was only too glad to be able to bring Christmas happiness to others—especially when she had her loyal dogs to help her!

A HAPPY DAY FOR THE DOGS!

"HALLO, dogs! And a Merry Christmas to you!"

Kaye Chalmers was going the rounds in the kennels on Christmas morning, and crisp though the morning was, with snow falling, those kennels were all cosy and warm, for they were centrally heated.

Happier dogs than those in Kaye's charge could not have been found anywhere, and this morning they had a special, additional reason. From every kennel, except only those of invalids who had been left in Kaye's care and were not allowed such luxuries, came the sounds of bones being scrunched.

"Nice bones?" asked Kaye.

Scrunch, scrunch, scrunch! came the reply.

Kaye laughed; they all looked so happy in their own doggy way that she felt sure that they were enjoying Christmas thoroughly.

Brutus, her own St. Bernard, who was always allowed to be free, followed her round from kennel to kennel—from the spaniels to the Dalmatians, the terriers, the pup, Ming Wu, the lordly Peke, and with him Brutus took his own enormous bone, fitting to his size.

"Perhaps you will have a tiny taste of turkey later," Kaye said. "And maybe—"

But the other luxurious possibilities were not mentioned, for the maid called suddenly from the house.

"Miss—the turkey!"

"The turkey? What about it?" asked Kaye. "Don't say the oven's too small, after all."

"Too small!" said the maid, running from the house. "A cocoa tin would have been too big if that nasty dog had had his way!"

Kaye hurried to her, not having quite grasped what the maid meant.

aid to the lane, where, above the hedge, showed a policeman's helmet.

"Don't say you've seen me or—Patch," he said to Kaye, with sudden earnest appeal in his voice. "Be a sport—please!"

Without a word he took to his heels and ran.

Kaye stood stock still, puzzled, not knowing what to make of this. One thing was evident—the sight of the policeman's helmet had frightened the boy. It was clear, too, that, despite his denials, he knew the dog as Patch, and in some way was connected with him.

But now the dog was out of sight, and Kaye in order to catch up with him would have to run hard. Then suddenly she heard Brutus' well-known warning bark.

That bark said: "Someone at the gate, mistress!"

Kaye returned swiftly to the kennels; but by the time she reached the gate her grandfather had opened it to admit two men who had a solid, well-built appearance and grim expressions.

Christmas Day was an odd time for callers, and Kaye looked at them in surprise, wondering what their business was.

They quickly told her.

"Miss Chalmers," said one of them, producing a warrant card from his pocket and handing it to her, "we are

police officers. We have come to inquire if you have seen a stray mongrel dog—terrier size, brown-coated, marked with a black patch?"

Kaye gave a jump of surprise.

"Why, yes," she said, "only a minute or so ago!"

"You have?" said the detective eagerly. "Where? Did you see which way he went?"

"Over the field," said Kaye, pointing. "If you care to climb the fence you can follow the trail."

The two detectives smiled with obvious relief.

"Splendid!" said the spokesman. "With any luck we'll arrest him in time to be back for our Christmas dinner."

Kaye let out an exclamation of surprise.

"Arrest a dog? What for—stealing?"

She was on the defensive at once, and she wished she had not given his whereabouts away to them.

"No, we shan't arrest the dog," the detective replied grimly. "But we'll arrest the man he'll lead us to—his master. Last night his master escaped from gaol, and he's at large still, hiding somewhere—but where, only that dog knows. And, from what we've learned, he's taking his master food."

Raising their hats then, the detectives walked past her swiftly up the drive to the fence she had indicated; and, once

there, the dog's trail was clear to be seen, easy to follow right to the secret hiding-place of the master whom he so loyally served in his hour of need.

Kaye stood irresolute, conscience-stricken, ashamed, furious with herself. Not for the world would she have betrayed that loyal dog if she had guessed the truth. But now it was too late. There was no hiding his tracks.

Then suddenly Kaye braced herself and called to Brutus.

"Kaye, where are you going?" her grandfather exclaimed.

"On the trail," said Kaye, a glint in her eyes.

And, hardly knowing whether she was doing right or wrong, thinking only of the dog whose faithfulness might prove his master's undoing, Kaye freed two spaniels and a Dalmatian, and ran after the detectives, with Brutus bounding at her heels, and the rest following.

But she went not to follow the trail, but to smother it with Brutus' footprints and confuse it with others.

THE CHRISTMAS FUGITIVE

BRUTUS was almost too large to get through that gap in the fence, and certainly too large to climb, or jump, or be lifted over; but he could make himself a good deal smaller than he looked when occasions demanded, and this was such an occasion.

Kaye, on the far side of the fence, called him sternly, knowing that where there is a will there is a way; and Brutus found the way, wriggling through.

"Come on, Brutus!" she urged; for the detectives were already hot on the trail.

Then from the trees near by came a shout:

"Sneak!"

The boy, whom Kaye had all but forgotten, stepped into view and shook his fist at her.

"Sneak!" he repeated fiercely. "I know who those men are you've sent after dad; they're tecs! I know, because—because—"

His face worked; and Kaye's heart was stabbed with remorse and pity.

"I'm sorry, sonny! I didn't know," she said guiltily.

"I told you," he gulped. "And now you've done it. They'll take dad back to prison; and he said if he could be free for a whole day he—he could clear himself. Now he won't have the chance—and all because of you!"

Kaye eyed him compassionately.

"Your father?" she said. "Oh, I'm so terribly, terribly sorry! But I thought the detectives were just trying to take the stray back to his owner, you see—"

He regarded her resentfully and in scorn.

"Go on, chase after them!" he said bitterly. "Get your big dog to fly at poor old Patch. I would! If it hadn't been for you, dad might have found a way of having Christmas dinner with me and my sister."

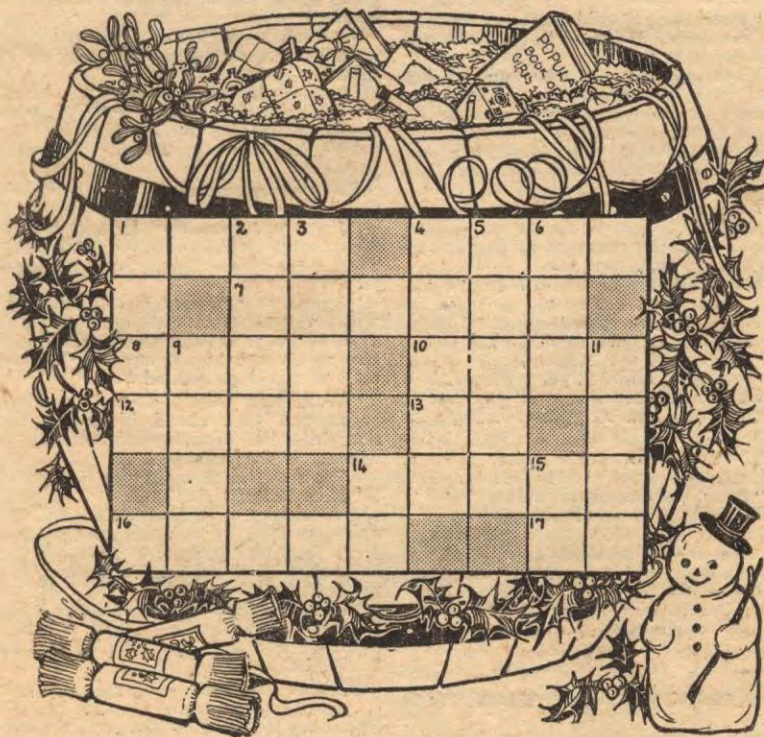
"Oh, don't—don't rub it in!" implored Kaye. "And while we're talking they're catching up with Patch. I'm not going to try to catch him; I'm just going to spoil the trail. And while I'm gone, go into that house; say Kaye sent you, and ask for a mince pie. They're grand!"

But when she looked back a hundred yards farther on he still stood there, not even tempted by mince pies.

With Brutus bounding ahead, Kaye, by running hard, caught up with the detectives. There was no need to tell

A BRAN-TUB CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Ten minutes' fun working out this seasonable crossword puzzle. See how many good things you can find in the bran-tub. The solution appears on the back page.



ACROSS:

1. Of course, you'll find one in the Bran-Tub!
2. A Christmas present for a Scotchman.
3. Juicy fruit your Christmas guests will love.
4. Perhaps you'll see him in the pantio.
5. Christmas cakes are usually this.
6. You've often seen a five-barred one.
7. Renee Frazer's initials have been changing places.
8. Hungry people love this part of the Yuletide proceedings.
9. It quivers on the festive board.
10. Namely

DOWN:

1. Sailor's term for a Christmas drink.
2. A present for a very youthful "soldier."
3. This must be hung with Christmas gifts.
4. A gift with a keen edge.
5. This cigar has been well mixed up!
6. The sheltered side.
7. Many a — will be played in the festive season.
8. A popular, but sticky, Christmas fruit.
9. Poor Fay has lost her middle!
10. Spanish term for "yes."

Brutus what to do. He was a snow dog, born for the snows, and he loved it; he chased it, tossed it into the air, danced, and ran round in circles.

"Hey, stop!" snapped a detective angrily. "You're muzzing-up the trail!"

Muzzing-up was the word. Not only Brutus, but the spaniels and the Dalmatian. What a game they had—and especially when Kaye threw a stick she dragged from under the snow!

"Don't you worry about these dogs; they're wonderful trackers," said Kaye. "Come on, dogs; follow him!"

Kaye ran ahead, and, covering the ground more easily than the heavily built men, she was soon a hundred yards ahead.

Over the brow of the hill there was a wood, and Kaye soon saw to it that within two minutes there were a dozen doggy trails leading in all directions.

Ahead, Patch's trail took a bend by a large bush, and Kaye had just obliterated it with her own footprints when the detectives appeared.

In deep disgust they stared at the scene.

"Well, what a mess!" said one. "How are we going to know one trail from another?"

"This way," called Kaye, and having sent a stick for the Dalmatian she had ensured that he left a clear imprint in the snow.

But the direction in which she sent him was opposite to that taken by Patch!

And all the while snow was falling. Presently, Patch's new tracks would be covered, and his destination would remain a mystery.

Kaye alone knew now in which direction he had gone—towards the peaky hills, where the snow made climbing over the jagged, rocky slopes terribly dangerous.

Somewhere there, she guessed, the prisoner was hiding—and if he could but remain hidden until darkness fell, there would be no finding him.

"Well, well," said Kaye after half an hour had passed, and it began to dawn on the detectives that most likely they were only following the Dalmatian or the spaniels' trails. "I'm afraid I must be turning back, my Christmas dinner will soon be ready. We'll have to try again later."

Grunting, without expression of gratitude for her aid, the detectives bade her adieu.

Kaye hurried back to the kennels—and there, at the fence, was the boy, waiting anxiously, white-faced.

"All right," she said gaily. "The trail was lost. They're safe for awhile—and maybe darkness will fall early to-day."

The boy looked at her with shining eyes.

"I'm sorry I called you a sneak; you're a topper, and no mistake," he said. "I wasn't half scared though when I saw those tees following Patch's trail."

Kaye patted his shoulder comfortingly.

"Don't you worry, things will turn out all right," she said. "If your father is innocent, he'll be set free."

"He is innocent. He's not a thief, and he didn't take the Thrift Club money," said the boy fiercely. "I know who did, and he does. Old Tanner, only he was too cunning to be caught, and left dad with the blame."

Kaye heard the church bells ringing, and the dark sky and the flurry of snow impressed upon her more strongly than ever that it was Christmas Day. But for the lonely, hunted man in the cold



"Don't run off," said Kaye. "I'm not going to eat you—nor the dog. What's his name?" The boy was at once cautious. "I don't know," he muttered. But Kaye knew that he did.

hills it would be a bleak, miserable business—and for the boy, and for his sister—

Kaye turned to him impulsively.

"You and your sister—why don't you come and have Christmas dinner with us?" she asked. "I'm having the dogs in. It'll be just grand. There's a Christmas tree, and we'd have awful fun."

His eyes rounded and shone.

"You don't mean that? Truth and honour?" he asked.

"Truth and honour," smiled Kaye. "I do mean it. We'll just love to have you. Go on—run home and fetch your sister. Have you ever seen dogs pull crackers? Well, you shall—and eat Christmas pudding, too!"

He turned, colour in his cheeks again, and then paused.

"There's aunt," he said. "We couldn't leave her alone. She's so down, you see. She—she was so cut up she didn't even get in things for Christmas, like dates and figs—although with poor dad—perhaps we ought—"

Kaye pooh-poohed such sentiment.

"Your dad will be a lot happier if you have a good Christmas," she said.

"That's what he wants you to have. Run along. Bring your sister, and bring your aunt. Tell her—tell her that if there's any message she'd like to send your father, I can get it to him."

The boy gaped.

"You can? You don't know where he is."

"I don't—yet!" admitted Kaye. "But you wait. I've got my dogs, and when it comes to finding people, a dog's worth a hundred clever detectives with magnifying glasses and false beards."

Chuckling, braced already, the boy hurried off, galloping rather than running, and Kaye went into the house to break the news to grandfather and the maid.

"Grand—a happy thought," said her kindly grandfather. "Just what we needed ourselves to make Christmas the real thing—youngsters."

Kaye set about adding the final touches to the decorations.

Holly, mistletoe, balloons, fruit and nuts, sweets and muscatels and almonds—it would be a real Christmas for them all—all save the hunted man and his faithful dog.

Presently the guests arrived, the boy, a shy girl, a year and a half younger than he, and their aunt, a grave, anxious woman, who accepted the hospitality with quite pathetic gratitude, mingled with faint guiltiness.

Yet the looked-for joys of the Christmas meal were not to be had so soon, for just when the maid was saying that they could soon start being hungry, Kaye's quick ears heard a pitiful, doggy wail.

"Patch!" cried the boy. "I know that howl of his."

Kaye ran to the door and opened it, and was almost knocked over by the rush of a muddy dog who limped on three legs, holding the other in the air.

He went straight to the boy, barked frenziedly, and tugged at his jacket, striving to pull him to the door.

"Oh!" came a cry of horror from the aunt. "They've got him. Patch has come to tell us—"

"No, he hasn't come to tell us that," Kaye assured them, and dropping to her knees, she examined Patch's injured foot. But impatiently he tugged it away, as though his own injury did not matter in the very least.

"Strained," she decided in relief. "Not badly damaged but painful to put down, poor chap. What's wrong, Patch, old lad?"

He looked up at her, pathetic and pleading, his tongue lolling.

"First—water," said Kaye. "And then—"

The maid gave a call for the door to be opened, and knocked it wide. Beaming, she bore a tray weighted with a delicious, savoury soup in the large tureen.

"Can you hold my dinner back just for a little while," said Kaye guiltily. "I've got to go out."

"Now?" said the maid, aghast, almost with a wail. "And Christmas dinner ready? Why, Miss Kaye, the turkey will spoil. Why, she's gone—"

A GLAD RE-UNION

KAYE had gone, but she looked back from the door.

"Start, every one!" she said. "Don't wait for me. I'm going to attend to poor Patch's foot and find out just what's on his mind."

But after bandaging the foot, Kaye did not hurry off with him, but went up into one of the sheds where an old macintosh of her grandfather's hung and an old battered felt; rolling them into a bundle, she added some brandy and the first-aid kit.

For the first time, Brutus was due to go out into the snow in real St. Bernard fashion, a flask at his throat, first aid kit on his back, to the rescue of the lonely, hunted man, who, as Kaye had decided from Patch's manner, was either in a collapsed state due to cold or hunger, or else—injured when climbing on the slippery rocks.

Looking up at the lowering, snow-laden skies, Kaye realised that darkness was not far ahead. Just in case it fell before she reached her journey's end, she took a torch.

Together, she, Brutus, and Patch set out, making for the route they had taken that morning, hurrying, covering the ground swiftly—as swiftly as Patch's limping allowed.

All the while, as she hurried, Kaye kept her eyes open for the detectives, who might easily be in hiding.

But there was no sign of them. Not even though they crossed the wood did Kaye catch sight of them, nor indeed they of her, though they were searching there still.

Patch did not waver, did not hesitate, but by a narrow path he led the way along a dried brook, turned right, left, again right, and reached the towering hills.

And now Brutus went ahead. Brutus could hurry on snow with ease. Sure-footed, he never seemed to hesitate, although twice Kaye slipped, and Patch faltered and lagged, whining piteously. Then Kaye picked him up and insisted that he should be carried, despite his wriggling protest.

"Brutus will find him," she said—and Brutus did.

Brutus, snuffing ahead, felt the instincts of his ancestors in him, and even as his grandfathers, trained by the monks, had sought and found travellers collapsed in the mountain snows, Brutus now found the hunted man.

Woof! came his bay of triumph, and at the edge of a lip of rock he stood, looking back at Kaye as she struggled up towards him.

Brutus hesitated, and then, finding his way round, went down into the hollow, sure-footed.

When Kaye reached the spot she saw the man lying at the foot of the hollow. He started up in alarm at sight of her, but Patch reassured him with glad barks.

"Good Patch—good old fellow!" he said huskily. "The best pal ever a man had, Patch! But—but who are you?" he asked Kaye.

Briefly Kaye explained, and then asked if he was hurt.

"My knee!" he groaned. "It's easier now. With help, I can climb out. And I've got to climb out, for I've found what I was hunting for, what I knew was somewhere hereabouts."

"You mean—something that will prove your innocence?" Kaye asked in delight.

The man nodded his head, smiling.

"Yes, I mean that. I came here to find it. And I have found the spot where it's hidden, if I can reach it."

"Where? Can I help?" said Kaye eagerly.

But she saw with despair that the spot he indicated was inaccessible without a board or some other aid; for a wide, dangerous gap cut it off from them.

"I did reach it, and started to dig," he said. "So did Patch, but we both fell, and both got hurt, only he managed to climb out, great fellow that he is."

It took twenty minutes to rescue him with Brutus' aid, and with Patch tugging his master's coat; and by then it was quite dark.

"No good now; we'll have to dig and bring the proper tools to-morrow," said Kaye. "Meanwhile, you must come home to our place. We'll shelter you, and no one will suspect."



"Let me see . . . We've got a dart board, and snakes and ladders . . . Oh, I know, I'll buy that new card game, 'Spelling Bee,' which is all the rage just now. Two complete packs of cards for 2s. 6d.—jolly good value and ripping for a party, for any number can play."

"Now, what about young Jack? He'd like something skilful. 'Stak-a-Stik'—that sounds fun. Should certainly keep him engrossed for hours. And all for a shilling!"

"Then there's Cousin Bill coming to stay over Christmas. He's potty on trains for one thing. Ah, the very idea. I'll buy him 'Main Line'—the card game that's really different. You have to make a railway track with cards—that costs half-a-crown."

"Then there's Dorothy. She'd adore 'Tap-Dancing Dinah.' So she would 'Over She Goes'—But perhaps I'll get that for myself. So here goes."

All these games are Waddy productions—which is the name that stands for quality and are on sale at all good stores and news-agents.

But a few hundred yards behind them, the detectives were following their trail.

Nevertheless, despite their slow gait, so well did Kaye cover the trail, that they were not followed home, and there was no sign of the detectives when the house was reached.

It was a glad scene when father and children met; there were tears of joy. And the sight of the hunted man getting warm by the fire after he had had the wash and change he craved, made Kaye's heart swell with happiness.

"A happy end to a happy afternoon," sighed the ex-prisoner.

And the words were hardly out of his mouth when there was a violent

thumping on the door, a business-like, important rat-a-tat.

In a moment the dining-room door was flung open—and there, grim-faced, stood the detectives, snow on their clothes and boots.

"James Oliver," said the sergeant, "you are an escaped prisoner, and it is my duty to take you in charge."

"It's all been a mistake, officers," said James Oliver quickly. "To-morrow I'll get my proof. You needn't fear my trying to escape. I know where the proof is—I have but to dig."

"Yes—we found the spot," said Kaye. "When it's daylight we mean to—"

She broke off, for the detective had brought into view a small steel box. "This it?" he asked. "We had a ladder with us, and got across to the spot where you had obviously been digging. This is what we found—this box, empty. No proof, no papers. Not even the money that's disappeared, whoever stole it."

Kaye, in horror, looked at James Oliver. He had suddenly become ten years older, his face haggard and drawn; and she knew now that his last hope was gone. The proof he sought was missing, taken away before he could find it!

And while they stood in speechless horror there came an interruption from outside, an excited whining.

"Patch!" cried Kaye. "My goodness, I left him by the fire. How did he get out?"

"I let him out over half an hour ago, miss," said the maid.

Kaye ran to the door and let him in. Bounding on three legs, eyes shining, Patch entered the room, and in his teeth was a thick envelope.

"He's found it!" cried Kaye. "Look at the mud on him. He's been digging!"

His master stooped, took the package tenderly, and then became a young, upright man again as he held it out to the detective.

"There, this envelope, buried for weeks, addressed to that rascal Tanner in his own handwriting: 'If found, deliver to—' An address of his own in the North."

The detective slit the envelope, pulled out the contents, and whistled softly. For inside the envelope were notes each worth a hundred pounds, fifteen of them wrapped in greaseproof paper.

"That settles him," he said grimly. "You're all witnesses that I opened this. All the same"—he lowered his voice—"you'll have to come with us, James Oliver—just for a little while. Formalities, you know—"

Kaye, hugging Patch, looked up at them.

"Yes, but not yet—not until you've seen us dance round the Christmas-tree and seen the dogs pull crackers."

And the detectives stayed. They tasted the Christmas pudding, the wine, pulled crackers, wore paper hats, and then laughed heartily at the sight of Brutus and Patch pulling crackers. It was an old trick of Brutus' and dog Patch was not to be outdone.

But no dog, however clever, could have outshone Patch this happy day; he was the hero. Lame though he was, he had gone back to dig where his master had dug so frantically, had risked his life to reach the spot—and won the reward.

"A mongrel, but a dog in a million!" said Kaye. "A happy Christmas, Patch—a happy Christmas all!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Another of Ida Melbourne's appealing stories featuring Kaye and her lovable dogs, will appear in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Order your copy in advance.



NORMA IN FLIGHT

WHEN Norma Royston arrived in the tiny Cornish village of Clovellyn, she quickly realised that there was some mystery there connected with her dead father.

She distrusted Mr. Penhale, who lived at Grey Gables, a large house near by, and about whom she had been warned by Ben Tregellis, an old sailor.

Mr. Penhale's ward, Gerald Graham, seemed a likeable boy, however.

At Ben Tregellis's home, Norma discovered a last message from her father, which said that there was a secret of importance to his daughter connected with the "Black Knight"—a statue at Grey Gables!

Old Mr. Tregellis disappeared, and Norma determined to take charge of his little shop and his small grandchildren, Elsie and Martin. She also decided to search in Grey Gables for her father's secret.

Grey Gables was supposed to be haunted by the ghost of Lady Rowena, and Norma decided to dress in an old gown she had discovered, in order to make her search easier.

At night, dressed as Lady Rowena, she went to Grey Gables, and reached the room where stood the Black Knight statuette.

Then she received a shock; for Gerald Graham suddenly appeared.

"Uncle—quickly!" he shouted. "The ghost of Lady Rowena!"

NORMA felt her blood run cold, as Gerald's gay, challenging voice reached her ears.

"The ghost, uncle—the ghost of Lady Rowena!"

For a moment she felt unable to move; pale as death—the veil of her head-dress partially screening her face—she stood there in the moonlight, like a spectre from other days.

Then the boy took a quick step towards her—and the spell was broken.

With a stifled cry, Norma turned and sped for the door, her gown rustling like falling leaves.

Gerald raced after her, with a challenging laugh.

Along a dark, winding corridor sped pursuer and pursued.

Norma's heart was thudding; she was panting for breath now. To her horror she realised that she have taken a wrong turn; she was lost!

The boy's footsteps were swiftly overtaking her; he was the better runner of the two, and he had the advantage of knowing all the twists and turns of the old house.

Panic-stricken, Norma slipped through an open doorway, pulling the door to behind her.

Gerald's running footsteps came closer; for a moment they seemed to hesitate—and then went straight on, past the door.

With a little stifled sob of relief, Norma crouched behind the door, her ears strained. The boy's footsteps died away in the distance, and she breathed more freely, venturing to look round her.

She was in a pleasantly furnished, panelled room—apparently the writing-room.

Large windows opened on to the terrace and the moonlit lawn. Her heart beating quickly, Norma crossed to the window; but even as she reached out to unfasten the catch, she paused, her eyes widening in amazement.

For a moment, even her fear of capture was forgotten as she stared at the little black statuette that stood on the writing-table under the window.

It was a miniature replica of the Black Knight!

"Two of them!" whispered Norma, her mind in a whirl.

Two Black Knights, in Grey Gables! Here was a strange and startling complication of the mystery. Her father's broken message had referred to a Black Knight, and had urged that a search should be made for some secret connected with it.

But to which of the statues did the message refer?

Desperately Norma tried to think of some way to make the little shop pay, so that little Martin and Elsie could be sure of a happy Christmas. But it was a difficult task that Norma had set herself—one that would need all her pluck.

By RENEE FRAZER

Her hand shaking, Norma reached out to pick up the little marble statuette; it was barely six inches in height, but mounted on a solid base and surprisingly heavy.

She examined it in the faint moonlight that streamed through the window.

There was something scratched on the metal base, some inscription that she tried in vain to decipher. It might be merely some kind of trade-mark—but no!

With a sharp intake of breath, Norma recognised part of the inscription—an arrow, surmounted by the letter "R." It was the curious crest that she remembered having seen stamped on the tattered cover of her father's diary!

Then this statuette—Norma's startled thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Gerald's footsteps hurrying back along the passage.

Her present danger returned to her with full force.

Barely pausing to think, she slipped the statuette into the voluminous pocket of her gown, and strove feverishly to pull back the bolt that fastened the window.

The bolt was stiff. It moved back with a jerk, and Norma stumbled against the writing-table. There was an ominous crash as it overturned, scattering its contents over the floor.

Horried, Norma flung open the window and raced out on to the moonlit terrace; she heard a distant shout, echoed by another. Lights appeared in several of the windows. The hue-and-cry had been raised.

Desperately Norma sped across the lawn, in full view of the house.

Her racing figure, in its old-world gown and fluttering veil, might have been a ghostly illusion—created by the moonlight and shadows.

With a sigh of relief, she reached the welcome darkness of the trees.

Swiftly, breathlessly, she divested herself of her ghostly attire, and rolled it into a bundle, the dark lining outermost.

Her heart thumping, her forehead damp with perspiration, she crept among the trees, emerging finally through a gap in the crumbling brick wall that surrounded the grounds.

She was safe—or nearly so; it was unlikely that she would encounter anyone on the lonely cliff path at this hour of night.

But as it happened, she met a belated fisherman, returning to the village with his nets.

The man peered at her, and murmured a gruff and rather surprised "Good-night." Norma nodded hastily in response and hurried on, confident that the other could not have recognised her in the gloom.

Thankful for her escape, her mind racing with conflicting thoughts, Norma reached the little cottage that was now her home.

She saw a light gleaming dimly in the children's room over the shop; but no sound reached her ears as she cautiously unlocked the door and entered the tiny parlour.

The fire had burnt low in the grate, and was now hardly more than a few smouldering embers.

Everything was exactly as she had left it.

With a little sigh of relief, Norma closed and bolted the door.

Her reckless venture was over, and she had not been caught—though it had

been a near thing! And she had brought back something with her, something that might be of vital importance.

But before she examined the statuette she decided to take a peep at the children, to make certain that they were safely asleep.

Lighting the lamp, she slipped the statuette into a drawer, and crept softly upstairs.

With a faint smile, she pushed open the door of little Elsie's room, and peeped inside; then the smile was frozen on her lips. For the little girl's bed was empty, the coverlet thrown back.

A swift glance revealed that young Martin's room was also deserted.

Before Norma's bewildered thoughts could shape her unspoken fears, there came a loud commotion from downstairs—laughter, and the scamper of feet.

In mingled relief and anxiety, Norma raced downstairs. She flung open the door of the parlour; then she caught in her breath sharply, her face paling.

A surprising scene greeted her. Chasing round the table were the two children—both in their night attire.

Young Martin was trying to catch Elsie, who was clinging possessively to the bundle containing the phantom costume!

"Oh!" cried Norma, taking a quick, anxious step into the room.

The children turned instantly, and Martin gave a loud whoop.

"Surprise!" he exclaimed. "We heard you comin' in, and we crept down an' hid behind the sofa!"

Little Elsie gave a delighted laugh.

"And you've got a s'prise for us, Norma!" she declared, triumphantly holding up the bundle. "Martin says it's a s'prise for Christmas!"

"I bet it is!" declared Martin eagerly. "And I bet it's something for dressing up, too!"

They clung round her eagerly as Norma, her face rather pale, caught up the precious bundle.

In her agitation, she allowed the bundle to slip, and part of the voluminous gown trailed on to the floor.

"I knew it!" exclaimed young Martin triumphantly. "It's something for dressing-up!"

"Please—please show us!" pleaded Elsie, capering with excitement.

Norma thought quickly, her wits sharpened by her anxiety.

Perhaps it would be best to satisfy the children's curiosity—and to pledge them to secrecy. After all, they would see nothing suspicious in the fact of her possessing a fancy dress. On the other hand, if their curiosity remained unsatisfied they might continually ply her with questions—perhaps in front of other people.

She swiftly came to a decision. "Very well," she said, smiling; "but remember—it's a secret—just between we three! It's a costume I'm saving for dressing-up when we're on our own—like last night."

As she spoke, she unfolded the shimmering gown, and held out the pointed headdress.

A whistle of astonishment escaped young Martin's lips, and little Elsie clapped her hands.

"Do put it on, Norma!" she urged. "Now!"

"Another time—" began Norma hastily.

"Now—now!" came the eager chorus.

With a faint smile, Norma complied; having gone so far, it could do no harm. But first she took care to pull the curtains closely across the window, a proceeding which the children watched with interest.

Delighted shouts greeted her donning of the costume.

"S'sh, children—not so much noise, please!" whispered Norma anxiously.

"You look like—like a witch!" declared Martin.

"A princess!" corrected little Elsie indignantly. "A beau'ful princess."

Norma smiled in spite of herself; her anxious fears were thrust into the background in the presence of these two adorable youngsters.

"Now—that's enough," she said, at length, as she removed the costume.

"And remember"—her voice became graver—"it's a secret! You mustn't breathe a word to anyone. Promise!"

"Promise!" chorused both children.

"I say, we'll have such fun at Christmas!" added Martin eagerly. "Dressing-up-games, an' all that. Are you going to decorate the shop, Norma? Granddad always does at Christmas. But I s'pose he'll be home before then?"

Norma swallowed hard as she encountered two pairs of trustful, eager eyes.

"I hope so, dears," she said. "But if he's delayed—if his ship doesn't come in before then—we'll make the shop



"Girls' Crystal" Office,
The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street,
London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR READERS,—A Special Christmas Number wouldn't be complete without Christmas wishes, would it? So first, I must wish you all a **Very, Very Happy Christmas** and a **Bright and Prosperous New Year**.

Next I must say thank you.

First to Doris Pye, who very kindly sent me a birthday card in honour of the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL's** third birthday. It was perfectly charming of you, Doris, and I assure you that we honestly did appreciate it enormously. (As a matter of fact, we had forgotten the birthday occasion ourselves until your card arrived.)

But that's only the first thank-you. My others are to all those hundreds of readers who have already sent Christmas cards.

I'd love to have been able to send you all one personally in return, but I do hope that you'll accept instead, the card I have had printed, on page 226, and know that with it are all my own, and our authors', good wishes.

We have also tried to make this an extra-special good number of the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** for you, so that it shall add to your Christmas pleasures.

WELCOME GIFTS

I suppose we all like a "good read" at Christmas, even more than at any other time of the year. You'd certainly revel in every single story that appears in "The Popular Book of

Girls' Stories," which is now on sale at 2s. 9d. Many favourite **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** authors have contributed to this splendid book which is so reasonably priced.

"The Schoolgirls' Own Annual," which costs 6s., would certainly make a marvellous present from a kind person who loves you very much, while the "School Friend Annual" and the "Golden" both at three-and-sixpence, would give you hours of pleasure during the Christmas holidays.

NEXT WEEK

Now for just a swift peep at next Friday's splendid programme of stories, still in Christmas mood, of course.

"Noel's Christmas Conjuring Trick" is the title of the mystery and detective story featuring the one-and-only Noel Raymond—and a more seasonable or more thrilling story you couldn't wish for.

"Pat Lovell's Circus Scoop" features that charming girl reporter. A story you'll love from the start.

Another complete story of Kaye and her pets, and further instalments of our three grand serials will also appear.

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR

look really Christmasy. I promise you that!"

She hustled them up to bed, laughing and joking; but the laughter had left her eyes when she came downstairs into the deserted parlour.

The children were talking eagerly of Christmas, of presents and fun. They fully expected that their grandfather would be back by then. What could she tell them—what could she do?

Her examination of the accounts that morning had shown that there was very little money to spare; a pound or two in the till—another three pounds locked in a drawer.

It was possible that the old sailor kept a post office savings account—but, of course, she could not touch that, even if it were so!

Luckily, most of the bills seemed to have been paid up to date—but it was going to be a struggle to keep the little shop going, and make sufficient money to keep the children in food and clothes.

Norma gave a quick, determined smile, shaking off her momentary deep despondency.

She was not beaten yet! She had taken on this task of her own free will—and she was determined to carry on, whatever happened, for the sake of the two youngsters.

After all, Christmas was very near now, and trade was bound to bristen!

Tired out after her reckless venture, Norma decided to postpone her examination of the black statuette until the morning.

A BLOW FOR NORMA

NORMA awoke with a start, to find the sunlight streaming through the window of her room. She sprang out of bed, realising that it must be late.

As she pulled back the curtains from the lattice window, a little gasp escaped her lips.

For it had been snowing in the night—and a sparkling white carpet lay over the cobbled street, on the roofs of the houses, and on the crooked chimneys.

Sounds of excitement came from the next room; as Norma dressed hastily, and hurried to discover the cause of the commotion, she found young Martin standing by the open window, scraping up the snow on the sill to make snowballs.

"Hands up!" cried little Elsie, who was standing in her dressing-gown, with a snowball tightly grasped in each chubby hand.

Both children burst out laughing as Norma held up her arms.

"Pax!" she exclaimed smilingly. "We can't have this, you know. Time for breakfast."

"Can we go out an' play snowballs after breakfast?" demanded Martin eagerly.

"After breakfast," nodded Norma. "Now, put those away and get dressed. You'll catch your deaths of cold."

She hurried downstairs to put on the kettle; then, seizing her chance before the children came down, she unlocked the drawer in the bureau and took out the black statuette.

"The Black Knight!" she breathed. "If only I could discover its secret!"

The grim little statuette brought back forcibly the strangeness of the mystery into which she had been so unexpectedly plunged.

It seemed impossible that, only two days ago, she had set off lightheartedly from London, thrilled by the thought of a job abroad.

Now she was here, in tiny Clovellyn, running the village shop, and taking



"I say, that's a topping box of chocolates you've got there," Gerald remarked. "How much?" Norma hastily snatched it up and placed it on the shelf. "It's only a dummy," she said quickly, for no one must know what that box contained.

care of two children, whose grandfather had mysteriously vanished!

And not only that. She had discovered, without a shadow of doubt, that her father had been connected with the village, and that some secret connected with him was hidden in Grey Gables, the residence of Mr. Penhale.

Her daring masquerade of last night was only the beginning of her strange quest.

The scamper of feet on the stairs caused her to thrust the statuette out of sight, and set to work on the children's breakfast.

It was a simple and hasty meal. The children were all agog to go out; and at nine o'clock the little shop had to be opened.

There was much to be done if everything was to be got in readiness for the Christmas shopping.

Norma had no time to look at the statuette again. As soon as the children had departed, warmly wrapped up against the frosty air, she removed the shutters at the shop window, and unfastened the door.

A few minutes later she was busily serving one or two early customers. Norma was beginning to know some of them by sight, and they greeted her with friendly smiles.

Old Mrs. Tregurtha, a fisherman's widow; buxom Mrs. Fowey, the wife of the village shoemaker, and one or two others.

They asked after the two "bairns," and inquired if she'd had any further news of Ben Tregellis.

Norma replied lightly that she wasn't expecting him back for a few days, and that the two children were very well.

Then Mrs. Tregurtha mentioned a piece of news that gave Norma cause for fresh worry.

"Have you seen the new shop that's opened at the end of the High Street, dearie? They're selling sweets and groceries, and the window's all decorated up for Christmas. Very grand! I did notice one or two of Mr. Tregellis' customers going in there."

"Oh!" breathed Norma, taken aback. Then she forced a quick smile. "We don't mind a little competition.

Just you wait till you see our shop in a day or two."

"A day or two may be too late, dearie," Mrs. Tregurtha patted her hand in a motherly fashion. "I thought I'd just be warning you. I'd not like to see you losing custom by those new upstarts."

And, nodding her grey head emphatically, the old lady left the shop.

Norma's face fell after she had gone. The news of a rival shop, so near to her, was certainly bad. Of course, it had opened to take advantage of the Christmas rush.

She must do something about livening up the little shop—and without delay. But there was the question of ready money. Could she afford it?

Anxiously she re-examined the slender resources at her disposal—a little over five pounds, in all. If she was very careful and ingenious, she might be able to put up an attractive window display, and she would be more than recompensed by the results.

More cheerfully Norma set to work, examining her stock, and trying to plan the most attractive way of setting it out in the window.

She was busily engaged when the village postman arrived with a letter.

"Seasonable weather, miss," he remarked, stamping the snow off his shoes. "Good for trade. Just one letter this morning, miss."

"For Mr. Tregellis?" asked Norma, holding out her hand.

"No, miss; for you."

"For me?" echoed Norma, in surprise.

"A Christmas-box, maybe," chuckled the postman.

The shop door clanged behind him. Norma stared at the inscription on the letter. It was typewritten, and addressed from the neighbouring town.

But she knew nobody in Cornwall. What ever could it be?

Curious and slightly uneasy, she tore open the letter. Something fell out—a bill. And there was a typewritten letter.

Swiftly she scanned it, and the blood drained slowly from her face.

A cry of dismay escaped her lips, in spite of herself.

The letter was couched politely, but tersely:



"Miss Norma Royston.
 "Dear Madam,
 —We understand that you have taken over Mr. Tregellis' business. That being so, we should like to draw your attention to an outstanding account for groceries and confectionery supplied.
 "As this account is now very much overdue, we should appreciate a settlement before Christmas.
 "Yours faithfully,
 BELDON & SONS
 (Wholesale Merchants)."

Her hand shaking, Norma picked up the bill. Her eyes widened in horrified dismay.

For the amount was for over ten pounds—more than twice the sum of her slender resources—and those few pounds she had meant to expend on her Christmas display.

THE little shop was very quiet; the usual morning customers seemed to have deserted her. With a sinking heart, Norma guessed that they had been attracted to the new establishment.

White-faced, she stared at the letter and the bill. It had come as a bolt from the blue, shattering all her plans. From the street outside came the merry voices of the two youngsters as they played lightheartedly with the snow.

What kind of Christmas would she be able to plan for them now? How could she possibly hope to raise the money to pay this bill, let alone afford to decorate and stock the little shop?

Biting her lip, she put the hateful bill away in a drawer, and tried desperately to think, to make plans.

If only she could solve the mystery surrounding the old fisherman's disappearance—

Norma's lips tightened a little. There was one chance, and one only!

The secret hinted at in her father's diary! It was all she had to work on. The secret connected with the Black Knight.

Hastily she fetched the little statuette from the drawer in the parlour, and carried it into the shop. The light was better here, and she could keep her eyes open for customers.

She dared not risk losing a single customer now.

Anxiously she examined the statuette, turning it over in her hands. There must be some significance attached to it—but what?

Apart from the curious inscription on the metal base, it seemed quite an ordinary statuette; apparently made of solid marble, and surprisingly heavy.

But her father would not have made that entry in his diary without good cause.

Engrossed in her task, she held the statuette up to the light, and just then she heard the tinkle of the bell over the shop door.

Taken by surprise, Norma turned sharply, thrusting the statuette behind the till.

"Hallo!" exclaimed a cheery voice. "Nice weather for tobogganing—if we get enough of it!"

Norma's heart gave a violent jump as she encountered Gerald Graham's friendly grin.

In a flash there came a recollection of their last meeting, though Gerald was unaware of that.

Did he suspect—could he suspect?

The boy's friendly smile put her at her ease. He came forward and examined the bottles of sweets; but there was a rather abstracted look in his eyes, a look of suppressed excitement.

"I'll try a quarter of peppermints this morning," he said. Then, as Norma turned to measure them out, he leaned over the counter.

"I say, Norma, have you heard?" he demanded.

Norma gulped, upsetting some of the sweets.

"Heard about what?" she breathed.

"The ghost!" declared Gerald, his eyes dancing. "Honest Injun—I'm not pulling your leg. I saw it myself last night—the ghost of Lady Rowena!"

Norma clenched her hands, trying desperately to retain her composure.

"Surely, not a real ghost!" she returned, with a smile.

The boy grimaced.

"Well, I suppose not. It does sound a bit fatheaded, doesn't it? Maybe it was someone dressed up; but if so, they've got me beat! Listen!"

Eagerly he described the events of the previous night—the events that Norma knew only too well!

"Well?" he demanded at length, eyeing her quizzically. "What do you make of it?"

Norma had turned very pale; she tried to force a smile.

"It doesn't sound true," she said.

"It's as true as I stand here!" declared Gerald. "And, what's more, it stole something. I say, Norma, what's the matter? You look as pale as a ghost yourself!"

He leaned anxiously over the counter, and Norma tried frantically to screen the statuette of the Black Knight.

"It—it's nothing," she faltered.

At that moment Gerald gave a shout and spun round, clapping a hand to the back of his neck, where a snowball had struck him.

There came a burst of laughter from outside the shop.

"Got you!" exclaimed Martin's delighted tones.

"You—you young villain! I'll pay you back for that!"

With a broad grin, Gerald removed the snow that was clinging to his collar and strode to the door.

The two children raced away, and Gerald, with a chuckle, bent to gather up some of the snow on the step.

Seizing her chance, Norma snatched up the statuette and looked round desperately for somewhere to hide it.

There was an empty chocolate-box on the counter, a large, attractively decorated box that had been sent as a sample.

Swiftly Norma thrust the statuette in the box, and, replacing the lid, secured it with a coloured ribbon.

Only in the nick of time! Just then Gerald returned, smiling broadly.

"Bless them!" he remarked good-humouredly.

"I've got about a quarter of pound of nice damp snow down my back—ugh! I say, that's a topping box of chocolates you've got there! How much?"

He reached across for the box, but Norma hastily snatched it up and put it on the shelf behind her.

"It—it's only a dummy," she said.

"Too bad! What were we talking about? Oh, yes, of course! You look pale; not your usual cheery self. What's wrong? I've not scared you by that ghost story, have I?"

Norma gave a quick, nervous laugh.

"Of course not! As a matter of fact—" She came to a swift decision. After all, Gerald was a good sort. He might be able to advise her.

"I—I had a rather unpleasant surprise this morning," she said unsteadily.

"Look!"

She pushed the letter and bill across the counter.

Gerald scanned them, and his smile faded; a low whistle escaped his lips.

"Ten pounds! I say, that's a bit thick!"

He frowned, re-reading the letter and examining the bill as though suspicious of fraud.

"The blighters might have waited till after Christmas before sending this," he declared indignantly. "They knew you'd only just taken over the shop. Wonder how they found out, by the way?"

"I—I don't know," said Norma. "And, Gerald, we haven't the money to pay it. You see," she went on hastily, anxious to defend the old fisherman, "poor Mr. Tregellis wasn't really a business man—he was a sailor. There's no mention of this account in his books; he must have forgotten it."

Gerald looked really worried.

"But, I say, it's a bit rough on you," he declared. "I suppose"—he hesitated, his boyish face reddening a trifle self-consciously as he slipped a hand into his pocket—"I suppose you wouldn't let me advance a pound or two? I mean, if there's anything I could do for you and the youngsters—"

"No—please!" Norma crimsoned. "It's awfully kind of you, but I must see this through on my own. After all, I took on the shop against your uncle's advice, and I must make the best of it."

Gerald nodded, biting his lip, his brow furrowed in thought.

Then abruptly his face lit up.

"I say, I've got it! About how much do you want?"

"At least—at least five pounds," replied Norma, her heart sinking at the mention of the sum.

"Then I'll tell you what!" declared Gerald eagerly. "We'll earn it. Listen! That new shop down the road has put up a Christmas display—a pretty poor effort—but they're attracting custom galore. We'll beat them at their own game!"

"But—but how?" faltered Norma.

"I've thought of the very thing," declared Gerald confidently. "I saw it worked in a shop in Clinswell, and it almost held up the traffic. We'll have a bran-tub outside the shop! You know the kind of thing; whopping great tub filled with bran. You stick in a few dozen packets of chocolate, toys, groceries, and so forth—all tied up in fancy paper; then you charge sixpence a dip—half-price for kiddies—and the cash comes rolling in!"

Norma had to smile in spite of herself at Gerald's infectious enthusiasm.

But she realised that there was something in his idea. At least, it was a chance!

"That's a splendid idea!" she said gratefully. "But—but I haven't got a suitable tub—"

"I'll see to that!" chuckled Gerald. "You've just got to get the goods ready; let the kiddies help you. I'll fix up a tub in no time!"

Gerald was as good as his word. While Norma, with the help of the two delighted children, tied up packets of sweets and groceries in dainty parcels, Gerald departed on his errand.

He returned ten minutes later, accompanied by a youth from the village. They were carrying between them a huge packing-case, an enormous affair.



SUPERB CHRISTMAS PRESENTS



Put all these lovely annuals on your Christmas List.

Favourite "Girls' Crystal" authors contribute to the "Popular Book." The "School Friend" features long, enthralling stories about Bessie Bunter and the girls of Cliff House School. You'll find tales for every mood in the "Golden" Annual—price 3/6—while the "Schoolgirls' Own" is a big luxury book you will treasure for years. Make certain of a Happy Christmas by getting at least one of these grand story-books.



"It's a bit large," panted Gerald, mopping his forehead. "But I'll cut down the sides a bit. Jim, run and fetch a sack of sawdust from your dad's shop, and look slippery!"

The youth grinned and darted away, while Gerald set to work with a hammer and saw.

Very soon the sides of the packing-case were sufficiently low to permit even a child to dip into the tub. Jim—the village carpenter's son—returned with a sack of sawdust, and Gerald emptied it into the tub.

Then came the exciting business of packing the presents away in the sawdust—and here the two children lent a willing hand.

Gerald left them to it, declaring that he was going to scout round for something suitable to decorate the outside of the box.

"I suppose you've got nothing suitable in the shop?" he asked. "Can I have a look?"

Norma nodded, smiling, as she busied herself with the packets of groceries.

The children chattered endlessly and excitedly as they hurried in and out of the shop, trying to help. It cheered Norma to see their happiness.

Her worries had been thrust into the background; Gerald's brilliant idea, and his enthusiastic help, seemed to have given her a new lease of hope.

She was putting the last packet into the bran-tub, when she heard footsteps behind her.

"Good-morning!" boomed a deep, familiar voice.

Her heart missing a beat, Norma spun round—to confront Mr. Penhale!

NORMA'S VISITOR

GERALD'S guardian had descended from his car, and his manner this morning seemed more affable.

"Busy preparing for Christmas, I see," he remarked, glancing at the bran-tub. "Do you think it really wise, my dear?"

Norma stared at him.

"Why—what do you mean?" she breathed.

He shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I'm afraid you've taken on more than you can manage, Miss Royston," he said gravely. "I'm speaking as your friend. It's come to my ears that Tregellis left the place with a number of debts owing. You've heard nothing about that, I suppose?"

Norma swallowed hard, her face turning pale; but loyalty to the old fisherman put her on her guard.

"I'm sure that Mr. Tregellis doesn't owe more than he can pay," she declared loyally.

Mr. Penhale lit a cigar before replying.

"And—supposing he doesn't come back? What then, young lady?"

Norma clenched her hands, her eyes flashing.

"Then I'll carry on here—and look after the children," she replied boldly. "We're going to make the shop a big success!"

A slight frown crossed Mr. Penhale's face—but it faded almost at once.

"I hope so—I hope so, my dear, for your sake," he replied, shaking his head. "By the way, have you seen anything of Gerald this morning?"

"Here I am, uncle!" declared Gerald cheerily, as he emerged from the shop, a pile of crinkled red paper under his arm. "What do you think of our bran-tub? Going to have a dip?"

He winked gaily at Norma. "I've got something more serious to talk about at the moment, my boy," his guardian replied.

"You mean the ghost, uncle?" asked Gerald, grinning.

"I mean—that rascally thief!" was the answer. "The audacious scoundrel has got clean away. No one seems to have seen anything of the person; but it's evidently someone who knew the house."

Gerald nodded.

"It looks like it," he agreed. "But why worry? Nothing of any value was stolen. Only a trumpery statuette—"

"Don't be too sure about that, my boy!" snapped his guardian. "The statuette may be worthless—or it may not; as you know, I have never troubled to have it valued. But the thief may have taken other things, for all we know. The drawer in the writing-table was rifled, and its contents scattered over the floor. I'm convinced that the thief is connected with the village—and I'm going to make exhaustive inquiries."

Norma felt her heart turn cold. Supposing—supposing, by an unlucky chance, the black statuette should ever come to light?

She made a hurried excuse, leaving Gerald with his uncle, as she returned to the shop.

Quickly she darted to the shelf on which she had placed the chocolate-box. Then a gasp of horror escaped her.

The box containing the statuette had vanished!

Who can be the mystery thief? There are more surprising developments in next Friday's instalment of this grand new story. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** to-day!



Her Chance at the Christmas Party

A delightful story
Featuring PAT LOVELL—
GIRL REPORTER
By ELIZABETH CHESTER.

NOT ALLOWED TO SING

PAT LOVELL opened her short-hand notebook, and looked about her in the large kitchen of the Midshire Royal Hotel.

Everyone was busy. The chef in his white jacket, apron, and cap was giving orders to helpers who were putting turkeys into great ovens, and the most savory and delicious smells filled the air.

"Mmm," murmured Pat Lovell, and felt quite hungry.

Pat had never been in a big hotel kitchen before, and she was deeply impressed. A reporter on the staff of the "Midshire Gazette," she had been given the job of "covering" the Christmas-party which every year Mr. Arnold Landmore gave to children at the Royal Hotel.

Pat intended to do the thing thoroughly. Not only would she report the actual dinner, but she would mention in the article she had to write for her paper something about the preparations.

"How many turkeys?" asked Pat. "Five," said the chef with pride. "And five of the best turkeys ever. I, Emilio, I chose dem. You say dat in de paper? One time I cooka for the Grand Duke Michael. Later you coma back I tell you good story."

"Thank you," said Pat. "You have a mince pie?" asked the chef. "Ze besta in all the world. I myself make them."

Pat took the mince pie. It was burning hot, but she nibbled a piece out.

"Lovely," she said, although the hot mince burned her mouth and made her eyes water for a moment. "Delicious—"

And after that she had to sample some game, chops, some sauce, the soup. But at last she slipped away to visit the party-room.

Up the stone staircase she ran, glad of the cool after the heat of that enormous kitchen. Turning into a corridor, she saw the notice "Party." Looking at it was a girl who carried a music portfolio under her arm. The girl looked round as Pat approached.

"Does that mean Mr. Landmore's party?" she asked.

"Oh, I think so," said Pat. "I'm taking it for granted, anyway. That's where I'm bound for myself."

And she gave the girl an appraising look, wondering if she were a reporter, too, or if she were to be a performer.

"Oh, good! Are you singing?" said the girl.

"No, reporting," said Pat, and then seized her opportunity for more information for the paper. "But I take it you are a performer yourself?"

The girl's eyes sparkled. "A newspaper reporter! How lovely," she said, and then added shyly: "You will be kind about my singing, won't you?"

"I'm sure I couldn't write anything unkind without its being true," smiled Pat. "But tell me about yourself. It's my job to be inquisitive, you know."

The girl opened her portfolio and produced a newspaper cutting, with every show of pride and excitement.

"There—that's what they wrote when I sang at another dinner somewhere," she said. "Angela Hope—that's me. Not my real name—at least, Hope isn't; but hope is about all I started with, so it seemed a good name."

Pat wrote down the name, skimmed the article, and gleaned a little more information which enabled her to add to the notes in her book.

"Well, I wish you luck and plenty of cheers," said Pat sincerely.

"Thank you—and I hope you enjoy the party, and write such a lovely article for your paper that they make you editor," rejoined Angela Hope.

The children's Christmas party promised to be one of the jolliest events of the year. But not only was it going to bring happiness to the kiddies—it should also bring joy to the young girl singer. Pat Lovell, girl reporter, had resolved that!

"Hurrah for that," laughed Pat. "But small hope, alas!" She turned as an hotel page-boy came towards her.

"Miss Angela Hope?" he asked. "This is Miss Angela Hope," said Pat, indicating the young singer.

"You are wanted at once in the office, miss," said the page, adding, as he turned: "This way."

Pat pressed Angela Hope's arm encouragingly.

"Good luck!" she said.

"Thanks. This means a lot more to me than most jobs," said Angela, with excitement she could not suppress. "It isn't just the singing, but—well! Maybe after this party you'll have some exciting news to print," she added.

She hurried off, as though she had said too much, leaving Pat wondering what that news might be; but as she had plenty to do, she did not waste time on idle conjectures.

Pat went at once to the large room where the party was to be held, and which was already being prepared efficiently and speedily.

There were Christmas decorations everywhere—holly, mistletoe, paper streamers, flags—while the table was gay with artificial snow, a model of Santa Claus in a sleigh drawn by reindeer, and little Christmas-trees forming an avenue all the way down the table.

As Pat entered the room, crackers were being placed in position by the waitresses.

"Oh, lovely!" breathed Pat. The table really did look a picture; and Pat could just imagine how happy all the kiddies would be when they saw it.

Pat helped with the decorations, chatted with the waitresses, and then, learning that in another room Santa Claus was preparing sacksful of toys for the kiddies, she hurried to find him.

Tugging open the door, Pat went into the corridor, and then reeled.

A girl, walking head down, had not seen her in time; and Pat, emerging from the room at speed, could do nothing to avoid a collision.

Bump! They met, and reeled. And only then, as the girl staggered back, did Pat realise who she was—Angela Hope.

But it was a changed Angela. The bright sparkle had gone from her eyes, to be replaced by tears.

"Oh, Angela—what's wrong? Why— you've been crying!" gasped Pat.

Angela looked away, dabbed at her eyes, and braced herself. It was obvious by the way she gulped that she was as near to breaking down completely as any girl could be, and Pat's heart went out to her.

"Do tell me," Pat breathed. "Something's gone wrong?"

Angela composed herself sufficiently to speak.

"Everything's gone wrong," she said huskily. "I'm not to sing. I'm sacked. They won't have me; and I've not had even a trial. The man just gave one look at me, and then said flatly that I wouldn't suit."

"Oh, how terribly unfair," protested Pat. "Weren't you even allowed to sing? Not even one note to show them your voice?"

"No."

Pat saw how terribly upset Angela was, and it touched her heart. She knew herself how bitter could be the pangs of disappointment; and Angela had obviously set her heart on singing at this party.

"Wait," she said, as Angela, defeated, turned to go. "I've got an idea. Who was it you saw? Not Mr. Landmore himself?"

Angela shook her head.

"No, a younger man—not young, actually, middle-aged. But Mr. Landmore is elderly—"

"You've got to see Mr. Landmore personally," said Pat determinedly. "That's the only way. I've got the job of interviewing him, and I'll see that he gives you a fair chance."

Angela's eyes sparkled.

"You mean that? You think he would give me a chance?" she cried eagerly. "Oh, if only he would! You don't know what this means to me. Why, if I could see him face to face—talk to him—"

Pat gave her arm an encouraging squeeze.

"Wait down the corridor on the seat there," she said briskly. "I'll fix this."

And Pat, convinced that she could arrange the needed interview, swung round the corner.

Someone was waiting round that corner, a middle-aged man, and he snatched at Pat's arm, and held her. Eyes blazing, he fixed her with a savage look.

"Just a minute. Where do you think you're going? And who do you think you are, fixing things with Mr. Landmore? I heard every word you said, you little busybody; and let me tell you I'm running this party for my uncle. He's not here yet."

"I—I'm a reporter on the 'Gazette,'" said Pat, taken aback.

"Then you'd better get back to your office quickly. I'll have them send another reporter—one who can mind her own business."

trivial offence, and she was quite as surprised as she was dismayed.

"Oh, but really!" said Pat. "I have merely suggested getting Angela Hope an interview with Mr. Landmore—"

"I heard you. I have already told the girl that she is not wanted!" he snapped. "Go on; get back to your office. You are obviously young and inexperienced. Even though it is a children's party, I don't want children here reporting it."

Pat did not move. She was thinking of what would happen if she returned to the office and had to explain why the party was not being reported. There could be no greater possible disgrace than this; and even though it was so high-handed and unfair, the editor might not take a kindly view of it.

An apology trembled on Pat's lips, but she checked it and a glint came into her eyes.

"Very well," she said, "I'll go. But I can't promise that another reporter can be sent; I shouldn't think after his representative has been insulted my editor will send another. All I did was to investigate a case of gross injustice—and that's the policy of the 'Gazette.' We throw a searchlight on local injustices."

And Pat swung on her heel—but not before she had time to see his chagrined change of expression.

The power of the Press! Pat knew that she had scared him; for, although he was high-handed in the privacy of this hotel, he might not be so keen to have the incident reported.

She did not weaken; she walked on, head in the air—hoping that she would be called back. But no call came. Mr. Landmore's nephew was not the kind of man to take back what he had said, even though it was unwise and unjust.

At the end of the corridor Pat met Angela, who jumped up excitedly.

"You've done it?" the singer asked eagerly.

Pat hated to dash her hopes, but it had to be done.

"I'm afraid not," she admitted. "Mr. Landmore's nephew seems a horrid, spiteful man. Strange, when you think how nice his uncle is."

The girl's face showed amazement more than disappointment, a quite blank look coming on to it.

"His nephew! That man is Mr. Landmore's nephew!" she gasped incredulously. "Oh, but—but— My goodness! I wonder—" she ended in an excited tone.

"Wonder what?" Pat asked, scenting a story.

"Oh—nothing," said Angela slowly. "Only it doesn't seem so mysterious now that he doesn't want me to sing; that's all. And perhaps—perhaps it isn't all his doing. It may be that—perhaps—perhaps Mr. Landmore gave him the hint."

Mystified, Pat tried to learn more; for Angela's change of manner puzzled her. There was something behind all this that was not being told; and although Pat was the last girl to pry into anyone's affairs, she was a reporter, and having a quick scent for a story, never lost a chance of following it up.

But Angela closed up like an oyster. She said no more.

"What'll you do?" she asked, when Pat had told her exactly what had happened.

"I? Oh, back to the office for me," grimaced Pat. "And unless I can come back, I shall miss the lovely party."

"What a shame! I am sorry. And all my fault," said Angela. "You were a brick to try to help me. Thanks ever so—and I hope we'll meet again."

"Of course we shall—we must!" said Pat quickly. "You can always find me at the 'Gazette' office. I'd like your address though."

Angela opened her handbag; she fumbled with it and it slipped, letting the contents roll on to the thick hotel carpet.

Stooping, Pat helped her pick up the oddments, and the first thing that her fingers closed upon was a small photograph of a handsome man.

"Your father?" she asked.

"Grandfather," said Angela, and took the photograph rather hurriedly.

Then, giving Pat the address of the house where she was staying, she went with her into the street, momentarily at a loss to know what to do, her face clouded, her eyes sad.

"Tell you what—meet me for tea at five," said Pat.

They parted then, and Pat turned to



As Pat snatched off the wig, there came squeals of delight from the kiddies. But Mr. Landmore looked quite angry. "If this is a joke—" he began. "It isn't a joke," Pat said calmly.

ANGELA'S SECRET

PAT LOVELL stared at the middle-aged man, at a loss for words. It had not occurred to her that she might be considered a busybody. But he left her in no doubt; and he was terribly angry.

He was far more angry, in fact, than Pat thought normal, considering her

go to the office, feeling quaky inside with uneasiness at the thought of the interview with her editor. But suddenly she paused. An elderly man had emerged from the hotel—a man whose face was vaguely familiar.

For a moment, however, Pat could not place him, could not decide where she had seen him, and she stood looking back at him as he stepped into a taxicab which the hotel porter had hailed.

Then, as she saw him three-quarter face, Pat knew who he was. He was Angela Hope's grandfather! Though older than he had seemed in the photograph that had fallen from Angela's handbag, the likeness was nevertheless unmistakable.

In her schooldays Pat Lovell would have been too shy to have asked the porter who the distinguished-looking man was, but newspaper work had changed her.

"I say—that gentleman—the one who just got into the taxicab," said Pat. "What is his name? I'm a reporter," she added.

The porter smiled. "Well, fancy you not knowing, miss!" he said. "Why, that's Mr. Landmore, the gent who's giving the big party for the kiddies to-day."

Pat nearly collapsed. Mr. Landmore—Angela's grandfather! And the nephew who had rejected her was, therefore, a relative, too; her second cousin.

Amazed, Pat thought it over. Then she jumped forward and hailed a taxicab.

"'Gazette' office!" she cried. Pat suddenly saw that instead of disgrace when she returned to the office, there might be something like praise for her!

In a few minutes the taxi covered the distance, and Pat, with the money ready, paid off the driver, rushed up the steps, into the lift, and in record time was rapping on the editor's door.

He glanced up from a batch of copy he was reading.

"What's wrong—party off?" he asked, surprised to see her.

"No; I've been turned out," said Pat, smiling to brazen it out, and rushing on before his surprise and anger found words. "Turned adrift by Mr. Landmore's nephew. And what do you think—a girl singer was turned adrift, too. Mr. Landmore's own granddaughter!"

She had expected the editor to be surprised, but not completely taken aback.

"His granddaughter? Here, steady! He hasn't got one!" he said. "He's a lonely old widower. He turned out his only daughter years ago because she wanted to go on the stage. It was a grand news story at the time. So far as we know he's never heard from her since. I ought to have warned you. Don't mention it to him. He gets mad. Very sore point. My idea is he'd like to have the daughter back, but pride bars the way—you know how it is. And she—well, I don't know. Mebbe she has written during all these years—"

Pat cut his reminiscences short.

"But this girl has a photograph of him in her handbag!" she said excitedly. "And old Landmore's nephew, for no reason at all, refused to let her sing. Turned her away. Then he turned me out because I wanted to fix an appointment for her with the old gentleman. My goodness! Doesn't it begin to look as though she really is his granddaughter—and that for some reason the nephew doesn't want her to be there!"

The editor thumped the desk and his eyes gleamed.

"Good girl! You're on to something," he said briskly. "But wait a bit. It may be that the nephew has

instructions. The grandfather may not want to meet the girl."

Pat shook her head. "I've seen that nephew. He's hateful, bad-tempered. I wouldn't trust him. If you ask me, he knows that Angela is the lost granddaughter. And he knows that granddad would weaken, take her into the family—"

"Hah! And freeze him out," said the editor, sitting up and beaming. "My girl, although you're a novice, you've a sound, shrewd head. You've hit it. The nephew's keeping them apart! Pat, you've got to find out the truth. See that that girl does sing at the party and that the grandfather sees her."

"Chief, leave it to me," said Pat. In a taxicab Pat rushed to Angela's address.

Convinced now that the girl had been turned away because her true identity was known, Pat planned to fool the scheming nephew! He would certainly rue the day he had insulted Pat.

Angela Hope should go to the party in disguise!

AT THE PARTY IN DISGUISE

"YOU must. I tell you, you must," insisted Pat. "You can't let him diddle you! He wants another singer, and I've phoned to say that one is coming. Your new name is Elizabeth Wiles—a jolly good name, considering everything," she added, with a smile.

Pat was in Angela's room, a simple bed-sitting-room, which was cosy and attractive. Angela's small wardrobe of frocks was spread on the bed, and Pat had selected one for her to wear.

"This blue one," she said. "I'm wearing blue, too, not very exciting but popular. I've got the wig. Everything is ready except you."

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She turned to Angela, who, half dressed, looked worried and doubtful.

Without beating about the bush, Pat had told all she knew and all she had guessed, and Angela had not been able to deny the truth.

She was indeed the lost granddaughter. For years she had begged her mother to make it up with her father; but, although once her mother had written, there had been no reply.

Now her mother was ill, and, although Angela helped all she could with her singing, they needed help. It seemed to her quite impossible that any father could ignore his daughter's need; so, without letting her mother know, she had planned this ingenious way of meeting him.

"You're too easily beaten," said Pat, half in despair. "I tell you your plan's wonderful! Sing to him—sing the songs your mother sang; he'll know the voice. And the wig—that won't matter. It's your face, not your wig, that matters, although it will deceive that rascally cousin of yours who knows you have really dark hair."

"Y-e-es," demurred Angela. "But—suppose granddad ordered me to be turned away? Suppose—"

"Listen!" said Pat. "You have your mother to think of. Suppose he does treat you coldly; suppose he ignores you—turns you away? You'll be hurt, upset; but what does that matter compared with all the happiness that success might bring? Come on! Here's the frock."

Angela gave in. And ten minutes later she was on her way to the hotel with Pat.

Now was the testing-time, and Pat, following her in, wearing thick glasses herself and a different frock, hoped that she, too, would bluff the nephew who might be too busy to give her much attention.

While Angela went to interview him, Pat loitered outside, anxious, hoping intensely. Five minutes passed, and the door opened.

Angela, smiling, emerged, and, winking at Pat, did a little dance.

That was enough. All was well, and Pat hurried to find the room where the presents for the kiddies were being arranged. Already the children were queuing up in the large foyer, and Pat ran to see them.

How happy they looked! And how expectant! This was the grandest party of the year for them. They were poor children, and their own parents could not afford many presents, nor expensive ones. But at this party every child would have a gift that would really seem like a present from some wealthy, generous Father Christmas—something to treasure for always.

"Hallo, kiddies!" said Pat; and then, mingling with them, asked their names, what they thought of Christmas, what fun they had had, what they liked eating, and thus gathered material that she could weave into an article for the "Gazette."

When she returned she was met by Angela, shining-eyed with excitement.

"I've met granddad," she cried, "face to face; only I hadn't time to talk because my cousin was there—"

At that moment the nephew appeared at the far end of the corridor.

Pat moved into hiding, and then, seeing a man approaching bearing some holly which was to replace some other decorations in the party room, she dodged behind him.

There was plenty of holly, and Pat was obscured from view.

On went the man, overtaking Angela, who had boldly turned to walk past her

Last-Minute Christmas Presents

Some very inexpensive gifts that you can make in a twinkling—described for you by Penelope.

I EXPECT you have most of your Christmas presents all ready—beautifully wrapped and intriguingly tied, just waiting for Christmas morning to be presented.

But perhaps there are just one or two presents you have not yet bought, and you're wondering what on earth to give.

So I have planned some very easy-to-make gifts that will cost you very little, and yet will be very popular, I'm sure.

1. This is a good old favourite. A penny coat-hanger, or one from your wardrobe that is to spare, is covered with pretty silky material.

First, you should wind cottonwool, or odd scraps of material all round the wood part of the hanger, to pad it. Then gather up two long strips of the silky material. Slip the hanger into this, and fasten off at the ends.

Bind the hook part with ribbon, and it will look very luxurious. An aunty or big sister would love it!

2. Father would like this special duster for the car, I'm sure—and mother would be pleased, too—for then hers would not be used! It is just a bright-yellow duster, which

costs three-ha'pence, but in the corner you "print" FOR

THE CAR in pencil, and then work over this in chain-stitch, in bright-red or blue cotton or wool.

3. A chum would adore this charming little hair ornament. It is just the thing to wear at parties. A three-penny posy of artificial flowers and a hair grip are all you need. You stitch the flowers firmly to the "grip"—pack it prettily in a dainty box, and it would be a pleasure to receive.

4. A pink powder-puff for three-pence, and a mauve chiffon hankie at the same price. Stitch the puff to the centre of the hankie, work initials in one corner, and you have an ever-useful present for a grown-up sister.

5. A fancy rubber and decorated pencil. Buy a penny rubber and a gay pencil with a ring at the end.

You paint a simple little design on the rubber. Then you heat some sealing-wax, and smear this over the end. Push a tassel into the wax while it is still hot, and it will stay in place.

Tie a tassel to match on the ring of the pencil.



A grown-up would love these for scoring at card games, and a chum would love them for school. You'll remember to make the tassels before you heat the wax, from odd lengths of embroidery silk or wool, won't you?

6. This is a real "homey" present—a draught excluder, that can be placed along the bottom of the door to keep out stray winds when you're all cozily in the sitting-room.

You want a whole newspaper. This must be rolled up very, very tightly, and bound around with string or twine. Then you make a cover for it with any bright pieces of material which will match the colour scheme of the room.

Slip the roll of paper into the cover, oversew the ends, and stitch a loop at one end so that it can hang on the door-handle when not in use.

second-cousin, taking care to bend her head.

"Mind, please!" called the man bearing the holly.

Angela moved aside, and Pat ducked her head.

When Pat glanced up she saw something that made her blood run cold. She stared, and could hardly believe her eyes.

Caught on the prickly holly was a wig—a fair wig—Angela's!

"Oh!" gasped Pat, and turned back.

There stood Angela, quite dazed, putting a hand to her head, and just in front of her was the nephew!

"You!" he cried. "You've had the impertinence to come here disguised! This is the limit! How dare you!"

He gripped her arm, and Angela drew back.

"Take me to Mr. Landmore!" she said fiercely.

"Just what I'm going to do!" he snapped. "Come on!"

Angela, her arm still held, went with him, and Pat followed. He turned left down a corridor, and then right. Presently he flung open a door, standing aside for Angela to enter.

Unsuspectingly, she walked in, and, quick as a panther, he jumped to the door-handle, slamming the door shut. The key clicked in the lock, and Angela was a prisoner.

Pat made a move forward; then, changing her mind, she jumped back, hoping to be able to sneak forward and release the prisoner.

Vain hope! For the nephew took care not to leave that key in the lock.

Through the door Pat spoke to Angela.

"Don't knock—don't shout!" she said. "I've got a plan."

Pat turned round and hurried back down the corridor to the spot where the wig had been trapped by the holly. It was now being taken care of by the nephew.

Hiding it behind his back, he stood aside as the children came into view, chattering, and Pat, looking down to the end of the corridor, saw kindly Mr. Landmore senior waiting to receive them, all smiles.

It was a time for quick thinking, and Pat's brain did not fail her.

Pretending to take notes, she watched the nephew, and saw him hurry down to the cloak-room, where he tossed the wig over the counter.

Pat waited until he was gone, then followed, and boldly asked for "her" fair wig that the gentleman had just deposited.

Without a question, it was given to her, and Pat, hurrying to a cloak-room, adjusted it.

By the time she was ready the children were in the party room, and the pianist was striking up. Coos of joy and excitement came from the kiddies as they saw the loaded table, the lovely decorations, the bonbons, the flowers, the glittering artificial snow, and the hundred and one ingenious delights to amuse and intrigue them.

Mr. Landmore, beaming with happiness, sat at the head of the table. This was the high spot of the year, his happiest hour; and Pat thought, as she peeped in, that she had never seen any man look more radiant than he did at this moment.

"Rupert," he said to the nephew, "that pretty singer—where is she?"

Pat listened for the answer.

"Poor girl, she's had a fainting attack!" said the nephew.

"Oh dear! I am sorry! See that she has the best attention," said the grandfather in his kindly, considerate way.

Those few words told Pat everything—told her that her guess was correct. The mere fact that the nephew lied showed that he was keeping the truth hidden; that, although he knew who Angela was, the grandfather did not.

Pat opened the door, and, wearing the blonde wig, entered.

"Why, here she is!" exclaimed old Mr. Landmore.

Pat looked slyly at the nephew. What an expression on his face! He went pale, almost green; and then, looking more closely, he saw that it was not Angela after all, and he became puzzled.

Pat walked boldly to the platform.

She was not a trained singer, but she could keep in tune, and for kiddies it hardly mattered whether one was perfect in the matter of breathing or not.

An old popular song, "Happy Days Are Here Again," was what she had to sing first, and she managed it easily, the kiddies joining in the refrain.

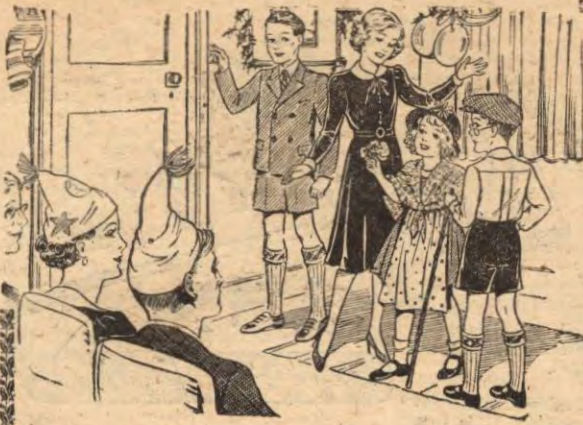
Then, with old Mr. Landmore looking at her with kindly interest and appreciation, Pat stepped to the edge of the platform.

"That was awfully kind of you all," she said, smiling. "Because, really, I can't sing for nuts. I'm not a singer—I'm just a newspaper reporter. Look!"

Pat whipped off the wig and there came squeals of delighted laughter from the kiddies.

But Mr. Landmore jumped up, looking quite angry.

"Really!" he protested. "If this is a joke—"



BLACK-OUTS ARE SUCH FUN!

Here's such a jolly way of entertaining your friends and the family on Christmas evening or at a Christmas party.

BLACK-OUTS!

You'll probably wonder what these are, so I'll explain first. They are very tiny little one-act playlets that can be performed without much dressing up—a little always adds to the enjoyment—and by any members of the family whether they are good at acting or not.

The chairs should be arranged at one end of the room for the audience, and the actors should be at the other end, preferably near the door, in order to make quick exits and entrances.

One person should be allotted the job of controlling the light switch, for at the end of each little act, instead of a curtain coming down, out goes the light—black-out, see?

Now I'll give you one or two examples of these tiny acts that you can perform, you and your young sisters and brothers and cousins.

I think it would be a good idea to have just one rehearsal first—to make sure that all know their lines, simple as they are, and to make sure that the "black-out" comes at the right moment.

Here we go.

POOR ALFIE!

Enter two schoolgirls, dressed in some of mother's clothes perhaps.

FIRST SCHOOLGIRL: Good-morning, Mrs. Clutterbuck.

SECOND SCHOOLGIRL: Same to you, Mrs. Snufflewick. Haven't seen you lately.

FIRST SCHOOLGIRL: No, dear, I've been that busy, what with mending—and so on. Isn't it dreadful the way the children will wear out their clothes?

SECOND SCHOOLGIRL: Dreadful! Shocking, I call it. I'm always doing something to my young Tommy's jerseys and coats. As for his shoes—

FIRST SCHOOLGIRL: Don't talk to me about shoes. Why, here's my young Alfie.

(Enter young boy—Alfie—clutching seat of trousers)

FIRST SCHOOLGIRL: What's the matter now, Alfie?

(Alfie shows huge tear in trousers.) Goodness, gracious me! How on earth did you do that?

SMALL BOY (ALFIE): Well, mum, you told me to go up the stairs two at a time to save my shoes. So I went up three at a time—and split my trousers.

(Black-out—that is, light is switched off by girl or boy in charge of it.)

Exit all players, to the applause of the grown-ups.

I've written that one out rather at length, to make sure you have the idea, but the others I'll make snappier, and you can spin them out during rehearsals if you like.

Here's one for two boys to act.

A SHORT CUT

FIRST BOY is reading a newspaper. Second boy approaches and gives him a prod in the back with walking stick.

SECOND BOY: I say, my man, which is the quickest way to the hospital?

(First boy turns over page, and says nothing.)

SECOND BOY (giving another prod): Didn't you hear me? I said, which is the quickest way to the hospital?

FIRST BOY (turning, placing newspaper on floor and pushing back sleeves): You just poke me in the back again with that stick, and you'll jolly soon find yourself there!

(Black-out).

Now one for a boy and girl.

DEAR OLD LADY: Constable, do you mind going into that drapers' shop and asking them for their Christmas catalogue?

POLICEMAN: Sorry, madam. Why ask me? Can't you get one yourself?

DEAR OLD LADY: No, because, you see, it said in the paper, "send p.c. for catalogue!"

(Black-out).

Now here's one for two girls dressed as grown-ups and one small girl as herself.

AUNT: So there you are, and there's little Dorothy. How are you?

MOTHER: We're not too good. You see, Dorothy didn't do too well in her exams—in her history exam, that is.

AUNT: Oh, what a pity! I'm sorry to hear that.

DOROTHY: Well, it wasn't my fault, aunty. They asked me things that happened fore I was born!

(Black out).

There, now you have the idea. I'm quite sure you can make up further "black-outs" for yourself.

Just adapt any good jokes, giving them dialogue as brief as you like, and perform them one after the other, making the "interval" between each as short as possible.

Pat turned on him.

"It isn't a joke! I am taking the place of the other girl, the real singer, Mr. Landmore," she said. "She isn't ill, and she hasn't had a fainting fit. She is locked in one of the rooms. Your nephew didn't want her to sing here."

The nephew sprang up.

"That's a lie," he said shakily.

"Quiet, Rupert!" said his uncle, and turned to Pat. "Kindly explain why you are interrupting these happy proceedings in this manner. If you are indeed a newspaper reporter—"

"I am a reporter," said Pat quickly, "and I hope to have happy Christmas news to report. That other girl is locked in a room because she is your granddaughter, Mr. Landmore," said Pat. "Your nephew is afraid you might recognise her; he is terrified that there will be a reunion."

Mr. Landmore was staring at her, and then from her to his nephew, blankly amazed.

"It's a lie!" said the nephew thickly.

"Bring her here," said the grandfather.

But Pat intervened.

"No; no; don't tell her I've said all this. Let her come as she wanted to, wearing this wig. Let her sing—and then you can judge for yourself. Why shouldn't she sing?"

"Fetch her," said the old man shakily, but with a strange new light in his eyes, a new expression on his face.

Pat hurried to the door, ahead of the nephew, and then turned back.

"The key, please," she said to him.

Five minutes later, when the meal had begun and the excitement had died a little, Angela entered, unaware that her identity had been disclosed.

Pat took her appointed reporter's place at the table and waited.

Angela sang her songs when the time came—songs that her mother had sung.

Suddenly the old man rose.

"Stop! Please stop!" he begged.

Then he stepped to the platform, and as the amazed Angela leaned down, he lifted her to the floor and removed her wig. But the expression on his face told her what she longed to learn.

"I am your grandfather," he said huskily. "I should know those eyes of yours anywhere—your mother's. Oh, how glad I am, how happy!"

Pat Lovell, as she saw the embrace, hurried to the door, and there collided with the nephew.

"Get out of my way!" he snapped in fury. "You worked this. But for you—"

"Tell me some other time," said Pat, enjoying her triumph. "I must hurry to get a cameraman. If you wait, you can be on the front page."

But the nephew did not wait; he knew the scene ahead of him, knew that the truth must come out; how he had burned all the letters Angela's mother had written.

Pat, without wasting another thought on the rascal, went to the telephone.

"We were right, chief," she said, in thrilled tones. "They're hugging now, happy as kings. Send a cameraman—quick!"

Then Pat returned to the party to receive the fervent thanks and praise of grandfather and granddaughter and the cheers of the kiddies.

After that, of course, nothing could have gone wrong with the party, and nothing did. It was a riot.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Another enthralling story about Pat Lovell next Friday. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL now.



IRMA'S REVENGE

DOREEN CARSDALE and Jean Hinton could hardly believe that they had actually arrived in Switzerland for a wonderful holiday with Doreen's Aunt Elizabeth. It seemed too good to be true.

At their hotel in St. Lauritz they met Mr. and Mrs. Ross and their daughter Irma. With them was Sylvia Drake, Mr. Ross' ward, about whom there seemed to be some mystery. The chums disliked the Ross family, but felt drawn towards Sylvia.

A strange old woman in the mountains told the chums that in a secret mountain chalet was to be found the solution of the mystery about Sylvia. She said she would take Sylvia there herself.

The Rosses, however, were determined to find the chalet. But Doreen & Co. tricked Irma. They persuaded Tony Semers, a boy they had met, to disguise himself as a guide, and take Irma on a false trail into the mountains, so that she would not meet the real guide to take her to the chalet.

Later, they saw Irma Ross returning home, furious and bedraggled. Irma and her mother made a great fuss at the hotel, to attract attention and sympathy, though the chums knew Irma was exaggerating.

Suddenly Irma turned on Sylvia, seized her handbag—and drew out the incriminating false beard which Tony had worn!

"This is the girl who is responsible for the trick played on me!" she cried.

DOREEN, Jean, and Sylvia watched helplessly as Irma flourished the false beard!

"This is proof!" she cried. "Sylvia is the girl who might have sent me to my death! She wasn't the actual impostor, but she must have put someone else up to doing it."

There was a murmur from the crowd. Half-incredulous, half-condemning looks, were being cast at Sylvia now.

"I can't believe it of her."

"Then what's she doing with the beard in her possession?"

"It was a shameful trick to play. Jokes of this sort are beneath contempt. Whoever did it deserves to be punished—"

"Oh, Sylvia, how could you?" Irma's voice was bitterly reproachful now. Irma was acting for all she was worth.

"When we've been such friends together—more like sisters than anything else."

Doreen couldn't help the little curl of contempt that came to her lips then. Those hypocritical words jerked her out of her daze.

"Oh, don't put it on, Irma!" she cried angrily. "You've been no friend to Sylvia—"

"I think you'd better keep out of this, Doreen," Irma said, in a darkly hinting voice that was not lost on everybody there. "I notice that you don't stick up for Sylvia—"

"I do stick up for her!" "Then deny that she knows anything at all about this business. You deny it, also, Sylvia!"

Helplessly the three girls glanced at each other. How could they truthfully deny it? Sylvia had played a part in tricking Irma—all three of them had.

But there had been no danger attached to it. Irma was deliberately exaggerating to suit her own and her parents' scheming ends.

"Oh, we don't deny it!" Doreen said grimly. "But you're not telling the truth, Irma, when you say that you were put in any danger. You couldn't have been—"

"I was! Anyway, what do you know about it?"

Sylvia was locked in her room; it was impossible for her to visit the old woman in the mountains. So Doreen decided to go instead. Would the old woman reveal to her the secret of the chalet?

THEIR QUEST at the WINTER SPORTS

By

DAPHNE GRAYSON

"Well, if there's any blame going, Jean and I are as much to blame as Sylvia."

There was another murmur from the crowd—louder now. Mrs. Ross, standing beside Irma, gave a pretended gasp of horror:

"Girls, I can't believe it—"

While there was a sudden angry exclamation, and Aunt Elizabeth pushed her way forward to the front of the scene. In scandalised horror she regarded her niece.

"Doreen, what does this mean? Are you admitting you took part in this disgraceful outrage?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"Good gracious! This is terrible!"

"There's nothing terrible about it at all, Aunt Elizabeth," Doreen said, her head held proudly high. "Irma is fond of making these accusations, but she's careful to keep back the real truth. She doesn't say how she stole an important letter, how she's been scheming against Sylvia—"

"It's all lies! Don't listen to her!" Irma hooted.

"I don't intend to. Doreen, you're being ridiculous!" Aunt Elizabeth said angrily. "How dare you make such preposterous accusations! Really, I'm ashamed of you!"

"Please don't distress yourself, Miss Hill," broke in Mrs. Ross quickly. "I think it is fairly obvious who is at the bottom of all this unfortunate affair. Once again your niece and her friend have allowed themselves to be swayed by the willfulness of my ward, Sylvia, you wicked girl, you are to blame—"

"She isn't!" Doreen protested desperately. "Aunt Elizabeth, you must believe us—"

"Not another word, Doreen!" Aunt Elizabeth ordered.

"I am sorry that this should have happened to-night," Mrs. Ross declared. "But I intend that Sylvia shall be taught a lesson. Sylvia, you will not attend the dance. You will relinquish your office as queen of the carnival, and I shall see that you are confined to your room for the rest of the evening."

"And that," Aunt Elizabeth, put in

angrily, "will also apply to Doreen and Jean—"

"No; please don't do that!" pleaded Mrs. Ross. "It is sufficient that Sylvia be punished—"

"You are very kind, Mrs. Ross, but on this occasion I do not agree with you. You heard what I said, Doreen?" Aunt Elizabeth added sternly. "You and Jean will go up to your room now. There will be no more carnival celebrations for you."

Doreen gave a little groan, but she saw it was useless to attempt to argue, so reluctantly she and Jean returned to their hotel, and went up to their room.

Slowly the evening passed, and at last it was time for bed. The next morning they awoke to see a sky that was grey and clouded, the mountain peaks hidden in swirling mist—the first dull morning since they had arrived in St. Lauritz.

Down they went to breakfast, and there a shock awaited them.

Sylvia was not there.

"Sylvia will remain confined in her room for this morning, at least," Mrs. Ross explained sternly. "I am sorry to have to do it, but I intend that the girl shall be taught a lesson!"

Sudden consternation came to grip Doreen as she heard that. Sylvia still confined to her room—when that morning she was to meet the mysterious woman in black, who had said she would take her to the secret chalet.

A gasp of dismay rose to Doreen's lips, but quickly she bit it back, aware that Mr. Ross was watching her closely, suspiciously. There was a hard glitter in his eyes; but he made no mention of how he, like Irma, had been tricked the previous evening in his attempt to reach the chalet. When he had returned she did not know, did not care. She was thinking of Sylvia.

"Golly, what are we going to do? What is Sylvia going to do?" Doreen demanded anxiously of Jean when, after breakfast, they strolled through the snow outside the Crestina.

Jean shook her head, as dismayed as her chum.

"Could we manage to smuggle her out?" she suggested tentatively.

"There won't be much hope of doing that, I'm afraid," Doreen said bitterly. "You can bet the Rosses will be guarding her like the Crown jewels. But we've got to do something. If we could only see her, talk things over, and—"

She broke off, dodging back as a snowball suddenly whizzed down in front of her, missing her only by inches.

"Here, who's larking about?" she began, looking in the direction from which the snowball had come, and then giving a shout. "Sylvia!" she exclaimed.

There above them was Sylvia, standing on the balcony which ran outside her room. She leaned over the rail, and now the chums saw that she held something in her hand.

"Catch!" Sylvia called.

"It's a letter!" Doreen exclaimed.

The letter dropped into her eagerly awaiting hands. It was addressed to her, in Sylvia's handwriting.

Excitedly Doreen opened the envelope, took out the single sheet of notepaper it contained.

"Dear Doreen," she read—"I cannot get out—I'm locked in my room. Please go to

the chalet for me—you know how important it is. It should make no difference. You can find out everything and tell me when you come back. Please go—please!—SYLVIA."

Doreen's eyes shone. Would she do it? No need for Sylvia to ask that.

"My hat, it's a brain-wave!" she jubilantly told Jean. "This is the solution to the problem. Of course I'll go—"

Thrilled and excited now, she looked up to nod her agreement. But then she stared. Sylvia was still there on the balcony, and Sylvia was waving one arm in frantic agitation.

"Look out!" she cried. "Don't let her see it, Doreen—"

Round swung Doreen with a gasp, hearing crunching footsteps at that moment. Striding towards her was Irma Ross, a desperate gleam in her eyes.

DOREEN SPEAKS HER MIND!

TWO more frantic strides, and Irma had reached Doreen. Out shot her hand, making a grab at the letter which Doreen held.

Quick as a flash Doreen drew back and thrust the envelope and sheet of notepaper into the pocket of her ski-jacket.

"Give me that letter!" Irma cried. "Try to get it!" Doreen said ominously.

Irma's face flamed with fury.

"Give it me, I say—"

"And I say you're not having it!" Out shot Irma's hand again, making a dive for Doreen's pocket. Angrily

Doreen gripped the arm, pushed it away.

"If you try that again," she warned, "we'll roll you over in the snow!"

Irma stood panting and glaring.

"That was a letter from Sylvia!"

"Well, what of it?"

"She's no right to communicate with you!"

"She has every right to!" Doreen retorted. "Anyway, it's none of your business!"

"Not my business, eh? We'll soon see about that! Mother! Mother!"

Doreen looked round uneasily as Irma began to shout. Sylvia had gone from the balcony, dragged back into her room by Mrs. Ross, who had witnessed the scene going on below. Now, having rushed downstairs, she was just emerging from the hotel entrance. She came running across to the group.

"Irma, what's been happening?" she demanded.

"Sylvia wrote these girls a letter."

"What? I'll make that girl pay for this! Doreen, you will hand over the letter immediately."

Doreen stood her ground, gazing back defiantly at the angry woman.

"I'm sorry, but I refuse!"

"How dare you, girl—"

"I dare anything," Doreen retorted recklessly, "when I'm dealing with your sort, Mrs. Ross!"

Jean gasped, while Mrs. Ross went livid.

"You insolent girl!" the woman cried. "Miss Hill shall know about this!"

"You'll have to wait. Aunt Elizabeth has gone out. Oh, come on, Jean!" Doreen added, gripping her chum's arm. "Let's go before I say more than I should!"

And she strode off, Jean beside her, leaving Mrs. Ross and Irma glaring after them helplessly.

"My hat!" Jean gasped. "You've caused it now, old thing. They'll tell your aunt everything you said."

"I don't care! They asked for a few

home-truths and got them! What worries me," Doreen said, "is how I'm going to get away this morning. Blow them seeing that letter! They're on their guard once more. They'll watch us every second. But somehow I'll diddle them. I'm going to see that woman if it's the last thing I do!"

"Crumbs! Irma is following us already," Jean muttered, glancing back over her shoulder.

Doreen frowned, more than ever worried.

And then a cheery voice hailed them, and Tony Semers came running up with his pal, Jack Huntley.

"Hallo, girls! I say, where d'you get to at the dance last night—and Sylvia, too? We were looking forward to having some dances together."

Doreen shot her friend a quick, warning glance. No need for Tony to know about last night's terrible scene—it would only make him uncomfortable and cause him to ask a lot of awkward questions.

"Oh, Irma kicked up a bit of fuss, as you thought she would, and Aunt Elizabeth wouldn't let us come to the dance, that's all," Doreen said. "Now, what's all the excitement?"

"Well, what a rotten shame!" Tony exclaimed. "That girl gives me the pip—" He coughed, noticing Irma hovering near by. "But, I say, come and join in some fun. We're just going to do some ski-joring. You know, being towed along on skis by a pony. What do you say?"

But Doreen shook her head. Her one concern was to find some way of dodging Irma so that she could set out for the chalet near the Mill Grinnelle.

"Not now, Tony," she said.

"Another time—"

"Oh, but you must come!" Tony protested. "There's a party of us, and it's going to be grand fun!"

Another refusal was on the tip of Doreen's tongue, but this time she paused as a sudden thought came to her. A gleam shot into her eyes.

"Where will you be going?" she asked eagerly.

"Through the village," Jack put in.

"You'll come, then?"

"Yes," Doreen said, her mind made up now.

"Mind if I join in, too?" asked a voice behind them; and there was Irma, smiling sweetly at the boys.

Jean gave a little groan. Tony didn't look too pleased. But he had to be polite.

"Well, if you want to—yes, of course."

"Thanks!"

And Irma smiled again, shooting a look of satisfaction at Doreen. But Doreen ignored her.

"When do we start, Tony?" she asked.

"As soon as you've got your skis," Tony said. "Have you done any ski-joring before?"

"No. Is it difficult?"

"Well, yes. But perhaps Jack and I can give you one or two tips. You'll soon get the hang of it. Come on!"

Doreen and Jean made their way across to a small cabin at the rear of the hotel, where they would be able to hire skis. Irma followed closely behind them.

"This couldn't have happened better," Doreen chuckled. "Just got



an idea, Jean. I think you'd better go on that trip instead of me. You'll be able to give Irma the slip as we're going through St. Lauritz—"

Jean was staring in amazement. For Doreen, usually so cautious, had made little effort to lower her voice.

"Shush!" she whispered. "Irma can hear you!"

Doreen pretended to give a little start as she saw Irma still hovering near by, and hastily dropped her voice. But she was still grinning.

"I wanted her to hear," she told Jean in a whisper. "Listen! She'll be watching you now. She'll follow you like a lamb when she sees you dodge away from the others. Well, you'll just lead her round the houses, and that will leave it clear for me to slip away at another point. Get me?"

Jean glanced admiringly at her chum.

"I get you," she grinned. "And it'll work like a charm!"

"Let's hope so."

Five minutes later, having fixed on their skis, they rejoined the boys, who were waiting in the roadway with a little crowd of other young people from the hotel.

"Here you are, then!" Tony greeted them cheerily. "Now let's see how you get on." He was leading them across to where a number of ponies stood bunched together at the side of the road. "You going to have a practice, too, Irma?" he added, as that girl accompanied them.

Irma gave a sniff.

"Oh, I've done a lot of ski-joring," she said loftily. "But—but I thought I might be able to give Doreen and Jean a little advice, you know."

Doreen gave a little chuckle. Obviously, Irma didn't intend to let them out of her sight.

But now Tony and Jack were leading two of the horses out into the centre of the road.

"Grab hold of the reins," Tony instructed the girls. "Hang on tight. Now, gee-up, boy!"

The ponies trotted forward. There was a jerk of the reins, and then the chums were being towed along over the snow. But this method of ski-ing was certainly more difficult than it seemed.

Going along on her own, Doreen had been able to control the movements of her legs. Indeed, during the few days she had been at St. Lauritz, she had become quite an expert ski-er.

But being towed along by a pony was a different proposition altogether—and she simply couldn't control her legs. They would persist in wobbling outwards.

"Whoa-back!" she laughingly cried. "Whoa— Oh golly!"

Out shot one leg, off her balance she went, and next moment she was rolling in the snow, being dragged along as she instinctively still clutched at the reins.

Quickly Tony brought the trotting pony to a halt.

"All right?" he inquired, racing to Doreen's rescue.

"Well, except for having swallowed a mouthful of snow," Doreen laughed, struggling upright and hastily grabbing a handkerchief from her pocket to wipe the snow from her face. "But I say, it's grand fun. Here, let me have another shot at this!"

She had another "shot" at it—and another. Up and down the road Tony trotted the pony, while Doreen gradually gained confidence and skill. Jean was doing the same, helped by Jack.

"You're doing fine!" Tony said, five minutes later. "Feel confident enough now?"

"Rather," grinned Doreen. "Come on—let's get started!"

There was a cheer from the others, who had been watching with amusement. Then off they all went.

Down the street trotted the ponies. After them went that merry party of boys and girls as they clung to the reins.

Ski-joring was certainly grand sport. Doreen's eyes sparkled as she was pulled along faster and faster. Through St. Lauritz they went, and now some of them were urging their ponies on to a gallop.

Skis swished over the hard-caked snow in the roadway. Just behind her Doreen glimpsed Jean. And behind Jean was Irma, hanging on like a leech.

Doreen winked across at her chum.

Jean grinned back, gave an imperceptible nod. A moment later, as they approached a side turning, she suddenly swung the pony round with a jerk of the reins.

Away she shot, down that side street. And after her went Irma.



"Sylvia wrote these girls a letter," Irma told her mother. Mrs. Ross turned angrily to the chums. "You will hand over that letter immediately," she commanded. Doreen faced the woman defiantly. "I'm sorry, but I refuse," she said.

Doreen swished on.

"Giddup! Giddup!" she urged her pony.

Despite her chum's neat manoeuvre, Doreen knew she had not a moment to lose. She mustn't let Irma have the slightest chance of catching up with her.

The animal broke into a gallop. Jean and Irma were out of sight now. A minute later, on the opposite side of the road to that turning down which her chum had disappeared, Doreen spotted another thoroughfare.

"And this is where I do the disappearing act!" she whooped.

She gave the reins a tug. Round veered the pony, turning down a side street which she knew led towards the mountain slopes.

Doreen thrilled. She'd dodged Irma. Now for the mountain road which led to the Mill Grimelle—and the little cabin where lived the mysterious woman in black!

Now, at last, to learn for Sylvia the secret of the chalet.

MADAME MARIE DECIDES

RAP! Rap! Urgently Doreen knocked on the door of the little chalet, then waited impatiently, shaking the clinging snow from her clothes.

Breathless and glowing, she had just arrived. Thrilling had been the journey up the mountain road, drawn by the galloping pony, with the snow—which had begun to fall soon after she had left St. Lauritz—whirling into her face.

But even more thrilling was the anticipation of the adventure which lay before her. The old woman would be surprised to see her and not Sylvia. But it would make no difference—surely it would make no difference. The woman would understand, would take her, knowing that she was Sylvia's friend.

Shuffling footsteps sounded from inside the little cabin. Then the door opened.

The strange old woman stood framed there, dark eyes gleaming, wearing that long, flowing black cloak in which the friends had first seen her.

The parchment-like face broke into a wrinkled smile, then quickly faded.

"You?" she asked, staring at Doreen in surprise. "But where is the Mademoiselle Sylvia? Did you not give her my message? Why has she not come?"

Doreen hastened to explain.

"So you see it was impossible for her to get away," Doreen finished. "And she asked me to come in her place. I am her friend. I want to help her. Surely you understand—"

The old woman shrugged her shoulders. There was a look of disappointment on her wrinkled face.

"But it is not the same, mademoiselle," she said. "I do not know that I should take you."

"But you must—you must!" Doreen pleaded. "It is for Sylvia's sake. She wrote me a letter, asking me to come. I will show it you."

Quickly she fumbled in the pocket of her jacket; but her fingers encountered nothing—the pocket was empty.

Doreen gave a groan. Oh goodness! What had become of the letter? Then, as she recalled that spill in the snow when she had been practising ski-jumping, she understood. The letter must have fallen out of her pocket.

"I—I'm afraid I've lost the note!" she faltered. "But you must trust me, madame."

"I trust you, mademoiselle," the woman said. "I know you are Sylvia's friend. It is not because I doubt you that I hesitate. But this is a matter concerning only Madame Marie—a matter of grave importance, of vital consequence concerning not only her own future happiness, but the happiness of another as well. That is why it was so important that Sylvia herself should come with me. And now—"

"Please take me!" Doreen urged. "Everything that happens, anything you say, I will tell Sylvia. She will be able to come later. But now surely it is vital that she should know something of what this mystery is about! Her guardians are becoming more and more suspicious—"

And then Doreen gave a sigh of relief. Her heart leapt within her as the woman nodded.

"Very well, mademoiselle, I will take you. But I can promise you nothing. All will depend on what happens when we reach the chalet. Come, now, we must hurry before the snow thickens."

Doreen was thrilling again now. "It will be all right if I leave that pony here," she asked.

"Bring him into this shed and halter him there," the woman instructed. "There he will be warm and comfortable out of the snow until we return. Wait whilst I fasten these skis. You have the key to the gate, mademoiselle."

Doreen nodded. Fortunately that had not been in her trousers pocket. She gave it to the woman.

"Bien! Let us go, Madame Marie will now take you to the secret chalet."

They set out into a world of whirling white flakes. Already the snow had thickened since Doreen had arrived at the little cabin.

Now she was a-quiver with eager excitement. Now nothing could go wrong, with this woman who called herself Madame Marie to guide her to the mysterious chalet.

What would she learn when she arrived there? What was the secret of this mystery? What was there that was so grave and vital, so important to Sylvia's future? And what had the woman meant when saying that not only was Sylvia's future concerned?

Soon she would know—soon. And once she knew she could rush back to St. Lauritz, tell Sylvia all that had happened.

How excited she was! How excited Sylvia must be, waiting back there in the hotel!

The woman pressed on at a steady pace, moving through the snow with unflinching steps. She must be old, very old, and Doreen marvelled at her endurance, her agility.

All around them the snow whirled, settling on their clothes, hiding the leaden sky above, hiding the mountain peaks in the distance.

Madame Marie was taking the short cut which she had instructed Doreen and Jean to follow the previous day. Doreen recognised the various landmarks which they had passed.

Just ahead of them she made out that little clump of fir-trees, their branches

bowed down with the weight of the thickening snow. Not far beyond would be the ridge, and beyond that the tunnel leading to the secret chalet.

Doreen tingled, her heart pounding within her. Not far now. Soon they would be there. Soon—

Then suddenly she stared. Dimly through the whirling flakes ahead of them she saw moving figures.

Madame Marie had seen those figures, too. A queer glitter shot into those piercing black eyes of hers—a look of fear!

Next moment she had grabbed hold of Doreen's arm.

"Down!" she cried hoarsely. "Don't let them see us!"

With amazing strength she jerked at the arm she held, forced Doreen down into a dip in the snow, fell to her own knees beside her.

"They mustn't see us!" she croaked again.

"But—but who are they?" Doreen gasped.

"Gendarmes!" Madame Marie panted.

"You mean police?"

"Yes. And they are going to the chalet. But they must not go there. They must not find—"

She broke off, frantic with fear, while Doreen stared at her in utter amazement; from her to the spot in which she had seen those moving figures. But now they had vanished from sight, lost in the falling snow.

Police! Going to the chalet! What did it mean? What could it mean?

But now the old woman was scrambling agitatedly to her feet.

"I must go!" she panted. "I must reach the chalet first. Wait here, mademoiselle. The gendarmes must not find me there!"

Doreen gasped.

"Him? Who? What do you mean?" But Madame Marie was already moving away.

"Wait here!" she repeated. "Wait here until I return. I shall be back in ten minutes!"

And then, with amazing agility, she was rushing off through the snow. Doreen, startled and bewildered, watched until the old woman vanished from sight, blotted out in the whirling snow.

Her brain was racing. The woman's words echoed in her ears. "The gendarmes must not find him—"

Then there was someone in the secret chalet. But who could it be? Was it because of "him" that Madame Marie had been taking Sylvia to the chalet?

Doreen quivered with excitement. Here was another development in the baffling mystery. Oh, who could it be? What did it mean? What was the explanation?

But she must restrain her impatience. Soon she would know—when Madame Marie returned.

In ten minutes she had said she would be back. Did it mean she would be bringing "him" back with her—this unknown person who must not be discovered by the police?

Suddenly Doreen became aware that her skis had become buried in the

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## BRAN-TUB CROSSWORD PUZZLE SOLUTION

ACROSS: 1. Gift. 4. Kill. 7. Orange. 8. Ogre. 10. Iced. 12. Gate. 13. FR. 14. Feast. 16. Jelly. 17. Ice.

DOWN: 1. Grog. 2. Fort. 3. Tree. 4. Knife. 5. Igra. 6. Lee. 9. Game. 11. Date. 14. Fly. 15. Si.

thickly falling snow. She became aware that she was shivering.

Ten long minutes passed. Now Madame Marie should be back. Doreen strained her eyes through the snow.

But no one came. Again and again Doreen glanced at her watch. Five more minutes had passed. Where was Madame Marie? She was five minutes overdue now.

Still the seconds ticked on, and still there was no sign of the woman—no sign of anyone.

A vague, uneasy feeling took possession of Doreen. Had something gone wrong?

"Oh golly! What shall I do?" Doreen muttered uncertainly. "She said wait here—"

But for ten minutes. And now twenty minutes had passed since the woman had gone.

"I'm going after her," she determined. "I can follow her tracks."

She set forth. But sudden dismay gripped her. The ski-tracks left by Madame Marie were becoming fainter and fainter, obliterated by the falling snow. And then they vanished altogether.

What was she to do now? Had Madame Marie gone straight-on? But she might have veered off at a tangent, and now there was no means of telling.

Doreen pressed on, staring through the snow. It was falling faster and thicker now. The wind was rising, moaning eerily as it swept down through the mountains, driving the snow before it.

And still there was no sign of Madame Marie—no sign of any tracks which would indicate in which direction she had gone.

Useless to go on. She might be getting farther and farther away from the woman.

"I'll have to go back!" Doreen muttered.

She turned, began retracing her steps. But now her own tracks had become blotted out. Sudden fear gripped Doreen.

Which way had she come? Surely she had been moving in a straight line! Surely she would come to that dip where she had left Madame Marie!

But there were many such dips. Doreen stopped again, trembling—not so much with the cold as with the apprehension now surging through her.

Desperately she tried to take her bearings. She must find shelter. Now the wind was roaring about her ears. The snowstorm had become a blizzard.

Those rocks by the tunnel which led to the secret chalet—they would offer a haven of refuge—if she could find them.

But where was the tunnel? In which direction? Frantically she tried to work it out. To her right? No, slightly to her left.

She moved on. And now she was facing the full force of the wind.

On and on; but there was no sign of the tunnel—no sign of any place where she could shelter from the blizzard.

Not a thing could she see—nothing but snow, snow everywhere about her.

She stumbled on. But now the blood seemed to have frozen in her veins; her whole body was numbed with the cold and exposure.

And suddenly she slipped and toppled. She scrambled to her feet, staggered on for a few minutes, then fell again, and this time she had no strength to rise.

Exhausted, frozen to the bone, she lay there, the wind shrieking about her, the snow piling up over her body.

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