

Mayone to holler

"Brenda's Mystery Task In Hollywood"

One of the six splendid stories for schoolgirls, inside.

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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{2^D} WEEKLY



"LOOK! SHE IS WEARING THE STOLEN TIARA!"

Lola heard her spiteful rival say to Tony Creswick.

(See "The Bandit's Daughter," inside.)



HER FATHER'S ENEMY!

WHEN Lola Sharman left school she was thrilled at the thought of joining her father again and taking up her career as a dancer, in Mexico.

What a shock it was when she discovered that her father was a bandit known as the Grey Shadow. And Tony Creswick, a young Englishman who had befriended her, was out to capture the bandit!

So Lola determined to keep her father's identity and his hiding-place a secret.

She was engaged to dance in a cafe, where she met Maria Garcia, a girl who was obviously jealous of her.

Then Tony obtained for her a dancing engagement at a rich house. He took her there, and Lola realised that she was in the house of her father's biggest enemy, and that Maria Garcia was his niece.

"SENORITA—allow me to present my niece!"

Her heart cold with dismay, Lola stared into the dark eyes of her bitter rival—the girl who had sworn to wreck her career! The shock of the encounter momentarily held her speechless; Maria, though equally surprised, was the first to recover.

A mocking, unpleasant smile curved her red lips.

"La Bella Lola and I have met before," she remarked softly.

Senor Garcia looked swiftly from one to the other, obviously surprised. It was Tony who saved the situation. The boy had taken in the situation at a glance.

"I say," he remarked cheerfully, "this is rather jolly! Your niece, senor, and my young friend are dancers at the same cafe."

"Ah, indeed?" murmured the senor, regarding Lola narrowly.

Lola's thoughts were in a whirl; the colour had drained from her face, and she was holding tightly to Tony's arm.

By what cruel twist of fate had she been brought here—to dance at the house of her father's merciless enemy?

Even though Senor Garcia might not suspect her true identity, Maria would

take care to blacken her rival in her uncle's eyes.

And that was not the worst.

For the Hacienda Barranca was the very house that her father had been accused of robbing; and Tony was here to discuss with Senor Garcia the best means for laying the daring bandit by the heels!

Lola felt sick at heart as she tried desperately to regain her composure—to force some semblance of a smile to her dry lips.

It was too late to retreat; she must go through with her dance—whatever happened.

Tony, though unaware of the true state of affairs, seemed to guess something of her dismay. He pressed her arm reassuringly as he turned to his host.

"I can assure you, senor," he declared, "that your guests have a treat in store! Lola brought down the house at the Cafe Padrino last night. I had a job to persuade her manager to release her for this evening."

He winked at Lola with a boyishly infectious grin.

Lola flushed nervously beneath the senor's coldly appraising glance; there was a murmur of interest among the guests standing near.

Senor Garcia raised his eyebrows.

"I shall look forward to seeing La Bella Lola's performance," he remarked dryly. "Maria—will you please escort the young lady to the dressing-room? Come, senor, we have business to discuss."

He motioned Tony to follow him as he turned on his heel.

But the boy lingered for a moment, his hand on Lola's arm.

"Good luck!" he whispered. "And don't worry. You'll sweep 'em off their feet, once you start. By the way—see that grey-haired johnny standing by the stairs? That's James Radcliffe—the London producer of musical shows. He's in Mexico on the look-out for talent. To-night's your chance!"

No matter what other people might say, Lola would never believe that her bandit father was a thief. Yet the tiara he had given her was identical with the one that had been stolen!

By RENEE FRAZER

With a mysterious nod, he hurried to overtake his host.

Lola was conscious of a sudden, breathless flutter of her heart as she caught sight of the distinguished guest whom Tony had mentioned.

For an instant she encountered the producer's interested scrutiny, ere he turned away; and for the space of a moment Lola forgot the merciless web of fate in which she was entangled like a helpless fly.

As in a flash she had a momentary, dream-like vision—a picture of herself, flushed and smiling, acknowledging the applause of a glittering audience in a big London theatre!

And in the front row of the stalls she imagined a sun-tanned, handsome figure—the lines of care smoothed from his face—his eyes shining with affection and pride.

Her father!

Then the dream faded; Lola came back to earth, to encounter the cunning, watchful glance of Maria Garcia.

"Come, Lola," remarked the Mexican girl, with a patronising smile. "The room reserved for the artistes is at the end of the portico. You will not mingle with the guests except when you are actually performing."

She raised her voice deliberately for the benefit of the guests, as she motioned Lola imperiously to follow her.

Lola clenched her hands, her day-dreams shattered by Maria's sneering tone.

She was simply an unknown dancer—the daughter of an outlaw!

What chance would she have of attracting the attention of the distinguished guest?

But when Maria had left her, after one or two pointed jibes, Lola's natural spirit reasserted itself.

After all, she had already met with a measure of success—and she would have a chance of showing her worth! Why should she allow vague, intangible fears to oppress her?

No one knew that she was the bandit's daughter—and even if the truth came to light, what of it? Her father was innocent!

Lola drew a deep breath, her eyes lighting up as she commenced to unpack her things.

The rose-petal dress, the dainty shoes—the crescent headdress, her father's present!

One by one she donned them,

glancing into the tall mirror. The effect was dainty—exquisite.

The crimson glow of the sunset slanted through the window, throwing her shadow across the floor, as she practised one or two steps—dreaming that she was dancing on the Loudon stage.

And just then she heard a murmur of voices from the terrace outside—Tony's cheerful voice and the cold, hard tones of Senor Garcia.

"I tell you, my young friend, the Grey Shadow is as good as captured! The heirlooms that were stolen did not, as you know, belong to me. They were only entrusted to my care, but I have obtained photographs of them, and once these are circulated someone is bound to come forward with information that may lead to his arrest!"

A cold hand seemed to clutch at Lola's heart; she stood motionless, statuesque, a smile frozen on her lips.

"Splendid, senor!" replied Tony. "I congratulate you. May I see these photographs?"

"Certainly, my friend—but there is no immediate hurry. I wish to talk to you about my plans for trapping this scoundrel. The photographs are in my study."

The voices trailed away as the Mexican and his young companion descended the terrace steps.

Lola darted to the window, watching the two figures as they vanished among the trees.

For the moment, all thoughts of her dancing ambition were banished from her mind.

Curiosity—anxiety—dread followed each other in swift succession as she turned, glancing at herself in the mirror.

The crescent headdress seemed to wink accusingly from the coils of her dark hair.

Once again a horrid doubt swept over her—a doubt that she sought vainly to banish.

Supposing that among the photographs of the stolen jewellery there should be one that resembled—

No! It was hateful—unthinkable. Lola clenched her hands till the nails bit into her palms, but the dreadful doubt still persisted.

She felt that she must see those incriminating photographs—whatever the cost.

But she was a complete stranger in the house—an unknown artiste, paid to entertain the guests. She did not even know where the senor's study was located.

Yet she could take steps to find out—before it was too late.

A reckless plan was born in Lola's mind.

Her heart in her mouth, she crossed to the door and opened it gently—The corridor, with its sumptuous carpet and palms, was deserted, except for a flunkey in resplendent livery who was standing with a bored expression by the stairs.

Plucking up her courage, Lola approached him, trying to appear completely composed.

"Could you tell me if Senor Garcia is in his study?" she inquired.

The man glanced at her in respectful admiration, obviously arrested by her dainty appearance.

"I will find out, senorita," he replied in Spanish.

"Thank you," murmured Lola, with her sweetest smile.

The flunkey departed—and Lola crept after him, watching him from behind a palm.

She saw the man ascend the stairs, and knock on a door. There was no

reply. When the flunkey returned a few minutes later he found Lola seated in an alcove, fanning herself with apparent unconcern.

"El Senor is not in his room, senorita; he is possibly entertaining his guests."

Lola thanked him, and begged him to search in the ball-room for his master.

"I wish to know when I am to commence my dance," she explained, slipping a coin into the servant's hand.

Once again she watched the man depart—and barely was he out of sight when she sprang to her feet, her heart beating quickly, and darted swiftly towards the stairs.

A moment later she stood outside Senor Garcia's study, her hand trembling on the knob of the door.

Only too well she realised the risk she was taking. If she should be caught there—

Impatiently she thrust the thought aside. With a swift, anxious glance over her shoulder, she pushed open the door and crept into the room.

It was sumptuously furnished, in Mexican style; the fading sunlight crept through the tall windows, lighting on the big desk in the middle of the room.

And there on the desk, amid a quantity of official-looking documents, Lola saw the fatal photographs—a small pile of them, neatly secured by an elastic band.

She paused for a moment to listen—but the only sounds that reached her ears were the strains of music from the distant ball-room, and the plashing of a fountain in the courtyard below the window.

Beads of cold perspiration broke out on Lola's forehead as she crossed the room and bent over the desk.

She almost dreaded to pick up that packet of photographs—yet her fingers were drawn to it as though by an irresistible magnet.

A moment later she had snatched off the elastic band—and was sorting feverishly through the score or so of snapshots. Necklaces, bracelets, rings—a veritable pictured treasure-trove; but the one picture she sought—yet dreaded to find—was not there!

Lola breathed more freely; there were three photographs of tiaras—but

not one resembled her dainty headdress. Her face pale with an almost overwhelming relief, Lola was about to replace the photographs in the elastic band when a snapshot that had somehow become stuck to the back of one of the others fluttered from the pile and lay face downward on the carpet.

As Lola bent to retrieve it, a look of horror sprang into her eyes; a choking cry was stifled on her lips.

For she was staring at the pictured replica of the crescent headdress—her father's gift!

And as she knelt there, white to the lips, as though graven from stone, the door opened gently and closed again.

With a startled cry Lola turned—to encounter the bewildered question in Tony Creswick's eyes.

"Why, Lola!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

MARIA'S STARTLING ACCUSATION

FOR a moment Lola felt too stunned to move, or to speak; her first thought, when she could think at all, was to hide the incriminating photograph—the picture that was proof of her father's guilt!

Instinctively she crushed it in a trembling hand, as she forced herself to meet Tony's puzzled stare.

The full horror of her discovery had barely begun to dawn on her. All she knew was that she longed desperately to escape—to get away from this house; to be alone with her thoughts.

But Tony was barring her way to the door, his hands in his pockets, a quizzical smile on his lips.

"I say, Lola, you look stunning," he declared, taking in her dainty costume at a glance. "But I didn't know you were rehearsing in here. Senor Garcia didn't mention—"

Lola seized at the explanation as a drowning man grasps at a straw.

"I—I came to show Senor Garcia my costume," she whispered, "but—but I don't think I'm going to dance. Tony—please let me go."

She attempted to brush past him, on her way to the door; but Tony caught



Lola gazed in astonishment at the photograph of the crescent headdress. Then she turned as the door opened. "Why, Lola, what are you doing here?" exclaimed Tony Creswick.

at her arm. His eyes were filled with boyish concern.

"I say, Lola, what's up?" he demanded. "You're as white as a ghost. Don't you feel well?"

"I'm all right," breathed Lola desperately. "I just don't feel like dancing—that's all. Tony, please—"

In an instant the boy released her arm—and Lola darted out of the room, making for the stairs, the incriminating photograph crumpled in her hand.

But as she reached the top of the staircase, she almost collided with someone who was coming up.

"Senorita!" exclaimed a surprised voice.

Pale as death, Lola stared into the small, restless eyes of Ramon Garcia!

The senior stared at her sharply, grudging approval mingled with suspicion.

"You look well, senorita," he remarked. "But why are you not in the ball-room—entertaining my guests? Your dance has already been announced!"

Lola's heart felt cold as ice as she backed instinctively away from him, thrusting the incriminating photo in the hand of her frock.

"I—I—" she faltered.

Tony's voice, cheerful and unconcerned, spoke behind her.

"I think La Bella Lola is feeling a trifle indisposed, senior; perhaps a stroll in the grounds might make her feel better."

Lola flashed him a swift, grateful glance. Once again Tony had come chivalrously to her rescue—and he had not spoken a word about finding her in the senior's study.

But Ramon Garcia's swarthy features darkened; he was a man of quick temper, and used to having his slightest wish obeyed.

"What is this?" he demanded sharply, staring at Lola. "But I tell you, senorita, your dance has been announced—and I cannot have my guests kept waiting. I shall begin to suspect that you have been trifling with me—that you are here under false pretences, as my niece Maria suggested—"

He broke off, as though he had said more than he intended.

Lola's face had drained of every vestige of colour; she felt Tony's hand close on her arm.

"Look here, senior," cut in the boy, "La Bella Lola is my friend—and I can vouch for her! She is not the sort of girl to back out of an engagement without jolly good cause!"

A lump rose in Lola's throat as she encountered his anxious, appealing glance.

She realised that if she failed to keep her dancing engagement now, she would not only draw suspicion on herself—but implicate the boy who had done so much for her.

With an effort she drew herself up, forcing an unsteady smile.

"I feel better now, senior," she said quietly. "I am ready for my dance."

"Good for you, Lola!" breathed Tony's voice in her ear.

"Come, then," said Senior Garcia, his frown lifting. "My guests are waiting."

He proffered his arm to Lola, giving her no chance to slip away, or to collect her racing thoughts.

She tried to smile, but her heart felt as though it were dead. One dreadful thought pounded unceasingly in her mind.

Her father was a robber—a thief! The evidence lay crushed in her frock—and glittering among the dark waves of her hair.

The jewelled crescent was identical with the photo of the stolen tiara!

A choking sob rose in Lola's throat as she groped her way blindly down the wide staircase, her hand resting on Senior Garcia's arm.

She heard the music drifting from the ball-room—the ripple of applause that greeted her appearance.

But she saw nothing except a haze of lights—a blurred sea of faces, of sparkling jewellery and magnificent dresses.

Tony, seeing her step falter, smiled encouragingly.

He mistook her agitation for natural stage-fright, caused by the glittering and distinguished audience.

"All right, Lola," he whispered. "Just forget 'em—and think of your dance. You were magnificent last night, and you'll be even better tonight. Hark how they're clapping you!"

The clapping was subdued, yet generous; the reputation of the new young dancer had spread—largely owing to Tony's enthusiastic praise.

The audience were interested—and not the least interested was the famous English producer who had come with a party of friends.

"Radcliffe's got his eye on you," whispered Tony. "Let yourself go, Lola—and there's no telling what chances'll come your way!"

Lola made a plucky effort to pull herself together; she smiled wanly at Tony, as she pressed his hand.

The next moment the orchestra struck up the opening bars of her dance; Tony slipped away to a seat by the wall—and Lola stood alone, a wistful, rather pathetic figure in the glittering lights.

If only she could forget! If only for a moment she could thrust aside the grim, terrifying tragedy that clouded her mind!

The guitars repeated the opening bars of the haunting refrain; the audience was waiting impatiently.

With a sheer effort of will, Lola commenced to dance—the dance of the falling petals; the dance that had come to her as a happy inspiration, on which she had based so many hopes.

The haunting lilt of the music urged her feet to keep time; but a leaden weight seemed to hold her back—the weight of her aching heart.

As she danced, mechanically, without feeling, the blurred faces in front of her seemed to take the shape of one face—a lean, reckless face beneath greying hair, a daredevil smile on its lips.

Her father's face—laughing in defiance of the world who knew him as a scoundrel.

"No!" The soundless cry broke from Lola's lips as she faltered in her step.

She heard a low, restless murmur from the audience; the music changed to a soft, whispering undertone—the rustle of the falling petals.

It was the big moment of the dance—the effect for which Lola had planned and practised.

She made a last, desperate effort to regain mastery of herself—to bring the dance at least to an artistic finish.

But at that instant the haze seemed to lift from her eyes—and plainly she saw the upturned, critical faces of the audience—faces expressive of boredom and disappointment.

And she saw two faces more clearly than the rest—the faces of two people seated by the wall—Tony and Maria Garcia!

There was an anxious, bewildered look on the boy's face; Maria was smiling vindictively as she held out a crumpled photograph, and raised a hand to point to the young dancer.

A stab of horror cut suddenly through Lola's heart; her hand flew to her frock—and she realised that the fatal picture of the crescent headdress was no longer there.

She must have dropped it on her way into the ball-room!

"Look, senior!" Maria's hissing whisper sounded clearly above the music of the dance. "That headdress she is wearing—it is the stolen tiara! It must have been given to her by the bandit himself!"

WOULD HER RUSE SUCCEED?

LOLA'S dance ended sensationally, in a manner that she had never planned.

A wave of sick faintness swept over her; she felt as though the floor was tottering under her feet. The lights became blurred, dancing fantastically in front of her eyes.

The orchestra leader, realising that something was wrong, brought the tune to a sudden stop. The murmurs of the audience rose to a hideous clamour in Lola's ears as she stumbled, groping desperately to save herself.

Tony Creswick sprang forward, catching her by the shoulders.

"Lola—hold up!" he breathed.

The sound of his voice seemed to act as a lash to Lola's reeling senses.

She shrank from him with a little sob, suddenly regaining her strength.

Desperately she thrust past him, and stumbled blindly past the startled members of the orchestra, and through a curtained doorway.

She ran—panic-stricken, anxious only to escape from the house.

But the passage led only to one of the ante-rooms—a room in which refreshments were laid for the members of the orchestra.

A dark-eyed young Mexican girl, carrying a tray, entered through another door as Lola burst in, white-faced and dishevelled.

The girl nearly dropped the tray in her fright; then her expression

(Please turn to the back page.)



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THE PHANTOM of the BAY

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Story, Featuring
Noel Raymond,
the young
Detective.

By PETER LANGLEY

NOEL HEARS A STRANGE STORY

"COME in, sir! I dunno as I'll be able to put you up to-night, but you're welcome to rest here, and have a bite o' something to eat."

The broad-shouldered, rugged-looking fisherman regarded Noel Raymond keenly, standing in the doorway of his isolated little cottage on the gale-swept headland.

"Thanks, awfully!" smiled the young detective, raising his voice to carry above the noise of the storm that was breaking. "I've been walking all day, and I'm just about beat."

He stepped inside the cosy little cottage, glancing appreciatively at the bright fire in the kitchen. Then he saw that there was another occupant—a pretty, fair-haired girl of about fifteen, who smiled shyly at him.

"My daughter Betty," said the old fisherman, shutting the door behind him. "My name's Trelawney—Tom Trelawney, sir. Betty will make you a cup of coffee, so sit down."

"Nice, cosy place you have here, Mr. Trelawney," remarked Noel, as he drew up a chair. "Though a bit lonely at times, I should imagine."

"That's a matter o' taste," the old fisherman replied gruffly. "There be folks that like loneliness—an' folks that don't. Hurry up with that coffee, Betty, lass. I could do with a cup myself afore I go out."

The girl looked round quickly.

"You—you're not going out to your nets to-night, dad?" she asked.

"That I am!" replied her father placidly. "It takes a wilder night than this to put Tom Trelawney off his work."

Noel's keen eyes noted the slight tremor of the girl's hand as she placed a steaming cup of coffee before him, and carried another to her father.

"Dad," she whispered, almost pleadingly, "you won't go out to the island. You know—the warning—"

Tom Trelawney frowned.

"I'll just be going to see the nets are all right, lass," he said, and he turned to Noel. "Betty'll maybe be able to make up a bed for you, sir, if you'd like to stay the night. But we can't offer you much comfort. Now, I won't be more'n an hour or two, lass. You needn't bother to come down to the beach."

Noel was shocked at Betty's pallor as the door slammed behind the old

fisherman. She looked suddenly older than her years, and her serious grey eyes held a hint of lurking fear that went to the young detective's heart.

Instinctively he rested a hand on her slim shoulder.

"I shouldn't worry about your dad, Betty," he remarked lightly. "The sea's not so rough as it sounds; and I bet he's weathered a few storms in his time!"

Betty smiled quickly, gratefully. "It's not that," she whispered. "It's—oh, I know father would be angry if I told you, but I feel I must confide in someone. It's the curse of the Trelawneys—the phantom fishing-boat—that—"

"Eh?" demanded Noel, his blue eyes narrowing. "The what?"

"Please don't laugh at me," pleaded Betty. "I know it must sound impossible to a stranger, but it's very real to me. I—I've seen it; and so has dad, only he won't admit it."

"Tell me," said Noel seriously. "I promise I shan't laugh."

With earnest simplicity, Betty told him about the "curse"—the legend of the Trelawney family. It appeared that many years ago, one of the Trelawneys—the owner of a fishing-boat—had rescued a nobleman whose ship was wrecked on a rocky island just outside the bay. In gratitude, the nobleman had informed the fisherman that a treasure-chest had been left aboard the wreck, and he could have it if he were able to salvage it. Betty's ancestor had sailed out to the island again, and had managed to put the treasure-chest in his fishing-boat.

And then, sailing across the bay, the boat had sprung a leak, and, sank, carrying with her the ill-fated fisherman and his treasure-chest. Since then—so the legend ran—the treasure

From the blackness of the cliff glided an eerily glowing, awe-inspiring shape. The Phantom Fishing-boat! Desperately Betty Trelawney pulled on the oars. The Phantom Ship had been responsible for her father's disappearance—and now it was pursuing her!

had lain at the bottom of the bay, and was guarded by a phantom fishing-boat that brought disaster to anyone who saw it.

"We've seen the phantom boat twice lately," whispered Betty. "Out there in the bay. Father refused to believe it; he said it was a trick of the light. Yet already we've had bad luck; unless father can find enough money to buy the place, we'll have to leave this cottage very soon."

The girl glanced away for a moment, and her voice trembled a little as she spoke again.

"We both dread leaving it. Father was born and brought up here, and so was I. And now we may have to go, and the cottage will be demolished. Father thought we'd be able to stay on at first, but I guessed the worst, as soon as I saw that dreadful phantom fishing-boat. And I'm certain father is going out to the island—Shipwreck Island, they still call it—to find some clues. I'm terrified for his safety, Mr. Raymond—yet what can I do?"

Impulsively she clung to his arm, staring fearfully out of the window into the dark, windy night.

"Goodness only knows what may happen to him if ever he reaches that horrible island," she breathed unsteadily.

Noel pursed his lips thoughtfully.

The tale of the spectral fishing-boat was almost incredible—and yet Betty was obviously certain she had seen it. And he remembered how nervous her rugged, weather-beaten father had been.

Glancing down at the girl's agitated face, he came to a swift decision.

"Look here, Betty—just to set your mind at rest, we'll go down to the beach and watch your father put out to sea. I've a pair of binoculars specially made for night-work, and you can look through them. What about it?"

Her face lit up with swift gratitude. "Oh, please—if you don't really mind!"

A few minutes later they set off in the teeth of the buffeting wind.

By the time they reached the narrow beach, at the foot of the rugged cliffs, Tom Trelawney had launched his boat, and was already some way out at sea.

Noel picked up the hobbling craft with the aid of his binoculars, and handed them to Betty.

"I can see dad!" she breathed eagerly. Then she gave a sudden sharp gasp. "He—he's going out to the island! He's not making for the nets at all. He— Oh!"

A stifled scream escaped her lips and Noel saw the blood drain from her face.

"What is it, Betty?" he demanded quickly.

"The boat—the phantom fishing-boat!" cried Betty, with a terrified sob.

Noel snatched the binoculars from her trembling hand, directing them out to sea.

A sharp, startled hiss came from his set lips.

He could still see Tom Trelawney in his boat, crouched there like a man turned to stone.

And gliding across the waves towards the fishing-boat was another vessel—an eerie, spectral craft, suffused by a pale, unearthly glow.

Just then the watery moon that had shed its ghostly light on the scene vanished behind a heavy bank of clouds. Tom Trelawney's boat was no longer visible—but the spectral craft could still be seen, moving in an uncanny way across the water.

Then an even stranger thing happened. Plainly, before the eyes of the transfixed watchers, the phantom boat upended, its prow pointing to the sky, its stern disappearing below the surface. In a moment it had sunk into the dark trough of the waves.

Its disappearance was followed by a moan from Betty Trelawney.

"Dad!" she sobbed. "Oh, dad! Something dreadful's happened to him—I know it!"

ON SHIPWRECK ISLAND

NOEL'S face was pale and grim as he spun round, clapping the binoculars into their case. He did not attempt to explain what he had seen; but it was obvious that the "curse" of the Trelawneys was something more than a mere legend.

The girl was clinging to him, her eyes wild and entreating.

"What can we do?" she sobbed. "How can we save him?"

Noel grasped her trembling shoulders.

"Pull yourself together, Betty! We can only help him by keeping calm. Tell me—where can we find a boat? Anything—so long as it'll keep above water."

Betty stared at him, fighting pluckily to regain her self-control.

"There—there's an old boat that dad meant to overhaul," she breathed. "It's drawn up in the cove, over there. But it leaks badly—"

"Let's have a look at it!" cried Noel.

He raced towards the cove, Betty at his heels. They had to wade through the surf to reach the place.

The boat was a weather-beaten fishing-craft, its paintwork peeling, its hull battered by years of service. But there was no time to pick and choose; it was that—or nothing.

"Give me a hand, Betty!" shouted Noel, raising his voice to carry above the thunder of the surf and the buffeting wind. "I'm going to launch her."

Owing to the encroaching tide, the boat was only a few yards from the water's edge; with Betty's aid, Noel contrived to push the cumbersome boat down the sloping shingle—finally to lurch with a splash into the frothing breakers.

"Wait here, Betty!" shouted Noel as

he leapt on board, reaching for the oars. But before he had realised her intention, the girl had scrambled in, too.

"I'm coming with you," she said breathlessly. "The boat leaks, and someone must bail it out. Please don't worry about me. All that matters is—dad."

Noel's eyes gleamed with warm admiration as, without another word, he picked up the oars, his whole attention concentrated on the grim task in front of him.

Betty, between bailing, sat very white and still, staring out to sea. Only once she spoke, during a lull in the wind.

"I can see the boat," she said unsteadily; "but—but I can't see dad."

Noel glanced over his shoulder; the moon had come out from behind the clouds, throwing a pale, cold light on the restless waves.

The young detective caught sight of the rocking fishing-boat—apparently empty. His lips tightened as he threw his whole strength into the battle with the incoming tide. Another five minutes' hard rowing, and they had drawn level with the tossing fishing-boat.

A glance confirmed Noel's worst fears; the boat was empty—drifting aimlessly. Of Tom Trelawney there was no sign!

A pitiful moan came from Betty, and she sprang to her feet, as if intending to leap desperately across the intervening gap between the two boats.

"Steady, Betty!" Noel cried huskily. "There may be some other explanation. Wait!"

But though he tried to speak reassuringly, his heart was heavy as he reached for the boathook.

Their own ancient craft was almost half-full of water, in spite of Betty's tireless bailing. It lurched drunkenly in the swell as the two boats drifted together. Noel lifted Betty into the other boat, and sprang after her—in the very nick of time.

With a final, despairing lurch, the boat they had left sank with a gurgle beneath the waves.

The girl clung to Noel, trying pluckily to fight back her sobs, as he stared keenly round the little fishing-craft. There was ample evidence of its recent occupation.

The oars were still in the rowlocks; the old fisherman's jacket lay folded on the stern seat, his pipe near to it—still warm to the touch.

"He—he's dead—drowned!" whispered Betty tragically. "It's the curse of the Trelawneys—that he's always laughed at—"

"Wait!" interrupted Noel sharply.

He had dropped to his knee, and was examining the prow of the boat by the aid of his torch; then he turned his attention on the seats. A noiseless whistle escaped his lips.

"Your father was wearing hob-nailed boots, wasn't he?" Then, as Betty nodded dumbly, Noel added: "I thought so. But there's been someone else in the boat to-night—a man wearing rubber-soled shoes! And ghosts don't wear shoes. I can see the marks plainly. He has stood on one of the seats; possibly he sprang at your father. There was a struggle, and this tin mug was trodden underfoot."

"Meanwhile, someone else was holding the boat with a grappling-hook; the paintwork is freshly marked. You can see here where the point of the hook sank into the wood. Your father

has not been drowned, Betty, he has been kidnapped!"

Betty was staring at him, her face pale, her eyes wide and bewildered.

"But how—how do you know?" she gasped.

"All the signs point to it," declared Noel. "I'd stake my reputation that he was dragged into another boat, after putting up a desperate fight. Obviously, there was more than one man concerned. Do you know if your father had any enemies?"

Betty shook her head, as though in a dream.

"I—I'm certain he hasn't. Mr. Raymond, what does it all mean? The phantom boat—you saw it—"

"A trick," snapped Noel. "A clever illusion. I'm not certain how it was worked, but it was obviously used for the purpose of scaring anyone who might be watching from the shore. The scoundrels must have known of the legend."

"But why?" blurted Betty. "Why should anyone attack father?"

"That," jerked Noel, "is what I intend to discover." He was scanning the sea through his binoculars as he spoke, his boyish face set in grim lines. "I'm pretty certain that the phantom boat did not sink; that was just part of the illusion. It made off somewhere, either towards the shore or—"

He broke off, stiffening, his gaze fastened on a gaunt rock jutting out from the sea, marked clearly by a line of white breakers.

"Is that the island you spoke of, out there?" he demanded sharply.

Betty nodded, following the direction of his glance.

"Yes, that's Shipwreck Island, where the nobleman was supposed to have been wrecked in the olden days," she breathed. "It's just a rock, really. It—it's supposed to be haunted by the ghosts of the crew of the lost ship."

"Umph!" commented Noel, with a grim smile. "An excellent hiding-place, I should imagine—with a reputation like that."

For a moment he concentrated his glasses on the rock-bound island. Then, replacing them abruptly, he dropped into a seat, reaching for the oars.

"I'm going to row you back to the shore, Betty," he announced. "Then I'm going to explore that island. I rather fancy I may find something there."

Betty leaned forward, her hand grasping his knee.

"I—I'm not going back," she whispered. "I'm coming with you. You must let me!"

Noel regarded the girl incredulously.

"Yet you believe the island is haunted?"

Betty nodded.

"I—I'm certain it is. But that makes no difference. You must let me go with you. I must help to discover what's happened to dad."

He hesitated for a moment, then he pressed her hand.

"Good for you, Betty!" he said. "We'll see this through together!"

Without another word he plunged in the oars, heading the boat towards the rock-bound island.

As they drew nearer Noel could see how desolate the place was—merely a barren rock rising from the sea, the eyrie of countless seagulls. No wonder queer legends had grown around this sinister-looking island impressing the minds of the simple fisher-folk who inhabited that part of the coast.

But Noel himself was troubled by no such fancies. He was convinced that the disappearance of Tom Trelawney

was the result of trickery—of some deep-laid, scoundrelly plot!

They reached the forbidding island, splashing through the foaming breakers that ringed the rocks. With some difficulty he contrived to moor the boat to a jagged boulder; then he and Betty scrambled out on to the slippery rocks.

On one side was the sea, on the other a cliff—steep, slippery, seemingly impassable.

"There can't be anyone here—alive!" the girl breathed.

For a moment the young detective felt almost inclined to agree; his hopes sank lower as they picked their way over the slippery rocks.

Then he abruptly stiffened, his eyes narrowing. Bending suddenly, he picked up a small object wedged in a crevice in the rock.

It was the burnt end of a match—and it was quite dry!

Noel smiled grimly as he held out the object in the palm of his hand.

"This didn't grow here, Betty," he remarked, "and it hasn't been in the water. There's someone on this island!"

From that point Noel's eagerness increased. He was convinced that he was on the right track. Dropping to his knees, he examined the slippery rocks through a powerful magnifying-glass, seeking some other trace.

And it was not long before he found what he sought.

"Look!" he said tersely. "That seaweed has been crushed underfoot, and you can see where the underside of this boulder has been chipped. Someone climbed up this way recently! Careful, Betty! Give me your hand!"

He assisted the girl through a narrow fissure between two boulders. Then a soft, excited ejaculation escaped his lips and his hand tightened on his companion's arm.

In front of them, hewn in the slippery face of the cliff, was a flight of rough steps.

Instinctively Noel's hand reached for his pocket, to make certain he was carrying his revolver.

"Listen, Betty!" he breathed. "Someone must keep an eye on the boat. We mustn't allow ourselves to be stranded here. So you wait in the boat, and I'll see what's to be found at the top, here. If I do find anything I'll let you know; but, whatever happens, don't move from the boat."

He did not tell her that he anticipated danger. The boat was really an excuse. He had no intention of dragging the girl into peril. In spite of her courage, he had begun to regret having brought her so far.

Betty nodded obediently. "Please—please, don't be long!" she whispered.

Noel pressed her hand, and, turning abruptly, commenced the hazardous ascent, his nerves tensed for action.

Betty, her eyes strained, watched his tall, athletic figure till he was out of sight.

Then, squeezing through the fissure between the two boulders, she made her way down to the water's edge again. Stepping gingerly over the rocks, she reached the gently rocking boat and scrambled in. To occupy her mind, if only for a few moments, she decided to row a few yards out into deeper water.

She took the oars and paddled out a little way; then she sat back to wait for signs of Noel.

Betty tried to think of the young detective and of her father, but her thoughts turned involuntarily to the phantom boat, and the grim stories told about the rock-bound island.

"Hark! What was that?"

The girl's heart thudded painfully as she peered through the gloom. She thought she heard a gurgling, splashing sound, the ghostly mutter of voices carried on the wind.

The moon had vanished again behind the heavy clouds; only dimly could she make out her surroundings—the gaunt cliff and the white, curling breakers lashing themselves on the rocks near at hand.

And then a sharp, involuntary cry was torn from her lips. She shrank back, cold with terror.

From the blackness of the cliff, from the solid rock itself glided an eerie, awe-inspiring shape, irradiating an unearthly, pale luminescence. The phantom fishing-boat!

Slowly, noiselessly it moved through the water towards the little boat where Betty sat, petrified.

With a great effort, she tried to gain control of herself. Her dominating thought was to flee, to escape this thing of mystery and terror.

She seized the oars and commenced to row feverishly, pulling away from

the spot where he had left the boat. But there was no sign of it.

Betty and the fishing-boat had disappeared. He swept the sea through the binoculars, but there was nothing to be seen.

His face pale, Noel made his way back to the cliff-face, thinking furiously.

He had guessed what had frightened Betty—the reappearance of the phantom boat. But where had it come from? And where had it gone to with Betty Trelawney?

Somewhere on the island, the young detective was convinced, lay the secret hiding-place of the mysterious people in the phantom boat. There the boat must be hidden, and there old Tom Trelawney and his daughter had, in all probability, been taken.

He made his way back up the steps and searched the plateau on the top of the cliff, hoping to find some clue to the mystery kidnappers' secret lair; but he searched in vain.

"It must be somewhere on the other side of the island," he told himself, after a while.



As Noel held up the object, Betty looked eagerly. It was a match. "There's someone on this island," Noel said quietly, and the girl's eyes lit up with hope.

the island, but hardly knowing where she was heading for, intent only on escape.

But the spectral craft was bearing down on her. Slowly, relentlessly the distance between the boats lessened.

With a panic-stricken gasp, Betty glanced back over her shoulder. The phantom craft was almost on her. She gave a single scream, then there was a splintering crash, and icy water rushed into her little boat.

WHAT HAD BECOME OF BETTY?

ON the plateau that crowned the island Noel stopped, transfixed.

The pitiful, terror-stricken scream had reached his ears through the howling of the wind that swept over the island.

"Betty!" he muttered, through clenched teeth.

Leaping back over the rocks that strewed the cliff-top, he reached the rough steps, and began the precarious descent as quickly as he could.

He reached the beach, and, picking his way over the boulders, made for

But only by means of the steps was it possible to ascend or descend the frowning cliffs. The one way he could reach any other part of Shipwreck Island was by boat, and that would be dangerous enough.

"And the boat has vanished, too!" muttered Noel, as he again descended to the shore. "Whether the phantom boat shows up again or not, I'm stranded here!"

Again he directed his glasses on the restless, tossing sea, hardly expecting to see anything, yet hoping for some clue, some slight thing that might give hope.

And suddenly his face tensed. "Gosh," he breathed, "something drifting in the water!"

He raced down to the water's edge and waded out a little way, heedless of the icy chill of the water. Something was floating in the sea—something that had caught his eyes.

Noel flashed his torch on to it. It was a piece of wood, about two feet long, with a small brass plate on one side. It was this plate that had caught Noel's eye. Engraved on it was the one word: "Mossrose."

The name of Tom Trelawney's little fishing-boat! The drifting piece of wreckage was a seat support from the missing craft.

The young detective picked it up, weighing it in his hand thoughtfully. Where had this actually come from?

It seemed to have drifted around an outjutting mass of rocks that effectively blocked the beach on the left.

"It was fairly close in," muttered Noel. "That means the boat must have been wrecked near the island—somewhere on the other side of that pile of rocks."

But how was he to get round to that side of the rock-bound island?

Noel hesitated only a moment. Then, tucking his revolver inside his shirt, in order to keep it as dry as possible, and removing his shoes, he plunged into the heaving water, and struck out strongly away from the shore.

The tide ran strongly here, and the half-submerged rocks menaced him; but, with the skill of an expert swimmer, Noel avoided them, and, fighting the powerful eddies and currents, battled his way farther and farther out.

Gasping as the icy water struck him to the bone, he made his way slowly round that great pile of rocks, intent on gaining the far side.

And as he passed its outmost point, and then headed for the shore, Noel was conscious of a feeling of relief. The barrier of rocks acted as a break-water, and on this side the water was almost calm.

The young detective trod water, and dashed the spray from his eyes, blinking around him.

And even as he did so, he almost shouted aloud.

Not a dozen yards away, drifting idly in the water, was the phantom boat itself.

With swift strokes, making no noise, Noel swam near to it. Soon he was near enough to see it clearly. His lips tightened as he saw through the illusion that had frightened Betty.

The phantom boat was revealed as a powerful motor-launch; over the side, on wires, was suspended a thin sheet of aluminium, painted with some phosphorescent substance to resemble the spectral craft of the legend.

"The cunning rascals!" muttered Noel, swimming slowly through the darkness. "I can see how it's done; that sheet of metal can be raised or lowered at will into the sea, giving the illusion that the boat is sinking and first. No doubt it can be hidden in the boat itself, and then, with no lights burning, the craft is practically invisible at night."

On board the mystery boat he could see a solitary figure, holding the tiller. An idea sprang suddenly into the young detective's mind.

Still swimming silently, he reached the stern of the boat, and grabbed a rope trailing in the water.

The boat was now moving at a faster rate. Noel could hear a low, hardly audible hum; evidently there was some kind of silencing arrangement for the engine. He felt the warm exhaust-gas that was being ejected; smelt the sickly fumes of petrol.

The man at the helm had his back to the stern, and was steering the boat towards the shore—all unaware that he was towing the swimmer in the water! Would he lead Noel to Betty Trelawney and her father?

the rock face ahead. It seemed just wide enough to allow the launch to pass through, and the sea hissed and gurgled as it swept inside.

A moment later the young detective found he was being towed through the tunnel. It opened out into a dim, echoing cave. Ahead he saw a faint light, and heard gruff voices.

The boat stopped, and began to swing round, so that its bows faced the open sea again; evidently it could go no farther. Noel felt his feet touching the sandy bottom of the channel.

The man on the launch leaped out on to a ledge that ran alongside the wall of the cave, and walked towards the light. Noel waited for a moment, then he drew himself up out of the water and on to the ledge.

Cautiously he made his way forward, feeling for his revolver as he did so.

Then, as he rounded a bend in the cavern, a startling scene burst on his gaze.

In the vaulted cavern, dimly lit by a flickering lantern, were two men. One Noel recognised as the man who had been in the launch. He was examining an ancient-looking, weed-encrusted wooden chest, rotted by immersion, yet still intact.

The second man, better dressed, stood by, glaring down at two bound figures who lay on the floor of the cave—Tom Trelawney and Betty!

"Well, Trelawney—we've won!" he snapped harshly. "We've got the treasure, and we're leaving here right away. Many thanks for locating the wreck of your ancestor's boat; it saved us a lot of trouble!"

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed the old fisherman. "You won't get away with this—"

"That remains to be seen," rejoined the other coolly. "When we have taken the treasure chest on board, we shall leave you here, with your meddling daughter—to escape as best you can. Possibly some of your friends on shore will think of sending a search party out here." He turned to the other man. "Can you get that aboard?" he asked. "Think so, chief—but it's as heavy as lead."

Staggering under the weight of the chest, the man came forward. Noel crouched back in the shadows, hardly breathing as he went past. It appeared that the precious box was being placed in the waiting motor-launch. In a few moments the man returned, passing Noel's still figure without glancing in his direction.

"O.K., chief," he said.

"Good," smiled the man, and he glanced down at the prisoners again.

"Good-bye, Trelawney—and thanks for the valuables!"

At that moment Noel acted. He stepped forward from the shadows, revolver in hand.

"One moment, please!" he remarked.

His appearance created a sensation. With a startled ejaculation the chief spun round; the other man stared, his face paling.

"Who—who are you?" demanded the well-dressed man, his face white.

"Never mind that for the moment," snapped Noel. "The main point is that your game is up, my friend! You've left your flight with the treasure that rightly belongs to Trelawney too late. Kindly put up your hands!"

Noel was playing a precarious game; his revolver was no good. The immersion in the sea had rendered it useless. He was depending solely on his powers of bluff.

Coolly, still keeping them covered, Noel crossed to the two bound figures and swiftly cut their bonds.

"All right, Betty," he said, helping the white-faced girl to her feet. "And you too, Mr. Trelawney. We've caught these scoundrels nicely. Betty, just get on board the boat; we'll follow."

The girl made her way down to the opening where the launch lay.

But suddenly the "chief" smiled sneeringly.

"I see you have been swimming," he remarked. "Perhaps your gun has got wet? We will see—"

As he spoke he whipped out his own revolver, and, aiming at Noel, pressed the trigger.

In the nick of time the young detective ducked—flinging himself forward and grappling with the man.

Together they rolled on the ground; but Noel contrived to wrest the pistol from the other's hand. He sprang to his feet, in time to go to the aid of the old fisherman, who was grappling with the other burly ruffian.

The man toppled over with a crack on the jaw that knocked him senseless.

"Come on, Trelawney," snapped Noel.

He seized the old fisherman by the arm, and hustled him down to the launch. They scrambled in, even as Betty, who had started the engine, headed out through the narrow opening.

In a few minutes, with Noel at the controls now, the launch was heading for the nearest coastguard station.

And in the seat behind him, Betty snuggled closely to her father, while he prised up the lid of the ancient chest. Then she gasped, her eyes wide, as the contents were revealed.

There was jewels, coins, and plate there that must have been worth hundreds of pounds!

"Yes, it's the old nobleman's treasure all right," remarked Noel, smiling. "Presented to your ancestor—and now your property."

"I had a feeling it were there on the bed of the bay," nodded the old man. "And then when my nets fouled some wreckage one night, I found I'd stumbled on the place. And then the phantom boat started to appear, and they tried to scare me away. I suppose that rascal on the island had got wind of the legend, and guessed I was on the track."

"So he decided to find the treasure for himself," said the young detective. "The phantom boat he used for two purposes; to scare you and anyone else away, and to drag the bed of the bay in that vicinity. To-night, when you were on your way across the bay to see if you could find any clue on the island, the villains had found the treasure at last; they saw you in your boat, and decided to run you down and leave you on Shipwreck Island, so they could make a clear getaway."

Betty looked up with shining eyes.

"And now we shall be able to buy the dear old cottage," she breathed.

"But—oh, dad! Why did you keep it all to yourself?"

The old fisherman puffed at his clay pipe.

"Didn't want to raise your hopes, in the first place, Betty, lass," he said. "And then I didn't want you to get into any danger with them scoundrels. But it seems you weren't to be kept out. You're a real Trelawney, Betty, an' no mistake!"

"Hear, hear!" remarked Noel, with a boyish grin. "A chip of the old block, Mr. Trelawney!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

THE CLUE OF THE EASTER EGGS—that is the title of next week's thrilling Noel Raymond story. Don't forget that, owing to the Easter holidays, your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale a day earlier than usual.

GRIPPING the trailing rope tightly, Noel realised that they were heading straight for the beetling cliffs. And then he saw a dark crevice in



Her Unknown Enemy at School

By GAIL WESTERN

IN THE SECRET TUNNEL

OLIVE FRENCH, Fourth Form captain at St. Kit's School, and her chum, Letty Johnson, liked Jess Grant, the newcomer to the Fourth, as soon as they met her.

But there was some mystery about Jess, and the chums soon realised that an unknown enemy in the school was trying to get her disgraced. Also, in the village, was a girl who was Jess' double, and who was in league with the unknown enemy.

Thanks to Jess' enemy, she and Olive fell into disfavour, and finally, to save Olive from losing her captaincy, Jess ran away from school.

Following up a clue, she rowed to Peewit Isle, not far away. There she saw her double. The girl entered a secret tunnel leading under the island. And excitedly Jess followed.

HER heart thumping, her pulses racing, Jess stood in the secret passage that burrowed under Peewit Isle, and the lake surrounding it.

The tunnel was in pitch blackness; the air was clammy, and from the roof came the eerie patter of dripping water.

But Jess did not hesitate.

Eagerly she stole forward, determined to follow her mysterious double, determined to discover the truth at last.

Jess had a torch with her, but she dared not switch it on, for fear of betraying her presence. One hand pressed against the wall, she groped her way onward.

Occasionally she passed arched openings, leading to side passages, but she kept straight on, guided by that tell-tale pitter-patter. But suddenly the sound of footsteps ceased. There came a loud bang, then silence.

Wondering what had happened, Jess walked on, only to find that the tunnel came to an abrupt end a little farther ahead. She stood there for a moment or two, then produced her torch and switched it on.

Instantly the bang she had heard was explained. Before her was an ancient wooden door, iron-bound and worm-eaten. Her double had evidently passed through, banging the door behind her.

Ascending the stone steps that led up to the door, Jess lifted the iron latch and pressed, but the door refused

to budge. The other girl had locked it. But where did it lead?

Jess, thinking of the chart she had found, caught in her breath.

"It must be a secret entrance to that house marked on the chart," she told herself. "Golly, suppose my double lives here!"

An electric thrill ran through her. Then her eyes gleamed as she noticed a tiny shaft of light shining through a hole in the door. Rising on tiptoe, she pressed her eye to the spyhole, to find herself peering into a comfortably furnished library.

Two people were in the room. One was her double, in the act of removing her hat and coat. Her companion was a dour-faced, grey-haired man, who, judging from his clothes, seemed to be a butler. But there was nothing about the butler in his behaviour now. He lounged back in a big armchair as if the house belonged to him.

Faintly their voices reached Jess. She listened eagerly, convinced that she was on the verge of important discoveries. Nor was she disappointed. Their very first words made her start.

With a grin, the butler looked across at the girl and remarked:

"Wouldn't old Mrs. Malvering have a shock if she could see me now?" Jess' double laughed.

"Rather! But it would be nothing to the shock she'd get if she knew I wasn't the real Jess Grant! To think I've been living here all these weeks without the old fool ever guessing, I'm not her niece. It's a good job—"

But Jess heard no more. She was too utterly amazed to listen to the rest of the sentence. Not only had her double stolen her name, but she had

actually passed herself off as this Mrs. Malvering's niece! Then that surely must mean that Mrs. Malvering was her own aunt!

Crouching behind the door, Jess stared unseeingly, her mind in a whirl. She had heard her chums speak of Mrs. Malvering, the aristocratic, rather forbidding owner of the big house known as Twin Towers. But that the old lady was a relation of hers came as a tremendous shock.

But what was the impostor's game? Why was she living here? And why was she carrying out her daring impersonation? Jess could not guess, but at last she had a shrewd idea why her double and her unknown enemy at St. Kit's had conspired to get her in disgrace in the school.

"They were scared I might discover the truth," she told herself excitedly.

"Scared lest Mrs. Malvering should see me and guess how she was being tricked! Oh, it's crystal clear now. But why—"

Eager to learn all she could, she pressed her ear to the hole in the door, and listened to the low murmur of conversation that came from the library.

Judging by what was being said, Mrs. Malvering was away. That was why the butler—Dunn was his name apparently—was making himself so much at home.

Suddenly Jess' double glanced at her wrist-watch. She frowned and stared across at the secret door.

"What the dickens has become of her?" she muttered. "She promised she'd be here by nine. I vote we give her another couple of minutes, then start searching on our own."

The butler nodded.

"Yes, we can't afford to wait another night," he growled. "Time's getting on. Any day, now, Miss Dalton may be discharged from hospital, and if we haven't discovered what we're looking for by then—well, the game'll be up. We'll have to pack up and go."

"I'll say we will," agreed the girl. "Once she can get about, you can bet your boots that she'll make post-haste for here."

Again Jess' mind wandered. She caught in her breath. So Miss Dalton was in hospital! That explained why her benefactress had not got in touch with her. All this time she had been ill.

Slowly but surely the dark clouds of

Olive and Letty were certain that their runaway chum had come to Peewit Isle. Why, then, did she not respond to their shouts? Was it because she was hiding from them? Or—was it because she was a prisoner?

mystery were dispersing. If only Jess could discover what the conspirators were searching for, then—

Her eyes gleamed.
"Then I'll know the whole truth," she murmured. "Then I'll be able to return to St. Kit's! Oh, wouldn't that be lovely! Wouldn't it be wonderful if—"

She broke off sharply and whirled round. From the tunnel had come the sound of footsteps. Someone was approaching the secret door. Who could it be—but her unknown enemy?

She was on her way to keep her appointment with her confederates!

Desperately Jess looked around. She must not be caught here. The identity of her enemy could wait. All that counted now was to find out what this rascally trio's game was.

But there was no way of escape. Behind her was the locked door; on either side moss-covered brick walls. And even as she realised that she was trapped, a dim figure appeared in view, coat collar turned up, school hat turned down.

Despite her danger, Jess could not help speculating as to whom the approaching girl was. Swiftly she ran through her list of suspects.

First of all there was Lorna Meredith, the popular prefect. Then there was Billie Carlton, another prefect, and finally, Winifred Butler, the surly Fifth Former.

Which of that trio was the girl before her?

Jess did not get a chance to find out, for suddenly her enemy gave a startled gasp, and next moment a torch flashed on. The dazzling light blinded Jess, as involuntarily she raised a hand to her eyes, and her coat fell open, revealing her school uniform.

The other girl gave a shout of amazement.

"Jess—Jess, Grant!" she gulped, recoiling in alarm.

Jess gave an excited cry.
"Yes, it's me," she shouted, and forgetting her peril, forgetting everything but the fact that here before her stood the girl who had eluded her for so long, she dashed down the steps. "You know me," she panted, "and I mean to unmask you!"

She flung her arms around her enemy. That girl gave a gasp and hurriedly clicked off the torch. But Jess seized her by the wrist and struggled to get the light from her.

"It's no use," she declared. "I mean to see who you are! Just wait until I've got that torch—"

Fiercely they struggled in the darkness; but the mystery girl, realising that her secret was in jeopardy, suddenly gave a frantic cry for help.

"Dunn, Dunn!" she screamed. "Quick—the real Jess is here! Quick, before she discovers who I am!"

From the library came an answering shout, then the crash of an overturned chair, and the thud of heavy feet crossing the floor.

It was Jess' turn to take alarm. If she stopped here she would be captured. At all costs she must escape. Olive and Letty must know what she had discovered. The identity of her enemy counted little now, so, even as the secret door swung open, she tore herself free and went plunging back down the tunnel.

From behind her came angry yells and a rush of pursuing footsteps. Jess flung one apprehensive glance behind her, then on she sped again. But in her blind haste she took the wrong turning. Instead of heading the way she had come, she found herself in a side passage.

Would her pursuers realise what she had done?

She dared not stop to investigate. On she dashed, only to cry out as her outflung hands struck solid bricks. The passage was a cul-de-sac. She could go no farther.

Panting, she swung round and strained her ears. The sound of those rushing footsteps was receding. Her enemies had, apparently, gone straight on down the main tunnel. But it would not take them long to discover their mistake. At most she had a respite of a few seconds.

Frantically she looked about her. Eventual capture, she knew, was almost certain. If only she could leave a message! Olive and Letty knew of the existence of this underground passage, and they might succeed in discovering it.

Whipping out her torch and a nail-file, Jess began to scratch a message on the moss-covered wall. But she had barely time to draw three words with the file when there came the thud of approaching feet.

"There she is!"

It was her double. Jess shrank back as that girl came into view, followed by the dour butler. For a moment they both eyed her silently, then the impostor gave a jeering laugh.

"Thought you'd get away, eh?" she said. "But we'll see you don't."

The butler nodded.

"Yeah, we'll see you stay here," he growled. "Guess you know too much, my girl, to be given your freedom."

And, gnarled hands outstretched, he stole forward. There was something so frightening about his expression that Jess could not suppress the scream that rose to her throat—a scream that went echoing shrilly through the underground labyrinth.

THE CHUMS' SEARCH

"WHAT'S that?"

It was Olive who asked the question, and resting on her oars, she peered about her in sudden alarm.

Determined to find their missing chum and bring her back to school, Olive and Letty had lost no time in making their way to the ferry. The little cottage had been in darkness, but drawn up on the bank had been the boat they had hired earlier in the day.

Without compunction they had borrowed it. They had almost reached Peewit Isle when a faint, distant cry had chilled the Form captain's heart.

"It's Jess!" she gasped. "It was her—screaming!"

But Letty pooh-poohed the idea.

"More likely a peewit!" she scoffed.

For a moment her chum made no reply. Her face white, her heart thumping, Olive strained her ears. But now all was quiet. Nothing stirred on Peewit Isle.

"It was a peewit, I tell you," insisted the fat girl.

Olive's lips set grimly. She was positive she had made no mistake. However, they could soon find out.

Picking up the oars again, she rowed vigorously for the shelving mud-bank. As their boat grounded, they leapt out and pulled it amongst the reeds. Suddenly a cry of horror escaped Olive.

"I knew I was right!" she exclaimed. "That was Jess I heard. Look—there's her boat!"

And she pointed to where, half-hidden amongst the reeds, lay the light skiff their missing chum had used. Letty peered at it in alarm; then she forced herself to look on the bright side of things.

"That only proves Jess is here," she declared. "It doesn't prove she's hit trouble. Don't be so windy, old scout. It isn't like you to imagine things!"

"I'm not imagining things," was Olive's quiet answer. "Jess is in danger. I know she is." Clambering to the top of the bank, she cupped her mouth with her hands and began to shout: "Jess! J-e-e-s!"

The night breeze flung back the name, but that was all. There came no reply.

"Jess! Jess!" As worried as her chum now, Letty took up the call, but in vain. "My giddy aunt! What's become of her?" she muttered. Once again her native optimism rose to the surface. "Perhaps she's in the tower! Yes, that's it," she declared eagerly. "She's too intent on finding that secret passage to hear us. Come on!"

As she spoke she broke into a run. Olive was quick to follow her, but when they reached the tower and went plunging down the crumbling steps into the cellar there was no sign of their missing chum.

Striking a match, Olive looked about her. She even tapped the walls, stamped on the stone floor, thinking that perhaps Jess had located the underground passage and was still in it.

But, unlike Jess, she had no clue as to where the secret entrance was. She did not even know for sure that the entrance to the tunnel was in the tower.

For a few minutes she and Letty stayed there, peering about. Then the fat girl had another suggestion to make.

"Maybe she's over at the other end of the island," she said. "Anyway, let's go and see."

Together they set off. Hardly had they gone than, with a grinding creak, the trapdoor in the floor swung open, and a tall, slender girl clambered out.

It was Jess' unknown enemy!

One mocking glance she flung at the two unsuspecting Fourth Formers, then stealthily she made her way down to the shore.

Ignorant of what was happening behind them, Olive and Letty called their chum's name again and again. But still there was no answer. They tramped right around the island. They plunged amongst the reeds. They searched everywhere, but all in vain. At length Letty turned to the Form captain and shook her head.

"It's no use, Olive!" she declared. "Jess isn't here!"

"But she must be. That was her skiff we saw, so—"

Olive broke off, and her eyes widened incredulously. They had reached the spot where they had seen the skiff, but, though the reeds were still flattened down, now there was no sign of the boat.

"Why, look! The boat's gone!" she exclaimed. "But surely Jess would never leave without speaking to us! She must have heard us shouting—"

Letty nodded and gave a heavy sigh.

"She heard us right enough," she agreed; "but, if you ask me, she didn't want to answer."

"Not—want to answer?" stammered Olive in bewilderment.

The fat girl shook her head.

"No. She guessed what brought us here. She guessed, old scout, that we'd come to take her back to school. But Jess doesn't mean to go back. She means to do what she said in her letter—run away, and so let you get your vote of confidence to-morrow."

Reluctantly Olive nodded. She felt that indeed that must be the case. But her eyes filled with tears as she thought of the tremendous sacrifice the missing girl had made.

"Hang the captaincy! Hang everything!" she burst out. "I don't care tuppence about my position in the Form! All I want is Jess to come back—for this wretched mystery that surrounds her to be cleared up."

Letty gave her arm a sympathetic squeeze.

"I know, old scout. I know just how you feel," she said softly. "And—don't fret! Even though Jess has gone, we'll clear up the mystery. But we can't do anything to-night. Let's get back to school. There's no sense in us getting into trouble."

With a bitter sigh, Olive nodded. Dragging their boat back into the water, they got in and rowed away from the island—back to the ferry—little dreaming that their chum had not escaped in the skiff, little dreaming that deep underground she was a prisoner!

THE FIFTH FORMER'S TREACHERY

"WATCH your step, old scout! We don't want to be caught, you know."

It was Letty who spoke. Having put the boat back where they had found it, she and Olive were creeping alongside the school wall, making for the little wicket-gate that was always kept unlocked.

It was the sound of footsteps that had prompted the fat girl's warning. In alarm she grabbed Olive by the arm and dragged her behind a bush.

The footsteps drew nearer. Thinking it might be a mistress returning from a visit to Fenleigh, the two Fourth Formers crouched there apprehensively.

But the figure that appeared around the bend in the road was not tall enough to be a mistress. Olive gave a gasp as she recognised her.

"It's Winifred Butler!" she exclaimed in a whisper. "But where has she been? It's long past the Fifth's bed-time."

The furtive way in which the senior girl was looking about her showed that she had no right to be outside school grounds. Suddenly a startling suspicion flashed across Olive's mind.

Suppose Winifred was Jess' unknown enemy! Suppose she had broken bounds in order to meet her confederate!

The Form captain's pulses began to race, and a gleam crept into her eyes.

Always she and Letty had suspected Winifred. They had dismissed as incredible Jess' suggestion that the traitor in the school might be Lorna Meredith. Nor could they credit that Billie Carlton was the schemer.

"No; it's Winifred," Olive told herself. "Anyway, I'll soon find out."

And as the Fifth Former drew abreast she straightened up and leapt out from behind the bush.

"Got you!" she cried, her fingers closing around the other girl's arm.

Winifred gave a horrified gasp and the blood drained from her face; then, as she recognised her captor she glared and began to struggle.

"Why, you rotter!" she gasped. "I thought it was old Brammy! Let me go at once! What the dickens d'you mean, scaring the life out of me like that?"

But Olive's fingers tightened their grip, and keenly she surveyed the elder girl.

"It's no good you bluffing," Winifred! she said sternly. "You're bowled out at last. We know what you've been up to."

The Fifth Former's jaw dropped.

"You—you mean you've been spying on me!" she panted.

"I mean, that we know you're the rotter who's been causing all the trouble in the Fourth!" snapped Olive. "It's you who are Jess' unknown enemy!"

"Jess' unknown enemy?" Winifred stared. Then suddenly she gave a derisive laugh. "So that's it, is it?" she cried. "That's why you kids are hanging about here. You're hoping to catch that anonymous letter-writer."

"Not hoping to—we have caught her!" retorted Olive.

Winifred glared, then laughed again. "You idiot!" she cried. "I'm not Jess' enemy. You must be potty! I've got something better to do than to bother my head with Fourth Form kids!" She gave a scornful sniff. "If you must know," she went on, "I've been to a dance down in Fenleigh."

"A—dance?"

Olive lost her confident look; involuntarily her grip on Winifred's arm relaxed.

"Yes, a dance!"

And, with another derisive smirk, the Fifth Former pulled open her coat and displayed the dance frock she wore.

rose pergola. In surprise she looked around.

"What on earth's happening?" she asked. "Sounds as if half the school is out."

Olive and Letty surveyed each other ruefully.

"They must be searching for Jess," the Form captain declared.

"For Jess?" echoed Winifred, in bewilderment.

Olive hesitated, then, realising that there was nothing to be gained by keeping silent, she explained. The Fifth Former gave a surprised whistle.

"So that's what they're up to, is it?" she murmured. "Well, let's hope they don't know about us being out." For a few moments they watched the searchers from behind the pergola, then Winifred gave a gulp of dismay. "Oh, help! They're coming this way!" she announced.

Desperately all three of them crouched out of sight. Plainly now they could hear someone shouting Jess' name. Suddenly a familiar figure loomed into sight. It was Miss Bramleigh, the headmistress, and she was



"Why, look—the boat's gone!" Olive cried. Did this mean that their missing chum was deliberately trying to avoid meeting them?

"That was why I was so cautious," she explained. "I slipped out directly after roll call, and, naturally, didn't want to be spotted."

Olive and Letty exchanged wondering glances. Were their suspicions wrong, after all? Was Winifred Butler blameless? But if she wasn't Jess' unknown enemy, then who was?

The Fifth Former gave them no chance to get over their discomfiture. With a toss of her head she strode on, cautiously pushing open the wicket gate.

"If you don't want to be caught you'd better stick close to me," she declared.

Their minds in a whirl, hardly knowing what to think, Olive and Letty followed her through the gateway, and all three girls stole up the gravel path through the headmistress' garden. But suddenly there came a fresh alarm. From the distance sounded voices and the scuffling of hurrying people.

Winifred dodged quickly behind a

striding straight towards the rose pergola.

Olive and Letty gulped, but their despair was nothing to that which seized their companion. For a moment she glared about her wildly, then, realising that discovery was inevitable, she showed herself in her true colours.

Leaping up, she grabbed the unprepared Fourth Formers and let out a lusty shout.

"Don't know where Jess is, Miss Bramleigh!" she yelled. "But here are two of them! I just happened to catch sight of them hiding here!"

And she dragged Olive and Letty out on to the path. They were too surprised to resist. They could only glare at the Fifth Former in utter scorn.

"Oh, you rotter!" exclaimed Letty, her plump cheeks red with indignation.

Olive said nothing, but her eyes were ablaze with suspicion. This kind of treacherous action was what one would expect Jess' unknown enemy to perform. Had, then, Winifred

fred been bluffing? Was she really the girl they had both hunted for so long?

Olive got no chance to decide that ticklish problem, for with a cry of scandalised surprise the Head came striding forward.

"Olive! Letty!" she exclaimed. "What does this mean? Why aren't you in bed?"

The chums said nothing. They did not know how to answer. Winifred Butler surveyed them gloatingly.

"I think they were trying to break bounds, Miss Bramleigh," she said. "Anyway, I saw them sneaking through your garden and guessed they were up to no good."

Miss Bramleigh's stern gaze settled on the Fifth Former.

"And what might you be doing out here?" she demanded.

Winifred did not turn a hair.

"Oh, I heard the shouts, Miss Bramleigh," she declared, "so I joined in the search for Jess Grant. I hope I didn't do wrong?"

The Head did not reply. Her attention again centred on the two Fourth Formers.

"I am still waiting for your reply," she reminded them. "Why are you girls not in bed? Surely you cannot be in league with the wicked girl, Jess Grant?"

There was a note of utter scorn in her voice as she spoke. Olive and Letty stared blankly.

"In—league with Jess?" stammered Letty, while her chum's cheeks flushed indignantly.

"She isn't wicked, Miss Bramleigh!" she cried. "Oh, surely even you can't think that of her! Why, it was a splendid action of hers, really. I know she was wrong to run away, but—"

The Head raised her hand sharply. There was a puzzled look in her eyes.

"I don't think you can know exactly what has happened, Olive," she said, her tone a little less severe. "What reason do you think Jess had for running away?"

"Why, to help me—to make certain

I'd get my vote of confidence tomorrow. You see—"

Swiftly Olive explained how they had gone up to the dormitory, only to find their chum gone. She told of the note Jess had left behind, and of their search for the missing girl; though, wisely, she made no mention of their trip to Peewit Island.

To her relief, Miss Bramleigh's stern frown faded. She even gave Olive a sympathetic pat on the shoulder.

"In the circumstances," she remarked, "I will overlook your foolishness. It was wrong of you to go in search of Jess. You ought to have reported her disappearance to me. However, I respect your loyalty and so will not punish you. But—that ominous frown returned to her face—"you have been sadly deceived."

"D-d-deceived?" stammered Olive.

The Head gave a grim nod.

"Yes, it wasn't out of any noble motives of friendship that Jess Grant ran away. It was fear of the consequences of her own wickedness that made her flee."

Olive and Letty stared incredulously. "What—what do you mean, Miss Bramleigh?" Olive gulped at length.

The headmistress' lips set scornfully.

"I mean that the note Jess Grant left you was untrue. The reason she ran away was because she knew that sooner or later her despicable theft must be discovered."

"Des-despicable theft?"

"Yes, the Senior Sports Club funds have been stolen. When Lorna went to the box to-night it was empty. The twenty pounds it contained had gone."

Letty stared in petrified horror, but Olive managed to ask a question.

"And—and you think that it was Jess who took the money?" she gasped.

"I know she did, Olive," was the quiet reply.

"Yes, I'm afraid there can be no doubt about it," cut in a fresh voice. Swinging round, the chums saw Lorna Meredith approaching.

With an effort Letty roused herself from the stupor into which she had fallen.

"I don't believe it!" she shouted.

"Nor me, either!" cried Olive.

Miss Bramleigh frowned.

"I'm afraid you will have to believe it," she declared, "for the evidence is conclusive. Not only was Jess Grant seen stealing out of Lorna's study this evening, but—"

She paused and looked across at the prefect.

"What clinches it," Lorna finished for her, "is the fact that the lock of the cashbox was forced with a penknife, and—"

"Yes?" prompted Olive, as the prefect seemed reluctant to proceed.

"And the knife," finished Lorna, "was found inside the empty box. There can be no mistaking it. Look for yourself!"

She put her hand into the pocket of her coat and held out a red enamelled knife. Both Olive and Letty went white as they peered at it. For it was the one that they themselves had given their missing chum.

Dumb with horror, they stood there, while both Miss Bramleigh and Lorna, seeing their distress, stared in sympathy. But from Winifred Butler there came a malicious chuckle.

"There can be no going against that," she declared. "It's proof positive. Jess Grant's the thief!"

Will Olive and Letty be able to prove their chum's innocence and will they be able to find her? Don't miss next week's exciting developments. And don't forget to get your next **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** on Thursday, not Friday.

Your Editor's Corner



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

be going to the Zoo on Easter Monday. And so, says Penelope, will you please give the Baby Giant Panda her love if you see it? (She simply adores that animal, not to mention all other animals!)

Penelope also tells me that if you want to be really popular with the monkeys at the Zoo, don't bother so much about taking them nuts, but take a stick or so of celery with you instead. They'll simply clamour around you, and desert all the other visitors in the Monkey House if you do.

Carrots are a bit of a brain-wave, too. There are so many animals that like these. The ponies and the donkeys, the elephants and the camels will be your friends for life if you give them some crunchy bits of this homely vegetable.

As for the bears, Penelope says give them the sweetest things you have. Nobs of sugar, cream biscuits (if you don't want these for yourself), honey sandwiches (left over from lunch, perhaps), and tasty bits of cake are their favourite dishes.

Even if you're going to several exciting places over Easter, you'll still be wanting to get down to a "good read," I know.

SIX FINE TALES

So I'll tell you what treats you have to look forward to in next Thursday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

"THE CLUE OF THE EASTER EGGS!" is the title of the mystery and detective story featuring Noel Raymond. It's as baffling a tale as you could possibly wish for, simply crammed with suspense and thrills.

"Only Pat Knew Her Secret!" is the title of the complete story in which Pat Lovell, the young girl reporter, appears, and there will also be a further tale of Kaye of the Kennels and her lovable pets.

Our three serials will be every bit as thrilling as ever, leaving off at most exciting parts to make you very impatient for the chapters to follow.

Don't forget about ordering in advance, will you?

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR.

MY DEAR READERS.—First I must tell you that next week's issue of the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale a day early, owing to the Easter Holiday.

You wise ones who have your copy delivered will find it popped through the letter-box on Thursday morning instead of Friday, while you who fetch yours from the shop should do so on Thursday.

Don't leave it until Saturday, otherwise you may find your news-agent "sold out"—unless, of course, you take my oft-repeated advice and remember to order in advance, in which case your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be kept for you, whatever happens.

END OF TERM

Many of you will be "breaking-up" from school this week, so I can just imagine how hard you're all working at the moment—what with exams and so on.

It's a proud moment, isn't it, when you take home your school report to find that you have "Excellent" marked against several subjects? Perhaps there will be a big Easter egg for every "Excellent" you get, and a smaller one for every "Very good."

I dare say most of you like chocolate eggs best.

Though, of course, all Easter eggs are not made of something to eat, by any means, are they? I have seen such fascinating silk and cardboard ones in the shops—and inside are the most intriguing gifts, from diamond bracelets to tiny bottles of perfume. But I haven't noticed any containing gifts for a mere man. Have you?

EASTER PLANS

I expect you'll be doing all sorts of exciting things over the Easter Holiday. Lots of you will certainly



WANTED BY THE POLICE!

PAT LOVELL gave vent to an involuntary gasp. One moment she had been strolling jauntily along towards the office of the "Midshire Gazette"—on which newspaper she was the youngest reporter—the next she had almost tripped over.

It was the ribbon of her smart suede shoe that had come undone and nearly brought her to disaster. Pat rested her foot on the coping of a house she was passing and stooped to tie the ribbon.

And at that moment the door of the house opened, and a young man dressed in a light suit and with a green pork pie hat and glasses emerged, followed by a pretty girl.

"Don't be nervous, Michael," adjured the girl. "The disguise is absolutely perfect. No one would recognise—" "Shush!" warned the young man swiftly.

Pat coughed, and, having tied the ribbon, walked quickly on. But she wondered what the words had meant. She gave a swift glance at the young man as she passed him and saw he had an unusual pallor and very dark hair and eyebrows.

Then the two had vanished round the corner. Pat had almost forgotten the incident when she reached the office, for she had a thrilling job to tackle to-day. She was to take the place of the staff gossip-writer, who was ill, and go on the boat-train to keep her eye on a certain countess who had been staying in Midshire.

"Now, remember," said her business-like editor, giving her final instructions at the office, "you're to watch the Countess Morza, note her friends, and do the usual story about sitting near her at lunch on the train. Here's your ticket and money for expenses—Oh!"

He broke off, suddenly noticing a photograph lying on his desk.

"Another thing you might do," he said. "Here's someone who may possibly try to get on the train. It's a young Government clerk; he's disappeared at the same moment as some important State papers. He's suspected of being a spy, though nothing definite is known yet."

"Anyway, there are detectives watching the station; so if you see him

arrested there, be sure to get the story. Here's his photograph. It may not tell much, though, as he's likely to be in disguise."

Pat nearly jumped a foot in the air. "In disguise!"

"Well, don't shout," said the editor, drawing back. "Nothing queer in someone wanted by the police disguising himself, is there?"

"Nunno, I suppose not," murmured Pat, staring at the photo. It showed a smiling young man, and underneath were a few details—fair hair, fair skin, blue eyes, quietly dressed, quiet manner, believed to have a sister, a hairdresser or beauty specialist. Name Michael Jordan.

Pat's mind raced. Disguise—Michael—sister. The thoughts jumped into her head. The young man she had seen had been sallow-skinned and dark-haired; the wanted clerk had fair skin and fair hair. With the glasses, it would be an obvious disguise for him. Then there were his light, even gay clothes, and the jaunty green hat; the opposite from his usual style of dressing!

"Better hurry," said the chief, breaking in on her thoughts. "You know the countess by sight all right?"

Pat did. She had seen the smart, elderly countess before. With her gleaming golden hair, rather exotic dress, many jewels, and almost overpowering perfume, the Countess Morza could not easily be mistaken.

But Pat was thinking rather sadly of Michael Jordan as she rode to the station. It seemed a shame that he should be pounced on by the detectives as soon as he reached the station. His

The crowds boarding the boat-train for the Continent were all light-hearted and gay. But Pat Lovell was not in holiday mood. She had to prove a young man's innocence before the train reached its destination.

By ELIZABETH CHESTER

sister, too, had seemed such a nice girl, and concerned for him.

At the station Pat was in time to see the countess' arrival. She stepped from an enormous luxury limousine, talking in slightly broken-English. Followed by a maid, she made her way regally through the booking hall, attracting all eyes.

Pat saw, rather to her surprise, that there was no one to see the countess off. But she did see a number of solidly built men lounging about, apparently loafing, but actually glancing continually everywhere. Detectives!

And even as Pat realised who they were she saw the young man in the gay suit and the green hat walk through the booking hall. He half-turned as he neared the barrier and waved good-bye to his sister.

Pat drew near the barrier, gazing after him.

"It is him," she murmured. "It's Michael Jordan."

A hand gripped her arm tightly, tugging her back.

"Yes, it is," said a low, trembling voice. "But he's my brother, and he's innocent. Don't give him away—for pity's sake, don't!"

And there, her face white, holding Pat's arm, was the girl who had seen him off.

THE COUNTESS' SECRET

PAT LOVELL turned to her, and the girl's piteous appeal went to her heart.

"They'll get him," groaned the girl. "I know they will!"

But Pat, watching, saw the boy reach the barrier, show his ticket, and pass the two detectives who stood there. Then he had reached the train.

"The disguise worked," breathed Pat.

The girl breathed more freely now, and the colour came to her cheeks. She looked at Pat in gratitude.

"It was sweet of you not to give him away," she said. "You passed the house, didn't you? We've been scared since. But we thought you were just a girl going to an office, perhaps—"

"I was—and be careful what you say to me," said Pat. "I'm a reporter, and—" She broke off and frowned. "Really, I suppose it is my duty to give your brother away."

Tears came into the other girl's eyes. "Oh, please don't—please!" she implored. "He is innocent—I assure you he is!"

So earnest was the girl that Pat was impressed.

"Well, I do feel sorry for you both," she declared. "But won't you tell me about it? I've got to catch that train, too. If he does get away, I can print an article, then—perhaps it may help him."

The girl bit her lip.

"I—I don't know if I ought to say," she replied. "You see, he suspects someone else, but has no proof. That's why he's on that train—he isn't running away, only keeping watch. It's a famous person, and it might be libel or something if I told you. Even though she is going back to her own country—"

"Golly! Not the countess?" cried Pat.

"How on earth did you know?" asked the girl, staring blankly. "Or is she already suspected?"

Pat smiled faintly. Considering she had come to travel down with the countess, it was surely natural that her name should jump to mind.

"So-ho!" she murmured excitedly. "This is getting quite thrilling. You see, I've got the job of travelling down with the countess."

The girl grimaced at that.

"Not so lucky as you think. I know her," she said. "I've had to go to her hotel before now and give her beauty treatment—the old hag. I wish her wig would fall off one day!"

"Wig?" gasped Pat. "That lovely hair is a wig?"

The hairdresser coloured.

"Please forget I said that; it should be a professional secret," she murmured.

Pat nodded, but she made a mental resolve to note the countess' hairdressing very carefully. And then an idea struck her, and she turned to the girl.

"I say, why not come on the train? Can you get the time off?"

The girl, Sybil Jordan, as she told Pat her name was, explained that she could do so as she was now working on her own, a free-lance, visiting customers in their homes. But she was afraid that her presence on the train might ruin her brother's plan if she should be recognised.

"What is his plan?" asked Pat.

"To find out which of her cases the countess thinks most important," said Sybil. "He's sure she has the missing document with her in one of them. It's a desperate plan—but he is desperate now. When he's decided about it—well, I don't know what will happen."

"But suppose he's nervous?" asked Pat. "Suppose he makes a hash of it. If you were there to keep an eye on him—"

The girl, who had been tempted all along to accompany him, suddenly made up her mind that Pat was right; they got a ticket, and together they went through the barrier, just as the guard was getting ready to send the train off.

Pat stepped in through an open doorway, and Sybil followed; but she entered a third-class compartment while Pat walked through the train to a first-class compartment near to where a porter on the platform was saying something to the countess about her cases.

In the days when she was a novice,

Pat might have entered the compartment where the maid sat, with the luggage on the rack. Instead, she chose a deserted non-smoking compartment near by.

And, sure enough, as the train moved out, the countess entered that compartment, to be followed a moment later by the maid, and then by the luggage carried by an attendant.

"You have my black case, Miles?" asked the countess, turning to the maid.

"Yes, my lady. I've held it all the time!"

"It has my jewels in it, remember. Do not let it out of your care!"

"No, my lady!"

Then the countess fixed Pat with a cold stare which meant, "There is another compartment next door. Go there!" Pat with equal interest looked at the black case!

The question that Michael had wanted answered was answered already. If the document was anywhere, it was surely in that case!

Suddenly the countess spoke to Pat.

"I think I have seen you before," she said. "I never forget a face."

"It—it's possible," said Pat, in surprise. "I am quite sure I have seen you before—at some function. Aren't you the Countess Morza?" she asked innocently.

The countess regarded her keenly, and touched her golden hair with bejewelled, smooth, white fingers.

"I am, yes. And you—" She narrowed her eyebrows, and then gave a slight start. "Ah, yes, you are a newspaper reporter! I have a good memory. You asked me for my views on the horse show."

Pat was staggered. It was true; but she had not thought for a moment that the countess would remember her.

"Why, yes—I am!" she admitted.

The countess drew up stiffly.

"If you have forced your company on me to get an interview, then you are wasting your time. No," she ended, her tone changing surprisingly and suddenly, "you shall have your interview, if you will leave me in peace."

It was a quandary for Pat. She had been told not to reveal the fact that she was a reporter, and to keep near the countess all the time. But she had been bowled-out.

"That's very nice of you," said Pat, after a pause, and took out her notebook.

"Give it to me," said the countess.

She took it, opened her handbag, and took out a fountain-pen. Then she wrote a few sentences, and returned the book to Pat.

All she had written was that she was sorry to leave such a beautiful country where she had been so happy. She liked England and English people, and would not be really happy until she returned.

"Thank you!" said Pat. "A charming message, countess."

Then, there being nothing else for her to do, she rose and left the compartment. After a moment's pause in the corridor, she decided to find Sybil. On the way, however, passing a compartment, she saw Michael. He sat alone, pretending to read a paper, which, in his agitated state of mind, he held upside down.

Pat opened the compartment door and went in.

"It's all right, Mr. Jordan," she said, smiling at him. "I'm a friend of your sister's, and I want to help you. Listen—I've just found that the countess is very particular about a black case she has. She says it contains her jewels, and warns the maid not to let it out of her care."

The lad looked at her, amazed.

"Gosh, thanks for telling me," he said huskily. "I don't know who you are, but it's jolly good of you. I'm convinced the countess has got those papers, but I've no proof. The only clue really is a slip of paper with the word 'country,' written on it. Whoever wrote that is the thief and spy, for certain. If I could prove the countess wrote it, my last tinge of doubt would be gone."

Pat started, and whipped out her notebook.

"Look! The countess wrote that: 'sorry to leave the beautiful country where I have been so happy.' See the word 'country' there?"

Michael Jordan stared, and a flush stole into his sallow cheeks. He pulled a slip of paper from his notecase and studied it.

"My golly, I'm right," he exclaimed.

"The writing's the same!"

"My word—" began Pat excitedly.

A shadow fell across the door. A burly man in a blue suit pulled it open and entered.

"Michael Jordan," he said. "Just the young man I'm looking for. I am a detective. Here's my warrant-card."

OUTWITTED BY PAT

PAT uttered a sharp gasp. Her heart went out to the stricken young man, who sat silent, stunned.

"I warn you," said the detective, "that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you." He turned to Pat. "And you are his sister Sybil?" he asked.

"Wrong," said Pat swiftly. "I'm a newspaper reporter, getting his story; and I can prove it. Pat Lovell, my name is. Here is my card. You don't mean you didn't recognise him at once, inspector? Good gracious!"

The detective smiled grimly.

"Better late than never," he said. "He was recognised by the last person in the world you'd think would know him. Some women have keen eyes. If you're a reporter, you can have the story; it won't be a secret long. The Countess Morza recognised him as he walked by—couldn't place him at once, and then knew him."

Pat set her lips grimly.

"Oh, she did, eh? Smart work."

She saw Michael's eyes glint.

"The countess! Then that's proof. She's the woman you want," he exclaimed. "She came to our office disguised, but I knew her by her hands and rings. My sister gave her beauty treatment, you see. If you want the thief—search her luggage. Search her black case—"

"Quietly," scowled the detective. Then he turned to Pat. "Don't take any notice of that wild, libellous statement. The boy's a fool. You trot along and leave us alone."

Pat looked at the boy's agitated face, and gave him a nod.

"All right, inspector," she said. "I heard, and it won't go into the papers—yet. Not until it's official. But reporters are like good detectives. They always follow up a clue."

And with that hint to the boy, Pat hurried from the compartment. She almost ran down the corridor until she saw Sybil, and beckoned her out. Sybil, pale and alarmed, seemed to guess the dread news before it was told.

"Arrested—" she groaned, as Pat told her gently. "His chance has gone. They'll never search her luggage. She'll get away—she'll be on that private yacht. Oh! What can we do? Nothing, nothing."

Pat gripped her arm tightly. "Steady," she said. "We've got to do something. We can't give up. Let's think hard."

Pat walked along the corridor with Sybil, and thought as she walked. Presently she paused.

"Wait here, I've half an idea," she said.

She hastened softly along the corridor, and then more slowly as she neared the countess' compartment. The countess had her back to Pat, and the maid was facing her, but looking down at the black case which was open on her lap.

Stopping by a window, Pat opened her handbag, took out her small mirror, and held it so that she could see the reflection in it of the countess and the maid. What she saw was interesting, and yet did not reveal whether a document was in the case or not.

The maid took a small pair of scissors from the case, and leaning forward clipped at the countess' hair, just by the ear, while the countess studied her reflection in the mirror.

Something was not quite to her liking about the wig, apparently! Pat smiled, then, suddenly serious as an idea came to her, turned and hurried back to Sybil.

"Well?" asked Sybil eagerly.

"I don't know whether the paper is there or not," said Pat. "But I've learned that she keeps some make-up stuff in the case."

"A black case? Why, yes, of course. She does," nodded Sybil. "She keeps being touched up by her maid every now and then, you see."

"Good," said Pat eagerly. "It helps my plan. Come along with me, and keep not far from the compartment. Can you lend me your light coat?" she added.

She did not explain her plan, and Sybil was mystified as Pat, with the coat over her arm, returned to the countess' apartment.

Pat slid the door open, and received a glare from the countess.

"If you seek a further interview, my girl, you are wasting your time," said the countess haughtily. "Don't pester me, or I shall call an attendant."

Pat shook her head.

"Do you mind if I look for a ring of mine?" she asked.

The countess could hardly refuse, and Pat entered the compartment, put the coat down on the seat, and searched on the floor and on the seat.

Apologising, shaking her head sadly, she went past the countess, carrying the coat on her arm, and just avoided brushing the countess' hat with it.

"Aha!" cried Pat suddenly; as though she had spotted the missing ring she darted forward and swung the coat.

The swinging coat caught the countess' smart hat a clomp. It whisked it off on to the seat, and Pat, watching for it, gave a soft murmur of delight.

For with the hat was the beautiful wig.

A shrill cry came from the countess, and her hands went to her almost bare bald head. But worse was to follow; for Pat, with unusual clumsiness, knocked the hat and wig on to the floor. And then, as though damage enough had not been done, put her foot right on the wig.

"Oh, what ever is this?" she cried in a surprised tone.

She turned round, picked up the hat, and stared at the countess, who, in futile self-protection, sat with her hands clasped over her head. Next moment she snatched down the nearest blind, and the horrified maid drew the others.

The countess was white under her make-up, and her eyes blazed.

"You stupid, careless, ill-bred creature!" she stormed. "How dare you! I will report this! I will have damages! This shall not rest! No, no! Oh, you— And, look! You have trodden on it—trodden on my beautiful transformation!"

Pat stood quite still. She had done a daring thing, and she suddenly wondered if she had been a little too daring. But it was the one sure way of staying here, and, with luck, of seeing that black case opened.

"Oh dear!" she gasped. "You won't report me to my editor?"

"I will—I will! I'll have you dismissed, girl!"

"Dismissed? But I swear not to mention about your wig in the paper," said Pat shrewdly. "I won't make it public. Some editors might publish it, but mine wouldn't."

The countess was suddenly silent. The mere mention of the possibility of her wig becoming news startled and horrified her. And, as Pat guessed, the

and an envelope bearing the name of a famous London fashion house; the kind of envelope in which catalogues are sent. But did it contain a catalogue or—the document?

"I will get the hairdresser," Pat said, and hurried from the compartment to where Sybil fretfully waited.

Pat briefly explained what had happened.

"But take care!" she said. "I'll go in first, and say you are coming. When she sees you she will recognise you. She must know Michael is your brother, and may be suspicious. Get the attention of the maid and the countess. Leave the rest to me."

Pat returned to the compartment, unable to open the door, however, until the maid recognised her.

"The girl's coming," said Pat.

"There is no need for you to remain!" snapped the countess.

"No; but I have left my coat," said Pat, stopping between her and the maid to reach it.

Almost on her heels Sybil arrived, and the countess, looking up at her,



Pat whipped out her notebook, as the young man held out the slip of paper. Carefully they studied the writing. "My golly, I'm right. They're the same!" Michael Jordan exclaimed.

suggestion was enough to damp down her rage.

"You—you stupid, wicked creature!" she fumed. "Now what am I to do, with a footprint on this wig—an obvious footprint?"

Pat played her trump card.

"Countess," she said, "I know no apology can help; but there is something better I can do than say how sorry I am. There's a skilled hairdresser on the train. She may not have any equipment, though. If you have any—"

"Miles, you have the things in the case!" fretted the countess. "Who is this hairdresser?"

"Oh, a skilled girl," said Pat—"an expert! She has dressed hair for important titled people before now."

"Then fetch her, but promise to mention it to no one else! Promise, and I will not report you, stupid though you have been, girl!"

"I promise," said Pat, and cast a side glance at the maid, who was opening the black case.

The maid put the case on the seat, open wide, and Pat saw the contents—make-up equipment, a small jewel-case,

gave a quite noticeable start of surprise.

"Miss Jordan?" she said. "You on this train? Why, I have heard that your brother—"

"My brother has been arrested, my lady," said Sybil, looking very nervous. "Oh, I'm so glad you are on the train! You have influence. I wonder—could you—I—I'm sure he is innocent, and it's all a mistake."

She said what Pat had advised her to, and said it well, so that the countess' suspicions should not be aroused.

"I can do nothing. But we can discuss it later. This stupid reporter girl has damaged my wig. Can you do anything about it?" the countess asked.

Then suddenly she leaned forward and took the envelope from the case.

"My catalogue. That mustn't be lost," she said; and, standing up, tried to open the case, found it was locked, so put the envelope on top.

Pat seemed to take no interest, but she sat down.

From the black case the maid took a small bottle, a brush, some scissors, and a tiny pair of tongs.

Pat Lovell thought quickly. If only the countess's attention could be diverted for a moment she could do the trick. She looked at Sybil, catching her eye for a moment, and Sybil nodded.

"I must put the wig on your ladyship's head," she said. "Please close your eyes, as I will use a small, light brush first, and the specks of dust may get into them."

The countess, who would have suffered anything in the cause of beautifying herself, closed her eyes, the wig momentarily more important than the document. And she had no reason to suspect either of these girls of wanting to steal it—certainly not Pat Lovell.

Only the maid could watch now. But Pat soon distracted her attention.

"Scissors," said Pat softly, and pointed under the seat.

The maid leaned down, and Pat, on tiptoe, reaching up, took the long envelope and whipped it under the loose coat that she had on her arm.

The deed was done. But Pat, instead of leaving the compartment with the document, turned to the window and stood looking out. Then cautiously she held the envelope in front of her. Slightly projecting from it was an obvious fashion folder. But inside, pushed down, was a wad of cartridge paper, very thin paper, but a large sheet folded several times.

Pat whistled softly, looked through the window, drew the paper out, pushed it back, thought, and then suddenly came to a decision. Turning, with the envelope under her coat, she spoke to the maid softly.

"Is that someone peeping through the window?" she asked.

The maid drew the blind aside a little way, and Pat slipped the envelope back where it had been on the case, while the countess, still with eyes closed, sat motionless.

"I'll leave you to it," Pat said.

"Pardon me, please."

She passed from the compartment and went at once to the one where Michael sat in earnest conversation with the detective.

"Well?" said the detective shortly, as Pat entered.

"I've found the missing document," said Pat briefly. "The Countess Morza has it. It was in her black case; but she has now put it on the rack. It's in an ordinary long fashion catalogue envelope, with a real catalogue there, sticking out a little way as a blind."

Michael gave an excited gasp.

"There! That's what I've been telling the detective," he exclaimed. "I know she's the one. I've given him a string of facts. And now—"

The detective frowned, pursing his lips. Then he rose.

"There's another detective farther along, in a brown suit, smoking a pipe, looking out of the window," he said to Pat. "Fetch him here, please."

Pat found the man without difficulty and brought him back to the compartment. Leaving him in charge of Michael, the first detective then went with Pat.

"I'm taking a chance," he said slowly. "But that boy has told me a quite impressive story that fits certain facts known to us; and we've had ideas about the countess."

He went to the countess's compartment and rapped. His card was sent in, and there was a flurry for a moment or two before he was admitted. Pat followed him in as he signalled her.

"Good gracious, what is the meaning of this?" asked the countess. "In regard to that young man?"

"Just so, countess," said the detective. "We have a suspicion that—that the document may have been planted on you."

"Planted on me?" exclaimed the countess sharply.

"Yes; it may surprise you to learn it. We have reason to think it was smuggled into your black case."

"What? Impossible!" the countess cried indignantly.

"Well, that's what we suspect," he said quietly. "And I must ask you to let me see inside the case."

The countess smiled in triumph.

"By all means," she sneered, pointing to the case. "There it is!"

The detective examined the case carefully, and Pat smiled.

"Perhaps the countess forgets that she put it on the rack," she said.

"There—above the suitcase."

"That? A mere envelope containing fashion papers," the countess said.

The maid struck a match at that moment and lit a small methylated spirit stove fired by a block. At the same time her mistress stood up and groped on the rack, finding the envelope.

"Miles," she said, "take out the contents and show this clever detective."

The maid took the envelope, turning it so that it was over the methylated flame. Instantly there was a roar. The envelope burst into flame with a sudden intense heat that drove Pat, the detective, and Sybil crouching back.

In hardly more than a second the envelope and contents were dusty white ash on the seat.

"Miles," choked the countess, "you careless creature! Oh, how could you?"

Pat Lovell whistled softly, and then laughed.

"Smart work!" she said.

"Smart work!" agreed the detective grimly. "The envelope was soaked in a special chemical; the evidence is gone, eh? But if the envelope contained only fashion advertisements why burn it?"

The countess shrugged; but Pat had the answer. She held out a wad of cartridge paper.

"Because," she said, "the countess thought it contained this."

The countess gave a strangled cry and snatched at it; but the detective held her wrist.

"Countess, you are under arrest," he said. "Caught red-handed; and a young fellow whose life might have been ruined is free."

Down the corridor walked an attendant. He opened the door.

"How many for lunch, please?" he asked.

"Two," Pat said. "No, three—if Michael Jordan is free?" she added to the detective.

"He certainly is!"

And he wrote a note in Pat's book for her to give the other detective. Hilarious, joyful, excited, Pat and Sybil found Michael. He shook their hands; he laughed.

"By gosh! It's amazing! Wonderful!" he cried. "I say, but we must celebrate this—and here we are on a train!"

The three went into the sunny Pullman car, delightfully set for lunch, and there celebrated with the best that could be bought. But there was no countess for Pat to watch. She was confined to her compartment on the pain of having to wear a bracelet of steel that knew no diamond studs, only a key! She was under arrest.

It was a happy meal for the three in the Pullman, though a luxury meal as the train sped through beautiful country; and Michael told them how through Sybil's mentioning his being in a secret Government department the countess had been helped in her plan, had, under another name, befriended another young clerk, visited him at the office, disguised, and purloined some keys of Michael. He had, at any rate, suspected that the woman was the thief and that she was the countess; and the word "country" had been the sole fragment of a letter she had written that other clerk. But evidence had been framed to throw the guilt and suspicion on to Michael.

"If she had left the country," said Michael, "the mysterious woman who visited the office would have disappeared, too. No one saw her but the other chap and I, and he denied the whole thing. The evidence was black against me. I bolted. But now—"

"Now," said Pat, "all's well. You two carry on the celebrations, but I must find a quiet corner and get my telegram to the chief mapped out, ready to be sent the very moment we arrive."

There was only one blemish on Pat's happiness: she wished she could have seen the chief's face when the telegram arrived. The "Gazette," about to go to press, could be packed with the story. It would be first with the news!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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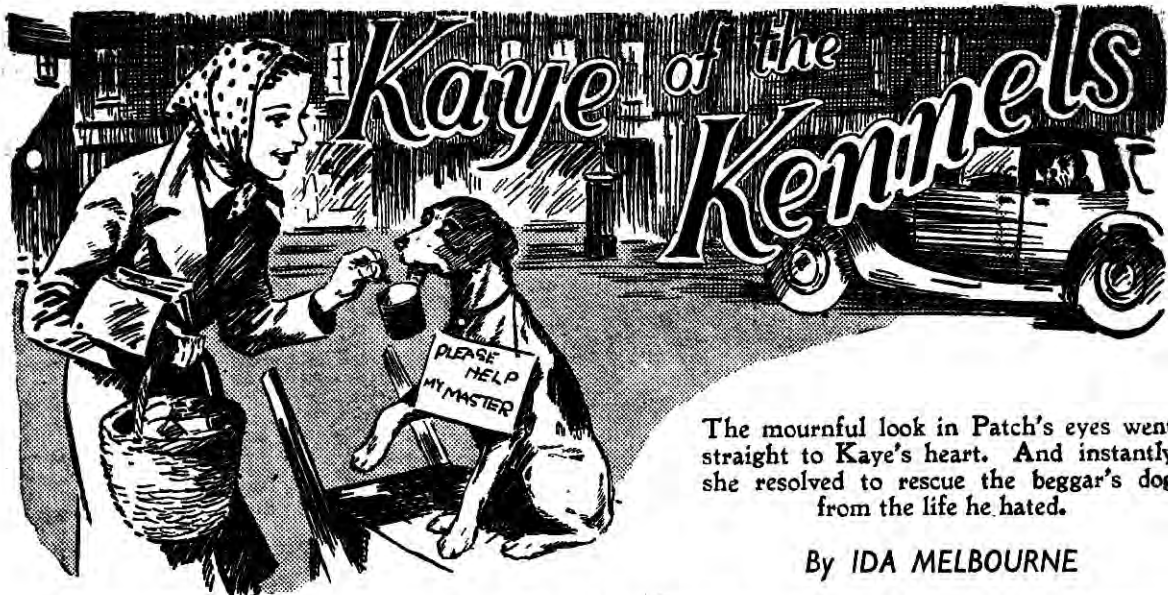
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AND ALL THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES OF SOMEONE WHO SEEMS DETERMINED TO BLACKEN BARBARA'S GOOD NAME!



The mournful look in Patch's eyes went straight to Kaye's heart. And instantly she resolved to rescue the beggar's dog from the life he hated.

By IDA MELBOURNE

THE BEGGAR'S DOG

"**N**OW stay there, Brutus, and be a good dog," pleaded Kaye Chalmers, as she fondled the head of her pet St. Bernard dog.

But Brutus did not want to stay in the car while Kaye went shopping. He wanted to carry her basket, and go into the shops with her. So lifting his head, he gave a deep, mournful bark.

"Now he a good chap," said Kaye, soothing him. "Granddad has only gone to buy baccy; he'll come back to the car in a minute. And, anyway, think yourself lucky." She pointed across the road. "Look at that poor doggy working for his living."

The dog she pointed to was sitting on a small hand barrow. Beside him was a gramophone that ground out music, and there was a notice that said: "Please help my master!" The dog's job was to look pathetic and beg for pennies—and he was doing it very well.

Brutus made an eager effort to get out through the window to have a chat with the dog, and then obediently took the seat as Kaye raised an admonishing hand. Sighing, he gave in, and settled down. And Kaye turned to the shops.

But while she was shopping, her thoughts were with the dog she had seen on the other side of the road, and now and then she glanced across at him.

Kaye did not approve of dogs being used to win sympathy for beggars, and she often suspected that their lives were not happy. In some cases, no doubt, they were well-cared for; but it seemed a poor life for a dog, perched on a barrow all day in all weathers, forbidden to play with other dogs, and unable to scamper about in the fields.

Her shopping finished, Kaye crossed the road, taking a penny from her purse. Giving money was encouraging the man; but she did not want the dog to be punished for failing in his duty, and she intended to have a word with him to see if he were well and happy.

The man was changing a record when Kaye reached his barrow; but he saw her approach, and spoke to

the dog, which had just scolded down, head on paws.

"Get up!" snapped the man, in an undertone.

The dog, a terrier, rose to a sitting position, and flapped a paw at Kaye. He was a nice little dog, but he had a frightened look, and gave his master wary, anxious glances that Kaye did not like to see.

"Hallo, old chap!" she murmured, taking his paw. "And what do you want, eh?"

The man picked up a small enamel jug with a wire handle, and gave it to the dog, which opened its jaws slightly to take it. Then he patted the animal on the head.

"My best pal, miss," he said.

Kaye did not answer, but looked keenly at the dog's mouth. She could see that the dog did not like holding the wire, and her keen, trained eyes saw how he pulled back his cheeks. Leaning forward, Kaye made a closer inspection of his mouth, and, with a quick start of indignation, she saw that it was quite sore.

"That wire is too sharp!" she exclaimed.

The man gave her a swift, measuring glance.

"Is it?" he said. "He doesn't mind it, anyway."

"No? Well, I think otherwise," said Kaye. "It's cutting his mouth. Look! See how he winces," she added, touching the dog's mouth.

Then she took the mug from the dog, put it down, and opened his jaws wide. His mouth was obviously tender, and the wire had chafed his flesh. Kaye indignantly turned to the man.

"His mouth had better be seen to," she said, "or it will soon be really bad. I shouldn't put that mug in his mouth again."

The man's manner changed then, and a glint came to his eyes.

"Oh, just a busybody, eh?" he asked nastily. "This dog's my pal, and I know what hurts him and what doesn't, and I don't want people like you pushing their noses into my affairs."

Kaye ignored him, and examined the dog's back, paws, and neck. He had several painful sores, and obviously he had been cruelly ill-treated, and only with difficulty did Kaye smother another protest.

This was a case for some inspector to investigate; but she was cute enough to realise that if the man were warned, he might move out of the district, and be hard to find again.

She returned to the car, and explained matters to her grandfather, whose indignation was as great as hers.

"We'll find an inspector at once," he said grimly. "That rascal needs to be taught a lesson."

But a disappointment awaited Kaye. The local inspector, a man she knew well, was out, and he would not be returning until after lunch.

"Oh, I do hope he comes back before that rascal moves farther on," fretted Kaye. "I couldn't bear to think of that poor dog's being in his charge for even another day."

But there was nothing she could do until the inspector returned. After lunch Kaye telephoned again, but he had sent a message to say that he would not be home for another two hours.

To Kaye these two hours seemed interminable, but at last the inspector arrived. He listened to her story, then frowned.

"Do you know where he's likely to be now?" he asked.

"Not far away," said Kaye grimly. "He was in King Street this morning."

To King Street they went, Kaye in a state of dread lest the man had moved on, and had hidden himself and the dog; but as they entered the street, her heart leaped with joy.

A hundred yards farther on, at the kerb, was the barrow covered with red cloth, the gramophone mounted on it, and, sitting up, the tin mug in his jaws, was the dog.

"There he is!" she exclaimed. "Oh, thank goodness!"

The inspector strode forward—strode to the beggar, and produced his card of authority. The man with the barrow scowled.

"I've been expecting you," he declared. "I thought that busybody of a girl might report me."

"I want to examine the dog!" said the inspector curtly.

The man stood back, a sneer on his face, while the inspector, knowing just what to look for, examined the animal.

Kaye waited for his indignant protest, but she waited in vain. The inspector seemed puzzled rather than indignant.

"Well, anything wrong?" jeered the man.

The inspector looked up, frowned, and then turned to Kaye, his manner troubled.

"There's some mistake here, Miss Chalmers," he said.

"Mistake?" Kaye echoed.

"Yes. There's nothing wrong with the dog. In fact, he's well cared for—very well cared for—and in perfect condition."

Kaye, completely bewildered, stepped forward and looked at the fox-terrier; then a glint came to her eyes. For this dog, although the same in appearance to a casual observer, was not the one she had examined.

"Why—why, my goodness!" she cried. "You cheat! It's a different dog! Where is the dog I saw this morning? What have you done with the poor thing?"

BRUTUS ON THE TRAIL

KAYE'S ringing tone of anger attracted the attention of passers-by and a small crowd gathered. The inspector, silent, puzzled, stood back; but the man with the barrow turned on Kaye in fury.

"You move off!" he said. "You interfering busybody! There's nothing wrong with my dog! Let everyone examine it! He's my pal. He's well fed, and well cared for, too, better than your own dog, I dare say."

Kaye did not move, but her keen eyes were fixed on the dog on the barrow. She knew that this was a different dog, but the similarity to the one she had seen before surprised her. It was not surprising that another fox-terrier could be procured, but it was certainly a coincidence that it should have the same black patch on the side. Kaye ignored the man and studied that patch.

"I'll have your name and address, miss!" the man said. "This is defamation of my character!"

Kaye answered quietly.

"All right!" she said. "I'm Kaye Chalmers, of the Chalmers' Kennels, and I know the difference between black fur and black dye! If you want to call a policeman, do so!"

She looked at the man, but he would not meet her eyes; the bluster momentarily went from him. The inspector, with a muttered exclamation, stooped and examined the dog, wetting his finger and smoothing the patch on the coat; but the dye was not the kind that softens in water so that he learned nothing one way or the other.

Kaye took a note of the man's name and of his address. The dog's name was Patch, she learned.

That done, she turned away with the inspector, pushing through the crowd.

"It's an odd business!" said the inspector.

"Very odd!" agreed Kaye grimly. "That dog has been stolen!"

"That's a serious thing to suggest without proof!" the inspector murmured.

"The proof," answered Kaye, "is that it is well cared for, well groomed, and well bred. It is a young dog, and must have cost five guineas when a pup. That man could not have bought it himself. Besides, the dog which I saw originally was at least seven or eight years of age, and this one is only two to three."

Kaye knew what she was talking

about; she was a dog expert, and the inspector did not question her judgment. But he did not quite see what could be done in the matter.

"I know what can be done!" said Kaye grimly. "First, we'll check his address, which is probably false, and then I'll have him shadowed."

"Detectives?" asked the inspector.

"A four-legged one!" smiled Kaye, and pointed to her pet St. Bernard. "When I put Brutus on to anyone's trail, he just follows doggedly, and won't be shaken off."

The inspector left them then, since there was nothing he could do in the matter until the older dog was found. But Kaye and her grandfather looked up the man's address. There was no such street in the town as the one he had given.

That did not surprise Kaye at all. Returning to King Street, she found that the man had moved on; but he was found in a side street. He had not seen her, so she released Brutus.

"Follow!" she said softly, and pointed to the man.

Brutus sat down on the pavement, looked after Kaye a little worriedly as she departed, and then, knowing full well what he had to do, he waited for the man to move on.

The man moved the barrow first to a busy street, and for some minutes played the gramophone, while Brutus sat outside a shop, and, ignoring the petting of passers-by, waited.

Presently the man moved on again, and this time he made for home. As he trudged along with the barrow he looked back now and then to make sure that he was not being followed. Assured that he was not, and paying no heed to the St. Bernard dog, he reached a cul-de-sac where he had lodgings.

Brutus paused at the corner of the street and watched. The man, the barrow, and the dog disappeared inside, and still Brutus waited. Half an hour passed, and then he wheeled and trotted back to the kennels.

Kaye was waiting for him anxiously. She jumped with joy when she saw him, hugging and petting him, wishing that he could speak to tell her what had happened.

It was dark when Kaye decided to take Brutus to show her the way. They drove to the town in the car. Once there, Brutus was released. Instantly the intelligent dog set off at a trot, leading Kaye unerringly to the beggar's lodgings.

Kaye, hesitating outside the house, decided to take a note of the number and return when the man was out.

There was a rather desperate idea in Kaye's mind. The man had fooled her once, and she was resolved that he should not do so again. The next time she would take the law into her own hands.

Since the dog had not been with his master, he was probably at home; and probably on the morrow, too, not daring to risk taking the dog out again, he would leave him there.

Right or wrong, what Kaye planned to do was to take the dog away. If the man claimed him she would have to let him go back, unless she could prove ill-treatment. In the meanwhile, however, she could give the poor thing the treatment it needed.

Excited, eager to think that at last she would be able to do something for the dog, Kaye returned home and told her grandfather the good news.

"Good—good!" he said gladly. "And I've got news for you, too, Kaye! I've telephoned the local police stations, asking if a smooth-coated fox terrier has been lost—"

"And one has—a young one?" Kaye asked eagerly.

"Yes; and it's been lost for three days. By the description, I should say it's the one you saw this afternoon on the barrow."

"Hurrah!" cheered Kaye, in delight.

Her grandfather had taken a note of the owner's telephone number, and Kaye wasted not a moment in ringing through. The owner was a girl, and Kaye could picture how happy she would be to get her pet back—if indeed it were hers.

"Miss Marchmont?" she asked, checking the name, which her grandfather had written down on the pad. "This is Kaye Chalmers, of the kennels."

A young girl's excited voice answered.

"If it's about Kinks, it's all right. He's come back. Poor darling, he looks so worn out! And there's some funny black stuff on his side—like tar, or something; but he's all right."

"He's back!" said Kaye, surprised.

"That's good! That mark on his side is dye. I have some stuff that will get it off quickly. Shall I bring it along?"

Kaye was eager to see that dog and made sure that it was the same one, although she had practically no doubts in the matter. It seemed quite evident that the man had been scared when he knew she had guessed that the patch was dyed, and, afraid of being trapped, had set it loose.

"It's good, granddad, and yet, in a way, bad," frowned Kaye, hanging up the receiver. "I was hoping to prove he was a thief; then I could get the other poor dog."

But Kaye's plan was still firmly resolved. With her grandfather she drove to the girl's house, and was touched to see the dog's obvious joy, and Celia Marchmont's delight and relief to have him back.

"The same dog!" mused Kaye; but she did not tell Celia what had happened. There was no point in worrying the girl about what had happened to her pet now that he was safely home.

Petting him, calling him a lucky dog, Kaye left the dye-remover and returned to the car. The fact that the man had acted so swiftly filled her with anxiety, for there was a chance that if really alarmed he might move out of the district altogether, and in that case he would be hard to find again.

"There's only one thing for it, granddad," said Kaye. "Drive me to that lodging-house, please."

Ten minutes later the car was halted near the house, and Kaye warily approached it. Knocking at the door, she asked the woman who opened it if Mr. Bill Jones lived there.

"Yes, but he's out, Miss," was the answer.

"Is Patch in—the dog?" Kaye asked.

"Yes, he's in. He's shut in the room. That's him whining."

"Ah! Knows my voice," smiled Kaye. "I know he'd like a bone. Could I take it up to him?"

The woman surveyed her for a moment, and then nodded.

"Yes. Top of the stairs, first room to the left. Excuse me! I've got the kids to see to."

Kaye mounted the stairs, and as she reached the landing she heard Patch's whine, and his scratching at the door. "All right, old chap! Come on!" said Kaye.

She opened the door, and he came out, recognising her at once, wagging his tail, shaking all over with excitement.

Kaye snatched him up and carried him down to the car. As she got in there came a shout from the far end of the street, and on looking through the

window, Kaye saw the beggar running towards the car, waving his arms wildly and shouting.

"Drive on, granddad!" she said excitedly. "I'll explain at home."

The car whirled forward, and the beggar shook a furious fist.

"All right," he rasped. "I know where you live. You've gone a bit too far this time. Dog stealing, that's what the police will call it!"

KAYE'S DESPERATE SEARCH

"BETTER?"

Kaye looked at the dog Patch and smiled.

She had dressed his mouth and sores, brushed, and groomed him, fed him, and fondled him. His ears were up, and there was a sparkle in his eyes.

"Good fellow, Patch!" she said softly. "And you're not going back until you're really fit."

Patch was in Kaye's bed-room, envied by every other dog in the kennels, and it must have seemed to him that a fairy godmother had come into his life. Here was peace, here was comfort—and love, too. No dog could have asked for more.

But in the midst of their romping, Brutus, outside, barked as a ring came at the outer gate. Kaye looked up, and her heart jumped.

"The police!" she gasped, looking through the window.

While her grandfather kept the constable in conversation, Kaye took Patch out through the back door and put him in one of the kennels; then she joined her grandfather.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I'm making inquiries about a stolen dog," the policeman replied.

"Stolen dog?" asked Kaye innocently.

"Yes, miss; a smooth-coated fox terrier, brown ears, and brown patch on head, black patch on the left flank."

Kaye shook her head.

"There's no dog answering that description here," she said. "I have a fox-terrier with one brown ear, but no black patch. Come and look at him."

She led the policeman to Patch's kennel. There sat the dog, one ear brown, the other white—and there was no black patch on his side.

"This is a dog that has been ill-treated," explained Kaye, as the policeman examined it. "I'd like you to look at his mouth and at those awful sores on his body. If anyone claims him, ask him why he has ill-treated Patch like this, will you?"

The policeman made a note in his book and frowned heavily.

"Well, this dog has no black patch, miss," he admitted.

"No, and the black patch isn't covered with white dye," added Kaye, with a grim smile. "The one the police reported missing this afternoon arrived at his home safely—with black dye on the side. Perhaps that is the one the man is looking for."

"Ah!" said the policeman grimly. "Maybe, I'll take a note of the address."

Since Patch did not answer the description he had been given, there was nothing further he could do now; so, apologising for causing her trouble, he went.

But Kaye's grandfather was anxious and perturbed.

"I don't like it, Kaye," he said. "This is that beggar's dog, and—"

"No, granddad," said Kaye quickly; "you're wrong. Patch had a black dye mark on his coat, too. I should say

that rascal does that always. Patch isn't his dog any more than the other one was. He, too, has been stolen!"

That night Patch slept in Kaye's room; and on the morrow, for fear that the man might come to claim him, she took him out early.

Finding his true owner—for she was quite convinced that her theory was right—would not be easy; but Kaye had method. A lost dog seeking his owner is tireless.

Patch revelled in his freedom; but, although she allowed him to lead, he did not seem to know where he wanted to go. All that day Kaye let him wander at will; and next day she again took him out. But not until they reached the local park did he show any eagerness.

Then suddenly he bolted and ran through the gates. Kaye, at a trot, followed, delighted that at least he knew his way. But when she walked into the park she saw him, tail down, looking rather sad, standing beside a pram, while a keeper rebuked him.

"This your dog, miss?"

"I'm in charge of him, yes," answered Kaye.

"Well, put him on a lead, please. He jumped up at the pram and nearly knocked it over."

Kaye's eyes shone at that. A clue!

"He looked in the pram?" she asked.

"No thought he knew the baby."

"Yes, and found he didn't," smiled the nursemaid. "He's got a pram in his family, I should imagine."

That was just what Kaye thought, too, and, with hope rekindled, she put Patch on the lead. Just as though drawn by a magnet, he made for the next pram he saw; but again, after a sniff and look inside, his tail drooped.

"Keep on trying, old fellow," said Kaye excitedly.

But, although they found a dozen

more perambulators, not one had the occupant Patch sought, and his spirits drooped. Kaye, thinking things over, decided that they were on the wrong scent. As Patch had obviously been stolen, the thief would hardly make use of him in his own district.

It was most likely that he had been stolen from another town. In deep thought she went through a list of near-by towns with parks.

Reaching the main road, Kaye found a telephone-box. She phoned her grandfather and asked him to bring the car. When he arrived she told him everything, and he sighed in relief.

"I think you're right, Kaye—and I hope you are, for the police have been to the kennels again; they want to see the dog. We were seen taking him, and the car's number was noted."

"Never mind that. Raysfield Park first," said Kaye.

To Raysfield Park they went, then to Moreton Park; but without result, although they examined twenty or thirty perambulators. With sinking hopes, tired and dispirited, they made one last attempt. Five miles away was Worries, with a small recreation ground and common land near by.

With a rather weary sigh, Kaye's grandfather stopped the car at the gates, and Kaye and Patch alighted; but at the same moment a small black two-seater pulled up ahead of them. A police car!

The passenger, a sergeant, stepped out. Looking grim, he approached Kaye, who stopped and released Patch's lead.

"Just a minute, miss! I want a word with you. That dog—Hey! Stop!" cried the sergeant.

But Patch, freed from the lead, dashed through the park gates. After him went the police-sergeant, followed by Kaye.

A wild barking came from Patch, a shout from a girl; and next moment Kaye saw Patch leap into the air, while from a pram a small boy leaned out, chuckling with delight.

The boy's nurse gave an amazed shout, then began to pat Patch.

"It's Ned! It's really Ned!" she cried.

Kaye, beaming, as happy as Patch, turned to the policeman.

"This is a stolen dog," he said.

"Stolen—yes! Stolen in this very park six months ago!" said the nursemaid hotly. "And I know the rascal who stole him, too! I'd know him again!"

"Good!" Kaye said, turning to the sergeant. "Bring Mr. Bill Jones here to identify his dog, please. I think he'll be identified himself as the thief."

Kaye was thrilled with excitement and joy. Tears filled her eyes as she saw the dog's joy to be with his young master and the nurse again.

In the park Patch waited with the nurse; and there, quaking and reluctant, came the man with the barrow, brought by the sergeant. He knew his fate even before he saw Patch, but he could not draw back.

"That's the man!" cried the nurse. "He stole Ned!"

The sergeant's hand dropped on Bill Jones' arm.

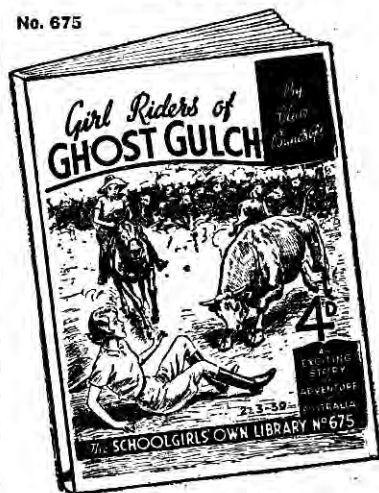
"We want you," he said. "And you'd better come quietly."

He led the man away; and, as if he knew that all his troubles were over, Patch—otherwise Ned—gave a shrill bark of delight.

Another delightful story about Kaye next week. Owing to the Easter holidays, the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale a day earlier than usual. Get it on Thursday, instead of Friday.

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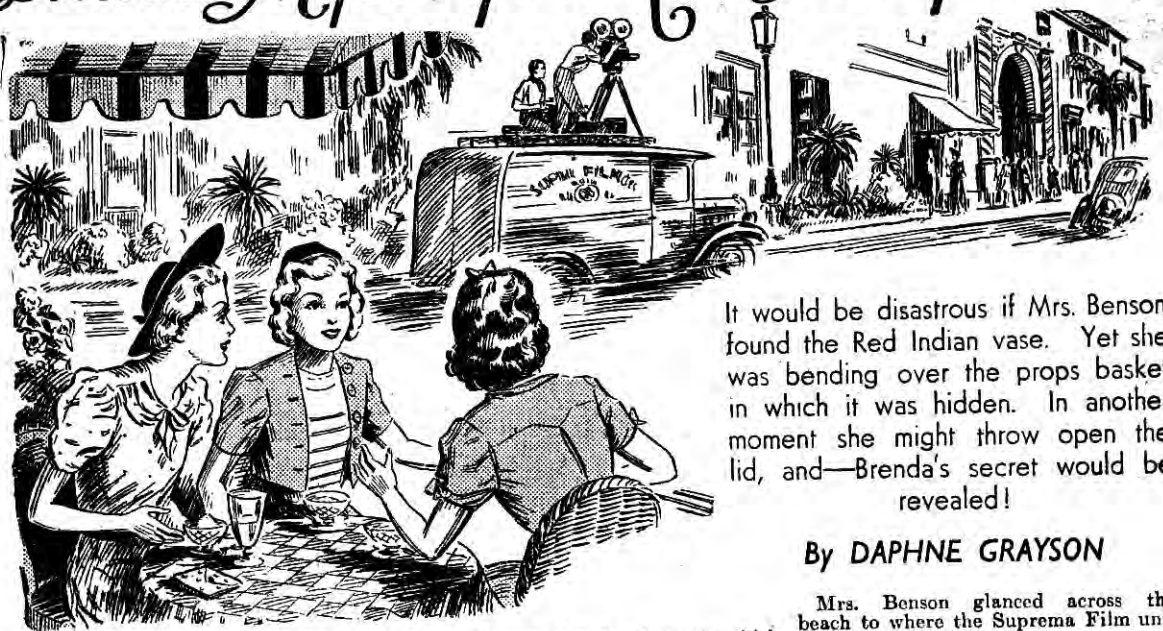
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Brenda's Mystery Task in Hollywood



THE VASE VANISHES

BRENDA CASTLE came to Hollywood to meet her sister Marion, who had been employed by a Mrs. Benson. But Marion had been dismissed, thanks to the treachery of Mrs. Benson's secretary, Ruby Fletcher.

To clear her sister's name, Brenda obtained a job with Mrs. Benson as guide to her English nieces, Molly and Audrey Duncan. She had adopted the name of Collins, but, nevertheless, Ruby Fletcher was suspicious of her.

Brenda found Mariou, who told her that a secret involving their future happiness was hidden in Mrs. Benson's room full of curios.

Brenda recovered a vase that had been stolen from this room by Ruby, and for safety's sake she hid it in a "props" basket belonging to a film company.

Then, to her horror, she saw Mrs. Benson about to open the basket. If she saw the vase inside Brenda would be blamed for stealing it!

FOR perhaps two seconds Brenda stood there as if petrified, unable to move or speak.

She could only think how disastrous the consequences would be if once Mrs. Benson opened the lid of the props basket and saw the Redskin vase inside!

Molly and Audrey, too, had seen the danger, and their horrified stares made Ruby Fletcher swing round sharply.

Another moment and Mrs. Benson would have had the lid of the basket lifted open. But in that moment Brenda's whirling brain asserted itself.

Somehow Mrs. Benson must be prevented from discovering the vase. In some way her attention must be distracted. How, in what way, Brenda did not know. But involuntarily a cry broke from her lips:

"Mrs. Benson! Mrs. Benson!" she called desperately.

Mrs. Benson, her hand on the thick leather strap which she had been in the act of pulling through the slot in the basket lid, looked round with a smile. "Hallo, my dear, what is it?" she called back.

Ignoring Ruby now, Brenda went rushing across the beach.

"We—we've been looking for you, Mrs. Benson!" she cried.

Her heart was in an agony of suspense. Her eyes were frantic, fixed on the basket. If only Mrs. Benson would come away—

Oh, the blessed relief! Mrs. Benson had moved. As she had hoped, prayed would happen, Mrs. Benson came strolling towards her.

"Well, here I am, Brenda," she said, still smiling.

Brenda rushed up to her, gripped her arm as if she would never allow the woman to turn back.

"My dear, you seem very excited."

Brenda gulped. She knew she was betraying her emotions, but she couldn't help it. And suddenly, in the relief that swamped her—relief that, for the moment, at least, she had forestalled the impending catastrophe—she found herself at a loss for words.

"You—you see, Mrs. Benson—"

Brenda stammered.

It was Molly who came to the rescue. "Brenda was wondering if—if you'd seen Gloria's bungalow, aunty," she put in, saying the first thing that came into her mind.

"Yes, that's it," Brenda nodded eagerly, flashing Molly a grateful glance. "Have you, Mrs. Benson?"

"Well, no."

"Then we'll show you round," Molly said. "Gloria won't mind. Let's go now, before the party starts."

"Very well," Mrs. Benson smiled. "But just a moment, girls. I'm engaged on an important mission," she added mysteriously.

They all stared.

"Mission?" Brenda repeated.

"Yes."

It would be disastrous if Mrs. Benson found the Red Indian vase. Yet she was bending over the props basket in which it was hidden. In another moment she might throw open the lid, and—Brenda's secret would be revealed!

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

Mrs. Benson glanced across the beach to where the Suprema Film unit was very active.

Gloria Deane, their film star friend, was not acting before the camera at that moment. She stood near Carl Leiner, who was directing a scene taking place under one of the many large, gaily coloured umbrellas which dotted the Santa Monica beach.

"I heard Gloria say she was waiting for the hat she is to wear in her next scene," Mrs. Benson went on, "and I offered to fetch it for her. It's in that props basket over there."

Brenda gave a start. Her heart began to pound again as Mrs. Benson turned with the obvious intention of retracing her steps to the basket. Disaster threatened once more.

But, then, quick as a flash, Brenda saw her chance.

"Don't you bother, Mrs. Benson. I'll get it for you and take it to Gloria!" she cried. "What's it like?"

"There's only one there, apparently. But, Brenda—"

Brenda, however, not giving Mrs. Benson time to protest, rushed past her. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Molly hastily take Mrs. Benson's arm and lead her away. Audrey was making sure that Ruby went with them.

"Phew!" Brenda gasped. Just in the nick of time the situation had been saved. She was saved. Mrs. Benson had not seen the vase, which she would have recognised immediately as the one that had been stolen from her treasure-room.

And after all Mrs. Benson had evidently not been suspicious in any way. Brenda's fears that Mrs. Benson was about to investigate the basket to see what it was she had concealed there were unfounded.

"Oh, thank goodness!" Brenda breathed. "But I'll have to find another place to put the vase until I can take it back to the house."

She had reached the basket now. She opened the lid and looked in.

Yes, there was the vase—lying there just as she had left it. For a moment

her gaze rested on it, on the queer Redskin symbols with which it was daubed.

What did they mean? Could this particular vase—recovered so dramatically from aboard the Jolly Roger, that floating restaurant anchored out in the bay—be the one out of Mrs. Benson's collection which contained the secret Marion had spoken of?

But she mustn't waste a moment now. She must leave the mystery until later.

Brenda dived a hand into the basket. It would contain only the one hat, Mrs. Benson had said. Brenda stared, her brow puckering.

There was no sign of any hat, but on top of the costumes it contained were some half a dozen swimming-helmets.

"Funny!" Brenda murmured. "I wonder if Mrs. Benson got mixed up and it's one of these Gloria wants? Better take them all across to her and see."

She took out the swimming-helmets. Then, pausing just for a moment to hide the precious vase out of sight at the bottom of the basket, she closed down the lid and hurried across the beach.

Even as she did so she saw Gloria herself coming towards her—Gloria, looking most adorable in bewitchingly attractive beach-pyjamas. And beside her strode Carl Leiner, her celebrated director.

"Say, are you the kid who's fetching Gloria's hat for her beach scenes?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Benson told us you were," Gloria smiled, and then broke off. "But where did you get those helmets, Brenda?" she added in surprise.

"They were in that basket," Brenda explained. "I couldn't see any sign of a hat."

Carl Leiner suddenly threw up his arms in an angry gesture.

"What's that?" he bellowed. "But, gee, those helmets shouldn't be here! Where's that basket?"

He went striding forward, Gloria and a startled Brenda on his heels. He reached the basket. Brenda, watching anxiously, saw him throw open the lid and peer inside.

"The fools! The goldarned fools!" Carl raved. "They've sent the wrong stuff, Gloria. These are the things for that water carnival!"

Gloria looked annoyed; then she smiled.

"In that case, Carl," she said, "you won't be able to do any more shooting to-day, will you?"

Leiner glared.

"But we must. We're two days behind schedule, as it is. Goshakes, I'm going to blow somebody up about this!"

"Then while you're doing that," Gloria said sweetly, "I'm going to have some lunch. Come on, Brenda. Stick those helmets back and come up to the bungalow. See you later, Carl!"

But Carl, in a towering rage, was stalking off to have his "blow-up" with the unfortunate man who had blundered in sending the wrong props basket.

Brenda replaced the swimming helmets, and hesitated, still filled with anxiety for the safety of the vase which might mean so much to her. Dare she leave it in the basket while she went with Gloria to her bungalow for lunch? Wasn't there somewhere else she could conceal it?

She had intended asking Gloria if she could put it somewhere safe in her bungalow. But now the knowledge that Mrs. Benson was friendly with

the famous star made that out of the question. Gloria might mention it to Mrs. Benson. To pledge Gloria to secrecy might lead to awkward inquiries, and perhaps arouse suspicion, which Brenda was so anxious to avoid.

"Come on, Brenda! Don't stand there dreaming!"

And Gloria, in her gayest mood now, seized Brenda's arm. Before that girl quite realised it she was being rushed up the beach towards the film star's lovely bungalow.

"Looks as if we'll be able to make an early start to the party, after all," Gloria went on gaily. "I don't see how Carl can shoot any more scenes without those props."

Brenda laughed. Gloria was as excited as any schoolgirl at the prospect of her party.

And now they had reached the bungalow. Over on the terrace were Molly and Audrey, with Mrs. Benson and Ruby, talking to the other guests who had already arrived. It was a case of "the-ever-open-door" at Gloria's bungalow, where friends just strolled in whether the star was there awaiting them or not.

Delighted cries greeted Gloria. Then she was introducing Brenda to the guests.

"And now for lunch!" Gloria cried.

Brenda was just about to make her way through the press to join Molly and Audrey when Carl Leiner came stamping on to the terrace.

"Guess you're right, Gloria," he said, with a glare. "There'll be no more shooting to-day. I'm sending the unit back to the studios!"

Brenda, as she heard that, gave a gasp.

If the unit was returning to the Suprema Studios, then that basket containing the precious vase—

Brenda was suddenly galvanised into action. Fear tugged at her heart.

Out of the bungalow she raced and down to the beach.

She saw the camera-truck driving away. She saw a lorry being loaded with other apparatus. Her gaze flew

to the spot where the props basket had stood.

And then Brenda stopped dead, went cold with horror as if the blood had frozen in her veins.

For of the basket there was not a sign. The basket had gone—and with it, obviously, had gone the all-important vase!

BRENDA'S ONLY CHANCE!

A SOB of utter despair rose to Brenda's lips.

Gone—that vase in which was perhaps the key to her very destiny!

The shock left her numbed and dazed; brought an agonising ache to her heart.

That vase which she had risked so much to gain possession of after Ruby had stolen it; which meant so much to her and her sister; which had caused her so many palpitating moments since bringing it back from the Jolly Roger—and now, after all that, it had been whisked from her reach during the few minutes that it had been out of her sight.

Brenda's hands suddenly clenched. A desperate gleam came into her eyes.

If the basket was gone, then she must get on the track of it. Find out where it had been taken, trace it before the vase was discovered inside it! If once the vase was found by anyone but herself, then there would be no knowing what might happen to it.

"It must have been taken back to the Suprema Studios," Brenda muttered, and felt a wave of hope come to her. "Then that won't be so bad. I can easily get a pass from Gloria, and once in the studios I can look around. I'll ask one of those men loading that lorry where exactly the basket is likely to be put."

She hurried across the beach. But when, reaching the lorry, she put her question to one of the men, Brenda received another shock.



Breathlessly Brenda climbed up the steps. "Good old Brenda!" "Well done!" her chums cried. But Ruby Fletcher was looking at her with angry eyes.

"That props basket?" the man repeated, and didn't look too pleased. "Say, don't you mention that goldarned thing to me. There's been enough trouble already about it, what with Mr. Leiner saying he'll fire the whole lot of us because some pesky fool sent it down here in mistake."

"But I must know," Brenda persisted. "Has it been taken back to the studios?"

The man glared.

"Nope, it hasn't."

Brenda looked dismayed.

"Then where? Please tell me?"

"What d'yuh want to know for?"

"It—it's very important I should know."

"O.K." Then it's been taken up to the castle."

"The castle?" Brenda repeated, staring.

"What is this—third degree?" the man demanded sourly. "Yep, the castle—where they're holding that water carnival in aid of the hospitals. Ain't you ever heard of the castle, sister? Well place up in the hills that the Suprema big-shot had built. Reckon he took a fancy to those castle places he saw in England when he was there on vacation."

Yes, Brenda had heard of it—a marvellous home, the replica of a famous English castle, which had been built for Ernst B. Vahl, the millionaire film magnate and chief executive of the Suprema Film Corporation.

"Goodness!" Brenda gasped. "And that basket is being taken there?"

"Haven't I just said so? Reckon that's where it should have gone in the first place, seeing it contains some of the costumes for the carnival," the man informed Brenda.

"But—but there's something of mine in the basket," Brenda said. "I want to get it back."

"Then you've got some hopes—unless you've got a ticket for the carnival."

"I—I haven't."

"Then you won't get one now because they're all sold. Better get yourself a job as a mermaid in the show, but I reckon they're all fixed up now." And the man chortled, turning away. "O.K., Barney," he called to the driver of the lorry. "That's the lot."

He jumped up into the driving cab, and then, with a roar of its engine, the lorry started away.

Brenda stood looking after it, her hopes down to zero again.

Numbing apprehension gripped her. So that was where the vase had been taken—to the castle, guarded day and night because of the treasures it contained. Now it would contain, unsuspected, another "treasure."

How could she get the vase back now? The water carnival, she knew, was on the morrow. As soon as the basket was opened, the vase would be found. Inquiries would be made as to where it had come from. It might even end in she herself being accused of stealing it from Mrs. Benson's collection.

"Oh, goodness, what am I to do? What can I do?" Brenda muttered frantically.

Slowly she made her way back to Gloria's bungalow. Laughing voices, gay chatter, reached her ears. The guests were just filing into the spacious dining-room, and ahead of her she saw Molly and Audrey with Ruby.

"I'm entering!" Molly was saying excitedly.

"Rather! So am I!" Audrey exclaimed. "What about you, Ruby?"

Ruby shook her head disinterestedly. "Haven't any inclination to," she

said. "Any kind of carnival bores me."

And then Molly saw Brenda, and came rushing over to her.

"Brenda, you'll enter, won't you?" she asked eagerly.

"Enter what?" Brenda asked, completely puzzled. "What's all the excitement?"

"Didn't you hear? Oh, no! I saw you slip out a few minutes ago," Molly said. "But you remember that big surprise Gloria was telling us about?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's to do with this water carnival at some wonderful place called the castle. There are going to be all sorts of tableaux," Molly went on, in a thrilled voice, "including a mermaid scene. And what do you think? One of the girls in this scene has had to drop out owing to illness, and Gloria, who's on the carnival committee, has decided to organise a little contest among all her girl guests here, the winner to get this vacancy in the mermaid tableau."

Brenda gave a gasp. Incredulously she stared at her friend. What was this Molly had said?

Gloria organising a contest among her guests to find someone to take part in the water carnival at the Castle where the vase had been taken.

Wild, delicious excitement flamed into Brenda's cheeks.

"This is wonderful!" she cried. "It's marvellous! Goodness, am I entering? Is Gloria taking the names and—"

"We knew you'd enter, so we've already put down your name," Molly laughed. "But, Brenda," she added, her voice becoming serious, "why did you go rushing out like that? Why were you looking so terribly upset just now?"

And then Brenda told them what had happened.

"But don't you see, this contest is the most wonderful thing that could have happened?" Brenda finished excitedly. "It's a chance to get into the castle—to get at the vase. A chance I wouldn't have had otherwise. If only I can win, and be the girl selected—"

"You've got to win!" Molly told her.

Got to win! Yes, that she had! Brenda knew it. Just when everything had seemed lost, here was her opportunity—a gloriously thrilling, an excitingly sporting opportunity to retrieve the situation.

Her eyes glowed deep with determination.

"You're right; I will win!" she exclaimed tensely. "As an actual performer in the carnival, I'll be able to get at that basket, get back the—"

Molly suddenly gripped her arm.

"Shush!" she hissed sibilantly, and jerked her head warningly.

Standing less than five yards away from them was Ruby Fletcher.

Ruby smiled.

"Come along!" she said. "They're nearly all seated now, and lunch looks delicious."

She passed on. Molly looked anxiously at Brenda.

"Do you think she heard?"

"I don't know." Brenda's voice was worried. "I hope not."

But Brenda knew a few seconds later. Know the worst.

For even as they entered the dining-room they saw Ruby talking to Gloria.

"Put my name down," please, Gloria," Ruby was saying. "I'm going to enter for your competition, after all. And I'm going to win. I want to be in the carnival."

"That's the spirit!" Gloria smiled.

But Brenda did not smile. So Ruby had overheard her conversation with Molly and Audrey.

Ruby, who had been scornful of the carnival a little while ago, was now entering Gloria's contest with the determination to win.

And the only reason she could want to win was because she knew about the vase.

Brenda wanted that vase, and so did Ruby.

RUBY'S TREACHERY

"ARE we all here?"

"Yes, Gloria."

"Then listen while I tell you what you've got to do."

It was Gloria Deane who spoke in that sweet, silvery voice of hers which had grown to be loved by millions through the medium of the "talkies."

A Gloria who positively sparkled, who was radiant with the zest of life. A Gloria who, away from the cameras and without her film make-up, was as dazzlingly lovely as on the screen with it.

It was an hour after lunch—that delicious lunch which Brenda & Co. had voted perfect—and Gloria stood on the edge of her magnificent swimming pool at the rear of the bungalow.

It was a gay and colourful scene, with the clear blue water sparkling in the hot sunshine, with green lawns and shrubs and trees and masses of flowers stretching away in the background, with Gloria's guests seated round the pool.

And lined up before the famous star were the competitors in the carnival contest which she had organised.

Brenda's eyes, as sparkling blue as the water in the pool, were fixed on Gloria. So were Molly's and Audrey's, and the others.

"Now, as you know," Gloria went on, teeth flashing in that famous smile of hers, "it's a mermaid scene, and as near a mermaid as we can get the girl who is selected will have to be. So she'll have to be a good swimmer. In particular, she'll have to be an expert at diving and under-water swimming."

"Good! That's my mark!" Ruby Fletcher said boastfully, for Brenda to hear.

But Brenda smiled back challengingly.

Ruby might be good, but Brenda knew she was good, too. She'd won prizes at school, both for diving and under-water swimming. And, added to that, was her determination that she must win—must; must be the girl who filled that vacant place in the tableau which would enable her to take part in the carnival at Ernst B. Vahl's castle.

"We'll have the under-water swimming event first," Gloria went on. "I have appointed a timekeeper to each girl. In that way there will be no confusion. Every competitor will be allowed three attempts. Points will be awarded, and the highest aggregate number will determine the winner of the event. Now is that understood?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Sure thing, Gloria!"

"Then take your positions. Competitors will be allowed to enter the water when they like, and as each girl enters, so her particular timekeeper will keep check. Right! In you go, as soon as you like!" Gloria cried.

"Goodness, I'm not going to be so hot at this!" Molly whispered. "But who cares? It's the fun of the thing

that counts. And, anyway, I want you to win, Brenda."

They stood poised side by side on the edge of the pool, taking deep breaths.

"Look! Ruby's going in!" Audrey said.

Clean as a whistle, without splash, Ruby entered the water.

"She's good," Molly murmured.

Yes; no doubt about that. Though she had only dived from the edge of the pool, the execution had been perfect.

And now they saw her slim body in its yellow costume streak through the water, clearly to be seen in those crystal depths. The length of the pool she went, round, and back again. Then at last she came to the surface, shaking her helmeted head.

"Bravo!" went up a cry of applause.

"A grand effort!" Brenda said, unstinting in her praise, even of this girl who was her rival, and who might yet rob her of everything she hoped to gain.

"One minute, nineteen seconds!" announced the timekeeper.

"Seventy-nine points!" Gloria cried, making an entry in the notebook she held. "One point for every second."

"Go on, Brenda!" Molly urged. "Now you show them what you can do!"

Brenda stood on the edge of the pool, arms raised taut above her head, breathing deeply. Then gracefully her body curved over and down into the water.

"As good as Ruby's dive!" Molly murmured, with satisfaction.

Now every eye was fixed on Brenda's body as she cut through the water, close to the bottom of the pool.

One and a half lengths Ruby had done. Brenda, holding her breath until she felt her lungs must burst, then slowly releasing it through her nostrils, vowed she would beat that.

One length! Now round, now on. Could she do it—do two complete lengths? Her breath was gone; she must rise. She shot up above the water, heard cheers ringing in her ears, saw the rail of the pool above her.

"Two lengths!" Molly cried.

"Good old Brenda!" Audrey shouted excitedly.

"One minute, thirty-one seconds!" came the voice of the timekeeper.

"Ninety-one points!" Gloria cried. "Well done, Brenda! Keep it up!"

Breathlessly, drawing in deep gulps of air, Brenda climbed up the steps. At least, she'd beaten Ruby. She saw Ruby looking at her with gleaming, angry eyes.

But now the other competitors, one by one, were entering the water. Molly remained under water for only just over forty seconds; but then, she had known she would not shine, and it was only the sport of the thing that counted with her.

Audrey beat her by just five seconds. She, too, would obviously be out of the running.

And very soon, after the first heat had taken place, it became obvious that the issue would have to be decided between Brenda and Ruby. They were far ahead of the others on points; and Brenda herself was leading by eleven.

But in the second heat Ruby, making a desperate effort, cut down that lead by seven points. For seven seconds longer than Brenda she remained under water.

Only four points difference between their scores now.

"This is splendid!" Gloria cried enthusiastically. "Now, don't forget, the next heat is the third and final of the under-water swimming events. The



From One Girl to Another

Cheery Chatter and Helpful Hints by Penelope

my pets, with a rinsing between each. Then finish up with two more rinsings. Rub it fairly hard, press in your kinks and curls and waves, and then allow it to dry—out in the sun, if possible.

You'll be so pleased with it after this treatment that I've a feeling all the hat manufacturers for schoolgirls will go out of business, so anxious will you be to show your gleaming head of hair!

SO PRETTY!

Oh, and I must tell you! You know how popular net and veiling has been on hats this year? And very pretty it is, too, even though I did hear someone say that women looked these days as if they were all off to catch a swarm of bees!

Well, for schoolgirls, the idea is to buy yourself a yard of veiling (for sixpence) in your favourite pale blue, green, yellow, or fuchsia pink, and bring this around your head, tying in a topknot in front.

It's the very latest and very prettiest notion in hair-nets for tennis, hiking, and all windy days.

EGG-COSIES

Wouldn't mother love these snug egg-cosies as a little Easter gift? Just right for keeping the Sunday morning eggs warm for a family that isn't famed for being punctual at meals!

You could knit them with odd bits of wool left over from jumpers and so on.

Cast on about 32 stitches (on No. 9 needles), and knit in plain knitting for about 3½ inches.

Then break the wool, leaving an end about 7 inches long. Run this end back through the stitches on your needle, gather up, and stitch firmly down the side.

Sew a cheeky little chick on top, and it's complete.

The second egg-cosy is made in the same way, except that after the first six rows in plain, the rest is done in stocking stitch—which is one row plain and one row purl.

HAPPY EASTER

I wonder how many hot cross buns you'll be eating on Good Friday? They are the most delicious, spicy things, aren't they?

I've heard that you can have a wish for every bun you eat—rather as you can at Christmas, for every mince pie.

Oh, and it's also said to be lucky to wear something yellow for Easter Day. Even if it is only a yellow border to a hankie!

Bye-bye now until next week, when you know we'll be on sale a day early, don't you?

Your own

PENELOPE

HALLO, EVERYBODY!—Here is your Penelope again, feeling as chirrupy as an Easter chick, and with lots to chatter about as usual.

As spring is definitely in the air—and on the calendar—let's talk about that schoolgirl glory of yours—your hair!

With lovely weather in store, you'll most certainly be joining the "hatless brigade" again very shortly, and, of course, you want your hair to look at its very best.

Winter is terribly unkind to the hair, you know. The brightest blonde tends to darken during the winter months, and the glossy brunette head can go so greasy and stringy-looking, even if great care is taken.

So, brunettes and blondes—and brownettes, too—you must give your hair a spring tonic.

And this is what I suggest.

A TONIC FOR YOUR HAIR

I want you to arrange to wash your hair on Saturday. Then, on the night before, you are to "treat" it.

Buy yourself a tin of Vaseline or any good hair tonic, preferably of an oily nature. On the Friday night before the Saturday, make little partings all over your head, and rub this tonic in.

Now place all ten fingers on your scalp, and give it a wonderful rubbing, making sure that you actually move the scalp itself as you massage.

Comb it out, and then off to bed you go.

Naturally, this grease in your hair is not going to improve the sheets; so I wonder if mother would be an angel, and give you an old pillow-slip or towel to place over your pillow to protect it?

If she will, then you're a lucky daughter!

Next morning your hair won't look very exciting, I'm afraid. In fact, it'll look all stringy. But never mind.

(You see now why I suggest this treatment for a Friday night, when there's no school to-morrow!)

Leave the oil in your hair as long as you can. Then, in the afternoon, prepare yourself a luxury shampoo.

I mustn't mention special names, but I'm sure you know the really good shampoos, which cost as little as twopence. (Or you can use green soft soap, which is pretty marvelous.)

Give you hair TWO shampooings,



girl with the highest points will have a useful lead when it comes to the diving contests. The combined aggregate totals of both events, of course, will determine the eventual winner!"

The third heat began. One or two of the competitors, realising they had no chance, went in and got it over.

But Brenda waited. She wanted to see what Ruby would do this time. And Ruby, evidently with the same intention in mind, waited, too.

Brenda smiled faintly.

"Looks as if we shall go on waiting for each other for the rest of the day," she observed. "Well, here goes!"

"Good luck!" Molly and Audrey breathed in unison.

Once again Brenda poised herself on the edge of the pool. She was leading by four points. She must increase that lead to ensure that she entered the diving event in the winning position.

To win—to win! The thought hammered in her brain. To beat Ruby—beat her so that she would not be able to forestall her in securing possession of the precious vase.

A deep, deep breath, filling her lungs completely. Then into the water she dived.

And at the same moment Ruby dived, too.

Their bodies flashed through the water at the same moment. Then, with barely a yard separating them, they flashed through the clear, blue depths.

People had left their seats and were crowding round the pool. The timekeepers stood ready with their stop-watches.

Brenda, eyes open as she swam, saw Ruby just to one side of her. They were close—too close, really. The tips of their fingers almost touched as their arms threshed the water.

On and on through those crystal depths; but not crystal clear enough, because of those churning arms and legs rippling the water, for the spectators to see what happened then.

Suddenly Ruby edged just a little closer to Brenda. Her face was a mask of rage, distorted by the movement of the water.

The tips of her fingers touched Brenda's arm, closed together, and squeezed viciously. Then, in a fraction of a second, she had darted away, went plunging on.

While Brenda, feeling that agonising pain in her arm, suddenly gasped—and in a moment the water was gurgling into her open mouth, rushing down to fill her lungs.

Her breath was gone. Up to the surface she had to flounder, spluttering, gasping frantically for air, choking the water out of her system.

There were surprised exclamations from the spectators.

"Not so good this time!"

"Hard luck, Brenda!"

"Fifty-one seconds!" Gloria announced.

"Brenda, what happened?" Molly cried in amazement.

"I—I don't know. I felt a pain in my arm," Brenda said, through gritted teeth.

She suspected, but she could not be sure. Had Ruby really been so despic-

ably unsportsmanlike as deliberately to spoil her chances? Or had it just been an unaccountable pain in her arm?

But her heart was heavy. Only fifty-one seconds! And Ruby was still swimming.

Her heart became even heavier when finally her rival rose to the surface.

"One minute, ten seconds!" Ruby's timekeeper announced.

"Then that makes Ruby the winner of this event with a total of one hundred and forty-nine points!" Gloria said, consulting her notebook. "And Brenda is second, her total being one hundred and forty-two points!"

Brenda gritted her teeth. She saw Ruby looking across at her, laughing, triumphant.

She had been leading, but now the tables were turned. Ruby was in the lead—seven points nearer to securing the vase.

Seven points to be accounted for and wiped off if she—Brenda—was to win a place in the water carnival, tomorrow.

The diving event was yet to come. Could she do it? Could she overhaul Ruby, and win yet?

Or would Ruby, with her lead, beat her in their struggle to gain possession of the vase which, in some mysterious secret way, must be linked up with their separate destinies?

Will Brenda yet be able to beat her rival, and regain the vase that means so much to her? You will be thrilled by every line of next Monday's grand long instalment of this colourful serial.

changed. A look of bewilderment and pity crossed her face.

"Why—senorita—La Bella Lola!" she whispered.

Lola stared at her dazedly, recognising her as the youngest member of Maria's troupe at the Cafe Padrino, a girl named Carlotta.

"The way out, Carlotta," whispered Lola agitatedly. "Quickly—which is the way?"

The other girl shook her head. "Senorita—you cannot leave the house this way. This passage leads only to the kitchen quarters."

Lola clenched her hands, realising with a sinking heart that she was trapped—without a chance of escape.

"Senorita," faltered the other girl, as Lola stared round her wildly, "what is it? Can I help? You were kind to me at the cafe—on the first night when you danced there. You remember that you helped me to fasten my shawl, though you yourself were late for your dance?"

Lola stared at the girl vaguely, only dimly recollecting the trifling incident.

She became aware that she was staring at Carlotta's soft brown hair, worn long to her shoulders.

Securing the girl's hair was a crescent-shaped ornament, obviously set with cheap imitation stones.

Lola clenched her hand desperately, a gleam of hope flashing into her eyes.

"Carlotta," she breathed, catching at the girl's arm, "there is something you can do for me. Your hair ornament—lend it to me—for a little while. I can't explain why, but promise not to tell a soul!"

"Of course, senorita, I promise," whispered the bewildered girl, as she drew the ornament from her hair.

"Now—go," breathed Lola unsteadily.

THE BANDIT'S DAUGHTER

(Continued from page 816.)

She almost pushed Carlotta out of the room, closing the door behind her.

A moment later, the door leading from the ball-room was thrown open—and Maria entered with her uncle, Senor Garcia—Tony following closely at their heels.

Maria's eyes were glittering with spiteful triumph; in her hand she flourished the incriminating photograph.

"Here she is, uncle!" she exclaimed, pointing at Lola. "She tried to escape—and that proves her guilt."

"Just a minute!" cut in Tony, his boyish face rather pale. He crossed to Lola's side, taking her by the arm.

"I'm in this," he declared gruffly. "Lola came here at my invitation—and if there are any accusations I mean to get to the root of them."

Lola, pale but maintaining a desperate composure, looked straight into Tony's eyes.

"I don't understand," she said quietly. "Of what am I accused?"

Maria laughed shrilly. "Bah—the innocent one! She asks that—the girl who accepts stolen presents from a bandit!" She pointed to the ornament glittering against Lola's dark hair. "Perhaps she will deny that the crescent she is wearing is one of the heirlooms stolen by the Grey Shadow and his gang?"

"I do deny it!" Lola rejoined breathlessly.

"It will be easy enough to prove," put in Senor Garcia smoothly—and his tone was coldly menacing. "This photograph will prove who speaks the truth."

He stepped forward, and with a swift movement jerked the gleaming ornament from Lola's hair.

"I say, hold hard—" cut in Tony angrily, as Lola winced.

But Senor Garcia's expression had turned suddenly blank; he was staring in mingled bewilderment and disgust at the cheap paste ornament.

"What—what is this?" he demanded, his voice sharp with chagrin and annoyance. "Maria"—he turned angrily on his niece—"what have you to say? Where is this resemblance of which you speak?"

Maria's mouth fell open as she stared from the paste hair-ornament to the photo of the stolen tiara; her dark eyes glittered with baffled fury.

"It is a trick!" she exclaimed. "This headdress has been changed. It is not the one that Lola wore in her dance!" Swiftly she spun round on Tony. "Senor—you have eyes; you are not blind. Look at this. Is this the same ornament that La Bella Lola wore while she danced—or is it another?"

But Tony got no chance to reply, for suddenly, unexpectedly, there came a startling interruption.

From outside the house sounded the muffled clatter of hoofs, the sound of a shot, and into the room burst a white-faced flunkey.

"Senor," he gasped, "senor—the Grey Shadow has been seen again! The guards you posted in the grounds have given chase; they believe that they have him trapped!"

Even more exciting are next week's chapters of this colourful story. And don't forget that the next **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale a day earlier than usual—on Thursday, instead of Friday.