

Thrilling School and Mystery Story Starts To-day

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EVERY FRIDAY.

Week Ending January 14th, 1939.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{2^D} WEEKLY



A SURPRISE FOR THE MYSTERY GIRL

Her name was on the label, so the luggage must be intended for her. But it was addressed to St. Kit's School!

(See "Her Unknown Enemy at School," the grand new story that begins inside.)

HER UNKNOWN ENEMY AT School



Extra-long Opening Chapters of an Enthralling
New School and Mystery Story

By GAIL WESTERN

A STRANGE ARRIVAL

HOWS the voting going, Letty?"

Standing in the Fourth Form corridor at St. Kit's School, Olive French looked anxiously across at her chum. Letty Johnson, fat and jolly, consulted the notebook she clutched in one plump hand, then she looked up with a chuckle.

"Fine!" she declared. "You're five votes to the good already. Don't you worry, old scout; before the day's out you'll be Form captain right enough!"

"Oh, I hope you're right, Letty! But it seems too good to be true. Fancy being leader of the Fourth—"

Olive ended with a sigh. The very prospect made her thrill. How proud she would be if she were elected! And how hard she would work to make the Fourth a Form to be proud of at St. Kit's!

During the last few terms the Fourth had not done so well—either at sport or at lessons. The trouble had been they had had no really enthusiastic leader. Until now their Form captain had always been appointed by the Head—never elected by popular vote of the girls.

But all that was changed now. St. Kit's had a new headmistress, and although this was only the first day of the term, Miss Bramleigh, the new Head, had already announced a number of changes—the most welcome of them all being the decision that all Form captains should be elected by their Form-fellows, not chosen by those in authority.

Letty, guessing what this election meant to her chum, gave her an encouraging clap across the shoulders.

"Keep smiling!" she urged. "You'll beat Stephanie hollow! But we mustn't stand here gassing. There's heaps more canvassing to be done. Half a tick while I pop into the baggage-room. There's bound to be a gang of girls in there, unpacking."

As her fat chum crossed the corridor and disappeared into the room opposite, Olive waited with fast-beating heart. Through the open door came a buzz of voices:

"Rather! Put me down!"

"Same here! I'm voting for Olive!"

"Of course we'll vote for her!"

Then Letty reappeared, grinning all over her face.

"Another four promises," she announced. "That's nine to the good. Come on, let's see how many more we can find."

From room to room they went, tackling every girl they saw. Olive, as candidate, didn't like appealing for votes; but Letty was insistent, because it was being done by the rest of the school.

Banging open the Common-room door, she grabbed her more reserved chum by the arm.

"Come on, show yourself, Olive!" she chuckled. "Here you are, kidlets! Here's your future leader, Olive French, the sportiest girl in the school! Olive French, the—"

She stopped abruptly, for amongst the group of Fourth Formers gathered around the fire was a tall, haughty-looking girl with smartly waved blonde hair—Stephanie Warner, the rival candidate!

Stephanie had in her hand a huge box of chocolates, from which she had been urging the other girls to take all they wanted. But as the chums entered she looked round with a glare.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she snorted. "Well, you can buzz off, Letty Johnson! Your precious chum won't find any votes here!"

"That's what you say, old scout," commented Letty coolly; "but some of the others may hold different views. Well, what about it, girls?" she asked,

To go to a boarding school like St. Kit's had long been an ambition of Jess Grant's. And at last that wish was granted. But still there was a cloud to mar Jess' happiness. What had happened to the mysterious benefactress who was paying her fees—and why had she a secret enemy?

pencil poised in readiness over the open notebook. "Can I put any of your names down?"

One girl hesitated, then rather doubtfully nodded. The rest, however, shook their heads.

"Not likely!"

"Stephanie's our champion!"

"We're sticking to the old firm!"

"Right-ho!" said Letty, closing her books. "It's a free country. You can vote for whom you like. I only hope you won't regret it, that's all. Cheerio, Stephanie! See you at the poll. Meanwhile, please accept my fond regrets."

"Regrets! What are you talking about?" demanded Stephanie.

Letty winked around.

"Oh, I was just commiserating with you in advance," she explained. "You're bound to lose, you know."

And, leaving the rival candidate glaring, and some of the girls laughing, despite themselves, the fat girl nodded to Olive and they both withdrew. But once the door had been closed Letty's smile faded.

"It's not going to be as easy as I thought," she confessed. "I didn't bargain on that set of chumps falling for Stephanie's glittering charms."

Olive caught in her breath.

"You mean—"

"That our majority's wiped out. So far the voting's dead even. But keep smiling, old scout. The election isn't until just before tea."

They continued their canvassing, with spirits now rising, now falling. Though last term Stephanie, who had been appointed captain by the headmistress, had been very slack, and caused a lot of friction to break out in the Form, yet many of the girls thought they ought to give her another chance.

At last Olive suggested that they had done quite enough.

"Let's forget all about it, and go down into the village for that tuck," she suggested. "Don't forget that, win or lose, I said I'd stand everyone a feed."

At that moment a tall, gracious-looking girl appeared in sight. She was Lorna Meredith, one of the most popular prefects in the school. Seeing the chums standing there, poring over the notebook, she smiled.

"Hallo! Busy electioneering?" she asked.

Letty nodded.

"Rather! And what's more, Olive's going to win!" she declared.

The prefect's kindly gaze went to Olive, and she smiled again.

"I'm afraid I can't wish you luck," she told her. "That wouldn't be fair, especially as I'm to be in charge of the voting. But I can say, Olive, I think you'd make a jolly fine captain."

She passed on, and with admiring eyes the chums looked after her.

"Now, wasn't that nice of her!" Olive exclaimed, a flush of pleasure on her cheeks.

"I'll say it was," agreed Letty. "But then Lorna always is a top-notch. But come on, old scout, let's see about that tuck!"

Happily they set out. They had quite a long walk in front of them, for the school was situated some way from the little village of Feneigh. As this was the first day of the term they were both well supplied with pocket-money, so they bought unstintingly at the cake-shop kept by Mrs. Wiggs.

Having arranged with her for the parcel to be sent, they left the shop. Almost instantly they paused, for from behind them came an apologetic voice: "Excuse me!"

They turned, to find themselves confronted by a girl of about their own age—a girl who, over school uniform, wore a shabby raincoat.

There was something about her that instantly aroused all Olive's sympathy. More observant than her boisterous chum, she noted the anxious look in the girl's brown eyes; realised how pale were her cheeks.

"Can we help you?" she asked.

"Yes. What's the trouble, old scout?" demanded Letty, in her usual friendly way.

The other girl seemed to hesitate. Nervously her fingers plucked at the belt of her raincoat.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," she faltered, "but I was wondering if you knew a Miss Dalton?"

"Dalton?"

The two Fourth Formers wrinkled their brows in thought, but the name was unfamiliar to them.

"Fraid not," said Letty.

"But, perhaps, we can discover her address for you," added Olive. "Mrs. Wiggs, who keeps the tuckshop, is bound to have a local directory. Shall we go in and see?"

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble," was the reply. "You see, it's awfully important that I find her. If I don't, I'm afraid I shall be stranded."

"Stranded!"

The chums looked at her in surprise, and the girl gave rather a heavy sigh.

"Yes. You see, she asked me to meet her here this afternoon—at half-past two. But it's turned three now, and she still hasn't turned up. I'm nearly at my wits' end. I—I don't know what to do for the best."

Letty and Olive looked at each other wonderingly. Both of them scented a mystery. There was something appealing, yet strangely intriguing about this unknown girl.

"You come in with us," said Olive. "There's no need to worry. We'll soon find the address for you."

She led the way back into the tuckshop, and while Mrs. Wiggs went in search of her directory, the chums insisted on standing treat. The unknown girl's eyes glowed with gratitude as she helped herself to the cakes and tea they set before her.

"You are awful sports," she whispered.

"Rats!" said the fat girl. "You tuck in, and leave this to us."

As she spoke she took the directory from the shopkeeper, and together she and Olive went through it. Every town and village in the county was included, and methodically the Fourth Formers went through the various lists of names. But all in vain. They could not find the one they wanted.

Olive closed the book with a frown, and turned to the mystery girl.

"It doesn't seem to be here," she said. "Are you sure this friend of yours lives near here?"

To her surprise the other girl shook her head.

"I don't know. In fact, I hardly know anything about her at all. The whole business is so queer that I'm beginning to wonder if it isn't all a hoax."

"A hoax!" echoed Olive, staring.

"Yes, you see—"

But Letty interrupted.

"Half a tick, let's introduce ourselves. What's your name?"

"Jess—Jess Grant."

"Pleased to meet you," said the fat girl, and, grabbing Jess by the hand, she shook it warmly. "I'm Letty Johnson, and my chum's Olive French. Now we're friends, go ahead! Let's hear what all this mystery is about."

Only too willingly Jess explained, and Olive and Letty listened, first with wonder, then in frank amazement. It certainly was an astonishing story that Jess Grant had to tell—so astonishing that even Olive forgot all about the approaching election, all about her hopes of becoming Form captain.

Jess was an orphan, whose parents had died when she was a baby. Until to-day she had lived with a bad-tempered couple who, though apparently paid for their trouble, had always resented her presence in their house.

For a long time Jess had been very unhappy, then one day she had met Miss Dalton. Beyond the fact that Miss Dalton seemed to be charming, and fairly rich, Jess knew nothing about her; but the woman seemed to have taken a great liking to the girl. She had questioned her about her parents, and, on learning of her unhappy home life, had told her not to worry.

"She said she was planning a big surprise for me," explained Jess. "She wouldn't say what it was, but she declared that it was something wonderful—something that would make me jump for joy."

For a moment her voice quivered, and Olive and Letty gazed at her in sympathetic understanding.

"And did she keep her promise?" asked Olive.

Jess shook her head.

"I don't know. You see, I haven't seen her since. But this morning I had a letter from her. She told me she would meet me here at half-past two. She enclosed the money for my fare, and said that I need never go back to Mr. and Mrs. Higgs—they're the people who've been looking after me. They were only too glad to get rid of me, so I caught the first train, and here I am," she ended, with a sigh.

A tense silence settled over the tuckshop. The Fourth Formers hardly knew what to make of this queer story. Surely no one would be so cruel as to get Jess here for a joke?

"Didn't Miss Dalton put any address on her letter?" asked Olive.

The mystery girl shook her head.

"No."

"Then if she doesn't turn up, you'll have to go home?"

"But I can't." There was a note of desperation in Jess' voice. "You see, the Higgses are going back to Ireland. They were moving to-day, and I don't know where they're going."

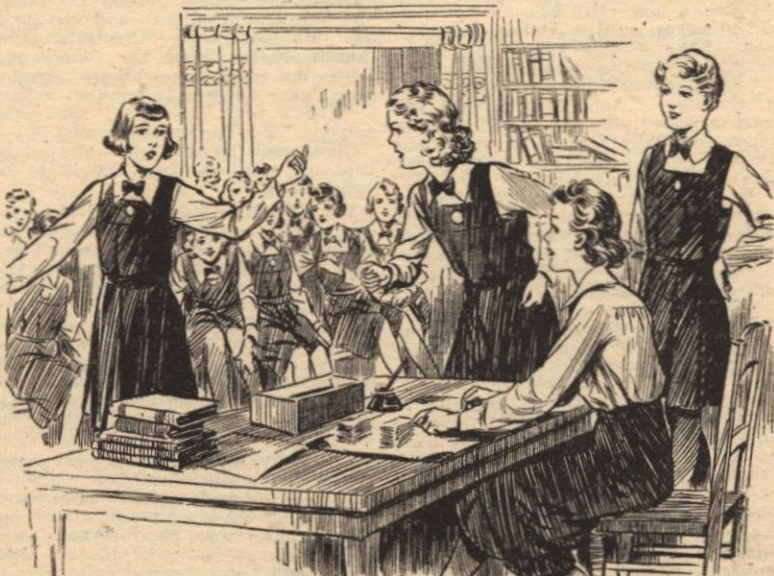
"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

Letty whistled shrilly. This was certainly an alarming piece of news. What on earth was the stranded girl to do? As usual, it was Olive who had a practical suggestion to make.

"We'd better go to the police station," she said. "They'll be able to ring up all kinds of people—make all sorts of inquiries. Don't worry, dear." She gave Jess' arm a cheery squeeze. "Everything will come right. I expect this mysterious benefactress of yours has been detained somewhere."

"Of course, that's it," put in Letty quickly. "Anyway, we'll soon run her to earth for you."

Encouraged by their confident tones, the other girl followed them out of the shop. Briskly they set off up the street,



"Just a minute!" Iris Watts cried. "If neither girl has gained a majority, then I claim that Stephanie should be declared captain. Anxiously the rest of the Form waited the prefect's decision—especially Olive, to whom it would mean so much."

but they had not gone many yards before they overtook old Sam, the one and only porter the village station boasted.

Old Sam was trundling a barrow, on which were perched four big, expensive-looking suitcases. He knew both Letty and Olive, but, instead of greeting them with his usual smile, he scowled irritably.

"Wish you young ladies would take better care of your luggage," he growled, and, setting down his barrow, the porter pointed to the suitcases.

"One of your crowd's bin and left them behind," he asserted. "Suppose they think I've nothing better to do than traipse after them. Mark my words, when I meet this here Jess Grant—"

"Meet who?" they all chorused together.

"Jess Grant—the gal who's left her luggage behind."

"Jess Grant!" It was Jess herself who spoke. Dazedly she surveyed Old Sam. "But my name's Grant!" she burst out.

"Then these here cases must belong to you," the porter said, "and the sooner you relieve me of them, the better I'll be pleased."

"But I didn't bring any luggage—"

begun Jess.

"Of course not!" cut in Olive. "But that's not to say they don't belong to you. I expect Miss Dalton bought these cases and things for you. She must have sent the luggage on in advance."

"Bullseye first time!" agreed Letty. "You certainly do work things out, old scout. I only wish—"

But the fat girl did not finish the sentence. She was gaping with rounded eyes at the label attached to the nearest suitcase. Olive, peering over her shoulder, also gave a startled gasp as she read what was printed on the card.

"Why, they're addressed to St. Kit's!" she exclaimed.

"St.—St. Kit's?" echoed Jess, in bewilderment.

"Yes, that's our school!" explained Olive. Then her face lit up. "Of course! It's as clear as anything now. You must be a new girl!"

"New girl?"

Jess' brain seemed to be in a whirl but smilingly Olive nodded.

"Yes, a new girl! That's the wonderful surprise Miss Dalton promised you. She's sending you to St. Kit's. Why, that explains the whole mystery!"

"Right again!" agreed Letty, with a chuckle. "And—golly, won't you have a time! St. Kit's is a ripping place—especially now we've got a new Head. Come along, old scout, follow us. We'll look after you!"

As she spoke, she seized two of the suitcases, Olive took the other two, and encouragingly they beckoned to Jess. But she still appeared to be in a daze.

"Are you—are you sure there's no mistake?" she asked.

"Of course not—come along," urged Olive, and she led the way along the road that crossed the marshes surrounding Fenleigh.

THE FOURTH FORM ELECTION

"WELL dump the cases here while you go to see the Head. That's her room over there. And you needn't be afraid—she's not a bad old stick."

Olive smiled encouragingly as she spoke, then she gave a gasp as she noticed the clock on the opposite wall.

"Five to four!" she exclaimed. "My hat, we'll have to scoot! The election begins at four!" She looked again at Jess. "You don't mind if we don't wait, do you?" she asked.

"You see, Olive's standing for the Form captaincy," explained Letty.

Jess shook her head.

"Of course not!" she said. "And—thanks awfully for your help!"

"It's been a pleasure!" declared Letty. Then, leaving the girl to knock rather nervously on the headmistress' door, she and Olive raced away.

When they entered the Junior Common-room, where the election was to take place, they found it packed tight with girls. Their appearance was greeted by cheers from their own supporters, and counter-cheers from the group of Fourth Formers who surrounded Stephanie.

Lorna Meredith, seated at a table at the far end of the room, looked up from the voting papers she was sorting.

"So there you are!" she remarked. "We were beginning to wonder what had become of you both."

Olive smiled apologetically.

"Sorry, but we were detained," she said.

Stephanie's red lips curled sneeringly.

"It was a clever bit of stage management, if you ask me," she told her pals.

"Olive always likes the limelight. Trust her to make a dramatic appearance at the last moment. Wonder she didn't arrive with a blare of trumpets!"

Her malicious remark was heard all over the room, and Olive flushed. As for Letty, she swung round with a glare.

"That's not true—and you know it isn't!" she snapped.

"Now, now, that will do!" Lorna tapped on the table with her pencil.

"No cross-talk, please! We're late already, so we will get on with the business. Will you all line up and come for your voting papers."

To the accompaniment of excited chatter, the Fourth Formers did so, and as each of them received her paper, the prefect ticked off her name on the register.

On each paper the names of the two candidates had been printed in red ink, and a cross had to be placed alongside one of the names. The paper was then folded and dropped into a wastepaper basket that Lorna held ready.

At last all the votes had been collected and, amid a tense silence, the prefect emptied the papers out on the table, and began to open them and sort them out into two heaps. One pile grew rapidly higher than the other, and Letty, her plump face red with excitement, gave Olive a triumphant nudge.

"That's your little lot," she whispered. "You're winning easily!"

Olive said nothing, but she never kept her eyes off those two heaps of voting slips.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if she were elected! To be the Fourth's first elected leader—what an honour that would be! How proud mum and dad would be!

Methodically Lorna counted the votes, stopping every now and again to make an entry in the book before her. The other pile now began to grow. There came a sudden avalanche of votes for Stephanie. Olive's heap seemed to remain stationary. More votes for Stephanie. Her pile was now the higher.

"Oh golly, surely she can't get many more!" Letty gasped, all her confidence fading as the prefect put another batch of votes on the rival candidate's heap. Then a cheer went up, for now it was Olive's turn. The piles became level again, and Letty mopped agitatedly at her hot, moist face.

"It's going to be jolly close," she muttered.

Olive nodded, but she was too keyed up to speak. She was thinking of all

the wonderful plans she had made; thinking of how, if elected, she meant to make the Fourth the happiest Form in the whole school.

Lorna placed the last paper in position, and the watching Fourth Formers caught in their breath as the prefect totted up the figures in her book.

Who had won? It was impossible to say by looking at the rival piles of votes. There was an electric silence. Even Stephanie's confident smile had vanished. Frowning, restlessly locking and unlocking her manicured fingers, she sat there.

Suddenly Lorna looked up from her book with a frown. Her oval, pretty face seemed strangely worried.

"This is all very difficult," she declared. "You see, the voting is dead even."

"What!"

An amazed gasp went up, and the prefect, after adding up her figures again, nodded.

"Yes; both candidates have received seventeen votes," she announced.

"Really, it's most unfortunate. I don't know what to do. It looks as if the election will have to be cancelled."

Another gasp greeted this statement, and then Iris Watts, Stephanie's staunchest supporter, jumped to her feet.

"Just a minute," she cried. "If neither girl has gained a majority, then I claim that Stephanie should be declared to be Form captain."

There came a cheer from Stephanie's cronies, but the rest of the Form stared, thunderstruck.

"Why do you say that, Iris?" asked Lorna, wrinkling her brows in puzzlement.

"Because Stephanie was captain last term," snapped Iris.

"Only because Miss Vickers appointed her over our heads," shouted Letty.

"Hear, hear!"

"What happened last term doesn't count!"

There came a storm of agreement from all over the room, but Lorna was frowning thoughtfully. She seemed impressed by what Stephanie's chum had said.

"The Fourth must have a captain," she observed, "so if you can't agree amongst yourself who should be appointed, then it seems to me—"

She paused, and tapped the end of her pencil against her teeth. On tenterhooks of suspense Olive waited. Letty gave a groan of despair. It looked as if Stephanie was to win the coveted honour after all—Stephanie who last term had done nothing but slack!

With desperate eagerness they all waited for the prefect to continue. The decision was in her hands. She cleared her voice to speak, and then, in the deathly silence of the room there came another voice—a nervous, half-apologetic voice from the doorway.

"Excuse me," it said.

The whole Fourth turned, to gaze curiously at the slender figure that stood there, a figure dressed in a shabby school tunic. Olive and Letty were the only ones to recognise her.

"Why, it's Jess!" she exclaimed.

And Jess Grant it was. Conscious of the sensation her unexpected entrance had made, even more acutely conscious of the glint in Stephanie's eyes as scornfully she regarded her shabby clothes, Jess advanced to the prefect's table.

"I'm a new girl, Jess Grant," she said. "Miss Bramleigh told me to come here, and said I was to vote."

"I protest!" shouted Stephanie. "This girl knows nothing about Form affairs. She isn't qualified to vote!"

Anyway, we've only got her word for it that she's in the Fourth. To look at her one would be more inclined to think she was the new skivvy."

And in contempt she regarded Jess' shabby tunic.

"That will do, Stephanie," ordered Lorna quietly, and she reached for an unused voting slip.

"If the Head says you're to vote, you vote," she said. "Here you are, Jess, just put a cross against one of the names."

Jess took the paper and pencil and bent over the table. With bated breath the Fourth waited. Only Stephanie's eyes were smouldering. Clear it was that she had no doubt of the result.

Lorna took the folded slip from the new girl, opened it out, then rose to her feet.

"I declare the voting at an end," she announced, "and I declare—" She paused, and Olive and Letty felt as if they were choking. "I declare," the prefect concluded in a ringing voice, "Olive French is the elected Form captain—by one vote!"

THE MESSAGE ON THE BLACKBOARD

GOOD old Olive!" "The new girl's done the trick!"

"Come on, let's give the winner a cheer!"

The suggestion was adopted with enthusiasm. Even most of Stephanie's supporters joined in the shouts. Olive's face glowed with pleasure as she faced the crowd.

"Thanks, everyone," she said. "I'll try to not let you down. But don't forget Stephanie. What about giving her a cheer?"

Again the rousing shouts nearly lifted the roof, and as the cheers died away, Lorna Meredith gathered up her papers and gave Olive a friendly pat on the shoulder.

"Best of luck, Olive," she said. "I'm sure everyone here, whether they voted for you or not, will rally round."

"Rather!" "The Fourth's always loyal to its captain!"

There came a general cry of agreement, and with another kindly smile around the prefect departed. When she had gone Olive stepped across to where Stephanie stood, biting her lip and scowling sullenly.

"Hope you don't hear any malice, Stephanie," Olive said. "Let's shake. Though we've been rivals, that's no reason why we shouldn't be friends."

She held out her hand, but Stephanie made no attempt to grasp it. There was an angry glitter in her grey eyes, and scornfully she tossed her head.

"Thanks, but I'm more particular than you are in choosing my friends," she snapped.

"Why, what do you mean?" In astonishment Olive regarded her furious rival. Stephanie glared across at Jess Grant.

"You know what I mean," she shouted. "That girl, Jess Grant, ought never to have been allowed to vote. Why, we don't even know who she is! We don't know where she's come from—anything about her at all! A new girl she calls herself—huh! St. Kit's must be hard up if it has to take in poverty-stricken wretches like her!"

"Stephanie!" Olive, her face pale with indignation, grabbed her rival by the arm.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she cried. "How dare you insult Jess like that! Just because your parents are rolling in cash, that's no

reason why you should despise other people."

From most of the others came a chorus of approval. Stephanie glowered around, then with another angry toss of the head flounced across to the door.

"All right, have it your own way," she stormed. "But, you mark my words, you'll regret this. You'll rue the day you elected Olive instead of me."

And—slam! went the door behind her. Olive and Letty grimaced ruefully at each other.

"Phew! What a cat!" exclaimed the fat girl; then impulsively they both turned to where Jess stood, white-faced and dismayed. "Don't take any notice of that jealous chump," urged Letty. "She doesn't count. Everyone else welcomes you to the Fourth. But, I say, old scout, how did you get on with the Head?"

Jess' eyes glistened. "Oh, she was a sport! She wasn't expecting me, really. You see, Miss Dalton only wrote once, asking her to accept me as a pupil, and enclosing a cheque for the first term's fees. Miss

as she and Letty departed, taking Jess with them, her smile faded and her face became anxious as she saw how pale and worried the new girl looked.

"What's the matter, Jess?" she asked. "You're not worrying about what Stephanie said, are you?" Jess shook her head.

"It's not that. It's—" She broke off and her lips quivered. "Oh, it's all this horrid mystery!" she burst out. "What can have happened to Miss Dalton? Suppose she doesn't turn up—suppose I never hear from her again!"

Olive put a soothing arm around her while Letty grinned cheerfully.

"Of course she'll turn up," the fat girl said. "You see, you'll have a letter from her in the morning. Stop worrying, old scout. By the way, did old Brammy say what study you were to dig in?"

Jess nodded. "She said I was to go in with you," she answered.

"In with us!" Olive smiled. "Oh, that's splendid! We'll be glad to have you, won't we, Letty?"



"I'm sorry," Jess faltered. "But I'm afraid I haven't got half-a-crown!" A chorus of surprised gasps went up. "But surely this mysterious benefactress of yours gave you some pocket-money?" said Edith Fox. But Jess shook her head.

Bramleigh said it was very unusual, but she told me not to worry, and said as I hadn't any real home I was to stay."

"That's splendid," smiled Olive. "But what about Miss Dalton?"

"Well, we still don't know where she lives," Jess said, with a frown. "It's all very mysterious, but the Head was awfully kind. She said—"

Jess broke off, suddenly conscious of the curious stares of the rest of the Form. They could not help overhearing this queer conversation, and Edith Fox—the Nosey Parker of the Fourth—was fairly twitching with inquisitiveness.

"What's this!" she cried. "You don't know who's paying your school fees! You haven't got any home! Crumbs, then Stephanie was right! You are a giddy mystery!"

"There's nothing mysterious about Jess," snorted Letty. "She's one of the best. As for you others, you must excuse us. We've got to prepare for the celebration feast. So we shall expect you all in Study No. 5 in about half an hour."

A shout of delight went up, which Olive acknowledged with a smile. But

"Rather!" the fat girl agreed.

The warmth of their replies brought a glow to Jess' brown eyes.

"You're a couple of bricks," she whispered, "and I shall never forget how sweet you've been to me. But for you—"

"Forget it, old scout," cut in Letty gruffly, "and come and help us to get the tuck ready."

"Yes, come and see our study," put in Olive. "I'm sure you'll like it."

And Jess certainly did seem to like it. When the chums opened the door and proudly led the way into the room, the new girl looked around in delight.

"How comfy!" she exclaimed. "Why, it's a real home from home!"

Although Olive and Letty had not yet had time to arrange all their treasured possessions, Study No. 5 certainly did look inviting. New, gaily patterned cretonne curtains hung at the windows; a cheerful fire burnt in the grate. There were two big armchairs, an old, but deep piled carpet on the floor, and a medley of tennis rackets, hockey sticks, and photographs hung from the walls.

On the table was the huge parcel that

Mrs. Wiggs, the tuckshop keeper, had delivered, and happily the three girls got to work to get ready for their guests.

They were not long in coming, and, to Olive's delight, practically the whole Form turned up. Stephanie and one or two of that supercilious girl's cronies kept away, but their absence was hardly noticed.

The celebration feast was a huge success, and Olive's heart beat with delight as she realised that she had made a good start. It was clear that everyone here wished her well; that even those who had not voted for her were eager to co-operate and help to make her captaincy a success.

One or two covert looks were cast at Jess. The mystery surrounding her arrival at St. Kit's had not been forgotten. Nevertheless, nothing was said to embarrass her. The fact that Olive and Letty had accepted her without question was enough for the majority of the Form.

When the feast was at an end, Olive pushed back her chair and looked around with sparkling eyes.

"I hope you've all enjoyed yourselves," she said.

"I'll say we have!"

"Rather—it's been the best tuck-in we've had for years!"

There came a chorus of agreement. Olive smiled with pleasure, then produced an empty tin cashbox from the desk behind her.

"Now for business," she said. "Last term the Fourth did badly at sport—in fact it wasn't a very successful term all round. Well, that's got to be changed. We've got to pull up our socks."

"Hear, hear!"

There came another shout of agreement. Olive waited until the noise had died down, then she pointed to the empty cashbox.

"That's for subscriptions," she said. "If we're going to do big things we must have money, so I propose to start a Form Fund. We'll need money for sports, money for theatricals, money for all kinds of things. What do you say?"

It was obvious that the idea appealed to them all. Only Milly Binns, the close-fisted member of the Fourth, looked doubtful.

"How much is the sub to be?" she asked cautiously.

"I suggest half-a-crown," Olive answered. She looked around. "But what's the general opinion? Perhaps we'd better take a vote. All those in favour, please signify in the usual way."

A forest of hands shot up.

"Good. That's carried, and, as there's no time like the present, I'll take your subs now. Letty, will you jot the names down as they pay up?"

"O.K., old scout."

The fat girl got out an old exercise book and seated herself beside her chum. One by one the Fourth Formers stepped forward with their half-crowns. Soon all but one girl had paid, and that one was Jess Grant. She flushed uncomfortably as she became aware of the curious looks that were directed at her.

"I—I'm sorry," she faltered, "but I'm afraid I haven't got half-a-crown."

"Not got half-a-crown!" A chorus of surprised gasps went up, while Edith Fox's long nose fairly quivered.

"But what will you do about your pocket-money?" she demanded. "Surely this mysterious benefactress of yours gave you some before you left?"

Jess shook her head.

"I'm afraid she didn't. She only sent me my fare. You see—"

She stopped in confusion, embarrassed

by the situation she found herself in. Olive patted her hand.

"Cheer up, your pocket-money will be sent on!" she said. "There's no hurry to pay!"

But Edith Fox had to chime in again.

"Fancy coming to school without a bean!" she exclaimed. "It strikes me—"

But fortunately at that moment there was an interruption. The door opened and Lorna Meredith entered. She looked around with a smile.

"Hallo, girls! Been enjoying yourselves?" she asked. "Sorry to interrupt the festivities, but I want a word with—"

She stopped as she saw the cashbox, now overflowing with half-crowns and shillings. "Goodness, what's this for?" she asked.

Olive explained, and the prefect gave a nod of approval.

"Jolly good idea! But wouldn't you like me to take charge of the money?" Olive shook her head.

"No, thanks! It'll be quite safe locked up in my desk!"

"Just as you like," Lorna smiled. "Jess!" She turned to the new girl.

"Come along with me, will you? I want to show you around and arrange about unpacking your luggage."

The prefect departed with Jess, and the party being over, the other girls went also. Olive closed the cashbox and was in the act locking it up in a drawer of the desk, when who should come in but Stephanie Warner.

She answered the chums' inquiring looks with a supercilious sniff.

"Just heard about this Form fund racket," she said. "I think it's a tomfool idea! Still, I suppose I'd better support it!"

"You needn't if you don't want to," said Olive.

"Oh, I may as well be in the swim!" Stephanie said; and producing a silver chain purse from her pocket, she ostentatiously pulled out three pound notes. "Got change?" she asked.

Olive took one note from her, handed over seventeen-and-six in silver, then prepared to lock up the cashbox. Stephanie gave a sudden cry of surprise.

"You don't mean to say you're going to keep the money here!" she exclaimed.

"Of course! Why not?"

Both Olive and Letty regarded her curiously. Stephanie tossed her head, and her red lips curled sneeringly.

"Please yourself, of course!" she replied. "But I wouldn't like to risk it being stolen!"

"Stolen?" Olive stared harder than ever. "Look here! What are you getting at?" she demanded.

Stephanie gave a malicious snigger. "Well, St. Kit's isn't what it was, you know. All kinds of queer people are admitted these days. Girls without homes—girls who arrive without a bean. I mean, it's silly putting temptation into people's way, isn't it?"

Letty was so shocked by the implication that she could only gasp, but Olive, her cheeks aflame, stepped indignantly forward.

"Why, you horrid cat!" she gasped.

"To talk like that about Jess! You ought to be—"

Words failing her, she pointed to the door. "You'd better clear off!"

"Don't worry; I've no intention of staying!" Stephanie shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "But don't forget my warning. If that money does go astray—"

Sw-ooo-sh!

Her voice came to an abrupt end as

a cushion came hurtling through the air. Letty, infuriated beyond endurance, had flung it with all her strength. Catching the spiteful girl full in the chest, the missile sent her reeling out into the corridor and she sat down on the floor with a bump.

"And now you're out, stay out!" shouted Letty, grabbing up the cushion and slamming the door.

A few minutes later Jess returned, smiling happily. But when she saw how flushed and grim the other two were she pulled up and stared.

"Why, what's the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing!" said Olive evasively. "Only had a bit of a row with Stephanie. But what have you been doing? Unpacking?"

Jess nodded.

"Not really. I'm going to do most of it in the morning. Lorna's been showing me round. Oh, but St. Kit's is a lovely place! I know I'll be happy here. At least I will if only—"

She paused, and her brown eyes became anxious. "D'you really think I shall hear from Miss Dalton in the morning?" she asked.

"Of course you will, old scout!" Letty assured her, while Olive put a cheery arm around the new girl's shoulders.

"Now don't you worry," she said. "When the letter comes all this mystery will be unravelled!"

Jess' face cleared, and for the rest of the evening Jess seemed to be perfectly happy. But next morning that apprehensive frown returned, for when, after breakfast, the mail was distributed there was no letter for Jess.

Incredible though it seemed, her mysterious benefactress had not written.

"Oh, what can it mean?" In blank dismay Jess turned to Olive and Letty. "Why hasn't Miss Dalton written?" she faltered.

The chums shook their heads. They were as mystified as much as Jess herself was. It certainly was strange. There seemed no satisfactory reason to account for Miss Dalton's silence. Then Olive had one of her brain-waves. "Perhaps she's been taken ill," she suggested.

Letty gave an excited whoop.

"Of course, that's it!" she declared, and cheerily she smiled across at the new girl. "Don't you fret, old scout!" she urged. "You'll hear sooner or later. Now let's finish arranging our knick-knacks before the bell goes for lessons!"

Jess had to finish her unpacking before lessons, so leaving her to go upstairs, the chums returned to their study. Hardly had they entered it than Iris Watts, accompanied by Stephanie, called.

"Iris wants to pay her sub," explained Stephanie.

Olive took the half-crown with a smile and crossed to the desk with it, then, as she made to open the drawer containing the cashbox, she gave a surprised gasp.

"Why, that's queer!" she exclaimed.

"Hallo, what's the matter?" demanded Letty.

Olive pointed to the drawer. "I'm certain I locked it last night, but now it's unlocked."

"Unlocked!"

Letty gave an alarmed shout, while Stephanie and her crony exchanged meaning glances.

"So I was right, after all," said Stephanie.

Olive and Letty stared at her in bewilderment.

(Please turn to the back page.)



ROSINA the ELUSIVE

By PETER LANGLEY

THE IMPASSIVE BUTLER

A SUMPTUOUS car, its headlights dimmed, purred softly to a standstill on the opposite side of the road from Noel Raymond's London flat.

The occupant of the rear seat—a slender, dark-haired girl, who wore a smart black outfit—leaned forward to speak to the uniformed chauffeur.

"It's worked, Pierre!" she breathed. "Our clever young detective has swallowed the bait—whole! Here he comes!"

There was a gleam of mockery in the speaker's violet eyes—a hard glitter that contrasted strangely with the soft beauty of her face.

One slender, be-ringed hand reached up swiftly to draw a blind across the window.

The chauffeur's dark, clean-shaven features reflected his mistress' triumphant smile.

"You are a wonder, mam'selle!" he murmured.

Unaware of their scrutiny, Noel Raymond, the young detective, hurried down the steps from his flat and hailed a passing taxi.

There was a worried expression on his boyish face. He glanced swiftly at a flimsy telegraph form that he took from his pocket, then he consulted his watch.

"We'll just about do it, Parker!" he called over his shoulder, as his manservant followed, carrying a heavy suitcase. "The seven-thirty from Victoria will get us to Brighton in time to meet the baroness. She says that the matter is urgent."

The taxi swung to the kerb, and Noel sprang in, followed by his valet.

"Victoria—and drive as fast as you dare!" ordered the young detective.

The taxi swerved away, vanishing round the corner of the street.

Rosina Fontaine, the girl crook, laughed softly as she leaned back in her luxurious hired car.

"The evening is ours, Pierre!" she declared. "The so-clever Mr. Raymond will be miles away by the time we reach our destination. I hope he has a good time—at Brighton!"

She waved her hand, and the chauffeur set the big car in motion, driving skilfully through the crowded London traffic.

"Home first," ordered Rosina, "and

then—Kensington! Ma foi, it is almost too easy! If only the jewels are in the safe in which the baroness usually keeps them, we shall be wealthy by this time to-morrow, my friend!"

There was a gleam of admiration in the chauffeur's dark eyes.

"Thanks to your astuteness, mam'selle!" he declared. "It was a cunning ruse to decoy the detective away from the very house where his presence would have been a stumbling-block to our plans!"

"And what is so humorous, my dear Pierre, is that I signed the telegram with the name of the wealthy client whose jewels he is supposed to be guarding! The baroness will be furious. Can you not imagine the headlines in the papers to-morrow?"

"Well-known Detective Duped by Elusive Girl Crook. Amazing Robbery of Famous Family Heirlooms."

Rosina laughed merrily, revealing a flash of white teeth, as she lit a cigarette.

Pierre, her faithful servant, grinned sardonically.

"You are well named 'Elusive,' mam'selle!" he declared. "The way in which you evade the police is a miracle; and even the clever Noel Raymond himself has not yet been able to catch you!"

Rosina's smile faded, and her teeth came together with a snap.

"It has been a near thing more than once, Pierre," she declared, her eyes flashing. "I have an old account to settle with that meddling detective! But for him, we might have gained a fortune before this!"

"Do not worry, mam'selle," put in Pierre consolingly. "He is well out of the way this time. Time enough to think of revenge when those jewels are safely in our hands."

"You are right, Pierre." Rosina flicked the ash from her cigarette. "My account with Noel Raymond can wait."

Rosina smiled in triumph as she watched Noel depart for Brighton. Her clever plan to get rid of him had succeeded—or so she thought!

Money is our first concern. Ah, we have arrived!"

The big car drew up outside an old-fashioned basement-type house in a gloomy street.

"Wait for me, Pierre," breathed Rosina, as she stepped from the car. "I shall not be long. Five—ten minutes at the most."

She drew her coat more closely round her and crossed the pavement—a smart, strangely incongruous figure in the drab London street.

She opened the door with a latchkey and walked lightly up a flight of narrow, uncarpeted stairs, entering a barely furnished room.

Rosina shuddered, with a slight gesture of distaste, as she switched on the light.

"What it is to be poor," she breathed—"to have to plan and scheme and live from hand to mouth—when there is so much wealth in the world ready for the taking!"

She tossed the glowing stump of her cigarette petulantly into the fireplace.

"But for Noel Raymond, I might be living in luxury now—I and my faithful Pierre. Yet he has not been clever enough this time! In an hour—two hours—the famous Le Feyre jewels will be mine!"

She crossed to the dressing-table—the most interesting corner of the room.

It was littered with grease-paints, powders, and various coloured dyes. There were three movable mirrors, and a full-length cheval-glass against the wall.

Rosina took a photograph from her handbag and propped it up on the dressing-table, studying it earnestly.

Then, with deft, practised fingers, she set to work.

Pierre, in the car, awaited his young mistress' return. He heard a door open, and spun round to attention as a tall, gracious figure slowly descended the steps of the house, leaning on an ebony cane.

Her white hair was piled high above her thin, aristocratic face; a black velvet cloak draped her shoulders, and she regarded Pierre a trifle short-sightedly through her lorgnettes.

"My good man," she said, with a slightly foreign accent, "I trust I have not kept you waiting too long?"

"Tiens!" breathed the amazed Pierre. "Is it possible?"

Rosina laughed softly as her servant sprang out to open the door.

"Will I pass?" she murmured. "Mam'selle, it is a miracle!" declared Pierre. "You are the baroness to the life! I have seen her on three occasions, and had I not known—"

"Careful!" breathed Rosina, with a warning gesture, as there came the heavy tread of a passing constable. "There is no time to lose. We must reach the house before the guests arrive."

The big car purred away, and Rosina leaned back, her lovely eyes half-closed, her active brain busy with her plans.

It was not without cause that Rosina Fontaine was known to the police as the most dangerous girl trickster in Europe.

And none could have vouched for that better than Noel Raymond.

Rosina was thinking of him, now—and apparently her thoughts amused her, for she laughed softly once or twice as the car sped on its way.

"Bah!" she breathed, snapping her fingers. "By the time he realises how he has been duped, it will be too late."

The car slowed down in a fashionable Kensington thoroughfare, and drew up outside a big house with many lighted windows.

"On your guard, Pierre!" whispered Rosina. "Take the car round to the news, and wait at the side entrance."

"Very good, mam'selle."

Pierre sprang out, deferentially opening the door. With a gracious nod, Rosina stepped on to the kerb and mounted the steps beneath the awning.

A grey-haired, austere butler opened the door—and his impassive face changed at the sight of the newcomer.

"My—my lady!" he faltered. "Is anything wrong? We did not expect you back so soon—"

"It's all right, Matthews," put in Rosina graciously. "I left some important papers behind, and decided to return for them personally. I may remain for an hour or two. Please put on the light in my private sitting-room."

"Certainly—certainly, my lady."

The butler crossed the hall and opened a door, revealing a sumptuously furnished room that was partly a boudoir and partly a study.

He hastened to switch on the electric fire and to flick a speck of dust from the polished desk. Then, with a bow, he withdrew.

Rosina waited till she heard the door close behind her; then a little sigh of relief escaped her lips.

"So this is the room!" she breathed. "And that must be the safe, in the corner. But I must take precautions."

She crossed to the door, and turned the key noiselessly in the lock.

Then she hurried over to the window and, opening it, discovered a small balcony overlooking the garden at the rear.

Stepping out on to the balcony, she glanced down into the grounds.

"Pierre!" she called softly. There came a movement below; the next moment Pierre's head and shoulders appeared above the balustrade. Rosina beckoned him to follow her into the room.

"Not a sound!" she whispered, her fingers to her lips. "What do you think of that safe?"

Pierre knelt down, examining the safe with the eye of an expert.

"An easy job, mam'selle; will you try it—or shall I?"

"You try it, Pierre; I must not look

flustered when I leave—with the jewels in my bag."

Rosina sat on the edge of the table and lit a cigarette, a gleam of amusement in her violet eyes as she watched her confederate at work.

"Noel Raymond ought to see us now!" she murmured. "He is probably cooling himself at Brighton, awaiting the dear baroness! Ah—it is open!"

Pierre nodded with satisfaction as the combination-lock clicked beneath his skilful fingers. The next moment he had swung open the door of the safe—to reveal a square wooden box secured by a metal hasp.

"The jewel-box, mam'selle!" he whispered huskily. "Your information was correct!"

"Give it to me!" Her hand shaking in excitement, a gleam of anticipation in her lovely eyes, Rosina reached out for the box.

And then abruptly her slim figure stiffened—as a suave voice spoke behind her.

"Put down that box, Pierre! And stand where you are, Rosina. We have met before—so I do not need to introduce myself."

Rosina spun round, her face pale, her eyes blazing incredulously—to confront the grey-haired butler!

"You!" she breathed, shrinking back.

"But—but—your voice—"

With a grim smile, the supposed butler snatched off his grey wig; his impassive features miraculously relaxed into a grim yet boyish smile.

"Noel Raymond—at your service, Rosina!" he remarked pleasantly.

MISS VARLEY APPEARS

A STIFLED, incredulous cry was torn from Rosina's lips; Pierre's hand flew to his pocket.

But Noel was quicker; a revolver glittered between his fingers.

"Put your hands over your head, Pierre!" he snapped. "And you, Rosina—I warn you not to try any tricks. I think you'll admit that it's a fair capture!"

He stood confronting them, a stern smile on his boyish face—completely master of the situation.

Rosina bit her lip, her face white with baffled anger and amazement. Pierre stared at the young detective as though unable to believe his eyes.

"Sorry to disappoint you," went on Noel pleasantly. "But I cancelled my visit to Brighton, after all. As a matter of fact, I had no intention whatever of leaving London—in spite of the enticement offered by your cleverly worded telegram, Rosina."

Rosina clenched her slender hands, her mind working swiftly; she had been trapped—but she was not beaten yet!

"You started out—in a taxi—" she breathed.

"Exactly," agreed Noel, with a grim smile. "I rather hoped that you'd be watching for me—and I laid my plans accordingly. As a matter of fact, I've been keeping an eye on your movements for some days!"

"You see," he went on pleasantly, "the baroness had consulted me about certain family heirlooms which she intended to take out of the safe-deposit to present to her niece on the latter's twenty-first birthday. Unfortunately, the news got into the papers—and I felt pretty certain that you wouldn't miss it!"

Rosina raised her eyebrows non-committally as she took out a dainty cigarette-case.

"I hope you've no objections to my smoking, Mr. Raymond?" she inquired.

"Not in the least," replied Noel

gravely. "To continue. It was on my first visit to the baroness that I noticed you among a crowd of loiterers on the pavement outside the house; you were disguised, I believe, as an elderly countrywoman."

Rosina blew a smoke-ring into the air. "How very clever of you!" she remarked sarcastically.

"How very unfortunate for you, Rosina!" rejoined Noel, not in the least put out. "It was an old disguise of yours—and I happened to recognise it. I realised, of course, that you were after the jewels—and I guessed that you'd seize the opportunity when the baroness was out of town."

"It was at my suggestion that the butler was given the evening off—and I took his place. When I followed you into the room, just now, you heard me close the door; but I remained inside—behind the screen."

Still keeping Pierre covered, he reached out for the silken bell-cord.

Rosina drew in her breath sharply, her lovely eyes narrowing. With a nervous movement she tossed her glowing cigarette-end towards the fireplace; it fell on the hearth-rug close to Noel's foot.

Instinctively the young detective made to stamp it out—and like a flash, Rosina acted. With a cat-like bound she reached the light switch; the room was plunged into darkness.

"The window, Pierre—quickly!" she gasped. "And take the box!"

Noel made a bound for the window—in time to see Pierre vault over the balustrade, crashing into the shrubbery below.

There was no chance of overtaking him.

With a soft laugh, Rosina reached the door—to find that the key was missing from the lock!

"Sorry, Rosina!" remarked Noel grimly, as he switched on the light and confronted her. "I took the precaution of removing the key."

Rosina shrank back, her eyes narrowed, a defiant smile on her lips.

"But—Pierre has got the jewels!" she breathed.

"On the contrary," replied Noel gravely. "Pierre has got the empty box which I advised the baroness to put in the safe!"

A look of baffled rage sprang into Rosina's eyes.

"I—I don't believe you!" she gasped. Noel shrugged, smiling dryly.

"Do you suppose I'd be standing here, talking—if that box contained the jewels?" he asked. "I'm afraid you've blundered badly. Won't you sit down?"

He indicated a chair—but Rosina refused it, with an impetuous shake of her head.

Nervously she took out another cigarette and lit it, watching the flame of the match as it burnt down towards her fingers.

"You win, Mr. Raymond," she said huskily. "And—what now?"

"Stand away from the window!" ordered Noel sharply. "That's better. I'm sorry, Rosina—but you've given me the slip once too often. I'm not taking any risks."

He reached for the telephone. "You—you're going to have me arrested?" breathed Rosina, her face very white.

"I'm afraid so; you're badly wanted for a number of recent robberies—including your attempt on the Le Feyre heirlooms." Noel picked up the receiver, still keeping a wary eye on the beautiful young crook. "You're a fool not to run straight, for a change, Rosina," he said. "With your brains you might do something worth while."

Rosina yawned faintly, flicking the ash from her cigarette; but her hand was shaking.

"Perhaps it would not amuse me, my friend; I find it too dull," she murmured.

Noel did not reply; he was dialing Scotland Yard. The next minute he was speaking to his old friend Inspector Stannard.

"You've got Rosina, you say?" demanded the inspector excitedly. "Disguised as the baroness? Phew! I'll come along myself with a warrant. We'll take no chances, this time!"

Noel put down the receiver, his eyes were stern.

"Better get ready," he remarked quietly. "We'll be starting out in five or ten minutes."

Rosina's languid pose broke down abruptly; she started forward, her lovely face convulsed, her hands clenched.

"I—I hate you!" she sobbed. "You have no heart—no feeling! What have I done to you, that you should send me to prison? Oh—I can't bear it—"

She swayed, catching at Noel's arm to support herself.

"Air!" she breathed. "I must—I must have air. I feel faint—"

She collapsed suddenly, sagging like a dead weight in the young detective's arms.

Noel stared at her sharply, torn between momentary sympathy and suspicion.

He knew Rosina's marvellous powers of acting only too well; but this time her faint seemed genuine.

Yet he had no intentions of leaving her to fetch assistance.

He reached out, pulling the bell-cord.

The elderly maid-servant who answered the bell stared in amazement at the sight of her mistress, the baroness, supported by the butler, whose appearance had undergone a remarkable change.

"You'd better see to this young woman," said Noel briefly. "She's a clever trickster—who has been masquerading as your mistress."

He carried Rosina to the couch and, leaving her in charge of the bewildered servant, crossed to the window and secured the shutters.

"How is she?" he asked. "Do you think she's shamming?"

"Oh, no, sir!" replied the other, with conviction. "It's a swoon. I think she will come round in a few minutes—"

Just then there came a loud knocking on the front door—followed by the sound of a splintering crash.

Noel stepped quickly out into the hall.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded, addressing the footman, who was aware of Noel's real identity.

"A runaway knock, sir," replied the other indignantly. "Some young varmint—broken the faulight, too."

He pointed to the splintered glass lying on the floor.

Noel crossed to the door and stared out into the street—but he could see no signs of anyone.

With a shrug, he returned to the hall.

"The police will be here in a few minutes. Thomas," he said briefly, "show them to the baroness' sitting-room at once."

He returned to the room, encountering the elderly maid-servant in the doorway. "Well?" he demanded.

The woman shook her head doubtfully. "It's shock, I believe, sir," she whispered. "She's not come round. I've made her as comfortable as I can—and I'm going to fetch her something hot to drink."

Noel nodded, stepping into the room.

Rosina lay motionless on the couch, covered by a rug; she was moaning faintly.

The young detective frowned in a rather worried fashion, as he lit a cigarette with a hand that was not quite steady.

His natural chivalry rebelled at the task confronting him—yet it was his duty. Rosina was utterly unscrupulous—a danger to the community.

The arrest would have to go through.

He glanced at the open safe. It was fortunate that the baroness had taken his advice and removed the jewels from the box.

She had mentioned that she would lock them in a secret drawer until her return.

Noel glanced at his watch. He was expecting the baroness to return at any moment. It was this evening that she was giving a reception in honour of her niece's twenty-first birthday; and it was then that the famous

been some trouble here, in your aunt's absence—an attempt to steal the heirlooms. But there is no need to worry. The young woman who made the attempt has been caught."

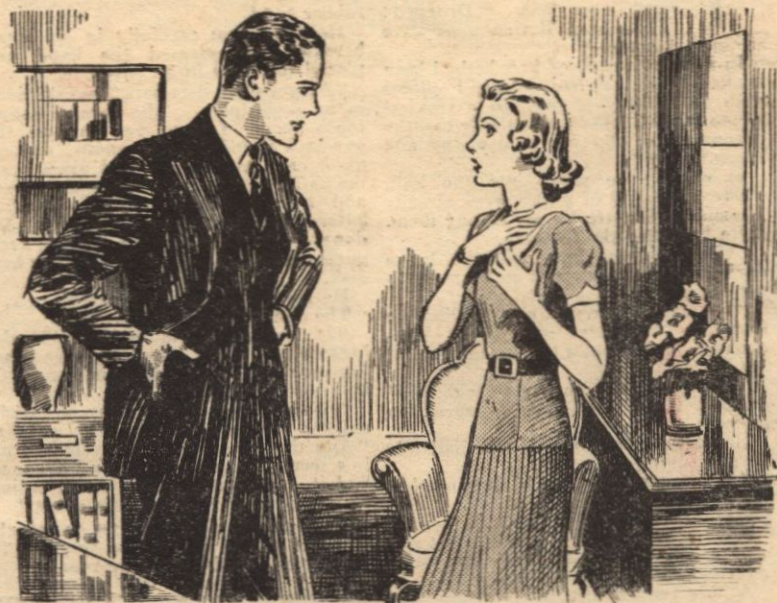
"Oh!" whispered the girl, her face paling. "Aunt—Aunt told me that you were taking precautions. She won't be able to get back from Scotland, this evening; her maid has wired to say that she has been taken ill. I am to ask you to give me the necklace and the tiara. Look—here is the telegram."

Noel stared at the telegram, a trifle taken aback.

"But, Miss Varley—I haven't the slightest idea where they are!" he explained. "Your aunt told me that she would lock them in some place of safety till her return."

Lucette Varley blinked in dismay.

"Oh," she breathed—and her lips trembled in obvious disappointment. "But, how strange. Aunt's so terribly



"I've a shrewd idea that Rosina is in the house at this moment," said Noel. "You mean—hidden?" faltered Lucette. "I mean, disguised as one of your guests," replied Noel.

Le Feyre necklace and diadem would be presented to the fortunate girl.

Noel himself would be present to keep an eye on the proceedings. Not that there would be much danger, he reflected, with a grim smile, with Rosina safely under arrest.

But he wished that the police would hurry!

He heard footsteps in the hall—and crossed to the door, even as it was thrown open impetuously to admit a flustered, rather pale-faced girl, her fair hair awry, her eyes red-rimmed as though from tears.

She was wearing a hat and coat, and apparently had just arrived.

"Mr. Raymond?" she inquired breathlessly. "You are Mr. Raymond, aren't you? I'm Lucette Varley—perhaps you've heard of me. My aunt—"

"Of course!" put in Noel, with swift enlightenment. "The baroness' niece. As a matter of fact, I was expecting your aunt."

The girl nodded unsteadily, and her glance rested on the motionless figure on the couch.

She started violently.

"Who—?" she began.

Noel hastily barred her way.

"It's all right, Miss Varley; there has

absent-minded. What—what shall I do?" Noel swiftly re-read the telegram.

"Miss Lucette Varley,

"Regret your aunt, the baroness, too unwell to travel. She sends her love. Please instruct Mr. Raymond, detective, to hand over jewels—"

Noel nodded thoughtfully.

"I was to have taken charge of them," he explained, "but your aunt left London rather suddenly. It's very unfortunate, Miss Varley, but I'm afraid there's nothing I can do about it, unless—"

He met the girl's appealing glance and came to a swift decision.

"Just a minute," he said. "I have an idea."

There was a knock on the door.

"Inspector Stannard, sir," announced the footman.

"Thank goodness, Stannard," exclaimed Noel, as the burly inspector appeared, followed by a constable. "The sooner we get Rosina to the Yard, the better."

He indicated the motionless figure on the couch.

"Do you mind waiting outside for a

moment, Miss Varley?" he said, anxious to spare the girl any painful scene.

"Of course," breathed Lucette, as she stepped obediently out of the room.

Noel crossed to the couch, followed by the inspector.

"She's fainted," he said briefly, "or it's a clever sham."

The inspector bent over the couch, and drew aside the rug. A startled ejaculation escaped his lips.

"Here, Raymond—who's this?" he demanded. "You'll never convince me that this is a disguise!"

Noel stepped swiftly to the inspector's side, then the blood drained from his face, and he drew in his breath incredulously.

For lying there, apparently in a swoon, was the grey-haired maid-servant!

THE FINGER-PRINTS ON THE PENCIL!

"YE gods!" ejaculated Noel as he bent over her. "Drugged! Then—then Rosina must have been—"

In a flash he realised how he had been tricked. Rosina had changed places with the elderly servant, in a reckless bid to escape! She had actually had the effrontery to stop in the doorway and speak to him!

Frantically he raced into the hall, where a number of guests were already assembled—Lucette Varley among them.

He beckoned the footman. "Could anyone have left the house during the last quarter of an hour—without being seen?" he asked.

"I shouldn't think so, sir," replied the footman. "Plenty of people have arrived—but no one's left, to the best of my knowledge."

"Get all the servants together," ordered Noel. "I want to speak to them."

He motioned Stannard, who had followed him into the hall.

"Better post a couple of men outside the house," he suggested tersely. "I've got an idea she's still here."

Noel interviewed the servants, but not one of them could give him any information.

At his request the whole house was searched thoroughly, but there was no sign of the elusive Rosina.

Could she have escaped, after all? With a worried frown, he returned to the hall, where the baroness' guests were assembled, all talking excitedly.

Rumours had reached their ears of some sensational happening, and they crowded round Noel, asking questions.

The young detective answered evasively as he drew Lucette Varley aside.

"Mr. Raymond, what has happened?" she faltered.

"Something very unfortunate, Miss Varley," replied Noel. "The girl crook who made the attempt on the jewels has escaped, and so has her confederate. It's just possible that they may be planning a fresh attempt."

Lucette caught in her breath sharply. "Then we must take precautions!" she breathed. "We must have the house guarded—"

"You don't know Rosina," put in Noel dryly. "Doors and bolts don't worry her. I've a shrewd idea that she's in the house at this moment, waiting her chance."

The girl's face paled. "You mean—hidden?" she faltered.

"I mean, disguised as one of your guests," replied Noel. "Are they all known to you personally, Miss Varley?"

The girl's eyes widened behind her spectacles.

"I can hardly believe it, Mr. Ray-

mond!" she breathed. "Of course, most of them are known to me. There are one or two people, though, whom auntie met when she went abroad. The Countess Marville—that tall, dark lady, wearing a veil—and her husband, the stout gentleman with the moustache."

Noel stared keenly at the two people referred to. The countess turned away rather hastily as she encountered his glance, and her hand went to her veil.

The young detective's eyes narrowed as he motioned Lucette to follow him.

For the first time he detected a faint, elusive perfume in the hall.

Rosina was here—somewhere among this crowd—as he had suspected!

"Miss Varley," he said tersely, "I want your help. There's only one way I can expose Rosina's latest masquerade, and that is by her finger-prints."

"But what can I do, Mr. Raymond?" asked the girl, staring.

Noel took from his pocket a bulky leather wallet, and extracted a pile of gleaming metal disks, secured by a rubber band.

Holding them carefully in his handkerchief, he released the band and placed the disks in an envelope.

"Finger-print detectors," he explained in an undertone. "Be careful not to touch them. I want you to pass the envelope round to your guests, and request each to take one and place it on the hall table. The disks are numbered, and you can explain that it is a kind of lottery, with a prize for the winner. Jot down on the envelope the name of each guest against the number of his, or her, disk."

He handed her a silver pencil. The girl nodded eagerly.

"It sounds quite exciting!" she breathed. "But it may take some time. Supposing—supposing Rosina escapes in the meantime?"

"She won't dream of escaping—without the necklace," replied Noel grimly. "And that necklace is safely locked up in a secret drawer. I shall endeavour to find it, while you distract the attention of the guests with this little game."

They parted then—Lucette to mingle with her guests, while Noel returned to the baroness' private sitting-room.

A SCHOOL STORY YOU'LL ENJOY

No. 666



"If Her School Friends Only Knew" is one of the four January volumes of the

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He had noticed a bureau there of early Italian workmanship—a period in which secret cavities abounded.

Swiftly he examined it, pulling out the drawers and opening the hinged flap with a master-key.

But he found no trace of any hidden compartment.

He had almost given up hope when his finger touched a concealed spring, and a square of inlaid woodwork sprang out, revealing a dark cavity.

Noel thrust his hand into the cavity, withdrawing it with something that flashed and glittered in the dim light.

"The Le Feyre necklace!" he breathed.

He heard the door-handle turn, and he slipped the priceless necklace quickly into his pocket as the door opened, to admit Lucette Varley.

Noel grinned in relief. "What luck, Miss Varley?" he asked.

Lucette smilingly held out the envelope containing the metal disks.

"I did as you suggested," she explained. "Some of the guests seemed a little reluctant—the Countess Marville and her husband, for instance. But I obtained all their finger-prints—I hope."

"Good work, Miss Varley!" said Noel. "Now, let us see."

He emptied the disks on to the bureau, and scanned them swiftly through a powerful magnifying-glass.

A baffled expression crossed his face. There were twelve disks, and twelve guests accounted for; but Rosina's familiar finger-prints were not among them.

"I expect you were mistaken," said Lucette, noting his look of disappointment.

"I can't understand it," muttered Noel. "I must check over this list. May I have my pencil?"

Lucette handed him the silver pencil. Noel turned it over carelessly; his eyes glittered.

Clearly marked on the silver barrel of the pencil were the telltale prints for which he had been searching!

His hand shot out, catching Lucette Varley by the shoulder.

"The game's up, Rosina!" he snapped.

The girl shrank back, and behind the thick spectacles her eyes glittered in baffled fury.

"So—you suspected all along?" she breathed.

"I half-suspected," replied Noel grimly. "But that double change of yours kept me guessing. How did you manage it?"

Rosina laughed unpleasantly. "Guess again, Mr. Raymond," she sneered.

"I will," rejoined Noel coolly. "When you pretended to light your cigarette you were signalling to Pierre in the grounds. It was he who flung the stone through the fanlight to distract attention. You had your other disguise ready; having overpowered the housekeeper and left the room, you returned again as Lucette Varley. Am I right?"

"Very clever," rejoined Rosina. "And what now, Mr. Raymond?"

"The police," said Noel grimly, as he reached for the bell-pull.

"I think not!" flashed Rosina, her eyes glinting. "Pierre!"

"Here, mam'selle!"

A figure stepped swiftly from behind the curtains, and something cold and hard was pressed to the nape of Noel's neck.

Noel, taken completely off his guard, stood motionless, his mind working swiftly.

"I warn you not to make a sound, Mr. Raymond!" said Rosina mock-

ingly, as she removed her disfiguring spectacles. "Pierre will make no mistake."

She thrust a hand into Noel's pocket, producing the glittering necklace.

"Very pretty!" she murmured, her eyes gleaming avariciously. "The window, Pierre—quickly!"

She tossed the necklace to her confederate, who made a dive for the window.

Noel spun on his heel in time to see Pierre vault over the balustrade. In one bound the young detective followed, landing with a crash among the bushes.

A soft, mocking voice drifted down to him.

"An revoir, Mr. Raymond!" called Rosina. "That was a fake necklace I threw out of the window; a little sleight of hand. I wish you luck!"

"Confound it!" breathed Noel, between his teeth.

Rosina had turned the tables, with a vengeance!

He made a dive for the gate; but a shadowy figure sprang on him from the bushes, landing on his shoulders and bringing him to the ground.

Your Editor's Corner



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

MY DEAR READERS,—I've been wondering how many of you made that New Year resolution I hinted at last week.

Do you remember it? I suggested that you should resolve to write to me—regularly.

Of course, once a week would be marvellous. But perhaps that's asking too much. So what about once a fortnight—or once a month?

You see, I'm just like you, and love receiving letters. And, quite apart from liking to know all about my readers, I also find your letters extremely helpful, for they tell me which stories appeal to you most, and for what reasons. As you can guess, this is very valuable when planning out new stories with my authors, for, naturally, my one idea is to give you the type of story you like best.

So don't forget to write—just whenever you feel like it, and remember, I shall always be pleased to write back.

STORIES FOR EVERY TASTE

Now what about my resolution—my one and only? You remember that it was to make the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** better and better every single week.

Well, to-day, you know whether I have succeeded in starting off as I intended, for you'll be reading the first instalment of Gail Western's splendid new school serial.

I've read further instalments of this, of course—and I can promise you that you're in for a real treat,

Pierre had been an ex-boxer in his time—and this time he meant to make no mistake!

THE powerful grey car purred along the narrow side streets, heading for the river.

Rosina bent over the wheel, her lovely face flushed with triumph, a hard glitter in her eyes.

"So much for Mr. Noel Raymond!" she breathed.

The priceless necklace reposed in her handbag; a fast launch was awaiting her at the wharfside.

Rosina laughed softly as she came in sight of the wharf—overhung with a faint, eerie mist.

"All the better for our escape!" she breathed. "I trust that Pierre will settle that meddling detective once and for all!"

As the car drew up at the wharf-side a man appeared from the enveloping mist—a tough, swarthy individual wearing a peak cap and reefer jacket.

"All ready, Jackson?" inquired Rosina, as she sprang out.

"All ready, miss," came the gruff reply. "I've got a couple of men with

for, as the story advances, it becomes more and more baffling even to guess who is Jess Grant's secret enemy at school.

"Mystery on the Night Express" is the title of next Friday's story featuring Noel Raymond, and it is every bit as exciting as the title suggests.

There are flying thrills in the tale about Pat Lovell, girl reporter—entitled, "When Pat Brought Good Luck." Another story, featuring Kaye of the Kennels, and her wonderful pets, will also appear, as well as further instalments of our three enthralling serials.

CONGRATULATIONS

I hope you all noticed that I was able to publish the list of prize-winners in our competition two weeks ago. It was squeezed in at the last moment, so I didn't have an opportunity to mention it in my chat.

If you did miss it, and have parted with your own copy, perhaps you can ask a chum if she'll let you look at hers.

I should like again to congratulate the prize-winners; I hope the cash was just what they wanted for those extra Christmas treats.

JUST A CHUCKLE

Here's a joke that I think will amuse your friends when you tell them—particularly if they are good dancers.

A young girl was at a party, dancing with a boy she had only met that evening.

Suddenly she looked up at him. "What's the difference between dancing and marching?" she asked him, just as if it were a riddle.

"I don't know," he answered stolidly.

"I thought so!" she said, wincing as he trod heavily on her foot, once more. "So now we'll sit down, shall we?"

Now I must say good-bye until Friday. Meanwhile, do remember to order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR.

me—in case of trouble. We'll just about make the tide."

Rosina glanced anxiously over her shoulder.

"We can't start without Pierre," she breathed. "But for him I'd never have pulled off this job. Why doesn't he hurry?"

She tapped her small foot impatiently on the ground, but there was a hint of real anxiety in her eyes.

The faithful Pierre was the one person in the world whom she could really trust; and Rosina was not ungrateful.

The minutes dragged on interminably; from the river came the faint, eerie hooting of syrens.

The captain of the launch grew impatient.

"If we don't start soon, miss, we'll miss the tide!" he declared.

"Hark!" breathed Rosina.

In the distance came the sound of an approaching car; it came in sight at length—a small, ramshackle car, splashed with mud.

It screamed to a halt a few hundred yards away, and a muffled figure sprang out, stumbling through the mist.

Rosina started to meet him.

"Is that you, Pierre?" she gasped anxiously.

"Oui, mam'selle!" came the husky, breathless reply. "I settled the detective. But the police are on my track; we must hurry!"

"Come, my friend," laughed Rosina, grabbing his arm. "The launch is waiting. The police will search for us in vain!"

"And the necklace, mam'selle," asked the other huskily—"you have it safely?"

"Here!" declared Rosina, opening her handbag and revealing the glittering chain of stones. "Does that satisfy you, Pierre? I'd like to see Noel Raymond's expression now!"

"You may, Rosina!" rapped the newcomer grimly, as he caught her by the wrist and jerked back the muffler that concealed his face.

"Noel Raymond!" screamed Rosina, her eyes dilated with baffled fury.

"Precisely, young lady!" Noel regarded her sternly. "Pierre is already under arrest. He is a good boxer, but lacks a knowledge of ju-jitsu. I shall be grateful if you would come with me without a fuss."

He slipped the necklace into his pocket.

"Jackson!" called Rosina.

A ruffianly figure loomed up behind the young detective. Noel spun round in the nick of time, his fist smashing into the man's jaw and sending him sprawling.

He ducked as a shot whistled over his head.

But Rosina had wriggled free. He was in time to see her leap in the waiting launch; with a splutter of its engines, the boat swung out into the mist.

"Adieu, Mr. Raymond!" came Rosina's mocking voice. "I took the liberty of extracting the necklace from your pocket while you were otherwise engaged!"

"Bon voyage, Rosina!" rejoined Noel, smiling grimly. "That necklace you took from my pocket is the fake necklace you threw out to Pierre; the real necklace is in my hand at the moment. Au revoir—until we meet again!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"Mystery on the Night Express" is the title of next Friday's complete story, featuring Noel Raymond. Don't miss it. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.



Her Ordeal at the Dress Show

The first time Pat Lovell entered the exclusive dress salon, she was quaking in her shoes at all the magnificence. But the second time was very different—for Pat had come in order to expose an unscrupulous trickster.

By ELIZABETH CHESTER

THE SLASHED FROCK

"TAXI!" called Pat Lovell, the youngest girl reporter on the "Midshire Gazette," as, notebook tucked under her arm, she hailed a passing taxicab.

Pat could not help smiling, but it was not a smile of amusement. She was in that state of pent-up excitement when it is hard to keep the face straight and to prevent sparkling eyes from giving away the fact.

Although by now Pat was an experienced reporter, she was still thrilled by the idea of taking taxicabs instead of walking—and most delicious part of it all was the fact that the fares did not come from her own purse, but from petty cash, under the heading "expenses."

As the taxicab drew up at the kerb, Pat tried to look serious.

"Pazénier," she said to the taximan; "and don't forget there's a small 'p.'"

"Wazzat?" said the taximan. "Pazénier—oh," he ended, as enlightenment dawned, "the new dress shop, you mean, miss? Going a splash, eh?" he added.

"Taking a head-first dive," smiled Pat. "No frocks under twenty guineas, no two alike. But this outfit didn't come from there," she added candidly. "I'm merely going to look on."

She climbed into the taxi, sat down, and sighed. What fun it was going to be! Pazénier, spelled with a small "p" in best Grosvenor Street manner, the London Bond Street touch.

Pazénier was the name of a dress designer who had opened an establishment in Midshire, something really new for the Midland town that was its capital. And Pat Lovell, as a "Gazette" reporter, had been given the job of attending the first reception when the latest models would be displayed by mannequins.

Never before in her life had Pat had reason to go into a super frock shop; for it would have taken her more than a year to save the price of one little frock of the Pazénier type; and even if she could have been so wildly extravagant, she would never have been able to wear it in her own cheery set.

But that did not mean that Pat Lovell had never wanted to see inside such a shop. She wanted to go everywhere, see everything, the lives of rich

and poor; and this morning it was the rich she would see.

The very smartest, best-dressed women with their escorts would be attending the reception, and Pat would have as much fun studying them as she would have in viewing the frocks.

She was so busy with her thoughts that the taxicab's halting took her unaware. Glancing from the window, she saw the new shop. It did not look like a shop at all, but more as though it were a private residence. There was no window display in the ordinary sense, only a purple velvet curtain on which the name "pazénier" was embroidered in gold, and in front of it some white roses in a black vase.

"Swank!" said Pat, as she stepped out, and then paid off the taximan, who winked.

Making sure that her Press invitation card was in her bag, Pat went towards the steps just as a woman with obviously the same destination in mind was helped down from an expensive-looking limousine by a chauffeur.

There was no question of a race to the doorway, but Pat was leading by a yard, and saw no reason to slow or to step aside.

"Parsons," said the woman who had been helped from the limousine. "Ring the bell!"

Her voice had an American twang, and Pat turned to give her a swift glance.

"Rich," decided Pat. "Well dressed, rather a bully. Treats the chauffeur like dirt."

The American woman exuded a delicate perfume, was cool-looking, and as perfectly finished as a work of art, hair-dressing—the little Pat could see of it—manicure, complexion, frock, sables, hat, all just as perfect as money could ensure.

But the hard glitter in the woman's eyes, the steely, merciless set of her mouth had not been altered in the beauty parlour; and perhaps that, too, Pat wondered, might be the effect of money.

In fact Pat was staring more than she intended, and was brought to a realisation of the fact by the American woman's metallic voice.

"Young woman, will you stand aside so that my chauffeur can ring the bell?"

"I meant to ring myself," apologised Pat, trying hard not to seem embarrassed.

The chauffeur rang, and the door was

almost immediately opened by a flunkey in livery who bowed his head and stood aside for them to enter.

Pat's strong strain of independence gave her no reason to guess that the American woman thought that she should enter the door first; for Pat, used to queuing up for buses and the cinema, had the fixed idea that who was nearest the door went in first.

Only when she was almost shouldered aside did Pat realise that the American woman viewed things differently. With a little bow, then, Pat moved away and followed her in.

"Quite a crush," said Pat to the footman.

He took no notice, but closed the door behind her. And Pat, feeling that she was not doing things in the right manner, made an effort at an expression of lofty disdain.

A small, dapper man with sleek appearance was bowing deeply to the American woman.

"My dear lady, how charmed I am to see you here," he gushed. "In every salon in Europe, Mrs. van Uffing's presence is counted an honour."

"The money I spend, I guess it ought to be," said the American woman. "And I've come here to buy to-day."

The suave little man made sweeping movements of the hand as though by so doing he could waft her to the gold-tinted lift and then up to the salon.

As she walked past him he turned to Pat.

"And what may you want?" he asked coldly, not realising that Pat was a reporter.

Pat proudly produced her invitation card, and his eyebrows shot up.

"Press?" he said, with a note of respect. "You looked so young that I thought you had come to visit an assistant."

It gave Pat a thrill to see the change in his manner, now that he knew she was from the "Gazette," but she wished that she did not look so young that people found it hard to believe that she really was a reporter.

"The lift is to the left," he said, with a courtly bow.

But Pat preferred to go by the stairs, as there were others bound for the lift, and there was no great hurry.

Not being sure of the way, however, she took a wrong turning on the landing, and presently found herself, not in the salon, but in what appeared to be a work-room. A girl sat there, busy with a frock which, with skilled fingers, she was altering.

She looked up with a start as Pat entered, and her expression seemed worried and tired; but Pat's ready smile was reflected at once on her face.

"I'm awfully sorry to butt in," said Pat. "But I'm a reporter, and I seem to have lost my way to the salon."
"The salon?" said the girl. "Oh, yes, you took the wrong turning." She made a move, as though intending to rise to show Pat the way, but changed her mind. "I'm afraid I can't show you as I'm rushing this frock through for Mrs. van Uffing," she said.

"Oh, I'll find the way," said Pat easily. "If you'll tell me—"

"Just down the corridor, and the first right and then left will take you in by the back door," said the girl.

"First right, and then left?" repeated Pat. "Thank you, and I hope Mrs. van Uffing will like the frock. It looks lovely."

She would have crossed the room to take a closer look at the lovely frock, but a sharp, querulous voice came.

"Miss Innis, have you finished that yet?"

A smart, sleekly dressed woman with pale face and white hair swept into the room, pulling up in surprise as she saw Pat.

"Really, Miss Innis, is this a time to entertain friends?" she demanded.

"My fault," said Pat quickly. "I'm a reporter from the 'Gazette.'"

The white-haired woman's manner changed instantly.

"I am sorry. Come this way. I really must apologise. I am sure you will find plenty to write about. It is an amazing display. Amazing—"

And Pat, with a good-bye smile to the girl, went with the white-haired woman into the salon, where people stood in small groups, talking. There was such a party atmosphere that Pat Lovell felt her excitement returning. Hothouse flowers, the gentle aroma of expensive perfumes, here and there the sparkle of jewels on white hands or throats—everywhere luxury, affluence, and near by, concealed at present by a purple curtain, the small stage where the mannequins would parade.

The chairs were not too formally arranged, and Pat was shown to a good position in front. For a few minutes she took stock of the people, jotting down the names of those she recognised who might be mentioned in the gossip column, and then a soft-tone bell rang, the murmur of voices died down, and the curtain rose.

The show was on, and Pat, concentrating on her job, jotted down a swift description of the first frock in shorthand, listening to the comments that the white-haired woman made.

The frock was a spring poem, and Pat sighed a little as she looked at it, wishing that she could afford to buy and wear it.

The mannequin turned gracefully, and then, suddenly, the white-haired woman gasped, signalled frantically, and pressed a buzzer. At the same moment the mannequin momentarily lost her poise, turned her head, and gasped aloud.

The frock was torn! As she moved, it suddenly lost its line, its style, everything. A gaping slit showed, and the mannequin, after an appalled, panic-stricken moment, fled the stage.

Down came the curtain. Confusion reigned, and Pat hurriedly scribbled notes. She was still scribbling when she became aware that the suave man she had met in the hall below was leaning over her.

"One moment," he said, in grim tones. "Have the goodness to come to the office, please."

Pat, startled, jumped up, every eye upon her.

"You are speaking to me?" she said. "To you, yes," he said, in a hissing undertone. "You were in the work-room ten minutes ago I think? Very well. Please come to the office, and bring your handbag!"

UNDER SUSPICION

PAT LOVELL, red in the face, was quite bewildered but full of common-sense; she realised that there was a connection between this sudden summons to the office and the dramatic happening on the stage.

The curtain was rising again as she went out of the room, but whatever happened then was hidden from her; for the suave man, holding her arm, took her along to the office, where the white-haired woman stood with the girl whom Pat had spoken to in the work-room.

The office was a luxuriously equipped apartment that might as well have been referred to as a drawing-room, but Pat's reporter instinct for noting details was momentarily numbed, and she hardly gave the room a glance.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked anxiously, hiding her nervousness.

"Show me your Press ticket," said the man curtly.

"Oh, but I showed it before," said Pat, in surprise. "But here it is." And opening her bag, she held it out to him, wondering why he wanted to see it again.

He studied it, crossed to the telephone and lifted the receiver, calling the number of the "Gazette" office.

"The Editor?" he said. "I am Pazenier. I am inquiring about a reporter you have sent to my dress show. I fear there may be a mistake, and wish for her to be described, sir."

Pat's cheeks crimsoned, but she heard the editor's voice, and now and then caught a word. But her heart sank, for this humiliation was hard to bear; worse still, it might mean that the editor would think twice in future before sending her out on jobs of this kind.

"She seems very young and inex-

perienced," said Pazenier, shrugging his shoulders. "Yet she is the girl you describe. Tell me, you know her well, can you vouch for her character? No. Nothing is amiss, a general inquiry, that is all, for trade reasons only, you understand. No, no, we naturally treat the 'Gazette' with respect, and admire it. Yes, yes. Good-morning."

He turned to Pat and frowned as though disappointed, and almost sulkily spoke to her.

"You are evidently the girl," he said. "The 'Gazette' reporter."

"Why, yes, of course," said Pat, bewildered.

Monsieur Pazenier held out his hand and spoke curtly.

"Will you please let me look into your handbag?" he said.

Pat Lovell was so surprised that she could not speak, but she made no movement to give him her handbag. All at once it dawned upon her that she was being suspected of something. And since he wanted to look in her handbag, what could it mean but that she was thought to have stolen something?

Pat's cheeks crimsoned, and her chin went up proudly.

"I want to know why you wish to search my handbag," she said, hoping that her shaking nervousness was not apparent.

Monsieur Pazenier did not move; his hand was still held out.

"I will tell you," he said grimly. "A frock has been slashed and ruined—a very expensive, special frock. It has been ruined within the last twenty minutes, and most likely in the work-room. You were there, and you—like everyone else in the room—are under suspicion. I demand to see your handbag to discover if there is a razor blade concealed in it."

Pat heaved a sigh of relief. There was certainly no such thing in her handbag; and, with a clear conscience, she put the bag on the table in front of him.

"Search it, by all means, Monsieur Pazenier," she said quietly. "But I am sure my editor will consider this an insult to his paper."

Monsieur Pazenier did not reply; but he opened the handbag and tipped out the contents on the table—a few coins,



"One moment, please," Pat turned as she felt the hand of the manager on her shoulder. "Have the goodness to come to the office, please," he said in a grim tone.

keys, part of a bar of chocolate, a spare pencil, a photograph of her mother, powder-box, and a small hanky.

Monsieur Pazenier searched the bag carefully, sorted out the contents, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not there now," he said.

Pat saw red.

"And it never was! I am a reporter, not a frock-slasher, Monsieur Pazenier," she cried. "You've no right to accuse me!"

He eyed her sternly, and then turned to the girl whom Pat had spoken to in the work-room. She stood there—pale-faced, frightened, terrified almost, as Pat could see by her expression.

"You, then! It must have been you!" he cried in anger.

"Monsieur, oh, no!" cried the girl wretchedly, imploringly. "It's not true. I did not cut the frock. Oh, why should I, after all the hours I have spent on it?"

But his eyes glittered in anger.

"Only you, this reporter girl, madame, and Mrs. van Uffing touched the frock. One is to blame," he said. "I was close to madame all the time; it was not she who did the damage. Do you accuse Mrs. van Uffing?"

Pat watched the girl's face and thought that she had never before seen so stricken a look, such utter despair and misery.

"Why, no," said Miss Innis tearfully, "I don't accuse Mrs. van Uffing. But—I did not do it. Oh, please believe me, monsieur!"

Monsieur Pazenier pointed to the door.

"Go to the cashier, collect your money, and do not come back. You are dismissed. I am shocked and surprised, Miss Innis. But go before I lose my temper."

The dazed assistant gave him an appealing look; turned to madame, faltering inaudible words; and then, with a broken cry, her face in her hands, turned to the door.

She passed close to Pat; and Pat, her heart going out to her, hardly thinking what she was doing, took her arm.

"Don't go," she said. "You're not proved guilty yet."

Infuriated, Monsieur Pazenier swung round from his desk.

"Do you give orders here, or I?" he demanded. "Go, Miss Innis! You are dismissed!"

Pat stood back, her cheeks pale, as the assistant tugged open the door after a moment of fumbling, and then closed it behind her.

Madame turned to the dress designer.

"But, monsieur, she is my best assistant," she protested. "And, besides, she is the sole support of her mother. I cannot believe—"

"Enough, madame!" he said, drawing up.

But Pat, heedless of whether it was her place to do so or not, added her own plea.

"I'm sure that girl is innocent," she said, "and—"

He cut her short with a gesture and snatched up the telephone.

"Call the 'Midshire Gazette' office again," he said to his exchange operator.

Pat waited, wondering what was to be said, but she soon knew.

"The editor? Once more it is Monsieur Pazenier. Please send another and more experienced reporter. This one is impertinent and offensive. Thank you. Yes, I will ask her to return to the office."

Pat Lovell stood quite still, and she felt cold all over. She could hardly believe for a moment that this was not some joke, and she did not move; but

madame touched her arm and spoke kindly.

"You had better go," she urged gently, "or there will be worse trouble for you."

Pat Lovell turned to the door, and, with overwhelming dismay, knew that she was dismissed; that the editor would be furious, and that henceforth—instead of being entrusted with these responsible, attractive jobs—she would be kept at the office to do routine work.

She was disgraced, humiliated, sent back to her paper—and all because she had tried to be fair and just, to help a girl in distress.

In the corridor outside she pulled up short, but her own sorrows were forgotten when she heard the sound of crying.

Farther along the corridor Miss Innis was leaning against the wall, crying as though her heart would break. Overwrought, tired after long hours of rush work, this last blow had proved too much for her strained, pent-up emotions, and she could not hold her chin up, could not fight back the tears.

"Oh, please," begged Pat softly, "don't cry like this! I'm sure everything will come all right—really I am! Truth will out, you know."

But the girl shook her head; and when, after a moment or two, she had mastered her sobs sufficiently to be able to speak, she told Pat just what dismissal meant to her.

She was her mother's sole support, and they had just moved into a new flat; there was new furniture, bought on the instalment plan; and on Saturday a party had been arranged.

"I just can't believe I'm sacked!" she gulped. "It means— Oh, it can't be true!" And she pressed her hands to her head. "I didn't cut the frock—I didn't!"

Pat pressed her arm.

"If it can be proved," she insisted, "wouldn't Pazenier change his mind? He's angry now; but when he's calmed down perhaps he'd take you back."

But Miss Innis shook her head.

"No, never—unless one of the ladies asked for me back."

"Mrs. van Uffing?" said Pat quickly, with a faint hope of asking the woman to put in a good word for the assistant. "I've never seen her before to-day," said Miss Innis. "And—"

The door of Monsieur Pazenier's office opened, and a flunkey emerged. He crossed straight to where Pat stood.

"Sorry, miss," he said, "but I have been instructed to see you off the premises."

Pat Lovell, her cheeks burning, put her head up, and with one last look at Miss Innis, in which she tried to compress encouragement and sympathy, she followed the flunkey down the stairs and out of the building.

And ahead of her was a humiliating interview with her chief!

—

THE DARING ROLE PAT PLAYED

ALTHOUGH Pat's editor was angry that one of his reporters should be sent back to the office under a cloud, yet he was a fair-minded man, and he listened patiently to her version of what had happened. Hearing it, he became a little less angry.

"H'm! A queer business certainly," he said. "But what were you doing in that work-room at all?"

"I lost my way," admitted Pat.

"Reporters shouldn't lose their way!" he retorted.

Pat bit her lip, for until this moment her editor had had a high opinion of

her ability. Now in one awful moment it had fallen almost to zero.

"But—but there's this story of the slashed frock," she protested. "It's news—it's a mystery. Won't that be any use to the paper?"

But the editor almost snorted.

"A shop assistant sacked for cutting a frock? We can't report on it unless she is charged with the offence."

The telephone bell rang, and, attending to the call, he dismissed Pat with a motion of the hand.

Ruefully Pat left his office, feeling for the moment quite helpless, for, even though the editor thought that Monsieur Pazenier had been high-handed, he was convinced that in some way she must have acted foolishly.

Given sympathetic looks by the other reporters in the room, she went to her desk. For, at least, she had made a note of the people present, and it might do something to raise her stock if she could provide a gossip paragraph or two.

There are some people who are always news, and the name that jumped to Pat's mind was that of Mrs. van Uffing, known as the best-dressed woman of somewhere. To find out where, Pat referred to the files, hoping that Mrs. van Uffing was more important than she thought and perhaps worth writing a whole paragraph about.

Five minutes later she had routed out a few hundred words about Mrs. van Uffing, and a photograph.

Pat stared at the photograph, stared more closely, and then gave a startled gasp. Quite overcome with shock, she sat down on the nearest chair, only to spring up, however, in wild excitement.

She jumped for her hat and coat, and a sub-editor called to her:

"Where are you off to?"

Pat turned, her eyes sparkling again. "A big story," she said. "A case of imposture—and perhaps something more."

And Pat, the photograph in her hand, hurried out of the office, pausing when she reached the street to look at that newspaper-cutting again so as to make quite sure there was no mistake.

No mistake at all! If this photograph was indeed of Mrs. van Uffing, the best dressed woman in the eastern States of America, then the woman at the dress show was someone else!

"In fact," Pat told herself in thrilled tones, "she is an impostor. She's not Mrs. van Uffing at all!"

And if that were so, was it so utterly impossible that the person who had slashed the frock was not Miss Innis, but the impostor?

At once Pat saw that that was the likeliest explanation. If she could prove it, then Miss Innis was saved, and she would be saved from disgrace herself, since not only would she scoop a story for her paper, but Monsieur Pazenier would have to climb down and apologise.

But Pat Lovell, although she did not doubt the truth of what she hoped to prove, was still a long way from proving it!

"This," she told herself, as she walked slowly along the street, "is where you gang warily, Pat Lovell—very warily indeed."

PAT LOVELL looked at her reflection in the mirror, and had quite a shock. She had become almost middle-aged, and her hair was a most artificial reddish brown. Her clothes were middle-aged-looking, too, and rather frumpy.

"I don't look myself at all," she murmured.

It was in front of the long mirror in the back room of Miss Powell's theatrical costumier's shop that she stood, and white-haired Miss Powell was standing back, with a nodding, approving look.

"I think I have made a good job of you," she said. "And these plain, horn-rimmed glasses make a lot of difference, too."

Pat looked at her reflection more searchingly, but so well had she been made up that she really could hardly believe that it could be her own reflection.

"Good!" she said. "Let's hope that it really does take people in. Anyway, if it diddles Mrs. van Uffing, that's what matters, although I shouldn't care for Monsieur Pazenier to bowl me out."

Assured by the smiling Miss Powell that the make-up was perfect, Pat Lovell, now calling herself Miss Oswald, of Paris, stepped out, to hail a taxicab and drive back to the dress show.

So far as Pat knew there was no Miss Oswald, of Paris. But if Mrs. van Uffing was an impostor, she would not be sure that there was not such a person, a friend of the real Mrs. van Uffing.

And that was what Pat hoped. Once she had forced the impostor to pretend to know her, she fancied that she could then proceed to unmask her.

But when Pat reached the dress shop she was not nearly so confident of herself. Ringing the bell, she asked very shakily if Mrs. van Uffing was on the premises.

Invited in, she was presently informed that the person she mentioned was at present in a fitting-room trying on frocks.

"Then I'll go up. I'm a very old friend," said Pat.

And up she went, none of the flunkys caring to bar her way if she was indeed a friend of a rich customer.

Pat chose to go up by the stairs, and, meeting an assistant in a corridor, she asked for the sitting-room where Mrs. van Uffing was being attended to.

Rapping on the door, Pat pushed it open.

In the room was Monsieur Pazenier, madame, and Mrs. van Uffing; all three turned to Pat in surprise.

It was the most anxious moment of Pat's life when all three pairs of eyes were fixed upon her. But she walked forward, hand outstretched.

"My dear Mrs. van Uffing," she said, "how glad I am to find you here!"

Mrs. van Uffing stared at her blankly, and that blank look made Pat's heart jump with joy. There was no instant denial of recognition!

"You remember me—Miss Oswald? You remember staying with me in Paris, surely, Mrs. van Uffing?" said Pat, and she adjusted her glasses. "That is, unless my short sight misleads me, and you are not Mrs. van Uffing at all—"

"I—I—why, of course, Miss Oswald! How stupid of me! Why, certainly! Very glad to see you again. Very glad! If you care to wait somewhere until I have tried on these frocks—" said the American woman.

"I'll stay here, thanks!" said Pat. "It will be a pleasure to see you trying on these lovely frocks!"

"But certainly," said Monsieur Pazenier graciously. "At the moment we await an assistant."

"And here is Miss Innis," said madame.

Pat fell back amazed as Miss Innis, her tears dried, walked into the room.

"This lady sent for you specially, Miss Innis," said Monsieur Pazenier curly. "We always endeavour to please our customers."



FROM ONE GIRL TO ANOTHER

Helpful Hints
and Cheery
Chatter by
Penelope

HALLO, EVERYBODY,—Isn't it amazing how immediately Christmas is over, so many people seem to forget all about it—and get on with the next thing?

Your Penelope has even heard people at the office already discussing plans for summer holidays, if you please!

Schoolgirls, of course, are making plans to go back to school.

I know my young cousin Kathleen is dying to go back to hers on the South Coast. "Because, I suspect, she wants to show off all her Christmas presents to admiring Form-fellows!"

VERY AWKWARD

Isn't it difficult when you receive an unexpected present from someone at Christmas—and then realise you haven't a gift for that person!

This happened to me last year. A girl I don't know very well gave me a handbag. And I hadn't even sent her a card. I felt dreadful—particularly as there wasn't time to dash out and buy her something.

For some time I simply couldn't think what to do. Then finally I decided to send her just a small New Year gift—a calendar. (I purposely kept the gift small, so that she wouldn't think I was sort of trying to make up for her gift, you see.)

It occurred to me that this same problem might have happened to you this year. Perhaps there is someone to whom you feel you should give just a "little something" for the New Year. Something you have made yourself would just about be perfect, I think—and convey a very nice thought.

This cheery little calendar here is not only inexpensive to make, but it is novel as well, for the fish part is actually a pin-cushion.

With an eye on the picture here, cut out two fish shapes in brightly coloured felt, silk, or any other suitable material.

Stitch around and fill with bran or sawdust. Then mark on the fish an eye and a mouth—both need only simple stitches.

Sew a bow of ribbon to the top side of the fish, and two strips of ribbon to the under side, which should have a purse calendar glued on.

Arrange the pins artistically—and your present is complete.

AMAZING

I was very interested the other day to read about Plastics. I wonder if you knew that Plastics is the name

given to that new product of which so many things are now made. Wireless cabinets, zippy fasteners, picnic cups and saucers, cigarette boxes—many are made of Plastics, and it can be made colourful and gay, or representing wood.

It was discovered in the most amazing way, about thirty years ago. A chemist returned from his holiday to find that the saucer of milk he had put out for his cat before going on holiday was still untouched.

In fact, the milk had all congealed.

Then, by accident, he dropped some formaldehyde into this, and discovered that it turned the mass into a hard substance.

So did Plastics begin. And now more than 50,000 tons of skim milk is turned into the new product each year. Most of the milk, you may be interested to know, comes from France and the Argentine—where there are many surplus cows!

That's all very serious, I know—but frightfully interesting, don't you agree?

COSY GLOVES

I'm quite sure there is no need for me to ask if you are remembering to wear your gloves these chilsome days. You've only got to go out once or twice without them to find your fingers turning nippy and your hands red and unattractive.

'Tis said, you know, that if your hands and feet are warm, you are warm all over—and that means no colds for you!

But even more important than keeping the hands warm, is keeping the wrists snug. (You must have seen mothers feeling their babies' wrists many a time.)

So if you can spare a few pennies to buy yourself half a yard of fur-fabric edging—which looks almost as good as the real fur, you know—do treat yourself to some.

Sew it around the wrists of your gloves—where it will not only look very smart, but will keep your hands magically warm.

If you don't want to buy the fur-fabric, some pieces of warm tweed from mother's piece-bag would do equally well.

Bye-bye now, all, until next week!

Your own,
PENELOPE



"Thank you, madame!" said Miss Innis, with a look of gratitude at the American woman.

But Pat Lovell had a sinking feeling of dismay. This was the last thing she had expected. If Mrs. van Uffing had requested that Miss Innis be reinstated, could she really be guilty herself?

There were half a dozen lovely dresses and Miss Innis took them into the fitting cubicle.

A moment later Mrs. van Uffing reappeared, wearing a creation in blue, and smiling with pleasure. But as she glanced down the smile faded.

"Good gracious!" she gasped. "This frock is torn!"

"Torn!" cried madame, starting forward. "It's—it's slashed—another frock slashed!"

She hurried into the cubicle, picked up first one frock then another, and with an anguished cry returned to the main room.

"Look—look—they are all slashed—all of them!" she gasped.

Pat took in a breath, and looked from the American woman to Miss Innis. The latter seemed near to fainting as Monsieur Pazenier wheeled upon her.

"So it is an act of spite! This is proof if proof were needed!" he cried. "Go! Madame, take her to the restroom. I shall call the police!"

But Pat Lovell stood barring the way to the door.

"One moment, please," she said quietly. "There's a mistake. Why are you so sure that Mrs. van Uffing didn't do the slashing?"

Mrs. van Uffing drew up, startled, her cheeks white.

"I? I slash frocks?" she demanded. "Are you crazy?"

"These people here do not know as much about you as I do," said Pat coolly.

She was taking a chance, but she was nearest the door, ready to make her escape if her daring took the wrong turn; if the result were not what she expected.

"And what do you know about me?" asked the American woman icily.

Pat's reply was quiet and effective.

"I know that you are not Mrs. van Uffing, but an impostor," she said grimly. "You did not bargain with meeting a friend of the real Mrs. van Uffing, did you?"

The American woman looked her up and down, and reached for her handbag. Then she made a sudden spring for the door, pushing Pat aside; but Miss Innis put out her hand, catching her by the arm.

"No, you don't!" she said fiercely. "We'll have this out now, madame. I'm

TWA-A-ANG!

A bowstring throbs, an arrow wings silently on its way, embedding itself in the castle wall. Eagerly, the young Lady Fayre reaches out for the note attached to the arrow. It is from Robin Hood!

Meet Robin Hood—and the young Lady Fayre, of course—in our grand twopenny sister paper "The Schoolgirl." An enthralling series of complete stories featuring Fayre, entitled "Secret Helper to Robin Hood," begins in this week's issue, on sale Saturday, December 31st. And naturally it also contains a superb LONG Cliff House School story by Hilda Richards, as well as other fine features.

accused of this—and I want the truth to come out here and now!"

Shocked and bewildered, Monsieur Pazenier gaped at the American woman, who quite suddenly went limp.

"All right," she said. "I—I'm beaten. It was a thousand to one chance against my running into a friend of hers—and I nearly pulled it off."

"An impostor!" gasped madame.

"Then—"

"It was she who slashed the frocks!" cried Pat grimly. "Search her handbag!"

But the American woman made no further protest. Her handbag was taken and opened, and a small razor-blade in an ivory holder was taken out. To one corner still clung a small blue thread.

Miss Innis, her cheeks flaming, her eyes shining, turned to the supposed Miss Oswald.

"Oh, madam—how can I ever thank you?" she gasped. "Oh, what a fluke—what a lucky fluke your being here!"

Pat Lovell looked from her to Monsieur Pazenier and madame, both of whom were completely stupefied.

"It wasn't really lucky at all," said Pat, removing her wig. "I came on purpose."

As she stood revealed as herself, monsieur gave a violent start, madame uttered a cry of amazement, and Ruth Innis stood quite bewildered.

"You!" choked the American woman. "Then—then you are not a friend of Mrs. van Uffing?"

Pat Lovell laughed, and her clear, silvery laugh contrasted strangely with her get-up as the frumpy, middle-aged Miss Oswald, "of Paris."

"No, I certainly am not a friend of the famous Mrs. van Uffing. In fact,

I've never seen the lady in my life before!"

"Then who are you?" demanded the impostor.

"I'm representing the 'Midshire Gazette,'" announced Pat proudly, a thrill in her voice that she just couldn't keep out. "And, the 'Gazette' being an up-to-the-minute paper, we have in the office files of information and photographs of all the celebrities. This morning I discovered this."

And she held out the photograph of the real Mrs. van Uffing.

For a moment there was dead silence in the film-like luxury of the salon. Then Monsieur Pazenier turned to Pat and gave a deep, Gallic bow.

"Ma'mselle, this morning I say you seem a very young and inexperienced reporter. I made a very grave mistake. You are a star among reporters!"

Pat blushed a little at the compliment.

"Thank you," she replied. "But you should thank the power of the Press!"

RUTH INNIS was almost incoherent with gratitude when she met Pat later, by appointment, for lunch. The worried lines had gone from her face, and she looked years younger.

Monsieur Pazenier had offered her a reasonable sum of money in compensation for what she had suffered, and the Saturday party to which Pat was invited, promised to be far, far better than planned.

Monsieur Pazenier, intensely grateful to Pat for revealing the impostor, paid a personal visit to her editor, praising her, and apologising for his hasty action earlier that morning.

It appeared that the impostor was in league with a rival firm of ill-repute, and she had used the famous American woman's name, knowing that she was then in Paris, and supposing that she would be unknown personally in Midshire.

Naturally, it made a good story for the "Gazette," which was able to publish a full account of the arrest of the impostor, and to have an interview by telephone with the real Mrs. van Uffing well in advance of other papers.

"Well done, my dear!" said the editor to Pat. "Smart work, if a little irregular, perhaps. But you certainly showed initiative."

"And believe me, I certainly needed to," smiled Pat. "Because I've an idea that for a while in this office my name was mud."

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Meet Pat Lovell again next Friday in another grand story by Elizabeth Chester. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** now.

SCAMP, THE SCOTTIE



Their Quest AT THE Sports Winter Sports



A RACE AGAINST TIME!

DOREEN CARSDALE and Jean Hinton had been having a wonderful time at St. Lauritz, in Switzerland, with Doreen's Aunt Elizabeth. There they met the Ross family—Mr. and Mrs. Ross, their daughter Irma, and their ward, Sylvia Drake.

The chums liked Sylvia, but soon realised that the Rosses were her enemies. Though Aunt Elizabeth was at first deceived by the Rosses, she later discovered their treachery.

An old woman, Madame Marie, told the chums that Sylvia's cousin was in hiding from the police in a secret mountain chalet. He visited the chums, and told them that it was vital for Sylvia to win the forthcoming skating championship. Sylvia, however, was now virtually a prisoner, and forbidden to skate.

Then the chums discovered that Sylvia was not legally the Ross' ward, and would be able to take part in the championship, despite their ban.

But Sylvia was to be sent back to England that very day!

In desperation, the chums hired a sleigh and set off for Corvisch, where Sylvia was being kept by the Rosses.

They had got to prevent Sylvia leaving Switzerland—but in half an hour Sylvia's train left Corvisch Station!

"O H, thank goodness! Nearly there now!"

"What's the time, Doreen?"

"Twenty-past nine! Ten minutes before the train goes. We'll just about do it, but there won't be many seconds to spare!" Doreen exclaimed. "Keep it up, driver—keep it up!"

"Oui, oui, ma'mselle!"

His whip cracked through the crisp air, the pony's hoofs thudded in the snow, harness jingled gaily as the sleigh swished on.

Tensely Doreen and Jean sat, staring ahead of them. It had been a breathless ride from St. Lauritz. Right nobly the gallant pony had risen to the occasion, keeping up a spanking rate, never dropping below a canter, galloping most of the way.

And now the outskirts of Corvisch had been reached. Now, in a minute or two, the station would be reached.

Doreen's eyes were gleaming, her face grim with determination.

Somehow they had got to prevent Sylvia leaving on the train which would take her back to England. She mustn't go—she mustn't! Her cousin had said it was vital that she should take part in the St. Lauritz skating championships, and if it was humanly possible they were going to see that she did so. But if the Rosses were there at the station with her—

"Doreen, what are you going to do?" Jean asked. "You've still got that document proving the Rosses aren't Sylvia's legal guardians, haven't you?"

"Yes." Doreen patted the pocket of her coat. "But I don't want to use it if I can help it. Mr. and Mrs. Ross will be furious if they know we've got it. I've a feeling we should keep this back as a surprise packet for later on. It would be different if Aunt Elizabeth were with us. She would be able to make people listen to her. No; I'm hoping there'll be some other way," she went on quickly. "But if there isn't—well, then we'll have to grab a gendarme, show the document, and try to force him to step in."

But again she shook her head, hoping that contingency would not arise. Sylvia's name was bound to be on the document; and once a gendarme saw the name of "Drake," then he was going to start asking questions—awkward questions in view of the fact that Sylvia's cousin, Douglas Drake, was wanted by the police!

"Here we are—the station at last!"

Jean's excited voice broke in on Doreen's thoughts.

The sleigh drew to a halt and the

Sylvia was actually on the train bound for England, her guardians watching her every movement. Yet still Doreen and Jean were determined that she should return to Switzerland to compete in the skating championships.

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

driver scrambled down and whipped off the rugs that the chums had tacked about their legs. He grinned expansively.

"Five minutes to spare, ma'mselles," he said. "You catch ze train easily."

"We're not catching a train," Doreen told him. "Wait here. We shall want you to rush us back to St. Lauritz."

And then, leaving the startled driver to stare after them, they were darting into the station.

It was a scene of bustling activity. Crowds swarmed everywhere. Shouting porters, some carrying an incredible number of suitcases, others trundling trucks piled high with luggage, pushed their way through the throngs.

"The train's in!" Jean cried, and then gave a gasp of dismay. "Oh goodness! Look, there are the Rosses!"

Over by the station bookstall Mr. and Mrs. Ross stood, their faces grim and forbidding. Irma was not with them. Irma, of course, participating in the skating championships had not been able to come.

Doreen looked desperate.

"Blow the Rosses! But don't let them see us if we can help it. Oh golly! Where's Sylvia?"

She hurried on down the platform, dodging through the crowds, looking in every compartment of the train. Still no sign of Sylvia. But she must be somewhere on the train or the Rosses wouldn't be standing so watchfully on the platform.

Another yard Doreen took, and then gave a gasp as she almost collided with a perspiring porter, who suddenly appeared dragging a big basket towards the luggage-van. But at the same moment the porter was grabbed by a tall, bearded Frenchman, wearing a wide-brimmed black hat and a heavy overcoat with a fur collar. The Frenchman began expostulating volubly in his native tongue.

"He's saying he's not catching this train but the next one," Jean translated, with a faint grin. "He's calling the porter all sorts of names and threatening awful things if that basket gets put on the wrong train. Appar-

ently he's a member of some theatrical touring company."

But Doreen hardly heard. A cry broke from her lips.

"Look, there's Sylvia!"

She rushed on. Leaning out of a carriage window a few yards farther on was Sylvia, an expression of hopeless despair on her pale face. She saw Doreen and waved.

"Oh, Doreen," she said, as the chums raced up, "I'm glad you've come! I—I did so want to be able to say good-bye and to thank you both!"

"But you mustn't go!" Doreen cried frantically. "The championships—"

"It's no good!" Sylvia said hopelessly. "We can do nothing!"

"There must be some way!"

"There isn't; they're watching all the time!" Sylvia groaned. "They'd spot anything we did."

"Look out!" Jean warned. "They've seen us! The Rosses are coming along now!"

Doreen's hands clenched. Her brain was racing—a dozen different reckless schemes flashed through her mind. There must be something—some way!

"Sylvia," she suddenly hissed, "dodge along the corridor to the luggage-van!"

"But what—"

"The luggage-van!" Doreen hissed again, and then added in a louder voice: "Oh, it's a shame, but you're right! There's nothing else for it. Good-bye, Sylvia!"

"Here, you two girls, clear off!" came Mr. Ross's harsh voice at that moment. "I'm not having you talking to Sylvia and getting up to any tricks! Sylvia, get back to your seat!"

Sylvia withdrew from the window. Doreen, with a hopeless shrug of despair, tugged at Jean's arm.

"Oh, come on!" she said.

She moved away down the platform, but suddenly she broke into a run.

"Doreen," gasped Jean excitedly, "what's this about the luggage-van? Have you thought of something?"

"Pencil—paper!" Doreen exclaimed, already fumbling in her handbag. "Yes, I've got a wheeze! We'll save Sylvia yet. Where's that basket?"

"Basket?" Jean asked, then she stopped and stared in amazement. For Doreen had paused beside that big basket which, only a minute or two before, the porter had very nearly loaded into the luggage van, thereby incurring the wrath of the bearded Frenchman.

The Frenchman, Doreen saw, was now talking to a group of people who were presumably other members of the touring company.

"Jean," she said, quivering with excitement, "your French is better than mine. Call a porter and ask him to put this basket in the luggage compartment. And give him a tip and ask him to hand this note I've written to Sylvia! She'll be waiting there now."

Jean gasped. But swiftly she obeyed her chum's instructions. In a moment the porter she had beckoned was dragging the basket into the luggage compartment.

"Doreen," she said breathlessly, "what are you driving at?"

"I've told Sylvia to hide in the basket!" Doreen explained.

"But what good is that going to do?"

"Wait for it!" her chum grinned.

"Hallo, the Rosses are getting agitated. They've evidently spotted Sylvia isn't in her compartment and they're watching us. Don't look at the luggage van or they might get suspicious. My hat, will it work? There goes the first whistle!"

Jerkily she spoke in the excitement that gripped her. Doors were being slammed; people and train officials were shouting. She saw the Rosses hovering watchfully, suspiciously, yet triumphantly. The guard, flag in hand, was waiting to give the "away" signal.

Jean stared, puzzled and bewildered. What was her chum doing? How did hiding in the basket help Sylvia if she was still to remain on the train?

Doreen edged towards the big, bearded Frenchman.

"Excuse me, monsieur, but did you want that basket put on this train?" she asked innocently.

The Frenchman seemed to become electrified. One startled look he gave at the spot where the basket should have been standing, and then frantically he was leaping forward, almost tearing his hair in his rage.

"Nom de pipe!" he shouted. "Ze fools—ze idiots! I tell zem not zis train! Mon panier! Les costumes—"

He hurled himself towards the luggage compartment, shouting and gesticulating, and grabbed at the door handles.

Whereupon bedlam broke out. Porters yelled and rushed forward. The guard, just about to wave his flag, yelled. Everybody seemed to be yelling.

"Ze basket! Ze idiots!" the Frenchman was shrieking.

"Arretez!" howled the guard furiously.

But the Frenchman didn't stop. Now he had the doors open and had leapt into the van. Then he re-appeared, dragging his precious basket after him. Half a dozen porters flung themselves upon him, pulling him and the basket on to the platform.

The guard, flinging a last epithet at the offending Frenchman, waved his flag and a moment later the train began to draw out of the platform.

But Doreen's gaze was rivetted on that basket. Was Sylvia inside it? Had her stunt succeeded? But she dare not look yet—not until Mr. and Mrs. Ross had gone.

They came towards her, smiling and triumphant.

"Poor Sylvia!" Mrs. Ross taunted. "Such a pity we've had to send her back to England. But there"—her lips tightened, her voice grew harsh—"when other people insist on meddling in affairs which are none of their business, it becomes a necessity. Good-bye, my dears. I hope you won't be late for the championships. I'm sure you will want to be there to see Irma win the figure skating!"

Doreen said nothing, and the Rosses passed on, leaving the station.

"My hat!" gasped Jean excitedly. "Has it worked? Is Sylvia—"

"We'll know in two ticks!" Doreen said.

She turned to where the basket stood. And then she coughed. For seated on the basket, as if guarding it with his life, was the bearded Frenchman.

"Excuse me," Doreen said politely.

Courteously the Frenchman rose, gallantly sweeping off his big-brimmed hat. Next moment his eyes almost popped out of his head, as if he had seen some apparition.

For Doreen had lifted the lid of the basket, and out of it had stepped Sylvia!

"Oh, Doreen!" she cried. "You wonderful darling!"

"We've done it!" Doreen laughed.

"But come on—leave the compliments for later. We've got to get back to St. Lauritz. You've got to win the figure skating, Sylvia! And it's going to be

another race if we're to get there in time. Come on—come on! Merci, monsieur!" she added, turning twinkling eyes on the Frenchman.

And leaving him staring in goggling-eyed amazement, the chums rushed off down the platform.

THE SKATING COMPETITION!

A ROAR of applause swept over the lake at St. Lauritz.

With a whirl of gleaming skates, Irma Ross twirled gracefully in the centre of the ice. Her short, full skirt of silvery lame glittered with sequins and spread in billowing ripples as she spun.

"Bravo!"

"Marvellous display!"

"How many points has she got?"

Loud and long was the applause, wave after wave of it, as Irma, with a final twirl and then a dipping curtsy, went gliding off the ice.

And Irma was smiling—a vain, satisfied smile that became more and more satisfied as the cheering and clapping continued.

She knew she had done well. She knew she had never skated more brilliantly before in her life.

Swiftly, eagerly, her gaze shot to the big board erected over on one side of the lake.

There were already some numbers on that board—the total points earned by the competitors who had skated before Irma.

The St. Lauritz skating championships were in progress. There on the frozen lake, a natural arena in a wonderful setting of snow-covered mountains, the competitors had been battling for championship honours and the magnificent golden goblet that went to the winner.

To-day the figure-skating section was being held. For the St. Lauritz championship was unique inasmuch as speed as well as fancy skating had to be performed by the competitors. Points gained in each section were added; the trophy going to the entrant who secured the highest combined total.

Another cheer welled up from the spectators who crowded the banks and grand stand. For now another number had been added to the score-board—the number of points gained by the last competitor.

Irma's face flushed with triumph.

"Ninety-five points!" she exclaimed.

"I'm leading by four! I've as good as won the championship. With a lead already, I haven't much to fear in the speed races!"

She laughed, and bowed again and again to the still-applauding spectators. Exultation surged through her.

With Sylvia not competing against her it had been easy. All along she had feared Sylvia—feared that she would beat her. But that girl was on her way back to England even at this moment. Her parents, Irma gloated, had made sure of that.

And now the championship was as good as hers. The honour of being the finest skater in St. Lauritz, the winner of the Golden Goblet—and something more!

Something that was infinitely more important than honours and trophies!

"Mother! Daddy!" she exclaimed, suddenly sighting her parents pushing their way through the crowd. "Have you seen the score? I've won—I've won!"

"Well done, Irma!" beamed Mrs. Ross.

"Yes, yes!" Mr. Ross said heartily.

"Everything is working out just as we planned." He rubbed his hands in satisfaction, a glowing smile on his fleshy face.

"And Sylvia?" Irma questioned.
"Gone! No longer a danger," her father chuckled. "Those two interfering girls were at the station, but they could do nothing. We made sure of that." Again he rubbed his hands. "Any more competitors to go on?" he asked.

"No. Now that Sylvia won't be here I'm the last—"

She broke off. A booming voice came through loudspeakers erected round the lake.

"Listen!" crowed Irma. "They'll be announcing that I'm leading!"

"Ladies and gentlemen," boomed the announcer, "the number of points awarded by the judges to Miss Irma Ross, of England, is ninety-five—four points over her nearest rival, Ma'mselle Dulons, of Switzerland. And now the next competitor is ready to take the ice."

Irma started.
"The next?" she gasped. "But I was the last!"

"Miss Sylvia Drake, also of England!" the announcer went on.

Mr. and Mrs. Ross gazed at each other in consternation.

"It's a mistake—it must be!" Mrs. Ross panted. "How can Sylvia be taking part when we saw her off in the train?"

"I have a correction to make in this respect," continued the voice through the loudspeakers. "I previously announced that Miss Drake had unfortunately cancelled her entry. But Miss Drake has just arrived, and informs us that a mistake was made. She had no intention of scratching from the championship. It was done without her permission. In the circumstances, after considering all the facts which have been placed before us, the judges have decided that Miss Drake shall be allowed to compete. Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Sylvia Drake!"

The band struck up. And then, before the incredulous eyes of the Rosses, a slim figure whirled on to the ice.

"Sylvia! Hurrah! Sylvia!"
Irma swung round. Her parents swung round. Standing close by was a little group—Doreen and Jean and Tony Semers and Jack Huntley, their boy friends from the Crestina Hotel.

Irma went pale, then red with fury.
"We've been tricked!" she hooted. "Daddy, do something! Those girls have tricked you! They've done this! Sylvia mustn't skate! Stop her—stop her!"

Doreen laughed.
"You're too late!" she cried. "Yes, we tricked you—as you deserved to be tricked—"

"Come away—come away!" Mrs. Ross hissed. "People can hear! They're looking!"

Hurriedly the Rosses moved away, and, laughing again, Doreen turned towards the lake.

"By Jove, look at her!" Tony was exclaiming. "Did you ever see such skating! She's got Irma licked. I can feel it in my bones. Gosh! I wondered what had happened when that announcer chap said Sylvia had scratched. Thank goodness you and Jean got her here in time!"

"Don't talk so much," Doreen grinned. "I want to watch."

On the ice Sylvia was already holding the crowd spellbound.

She was such a tiny figure on that vast expanse of frozen lake, with the towering mountains forming a white backcloth, and yet she dominated the scene. Round and round she whirled—a

picture of grace in her ice-blue costume, which was trimmed with white fur, her legs, in white socks and white skating-boots, twinkling with a rapidity that dazzled the eyes.

First on one foot, then the other—then on none at all as she literally flew through the air. Flashing forwards, then whirling backwards, one leg poised, suddenly twirling, and, in a brief instant, streaking into the most complicated manœuvres.

It was fascinating to watch, breath-taking.

The spectators sat tense. Then there would come a ripple of applause, rising to a crescendo of cheers, then dead silence again.

"She's marvellous!" Doreen breathed. "You've said it!" Tony agreed. "If she doesn't get more points than Irma then I'll eat my hat!"

"You're safe," grinned Doreen; "you're not wearing one!"

Again their gaze became rivetted on Sylvia. Now she was waltzing to the strains of the band—turning, leaping,



Now all eyes turned to the scoreboard.

"Ninety-eight!" Tony shouted.

"Only two points lost out of the maximum hundred!" Doreen cried. "And she's beaten Irma! She's leading in the championship! Oh, she'll win—she'll win!"

"You bet she will!" Jack Huntley grinned. "She'll be favourite now—and won't we just celebrate when she's declared champion!"

Out on the lake, Sylvia, flushed and radiant, stood bowing and bowing again to the storm of applause.

WONDERFUL NEWS FOR SYLVIA

"O H, Sylvia, let me hug you!" Doreen cried excitedly.

"Jolly good idea!" approved Tony, with a chuckle. "Here, I'm in on this!"

Sylvia laughed. They all laughed. They were tremendously excited. Sylvia was deliciously happy. To her

"Sylvia! Hurrah! Sylvia!" the chums cried, as on to the ice whirled a slim figure. Sylvia had arrived just in time to compete in the skating championship.

it didn't seem true—couldn't possibly have happened. Less than two hours before she had been plunged into the deepest depths of despair. She had seen herself returning to England, torn from her friends, all her championship hopes smashed.

She had felt beaten; had told herself bitterly that the Rosses, hating her for some unknown reason, had won. All this mystery would remain a mystery; she would never see that cousin of hers who had so dramatically come into her life.

Even now she had not seen him. She still didn't know what it was all about. But soon she would know—surely she would, after all that Doreen and Jean had told her, after Douglas Drake had explained.

Why were the police after him? Why had he said that it was so vital she should enter for the St. Lauritz skating championship?

"Here, come off it, Sylvia!" grinned Tony. "No day-dreaming at a moment like this. Doreen, tell her she ought to be ashamed of herself. We're going to make whoopee—"

"Whoopee!" laughed Doreen.

"Come on, let's make for the refreshment department!" Tony went on irrepressibly. "And I'm going to

suggest Sylvia should be carried there in state."

"Rather!" yelled Jack. "Up with her on to our shoulders!"

"Goodness!" Sylvia gasped, but her eyes were shining with pride and happiness at all these signs of tremendous enthusiasm. "Oh, my hat, steady on! Doreen, help—"

"We'll help," Doreen laughed. "Come on, Jean. We'll do the carrying instead of the boys."

"Here, I say, it was my idea!"

"But we're doing the honours, see?"

"Oh dear! I think I'd rather walk," Sylvia gasped.

"How can you walk on skates?" Doreen demanded.

"I'll take them off—"

"Rabbits! You're coming along on our shoulders. Up she goes!"

And up Sylvia went, on to Doreen's and Jean's shoulders, grabbing frantically at Tony and Jack to steady herself, bringing a yell from Tony as she missed his shoulder and clutched at his hair.

And, perched high if precariously, Sylvia was borne in triumph towards the lake cafe.

All around people were still applauding, passing comments.

"There she goes—the future champion of St. Lauritz!"

"I can't see her losing!"

"No; although, of course, that Irma girl might turn the tables in the speed events."

"I doubt it. Well, good luck to them both—but my vote goes to Sylvia Drake!"

"And so does ours!" cried Doreen.

Through the crowds they made their way. But then, just as they were approaching the cafe, there was a sudden scuffle behind. A voice suddenly shrieked out:

"Sylvia!"

Sylvia gave a gasp. "Mrs. Ross," she breathed, and gazed down in alarm at Doreen.

But Doreen grinned.

"Don't you worry," she said. "You know what we told you. You leave this to me! We'll soon show her where she gets off."

"Oh, you will, will you!" And there was Mrs. Ross, her eyes glittering with fury. And with her was Mr. Ross. "How dare you speak about me like that, Doreen!" she cried. "But that is beside the point at the moment. Sylvia, get down immediately. What do you mean by making such an exhibition of yourself?"

"And what," Mr. Ross broke in savagely, "are you doing here when you should be on your way back to England? We saw you on the train. How did you get here?"

"You'd better ask me that, Mr. Ross," Doreen told him coolly.

"I thought as much!" Mr. Ross grated. "You interfering jackanapes to—"

"Here, steady on!" broke in Tony truculently.

"You keep out of it!" Mr. Ross snapped.

"You're not going to speak to my friends like that!"

"I'll speak as I wish! I won't be defied by a pack of youngsters. When I give my ward orders I expect her to carry them out, not have them flouted by girls who have not the atom of right to interfere!"

"I think we have," Doreen put in calmly. "In fact, I'm sure we have!"

"Preposterous!" fumed Mr. Ross. "Your aunt shall hear about this. I shall take action. If you were my niece," he went on, glaring at Doreen, "I'd—I'd—"

"And just what would you do, Mr. Ross, if Doreen happened to be your

niece?" broke in another voice, and on to the scene strode Aunt Elizabeth, a grim frown upon her features.

"Ah, I'm glad you're here, Miss Hill," Mrs. Ross said curtly. "Apparently you have no control over Doreen."

"How dare you!"

"Facts speak for themselves," Mrs. Ross sneered. "I warned you yesterday not to interfere in affairs which are no concern of yours. Yet to-day, when Sylvia was to be sent back to England, your niece had the colossal impudence to play some deliberate

trick on us so that Sylvia escaped from the train. When we want to send our ward anywhere, Miss Hill, we do not expect other people to interfere."

Aunt Elizabeth gasped.

"Doreen did that?"

"Yes, she did."

"Doreen—" Aunt Elizabeth looked suddenly distressed. "Really, you had no right to do that."

But Doreen was smiling now.

"You don't understand, aunt—"

"I'm afraid I understand only too well, Doreen," Miss Hill said. "Knowing what I do, I have every sympathy for Sylvia. I wish we could help her. But we can't. This morning I have been to see a solicitor friend of mine who happens to be staying in Switzerland. I asked his advice, and he told me we can do nothing. Mr. and Mrs. Ross are Sylvia's guardians, and therefore they have complete control over her every action."

Again Doreen laughed.

"But they haven't, Aunt Elizabeth."

"Doreen, you're being foolish."

"Aunt Elizabeth, Mr. and Mrs. Ross are not Sylvia's guardians!" Doreen declared calmly.

"What—what?" Mr. Ross gave a violent start, then he laughed. "The girl is being ridiculous!" he snapped.

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"It's preposterous! Of course we are Sylvia's guardians. What nonsense is this?"

But now, with a flourish, Doreen produced from the pocket of her coat the envelope which Douglas Drake had given her.

"Aunt," she said, "I'd like you to take charge of this, please. This," she added, speaking deliberately, her gaze on Mr. and Mrs. Ross, "is a document which proves that Mr. and Mrs. Ross have no right to call Sylvia their ward. They are not her legal guardians, and never have been—Here, look out!"

One frantic grab at the envelope Mr. Ross made, but Doreen, expecting something of the sort, was too quick for him.

"Oh, no you don't!" she cried. "Your guilty conscience, isn't it? You've been deceiving Sylvia all this time, but now it's come to an end. Aunt—"

Aunt Elizabeth, the document safely in her hands now, quickly read it through.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "This is incredible! But you're right, Doreen!"

"We deny it!" Mr. Ross blustered.

"This is a trumped-up story!"

"The document proves otherwise," Aunt Elizabeth said stiffly. "I think the less you say about it the better."

"Sylvia is our ward! Sylvia, come here! You will ignore this ridiculous attempt to challenge our authority over you."

But Aunt Elizabeth, smiling now, placed a hand on Sylvia's shoulder.

"You will stay here, my dear," she said. "And from now on, Sylvia, if you are agreeable, I propose to look after you until everything is cleared up. You will stay with Doreen and Jean and me at the Crestina."

"Oh, aunt!" Doreen cried rapturously.

"Miss Hill, you really mean it?" Sylvia asked, her eyes shining.

"I do. I am quite convinced by this time that Mr. and Mrs. Ross have not been acting in your best interests, and I intend to see that no further harm comes to you!"

"Thank you, Miss Hill! It's wonderful of you!"

"We forbid it!" almost screamed Mrs. Ross. "You can't do it. We'll take this matter to the police—"

"I should!" Aunt Elizabeth told her curtly. "Your bluff has not the slightest effect on me. I should welcome going to the police. This document will interest them. And now I suggest you leave us to ourselves. Sylvia stays with me. That is my final word!"

She turned away, her arm round Sylvia's shoulder. And with her went Doreen and Jean and the boys.

Doreen was glowing.

Sylvia to stay with them! Oh, it was wonderful! Good old Aunt Elizabeth! And together they would be able to solve this mystery, together they would help Sylvia to find happiness.

While Mr. and Mrs. Ross slunk away, aware of many curious glances being cast in their direction.

Mr. Ross gritted his teeth.

"Confound them!" he grated.

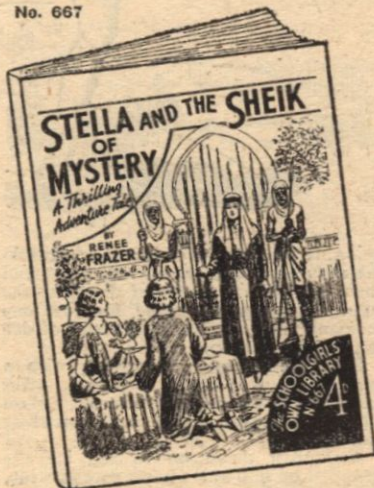
"They've called our bluff. We can't do anything. But where the dickens did they get that document from?"

"I don't know—but I do know we're not beaten!" Mrs. Ross said, her eyes glittering. "There's too much at stake. Everything depends on the skating championship. If Sylvia should win—but she won't win! She won't! Irma's got to win—and we're going to see that she does!"

Though Doreen and Jean have triumphed, trouble and danger still lurk ahead. Whatever you do, don't miss next Friday's thrilling instalment.

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The GIRL WHO HAUNTED GREY GABLES



NORMA'S DREAD DISCOVERY

NORMA ROYSTON, living in the Cornish village of Clovellyn, looked after a small shop, whose owner, Ben Tregellis, had mysteriously disappeared, leaving his small grandchildren, Elsie and Martin, in her care.

Norma believed that Grey Gables, a large house near by, contained a secret connected with her dead father.

The owner, Mr. Penhale, was her enemy; but Gerald Graham, a boy who lived there, was very friendly to her.

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

Returning from Grey Gables one evening, Norma met Squire Guthrie, who had given her an important order for the shop. She had the goods ready for him, and went in to get them.

Then she received a shock. For little Elsie and Martin were not there—and the squire's goods had vanished!



By RENEE FRAZER

She had left the two children here, playing happily behind the counter.

What had happened? What could have happened?

The bare shelves seemed to mock her. Nothing else had been disturbed. The robbery, if it was a robbery, had been carried out with amazing swiftness and stealth.

And the children—
With a choking sob Norma hurried out of the shop. The squire was waiting, a trifle impatiently, by his car.

"Well, young lady, you've been a long time," he remarked, glancing at his watch. "Are the goods all ready?"

Norma swallowed hard. "They—they've gone!" she faltered, wondering how she was going to explain.

"Gone?" echoed the squire, frowning slightly. "What do you mean—gone? Oh, you mean they've been sent up to the Hall? Well, well, why didn't you say so before—"

"No!" gasped Norma, catching him agitatedly by the sleeve. "You don't understand! They—"

Just then another, smaller car swung round the corner, its engine spluttering badly. Norma recognised it as the little car belonging to the village doctor.

Goods had been stolen from the little shop—and little Martin and Elsie were missing! No wonder Norma was frantic with anxiety. It was not until the children were safe again that she realised this had all been the work of one person—someone who wished her to fail!

It drew up at the kerb, and the doctor, a short, plump little man, climbed out of his seat and hurried across to the squire's car.

He glanced curiously at Norma, and leaned across to speak to the squire. She heard him mention an accident, and her heart gave a sickening jump.

Her first thought was for the children, but the squire's reply reassured her on that score.

"Sprained his ankle, eh? I'll come up with you at once, Barton. Jump into my car and we'll go together. I don't like the sound of it."

He turned to Norma. "Sorry to dash away, Miss Royston, but something rather unfortunate has happened. I'll expect those goods up at the Hall to-morrow morning, first thing. Don't forget!"

With a brief nod, he bent over the wheel.

Norma clenched her hands. "But, Squire Guthrie—" she gasped.

The car was already gliding away from the kerb. Obviously the squire had not heard her. His errand, whatever it was, was evidently important.

Norma watched the rear light vanish into the distance, and a little sob escaped her lips.

What could she do—to whom could she turn for help or advice?

She thought of old Mrs. Tregurtha. Perhaps she or one of the neighbours might have seen the children leave the shop.

She hurried to the old lady's cottage, only to find that Mrs. Tregurtha was out, probably visiting friends.

But one of the village youths was standing near, regarding her curiously; he recognised her, touching his cap.

"Good-evenin', miss!"

Norma hurried up to him. "Have you seen anything of my two young charges—Martin and Elsie?" she asked, trying not to reveal her agitation.

To her relief, the youth nodded. "Yes, miss, 'bout twenty minutes ago. They were setting off towards the cliffs, cheery as you like."

"Towards the cliffs?" Norma's heart contracted. "Are you sure?"

"Certain, miss! Young Martin, he waved his hand to me. They were goin' towards Clovellyn Cove."

Norma thanked him unsteadily and hurried on, taking the path that led to the cliffs.

Her perplexity and uneasiness had increased. Why should the children have set out on their own like that, leaving the shop unattended?

HORRIFIED, Norma stared at the empty shelves. She felt utterly bewildered—too dazed for the moment to think clearly.

Barely half an hour ago she had left the shop in the care of the two children. It had not been dark then, and there were plenty of people passing up and down the village street—fishermen returning home, housewives gossiping.

Yet in that half-hour something strange, something quite incredible, had happened at the little corner shop.

The packages and cases containing the goods she had ordered for the squire's party—nearly ten pounds' worth of stock—had been spirited away.

And Martin and little Elsie were nowhere to be found.

Norma raced upstairs and into their bed-rooms. Toys and other childish treasures lay scattered about, as usual; but there was no sign of their youthful owners.

Could they be hiding? Was this some prank of young Martin's?

Clinging to that faint hope, Norma called them:

"Martin! Elsie! Come out, you young scamps!"

But there was no reply. Her voice echoed in a hollow, ominous fashion through the little cottage.

Norma's forehead was bathed in perspiration now—cold perspiration that revealed her unspoken fears.

She hurried downstairs, vainly searching the kitchen and parlour, and finally retracing her steps into the shop.

And what had happened during their absence?

The thought of the stolen goods had almost been thrust from her mind by her anxiety for the children; yet she felt convinced that there was some connection between that amazing theft and the youngsters' absence.

Why had they come this way?

She hurried on, her fears increasing as she heard the dull booming of the surf below the rugged cliffs.

The winding path led very near to the edge, and one false step—

Norma strove to conquer her fears as she broke into a run.

And then abruptly, above the sound of the waves, a voice hailed her. Norma stood stock still.

"Hallo, there, Norma!"

"Gerald!" gasped Norma. Then a broken cry of relief escaped her lips as the boy came hurrying towards her through the gloom, grasping firmly, each by a hand, two small and breathless youngsters.

"Martin—Elsie!" she cried, and, darting towards them, caught the little girl in her arms.

"Darlings, I thought something dreadful had happened to you," she declared unsteadily, glancing at them in tearful reproach. "Why—why did you leave the shop?"

She encountered Gerald's curious glance.

"Where—where did you find them?" she asked breathlessly.

"Strolling along the cliff-path, cool as young cucumbers," replied Gerald. "They said they'd come to meet you."

Norma's heart gave a jump. Though Gerald's lips were smiling his eyes were grave—almost stern.

For the first time she noticed how pale he looked.

"We got your message," declared young Martin, nodding.

"Message?" echoed Norma, staring.

"What message, dear?"

Martin produced a crumpled scrap of paper, thrusting it into her hand.

"A boy brought it," he explained.

"He said a young lady gave it to him."

Dazedly Norma scanned the message; it was written in pencil, in a handwriting vaguely resembling her own. It was signed "Norma," and it asked the two children to meet her on the cliffs, near Clovellyn Cove.

"But this—this is a trick!" she gasped, realising in a flash why it had been sent.

It had been a ruse to get the children out of the way while the thieves raided the shop!

"May I see?" demanded Gerald, tersely.

He held out his hand for the paper, scanning it swiftly; his grey eyes narrowed.

"Why should anyone have played a dashed silly trick like this?" he demanded, regarding her strangely.

"You've not got any enemies in the village, have you, Norma?"

Norma clenched her hands; if only she dared tell him of her suspicions—her suspicions about his so-called uncle and cousin.

Why had Ethel Penhale called at the shop that afternoon? Too late, Norma suspected that girl's real purpose. She had called to spy!

The whole thing was a trick to prevent Norma from delivering the goods for the squire's party.

But she had no proof! How could she expect Gerald to believe her?

"Personally," he went on, "I'd say that it was a stupid practical joke. It's a bit of luck I happened to meet the youngsters when I did; the cliff path's pretty dangerous farther along."

"It—it was awfully kind of you to bring them along," breathed Norma gratefully.

Gerald grinned, his serious expression momentarily relaxing.

"Well, I could hardly leave 'em out here, could I? Matter of fact, I was coming down to the village to see you."

Norma caught in her breath sharply, recollecting Ethel's story about the tell-tale footprints.

"To see me?" she faltered.

If he did suspect—what of it? It would be a relief to tell him everything; to ask his help.

She felt certain, now, that she could trust him.

They had reached the village street, and Gerald took her arm as the two children hurried on ahead.

"Norma," he said tersely, "we're friends, aren't we? I know you can keep a secret, and I want to talk to someone."

Norma stared at him swiftly, startled by his tone; his face was pale and set, and there was an angry glitter in his eyes.

"What—what do you mean, Gerald?" she faltered, her heart sinking.

They had reached the shop, and Gerald halted on the threshold, his hand tightening on her arm.

"The phantom's been playing its tricks again," he said grimly, "and this time it's gone too far! It deliberately led uncle into a trap, and made him sprain his ankle; it's a wonder he didn't break his leg. Dr. Barton's up at the house now, with the squire, and I tell you there's going to be some trouble!"

A cold hand seemed to clutch at Norma's heart; she stared at Gerald, unable to speak.

The boy's eyes were stern.

"Personally, Norma," he said grimly, "I'm going all out to unmask this supposed phantom—and get him, or her, turned out of the village. And I want your help!"

HIDDEN IN THE CAVE!

NORMA felt too stunned to reply.

In a flash, she realised what had happened. Mr. Penhale had sprained his ankle when chasing her—and had blamed his accident on the "phantom"!

And Gerald, naturally, was on his uncle's side.

All her hopes of ever confiding in the boy were dashed to the ground.

If Gerald ever suspected the truth, now, his friendship would turn to distrust—and worse.

She was doomed to remain silent, and fight her own battles in secret.

She could not blame herself for Mr. Penhale's accident; it had not been her fault.

In a way, it was retribution. He and his daughter were plotting against her. The robbing of the shop had been carried out at their bidding—she was convinced of that.

They had struck a cruel blow at her, the result of which even now might lead to her losing the squire's custom, or worse.

But did they suspect that she was the "phantom"?

That was the question that hammered in Norma's brain, after Gerald had departed, promising to see her the next day.

Did they suspect her masquerade? And if so, what steps would they take to attempt to expose her?

It was useless to surmise; but Norma was conscious of a feeling of impending

disaster—a feeling she tried in vain to shake off.

Meanwhile, a more immediately urgent problem confronted her.

The goods for the squire's party must be delivered by the morning!

Yet she had no idea where they had been taken—or how she could hope to recover them, in time.

Long after the two children were in bed and asleep, Norma paced her room, racking her mind for some plan of action.

At length, tired out and despondent, she crept into bed and fell into a troubled, dream-haunted sleep.

She awoke with the first, dim, grey glimmer of daylight, and sprang out of bed, a gleam of determination in her eyes.

Her sleep had refreshed her, and she felt more hopeful.

She was not beaten yet!

There must be some way of discovering how the goods had been removed from the shop.

She crept downstairs without awaking the children, and carried out a hurried search on the empty shelves and behind the counter.

And then, unexpectedly, she came across a clue!

It was a slender clue; a piece of reddish clay that had fallen from someone's boot.

But Norma's wits were sharpened by the urgency of her quest.

Red clay? She remembered having seen clay of a similar reddish colour, on a muddy path that skirted the Penhales' estate.

There was just a chance—

Norma glanced at her watch; it was barely seven o'clock, two hours before she would have to open the shop.

The children rarely woke before eight.

A determined gleam in her eyes, she stole silently out of the cottage into the keen, chilly air of the early morning.

As yet, very few of the villagers were astir; a group of fishermen were making their way down to their boats, and they touched their caps to Norma in some surprise.

She hurried on quickly, taking the lonely path that led to Grey Gables.

By the time she reached the old flint wall that skirted the grounds, the first spear-like shafts of the sunrise were dispelling the mist and painting a shimmering golden path across the turbulent sea.

Overhead circled a flock of gulls, their white pinions gleaming in the sunlight, their shrill cries filling the air.

Norma's heart beat with quickened hope. She had shaken off her premonitions of the previous night; the keen morning air, the salt tang of the sea sent the blood coursing more swiftly in her veins.

She felt certain that she was on the right track.

Yes, here was the red clay, stretching for several hundred yards along the narrow track; and—her heart gave a bound—here were unmistakable tracks of a small car!

She could see the mark of the tyres where they had sunk deeply into the clay.

She followed the trail, her pulses racing, hardly realising which way it was leading.

With a start of surprise, she discovered that the track had ended close to the edge of the cliff; from where she stood, a steep and treacherous slope led down to the beach.

Norma commenced cautiously to descend the slope; the tide was coming in, and the waves dashed and swirled among the scattered boulders.

A gull wheeled round her head, screaming defiantly at this invasion of its rocky eyrie.

More than once she felt herself slipping on the steep path, and it was with a sigh of relief that she reached the firm sand.

The narrow strip of beach was completely deserted at this hour; far out on the restless sea she caught a glimpse of a white sail gleaming in the sunlight—a wisp of smoke on the horizon.

The silence was unbroken except for the sound of the waves and the occasional shrill clamour of the gulls.

She felt strangely excited, and her excitement was mingled with a thrill of almost nervous apprehension.

There were footprints on the sandy beach—heavy footprints leading towards the cliffs!

Norma followed them, to find herself in the dark mouth of a cave.

She halted, her heart thumping, listening intently. But the echo of the waves was the only sound that broke the silence.

Whoever had visited the cave must have departed long ere this—possibly on the previous night.

She entered softly, her eyes attempting to pierce the gloom.

The cave was only of short extent; the far end was cluttered by a heap of fallen rock.

After the bright morning light outside, she found it difficult to see anything clearly; but as she became more accustomed to the gloom, she could make out the green, sloping walls and roof—the sandy floor covered thickly with seaweed.

And then a little cry escaped her lips, echoing back to her weirdly from the shadows.

For lying among the seaweed was a large bale, covered in sacking!

Norma darted forward, tugging feverishly at the opening of the bale as she attempted to discover its contents.

In a moment she had pulled away sufficient of the sacking to disclose what it concealed.

Tins of biscuits, boxes of sweets and crackers—the goods stolen from her shop—intact!

TRAPPED BY THE TIDE!

NORMA'S first relief gave place to a wave of indignation.

The things must have been dumped here, to be washed away by the sea! The tide was out at the time, and it had been the easiest way for the thieves to dispose of it.

But her suspicions were confirmed. No ordinary thief would have done a senseless thing like this; it had been a deliberate attempt to spoil her chances—to put her out of favour with the squire.

And there were only two people in the village who could have planned such a trick!

Ethel Penhale and her father! If Norma had cherished any lingering doubts about their enmity, her last doubts were now banished.

She realised that the Penhales meant to leave no stone unturned to get her out of the village; and she suspected, too, that something far more sinister than mere spite was prompting their actions.

What was it that they were hiding—that they were so anxious she should not discover?

What lay behind Mr. Penhale's guilty fear of the "phantom" Lady Rowena?

What was it that old Ben Tregellis

had hinted at, on the night of his disappearance?

Those questions would have to be answered before her secret quest was finished.

But, meanwhile, her first task was to keep her promise to the squire—to make certain that the goods he had ordered and paid for were delivered promptly at the Hall that morning.

She stared in some dismay at the weighty bale. How could she possibly hope to remove it from the cave, unaided?

Exerting all her strength, she could only shift it a few inches across the seaweed.

And the possibility of obtaining help seemed remote.

Already the waves were lapping in dangerous proximity to the mouth of the cave. If she went for assistance, the bale might be washed away long before help could be obtained.

Norma's heart sank.

It seemed that all her efforts to trace the stolen goods had been in vain.

Yet she couldn't give in now—when so much depended on the delivery of those goods! Not only would the squire be furious, but she would have

forlorn hope that some solitary fishing-boat might be within hailing distance.

But now there was not a boat in sight; nothing except the rugged cliffs and the incoming sea, flecked with white spindrift in the morning sunlight.

Even the gulls seemed to be laughing in mockery as they flew overhead.

Norma started to run, splashing through the surf as she retraced her steps to the slope by which she had come. And then her heart gave a jump and a gleam of hope flashed into her eyes.

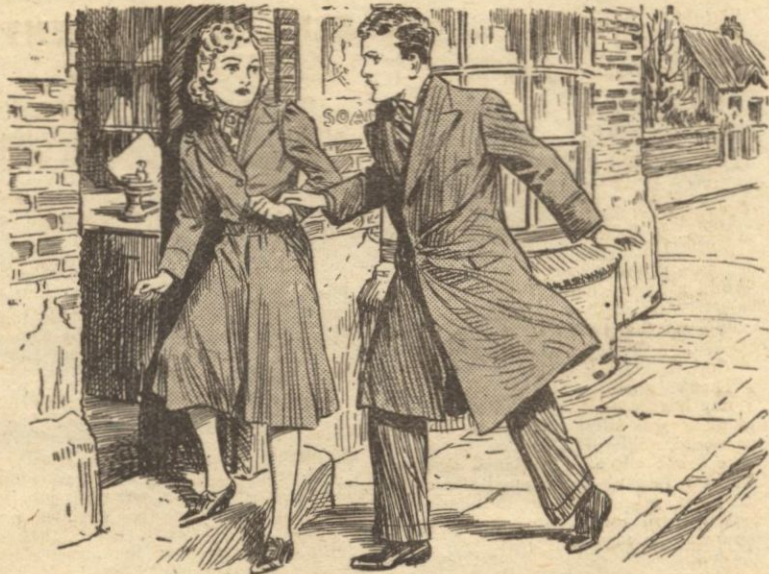
Drawn up in the sheltered cove, almost hidden from view by a jutting portion of the cliff, was a small dinghy!

It was painted white, with gilt lettering on the bows, and was moored by a rope attached to an iron ring.

Obviously it was privately owned, probably by the occupants of one of the scattered cottages in the vicinity. It was complete with oars—and to Norma it seemed a heaven-sent chance.

Dared she borrow it? There was no time to find the owners and ask their permission; even now it would mean a race against the tide.

Norma thrust aside her momentary



"Norma," said Gerald grimly, "I'm going all out to unmask this supposed phantom—and get him or her turned out of the village!" Norma felt too stunned to reply, as she realised that she could now never ask Gerald for his help in her secret task.

to refund the money for the goods—and where could she ever hope to obtain ten pounds?

Desperately Norma tugged at the thick cord that secured the bale; she had some idea of dragging it as far as the slope, and leaving it out of reach of the tide while she went for help.

It was a forlorn hope. She quickly realised that her strength was not equal to the task.

She bit her lip, desisting breathlessly from her efforts and staring in hopeless dismay at the incoming tide.

In five minutes—ten minutes at the most—the sea would have crept into the cave.

The precious goods would be ruined beyond hope of recovery.

In sheer desperation, Norma ran to the mouth of the cave, to find that the narrow strip of sand had already vanished. The waves were curling at her feet!

Right and left she stared, in the

scruples and, loosening the mooring-rope, pushed the little dinghy into the surf.

A moment later she was rowing back towards the cave.

The waves were already swirling round the cave, and as Norma manoeuvred the boat into the dark opening, she could see that the tide had almost reached the precious bale.

There was not a moment to lose!

Climbing out into the shallow water, she pulled the boat on to the shingle and set to work feverishly to drag the heavy bale towards it.

It was a task that required every ounce of her strength and determination; precious minutes were wasted in the struggle.

Twice she attempted to lift the bale into the boat—only to fail. Finally, using a piece of driftwood, she contrived to topple the heavy bundle over the side.

The boat lurched perilously, and righted itself as a larger wave gurgled

and splashed beneath it, swirling round Norma's feet.

Panting and dishevelled, she climbed back into the boat and endeavoured to thrust it off with one of the oars. Caught by the next wave, it rose and swung broadside towards the entrance.

The next moment there was a rending crash, and Norma was flung to her knees.

Scrambling unsteadily to her feet, she discovered, to her horror, that the dinghy was jammed securely between the side of the cave and a massive boulder! Her efforts to dislodge it were fruitless—and by the way in which it was tilted it was obvious that the waves would wash overboard at any minute.

With a sinking heart, she desisted from her efforts. Her plight was worse now, than it had been before.

Not only were the goods endangered—but she herself was in peril.

The tide was coming in swiftly; in the cave the water was almost waist-deep—and outside the waves were dashing in sparkling foam against the jagged cliffs.

Norma scrambled out and, standing waist-deep in the water, renewed her efforts to dislodge the boat.

But it was in vain.

A wave, larger than the rest, curled ominously at the mouth of the cave and, sweeping onwards, almost swamped the little dinghy.

Norma, clinging to the boat, narrowly escaped being swept from her feet as the wave receded.

Soaked to the skin and really frightened now, she attempted to reach the mouth of the cave—only to be flung back by another wave.

A choking cry was torn from her lips. "Help!" she called desperately, raising her voice. "Help!"

"H-e-l-p!" repeated the mocking echoes.

There was no other reply—except for the mournful skirling of the gulls and the chuckling gurgle of the remorseless sea as it eddied into the cave, rising higher with every passing minute.

The water was creeping above Norma's waist as she clung to a massive boulder; it had already half-filled the little dinghy—though the bale lying across the seats was as yet practically untouched.

Norma scrambled higher on to the

rocks, her heart in the grip of a numb despair.

In this deserted cove, who would be likely to hear her cries for help?

But once again, in sheer desperation, she cupped her hands to her mouth.

"Help! Help!"

As the hollow echoes died away, her heart stood still.

Were the echoes playing a cruel trick, or had there come an answering shout—muffled, barely audible?

It seemed to come, *not* from the open sea, but from the eerie darkness of the vaulted roof above her head!

Once again she shouted, straining her ears for that ghostly reply.

"Help!"

A wave dashed against the boulder to which she clung, dragging her from her hold.

The roaring of water in her ears drowned the answering shout that came miraculously from the darkness of the cave.

What will happen to Norma now in her desperate position? You must make sure of reading next Friday's chapters of Renee Frazar's grand serial. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL to-day!

"Right! What do you mean?" asked the Form captain.

"Why, about the folly of keeping the Form Fund money in your study. If someone's stolen it, you'll be in a fine old pickle! Well, you can't say I didn't warn you!"

Olive drew in a horrified breath.

"Surely—surely you don't think there's been a burglary!" she gasped.

Stephanie smiled maliciously.

"Well, it looks suspiciously like it to me. However, you can soon find out. See if the money's still there."

Amid a tense silence Olive jerked the drawer wide open and looked inside. A sigh of relief escaped her lips as she saw the tin cashbox standing where she had put it.

"Thank goodness!" she ejaculated. "I was beginning to get quite worried, though it was silly, really. As if anyone would steal—"

She broke off, and the blood drained from her face as she opened the cashbox. The pile of silver she had put there seemed intact, but of the notes there was no sign.

"Oh!" she gasped. "They've— they've gone!"

"Gone!" Her fat chum took an agitated step forward. "What's gone, old scout?"

"The pound notes. There were five of them; but they've all disappeared!" Olive's voice was little more than a whisper. Keenly she felt her position. As Form captain she was responsible for the money; if it were not recovered she would get the blame. In distress she looked around. "Who can have taken it?" she asked.

Letty shook her head helplessly. The disastrous news had left her speechless. Stephanie and her crony grinned slyly at one another. They were enjoying their rival's discomfiture. Then Stephanie crossed to the desk and bent over the open drawer. She gave a satisfied laugh as she straightened up.

"I guessed, as much," she declared. "This is no ordinary burglary. The lock shows no sign of being tampered with. It was opened with the proper key."

Olive gave a cry of protest.

"But that's impossible. I always

HER UNKNOWN ENEMY AT SCHOOL

(Continued from page 326.)

keep the key hidden behind the clock, but only three people know that—Letty, myself, and—"

She paused involuntarily, and Stephanie's grey eyes glittered in triumph.

"Exactly," she said. "You, Letty, and—Jess Grant!"

There could be no mistaking her meaning, and the excited whistle that Iris Watts gave showed that she shared her crony's views. Olive and Letty stared at them in horror.

"Surely—surely you aren't accusing Jess of being a thief!" gasped the fat girl.

Stephanie tossed her blonde head.

"I'm accusing nobody!" she retorted.

"Thank goodness it's not my job to decide what—or who—that precious pal of yours is! I only know that I wouldn't like to be in her shoes when the news gets around."

And with another malicious snigger she linked her arms with Iris', and both girls departed. For a moment or two Olive and Letty stood there in consternation, both their brains awl.

After all, none of them knew anything about the new girl. She was not only a complete stranger, but a mystery into the bargain. And it was certainly true that she was hard-up. Might it not be that the contents of the money-box had tempted her?

Olive shrank away from the thought. She liked Jess. She trusted her implicitly.

"No," she cried sharply, "I'll never believe that of her. Stephanie is just being catty. She hates Jess, and this is her way of getting her own back."

Letty nodded vigorously.

"My idea exactly, old scout. If you ask me, this is a frame-up to get Jess into trouble!"

"A—frame-up?"

"Yes. Doesn't it strike you as curious that the money should disappear the very day after Jess arrives at

the school—the day after Stephanie's declared war on her?"

"But, Letty," objected Olive, "Jess is a new girl. Until yesterday no one here had ever heard of her existence. No, Letty. You're just talking wild. It can't be any enemy of Jess who's taken the money—"

She broke off, as from the distance a bell clanged out. It was a warning that lessons would start in five minutes, and Olive, as Form captain, had to see that everything in the Fourth Form class-room was in order. She snatched up her books and clutched Letty by the sleeve.

"We'll have to talk it over later," she said. "There's no time now. Come on, or there'll be trouble. You know what Miss Charters is."

They went rushing down the corridor, to collect the class-room key from the matron—for it was a strict rule that all rooms were kept locked when not in use. Miss Bramleigh, the headmistress, was funny that way.

Unlocking the door, Olive hurried in. She tossed her books down on her desk, then darted across to the rostrum.

"Come and give me a hand," she urged her chum. "I've got to get Miss Charters' books out, and the blackboard's got to be—"

She stopped, and as her eyes went involuntarily to the blackboard, a startled cry left her lips.

"Oh, look!" she gasped.

Letty, gazing across the room, also gasped. And no wonder, for someone had written a message on the blackboard—a startling message that filled them with horror.

"IF YOU WANT TO RECOVER THE STOLEN MONEY," the message said, **"LOOK IN JESS GRANT'S LUGGAGE."**

And the only clue to the writer's identity was the single word:

"Well-wisher!"

Can Jess possibly have a secret enemy at St. Kit's? But if so, why should anyone be anxious to get her into trouble? You mustn't miss next Friday's enthralling chapters of this new school serial. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.