

"THE MYSTERY OF ALADDIN'S LAMP" One of the six grand stories for schoolgirls —inside.

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EVERY FRIDAY.

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GIRLS' CRYSTAL^{2D} WEEKLY



**"SH! HERE SHE
COMES!"**

At all costs the Secret Three must prevent the spiteful prefect from visiting the headmistress.

See "Secret Friends of the Speed Girl"
—inside.

SECRET FRIENDS *of* the SPEED GIRL



DANGER FOR MISS NEMO!

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.

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

Thanks to Florrie, Miss Grange discovered that Miss Nemo was her niece, and she forbade her to race.

The speed girl, however, was determined to take part in a championship race which meant everything to her. Linda & Co. were discussing this in the Common-room when Florrie Mears came in.

To the chums' horror, she announced that Miss Grange was going to wait at the track before the race—to catch Miss Nemo when she arrived!

"POOR Miss Nemo!"

"Shure, and 'tis a black outlook for the darlint!"

"If what Florrie said is true, then she won't be able to race to-morrow."

In consternation, Betty Russell, Mary Walton, and Terry O'Dare looked at each other. Linda was the only one who refused to think of defeat. There was a fierce glint in her eyes: a determined look on her face.

"Whether it's true or not," she snapped, "Miss Nemo is going to have her chance. She isn't going to be forced to withdraw from the race."

The other three stared at her blankly.

"But—but how can it be prevented?" asked Betty. "If the Head goes to the track, she'll be able to exercise her authority. She'll be able to insist that Miss Nemo doesn't race."

Linda gave a grim nod.

"If she goes to the track," she agreed.

"Surely you're not suggesting that we should prevent her from going there?"

Mary Walton's eyes opened wide with horror as she made the remark. Linda pressed her lips together.

"I'm not suggesting anything. This is a matter for the Secret Three."

"The Secret Three!" Betty looked startled, but Linda's chums drew in their breath sharply.

"Bedad, 'tis right you are, my darlint!" exclaimed Terry, her cheeks aglow, her eyes agleam. "The Secret Three promised to help Miss Nemo win, and 'tis themselves who must do it."

"But how?" demanded Betty.

Challengingly she regarded the other three girls. She suspected them of being the Secret Three; but if she expected Linda & Co. to admit it, she was doomed to disappointment. Innocently they returned her stare, and Linda shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't ask me!" she replied. "That's for the Secret Three to decide themselves."

At that moment the door opened, and the rest of the Form came rushing in. They clustered excitedly around Betty and the three chums.

"Have you heard the news?" gasped Lily Turner. "About Miss Nemo, I mean?"

"Isn't it a shame?" cried another girl. "We were all hoping to cheer her to victory to-morrow, but now—"

"Now it won't be worth while biking over to Hanthorpe," cut in someone else. "The race will be a wash-out if Miss Nemo isn't in it."

Linda said nothing. She just looked across at Mary and Terry, and nodded towards the door. They nodded back, and all three unobtrusively slipped away. The Fourth Formers were too busy discussing the sensational news to notice them go. Silently Linda closed the door behind her, then anxiously she surveyed her two chums. "Who's taking prep to-night?" she asked.

"Lena Craike," answered Mary.

There was only one way by which Linda could make sure that Miss Nemo had her chance to enter for the Championship race. And that was by running the risk of expulsion herself!

By GAIL WESTERN

"Good! It couldn't be better!" chuckled Linda; then, as there came a distant clanging, she gave a gasp. "Golly, that's the bell for prep! I must hurry! See you later, kidlets!"

And off she dashed, leaving her chums standing there in perplexity.

There was never a rush to begin prep, so it was not until Lena Craike appeared in the Fourth Form corridor that any of the Fourth Formers thought of making a move for the class-room.

As they entered the room, Mary and Terry received another surprise, for Linda was already seated at her desk.

Reluctantly the Fourth Formers settled down to work; but there came a gasp from Betty Russell as she opened her exercise-book, for inside it was a piece of card. She took one glance at it, then excitedly she nudged Lily Turner and passed the card to her.

"Take a look at that," she whispered.

Lily read the few lines that had been printed in red ink, then she passed on the card to her next-door neighbour. And so the card went from desk to desk.

Lena's attention was concentrated on a novel that she had propped up on her lap. She was ignorant of the sudden excitement that had swept around the room. Not until one of the girls made to hand the card to Linda did her suspicions become aroused.

Linda, in reaching for the card, seemed to stumble and slip. The card fluttered to the floor, and the history-book on Linda's desk thudded down after it.

With a gasp, Linda stooped to retrieve them both, but from the rostrum came an irate shout.

"What the dickens d'you think you're doing?"

Linda, looking up, saw Lena's sharp eyes regarding her. She hurriedly held the card behind her back.

"S-s-sorry, Lena," she stammered, "but the book fell."

She picked up the history-book as she spoke. The prefect, rising to her feet, strode ominously forward, grabbing Linda's right arm, and snatching the cards. A startled cry left her lips

as she read the printed words written on it:

"Don't worry, Miss Nemo will race to-morrow. We're writing to her to-night to tell her how she can outwit the Head."

"(Signed)
"THE SECRET THREE."

"Well, of all the cheek!" exclaimed Lena. "Someone will be expelled for this!" She looked up from the card, and her eyes seemed to bore into Linda's head. "Where did this card come from?" she demanded.

Linda shook her head.
"Don't ask me. I only got it from Terry," she said.

"Shure, and that's right!" agreed the Irish girl.

"And where did you get it from?" Lena snapped.

"From me," replied Mary Walton promptly. "But don't look at me like that, Lena. I didn't write it."

The prefect beamed.
"One of you must have done," she asserted.

"But we didn't," protested Betty Russell. "I started passing it around, but I'm no more to blame than anyone else. I found it in my exercise-book."

Lena questioned them all, but she failed to discover any clue to the identity of the writer of that sensational message. Finally, she pocketed the card and returned to the rostrum.

"Get on with your work," she ordered. "I'll deal with this business after prep."

Reluctantly restraining the temptation to discuss the note, the Fourth Formers obeyed. Curiously enough, Linda was the only one who did not seem worried, and seeing her chums looking at her curiously, she winked cheerfully.

For, strange though it seemed, she had deliberately wanted Lena to find that card. It was all part of her daring scheme to help the masked speed girl!

The moment prep was over, Lena hurried away. The Fourth Formers, guessing where she was bound, looked glum, but Linda, ignoring the excited chatter from all around, calmly remained at her desk.

"Shan't be a jiffy, kidlets," she told Mary and Terry. "But I've got to finish a letter home. Must be a dutiful daughter, you know."

Wonderingly they stood there while Linda's pen scratched and spluttered, then, the letter finished, she sealed it up, stuck a stamp on the envelope, and rose to her feet.

"I'll pop it in the box, then we'll see about supper," she said.

Her chums followed her out of the class-room, but as they reached the front hall, Terry gave Linda a warning nudge.

"Mind your step, me darlint," she whispered. "There's that sneak Ada Wilkes hanging about by the door."

But Linda only grinned.
"What of it?" she asked. "Surely she's got something better to do than to watch me post a letter."

And serenely she crossed to the big box on the wall where the school letters were posted. Without a glance at the Third Form fag, she dropped the envelope through the slip, and as she did so, Terry's worst fears were confirmed, for from the doorway came a shrill whistle. Ada was passing on the news! Instantly footsteps sounded in the corridor and Florrie Mears came striding forward. She grinned maliciously as she saw the three chums standing around the letter-box.

"Caught red-handed!" she exclaimed. Terry and Mary looked uneasy, but Linda's expression was one of bewilderment.

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded.

"You know—it's no use you trying to bluff," snapped Florrie, her eyes glistening with triumph. "Lena passed that card on to me and I passed it on to the Head. We know all about your plans to write to that speed girl."

"Write to Miss Nemo?" echoed Linda, staring in pretended innocence.

"Yes, write to that wretch. But she'll never get the letter, Ada!" The prefect beckoned to her grinning fag. "Go and fetch the Head. Tell her I've caught Linda posting a letter to her niece."

"Only too pleased," smirked Ada, and off she rushed.

THE INCRIMINATING LETTER

"WELL, Linda, what have you to say? Is it true that you slipped a letter into the box?"

Never had Miss Grange looked so stern. That note from the Secret Three that Florrie had brought her had filled her with indignation, but never for a moment had she believed the secret society would carry out their threat.

For a moment there was a hushed silence. Linda's chums were pale and worried. Florrie and her fag exchanged grins of anticipation. Then, slowly, Linda nodded.

The headmistress gave a gasp.

"You actually have the audacity to admit it! You actually admit that you have attempted to communicate with my niece?"

Linda looked startled.

"To your niece, Miss Grange?" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid there's some misunderstanding. That letter I've just posted wasn't to Miss Eileen. It was to my father."

"What!"

The Head looked thunderstruck, while from Florrie Mears came an angry shout.

"Don't believe her, Miss Grange. She's trying to deceive you. It was to your niece. I'm certain it was. I've known all along that Linda was the

leader of the Secret Three, and when Ada saw her sneak into the hall—"

The Head held up her hand.

"That will do, Florrie," she said coldly. "Kindly allow me to deal with this matter myself." Her stern eyes returned to Linda. "Is what you say true?" she asked.

Linda lifted her head indignantly.

"Really, Miss Grange, that's not fair. Why should you doubt me?"

"Never mind about that, Linda. Be good enough to answer my question."

Terry and Mary held their breath. What would their leader's reply be? To their relief Linda faced the headmistress quite calmly.

"Of course it's true," she said. "Terry and Mary saw me write it. They can confirm what I say. Besides, you can easily prove it for yourself. My letter will be on top of the pile in the box, so why don't you open it and see?"

"Yes, go on, Miss Grange," urged Florrie, not for a moment believing Linda's story.

But Miss Grange hesitated.
"I hardly like to do that, Florrie," she said. "Linda has given me her word of honour—"

"But I'd prefer you to open the box—I'd prefer you to see for yourself," persisted Linda.

"Very well—"

From her gown pocket, Miss Grange produced a key. She inserted it in the lock, turned it, then slowly pulled open the door. A great heap of letters was disclosed and eagerly Florrie peered at them, then a look of utter bafflement filled her eyes, for there, right on top of the pile, was an envelope addressed to "Mr. A. Hale." And the handwriting was unmistakably Linda's!

Miss Grange frowned.

"I think you owe Linda an apology, Florrie," she observed stiffly, "and I wish you would be more careful in future. This is not the first time—"

She broke off, for Florrie, agitatedly rummaging amongst the letters, had suddenly given a triumphant shout.

"Look!" she exclaimed, and brandished the envelope she had picked up in front of the Head's face. "Now perhaps you'll believe me. I knew there was a letter addressed to your niece here!"



"Look!" Florrie exclaimed in triumph. "I knew there was a letter here addressed to Miss Nemo." Terry and Mary were horrified. They did not know that this was just what Linda had hoped would happen.

Miss Grange caught in her breath. Dazedly she stared at that incriminating letter, then her frown returned, and she sharply regarded the chums again.

"What have you girls to say now?" she asked.

TERRY SAYS TOO MUCH

"WELL," Miss Grange fixed her eyes sternly on the chums. "I'm waiting," she said.

"We've never seen it before," declared Terry. "Why, anyone might have posted it!"

"Of course they might," agreed Linda. "It was at the bottom of the pile. It's impossible to say who wrote it."

The headmistress pursed her lips. "Impossible or not, I intend to try," she remarked acidly. "Florrie, kindly sound the bell. The whole school will assemble as quickly as possible. Since the writing has obviously been disguised I cannot possibly tell, without inquiry, who has written it."

The prefect hurried away, and five minutes later the wondering schoolgirls all flocked into the assembly hall. On the platform Miss Grange stood waiting, the telltale letter clutched in one hand. She quickly came to the point.

"Someone in the school has dared to attempt to communicate with my niece," she announced. "I have the letter here." She held it up and looked commandingly around. "Will the girl who wrote it kindly step forward," she added.

There came an excited hush. The girls looked at each other covertly, but no one moved. Miss Grange tapped her foot.

"I am waiting!" she snapped. Still no one stirred. Her frown deepened. "Am I to understand that no one claims this letter?" she asked. There came no reply. "Very well," she said, "in that case I deem it my duty to open it and read its contents."

She did so, and eagerly the girls watched, all agog to learn what was in the mystery letter. They saw Miss Grange give a start, they saw her face grow red with anger, then abruptly she crumpled up the sheet of paper.

"You may dismiss," she said. "But before you go I must give you all a word of warning. If anyone is discovered trying to communicate with my niece—either by letter, telephone, or by any other means—she will be instantly expelled. That is all. You may go."

Obediently the girls returned to their Common-rooms, there to excitedly speculate on the contents of the letter. Only Linda & Co. lingered, and when they were alone Mary and Terry grabbed their chum by the arm.

"Now then," began Terry.

"Yes, tell us what it all means!" gasped Mary. "It was you who wrote that letter, wasn't it?"

Linda nodded.

"Yes; I wrote and posted it before prep," she admitted calmly.

They both gasped.

"But what was in it?" they chorused.

"It was a letter reminding Miss Nemo to go to the Tudor Cafe at Moordale to-day. It said that if she could get there by half-past one she would be told how she could make sure of being allowed to race."

Mary and Terry gaped in amazement. "Moordale!" exclaimed the Irish girl. "Bedad, that's miles from the track—and the championship race begins at two o'clock!"

Linda nodded, a glimmer of amusement in her grey eyes.

"Exactly!" she agreed. "In the Red

Star, Miss Nemo could just get to the track in time. But the Head's old two-seater could never do it, especially as she's sure to hang about, waiting for Miss Nemo to turn up."

"You mean—" Terry broke off. Then a whoop escaped her lips as understanding came. "You clever darlint!" she cried. "Share and I see it all now. You never meant that letter to be posted. You never meant Miss Nemo to get it. 'Twas a trick to kid the Head to going to Moordale instead of to the motor-track."

"Exactly!" said Linda again, and she chuckled. As for her chums, they stared in frank admiration. Never had they heard of such an ingenious scheme before. Miss Grange would have a fruitless wait at the Tudor Cafe, and long before she could guess how she had been led astray—long before she could reach the track at Hanthorpe—the championship race would have started. And without her aunt there to exercise her authority there would be nothing to prevent Miss Nemo from competing.

But suddenly the delighted sparkle faded from Terry's eyes, and she looked anxious.

"But will the Head fall for it?" she asked. "Suppose she suspects a trick—suppose she doesn't go to Moordale after all?"

"There's a risk, certainly," admitted Linda. "But somehow I feel certain she will go to the rendezvous."

And it was not very long before her confidence was strengthened. For during the rest of the evening it became clear that all three girls were under surveillance. No matter where they went, what they did, Ada Wilkes always seemed to be in view. And when the Fourth Form went up to bed they were surprised to find that Florrie Mears had

had her bed moved out of her private room into their dormitory.

The Fourth Formers stared in surprise as they realised that to-night the unpopular prefect was to sleep with them.

"What's the big idea?" demanded Betty Russell.

Florrie smiled calmly.

"Oh, I only thought it might be wise to keep an eye on you kids!" she answered. "Just in case any of you should try to sneak out to get in touch with that speed girl."

As she spoke she looked maliciously at Linda & Co. But, instead of being downcast, they exchanged gleeful glances. All this supervision confirmed their hopes. Miss Grange did intend to journey to Moordale to-morrow, and Florrie was frightened lest the Secret Three should try to warn the masked speed girl of her danger. That was why she was determined not to let them out of her sight!

Next morning Linda & Co. again had the feeling that they were being spied upon. But the fact only pleased them. It showed that their hopes were justified. The Head did intend to act on the information she had obtained from the Secret Three's letter! Nevertheless, despite their belief that all was well, to the chums the morning was interminable. Indeed, the whole Fourth found it never-ending, for, like Linda & Co., all their thoughts were centred around the race for the championship trophy.

Would Miss Nemo really appear in her famous racing car? Would she be able to win if she did compete?

Those were the questions that the Fourth Formers excitedly tried to answer, and it was lucky for them that in Miss Tibbs they had an easy-going mistress, for never had they concentrated less on their work, never had their minds wandered so much.

But at long last the school bell clanged out, and they were free. A hurried dinner, then a wild scamper upstairs to wash and change. Linda & Co., who intended to call on Miss Nemo, deliberately lingered in the dormitory until the rest of the Form had gone downstairs. They wanted to slip off unnoticed.

Suddenly Terry, who was looking out of the window, gave a gleeful shout.

"The Head's car is waiting for her," she announced.

Eagerly Linda and Mary looked across the garden that separated this wing from Miss Grange's private house, and their hearts leapt as they saw the yellow two-seater standing at the end of the gravelled drive.

"Then she is going to Moordale!" exclaimed Linda, in delight. "Hurroosh! That means—"

She broke off, and they all tried to look subdued, for the door had opened and Florrie Mears had entered. The prefect eyed them suspiciously.

"What are you kids kicking up such a din for?" she demanded.

Linda tossed her head.

"What's that got to do with you?" she countered. "If we want to laugh, I suppose we can do so without asking your permission."

Florrie went red.

"I don't want any of your cheek," she snapped. "Anyway, I don't see what you've got to laugh at. In a few minutes the Head'll be setting out for Moordale. Your precious Miss Nemo's as good as trapped."

"That's what you think!"

Terry just could not resist the retort, but next moment she could have bitten her tongue out, for obvious it was that

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(Please turn to the back page.)



By
PETER
LANGLEY

PANIC IN THE THEATRE

NOEL RAYMOND enthusiastically joined in the applause at the Royal Theatre, Heatherfield, as Aladdin's song came to an end.

"Good work!" he murmured. "That girl should make a name for herself before long."

A slim, engaging figure in her pantomime costume, Una Calvert, the principal boy, was taking her bow.

Noel leaned back in his seat in the box, a thoughtful expression in his eyes. Although the show—"Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp"—seemed to be going with a swing, with its sparkling young principal boy, its excellent supporting cast, catchy tunes, and colourful scenery, the young detective felt that something, somewhere, was wrong.

Perhaps alone in that crowded audience, he sensed that the company were labouring under some tense, nervous strain. Una Calvert even now showed unmistakable signs of nervousness.

"Queer," muttered Noel. "They all seem to be scared of something."

Impatiently he thrust the idea from his mind. His friend, Geoffrey Langton, the show's producer, had sent him a ticket for the first night of the show, with a note urging him to be there. Even that had seemed rather strangely worded.

Grinning faintly at his fancies, Noel turned his attention to the stage.

The scene was the cottage of Widow Twankey, Aladdin's mother. Through an open window could be seen a painted vista of the domes and pagodas of old-time China. From off-stage came the droning of a voice.

"New lamps for old! New lamps for old!"

"Hark, mother!" exclaimed Aladdin. "The very thing!" declared Widow Twankey—the leading comedian. "A new lamp in exchange for that rubbishy thing you brought up from the cave."

A sinister figure appeared on the stage; the Chinese magician, disguised as a pedlar, and carrying a tray of strangely fashioned lamps.

The youthful Aladdin took down an old brass lamp from a shelf and gave

it a quick rub before handing it to the disguised magician.

There came a flash of green light—a delighted squeal from the children in the audience—and the Genie of the Lamp appeared on the stage in a cloud of smoke.

Noel grinned faintly at this old pantomime trick. Then abruptly the smile was frozen on his lips.

Barely had the smoke cleared away, when a girl's terrified scream rang through the theatre.

The young Aladdin was pointing upwards, her eyes wide with horror.

Next instant there was a deafening crash, and every light in the theatre was extinguished.

For a moment panic swept the audience. A voice shouted from the stage, urging people to keep their seats. The lights flickered up, revealing the scared faces of the audience.

Noel did not wait for the lights to reappear. At the first alarm he had slipped from his box and raced for the stage.

Behind the wings all was confusion. Stage hands were struggling frantically to dislodge the heavy scenery that had collapsed on to the stage, amid a tangled network of ropes and painted canvas.

The actors were gathered round, murmuring uneasily, their faces grotesque under the grease-paint.

Someone grabbed Noel by the arm. It was his friend, Geoffrey Langton, the producer of the show.

"Raymond, old man, thank heaven you turned up!" exclaimed Langton huskily. "It happened again—as I was half-afraid it—"

He was interrupted by the white-faced stage manager.

One rub of Aladdin's lamp and the kindly genie appeared, willing to grant every wish. That was the story of Aladdin and his wonderful lamp. But on the stage—one rub of the lamp brought only disaster to the players.

"What shall we do, Mr. Langton?" he demanded unsteadily. "Farrel's injured—not fit to go on again. The rest of the company are near breakdown."

"Have the house cleared," ordered the young producer huskily. "Refund the money, and tell them we'll open again to-morrow night—if we're lucky. This will probably mean ruin for the show, anyway—"

Noel's hand tightened on his friend's arm.

"Steady, old chap," he urged. "Take it easy. Just what was responsible for the accident?"

"Accident?" Langton repeated. "Call it an accident if you like, but no one here will agree with you. It's happened twice before, and the company have been getting panicky. That's why I asked you to be hero to-night. Thought I'd taken precautions."

Noel's eyes narrowed. He stated at the chaotic debris on the stage, and realised that no more accident could have been responsible for what had occurred.

"Well, let me have a word with the cast," he said briefly.

He and his friend approached the group gathered round Farrel, the actor who had been injured by the falling scenery and who was now being attended by a hastily summoned doctor.

Everyone was talking at once, and a slight, dark-haired chorus-girl was pointing accusingly at the youthful Aladdin.

"It's your fault, Una Calvert!" she exclaimed. "All your fault for bringing that hateful lamp into the theatre. There's a curse on it!"

There came a loud murmur of agreement. Her face white, the principal boy faced her accusers.

"Just a minute, please!" cut in Noel.

The murmuring died down, and all eyes were turned on the famous detective, as Langton introduced him.

"Now what's this about the magic lamp?" asked Noel briefly. "Perhaps you'll explain, Langton?"

The producer shrugged.

"Actors are superstitious," he said.

"Miss Calvert is the owner of the lamp used in the show. It was presented to a member of her family when touring in China. She looks on it as her lucky charm; but the others here think otherwise. They blame the lamp for these accidents—"

"Well, it was at the first rehearsal that the lights all failed—just when the lamp was taken from the shelf," put in the dark-haired girl breathlessly. "And at the dress-rehearsal part of the stage

gave way, and Jimmy Glover was hurt!"

"Nonsense, Miss Marnay," put in Widow Twankey, whose name was actually Charlie Bertro. "Miss Calvert's no more to blame than anyone else; it's just fate."

But few of the cast seemed to agree with him.

"Let me see the lamp," said Noel, his brow furrowed in thought. "I see you've got it there, Miss Calvert."

The young principal's hands trembled as she passed the lamp to Noel.

It was of quaint Chinese workmanship; fairly ancient, but probably of no intrinsic value in itself.

"I don't think we need believe that there's anything unlucky about this curio," said Noel, smiling faintly. "And now, if you'd kindly return to your dressing-rooms, I'd like to examine the stage—on my own."

In a few moments Noel had the stage to himself.

Losing no time, he began to examine the fallen scenery, searching for some tangible clue to the whole mystery. But for a time his search seemed in vain.

Then abruptly he stiffened as he picked up a length of thin, strong twine. One end was frayed, the other knotted.

The young detective examined the knotted end, and gave a soft whistle as something came away on his fingers.

"Grease-paint!" he breathed.

He rubbed it on his handkerchief, noting the shade. Then, pocketing the cord, he went in search of his friend.

Geoffrey Langton was in his office, putting something carefully in his safe—Aladdin's old brass lamp!

"What's the idea?" asked Noel from the doorway.

The young producer looked round quickly, with a wry smile.

"I promised Miss Calvert I'd take care of it for her. The rest of the cast are in the mood to take the law into their own hands."

Noel nodded, his eyes grave.

"Maybe you're right," he said. "When did Miss Calvert first ask you to take care of the lamp?"

"Soon after the rehearsals started," explained Langton. "When things began to go wrong. She'd told everyone about the legend attached to it, and some of them got the crazy idea that the lamp was to blame."

"Who started the rumour?" demanded Noel keenly.

"I've an idea it was Jeanette Marnay, the dark-haired chorus-girl," replied the producer, frowning. "She's Miss Calvert's understudy."

Noel whistled softly.

"So she'd play the leading part if Miss Calvert left?"

The other looked at him sharply.

"I say, old man, you're not suggesting—"

"I'm suggesting nothing," put in Noel dryly. "I'm simply getting at the facts. Now, I'd like another word with the cast."

In a few minutes they were all assembled on the stage. Noel spoke to them with boyish frankness.

"Look here," he said, "I want you all to be very sporting. There's been a series of accidents, so far unexplained. But it's no use losing your heads and indulging in fanciful theories. If you'll carry on with the show I think I can promise you there'll be no repetition of what happened to-night. Will you accept my promise and carry on with the show?"

His frank appeal met with instant response. Led by Charlie Bertro, the jovial comedian, they declared their willingness to go through with the show.

Only one or two hung back—among them Phillip Gaspard, the tall, heavy-featured actor who played the part of the wicked Chinese magician.

But in the end he rather grudgingly gave in.

"Splendid!" declared Noel. "Now I'd like you all to step up and sign your names on this list as you go out."

In his hand Noel was carelessly holding a handkerchief, and as each member of the cast bent over the table to sign, the young detective swiftly compared a smear of grease-paint on the handkerchief with the make-up on the actors' faces.

But as each actor passed his scrutiny, Noel did not see one whose make-up resembled the unusual olive shade of the grease-paint Noel had found on the cord.

He had almost given up hope when Jeannette Marnay, the young understudy, approached to sign her name.

Noel's eyes narrowed suddenly. The girl's make-up was practically identical with the telltale grease-paint!

At the same instant the girl glanced up. Her smile vanished, and a look of terror crossed her face. She pointed a shaking finger.

"The warning!" she gasped. "Look!"

There came a startled gasp from those on the stage, and Noel drew in his breath sharply.

Silhouetted against the scenery in the wings appeared a grotesque shadow—the shadow of a stooping figure, with something grasped in its hand.

A Chinese lamp!

ALADDIN VANISHES

ONLY for an instant the fantastic shadow appeared, and then, like a flash, it had gone.

Noel, the first to recover, leaped for the wings, but there was no sign of any lurking figure. The light against which the shadow had appeared was thrown from the open door of the property-room, but the room was deserted.

Baffled, uneasy, the young detective hurried back on to the stage.

The dumbfounded silence that had followed the appearance of the sinister shadow had given place to a loud buzz of amazement and uneasy comment.

"It's a warning!" repeated Jeanette Marnay, almost hysterically. "We're fools to go through with this show while that lamp is in the theatre."

Noel stared swiftly round the group. Several of the principals had departed after signing their names, but most of the chorus-girls remained, and it was obvious that the appearance of the shadow had shaken their determination to carry on.

"Come along, young ladies!" said Noel cheerfully. "Why this scare over a mere shadow? It can't possibly affect the show—one way or the other. You have my promise that there'll be no further trouble, and you've agreed to stand by Mr. Langton. We're not going to be scared by a shadow—a trick of the light!"

The young detective's cheery manner was infectious. The murmurs died down. The remaining performers looked rather shamefaced as they filed off the stage.

Finally only Noel remained, with his friend the producer, the young principal, and Jeanette Marnay.

The dark-haired understudy halted in the wings, flashing a challenging glance at Noel.

"For all that," she breathed, "there is something behind the legend about the lamp, as you'll find out to your cost—all of you!"

With that she was gone, a door slamming after her.

Geoffrey Langton was trying to reassure the young principal, who was on the verge of tears. He flashed a swift glance at Noel.

"What do you make of it, old man?" he asked huskily.

The young detective shrugged as he lit a cigarette; his blue eyes were thoughtful.

"I've a theory," he replied slowly, "and I want to put it to the test. Don't you worry, Miss Calvert." He smiled reassuringly at the girl. "Better go home and get a good night's rest; everything will turn out for the best."

Una Calvert glanced at him with tearful gratitude.

"I'll see Miss Calvert home," said Langton. "What about you, old man?"

"I'm staying here," replied Noel, briefly. "I'd like to have a look round. What time does the night-watchman turn up?"

"In about an hour's time," replied the producer. "But are you sure you'll be all right?"

Noel chuckled.

"I'm a sleuth," he said, "and warning shadows don't worry me. I'll give you a ring if I discover anything of interest. Good-night—and sleep well!"

A quarter of an hour later the young detective was alone in the darkened theatre.

Even the stage-hands and cleaners had taken their departure; the silence was eerie—almost uncanny.

Torch in hand, Noel prowled round the offices and dressing-rooms behind the stage.

His eyes were narrowed thoughtfully; his active mind was grappling with conflicting theories.

Not for a moment did he share the superstitious fears of the company; he was convinced that the series of accidents had been caused by human agency, but his earlier theories had been upset by the appearance of the strange shadow.

The shadow had been accidentally thrown by someone entering the property-room to examine the tray of lamps—someone who wished to avoid being seen.

But was Jeanette Marnay implicated? If so, what was her purpose? Jealousy? A desire to step into Una Calvert's shoes?

Noel shook his head impatiently.

"It doesn't make sense!" he muttered.

"If I'm any judge of character, Jeanette hasn't got the makings of a clever schemer; she's just a bundle of nerves—and temperament."

But how had the accidents been caused—and, in particular, the last spectacular accident?

There was room here for closer investigation. If he could discover the means that had been used it might give him a clue to the perpetrator.

His lips tightening, Noel scaled the iron ladder that led up into the dim region above the stage.

Here, among the ropes and intricate tackle that supported the mass of scenery, he carried out a careful search.

Clinging to a stout rope suspended above the stage, Noel examined the tangled network surrounding him, and abruptly he drew in his breath, his eyes narrowing.

A portion of the tackle had come away in his hands as he pulled at it, revealing the frayed ends of several stout cords. The ends were slightly discoloured, and a swift scrutiny under his magnifying glass disclosed the reason.

They had been almost burnt through by some powerful acid.

"Ye gods!" breathed Noel huskily.

"So that's how it was worked! The ropes were previously doctored, and could be snapped by jerking at a cord from below."

A gleam of excitement in his eyes, the young detective commenced to swing himself along the rope, intending to investigate farther.

And just then, chancing to look up, a stifled ejaculation was torn from his lips.

Crouching on the iron platform to which the rope was attached was a dimly seen figure; and as Noel stared, his eyes wide with horror, he saw a knife gleam in the figure's hand as it made a vicious slash at the rope.

The young detective felt the rope give way even as a girl's horrified scream rang through the theatre.

For a moment he hung suspended between life and death; then, summoning every ounce of energy, he took a desperate leap for the iron ladder at the side of the stage.

His outstretched hands caught the iron rungs, slipped, and held on grimly.

Several seconds elapsed before he could recover his breath; then, setting his teeth, he climbed swiftly up to the platform, whipping out his torch.

But the brilliant beam revealed no sign of the lurking intruder.

Yet someone had made a murderous attempt on his life—and Noel's face was pale and grim as he descended to the stage.

He was thinking of that terrified scream.

Swiftly he sped behind the stage, searching the dressing-rooms and corridors, but only to draw blank.

His quarry had escaped.

As a last resource he visited the producer's private office, flashing his torch on the massive safe.

The safe was securely fastened, but on the floor close to it lay a girl's lace-edged handkerchief.

Noel snatched it up and stared at the initials in the corner—"J. M."

"Jeanette Marnay!" he breathed huskily. "Then she was here to-night! But she can't have—Great Scott!" His eyes flashed. "I'm beginning to see daylight," he whispered.

IT was early the following afternoon when Noel arrived at the theatre, to be shown into his friend's office.

Geoffrey Langton was pacing the room agitatedly; his face cleared at the sight of the young detective.

"So here you are, old man! I suppose your message was genuine; not a leg-pull?"

The young detective placed a cardboard box on the table.

"I don't joke when matters are serious, Langton," he replied. "And since last night I've come to the conclusion that these so-called accidents are the work of a particularly cunning and ruthless scoundrel."

"But I don't understand," protested Langton. "Why should anyone try to wreck my show?"

"That isn't the motive," interrupted Noel—"at least, I don't think so."

Geoffrey Langton ran his fingers through his thinning hair.

"Well, what now? I've called a special rehearsal for this afternoon, as you suggested. I told 'em that I want to make certain that there'll be no further mishap this evening."

"Everyone turned up?" asked Noel keenly.

Langton nodded.

"All the principals—except Farrel, the injured actor who played the genie; I've not been able to replace

him yet. The chorus are here, too—with the exception of Miss Calvert's understudy, Jeanette Marnay."

Noel's eyes narrowed.

"I see. Well, I think we can go ahead with the rehearsal. I've found an actor to play the genie for this afternoon only; he's an amateur, but he might do at a pinch."

"Eh?" demanded Langton, eagerly. "What's his name?"

"Noel Raymond—at your service!" replied the young detective, with a flicker of a smile.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the producer. "I say, old chap, that's sporting of you—"

"Forget it," put in Noel dryly. "I'm playing the part for a purpose—and I don't want anyone else in the company to know. Not even Miss Calvert."

"Just as you like, old man; you'll be well disguised. But what's the idea—and what have you got in that parcel?"

The young detective shook his head mysteriously.

"I'll tell you after the rehearsal. Meanwhile, I want your assistance. The lamp of Miss Calvert's that there's been all the trouble about—have you got it locked up?"

"Yes; it's in my safe now; Miss Calvert only uses it in two scenes—the

remember—not a word to the others! Just run through the rehearsal in the ordinary way; luckily there's not a great deal to say in my part!"

Twenty minutes later, in the elaborate robes and glittering turban of the pantomime genie, Noel took up his stand beneath a trapdoor that gave access to the stage.

The special rehearsal was in full swing. Through a spyhole in the trapdoor, Noel watched the scene in the Widow Twankey's cottage.

The arrival of the wicked magician with "New lamps for old," was preceded by a musical item, in which Aladdin and his mother were entertained by a bery of lovely Chinese dancing-girls.

Charlie Bertro, the principal comedian, was in great form as the Widow Twankey; Una Calvert herself had never acted more spiritedly as Aladdin.

All that was lacking was the applause—for the theatre was empty except for a few stage-hands and cleaners.

But as the fateful moment arrived for the appearance of the Chinese magician, Noel became aware of the suspense that had been so noticeable on the opening night.

Aladdin's voice trembled slightly as



As Jeanette Marnay bent to sign her name Noel gave a gasp. Her make-up was identical with the grease-paint stain on the handkerchief!

scene where the genie first appears, and the scene in the magician's cave. For the rest of the time it's kept locked up—by her special request. When she's not actually on the stage herself, a property lamp is used."

"Well, I'd like to take charge of it for a while," said Noel. "I promise that no harm will come to it. I'll return it when it's required."

The producer unlocked the massive safe, pointing out that it was burglar-proof and fire-proof—a necessary precaution, as it was used for the safe-deposit of valuable stage costumes, as well as money.

But Noel was more interested in the old brass Chinese lamp.

He weighed it in his hand, shook it, and finally contrived to unscrew the top.

But, apart from the fact that it was surprisingly heavy, he could discover nothing unusual about it.

With a shrug, he picked up his parcel. "I'll go and change," he said. "And,

she spoke her lines; even the jovial Widow Twankey looked a little glum and uneasy.

A brass gong boomed off-stage.

"New lamps for old!" intoned the voice of the Chinese magician.

Dark-faced and sinister, the magician appeared, carrying his load of trumpery lamps.

Aladdin reached up for the old brass lamp on the shelf—her hand trembled as she gave it a hasty polish.

It was Noel's cue.

Screened by a flash of green lightning, he sprang through the trapdoor—his keen, restless eyes searching the stage as he held out his hand for the lamp.

So far, he had seen nothing suspicious.

Then, abruptly, there came a startled scream from Aladdin; a sheet of flame belched suddenly from the back-cloth, and the stage was filled with smoke.

"Fire!" came the terrified shout.

Noel, half-blinded by the smoke, leaped for a fire-extinguisher in the wings, turning it on the flames.

Others aided him with fire-buckets. In a few minutes the flames were extinguished.

Geoffrey Langton, in his shirt-sleeves, his face grimed with smoke, raced on to the stage.

"Good work, Raymond!" he panted. "That was a narrow thing. But is anyone hurt? Where—where's Miss Calvert?"

His face paled as he stared round. "Miss Calvert!" shouted Noel hoarsely.

Others joined in his shout. There was no reply; the company exchanged startled, uneasy glances.

The young Aladdin had vanished—and the ill-fated lamp had disappeared with her!

THE GENIE OF THE LAMP

NOEL was the first to recover; he turned to the agitated producer.

"Have all the entrances watched," he rapped. "No one must leave the theatre without permission. Better assemble the company on the stage; I'll question 'em!"

The actors were hastily assembled—but no one had seen anything of the missing "principal boy." In the smoke and confusion, anyone might have slipped from the stage unseen.

Just then Charlie Bertro, the principal comedian, hurried from the wings; his jovial face looked pale and grotesque under his comic widow's wig.

"Can't find her anywhere, Langton!" he panted. "She must have left the theatre."

"What—in her stage rig-out?" exclaimed the producer. "Impossible!"

Noel clenched his hands as he stared round at the startled group. He noticed the swarthy-faced Chinese magician lurking in the wings.

"Wait here, all of you!" he snapped. "I'm going to search behind-stage. Better come with me, Langton!"

"If anything's happened to that girl," declared the producer huskily, as they hurried from the wings, "I'll never forgive myself! I ought to have made her get rid of that wretched lamp—"

Noel's hand tightened on his friend's arm; he had halted in the property-room at the rear of the stage, and was staring at an old-fashioned cupboard in the corner.

"What's kept in there?" he demanded.

"Only old costumes," replied his friend.

"Is that an old costume?" demanded Noel, pointing to a piece of satin-like fabric protruding from a crevice in the cupboard door.

It was a corner of Aladdin's cape!

The cupboard door was locked, but together Noel and his friend contrived to wrench it open.

Her face deathly pale, her eyes closed, Una Calvert fell forward into Noel's arms.

"Heavens!" groaned the producer. "Raymond, is she—"

"She's fainted," said Noel tersely. "The shock! Someone's going to pay dearly for this!" As he lifted the senseless girl in his arms, something clattered to the floor.

The producer bent swiftly to pick it up; it was Aladdin's lamp—battered and twisted almost out of recognition!

"Confound the thing!" exclaimed Langton huskily; and made to fling the lamp across the room.

"Don't worry," said Noel grimly. "That's not Miss Calvert's lamp; it's a substitute that I put in its place this afternoon. That was in the parcel you were so curious about."

"But the real lamp—"

"Is safe in my keeping," jerked Noel. "And it's going to be used for the last time—at the performance to-night!"

"But there can't be a performance without Miss Calvert," groaned the producer. "And she won't be in a fit state to appear—"

"Perhaps not," rejoined Noel. "But she has an understudy—Jeanette Marnay. I've a shrewd idea that I can persuade Miss Marnay to take her place for one evening, and we'll bowl out a cunning scoundrel at the same time."

JEANETTE MARNAY sprang from her chair in the sitting-room of her little flat as Noel entered, unannounced.

"Sorry to startle you," he said gravely. "I told your worthy landlady that I was your brother. She said you were out, but I didn't believe her."

Her face very pale, a hint of fear in her dark eyes, Jeanette returned Noel's shrewd gaze.

"What—what do you want?" she faltered.

"Can't you guess?" countered the young detective. "I want to know what you were doing in the theatre late last night, and why you didn't turn up at this afternoon's rehearsal?"

The girl broke down suddenly, bursting into tears.

"Steady," urged Noel, his tone more kindly as he rested a hand on the girl's trembling shoulder. "You've done no harm, as it happens. I'll tell you why you went to the theatre. To attempt to get rid of Miss Calvert's lamp. Is that right?"

The girl nodded, fighting back her tears.

"Yes," she breathed. "I—I hated it. I thought it was bringing us bad luck. I meant to hide it till after the run of the show."

"But you couldn't open the safe," said Noel. "And then something frightened you. What was it?"

"I—I saw someone leap on to the stage," breathed Jeanette. "A cloaked figure. I just screamed, and ran. I was too afraid to go back there to-day."

Noel nodded gravely.

"I thought as much," he said. "You can rely on me to say nothing about your escapade, Miss Marnay, but I'm afraid you'll have to return to the theatre this evening. Miss Calvert has met with an accident, and you're the only one who can take her place. Will you do this, and help to clear up the mystery that is threatening the show, and your fellow artists? I promise you that no harm will come to you. Won't you take my word for it?"

Jeanette Marnay looked up, her dark eyes filled with tears.

"I'll do my best," she whispered, holding out her hand.

THE theatre was packed, and there was a feeling of tense expectancy in the air.

Rumours had got round, and no one quite knew what fresh sensation might be in store.

Jeanette Marnay, deputising as the principal boy, received a big ovation.

The ill-omened brass lamp was to be used in one scene only—at Noel's request. That was a scene at the end of the first act, in which Aladdin visited the magician's cave.

The stage was darkened, except for a single green spotlight.

Her heart thumping, Jeanette, lamp in hand, crossed to a massive, iron-bound coffer that stood at the back of the stage, and lifted the heavy lid.

But the cry of delight that she was supposed to give at the sight of the property jewels changed to a stifled, terrified scream.

A claw-like hand reached out from the chest, seizing her by the wrist!

The lights went out suddenly; there was a tumult and scuffle on the stage.

"Got you, you scoundrel!"

It was Noel Raymond's voice; the light from a torch stabbed the darkness, revealing the young detective kneeling by the half-fainting Aladdin, and struggling with a dishevelled figure, who was half in and half out of the trapdoor beneath the chest.

A shout of amazement went up from audience and actors alike, as the figure was revealed as the "Widow Twankey"—Charlie Bertro.

The actor's face was convulsed with fury as Noel twisted a revolver from his hand, and snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

Then, bending swiftly, he picked up the fallen brass lamp; twisting the carved handle, a secret cavity was revealed in the base.

Something fell out into Noel's hand—something that flashed and glittered.

It was a priceless emerald!

THE show was over; another comedian had taken Bertro's place at a moment's notice—an experienced actor who had long been out of work.

The manager made a brief speech to the amazed audience explaining the situation. The excitement was intense.

At Noel's request the entire company assembled on the stage after the show. Una Calvert was there, looking pale but happy, and her arm was linked in Jeanette Marnay's.

"It was a dastardly plot," explained Noel, "and I hit on Charlie Bertro as a possible culprit as soon as I suspected the real motive behind the supposed 'accidents.'"

"Aladdin's lamp!"

"Bertro knew that there was a jewel concealed in the lamp; but he couldn't steal it in the ordinary way, owing to the steps taken to safeguard it when not actually on the stage."

"His opportunity occurred in one scene in particular—when he was alone on the stage with Aladdin and the magician."

"He contrived the accidents in order to cause sufficient confusion to enable him to carry out his theft, unseen. I discovered that he was once a professional illusionist."

"Twice he failed, owing to Miss Calvert's jealous care of the lamp; on the third occasion he got away with the lamp, but it was the wrong one."

"Miss Calvert, aware that the lamp had been snatched from her, pluckily raced into the wings. Bertro, who was trying to force open the lamp, attacked her in order to avoid discovery."

"To-night, owing to my plans, he was forced to change his tactics; but he failed again—thanks to Miss Jeanette Marnay, who valiantly took on the dangerous role at my request."

Noel grinned boyishly.

"So here's best wishes to the show's success," he ended—"from your humble servant, the Slave of the Lamp!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Next week's grand detective story is entitled "Peril at the New Year Ball." Be sure you don't miss this thrilling tale—it is Peter Langley at his best! Order your copy of the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** to-day.



The GIRL WHO HAUNTED GREY GABLES



LADY ROWENA'S WARNING!

NORMA ROYSTON, who lived in the Cornish village of Clovellyn, believed that Grey Gables, a large house near by, contained a secret connected with her dead father.

She distrusted Mr. Penhale, who owned the house, but liked Gerald Graham, a boy of her own age who lived there.

Norma lived at a small shop, whose owner, Ben Tregellis, had mysteriously disappeared. She also looked after his small grandchildren, Elsie and Martin.

To carry out her search at Grey Gables, Norma had to impersonate Lady Rowena, whose ghost was supposed to haunt the place.

She discovered a statuette which was connected with her father's secret, and hid it in a dummy chocolate-box at the shop.

But Mr. Penhale, not knowing the contents of the box, took it, intending to give it to his daughter.

So Norma went to Grey Gables that night, dressed as the ghost, and hoping to recover the box. She found a secret passage leading to the library, and, unseen, observed Mr. Penhale present the "box of chocolates" to his daughter, Ethel.

NUMB with horror, Norma stared through the spy-holes in the picture—the picture of the Lady Rowena in whose phantom garb she was masquerading.

From her vantage point she could see the whole of the firelit library.

The fateful parcel in his hand, Mr. Penhale was speaking to his daughter.

"Chocolates, my dear," he remarked, with a slightly scornful smile. "I was pestered into entering the raffle by that young fool, Gerald; he seems to have taken this Royston girl under his protection."

Ethel Penhale laughed unpleasantly. "Gerald always was the perfect knight-errant," she drawled. "I wonder Norma Royston has the face to remain in the village, after turning down your offer!"

The man's features darkened.

"That girl's a confounded nuisance!" he snapped. "She's stubborn—like her father; and she's a danger to our plans while she remains here. She's staying on for the sake of the children—Tregellis' brats. For two pins I'd have them taken away from her!"

Norma caught in her breath sharply, the blood throbbing in her temples.



By RENEE FRAZER

"You—you don't think she suspects?" whispered Ethel, with an uneasy glance over her shoulder. "About—"

"Quiet!" rapped her father fiercely. "How often have I told you not to mention that subject! Walls have ears—and there are the servants! Of course, Norma doesn't suspect. How could she? Even Gerald knows nothing—and his wits are sharp enough. But something must be done about her. I've got to think!"

He put the unopened parcel on the table, and commenced to pace the room.

"You know what to-night is, father?" Ethel asked uneasily.

"Eh?" Mr. Penhale turned sharply. "What are you talking about?"

"It's the anniversary, father," Ethel whispered. "The night when Lady Rowena is supposed to—"

Mr. Penhale slammed his fist on the table.

"I want to hear nothing about Lady Rowena!" he grated, though his face was twitching. "That young fool, Gerald, has started the old scare—and you're allowing it to get on your nerves!"

With rather a sulky shrug, Ethel picked up her parcel and cut the string

What a task it was that Norma had set herself. Not only must she make a home in the little shop for Martin and Elsie, but she must also dress up as the phantom Lady Rowena in order to discover the secret of Grey Gables.

that secured it, removing the brown-paper wrapping.

Norma, standing helplessly behind the picture, felt that she could have screamed.

In another moment, the box would be opened—and the marble statuette revealed!

Once Mr. Penhale saw that, he would realise the truth—the fact of her own daring masquerade on the previous night.

The thought lent Norma a sudden, desperate courage.

Her hand shaking, she flashed her torch on the back of the picture.

The light revealed a mechanism of springs and rusted wires; the picture was made to open—in effect, it was a secret entrance into the library!

Ethel Penhale was bending over the parcel, her back towards the picture; her father was still pacing the room.

Drawing her cloak more closely round her, and allowing the veil from her headdress to fall over her face, Norma touched the lever that operated the mechanism.

With a faint whirr, the picture slid back into its frame; and with a low, blood-curdling moan, Norma stepped out on to the floor of the library.

A piercing scream greeted her ears. Ethel Penhale had turned, the parcel falling from her nerveless fingers; her face white as death, her eyes dilated, she was staring at Norma.

Her father looked round at the same moment—and a startled, incredulous ejaculation was torn from his lips.

With another hollow groan, Norma raised her hand; her shadow, thrown by the firelight, appeared grotesquely on the wall behind her.

Ethel Penhale gave a frightened sob, as she clung to her father's arm.

"It's—it's the Lady Rowena!" she gasped, and her voice broke in her terror. "The legend—the legend has come true!"

"It's a trick!" exclaimed Mr. Penhale hoarsely—but his voice was shaking.

He took a step back towards the door, dragging his daughter with him.

Norma steeled her nerves as, with noiseless tread, she glided slowly across the room.

"The time has come!" she whispered, pointing a menacing finger. "There is evil in this house—and evil will out! The secrets you guard, Richard Penhale, are known to me, and my vengeance will fall on you and yours, unless you repent!"

Just then, a log in the grate fell with a crash, sending a shower of sparks up

the great chimney. For a moment the room was plunged into darkness.

With a choking cry, Ethel turned and fled from the room; her father, after one hurried glance over his shoulder, followed quickly.

"Gerald!" he shouted hoarsely. "Gerald!"

His voice died away as he hurried down the passage.

Norma, hardly able to believe her good fortune, acted with desperate speed. Snatching up the fallen box, she removed the black statuette, and re-filled the box hastily from the carton of chocolates she had brought with her for that purpose.

Leaving the box on the floor, where Ethel had dropped it, she sped back across the room towards the open picture.

Too late!

A door on the far side of the room burst open, and someone entered, carrying a storm-lantern.

It was Gerald!

Gerald, out of breath from hurrying, with snow on his boots and clinging to his overcoat. He had obviously been exploring the grounds, and had been summoned by his uncle's frantic shouts.

He almost dropped the lantern as he caught sight of Norma; a startled whistle escaped his lips, and he raised the light above his head.

Norma stood motionless, a few feet from the gaping picture-frame, her heart cold with dismay.

"So!" exclaimed Gerald, with a broad grin. "We meet again, Lady Rowena!"

Norma dared not reply; she knew the uselessness of even attempting to scare this audacious, smiling boy whom she liked so well.

"Don't disappear yet, fair phantom!" Gerald remarked, eyeing her quizzically. "I've been dying for a word with you since last night. 'Tisn't often we get a real live ghost to break the monotony of this ancestral house. You are Lady Rowena, aren't you? If you wouldn't mind just lifting that veil of yours a trifle—"

He took another step towards her; Norma clenched her hands.

"Beware!" she gasped. "Beware, rash youth, how you trifle with matters you do not comprehend!"

Her sepulchral tone was blood-chilling in its effect—but Gerald gave an amused laugh.

"Rash youth—that's good!" he declared. "A new one on uncle. But, joking apart, who are you? I mean, in real life. Who ever you are, you've got a nerve!"

His tone was half flippant—half in earnest. A sudden glint in his eyes, he sprang towards her, attempting to grab her by the arm.

Norma was too quick for him; she darted past him like a flash. But, in her haste, she dropped the marble statuette.

It fell with a loud crash on the floor.

A stifled sob escaped Norma's lips—but she dared not stop to retrieve it. She heard Gerald's surprised ejaculation, and saw him bend swiftly to pick up the statuette.

It was her chance to escape!

With a fluttering of draperies she darted through the open frame, touching the lever that sent the canvas sliding back into place.

She heard Gerald's amazed shout as he looked round to find that she had vanished, apparently into thin air!

Her heart thumping, she peered through the spy-holes in the canvas.

She encountered Gerald's stare,

fastened in blank amazement on the portrait.

"Well, I'll be dashed!" he muttered. He crossed to the picture, and touched it gingerly.

Then he stared down at the floor, and a low whistle escaped his lips.

"Footprints!" he breathed. "And a girl's footprints, or I'm a Dutchman!"

Norma waited for no more. Turning, she sped back along the secret passage, not pausing to draw breath until she reached the grounds, and the safety of the sheltering trees.

NEW HOPE FOR NORMA

HER heart thumping madly, Norma halted to remove her phantom costume.

As she slipped it from her shoulders, something fell to the ground at her feet. She bent quickly to retrieve it, and a little cry of dismay escaped her lips.

She had snapped the slender coral necklace she had been wearing—one of the last gifts from her father. It must have become caught up in some way in her ghostly robes.

Anxiously she examined it. By a fortunate chance the coral beads were separately knotted, or the entire necklace might have been lost. As it was, one or two of the smaller beads were missing.

A trifle upset by the accident, Norma slipped the broken necklace into her pocket, and, making a hasty bundle of her robes, darted swiftly out of the grounds, back to the cottage.

Sleep that night seemed almost impossible. Norma was haunted by the memory of her secret excursion to Grey Gables.

Though she had averted the danger of immediate discovery, she had lost the statuette, on which her hopes had been centred. And she had learnt, beyond doubt, that Mr. Penhale and his daughter were her enemies.

Sheer weariness at length brought a lull to Norma's troubled thoughts. She fell into a heavy, dream-haunted sleep.

She awoke to a morning of dull, grey clouds, and snow. In the village street it was several inches deep already, muffling the footsteps of passers-by.

Norma sprang out of bed, trying to shake off the depression that had settled on her.

There was so much to be done, so many preparations to be made.

Several days still remained before Christmas. She must make the most of them to attract custom to the little shop.

As she hurried downstairs, there came a loud hammering on the shop door. She ran to pull back the shutters, to find Martin and little Elsie standing there, ankle-deep in snow, well wrapped up against the cold, their faces rosy with health and excitement.

They were all agog with the news of their visit to Mrs. Tregurtha's cottage on the cliff.

They insisted on helping to dust the shop, and arranging the sweets and groceries on the counter. Norma took advantage of their happy preoccupation to slip back into the parlour, and hastily conceal her phantom costume in the old cupboard.

She returned quickly to the shop as she heard the bell tinkle. Who was the early customer?

Then her heart missed a beat, and a swift, nervous flush crossed her face. For Gerald Graham stood there, cap in hand, smiling at her quizzically.

"Busy, Norma?" he asked.

Norma nodded, forcing a quick smile as she tried to shake off her nervousness, to appear at ease.

"Rather!" she replied lightly. "There's a lot to be done before Christmas."

"We're helpin'!" exclaimed young Martin importantly, rattling a tin of sweets. "What will you have this morning, Gerald?"

Gerald grinned, as he spun sixpence on to the counter.

"I'll take a penn'orth of bullseyes," he said, "and you can keep the change. Now run away and spend it on hot chestnuts, while I talk business to Norma."

The two youngsters departed in high fettle. Gerald solemnly produced a small leather bag from his pocket—a bag that chinked pleasantly as he emptied its contents on the counter.

"Balance of the proceeds from the bran-tub," he explained, his eyes twinkling. "I dashed off in such a hurry yesterday that I clean forgot to settle up. That's uncle's ten-bob note, and about thirty bob in silver."

Norma's face lit up gratefully.

"Gerald, it's awfully kind of you that—"

"Rot!" replied Gerald cheerfully. "It was great sport. Think you've got enough now to pay that bill?"

"I'll—I'll just count up," said Norma unsteadily.

Gerald leaned across the counter, with a cautious glance over his shoulder.

"I say, Norma, the ghost of Lady Rowena appeared again last night," he confided.

Norma's hands trembled as she made a pretence of busying herself with the till.

"What, again?" she asked, trying to speak lightly.

"I'll say!" Gerald did not notice her strained manner. "I caught it—her—in the library. Frankly, it's got me guessing. Warned me to mind my own business, and vanished into thin air under my nose. And there's something else. Remember we suspected the ghostly visitant of taking uncle's marble statuette?"

Norma nodded, forcing herself to meet his glance.

"Well?" she breathed.

"Well, the phantom brought it back again!" chuckled Gerald. "Can you beat it? An' that's not all." He grinned mysteriously. "There's a secret about that statuette that even uncle didn't know!"

Norma's heart gave a violent jump. She felt suddenly choked.

"A—a secret?" she faltered.

"Don't look so scared!" chuckled Gerald. "It's nothing dreadful. There's a secret compartment in the base of the statuette. I stumbled on it by accident when it fell on the library floor. Nothing in it, worse luck, but uncle's no end excited. He rang up a friend of his—a curio dealer—and discovered that statuettes like that nearly always go in pairs. So now he's advertising for its companion, though goodness knows what he expects to find in it!"

Norma's thoughts were racing as she fumbled with the till.

So there had been a secret connected with the statuette, as she had suspected; yet, luckily as it happened, its discovery had led to nothing.

If her father's cryptic message meant anything, there must be another statuette of the Black Knight, and probably, unknown to Mr. Penhale, it was hidden at Grey Gables.

Realising that Gerald was watching

her, Norma endeavoured to concentrate on the task on hand.

"I say, can I help?" he asked.

Together they checked up the money. It was nearly two pounds short of the required amount.

Gerald whistled lugubriously, and Norma's heart sank.

Unless she could pay her way she could not possibly keep the little shop going and support herself and the two children. In that case she would be forced to leave the village, and abandon all hopes of ever discovering her father's secret.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Gerald suddenly. He was staring at her in excitement, a gleam in his eyes.

"I've got it!" he declared. "You've got to grab Squire Guthrie's custom—get his order for the big kiddies' party up at the Hall."

Norma stared uncomprehendingly.

"Squire Guthrie?" she repeated.

"Surely you've heard of him!" said Gerald eagerly. "He's the big noise round here—local magistrate, landowner, and all that. Matter of fact, he owns this row of shops, including yours."

"Oh!" breathed Norma, rather blankly.

She had not even given a thought to the possibility of there being a landlord to whom rent would have to be paid. She had supposed that old Ben Tregellis was the owner of the shop.

Gerald seemed to guess the reason for her dismayed look.

"But don't worry about that!" he chuckled. "Squire Guthrie's a jovial old sort—one of the best. When he hears what a plucky fight you've put up on behalf of Tregellis' youngsters he'll be all in your favour. He's a great man for the kiddies, is the squire. Every year he gives a slap-up party for the village children up at the Hall—some time in the New Year. If you can get the order for supplies, your fortune's made!"

Gerald might be exaggerating a trifle, but Norma quickly realised the wonderful possibilities of his suggestion.

"But—but do you think I'd stand a chance?" she ventured doubtfully. "After all, I'm only a newcomer here, and if I wrote—"

"Don't write," said Gerald firmly. "Go and see the old buffer personally. I know him pretty well. Matter of fact, he and uncle are on visiting terms. I'll give you a note of introduction, an' your natural charm, should do the rest."

He grinned at her, but his tone was serious.

"Gerald, would you, really?" Norma flushed with pleasure and excitement, catching something of the boy's infectious enthusiasm. "Do you think I could pull it off?"

"Certain you could!" declared Gerald, taking out his fountain-pen. "Paper and envelope, please! 'Do it now' is my motto. H'm! Let me see—"

He scribbled rapidly in a characteristic boyish handwriting.

"That ought to do the trick!" he declared, grinning.

He pushed it across for her to read, and Norma's eyes misted with gratitude. What a sport Gerald was!

He took his leave a few minutes later, leaving Norma to her new and more hopeful thoughts.

If only she could get Squire Guthrie's custom, and win the approval of the most important man in the village!

It would certainly help her to keep the little shop going.

That afternoon was early-closing, and Norma grasped the opportunity to pay her visit to the Hall.

The children she left in the care of the motherly Mrs. Tregurtha, explaining the importance of her mission.

Attired in her smartest hat and coat, she set out for the Hall—a fine old house, built of grey Cornish stone, and standing in park-like grounds abutting the Penhales' estate.

Her hopes rose high as she walked up the drive, order-book in hand, Gerald's introductory letter in her pocket.

The door was opened by an austere footman, who took Gerald's letter and ushered her into a small ante-room.

Norma waited, plucking up her courage and turning over in her mind the little speech she had prepared.

Footsteps sounded in the hall, and Norma started to her feet as the door opened, to admit—Ethel Penhale, the daughter of her enemy!

A CHRISTMAS INVITATION

NORMA was utterly taken aback as she encountered the other girl's cold, hostile stare.

The last time she had encountered Ethel had been in the library of Grey Gables, when she had appeared

—that's his niece—asked me to see you."

Norma's hands clenched, a lump of humiliation rising in her throat.

It was quite obvious to her that Ethel had deliberately intervened!

"If—if the squire is out," she said, forcing herself to speak calmly, "I'll wait till he returns—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," sneered Ethel. "Sybil's entertaining some friends, and we can't be bothered by you. Besides, if you're angling for the squire's custom, you're too late. He already deals with the new stores!"

And Ethel smiled thinly as she reached out and pressed the bell.

The austere footman made his appearance.

"Walters," said Ethel loftily, "Miss Sybil asked me to deal with this young woman. Would you please show her to the door?"

The footman, his expression impassive, stood aside. Norma's blood was boiling, but she kept a firm control on herself. It would be useless—worse than useless—to make a scene.

Her head held high, she left the house and walked quickly down the



"Don't disappear yet, fair phantom," Gerald said lightly. Norma clenched her hands. At all costs, he must not guess her identity.

as the ghostly Lady Rowena. Then she had had the advantage; but now the advantage was all on Ethel's side. She was the last person Norma had expected to meet at the Hall.

"What are you doing here?" Ethel demanded.

Norma flushed, her hands clenching at the other's insolent tone.

"I've called to see Squire Guthrie," she replied, "on—a matter of business."

A faint sneer curved the other girl's lips; her glance rested on the order-book.

"Tradespeople usually go round to the side entrance," she remarked pointedly. "In any case, you can't see the squire—"

Norma stepped forward, her eyes flashing protestingly.

"But I've an appointment," she declared. "I've brought a letter of introduction—"

"From dear Gerald?" Ethel laughed, as she took the letter from her pocket. "Very obliging of him, I'm sure. But the squire happens to be out, and Sybil

drive. But there was a choking lump in her throat, and her eyes smarted with angry tears.

She was convinced that Ethel had deliberately spoilt her chances—that the squire's niece could not have known the full facts.

She could not bring herself to write to Gerald, to tell him what happened. Ethel Penhale was his cousin; he was bound to find some excuse for her action.

Norma wondered what she could say to him when he called to ask if she had obtained the order.

But two days passed, and Gerald did not put in an appearance. Probably he had forgotten her in the excitement of the coming festivities.

With her slender resources, Norma made as bright a show as possible of the little shop window; but customers were few and far between.

Christmas Eve came, and still there was no sign of Gerald. Perhaps—Norma clenched her hands—perhaps Ethel had told him lies about her visit to the Hall, had contrived to put her in a bad light.

The last customer had just departed; the two children had retired to bed—for once in a way without protest. Their stockings were duly hung at the foot of their beds, and Norma, her eyes misted, crept in to fill them with the small presents she had been able to purchase.

They were sleeping soundly, little Elsie with a happy smile on her lips. Probably they were dreaming of Christmas Day, little suspecting the shadow of intrigue and mystery that overhung them like a threatening cloud.

Tired out, Norma slipped into bed, to be awakened by the sunshine streaming through the window of her room, and the pealing of the bells in the old village church.

There was a hammering on the door of her room.

"Come in!" called Norma, only half awake.

The two children raced in, flourishing their presents.

"Post for you, Norma!" exclaimed young Martin, thrusting an envelope into her hand.

Norma glanced at it—and her heart missed a beat. Gerald's handwriting!

She tore it open, taking out a gilt-edged card. Her eyes widened in amazement.

It was an invitation to the Hall—from Squire Guthrie—requesting the pleasure of her company, with the two children, on Christmas evening!

Beneath it, in a characteristic, boyish scrawl, had been added:

"Do come! Gerald."

Norma caught in her breath, her eyes shining.

How the miracle had happened she did not know; but it was plain that Gerald had not forgotten!

That evening, well wrapped up against the cold, they set out for the Hall. Martin and little Elsie, in their very best things, were agog with excitement.

Norma had put on her prettiest frock, and had tried to mend the coral necklace—her only piece of jewellery. But the gold clasp, bearing her initials, was still insecure, and at the last minute she slipped it into her dainty evening handbag, intending to ask Gerald's help in fixing it.

Gerald himself met them in the porch, and gave them a boisterous welcome.

"It's all right!" he whispered in Norma's ear. "There was some mistake last time you called—but I've had a word with the squire and I've got him interested. If you play your cards properly you'll get that order!"

Norma glanced at him gratefully, but there was little time for conversation.

With the other guests, they passed upstairs to the big ball-room.

On the stairs Norma came face to face with Ethel Penhale.

That girl treated her to a stare of concentrated malice; and Norma, in her confusion, dropped her scarf and handbag. Gerald gallantly retrieved them.

"Having a good time, Ethel?" asked Gerald, grinning cheerfully.

"You appear to be!" rejoined Ethel, with a toss of her head.

"Rather," said Gerald, unperturbed. "By the way, the squire asked me if we'd do our little turn this evening—song and piano—"

Ethel turned away with an ill-tempered shrug.

Just then a booming, cheerful voice sounded above the lively hum.

"Hallo, Gerald! Your guests arrived?"

"Here they are, sir!" declared Gerald. "You know Martin and Elsie—and this is Norma."

Flushing, Norma found herself pushed towards a burly, grey-haired

man of jovial appearance; Squire Guthrie himself!

She shook hands a trifle shyly, and her confusion was not lessened when the squire declared, in his loud voice:

"Glad to meet you, Miss Royston! I've heard all about you from Gerald. And I admire your pluck. You deserve to succeed!"

Your Editor's Corner



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

MY DEAR READERS.— A Merry Christmas to You All!

May you have lots of fun and games, lots of presents, and lots of everything else to make this season of the year the very happiest.

My own Christmas will certainly be a jolly one—if only because I know I have so many good wishes from you all.

I think I really must have had a record number of Christmas cards from you this year—and again, I must thank you very, very much for them.

If you do find yourselves with a moment to spare next week, don't forget to write to me and tell me about all you have been doing—your presents, the Christmas pudding, parties, pantos—just anything at all.

WONDERFUL PRESENTS

A good many of you lucky young people know in advance that you'll be receiving one—or more—of our splendid "Annuals." Once you start dipping into these, I'm afraid you're going to become so engrossed that it'll need some particularly thrilling plan to get you out of them again!

As Christmas is certainly the time for old friendships, you'll particularly enjoy reading the stories in "The Popular Book of Girls' Stories." For in this you will meet again such old story-chums as "Kay, of the African Skyways," "Jingo, Tim, and the Pup," "The Happy-Go-Lucky Hikers," and "The Madcap Form-mistress,"—in addition to other splendid tales, of course, Babs & Co., of Cliff House School, are characters well known to many of you, I know. It is the "School Friend Annual"—price 3s. 6d.—which contains stories of their adventures—stories that are exciting, humorous, and appealing.

"The Golden Annual For Girls," which also costs 3s. 6d., is a treasure-trove of tales to suit every mood—the ideal present for you who enjoy "a good read."

A book to treasure for many years is the "Schoolgirls' Own Annual"—which is so beautifully printed and produced. It contains a variety of features in addition to stories—a book to dip into again and again, and to have pride of place on your very own bookshelf.

Once again let me wish you a Very Happy Christmas and a Glad New Year!

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR

"And now, Gerald," went on the squire, "what about that musical turn you and Miss Penhale were going to give us?"

Gerald glanced at Ethel, but that girl shrugged pettishly.

"I don't feel like singing to-night," she drawled.

The squire coughed, biting his lip; Gerald grimaced and glanced at Norma.

"Do you sing, by any chance?" he whispered.

"I—" Norma flushed. "No—that is, not really—"

"Oh, you do, Norma!" exclaimed little Elsie. "I've heard you!"

"Eh, what's that?" The squire looked keenly at Norma. "Will you help us out, Miss Royston?"

"Really," faltered Norma, her face crimson. "I'm not good enough to—"

"Name the song!" exclaimed Gerald gaily, grabbing her by the arm and marching her towards the piano.

Shyly Norma mentioned an old Cornish song.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Squire Guthrie. "We've got a costume here that will just suit that. Sybil, my dear"—he turned to his niece—"bring out that old Cornish costume for Miss Royston!"

Sybil Guthrie, a pretty, but rather insipid-looking girl, hurried to obey. Norma retired behind a screen, and slipped the dainty, old-world costume over her party frock.

When she emerged, a little gasp of delight went up from the onlookers.

The song commenced. Gerald was a first-rate accompanist, and though Norma was nervous at first, she quickly forgot her shyness in the lilt of the old-world tune.

She had a sweet, rich voice that sounded clearly through the lofty ball-room.

As the song concluded, a terrific burst of applause arose. The squire hurried forward.

"Splendid, Miss Royston!" he exclaimed, wringing her hand.

Her heart beating quickly, Norma smiled at the squire; but just then she heard a harsh, familiar voice address the host.

Mr. Penhale, unnoticed, had joined the group, and behind him Norma could see Ethel Penhale.

The squire held up his hand, his expression suddenly grave.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "I believe you have all heard rumours of the phantom figure who has lately been haunting Grey Gables, my neighbour's house."

There came a low buzz of excitement.

"Whatever the explanation of this figure," went on the squire grimly, "and I, personally, am convinced that it is the work of an ill-natured trickster—it is causing my good friend considerable annoyance. On its last visit, Mr. Penhale discovered these two coral beads." Mr. Penhale stepped forward and held them up. "If anyone could help to identify them, please step forward!"

There was a sudden hush. It was with an effort that Norma stifled the involuntary cry that arose to her lips.

For Mr. Penhale was holding up the two missing beads from her coral necklace—the necklace that she had brought with her in her handbag.

Her hand shaking, she opened the little gilt bag.

Then the blood drained from her face. The coral necklace had gone!

What fresh surprises—or disasters!—face Norma now? You must read next week's long instalment of this fascinating serial, and follow her further adventures. Be sure to order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** as soon as possible.

Their Quest AT THE Winter Sports



AUNT ELIZABETH'S BOMBSHELL!

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, named Madame Marie, tried to guide Doreen to a secret chalet where would be found the solution of the mystery about Sylvia.

Doreen lost Madame Marie in a blizzard, however, and when she was rescued, she was completely exhausted.

Thanks to Irma Ross, Aunt Elizabeth believed that Sylvia had deliberately sent Doreen out into the storm in the mountains.

She was furious, and forbade the chums ever to speak to Sylvia again!

FOR a moment, following Miss Hill's outburst, there was dead silence in the room. Then at last Doreen found her voice.

"Aunt," she cried, in stricken protest, "you can't mean that! Sylvia is our friend. She'll always be our friend. Oh, we—we won't let you do this!"

"Won't?" Aunt Elizabeth, eyebrows bristling, repeated the word sharply. "Doreen, you forget yourself! When I say a thing—"

"But you don't understand—you don't!" Doreen broke in. "You don't know the real truth!"

"I'm sure I understand perfectly!" Miss Hill said icily. "I happen to be able to read, Doreen, and this letter tells me all I want to know. Sylvia did write it, did she not?"

"Ye-es; but—"

"Then that's sufficient. The truth is that Sylvia had the effrontery to send you into terrible danger, and I intend to see that it does not happen again. How dare she do such a thing! The more I think of it, of the dreadful tragedy that very nearly occurred—"

And Aunt Elizabeth, angrier than Doreen had ever seen her before, broke off incoherently as a fresh tide of emotion surged stormily through her.

"Sylvia!" she suddenly cried, swinging round on that girl. "You heard what I said! Why are you still here? Go—go immediately!"

A low, sobbing cry broke from Sylvia's lips. Her face was ashen save for two spots which flamed scarlet on each cheek.

"Oh, Miss Hill, you're being unfair!" she cried.

"Go!" Aunt Elizabeth repeated vehemently. "And never let me see you associating with Doreen or Jean again!"

For a moment longer Sylvia stood there, flinching as if before a hurtful blow. In agonised despair she glanced at Doreen, at Jean—those two girls who had been such wonderful friends, who had given her the strength to face up to all her troubles, on whom more and more she had come to rely for help in fighting against the mysterious enmity of her guardians.

But now—Another sob shook her. With bowed head she turned to go.

In one quick stride, however, Doreen was beside her—was holding her arm.

"No; you're not to go, Sylvia!"

"Doreen!" Aunt Elizabeth stormed.

"She's not going!" Doreen cried, reckless of her aunt's anger, her own indignation now aroused to fighting pitch. "You've got to listen, aunt. You've been blind long enough to know how Sylvia's guardians have been treating her. They're up to some beastly game. All along they've been scheming for this to happen, telling you

Doreen and Jean had marvellous news for Sylvia. So eagerly they went to tell her. But a shock awaited them. For Sylvia had not only left the hotel—she had gone from the town of St. Lauritz leaving no address.

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

all sorts of lies so that you would break our friendship with Sylvia!"

"Nonsense! You're being ridiculous, Doreen!"

"That's why Irma showed you the letter," Doreen went on heedlessly. "That's why all along they've hoodwinked you that Sylvia has a bad influence on us."

"Doreen! Not another word!"

"Oh, I haven't finished yet!" Doreen rushed on. "You're hearing the truth now, aunt! The Rosses know we're suspicious—they're frightened of us! They know we're helping Sylvia, and they're scared of being shown up!"

"Stop! I've heard enough! I won't listen to another word!" Aunt Elizabeth declared. "If you're impressed by this girl's wild tales, then I am not. They only convince me more than ever that she is a menace. Doreen, my mind is made up. Once again, and for the last time, I say that you and Jean are to have nothing more to do with her. And," Aunt Elizabeth added, with grim ominousness, "if you disobey me—if ever I find out that you have even so much as spoken to her from now on—then I shall immediately cancel the remainder of your holiday here at St. Lauritz and send you back to England!"

"But, aunt—"

"Doreen, please!" It was Sylvia who spoke, her voice low and husky, her eyes brimming with tears. "Don't say any more, Doreen. Don't ruin your holiday because of me!"

"I don't care!" Doreen said mutinously. "If aunt won't believe the truth—"

"Doreen!" Sylvia said again softly, and gently she disengaged her arm. "Your aunt is right. My friendship has brought you and Jean only trouble. It—it's better we shouldn't see each other again!" Her voice quivered with emotion. "Good-bye, Doreen! Good-bye, Jean! And—thank you both for all you've done for me. I—I shall never forget you!"

Then, quickly turning on her heel, she rushed to the door and was gone.

"Oh, aunt!" Doreen choked.

Just for a moment Aunt Elizabeth's

grininess had relaxed as if, in spite of herself, she had been stirred by that touching little scene; as if momentarily doubt had come to her. But then once again her features hardened.

"You will soon get over it, Doreen," she said. "You will quickly realise that I have acted for the best. But remember what I said, and let me warn you I meant every word of it. Now, my dear—" Her voice softened, and affectionately she glanced at her niece. "Weren't you and Jean going to a party given by those two nice boys?"

Doreen nodded dully. Yes, Tony Semers was expecting them at his birthday party—her, Jean, and Sylvia.

But now Sylvia wouldn't be able to come. If she or Jean saw Sylvia they would have to pass her by—speak not a word to her. Oh, it was impossible! How could they do that to the girl who had so endeared herself to them?

"Now don't stand there, Doreen," Miss Hill said, giving her niece a gentle push through the doorway. "You go along and enjoy yourselves!"

The two chums went. They made their way along to Tony's room. Tony was standing at the door, anxiously awaiting them.

"Thought you weren't coming!" he said. "But, my hat, don't you look two rays of sunshine? And where's Sylvia?"

Doreen told him.

"Oh, I say, that's tough!" Tony sympathised. "Your aunt's a bit of a tartar when she likes, isn't she? But come on in. Everybody's ready. And cheer up! Things have a way of working right in the end, you know!"

But Doreen and Jean found it hard to cheer up.

If only Sylvia had been there with them! How they would have exclaimed at the lovely tea Tony had laid out. There it stood in the centre of the room—the table loaded down with the good things.

Tony, as the son of a famous surgeon, was a distinguished guest at the Crestina, and the staff had worked with a will to carry out his bidding.

Tony and Jack, immaculate in their best suits, grinned.

"O.K.?" Tony asked.

"It's ripping!" Doreen exclaimed, and smiled and tried hard to enter into the spirit of the party.

They sat down to tea. There were times when Doreen and Jean simply had to be gay and happy; they couldn't help but be happy and gay when the meal was so delicious and the two boys were such jolly company.

But then they would remember Sylvia and the bombshell Aunt Elizabeth had thrown among them. And then they would become quiet and the party would fall flat.

Tony understood, good scout that he was. He knew just how they must be feeling. He was disappointed—but only because the girls were not able to enjoy themselves as they would have done had everything been all right.

"Come and have a look at the presents I've had," he said cheerily. "This is from dad—something I've always wanted!"

Rather mysteriously he led the way round behind the big settee, and there, still partly in its wrappings, was a large, glittering toboggan.

"I shan't have to rely on hiring one now," Tony grinned. "My hat, we'll have some fun on this, girls! And here's what old Jack coughed up. Fine fellow, Jack! A brand new pair of ice skates!"

"Golly!" Doreen suddenly muttered,

and looked quickly across at Jean. "I hear what she was saying. Her glittering eyes swept furtively around, as if she feared someone might be listening. Then once again they bored into the chums' own eyes. 'But first you must promise not to breathe a word of what I tell you to anyone save the Mademoiselle Sylvia. You promise?'"

"You mean you're going?" Tony demanded, in surprise.

"Just for a few minutes. We'll be back."

"I should jolly well think so! Buck up, and then we'll have some games."

Outside, Jean stared in surprise at her chum.

"What's the sudden idea?"

"Well, there's Tony showing us all his presents and inviting us to his party, and we haven't bought him anything at all. Let's go along to the shops. We must buy something."

Hurriedly fetching their coats and snow boots, they made their way out into the gathering dusk. The shops and streets were ablaze with lights, making the snow scintillate.

Just ahead of them they saw the red glow of a charcoal fire which stood on a small hand-barrow. Doreen sniffed.

"Someone selling roast chestnuts!" she exclaimed. "Don't they smell scrummy? We'll take some back with us."

"Mesdemoiselles!" came a whispering voice.

And Doreen went rigid, noticing for the first time the aged woman who stood beside the barrow, turning over the baked chestnuts as they sizzled on the tray on top of the glowing fire.

A woman who wore a voluminous black cloak, out of whose parchment-like face glittered a pair of piercing black eyes.

"Madame Marie!" Doreen gasped.

And thrilled. For Madame Marie it was—that strange, elusive old woman who seemed to know the secret of the mystery which surrounded Sylvia!

WHAT MADAME MARIE TOLD THEM

"YES, it is I," the woman said in a hissing whisper. "But come closer. I was hoping I would see you. And where is Mademoiselle Sylvia? I have news for her!"

Again Doreen thrilled.

"We'll find her for you," she said excitedly. "Or perhaps we could pass on the news to her—" And then she broke off, remembering what had happened, that now Aunt Elizabeth had forbidden her to speak to or see Sylvia.

Madame Marie saw the look of dismay that came into Doreen's face.

"What is the matter?" she asked quickly. "Nothing has gone wrong?"

Doreen nodded.

"Well, in a way it has," she admitted, and went on to explain the situation. "It's all because of what happened yesterday, when you were taking me to the secret chalet in the mountains. After you went rushing away I got lost in that blizzard—"

The old woman looked startled.

"Tiens, I did not know that!" she exclaimed. "I am sorry—I did not realise. I was so anxious to reach the chalet before those gendarmes got there."

"And you did?" Doreen asked eagerly.

"Yes," Madame Marie nodded. "But I was only just in time. Had I been but a few minutes later, then—then everything would have been lost. They would have found him there—"

Excitedly Doreen gripped the old woman's arm.

"Him?" she repeated. "But who is he, Madame? What part is he playing in all this mystery?"

"I will tell you!" Now Madame Marie's voice had dropped to the softest whisper, so that the girls could barely

hear what she was saying. Her glittering eyes swept furtively around, as if she feared someone might be listening. Then once again they bored into the chums' own eyes. "But first you must promise not to breathe a word of what I tell you to anyone save the Mademoiselle Sylvia. You promise?"

"Yes, yes; of course!"

"Come closer, mes cheries! No one must hear what I am saying. Hiding in that chalet was M'sieur Douglas Drake."

"Drake!" Doreen gasped. "Oh, my hat, that's Sylvia's name!"

"Hush! Not so loud!" the woman hissed warningly. "He is Mam'selle Sylvia's cousin."

"Golly!" Doreen exclaimed. "Now we're getting somewhere. Her cousin! But—but why hasn't he been to see Sylvia?"

"Because," Madame Marie said, "he dare not!"

"Dare not? You mean he has some reason for not wishing to be seen? That is why he is in hiding?"

"Oui, mam'selle. He has a very important reason for not wanting to be seen. If the police should catch him he—"

Doreen's eyes dilated in amazement.

"You mean he is wanted by the police?"

"Yes."

"Oh, great Scott! But what has he done?"

"That, mam'selle, I do not know. I only know that he has had to go into hiding, and I have pledged myself to keep his secret. That is why, when I saw the gendarmes going to the chalet yesterday, I was afraid for his sake. But now he is safe."

"You have hidden him somewhere else?"

Madame Marie nodded.

"We must tell Sylvia!" Doreen exclaimed. "She will want to see her cousin. Where is he now?"

"It is better you should not know," the woman replied mysteriously. "One slip of the tongue, and everything would be lost. Perhaps already I have told you too much."

"But can't Sylvia see him? Surely she should know where he is?"

"And have someone follow her when she went to meet him?" the woman asked, and shook her head. "No; that would be too risky, with the police already suspicious. But listen, mes cheries. M'sieur Drake does want to meet Mam'selle Sylvia. He has much to tell her—much that concerns their future happiness. And so he bade me inform her that as soon as he can he will come to see her."

"Come here into St. Lauritz?" Doreen questioned.

"Yes. It may be days hence, perhaps a week or more—"

"But the risk?"

"That is why he cannot say definitely when he will come," Madame Marie said softly. "But come he will, by night, when there is less chance of anyone seeing him."

"Then how will Sylvia know when to look out for him?" Jean put in tensely.

"He will come to the hotel grounds," Madame Marie went on in a sibilant whisper. "He will give the hoot of an owl three times. That is clear?"

Excitedly the chums nodded.

"And now, before we part," Madame Marie went on, "I have one other message for the Mam'selle Sylvia. Listen well, for it is very important. M'sieur Drake bids me inform her that it is vital she should win the next round in the St. Lauritz skating championship. She must make every possible effort to

win. You will tell Mam'selle Sylvia that?"

"Yes, rather!" Doreen breathed. "Rely on us. But—but, madame, why is it so vital that Sylvia should win?"

The woman, however, shook her head, though her eyes seemed to glitter with a deeper intensity.

"Do not ask any more questions," she said. "Mam'selle Sylvia will learn everything when she meets her cousin. And now I must be moving on, and I implore you not to forget what I have said. Bonsoir, mam'selles!"

"Good-night, Madame Marie!"

Bending to the handles of her barrow, the woman trudged slowly on down the road, the red glow of the fire growing fainter and fainter.

Thrilling in every fibre, Doreen was looking at her chum.

"Oh my hat, what do you make of all that?" she exclaimed. "But come on. Let's buy Tony's present and then we must hurry back to the Crestina and find Sylvia. Aunt Elizabeth or not, we've simply got to tell Sylvia what's happened!"

Ten minutes later, returning from the shops, they were back in the foyer of the hotel. Doreen, after a cautious look round, made her way across to the reception clerk.

"We're looking for Miss Drake, of Room No. 41," she told him. "Have you seen her recently, please?"

The man looked at her in surprise.

"But yes," he said. "You are her friends, are you not? Then I should have thought you would know."

"Know! Know what?" Doreen demanded, and for some queer reason felt her heart give a little lurch.

"Why, that Mademoiselle Drake has left the hotel!" the clerk said. "She went with Monsieur and Madame Ross, and Mademoiselle Ross. They departed about an hour ago, saying that they were leaving St. Lauritz!"

IN SEARCH OF SYLVIA

"LEAVING St. Lauritz! Oh, great Scott!"

In consternation Doreen gazed at Jean, from her to the reception clerk. Dismay flooded through her heart.

"But—but we must see her," she gasped. "Where have they gone? You—you don't mean they're returning to England?"

"Non, non!" The reception clerk vigorously shook his head, and continued to stare at the startled chums in polite surprise. "They not return to England. Mam'selle Ross was saying it would make no difference to her competing in the skating championship. I think they only move on to another village!"

Doreen breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, thank goodness for that. But you don't know where, exactly?"

"M'sieur Ross did not say. He left no address," the clerk told her with an expressive shrug. "You wished to see Mam'selle Drake very important?"

"Yes."

"Then it is a pity." The clerk suddenly smiled. "But perhaps if you could trace the driver of the sleigh who took them—"

"Golly, that's an idea!" Doreen exclaimed eagerly. "What was he like? Do you know his name?"

"I am sorry, I did not see him. But you could make inquiries."

"Yes, we'll do that. Thank you!"

The chums moved away from the reception desk. Doreen was looking anxious.

"We simply must find Sylvia," she

declared. "You heard what Madame Marie said. This cousin may appear any night. And there's that other message about her skating—"

"Let's go back to the party," Jean suggested. "The sleigh-driver won't have returned yet. Then, after dinner, we can start making inquiries."

"No; we'll have to make it first thing in the morning," Doreen decided. "Aunt will expect us to go dancing to-night, and she mustn't suspect anything. If she did—if she knew we were trying to trace Sylvia—then she'd be sure to watch us, and that would spoil things completely."

So back to the party they went. Tony was delighted with the present they had bought him—a fountain-pen, which, he enthusiastically declared, had come just at the right time because his existing one had only that morning sprung a leak.

They had games, and, in spite of their anxiety, Doreen and Jean settled down to enjoy themselves. After all, there was nothing they could do until morning.

All that morning they made inquiries of every driver they saw. Some of them had taken parties from the Crestina for trips, but not one of them recognised Doreen's description of Sylvia and the Rosses.

They tried again during the afternoon, but still without success.

"Oh, goodness, what are we going to do now?" Jean asked in despair, as, with dusk gathering over St. Lauritz, they trailed their weary way back to the hotel.

"Just keep on trying," Doreen said doggedly. "Perhaps this particular driver isn't out to-day. But, anyway, we've left our names and hotel number with all the other drivers, and asked them to make inquiries for us, so we're not beaten yet."

She half-expected there might be a letter from Sylvia the following morning. But there wasn't. Doreen, in spite of her optimism, was beginning to feel desperate.

If Sylvia's cousin should come, they would be able to meet him, of course.



"Why, Mademoiselle Drake has left the hotel," the clerk told Doreen and Jean. The chums were completely dismayed. How could they get in touch with Sylvia now?

At last it was time for dinner. Dancing in the Crestina's magnificent ball-room followed, and then, at eleven o'clock, Aunt Elizabeth shepherded them up to their room.

And there, as they lay in bed, they instinctively listened, wondering if they would hear three hoots of an owl, if Sylvia's cousin would appear to-night.

But no signal came. Doreen's brain raced.

Who was this cousin of Sylvia's? Why should he be wanted by the police? The mystery became deeper and more baffling with every fresh development.

The chums were up early the following morning—a morning of blue skies and warm sunshine which quickly thawed the night's heavy frost.

"And now," Doreen said, after breakfast, "to begin the search for this sleigh-driver. I've told aunt we're going out for a long walk—but let's hope it won't be too long!"

But finding that driver, they quickly discovered, was like looking for the proverbial needle in its proverbial haystack.

But there would be little gained from that if they could not tell him where Sylvia was to be found.

And the day of the famous St. Lauritz skating championship was drawing nearer and nearer. They must set Sylvia before that, to make sure that she was still participating, and to pass on to her the message from her cousin.

"Well, off we go again!" Doreen said, trying to sound cheerful. "They say patience has its reward—"

She broke off as a pageboy appeared in the foyer.

"Telephone call for Mademoiselle Carsdale," he was calling. "Telephone call for—"

"All right, here I am!" Doreen said hurriedly, and looked round quickly to see if her aunt was in the vicinity and had heard. "Perhaps it's from Sylvia," she told Jean excitedly.

They hurried over to the telephone cabinet, and there Doreen's wildest hopes were confirmed. It was a sleigh-driver at the other end, and he declared he had driven to Corvish three people answering the description he had been given.

"Are they staying there?" asked Doreen eagerly.

"Oui, oui! Zey staying there."

"Do you know where?"

"Non. Zey pay me off, and say zay look for somewhere to stay—"

"It doesn't matter. Can you take us to Corvich now?" Doreen asked.

"Oui, oui! I meet you in trois minutes, mam'selle!"

"Come on, get ready!" she cried.

"They've gone to Corvich—that's where we met Tony's father. Oh, my hat, we're on the trail now!"

Five minutes later they were waiting impatiently outside the hotel for Georges, the sleigh-driver, to appear. His three minutes lengthened into ten, but at last he came wishing up the drive. The chums hurriedly clambered aboard the sleigh, and with a crack of the whip they were off.

Doreen felt herself tingling as they left St. Lauritz behind them and swished on along the mountain roads. Still they did not know exactly where Sylvia was staying, but once they arrived at Corvich they would surely be able to make inquiries and track her down without any serious difficulties.

When the snow-clad village was reached, the driver stopped at the far end of the main street.

"Zey leave me ici!" he announced, turning and beaming down upon the chums. "But as I drive away I see zem go down zere."

He pointed in the direction of a path

which cut through between two white-walled hotels.

"Oh, thank you!" Doreen exclaimed, leaping out. "Combien?"

And then, even as Doreen was paying the driver, Jean suddenly clutched at her arm.

"Doreen, look!" she cried. "The Rosses—they're just coming out of that chalet over there."

Doreen spun round.

Down the path which the driver had indicated, standing well back, was a large, picturesque chalet. And just emerging from its green-painted doorway were Mr. and Mrs. Ross and Irma.

"Golly, yes!" Doreen exclaimed. "And Sylvia's not with them. Does that mean she's inside the place or out somewhere? But quickly, dodge—don't let them see us!"

Hastily they made themselves scarce. And then, after the Rosses had gone by without seeing them, they quickly made their way towards the chalet.

Doreen paused outside, her heart pounding, frowning undecidedly.

"What shall we do? Knock and see if Sylvia is in?"

"Doreen! Doreen!" called a familiar voice.

Doreen's head jerked upwards. And then she was waving and laughing. There was Sylvia, peering out of a small attic window set high up in the very roof of the chalet.

"Sylvia!" she cried. "I say, we've

come to see you! We've news—tremendous news. Come down—"

"I can't!" replied Sylvia, and now Doreen noticed how piteous her voice sounded. "I'm locked in. I'm a prisoner up here!"

Doreen's eyes gleamed, her lips tightened.

"Then I'm coming up to you!" she exclaimed.

"But how—"

"Just watch! Jean, stay down here and keep guard! If you see the Rosses coming back, shout!"

And then, while Jean stared, Doreen leapt across to the front of the chalet, jumped on to the veranda rail, and went shinning up one of the supports.

Above was a balcony, running the width of the chalet. And above that was another and smaller balcony.

Swiftly Doreen climbed, gained the higher balcony, and then, clutching hold of the window-frame, she proceeded to stand on the narrow rail.

Below, Jean gasped and watched anxiously. A forty-foot drop would be Doreen's fate if she slipped.

But Doreen did not slip. She raised herself, was standing upright on the rail—and now she could see above the gutter of the roof, could see Sylvia, her eyes wide as she watched from the little window.

"Oh, Doreen," Sylvia gasped, "you shouldn't have done it! Are you safe?"

"Safe as houses!" Doreen grinned, gripping the gutter tightly. "Now, old thing, what's been happening? You say you're a prisoner?"

"Yes," Sylvia's face was pale, her eyes agonised. "I've been locked in here since we arrived the day before yesterday. At least, they take me out for a short walk twice a day, but always they keep guard over me. Oh, Doreen, they're treating me dreadfully!"

Doreen's heart contracted.

"And they won't let me skate," Sylvia went on pitifully. "They're not going to let me enter for the championship. They're going to cancel my entry."

"But, Sylvia, you must be in the championship. And you've got to win. Your cousin says you must!"

"Cousin?"

And then Doreen went on to tell her of that meeting with Madame Marie, of what the woman had told them—everything.

Sylvia listened in growing amazement. A flush came to her cheeks, a sparkle to her eyes.

"But I never knew I had a cousin," she said. "Douglas Drake? I've never heard of the name. And he's wanted by the police? Oh goodness! What does it all mean?"

"Only your cousin himself can tell you that!" Doreen said tensely. "Listen, you've got to meet him."

"But how can I?"

"We'll meet him first when he comes to the Crestina. We'll tell him what's happening. And then, somehow, we'll arrange a meeting between the two of you. And somehow, too, you've got to win that championship!"

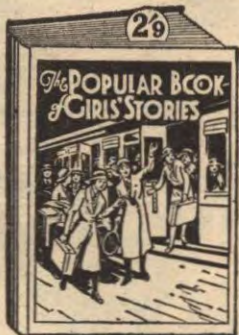
At which moment, from below, came a sudden warning cry in Jean's voice: "Doreen, look out! Cave!"

Doreen gave a gasp of consternation. From where she stood, high up on her perilous perch, she could see over the tops of a clump of near-by fir-trees.

And coming towards the chalet were the Rosses!

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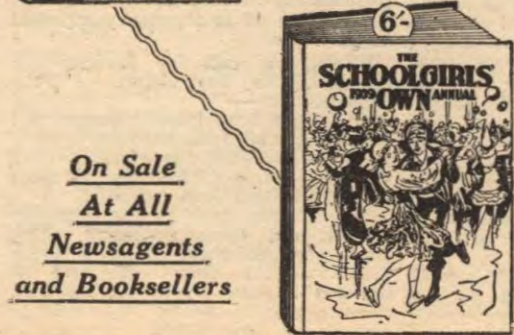
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PAT'S PURSUIT through the SNOW



The kidnapers had laid their plans well. But they had reckoned without the heavy snow-drifts—and without Pat Lovell, the girl reporter.

By
ELIZABETH CHESTER

KIDNAPPED FROM THE THEATRE

"A STOUT, middle-aged man opening his umbrella," murmured Pat Lovell, smiling. And she paused in the busy High Street of the Midland town to write that down in shorthand in her notebook.

People gave her puzzled looks as they saw her smiling to herself and making notes, but that did not worry Pat. She was doing a job of work. For Pat was a reporter, and she had been sent out into the snow to see how people were re-acting to Christmas. It was the evening of Boxing Day, but there were plenty of people about, and snow was falling. Pat had to note queer, odd things—things worth recording, even though they might be trivial.

There was nothing very funny about a stout, middle-aged man opening his umbrella—except that it happened to be full of snow which promptly showered over him. Some small boys had filled it with snow for him!

Pat had joined the queue that was forming outside the Theatre Royal for the pantomime, and had heard enough remarks to add a line or two to the column she had to fill.

A car had skidded, a girl had fallen harmlessly from her cycle. A man in jovial mood was linking arms with a friend and singing. Everyone seemed happy—even the man with the umbrella, who had laughed it off.

And then a small boy started to cry. He was being dragged along the lamp-lit pavement by a woman with a most determined air, and Pat wondered what was amiss.

"Want to go to 'antomime," he cried, struggling. "Pwomised me—pwomised—"

"Shame!" murmured Pat. "Poor kid."

But the small boy, who was dressed in a little green coat and cap, received no sympathy from the woman.

She hustled him across to where a saloon car stood waiting.

"Shut that kid up for mercy's sake," said the uniformed chauffeur.

Pat stiffened. What an odd remark for a chauffeur to make! Was he per-

haps taking his wife and child for a joy ride in the master's car?

"Quiet yourself," said the woman in an undertone which Pat nevertheless heard. "And hurry! With this snow falling we'll never get over the pass."

Away shot the car, and, as it did so, there came the sound of a disturbance in the foyer of the theatre. Out on to the pavement rushed another woman, calling in a distressed voice:

"Cyril! Cyril! Oh, my goodness!"

It was a moan of despair she gave, as she looked in vain up and down the street.

Pat hurried across to her.

"Can I help?" she asked.

"My little boy—Cyril!" said the woman frenziedly. "He's disappeared! He let go of my hand for a minute while I was brushing a cigarette burn from my coat; and now—oh, but where is he?" she cried, distraught.

A crowd gathered, but Pat took the woman's arm.

"What was he like?" she asked.

"He was dressed in a green coat with a green cap, and wore Wellingtons," said the woman.

Pat Lovell gave a gasp of surprise.

"Why, he went off with a woman in a car, a saloon car," she said.

The woman's face went deathly white; there was a look of horror in her eyes.

"He's been kidnapped," she gasped. "We came here to be safe, but they've followed us! They've got him!"

Quickly Pat hailed a passing taxi. As they waited for it to draw up, the woman explained that the kidnapped boy was the son of Miles Francham, an American millionaire, and that she was his nurse.

Pat helped her into the taxi and ordered him to drive straight on. She hoped they would be able to overtake the saloon car.

A cumbersome lorry was ahead, and the road was narrow, with traffic coming in the opposite direction.

"Oh, bother—that lorry's held us up!" exclaimed Pat.

But it had held up the car she was chasing, too! And it only just shot round ahead of the lorry as they arrived.

Luck was against the saloon car again. For the traffic lights at the

cross-road went red. Leaning from the window, Pat saw the car stop—and saw that on the opposite side of the road was a policeman.

"Stop by that policeman," Pat ordered her driver.

He pulled across the road, stopped as she directed, and Pat jumped out.

"A boy has been kidnapped. He is in that car over there," she exclaimed.

The policeman, startled though he was, did not hesitate, but crossed the road and held up the car—just as the lights turned to amber.

"What's wrong?" asked the chauffeur. "I want to see who's in the car," said the policeman grimly.

"A boy with a green coat and cap," said Pat. "Son of Miles Francham."

She tugged open the rear door and looked inside. The boy was there. And at the other door the policeman stood, ready to prevent escape.

On either side of the boy sat a man and a woman, and the woman, switching on an interior light, looked at Pat in blank amazement.

"What ever is the meaning of this, pray?" she asked.

Pat stared at the boy. He was dressed not in green, but in blue, and he wore a little round hat, not a cap. His face, too, was brownish, rather than fair, and he was certainly not wearing Wellingtons! In no way did he fit the description of the missing Cyril!

"That's not a green coat," said the policeman gruffly.

"Nun-no, it isn't!" said Pat, bewildered.

"George's coat is blue," said the woman. "Is there a law against my dressing my son in a blue coat?"

Pat stared dazedly at the boy.

"Is your name Cyril?" she asked him.

He shook his head.

"George," he said.

Pat knew when she was beaten. And this was just such an occasion. Whoever he was, he was not Cyril Francham.

"I—I'm sorry!" she faltered. "I've made a mistake."

She closed the door, and as the car proceeded on its way she turned to the policeman.

"That seems to be the wrong boy," she confessed; "but the son of the American millionaire, Miles Francham, has been kidnapped. I suppose I'd better take his nurse to the police station and get her to give a full description."

She got back into the taxi, and ten minutes later a sympathetic inspector was interviewing the distressed nurse.

The nurse explained how a man had burned her new coat with a cigarette, and how she had released Cyril's hand to brush out the burning end.

It was, as the police-officer suggested, a trick to distract her attention—and it had succeeded.

"Have you a photograph of the little boy?" asked Pat eagerly. "We'll get it into the papers. That's the quickest way of finding people."

The nurse produced a snap from her handbag and handed it over. Pat studied it for only a second and then her jaw fell, and she gave a startled gasp.

"Why, it's—it's the boy I saw in the car! They must have changed his clothes. He's wearing a blue coat and hat now! Oh goodness, I saw him—spoke to him—and let them drive off with him!"

Realising how she had been fooled, she blushed with mortification. Yet really she was not to blame, for hadn't the little boy insisted that his name was George, not Cyril!

"I expect those wretches scared him—terrorised him into telling a fib," Pat told herself, as the police-inspector got busy on the telephone.

The car that had got away was now to be hunted. Every police patrol was warned to look out for it.

Pat, able to learn no more at the station, returned ruefully to the newspaper office. The editor, when he learnt what had happened, sat bolt upright in his chair.

"This will make a grand story!" he cried. "Of course, I'm sorry for the kid, but we mustn't forget our readers. Pat, return to the police station and find out all you can about the boy's—Here, what's the matter?" he demanded, staring in surprise, for the girl reporter had suddenly leapt to her feet, her face red with excitement.

"The pass! I think they're making for the pass!" she exclaimed. "What a chump I was not to remember before! I heard them saying something about it!"

The editor looked thoughtful. He knew the pass, of course. It was the road that climbed over the high, rocky hills that lay to the north of the town. He shook his head scornfully.

"You must have heard wrongly," he said. "Look at the snow. They couldn't get over those hills. They'd be crazy to try it—"

His bell rang, and he answered the telephone, then looked at Pat and grimaced.

"They've found the car—abandoned. The kidnappers have either stolen another car, or else changed into one they had waiting at an agreed place. In any case, the car they used had been stolen in London."

Pat sighed. For this surely meant that the kidnappers would get clean away.

She left the office, but she did not go back to the police station as her editor had ordered her to. A daring idea had occurred to her. Hailing a taxi, she gave the driver swift instructions.

"Drive to the pass," she said. "And please drive fast—as fast as ever you can!"

The taxi-man stared at her incredulously.

"The pass!" he echoed. "Have a heart, miss. Look at that sky. Look at the snow! You don't think any car could get over the pass to-night? It'll be yards deep in snow. No one's going to get farther than the Crow's Nest. And that'll be choc-full, with people having to sleep in the bath and on the billiard tables—I give you my word."

"The Crow's Nest! The inn half-way up!" said Pat quickly.

"That's it! I've known a hundred people to be stranded there in a snow-storm. Some of them spent Christmas there. The drifts were eight feet deep in places, and several cars were buried!"

But Pat was not to be shaken. If the Crow's Nest was the halting-place—then the kidnappers might be halted there. And this time she would know Cyril by sight. They could not escape!

"The Crow's Nest—and I'll pay double fare," said Pat. "I'm a reporter and it's a big news story."

The driver hesitated and then shrugged.

"All right—but put a bit about me in the paper. Talk of heroes—I'm one for sure."

"A hero's right," said Pat with a smile. "But maybe we shan't have to go as far as you think. The car I'm chasing may be stuck in a drift!"

PAT BRAVES THE BLIZZARD

THERE was hardly standing room in the Crow's Nest. It was the last inn for ten miles, and those ten miles covered the highest parts of the mountain road.

People who had persevered as far as the Crow's Nest usually lost heart when they saw the snowy road winding ahead. For they knew that if their cars got snowed up they would find themselves stranded far from help.

True there was a farmhouse or two just off the road, but a car might break down a mile or two from them, and in the snow and darkness a wanderer might become hopelessly lost.

When Pat Lovell's taxi-cab reached the Crow's Nest she had almost given up hope of seeing the kidnappers.

Not one red rear-lamp had showed ahead, and the taxi had made slow progress. Not only was the road deep in snow, but the night was pitch black, and a blizzard threatened.

When she stepped half-frozen from the taxi-cab, the girl reporter paid off the driver in case he wanted to go back.

There was fully a score of cars parked in and around the Crow's Nest, while farther down the road were two that had half-buried themselves in a drift.

"Now for it," Pat told herself as she walked into the crowded inn.

Travellers were making light of their predicament, treating it as a joke. Some were saying they would turn round and go back; others that daylight would mean they could go on. But the inn was gay with Christmas decorations, and there was plenty to eat and drink.

Pat walked amongst the crowd, looking for the woman who had been in the car. Her face was committed to memory, and Pat did not doubt her ability to recognise her again at first glance.

"No room," she was told by the manageress in the office. "Not one left, miss."

"I'm not wanting a room. I'm looking for a man and woman who are with a little boy," Pat explained.

But to her dismay the manageress shook her head.

"I'm afraid we've no boys staying

here," she said. "The people in No. 4 have a little girl, but there are no boys."

Disappointedly Pat turned away. It was evident that the kidnappers must have braved the dangers of the pass. Instead of halting, they had driven straight on. She questioned the man in charge of the car park and he confirmed her worst fears.

"Yes, miss, one car did go on," he said. "A dark coloured saloon it was. Reckon the folks in it must be crazy. They'll never get through. Someone will have to go and dig them out."

Pat's heart thumped. There was a chance yet! Anyone who went on on such a night as this must have an urgent mission, a reason not to loiter.

"I may be crazy," she told the attendant, "but I want to catch up with that car!"

The man gasped.

"Impossible! You'll never get anyone to take you, miss. Just listen to the wind! And it's begun to snow again!"

"But I must overtake that car—I must!" Pat gasped.

"Sorry, miss," said the car park attendant again, "but—" he broke off. "Yes, there's one chance," he said. "Perhaps Old Giles hasn't left yet."

He went into the inn, to return presently with an old man whose face was muffled almost out of sight.

"Ay—I'm going on," the old man said. "In a horse sleigh. But only to my farm."

"A sleigh?" asked Pat eagerly. "Oh, could I have a lift, please? I want to catch up a car in front."

"Ay," he said. "There's my missus and me—that's all. You're welcome, miss, but it's cold, I'm warning ye."

Pat knew how cold it was, but the kindly manageress of the hotel lent her rugs which she said Old Giles could return, and had a hot-water bottle filled.

As Pat did not explain why she was in such an urgent haste everyone was intrigued, but she did not want the kidnappers to be warned if by any chance they had left one of their number in the inn. The impression Pat tried to give was that her family were in that car ahead.

Five minutes later, well muffled up with a hot-water bottle to hug, she took the back seat of the sleigh. It was a simple affair but pulled by two horses, and Pat made a hurried note of it in her mind.

Every detail of this would bear description—the crowded inn, the snowdrifts, the cars buried—the comments and anecdotes of the snow-storm she had overheard, all were registered in her mind.

But her great need was to catch up with the kidnappers—to make sure they were ahead. And then—

Provided the kidnappers did not suspect her, Pat meant to play the part of a local country girl and do what they had done—kidnap Cyril. If that proved impossible, and they were well snowed up, then she meant to return with the news.

There were enough men at this inn to capture the kidnappers ten times over!

With the crowd from the inn cheering, the sleigh moved off through the driving snow. It was her first ride in a sleigh, and the easy movement, the clomp of the horses' hoofs was something worth remembering. Bells tingling, the sleigh went uphill at a pace cars had reason to envy on such a night.

But the snow drifted down still blindingly, and the cold was like a knife. Even with her hot-water bottle and her rugs, Pat was not proof against it.

Two miles they went, and then as the

snowstorm began to blow over, the old man turned to her.

"Red light up yonder. Car stuck in drift," he said.

Pat sat up, and the excitement sent her blood coursing. The end of the journey was in sight at last!

"STOP that kid snivelling," said the man angrily.

Two men, a woman, and the kidnapped boy waded rather than trudged through the snow. Already they had quarrelled, for the plan to cross the mountain had failed.

"No matter if we are kept here," said the man who had just spoken. "I know this district, and that house yonder will make a good hideout. The occupants are away, and there's food enough in the larder. I've made careful inquiries."

The woman was carrying Cyril, who now, thoroughly frightened by the unusualness of it all, was crying for his mother and his nanny.

"Hush, hush," said the woman. "Soon be home, son. Soon be home all right."

The men picked a way through the snow, found the path that led to the deserted farmhouse, and then easily forced an entrance by a lower window.

"Better get inside and light a fire," said the leader. "We'll get stuff unpacked from the car—and then run it over the edge. It won't be found in the snow until we've been gone a week."

But as they turned back they saw the light of the approaching sleigh and switched off the car lights.

Pat did not think that she would be recognised. It was hardly likely that the couple she had seen in the other car would know her face again. Nevertheless, she caught in her breath anxiously as the sleigh drew alongside the car.

"This isn't the one," she said to Old Giles.

"Snowed up, mister?" asked Old Giles.

"No, just having a rest," retorted the man in chauffeur's uniform.

Pat thrilled as she heard his voice—for it was the same that she had heard near the theatre urging the woman to keep the child quiet.

The kidnapers were found. And now—

She looked back at the men and saw that they were taking suitcases from the car; but Old Giles did not stop the sleigh. Though the snow had piled up in front of the car, the horses trod through, cleaving a way, and the sleigh rode the snow easily.

"Looks like they're going to the farmhouse yonder," said Old Giles. "Mebbe they've rented it. Londoners, by the look of 'em. Londoners do purty queer things."

Pat waited until the kidnapers were out of sight, then she asked the farmer to pull up.

"Here's a ten-shilling note for your trouble," she said. "And thanks a lot. I'm going to that house, too."

"That so, miss?" he asked, taking the note and thanking her. "Why, you ain't got luggage."

"In the car," said Pat, to save argument. "I'm going to spring a surprise on them!"

Pat stepped down from the sleigh, watched it go on, and then picked her way through deep snow. Reaching the now deserted car she looked around her. The male kidnapers were now gathered around the front of the house. Screened by a hedge, she crept forward until she could hear their voices.

"Sure the house is empty?" one man asked.

"Of course it is. If anyone were in

it they'd have hollered out before now," said the other.

Pat stole to the back of the house. The door was open, for the woman had entered with the boy. Peeping in, Pat saw the kitchen, and walked across it.

Just beyond was the staircase. She could hear the woman's voice in the front room with Cyril, and the men's outside as they dragged cases over the snow.

Softly Pat mounted the stairs.

All was dark and eerie above, and her heart was in her mouth. But the house seemed to be quite deserted and empty. Taking her small torch from her handbag, Pat flashed it cautiously about.

She was in a bed-room. A print over-all hung across a chair, and there was an apron in another corner.

"Servant's bed-room," decided Pat. "Good."

For Pat Lovell, having overheard that the men were not sure that the house was empty, had made up her mind to carry out a daring plan.

She sat on the bed and peeled off her shoes and stockings. Then she tousled her hair, and tucked up her frock.

With her winter coat wrapped about her, she looked as though she were in her dressing-gown, and that she had just been roused from bed.

you've been making. Want me to come down and help?"

The men and the woman exchanged grins, and Pat guessed that they were relieved that they had to do with someone so simple and stupid as she was pretending to be.

"Yes—come down," said the woman. "We need some hot tea and milk, and something to eat."

"All right," said Pat. "I won't be a minute."

Holding the candle aloft, she went into another upstairs room to see if there were any clothes she could borrow that would suit her new guise. There was a worn dressing-gown, and she decided that that would be the best thing to wear.

Considering that Cyril's father was a millionaire, he would be able to compensate the owner of this house for anything used or damaged.

The great thing was to rescue Cyril before he could be really hidden—and Pat Lovell, searching the upper rooms, saw something that gave her just the idea she wanted.

In one of the wardrobes was some small boy's clothing.

Pat, wrapped in the dressing-gown instead of her own coat, went down—



"Whatever is the meaning of this, pray?" snapped the woman. Pat didn't know what to say. Although she was sure these people were kidnapers, this little boy in no way resembled the missing Cyril!

Finding a candle in the far corner of the room, Pat lit it, held it up, and then went to the door.

"Who—who's there?" she quavered. She heard the startled voices below. "Someone in the house!" gasped the woman.

"Who—who's there?" asked Pat, pretending to be as stupid as she could. "Is it a burglar?"

She went to the head of the stairs and looked down.

At the foot of the stairs was the woman.

"Hullo, who are you?" she said. "Have we come to the wrong house?"

"Me? I'm the skivvy," said Pat, with a yawn. "No one didn't tell me anyone was coming here to stay."

"What, they forgot to tell you?" said one of the men boldly. "Well, that's a fine thing! That's why there's no fire, eh?"

"That's right, mister!" said Pat. "Didn't half wake me up the row

stairs, having dirtied her face a little and untidied her hair.

"Snowing, ain't it?" she asked.

"It is," said the woman. "Gef us some tea, please; and this little boy will want something, too."

Cyril, though white and frightened, was no longer crying, and he could not be tempted with any more chocolate. He had been told that if, when he was asked, he said his name was George, he could have chocolate. But now he had had enough.

"My name's Cywil," he said. "Not George."

"All right—Cyril, then," said the woman.

Pat took care not to give him too close a look.

"He's just like our Perce," she said. "Wonder you didn't wake Perce. Be nice for him and Perce to play, won't it?"

"It will," said the woman.

"What I thought," nodded Pat. "But he can't sleep in my room with Perce.

One's enough, and Perce gets to waking up at night."

Then, still yawning, Pat went to the kitchen, filled a kettle, and made a fire. As she worked she decided on the details of her plan.

Soon they would all go to bed. Cyril would go to bed, too; he would be sent up first. And in that fact Pat saw her chance.

Upstairs were clothes of some other small boy whom she chose to call Perce. And if she could but get five minutes alone with Cyril, then she could dress him in Perce's clothes.

Believing that there was a Perce, would the kidnappers be surprised to see a disguised Cyril go out of the house with Pat?

"Of course they won't," Pat told herself. "I'll fool them completely."

PAT'S DARING RUSE

PAT'S editor was displeased. He had heard about her crazy drive up to the pass; for the taxi-driver, acting on instructions, had taken word back to the office to that effect.

And now the editor himself was at the Crow's Nest. He had a car of his own, and he had driven to the inn as fast as he had dared; for rather than have one of his staff marooned at the Crow's Nest for a week—which could happen if the snow continued to fall—he had gone to bring her back.

He had thought that the Crow's Nest was his journey's end. Imagine his surprise, then, when, on making inquiries, he had learned that Pat had gone on up the pass on a sleigh!

"The girl must be crazy!" he muttered.

More determined than ever to find his girl reporter, he drove on past the Crow's Nest until his car was jammed in the snow, just as the other had been before.

He climbed out, looked ahead at the snow, groaned, and then saw the house lying back from the road.

To turn his car alone was impossible, for fear he went too far in reversing and shot over the edge; so, switching off the lights, he pulled out his pocket-torch and trudged towards the house.

Inside the house tempers were improving; for Pat had made tea, and some hot milk for poor little Cyril.

But, at Pat's suggestion, Cyril had his meal upstairs in the room he was to share that night with the woman.

"He's ever so like you," said Pat to the woman. "Anyone can see he's your son."

"Yes," said the woman, managing not to smile. "So everyone says."

But Pat was merely making quite sure that she did not seem suspicious at all; and when she overheard their comments she smiled.

"Half-witted, that girl!" said one of the men. "If Perce is like her I pity the child!"

Pat, on being told she wasn't wanted again, yawned, and then said good-night; but the moment she was upstairs she went into Cyril's room.

He had been left with a light burning, and he lay awake, eyes wide with fright. He was past crying. His throat ached, and crying did not seem to help at all, for no one took any notice of him.

"All right, darling," said Pat softly. "I'm going to take you back to nanny." Cyril sat upright.

"You take me right away?" he asked eagerly. "Now?"

"Yes. But I'm going to call you Perce," said Pat, "and I'm going to dress you in different clothes."

PRIZEWINNERS ALL

Result of Recent "Story" Competition

There were so many excellent entries that it has been difficult to select the nine prizewinners; but after careful consideration your Editor has awarded the FIRST PRIZE of £2 to:

Mattie Clarke, 32, Hairst Street, Renfrew, Scotland.

The eight CONSOLATION PRIZES, each of 5s., have been awarded to:

Sheila M. Wood, 39, Shepherd Lane, Thurnscoe, Rotherham; Freda Adler, 4, Albert Avenue, Queen's Park, Glasgow; Irene Sternkiel, 111, Sandringham Road, Hackney, E.8; Winifred Temple, 12, Hollingbourne Place, West Derby, Liverpool; Kathleen Broadhurst, 44, Fauconberg Road, Chiswick, W.4; Gladys Plant, 76, St. Paul's Road, Canonbury, N.1; Margaret Helliwell, 11, Birkhall Terrace, Pellon Lane, Halifax; Dorothy Anderson, 20, Farm Road, Garden City, Queensferry, nr. Chester.

All the prizemoney was sent off so as to reach the fortunate winners well before Christmas.

She helped him to put on the old suit she had found, and wrapped a scarf around his head so that his face was half hidden; then she led him out of the room, but at that moment there came a knock on the front door.

One of the men emerged from the sitting-room and opened the front door an inch or two.

"Well," he said, "who are you? What do you want?"

A voice came to Pat then that nearly made her fall downstairs.

"Pardon my intrusion at this late hour—" said the editor.

Pat let out an amazed gasp; but she quickly got over the shock, and soon saw how she could turn the editor's unexpected arrival to her own advantage. Putting down Cyril, she whispered to him:

"Wait!"

Then she clattered downstairs.

"Why, it's Mr. Hicks!" she cried excitedly.

Jolly things every Schoolgirl can Knit

How would you like to knit a lovely present for daddy, mummy or your school-chum? Well, even a very little girl can make a "pixie" hood for herself, a scarf or shawl, a "Dusky Sue" tea-cosy, and "Bunny" bedroom slippers, and there are such hosts of other jolly knitted things. It tells you all about them and exactly how to do it, in this BESTWAY book, which costs only sixpence. You'll like the "pixie" pictures in it, too. Buy one and start knitting today. Ask for

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citedly. "All right, mister; leave it to me," she added.

The man opened the door; and the editor stepped in, gaping at Pat—at her tousled hair, at her dirty face, and at the dressing-gown.

"It's Mr. Hicks—my boss' best friend," Pat told the kidnapper; then, winking at the editor, she said: "This gentleman is one of the boss' friends who've come to stay here. I suppose you've come to collect Perce?"

"I—I—I—" faltered the bewildered editor.

In another minute his stupefaction would give the game away, for already the kidnapper was eyeing him suspiciously.

"Come up and see Perce, Mr. Hicks," said Pat. "I'll have to wake him up and dress him. I didn't think you was coming for him till to-morrow."

"Oh, I—I changed my mind!" stammered the editor—puzzled, but loyally backing Pat up.

The kidnapper stood aside.

"Come right in," he invited, his suspicions set at rest. "If the skivvy says you're all right, that goes for me, too. Collect young Perce and skiddoo."

Pat hurried upstairs, and the editor followed her. Once they were on the landing, out of sight, she explained. The editor gasped, but he swiftly realised what was expected of him. Taking the disguised boy by the hand, he led him to the stairs.

"Come on, Perce," he said. "This way, my boy—this way!"

Down the stairs he went, and, watched by the kidnapper, led Cyril out into the night.

Pat locked the door of the bed-room, changed into her own clothes, and climbed on to the sill. The snow reached almost up to it, and escape was easy.

Five minutes later Pat reached the editor's car. Between them he and Pat managed to turn it round; and Cyril gave a squeal of joy as the girl reporter seated herself beside him.

"We going to see mummy?" he demanded. "You take me to mummy?"

Pat nodded and put a soothing arm around him.

"Yes, dear, we're taking you straight home to mummy," she smiled.

But that they were unable to do, for they hadn't sufficient petrol to take them back to the town. The editor had come out in such a hurry that he had not looked at the petrol-gauge. So they stopped at the Crow's Nest, where there was also a filling station.

While the car was being fueled, Pat took Cyril inside to have something to eat and a glass of hot milk. She was instantly recognised as the girl who had been in such a tearing hurry that evening, and everyone was obviously curious to know what had happened.

So Pat, with the editor's permission, told them the whole story, causing a sensation such as the Crow's Nest had never known before. And Cyril became everyone's pet, so that when Mr. Grayson, the editor, said they really had to be going, even Cyril didn't want to go.

But he forgot all that when he was restored to his mother.

THE kidnappers, marooned by the snow and unable to escape, except on foot, were quickly arrested by the police; and next day the "Midshire Gazette" issued a special edition containing the full story—a story the London papers were glad to reprint.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Another enthralling story about Pat Lovell next Friday. Make sure of reading it by ordering your GIRLS' CRYSTAL now.

Kaye of the Kennels



A NEW PATIENT FOR KAYE

"YOU'LL need gloves, Miss Chalmers. The dog is awfully savage."

Kaye Chalmers smiled at the idea, for although, as kennel owner, she had to handle savage dogs, she had never needed gloves for the purpose.

"He won't hurt me, Mr. Lawrence," she said, and followed him into his house.

Kaye had been summoned urgently to take away a savage dog, for her fame in handling difficult animals had spread far and wide in the district where Chalmers Kennels were established. By love and understanding Kaye could master almost any dog. So she had no fears of Rufus.

Following Mr. Lawrence up the stairs, Kaye presently heard the sound of a girl's sobbing.

"My niece, Phyllis! Rufus is her dog," said Mr. Lawrence. "And she may make an effort to prevent you taking him."

So saying, he flung open the door of a bedroom, standing aside for Kaye to enter.

On the bed, her arms round a cross-bred dog, was Phyllis. The dog, his head on her lap, lay on his back, looking up at her.

Kaye drew up amazed. Anything less like a vicious dog could not have been imagined. Rufus looked sloppy—nothing less.

"There he is—take him!" said Mr. Lawrence to her curtly. "Phyllis, let him go!"

Kaye took a step forward, and then hesitated. She had never felt so wretched in her life. Phyllis, moist-eyed, was clutching her pet, and he, unaware that this was a really serious situation, rolled over and looked at Kaye, his tail thumping.

"You dare take him!" exclaimed Phyllis, tossing back her mop of brown, bobbed hair defiantly. "He's my dog! No one's going to take him from me. How can you be so hateful? He's not mischievous, nor savage. He's a darling—and I love him! And he loves me! And he's as good as gold. No one else has ever complained. He never did anything wrong until he came to live with uncle, here."

"Then he can go away. I don't care how good or how bad he is anywhere else," her uncle stormed. "If you want to stay, Phyllis, you must stay without him. If you can't part with him, then you can go back to Aunt Maud. It'll be good-bye to that fine boarding-school then—"

Phyllis looked as though she had been struck; and Kaye could not miss the horror in her expression. Yet not for a moment did Phyllis weaken. She clung to Rufus.

"I—I'd rather have Rufus," she said chokily, "than all the boarding-schools."

Kaye almost wished that she had not come. All her sympathies were with Phyllis, but she could see that the uncle was as hard as nails. He would not give in. If Phyllis kept Rufus, then she would lose the chances in life which otherwise her uncle would give her.

"Very well, if that's how stupid and obstinate you are!" said Mr. Lawrence bitterly. "Keep the dog—and go back to Aunt Maud and poverty."

He turned to the door, eyes glinting, in a bad temper, and completely stubborn mood that knew no yielding.

But Kaye had been watching Rufus, and had seen how he made an odd movement with his paws, more like a cat washing its ears than a true doggy movement. And something leapt into her mind.

About a dog who was thought to be rough and destructive—but who was really gentle and kind, as Kaye Chalmers set out to prove.

By IDA MELBOURNE

"Mr. Lawrence—one moment!" she called suddenly.

He turned back, scowling.

"Well, what is it?"

Kaye took two steps forward, and while Phyllis watched, puzzled, and her uncle stood frowning, Kaye dropped to her knees beside Rufus and groped with tender fingers under his chin.

Suddenly, eyes blazing with anger, she sprang up.

"Mr. Lawrence, someone has deliberately tormented this dog—has tried to make him savage. There's a cord tied round his throat—a thin cord, biting into the skin, giving him awful pain!"

"A cord about his neck!" gasped Phyllis. "Oh, the poor darling! I didn't know—"

"A knife, please, Mr. Lawrence!" Kaye said curtly.

She could not help the curtness, for her first thought was that Mr. Lawrence—the dog's obvious enemy—must be the culprit, even though she could not believe it to be an act of deliberate, intentional cruelty.

Mr. Lawrence, looking less angry and far less bombastic, produced a small pocket-knife, and Kaye very gently and carefully eased the tight cord and then snipped it through.

Rufus' reaction was pitiful to see. He jumped up, he licked Kaye's hands, he pranced and whined, and then turned his neck to and fro.

Phyllis, horrified to think that she had not noticed it, examined his neck, hugged, and consoled him; and it was obvious that she, at any rate, was not the culprit.

"I think you are right, Mr. Lawrence. He had better come away for a bit," said Kaye, in quiet but grim tone. "That neck needs attention, for one thing; and for another, I'll try him out."

Phyllis clung to her pet, and then released him, for it was quite obvious to her that Kaye was kind, a lover of animals, and the last person to make her lovely Rufus unhappy.

"Please make his neck well," she begged Kaye. "I don't mind your having him now for awhile. And I'll go with him to the kennels and make him understand that he's to stay with

you," said Phyllis eagerly. "Can I, uncle?"

He nodded assent, and Kaye turned to him.

"This ought to be investigated, Mr. Lawrence. Whoever tied that cord round Rufus' neck should be prosecuted for wicked cruelty."

In somewhat shaken voice he agreed. "Of course—of course! Pray do not think I did. I am not cruel. Only just—and perhaps strict. It is a shocking thing. I—I never dreamed—"

As Kaye and Phyllis turned to the door it opened, and a boy looked in.

"Oh—" he said, as though surprised to see them, and then held out a book.

It was tattered and torn, and well chewed at the corners, with the clear imprint of teeth marks.

"Uncle, I shall have to buy a new Latin grammar," he said. "I think Rufus has been trying to learn Latin."

"Oh! H'm! Yes, very well, Richard," said his uncle gruffly.

Kaye looked at the boy searchingly. "One moment. Do you know anything about a cord tied round Rufus' neck?" she asked.

Richard gave a start, and stared at her, then looked from Kaye to his uncle, and finally at Rufus.

"Cord—" he said, in a vague tone. "No—why?"

Kaye explained, watching him closely, and then his face cleared.

"Oh! My word. So that's what he was doing, eh?" he asked. "I saw an errand boy fumbling with Rufus' collar this afternoon. Phew! What a dirty trick."

"Dirty is right! I'd like to know which errand boy—and then I'd have a word with him," said Kaye indignantly.

But Richard did not know. There had been no trade name on the cycle, and he had never seen the boy before; but at least he said that he would know the lad again.

"All right. I'll track him down," vowed Kaye. "Come on, Phyllis. I'll show you that he'll be quite at home."

No sooner were they gone than Mr. Lawrence turned to Richard.

"Did Rufus attack the boy? Was there any reason for his tying that cord about his neck?"

"No, uncle," said Richard. "Not that I know of—although you know what Rufus is. I dare say he asked for it."

"I dare say," his uncle agreed, frowning. "But I do not like the idea to get abroad that I or anyone else in this house might have done it. That girl from the kennels gave me a most suspicious look."

"Oh, no one would think you could do such a thing, uncle!" said Richard, in flattering tone.

His uncle just grunted, and walked away. Had he turned back he might have seen Richard scowling, hands dived into pockets.

"Why had that girl to come and mess things up?" he muttered. "Hang her—interfering! If she cures him, I'll have to start all over again."

And then he added, with a faint, leering grin:

"Gosh, it's lucky dogs can't talk."

TRYING OUT RUFUS

KAYE had shown Phyllis round the kennels, had introduced her to all the pets, to Brutus, the great St. Bernard, who was so intelligent, to the spaniels, to the terrier pup, to the Dalmatian, to Ming Wu, the Pekie, and one or two others who were making temporary stay, either for

veterinary treatment, or because their people were away.

"What a lovely life it must be," breathed Phyllis. "And how they all like you."

"Oh, they'll love anyone who's kind to them," said Kaye, smiling. "Dogs have great big hearts. Unless there's something wrong with them, they never bear malice as humans do."

The tour having been completed, Kaye returned to the kennel which was Rufus' new temporary home.

Rufus was puzzled. He quite liked his kennel, and hoped that his mistress would stay with him.

In the other home, where the man with the gruff voice lived, everyone was cross with him. Everything he did was wrong—even when he had been lured on to do it. He chased a ball flung by Richard, and then he was smacked.

Rufus looked at Phyllis. She was his one firm friend, who never failed him; and as clearly as he could express the idea with his eyes, with his drooping ears, he said:

"Oh, please don't leave me, mistress." He put a paw through the bars, and with a smile Phyllis shook it.

"Dear thing," she smiled mistily. "It's not for long, and you'll be happier here for a day or two; and I'll come in before lessons, after lessons—just as often as I can. And no one will torment you here, Rufus."

Then she turned rather hurriedly, and her eyes had that queer glistening that Rufus had seen in them before when she was sad.

He could hardly believe it when she walked away. He whined. He stood up at the bars of the kennel door; he sat down and stared, and, ears back, gave a piteous whine that nearly broke poor Phyllis' heart.

"All right—all right," said Kaye soothingly, pressing Phyllis' arm. "I know how you feel. But I'll make him happy while he's here. Honest I will."

Phyllis nodded her head, unable to speak for the lump in her throat, and rather hurriedly went. Kaye loitered at the gate, then turned back to Rufus, playing with him, petting him, until she had managed to take his mind for a while from his mistress.

No dog was unhappy long at the kennels; and even those who really loved their masters and mistresses with deep love did not fret. Kaye saw to that; she saw that they had the love at the kennels that they had grown used to at home.

"Now, old chappie," she said to him. "You tore up a cushion, did you? Tore it to bits. And books, and tore the seat from a chair, and ripped up a rug, and knocked over a table, and broke down flowers, and dug a hole in the lawn. Why?"

Rufus put his head on one side, but he could not reply.

There was an old cushion in the kitchen of her house, so Kaye fetched it, and gave it to him. Pups were inclined to tear things up, in sheer destructiveness, but Rufus should have been beyond that age. Nevertheless, that was apparently how he had behaved.

But the cushion meant nothing to Rufus, and he made no effort to tear it. When he had torn the other cushion there had been his best bone hidden in the centre, and the only way of getting it out had been to tear the cushion. But this thing—poof. It was not his business.

It did not surprise Kaye that he betrayed no mischievous tendency; she did not expect him to do so. As a further test, she put in an old book, and left him the things there until morning.

When Kaye awoke next morning, she made Rufus' kennel her first port of call. He was asleep—lying on the cushion, which was not torn anywhere, while the book, unharmed, lay in the corner where she had thrown it.

"H'm, nothing mischievous about you, old chap," she smiled. "It looks to me as though you have been the victim of what is called a frame-up, eh?"

Rufus wagged his tail, and then was let out for a scamper, with good-natured Brutus and the spaniels. A fine time he had, but Kaye, to make sure he did not escape, had blocked up the secret hole in the fence—the hole that the dogs thought was their secret.

Together he and Brutus scampered, but Brutus was first back with a somewhat worried look, and ran to Kaye.

"Hallo—something wrong! What is it?" she asked. "Where's Rufus?"

She called Rufus, ran this way and that, and finally went to the hole in the fence. But it was blocked up as she had left it, and he could not possibly have got through.

A moment later he came running back, ears down, a most hang-dog manner, and tail between his legs.

"Now, what ever have you been up to?" Kaye asked.

Almost as though in answer to the question there came a furious ringing of the gate bell, not just an ordinary ringing, but a long, continuous ring.

Kaye hurried to the gate, opened it, and stepped back as a middle-aged woman with angry face walked in.

"Who owns these kennels?" the woman demanded fiercely.

"I do," said Kaye.

"Oh, you do! It's a pity you don't look after your dogs better, then!" the woman snapped. "Have you got a dog here with a reddish brown coat, rather like a spaniel?"

The description fitted Rufus, but Kaye shook her head. Rufus had not been out. He could not have jumped the fence, and the hole was blocked.

"If you have a complaint to make about a dog," said Kaye, "it's not a dog from here—"

But the woman marched past her. She was a militant type of woman, one who held her short umbrella as though it were a club, and by ill-luck within three strides she saw Rufus.

"That's the dog! He's the one that flew at me as I walked down the path!" she cried. "He jumped up at me from behind and knocked me forward. Look at the mud on my skirt!"

The woman pulled open her winter coat, and mud marks on her frock showed clearly she had fallen on her knees in the mud.

"I want compensation. Is the dog yours?" stormed the angry woman.

Kaye bit her lip. The last thing she wanted was for a complaint about Rufus to reach Mr. Lawrence's ears.

"No," she admitted. "But I am looking after him. Please let me pay for any damage!"

"The frock will have to be cleaned. I'll send you the bill. But that's not the main thing. I want to know that that dog is kept under control. I shall write to the owner and complain about your negligence."

Kaye made an anxious appeal.

"Oh, please don't do that! It would do me so much harm. I really didn't let the dog out. I can't think that he got out. In fact," she added desperately, "I don't believe it was that dog."

The woman glared at her.

"You don't. Well, a boy saw it happen—a boy with red hair. I'll find that boy, and he'll give evidence."

Then, demanding Mr. Lawrence's

address, she was given it, and stamped away.

As she turned, Kaye saw on her back the marks of muddy paws, and at such height that they must have been made by a dog of Rufus' size.

In dismal mood, Kaye turned back to Rufus, who still wore his guilty look. "Oh, Rufus, it was you, was it?" she asked. "But how on earth did you get out?"

If Rufus had jumped the fence he was an excellent jumper.

Kaye determined to solve the riddle. She brought a bone and threw it over the fence, telling Rufus to fetch it.

Rufus rushed at the fence and jumped; but he got little more than half-way, for the fence was high.

"Fetch it!" Kaye commanded, knowing that if there were a secret way out Rufus would use it and return with the bone. Up and down the fence he ran, barking, pausing, looking up at Kaye in appeal. But if he had found a secret way out before it was closed to him now.

Deeply puzzled, Kaye thought it over. That Rufus had a double seemed the only reasonable solution. But was it likely that he would have a double here, as well as at home? And if he had a double, where was that dog at this moment?

Kaye climbed up on to the fence and looked over. There was no sign of another dog, and whistling did not bring one into view.

Then, remembering that the woman's muddled frock showed that there was mud enough to leave footprints, she put Rufus on a lead and took him through the gate to the field where the path ran.

There were marks there, but not many, for the path was seldom used, and it had rained during the night, obliterating earlier marks.

Kaye's bewilderment increased, for the pad marks were unmistakably Rufus'.

It was half-way through the morning that Kaye received a call from Mr. Lawrence. He arrived in angry mood, highly indignant.

"So even you cannot keep the dog in order!" he cried. "I have had a complaint about him from some woman. He knocked her down from behind. Just the cowardly trick that fool-dog would play. And she's wanting damages."

Kaye apologised, showed him the fence and the blocked-up hole, and asked how he thought Rufus had got out.

"Through the gate!" he snorted. "You or someone else left it open. As you were in charge I shall expect you to pay the damages. One more complaint and I'll take desperate measures."

Kaye drew up, eyes rounding, as she guessed what he meant.

"You don't mean you'll have him put to sleep?" she jerked out.

"I might. If it hadn't been for Richard begging me not to I'd have done it before."

He turned away then, and Kaye, worried, and feeling that in some way she was negligent, returned to the kennels and sought Rufus. She called him; there was no response. Then, alarmed, she searched for him.

But Rufus had gone. In the same clever or magic way as before he had left the kennels; but this time he did not return.

Kaye, guessing he might make for home, hurried for her cycle. At all costs she had to prevent his being home when Mr. Lawrence returned there for lunch, for that would be Rufus' last act.

But Rufus was not making for home. He was in the field adjoining the



From one Girl to Another

Cheery Chatter and Helpful Hints by Penelope

(to them) exactly as they did before you vanished.

You just pounce on the two in which the wider border is now to the left, you see!

Sorry my explanation is a bit long, but even the simplest of tricks has a habit of spinning itself out in words, I've always noticed.

SO GAY!

What do you do with the charms that you get from crackers—and from the Christmas pudding?

I always smother myself with gaudy jewellery on Christmas Day, whether tie-pins, flashing rings, or savage bangles.

This year, I think I'll slip all the charms that have loops on a piece of ribbon, and tie this around my wrist. It'll certainly look gay—even if it doesn't make me look expensive!

A REVIVAL

If your mother should happen to have a muff—made either of fur or of velvet—that has perhaps been passed on to her from *her* mother, then do tell her how lucky she is. For this revival in Edwardian style is making muffs "the tops" in fashion again.

SO LUXURIOUS!

Don't fur-tops on gloves make your hands and wrists deliciously cosy? And they look so luxurious, too.

If you're going to do any sewing over the holiday, do consider stitching some strips of fur-cloth edging around the tops of your gloves—and also at the ends of a cravat-scarf to match. Then you can wear the scarf ends



outside your coat, and show the tops of your gloves as well.

They'll look so smart and festive—and the fur-edging only costs sixpence for half a yard.

Have a lovely time, my dears, won't you?

Your own

PENELOPE

P.S.—Again lots of thanks for your sweet Christmas cards.

A Merry, Merry Christmas to You All!

THIS, of course, is your own Penelope here, feeling just as excited as you all are—because it's Christmas.

I do hope you'll all have a perfectly glorious time, with lots of goodies to eat, pretty things to wear, and joyous things to do!

Wouldn't it be gorgeous if it were to snow?

Why is it, I want to know, that it always seemed to do this when I was a small infant—but doesn't seem to have done so since?

Still, I mustn't grumble—not at Christmas. As long as we don't have one of those dark, blanket-y fogs that we had last year on Christmas Day, I shan't mind what the weather does.

A BAFFLING TRICK

Here's a jolly good card trick I want you to try out on the family on Christmas Day. It's absolutely guaranteed to baffle completely—except any who might happen to know it, of course.

You take four court cards out of a pack—say a King, two Queens, and Jack (or Knave, if you prefer the word).

Now, if you look at the face of the cards carefully, you will see that the white border on the right side of the picture is wider than the one in the left.

So lay these four cards on the table, being careful to place the wider border to the right in each case.

Then, with mysterious chatter, tell the family that you want them to turn round *two* of the cards while you are out of the room—or hide behind the settee, or something.

They are not to be completely turned, mind, but the heads that were at the top should be placed at the bottom.

You disappear, and return when called.

To the family's undying bewilderment and admiration, you are then able to pick out the two cards which were moved—even though they look

kennels, dodging back from a red-haired boy in shabby clothes.

"Go on home—home, you fool!" snapped the boy.

Rufus sat back and looked at him with mistrust, with dislike, and he did not obey. The boy might be wearing shabby clothes and red hair, but to Rufus he was still the boy who lived in

his mistress' house—a nasty, horrid, teasing boy.

"Here you are! You'll never get it—never!" said the boy, and held up something in his hand, something precious to Rufus that he had had since a pup—a small blue ball.

But it was cunningly tied to a tough piece of thin cord, and every time he

jumped for it, it was whipped away. For weeks he had been trying to get that ball, and now he almost gave up hope.

The boy tossed the ball and dodged back. As he did so, the low branch of a tree caught his wig and knocked it off. Like a flash Rufus seized it, and, dodging him, raced back to the kennels' gate and jumped at it. Then, with the boy close behind, he jumped half-way up the gate and dropped the red wig over.

In fury, the boy arrived, climbing the gate. Then came Brutus, angry that anyone should try to climb his gate. Like the Charge of the Light Brigade itself, he arrived, and the boy did not wait. He fell back from the gate to the road in sheer fright, and Brutus, with a slither of feet, crashed into the gate.

Then, picking up the wig, Brutus trotted with it to his kennel and dropped it there, a trophy of war.

Just then Kaye and Phyllis appeared, cycling hard.

THE BOY WITH RED HAIR

KAYE hardly knew what to say. She had gone to Phyllis' house, and, as it was a Saturday, she was at home. Kaye had told her of Rufus' latest misdeed, of her uncle's threat, and the fact that he was now missing. Together they returned to the kennels.

Seeing him now, Phyllis was almost hysterical with joy.

"Look—look! There he is!" she cried.

Rufus ran to her, leaping, crying out with joy. Hurling her cycle aside, Phyllis hugged him to her.

Kaye, watching sadly, knew that these two could not be parted. At all costs, the mystery of Rufus must be solved.

"Come inside!" she said to Phyllis. "Let's see if you can find his secret way out."

But Rufus was searching for the wig. He was trying to tell them the important thing—that the nasty boy was here; that he had been teased, tormented.

He sniffed around, and then leisurely Brutus rose from his kennel, and, with his wonderful sagacity, produced it.

Rufus took it, and dropped it at Kaye's feet.

"Hallo! A wig! How queer!" said Kaye.

She looked in it, and saw one or two dark hairs inside. She turned it over, and gave a sudden exclamation.

"The boy with red hair—the one who saw Rufus with the woman! It was the wig he wore. Boys don't wear wigs—unless a disguise! And the dark hair inside!" she exclaimed.

Kaye looked at Phyllis eagerly, new hope in her heart.

"Phyllis, I'm sure of it. There's someone scheming to make poor Rufus seem mischievous. I suspected your cousin Richard. You don't think he'd like you to run away—to leave him the only one to share your uncle's money?"

Phyllis laughed.

"That's rather a horrid thing to suggest," she said. "But, of course, it would actually mean that if I ran away."

Kaye made up her mind, and suddenly new enlightenment came.

"The young rascal! If it's true, then we can prove it!"

"How?" asked Phyllis.

"Rufus can do it," said Kaye.

She ran into the house, and reappeared with the wig. Stooping, she gave it to Rufus, telling him to hold it tightly; then, leading him to the fence, she lifted him over.

"He'll drop it," said Phyllis.

Kaye opened the gate and let Brutus out; then she went farther along the fence where there was a tree, and, taking cover, peered over.

It was a minute later that she heard a snarling. Then came a muttering, too. Presently Brutus came into view, then Rufus.

And following Rufus was a boy with dark hair.

"Richard!" gasped Phyllis.

To and fro Rufus dodged. Luring him with a small ball, Richard got close to him, and snatched at the wig, but somehow could not free it from the dog.

"Brutus, hold him!" shouted Kaye.

The boy turned; but Brutus was upon him, holding his jacket, and from his grip there was no escape.

A moment later Kaye and Phyllis

were on the scene, and the first thing Phyllis did was to snatch the blue ball from Richard's hand.

"That's Rufus' ball! It's been lost for weeks, and he loves it, as I did my dollies when I was small!" she cried.

Kaye looked at the piece of string and saw daylight.

"Teasing him with that—ch?" she said grimly. "Well, he teased you with the wig, for I tied it to his collar with string in such a way that it stayed in his mouth! You sly little rascal! We know your name! You wanted Phyllis to have to choose between Rufus and staying with your uncle, and you knew full well that she'd choose poverty and Rufus!"

Then she found a small hook in the string, and to the hook was just a small thread of brown material.

"Ah!" said Kaye. "So you pinned his ball to the back of that woman's coat, and he jumped to get it, knocking her over! That's why he had jumped at the postman, and done other damage—all to get the ball, is it?"

Richard was chalk-white.

There was no chance of argument or dispute. Kaye went to Mr. Lawrence with the whole story, and, in face of all the evidence, he could not disbelieve it.

It was not Phyllis who was sent away, who lost her chance in life, but the cunning Richard. And Rufus stayed on in the house, to endear himself to the uncle as much as to Phyllis.

For that Phyllis thanked Kaye; but Kaye, smiling, shook her head.

"Rufus did it," she said. "And if I had used more brain I might have known how he got out of the kennels. It was quite simple. Rufus was lifted over by Richard, of course, and then lifted back."

"Of course!" said Phyllis happily.

"But I still owe everything to you, Kaye. And so does Rufus—don't you, pet?"

"Woof!" said Rufus.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Another of Ida Melbourne's charming and appealing stories featuring Kaye and her pets will appear in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Be sure to order your copy in advance.

her indiscretion had served to arouse the prefect's suspicions.

"What d'you mean?" she demanded. "Oh, n-n-nothing. Shure and 'twas myself who was only kidding," stammered the abashed Irish girl.

Florrie frowned. A flicker of uneasiness crossed her face.

For another moment or two she continued to survey the three chums angrily, then, biting her lip, she picked up her coat and hat and stamped her way out of the dormitory.

Linda, more worried than she cared to show, turned to the window and looked down at the quad.

The rest of the Fourth was just preparing to leave for Hanthorpe. From the cycle-shed they streamed, wheeling their machines. All were in the best of spirits and Linda's uneasiness deepened as she saw Florrie loom into sight.

The prefect flailed several of the Fourth Formers. It was obvious that she was questioning them.

As the last of the Fourth Formers went cycling away, Florrie was joined by Lena Craike.

"Buck up, the taxi will be here in a minute or two!" Lena urged.

But Florrie did not budge.

SECRET FRIENDS OF THE SPEED GIRL

(Continued from page 276.)

"You go and meet it, Lena," she said. "I'm wondering if that Secret Three have some game on. That letter may have been a trick. Anyway, I'm taking no chances. I'm going to ask the Head to call at the track first—make certain that Miss Nemo doesn't race."

Linda, leaning out of the window, straining every nerve, went white. In utter consternation she turned and looked at her chums.

"D'you hear that?" she gasped. "Quick—get your robes! We must stop Florrie!"

Terry rushed to the cupboard where their hoods and gowns were hidden, and swiftly they donned them.

"Come on. There's not a second to waste," said Linda.

Leading the way to the window, she clambered over the sill and out on to the fire-escape. Mary and Terry joined her, and frantically they went rushing down the iron steps.

To reach the front door of the headmistress' house Florrie had to make a

detour around the wall, but the foot of the fire-escape led right into Miss Grange's garden. Their hearts thumping, the Secret Three tore recklessly over the flower beds and suddenly Linda grabbed her chums by the arm.

"Bob down—quick," she whispered. "Here she comes!"

As they saw the unsuspecting prefect pass through the doorway in the garden wall, they all crouched excitedly behind a clump of bushes.

Unsuspectingly the prefect stalked on up the gravel path. She drew abreast of the bushes, when suddenly, to her amazement, she saw three hooded figures leap into view.

The startled Florrie got no time to struggle. Her arms were held tightly to her sides. Then she felt herself thrust forward.

"Quick march, you spalpeen!" ordered an Irish voice, and willy-nilly the breathless, furious prefect found herself being propelled down a side path.

Will the Secret Three's plan work? Be sure not to miss next Friday's chapters, which bring this serial to a most thrilling conclusion. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.