

"AN IMPOSTOR AGAINST HER WILL" ONE OF THE 7 FINE STORIES INSIDE

GIRLS' CRYSTAL

WEEKLY

2^D



**THE
MADCAP FORM-MISTRESS
BREAKS BOUNDS**

Penelope's Page of Novelty Notions

NEW

HALLO, EVERYBODY!—Here's your little Penelope in her Chinese mood, as promised. You remember I said I'd be giving you some suggestions for making yourselves all Oriental, don't you?

I expect you shop-conscious ones have noticed the Chinese reds and greens that are so fashionable, the mandarin hats, and the colourful kimonos.

It all started with that Exhibition of Chinese Art in London, and though I have to confess that Oriental fashions had never before appealed to my thoroughly English mind, I have been completely won over by some of the new ones.

Are you a proud possessor of a dressing-gown? If so, I expect you treasure it far too much to start making alterations in it.

But just supposing you're not; did you realise that you can make a perfectly sweet one from one of mother's older overalls?

Mind you, I'm not saying it'll be warm, but it will make a covering to go over your pyjamas as you stroll to the bath-room to clean your teeth at nights!

Cut the cuffs off and trim them and the edges of the overall with the brightest-hued braid or ribbon you can find or buy. Finish off with a girle from which tassels hang, and you'll be talking pidgin English in no time!

Of course, you needn't use an overall, if there isn't one to spare. There's not exactly anything wrong with a beach-coat that can be converted to the purpose.

Are you thinking I'm not very bright this week? I wonder?

If you do, I know you'll be sweet enough not to tell me, for that would be the final straw to break poor Penelope's very soft heart.

But just supposing the thought has occurred to you, perhaps you'll forgive me. For, do you know, this is the first day I have been in the office this week!

I've been ill! Not really ill, mind you—in case your hearts are as tender as mine! But I had to stay in bed for a day or two!

It was only a cold! Only a cold, did I say? It was the cold—the cold among colds! I'm sure there never has been and never could be another like it.

It started on Saturday when it pelted with rain, just as if it had never rained before.

I went out to do some shopping—to buy some new potatoes, as a matter of fact. They were a colossal price, but I felt justified, thinking they'd cheer me up.

But what are new potatoes without mint? So I bought some mint.

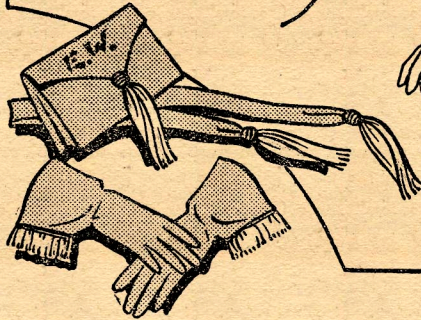
"Threepence, please!" demanded the assistant. I nearly expired on the spot, and I'm sure that was what started my temperature.

Threepence! I must have looked rather as if I was being offered the Crown jewels, for the assistant went on to explain that it was "hothouse mint."

Of course, silly me!—I hadn't realised outdoor mint wasn't in season. But why spoil the spuds (excuse the word, but it goes with "spoil") for three-penn'orth of mint, I cried recklessly to myself—which just shows what a temperature will do to a normally sane person.

So down went my cash and in return I received a bulky parcel.

Home I went. Believe me—that girl had forgotten the mint!



And just to show you how silly I can be—I nearly howled! I was fed up. I was wet, miserable, and mint-less!

Of course, that's not your normal Penelope. As I expect you've guessed, I was not too well. You're right.

But I'm better now, thank you, everyone, though still feeling a little fragile and interesting. (I only hope I look it!)

Everyone was terribly sweet, and said how they'd missed me at the office—which was very kind, don't you think? You can just imagine how I lapped that up!

Cut the bottom threads, slip off the card, and then tie again just below the top knot. Yes, I know it's easy, you who make tasselly toys to amuse baby brothers and sisters.

I wonder if you:

Place your school tunic—with blouse first—on day frock on a hanger every single night?

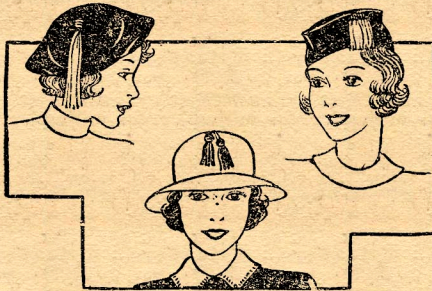
Put trees—even if they're only threepenny ones—into your school shoes when you take them off?

Brush your coat every single day? And your hat?

Leave your umbrella open till it's dry before standing it in the rack?

They're excellent little habits to get into, believe me! Even if the last one does sound unlucky to the superstitious.

And I don't see why it should. For it's much more unlucky to have an umbrella rot away quickly because it's closed when damp. Don't you agree?



Now you must admit that the little jacket-of-many uses depicted here has been your dream for a long time.

It can be worn on all sorts of occasions, and always looks correct.

You can actually make it from a dress that's grown too small, if you're clever enough to slit the old frock down the middle and cut off the skirt part.

It is trimmed all round—sleeves as well—with braid, in the approved Chinese style. Ribbon will do equally well, remember!

Then at one side, you simply must embroider your initials in what looks like Chinese letters.

Oh, now for summer, to wear this coatee over tennis frocks, beach frocks, sight-seeing frocks, and even over bathing suits when arms and back need protection from tanning that's too quick to be anything but painful!

And now—a-a-a-a—tish-coo-oo!—until next Friday. (Oh, excuse me! Yes, that really was a sneeze, just to prove that I did have a cold.)

But you just watch it disappear in time for Easter! It will, or I'm no longer your own

PENELOPE

P.S.—I say, you won't ignore the other tassel decorations on the top of the page, will you, pets?

The handbag, scarf and gloves trimming is really very sweet—and so easy to do.

The bag and scarf have tassels sewn to the important parts, and the gloves have fringing sewn to the gauntlets. While the initials are faintly reminiscent of Chinese lettering. Goodee-byee again.

But now I'm sure these hats in the middle of the page are proving much more exciting than accounts of my ailments. (Do you think I'll grow into one of those old ladies who can talk of nothing but symptoms? Say no, quickly!) The tammy beret on the left is very eye-catching, isn't it, pets? And so accommodating; it would suit you all—from seven to the great age of seventeen.

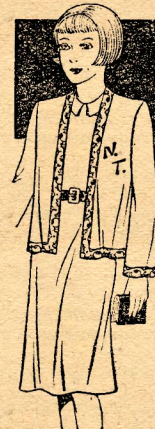
And to think it's only a fassel caught at the very centre of the crown, that looks very pretty flopping down as in the picture. And very jolly bobbing up and down as you run to catch train, tram, bus, or—dinner!

The trimming on the right is for the going-places hat. It is just a piece of flat fringe. (You can see me pretending to make it in the sketch at the top of the page—at least, it's supposed to be me!)

Your school hat will respond to the tassel treatment, too. Take off the old school band and pin two tassels to the crown. The pin goes inside, let me add, for the benefit of those who might think I meant it to stand on the crown!

Now just a line about the making of these tassels, if you're not in the mood or funds to buy them.

Take a piece of cardboard as deep as you want the tassels, and wind silk or wool around this. Run a thread under the silk at the top and tie.



was a smirk on the prefect's sallow face, and beneath her arm was a pile of exercise books. She encountered the young Form-mistress' surprised glance with an insolent stare.

"Ada," said Miss Murdstone, "you have been through the last batch of history answers submitted by the Fourth. What is your opinion?"

"Hopeless," replied Ada, with relish. "Never read such tosh in my life."

Miss Desmond's face flushed scarlet. "I corrected those exercises myself," she said. "They were excellent!"

"If that is so," sneered Miss Murdstone, "I can only say that your abilities are even poorer than I supposed. Read out some of those answers, Ada."

While the girls murmured protestingly, and the young Form-mistress stood as still as a statue, Ada commenced to read out a few answers in a high-pitched mincing voice.

The murmurs grew louder.

"I didn't write that!"

"Nor I!"

Miss Desmond was galvanised into sudden action. With an unexpected movement she sprang forward, snatching the books from the startled prefect's hand.

Swiftly she scanned a few pages then, her eyes flashing, she tossed the pile of books on the floor at the headmistress' feet.

"My girls did not write those answers!" she declared, her blood boiling. "They're deliberate forgeries!"

Ada hastily averted her eyes; an ugly crimson crept into Miss Murdstone's cheeks.

"You dare to insinuate," she gasped, "that my niece altered those answers! This is too much. You are attempting to cover your incompetence by calculating insult—but the attempt shall not avail you. Neither will your mock heroics. I forbid you to attend this—this function of yours this afternoon! You will stay at school and give the girls a lesson on the subject they have neglected under your disgracefully lax supervision—"

The girls' loyalty could be restrained no longer; several girls sprang to their feet, Pat Derwent acting as spokeswoman.

"Miss Murdstone," exclaimed the junior, regardless of the consequences, "that's not fair! Even if our answers were wrong, Miss Desmond's not to blame. She's a sport, and—"

"Sit down!" rapped Miss Murdstone; then, her tone changing abruptly, she added smoothly. "I do not blame you girls; it is your Form-mistress who is to blame. It is regrettable that you should be penalised owing to her slackness—but I can take no other course. Should she persist in her defiant attitude, I shall inform the school governors—who will doubtless take steps to provide you with a more suitable Form-mistress."

A groan of dismay went up from the girls; Miss Desmond, white to the lips, clenched her hands.

So that was Miss Murdstone's game! She was holding a deliberate threat over the juniors—in order to enforce her obedience. And Miss Desmond knew only too well that the tyrant headmistress was capable of carrying out her threat.

To climb down now would mean relinquishing the prospect of her outing—disappointing Dick Verrel—as well as being a bitter blow to her pride.

But Vera Desmond characteristically made up her mind with scarcely a moment's hesitation. Her own disappointment meant nothing compared with the welfare of her girls. The idea of leaving them to the mercy of one of Miss Murdstone's satellites—after the happy comradeship of the last few terms—was unthinkable.

Deliberately she thrust aside the thought of her well-earned pleasure, as she faced the headmistress calmly, a little scornfully.

"You need not trouble, Miss Murdstone," she said. "I have changed my mind about going out!"

If she spoke with a lump in her throat, and a sinking heart, she gave no sign of it. A little gasp went up from the girls; Ada Fengrove sniggered openly.

"You are wise," sneered Miss Murdstone, her lip curling triumphantly. "I shall take steps to see that you carry out my instructions. Come along, Ada—I am expecting a phone call

from one of the governors at this moment. I suggest, Miss Desmond, that you change your ridiculous costume for something more suitable for the class-room."

Miss Murdstone swept from the room, followed by her niece. The juniors were silent; sympathy sealed their lips. Only their eyes expressed their feelings.

The Madcap Form-mistress walked slowly to her desk, but even as she reached the rostrum, a cheery voice spoke from the direction of the open window.

"I say," it remarked, "hope I'm not butting in, but it's turned two o'clock—and my car's outside! Hop into a coat or something, and we'll make tracks for the hall!"

Miss Desmond turned, catching in her breath. An athletic-looking young man, his tweed overcoat concealing his fancy dress costume, was leaning in at the window, grinning round cheerfully at the class.

It was Dick Verrel!

DEFYING THE BAN

THE young sports master seemed to sense that something was wrong; his cheery glance passed from Miss Desmond's trim, attractive figure to the white-faced girls.

"Hallo," he remarked, "what's the trouble? Don't say Miss Desmond's been ticking you off; if so, I bet you deserved it!"

And he laughed boyishly.

The Madcap Form-mistress drew a deep breath, as she stepped down from the rostrum and approached the window. It was useless to beat about the bush; she'd better break the news at once and get it over.

"I'm sorry, Dick—Mr. Verrel," she said, meeting his gaze squarely. "But—I shan't be able to come with you, after all."

Dick Verrel's face fell; then he laughed.

"Now you're pulling my leg!" he said reproachfully. "Isn't she, girls? By Jove," he added, with involuntary admiration, "you look stuning in that rig-out! I bet some of the other fellows there will envy me!"

Miss Desmond flushed, swallowing hard as she attempted to reply. The girls maintained an awkward, sympathetic silence.

The truth seemed to dawn on the young sports master; he leaned farther into the room, with a puzzled frown.

"I say, you're not serious, are you?" he asked in anxious concern. "You are coming with me—"

"I'm sorry—I can't!" blurted out Vera desperately. "Dick—you must try to forgive me. I'm sure you'll understand when I tell you. Couldn't you possibly find another partner?"

"I'm dashed if I could!" returned Dick Verrel warmly. "Look here! What's all the bother?"

But Miss Desmond was not given a chance to explain; the juniors took the words from her lips. The young sports master was popular with all of them, and they made no bones about taking him into their confidence.

The whole story came out in excited, disjointed snatches.

"It's a shame!" declared Pat Derwent breathlessly. "Miss Desmond's being made to suffer because of us."

"It's not that," put in the Madcap Form-mistress quickly. "But I've made my decision, Dick—and I must stand by it."

Dick Verrel looked grave, though his eyes held a hint of admiration. He knew something of the state of affairs at St. Kilda's—and he realised—better, perhaps, than the girls themselves—the sacrifice that their young Form-mistress was making.

"Look here!" he said suddenly. "May I come in?"

Without waiting for permission he swung himself over the sill, and took his seat astride one of the desks.

"Now, let's get this straight," he began. "Will the headmistress actually be present at this lesson?"

Miss Desmond shook her head.

"Her usual method is to prowl along the corridor every quarter of an hour or so, and listen at the door—in the hope of being able to pounce on something! It's no use, Dick—Mr. Verrel—you might just as well go along to the

contest on your own; you're bound to find a nice partner."

"I'm not going without you," returned the young sports master doggedly, "and that's flat! Wait a sec—I've got an idea! If only we could work it—"

"What is it?" came an eager chorus from the girls.

Vera glanced at him hopefully in spite of herself.

"If someone could imitate Miss Desmond's voice!" muttered Dick Verrel. "But I suppose that's a pretty stiff proposition."

The Madcap Form-mistress caught in her breath sharply. Dick Verrel's tentative suggestion had given her an idea. A madcap sparkle crept into her eyes.

"Goodness!" she gasped. "I believe—I believe it could be worked! I've got the very thing in my study!" Then, abruptly, the sparkle left her eyes. "No," she murmured, half under her breath, "it would be too risky—for them."

She was looking at the eager girls. Dick Verrel followed the direction of her glance, and his eyes twinkled.

"Look here!" he said. "You can't let us down like this! Go and fetch this mysterious object, while the girls and I have a little chat. Don't argue now; we're all on tenterhooks."

"Go on, Miss Desmond!" came the eager chorus.

Half-protesting, his eyes shining, the Madcap Form-mistress left the room on her mysterious errand.

As the door closed behind her, Dick Verrel turned quickly to the girls, his finger to his lips.

"Now, look here, girls!" he said. "From what I know of your Form-mistress, she's a gilt-edged brick—"

"She is!" agreed Pat Derwent enthusiastically. "You'd never believe half the things she's done for us."

"And you'd be prepared to do the same for her, if you had the chance?" asked the young sports master, smiling.

"Rather!" came the breathless chorus.

"Well, this is your chance!" said Dick Verrel earnestly. "Vera—Miss Desmond's awfully keen on this skating contest—and, between you and me and the gatepost, she's got a little surprise up her sleeve for you girls, only don't let on that I told you!"

He grinned confidentially.

"But she'd rather throw up the whole thing than let you girls take any risk on her account—you know that. Now, look here!" he added boyishly. "You've got more influence with her than I have. Don't let her back out, will you? Promise!"

The promise was given with enthusiasm. Dick Verrel gave a warning gesture.

"S'sh! Here she comes! Not a word!"

The Madcap Form-mistress re-entered the room, carrying three surprising objects.

One was an ancient gramophone which she had borrowed from the school porter; another was a mysterious metal disc; and the third object was a piece of apparatus like the spare arm of a gramophone.

"It's rather a wild idea," she said apologetically, as she placed the objects on the table. "I bought this disc for recording the girls' singing. I thought that if I read out a few historical names and dates, battles, and so on, the girls could switch it on later, while they got on with their rehearsing, or whatever they liked. Do you see the idea?"

Dick Verrel gave a stifled whoop, as he hit the table with his hand.

"What a stunt!" he ejaculated. "The old—ahem!—Miss Murdstone would imagine you were in the room, giving a history lecture! Isn't it a winner, girls?"

The juniors' excitement knew no bounds. Trust Miss Desmond—even when in a quandary—to think out a topping plan like this!

Miss Desmond had broached the suggestion half humorously—but she found all the arrangements swept out of her hands. Dick Verrel would listen to no argument. Assisted by the girls, he rigged up the recording machine, fitting on it a large cardboard megaphone.

In front of this Vera took her stand, history-book in hand.

"Hush!" said Dick Verrel gravely. "Sound recording about to commence!"

Miss Desmond cleared her throat, opened her history book, and began to recite, her words being recorded on the revolving metal disc.

When she had finished she looked around, and her eyes became doubtful.

"Do you think I ought to risk it?" she asked. "If the trick was discovered—"

"We want you to go!" urged Pat Derwent. "Please!"

Vera gave in, her eyes a little misted. Dick Verrel climbed down to the ground, and a few moments later he moved a ladder against the window.

"You're sure you'll be all right?" asked Miss Desmond, as she clambered up over the sill.

"Of course," smiled Pat Derwent. "But here are your skates. You mustn't forget those."

"Dashing forward, she handed the Madcap Form-mistress the skates, and, waving them all farewell, Miss Desmond departed, making for where Dick Verrel's car was drawn up in the shelter of the drive.

"The girls are sports," she declared, when they were on the way to the near-by town. "I'll—I'll make up to them for this. I'm going to win that prize, by hook or by crook!"

"That's the spirit!" chuckled Dick Verrel. "And, what's more, you're going to enjoy yourself. I'll see to that!"

Miss Desmond smiled, but she was still thinking of the girls.

"I hope nothing goes wrong," she said anxiously.

"Forget it!" laughed Dick Verrel. "Nothing could go wrong. It's a walk-over."

But he spoke a little too soon.

"WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR—1066.
Duke of Normandy—landed in England."

Miss Murdstone, halting outside the door of the Fourth Form class-room, nodded with satisfaction as the clear, resonant voice came to her ears.

"So," she murmured softly, "all her defiance came to nothing! She's afraid of me—like everyone else in this school."

With an unpleasant smile she made her way to her study.

There was a note on her desk from Mr. Ponsonby, the chairman of the governors, making an appointment to visit the school that afternoon.

Miss Murdstone picked up the note to read it more carefully; but just then the telephone bell rang shrilly. With a slight frown the headmistress picked up the receiver.

"Hallo! Yes, this is Miss Murdstone speaking. Who—Ada?"

Ada Fengrove's voice, tremulous with excitement, came over the wire.

"I say, aunt, I'm speaking from Medwood. You'll never guess who I saw go into the skating-rink."

"Who?" demanded Miss Murdstone.

"Miss Desmond, with that sports master."

"Impossible!" grated the headmistress, starting. "She's in her class-room now."

"I tell you, I saw her!" declared Ada. "She was in fancy costume—that Russian affair. I was quite close to her. She didn't see me."

Miss Murdstone's face paled with sudden fury.

"Keep a watch on them!" she snapped. "Don't let them out of your sight!"

A glitter in her eyes, she strode back to the Fourth Form class-room.

Miss Desmond's cheery voice reached her astounded ears.

"William Rufus was known by that name owing to his red be-ard—"

The voice trailed away in a sort of scratchy moan.

Miss Murdstone seized the door handle and tugged at it; but the door was locked.

"Open this door at once!" she shouted, hammering on the panels.

There came a hasty scuffling within. A key turned gingerly in the lock. Miss Murdstone flung open the door, and marched into the room.

The girls were all there, looking very busy; but of Miss Desmond there was no sign. Nor

was there any sign of the gramophone. The girls had hidden it.

The headmistress glared round her.

"Where—where is your Form-mistress?" she rapped.

Pat Derwent looked up innocently.

"She was here just now," she said. "She must have left the room for something."

"Don't lie to me, girl!" grated Miss Murdstone furiously. "I heard her speaking—that is, I thought—"

She bit her lip, completely baffled, not knowing what to think. The juniors held their breath, exchanging anxious, furtive glances.

With sudden decision the headmistress spun on her heel and strode towards the door.

In the corridor she encountered Miss Hagsby.

"Miss Hagsby," she rapped, "please tell Williams to be ready with my car. I am going to Medwood skating-rink—as I strongly suspect that Miss Desmond is there, in spite of my orders. If I catch her—"

She left her sentence uncompleted; but the listening juniors shivered, and exchanged woful, horrified glances.

"We—we've failed," breathed Pat Derwent unsteadily. "Miss Desmond will be caught—and it's all our fault!"



"I'll teach you to trick me!" cried Miss Murdstone, but she got a shock when the girl skater turned. It wasn't the Madcap Form-mistress at all!

THE HEADMISTRESS AT THE RINK

SOFT lights, and the lilting strains of a waltz tune; a solitary couple, dressed in Russian costumes, followed by the limelight and the entranced gazes of the spectators, as they glided with swift, easy grace across the ice.

Then the thunder of applause; and Miss Desmond, flushed and breathless, glanced up at her partner.

"How—how did it go?" she breathed.

"A walk-over," declared Dick Verrel, grinning cheerfully. "At least, we've got as good a chance as anyone here. You're a marvellous skater, Vera!"

"So are you," declared Miss Desmond. "If only the girls could have been here, Dick—"

"Still worrying about the girls?" laughed Dick Verrel, as he slipped a hand under her arm. "Goodness, they'll be all right! Enjoying yourself?"

"Rather!" breathed Vera, her eyes shining. "Splendid! Hallo! There's Colonel Bennett, the judge. And that's his daughter Shirley. I'd like to introduce you to her."

Shirley Bennett, a pretty blonde, shook Miss Desmond's hand warmly.

"You were wonderful!" she declared. "If daddy doesn't give you the first prize, he ought to. You'll stay for the prizegiving, of course?"

"Of course," chuckled Dick Verrel. "We have come to carry off that prize."

"What a lovely costume!" sighed Shirley Bennett, gazing enviously at Miss Desmond's attractive attire. "It's the envy of every girl in the hall, I think. I wish you'd let me try it on some time—"

Just then Dick Verrel's hand tightened on the Madcap Form-mistress' arm.

"Ye gods!" he breathed. "Look over there—by the door!"

Miss Desmond looked, and her heart gave a violent jump.

Standing by the entrance, her tall, gaunt figure strangely out of place in the gay, colourful throng, was Miss Murdstone!

"Oh goodness!" breathed Miss Desmond faintly. "Something—something must have happened at school."

"Never mind what's happened!" cut in Dick Verrel gruffly. "The point is, she can't prove that you were here, unless she actually collars you. Come on!"

"It's too late!" whispered Vera. "She's seen me!"

Across the ice-rink she encountered Miss Murdstone's roving gaze, and she saw, by the headmistress' sudden start, that the latter had recognised her costume.

"That's torn it!" muttered the young sports master.

Miss Desmond was thinking quickly, her mind torn by doubt and anxiety.

Miss Murdstone's unexpected arrival at the ice-rink could only mean one thing. Somehow, their little trick had been discovered—the girls had been bowled out!

Her one anxiety now was to get back to school—to shield her class in case of trouble! The skating contest had lost its interest for her—even the thought of the possible prize faded into insignificance.

At all costs she must evade the headmistress and get back to the school first!

She grabbed the young sports master by the sleeve as a sudden desperate scheme flashed into her mind.

"Listen," she whispered. "Can you—can you keep her guessing for five minutes—play for time?"

"Leave it to me!" returned Dick Verrel, with a grin. "What's the stunt?" "I can't stop to explain now," whispered Miss Desmond hurriedly. "You're a sport!" She darted away, and was lost to sight in the crowd.

Dick Verrel drew a deep breath, his eyes twinkling.

"Now for it!" he muttered.

Miss Murdstone came striding across the rink, holding to the ropes. She made a beeline for the young sports master, who appeared completely oblivious of her approach.

"Young man!" she rapped, as she came up. "Where is your partner?"

Dick Verrel gave an assumed start, and his face lit up.

"Why, if it's not Miss Murdstone!" he exclaimed heartily, seizing the astounded headmistress by the hand and shaking it warmly. "Didn't expect to see you here. Have you entered for the contest?"

Miss Murdstone gulped, her eyes glittering. "I am not interested in skating," she snapped. "I have come here to find that—that young woman."

"Which young woman?" inquired Dick Verrel blandly.

"You know very well to whom I refer!" rapped Miss Murdstone, her gaze searching the hall. "Your partner, Miss—"

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Dick. "My partner, of course. Jolly girl—ginger hair, dressed as a cabbage—"

"Stop fooling, young man," grated Miss Murdstone furiously.

"Sorry!" said the young sports master. "Thought you were talking about my partner. I say—" he added, catching the headmistress by the arm as she was about to stride away. "Can I fetch you an ice?"

"I detest ices!" snapped Miss Murdstone, jerking her arm free.

"Bit chilly," agreed Dick Verrel. "Well, a nice hot coffee, then—or some sandwiches—"

"I do not require refreshments!" snapped the headmistress.

"Too bad!" said the young sports master imperturbably. "I knew—you're just longing for a bit of skating. Look here," he added, keeping pace with the infuriated Miss Murdstone, "as I've mislaid my partner, would you take pity on me, and we'll have a try at one of those jolly old figures of eight—"

"Certainly not!" gasped Miss Murdstone, crimsoning. "How dare you follow me about, young man? I'll inform the stewards— Ah, there she is!"

Dick Verrel bit his lip in dismay as he followed the direction of Miss Murdstone's vindictive glance.

Skating gracefully across the ice, the cynosure of all eyes, was a slim figure in Russian costume.

"The brazen creature!" ejaculated Miss Murdstone, her eyes glittering. "I've caught her in the act!"

She started out across the ice, slipping and slithering alarmingly.

"Dash it!" muttered Dick Verrel, paling. "What on earth has Vera got in her mind? That woman will catch her, and there'll be a scene—"

Setting his lips grimly, he skated swiftly in pursuit.

Panting, slipping, and recovering herself by a miracle, Miss Murdstone overtook the slim, skating figure, grabbing her by the shoulder.

"So you thought to defy me!" she grated, raising her voice. "You flighty, impertinent creature, I'll teach you to trick me—"

An indignant cry escaped the girl's lips as she turned; a curious crowd pressed forward, murmuring with excitement at the amazing scene.

Miss Murdstone took in a breath, preparing for a fresh onslaught—and then her mouth dropped open, and her eyes goggled.

For the young lady in Russian costume was not Miss Desmond!

"How—how dare you!" exclaimed Shirley Bennett, withering Miss Murdstone with a glance. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

Utterly flabbergasted, Miss Murdstone released her hold, and, missing her footing, sat down heavily on the ice.

An irascible, red-faced gentleman in evening-dress hurried forward; it was Colonel Bennett, the M.C.

"Turn this woman out of the hall!" he exclaimed angrily, beckoning an attendant and pointing to the floundering Miss Murdstone.

"I protest—" exclaimed Miss Murdstone shrilly.

But two burly attendants lifted her to her feet and hustled her towards the entrance.

"Hist!" breathed a soft, cautious voice from behind the young sports master.

Dick Verrel turned with a start. Smiling at him from behind a pillar was Miss Desmond, wearing a cloak over the costume she had exchanged for her own.

"Hallo!" she breathed. "Thanks for helping, Dick—and Shirley Bennett's a sport! Now I've got to dash back to school—"

"Take my car!" said Dick Verrel. "I'll join you later. Good luck!"

WHITE-FACED. Pat Derwent confronted Mr. Ponsonby, the chairman of the governors.

Mr. Ponsonby was in a towering temper.

"Is anyone here in authority?" he demanded. "I made an appointment with Miss Murdstone—and am informed that she has gone to the skating-rink! Where is Miss Desmond?"

Pat bit her lip as she glanced warningly at her chums.

"She must—she must be somewhere about," she replied lamely.

Mr. Ponsonby snorted.

He strode off in a towering rage.

"Goodness," breathed Pat, "that's done it! Poor Miss Desmond's for it when she comes back—"

Anxiously the juniors trailed after the angry governor, with some vague idea of being able to help.



WONDERFUL NEWS SOON

Look Out For Details



Mr. Ponsonby banged on the door of the Madcap Form-mistress' study.

At the same instant, a breathless, dishevelled figure climbed in through the window.

"Is anyone in there?" bellowed the angry governor.

Miss Desmond looked round desperately. Then, snatching up her mortar-board and gown, she swiftly donned them over her costume.

"Come in!" she called, pulling the black gown about her.

As Mr. Ponsonby burst into the room, the frightened juniors hovering behind him, a startled gasp went up from Pat & Co.

Trim and smiling in mortar-board and gown, Miss Desmond was sitting at her desk, a pile of papers in front of her.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ponsonby!" she said brightly. "Did you require anything?"

Mr. Ponsonby drew a deep breath.

"Thank goodness," he remarked, "that there's someone in this school who possesses a little common sense. I called to see Miss Murdstone concerning the arrangement for Founder's Day. As she has chosen to absent herself on a skating expedition, I should be glad to discuss the details with you."

"Certainly!" replied Miss Desmond.

"Girls—will you please bring in a cup of tea for Mr. Ponsonby?"

She flickered an eyelid ever so slightly, and the delighted juniors darted away.

"It's a knock-out!" whispered Pat Derwent. "How on earth did she manage it?"

Miss Murdstone wondered the same thing

when, returning a quarter of an hour later, crimson and furious, she burst into the Madcap Form-mistress' study.

At first she did not notice Mr. Ponsonby, who was seated in a chair behind the door.

"So!" gasped Miss Murdstone, confronting the smiling young Form-mistress, "you imagine you have been very clever, no doubt!"

"I beg your pardon?" inquired Miss Desmond, smiling.

"You were at the skating-rink," accused Miss Murdstone furiously, "and you escaped by a trick—"

"One minute, please!" boomed an unexpected voice, as Mr. Ponsonby rose from his chair.

The headmistress' mouth dropped open; in her anxiety to catch Miss Desmond, she had completely forgotten that the governor was coming!

"You will oblige me, Miss Murdstone," snapped Mr. Ponsonby grimly, "by moderating your remarks to this very capable young lady, who has kindly undertaken your duties in your absence."

"I—I—" stammered Miss Murdstone. "She—"

"I wish to hear nothing about Miss Desmond," interrupted the governor. "I only wish we had more mistresses in the school who were as conscientious."

"Ahem!" put in Miss Desmond, smiling modestly. "Tea, Mr. Ponsonby."

The door opened to admit the juniors laden with trays.

"Splendid!" beamed Mr. Ponsonby, rubbing his hands. "You think of everything, young lady!"

Miss Murdstone glared.

"Won't you have some?" Miss Desmond asked before the headmistress could say anything.

"No," she snapped. "I never drink tea."

Mr. Ponsonby looked up.

"Come, come, Miss Murdstone, you always seem to be at it when I visit you. You mustn't say things like that—not in front of the girls, you know." He turned to the Madcap Form-mistress. "Perhaps you will send for another cup, Miss Desmond?" he smiled, and there was a hint of authority in his voice as he looked at the scowling Miss Murdstone.

"Certainly! Pat!" said Miss Desmond, and gave a little nod.

Pat Derwent, who had been waiting at the door, rushed off.

She was soon back, and Miss Desmond proceeded to pour out.

"One lump or four, Miss Murdstone?" she asked.

"None. Thank you!" came the tight-lipped answer.

"Bad! Bad!" spluttered Mr. Ponsonby. "Sugar's good for everyone, I say. Another two, Miss Desmond, please. Sweetens one, you know. Why, sugar is made up of—"

"I say, excuse my butting in—" remarked a cheery voice behind the girls.

Dick Verrel, a brand-new portable gramophone in his hand, stepped into the room.

"Why, if it's not Miss Murdstone!" he exclaimed, glancing at the white-faced headmistress. "Did you enjoy yourself at the rink, Miss Murdstone? And Mr. Ponsonby—glad to see you, sir! Matter of fact, I just looked in to bring the girls a little present."

He placed the portable gramophone on the table with a wink at the delighted juniors.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Desmond!" they chorused.

"Eh?" demanded Mr. Ponsonby, looking a trifle surmised.

The headmistress glared.

Miss Desmond gave a rippling laugh, her eyes dancing.

"Why thank me, girls?" she asked. "You ought to thank Mr. Verrel!"

But the merry flicker of her eyelid was not lost on the juniors. Their Madcap Form-mistress had scored yet another victory on their account!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Next Friday Miss Murdstone tries to become popular. She even stands the Fourth Formers a posh tea! Whatever you do don't miss this fine story of surprises. Better order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.



AN IMPOSTOR AGAINST HER WILL

THE PERIL SHE DIDN'T SUSPECT

ENOJOYING the trip, my dear?"
"Rather!"
Sally Blythe turned from the carriage window and with glowing eyes surveyed her travelling companion.

"It's lovely!" she declared. "And it was nice of you to let me come with you. I'd never have found my way around on my own."
Mrs. van Dell, the rich American woman who was escorting Sally to Switzerland, smiled. It did her good to see the happy gleam in the girl's eyes, for she knew what a gloomy time she had had lately.

Sally was a girl without a memory. One morning she had awakened to find her mind a blank. She hadn't even known her own name. All her past was wiped completely out.

Even now all that she knew about herself was what she had been told. The only real link with her past life was her brother Charlie, and he was lying ill in a sanatorium near Lucerne.

Sally smiled wistfully as she thought of him. What a relief it would be to see him! And how wonderful it would be to talk to someone who might be able to give her the missing key to her lost memory.

Eagerly she looked across the first-class compartment.

"When will we get to Lucerne?" she asked.
Mrs. van Dell, guessing the girl's impatience, patted her sympathetically on the shoulder.

"Oh, not until this afternoon!" she replied.
"But cheer up, my dear; the time will soon pass. The Swiss scenery is grand, and you will enjoy every minute of the trip through the mountains."

She paused and glanced at the jewelled wrist-watch she wore.

"We ought to be at the Swiss frontier any minute now," she remarked. "We have to change there, you know. This isn't a through train."

"Will our luggage have to be examined?" asked Sally.

Mrs. van Dell nodded.
"Yours will, I'm afraid," she said. "But mine is registered through. Still, don't worry. It's not much of an ordeal—unless you're trying to smuggle something through the Customs."

She smiled as she spoke, and Sally, glancing up at her two small suitcases, smiled also. There was nothing there, she felt sure, that anyone could object to her taking into Switzerland.

If only she had known the truth!
If only she had known what her unscrupulous guardian, George Hunter, had hidden amongst her clothes!

But she didn't, and so it was quite unsuspectingly that she descended to the platform

when the train pulled up. Mrs. van Dell had to see about her registered trunks, and so Sally arranged to meet her on the Lucerne train.

Refusing the help of a porter, the girl joined in the noisy, excited rush across the platform, a suitcase dangling from either hand.

Squeezing her way into the shed where all hand luggage was to be examined, she deposited her two cases on the counter and cheerfully waited for one of the busy officials to attend to her.

Suddenly she felt her arm lightly seized, and, turning her head, she found herself confronted by a burly, black-bearded man.

His trilby hat was turned down over his eyes, and little of his face was visible. Yet some instinct made Sally draw back. There was something about this stranger that put her on her guard, although he smiled amiably enough.

"This Customs business must be tiresome for a young lady like you," he remarked, "especially as you have nothing to declare. If you will give your luggage to Carl here"—he nodded to a beady-eyed, blue-bloused porter at his side—"he will see it through without all these annoying formalities."

Grinning, the porter made to seize the two suitcases, but Sally hung on to them.

"But surely all luggage has to be examined?" she asked.

The black-bearded stranger winked.

"There are ways and means, you know," he said. "Now, you be sensible. Let Carl see you through. There's a terrific crowd, and I'd hate a young lady like you to be kept here for hours."

Again the porter edged his way forward.

"You leave it to me, ma'mselle," he said, in broken English. "I get you to your train in one leetle minute. Carl know how to work it."

He stretched out for the cases, but Sally shook her head. She did not trust these people. It occurred to her that this might be a scheme to steal her luggage.

TRICKED INTO ACTING AS SMUGGLER

Sally Got The Shock of Her Life When She Opened Her Suitcase At The Swiss Frontier

By SYLVIA MACRAE

"No, thank you," she said. "It's very nice of you, but I prefer to wait my turn."

And, dismissing them both with a smile, she turned back to the counter and prepared to open the two cases. From the black-bearded man came a whisper of warning.

"Don't open them," he said. "There's no need to look for trouble. I mean, if you keep them locked, the Customs man won't bother to disturb your pretty clothes. You take my advice, and keep your bags locked."

Sally frowned. She eyed the stranger keenly. Why was he so interested in her affairs?

"Thank you," she said, "but I have already been advised what to do. My travelling companion is a seasoned traveller, and I prefer to take her advice."

He frowned at the snub, and he and his companion exchanged queer glances. For a moment they lingered there, then, muttering between themselves, they disappeared through the crowd.

Sally felt vaguely troubled. She was certain that the pair had had some deep reason for advising her. What could it be?

"Oh, I expect I'm imagining things," she told herself, with a shrug. "Ever since I lost my memory I'm always suspecting people."

And as she saw that the Customs official was working his way along the counter towards her, she unlocked the cases and threw up the lids.

One case she had packed herself, but her guardian had been responsible for packing the other, and she frowned in dismay as she saw what a hash he had made of it.

"My best evening frock—it will be full of creases!" she gasped. "And look at my shoes! Stuffed in any old how!"

With horrified hands, she smoothed the crumpled garments, and then suddenly her hands bumped up against something hard that lay at the bottom of the case.

Wondering what it could be, she lifted up the clothes.

Then the blood drained from her face. Incredulously she stared. Hardly able to believe her own eyes, she gaped down at what lay revealed.

Plush-covered jewel-cases—three of them!

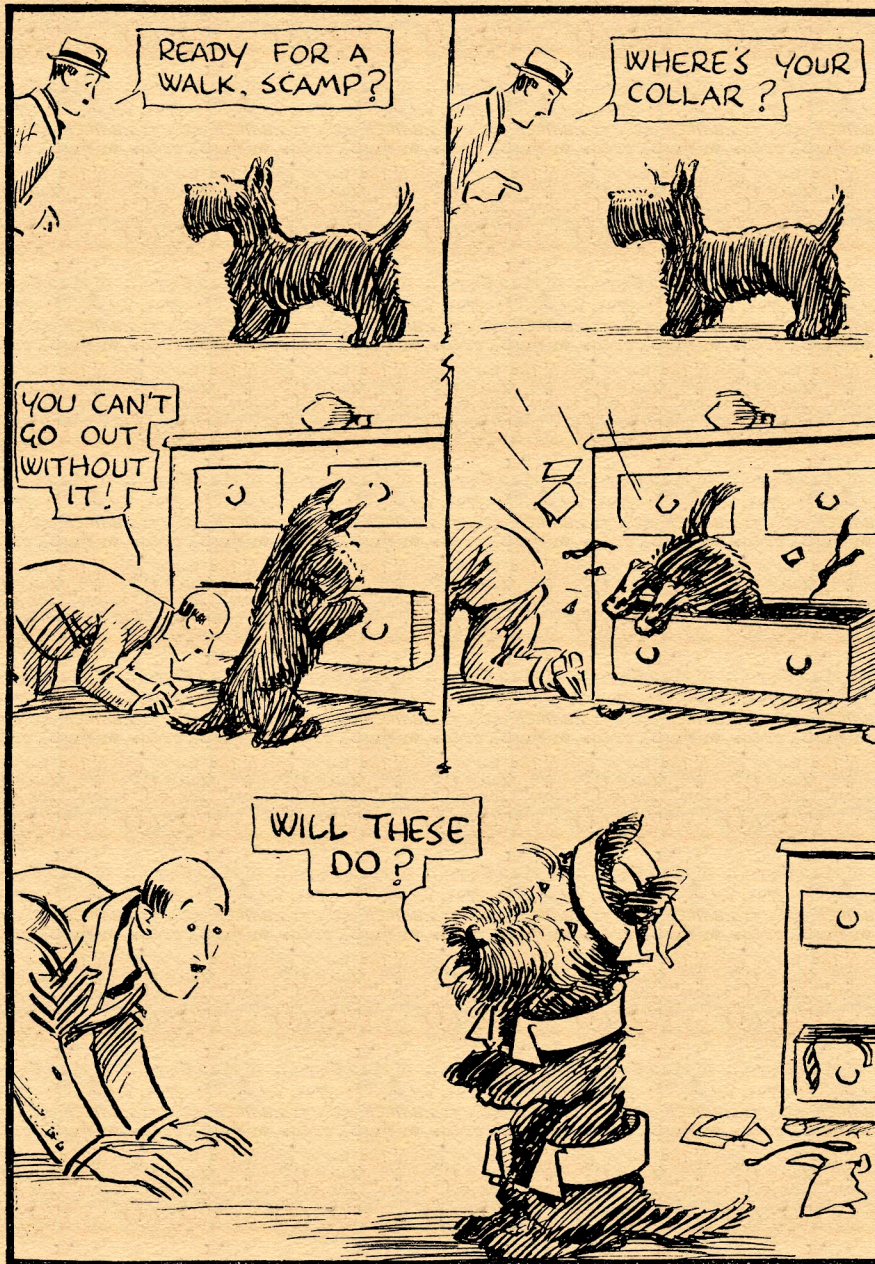
But what could they be doing there? Who had hidden them away?

Instantly she knew the answer. Her guardian! This was another rascally trick of his.

But why had he done it? Surely he did not want her to be accused of smuggling?

Suddenly realising her peril, Sally looked sharply around. Fortunately the crowd was too busily occupied in trying to get their own

THAT SCAMP SCOTTIE



luggage examined to bother their heads what anyone else was doing.

But the Customs man was only a few yards away, ransacking a German woman's portmanteau. In another minute he would reach Sally, and when he came to search her cases—

She shivered. How could she possibly prove her innocence? He would never believe that until this moment she had not known the jewel-cases were hidden amongst her clothes.

Startled and bewildered by this unexpected discovery, Sally mechanically clicked open one of the plush-covered boxes, and then she got another staggering surprise.

For gleaming up at her was an array of wonderful jewels—jewels that she recognised.

The Van Dell heirlooms!

The precious stones had been stolen from their safe recently, and at one time Sally had suspected that her guardian and Slim Jarvis, his rascally manservant, had been responsible for the theft.

And here was proof that her suspicions had been correct! But why had they hidden their booty in her suitcase?

As she stood there, staring dumbly at the incriminating evidence, Sally remembered the

black-bearded stranger and his insistence that she should let him help her to smuggle her luggage through the shed unexamined.

Clear enough the reason now. He had known what was stowed away inside that suitcase. He had been frightened lest the jewels should be discovered!

"He must be in league with my guardian," Sally told herself. "They planned to use me to smuggle the jewels through the Customs. If their scheme had succeeded, no doubt they would have stolen the stuff when my back was turned."

It was a terrible discovery that she had made. Proof at last of her guardian's duplicity. But what should she do?

With a gasp Sally suddenly realised that the Customs official had finished examining the luggage on the counter next to her own.

Smiling, he was coming to attend to her. Oh, what should she do? If only she had time to think. But her brain was in a whirl. This latest discovery had left her faint and dizzy.

Agitated, hardly knowing what she did, she dragged her clothes over the jewel-cases, and, white-faced, she faced the waiting man.

"Anything to declare, ma'mselle?" he asked. Sally shook her head.

"N-no," she faltered.

The words were spoken before she realised it, and with a gasp she realised that the official had ceased to smile. He was peering at her grimly, almost suspiciously.

"You are sure?" he asked.

"But of course."

Desperately Sally smiled. Desperately she tried to hide her agitation. She must go through with it now. She must lull his suspicions. If only she could pass through the Customs safely, then she could frustrate her guardian's villainy. She could see that the stolen jewels were returned to their rightful owners.

To her relief he hardly glanced at the first case. Without a look at its contents, he banged down the lid and made a yellow chalk on it. Oh, thank heavens! He was not going to search, after all. He didn't suspect her, after all. It was her silly imagination running away with her.

Feeling as though a great weight had been removed from her, Sally conjured up a charming smile, and made to close the lid of the other case—the case that contained the incriminating jewels.

He also smiled.

"One moment, ma'mselle, please."

He dragged the incriminating case from her eager hand and swung it round.

"I'd like to look inside this one," he said, and reached down to lift out the clothes.

Sally felt the strength ebb from her limbs. With horrified eyes she watched him clutch the evening frock that lay on top. He was going to search, after all. In another moment he must find the jewel-cases.

Merciful heavens, what could she do? How could she stop him? Now her guilt must seem certain. Oh, what a fool she had been! Why hadn't she shown him the jewels—tried to explain things to him? Why had she tried to trick him!

Paralysed with dismay, Sally stood there, lips quivering, tears in her eyes. Flinchingly she awaited his startled shout—the shout which would inevitably mean arrest and prison for herself!

THE RISKS SALLY TOOK

THE Customs man lifted the evening frock out of the case, and then, just as he dived his hands in again to seize the remaining garments, it happened.

Without warning the lights went out!

The long examination shed possessed no windows, and a crowd of jostling travellers and porters blocked the two doorways, with the result that though it was broad daylight, inside it became as black as night.

Startled screams arose from some of the feminine passengers, and then came a fresh diversion as one of the porters stumbled in the sudden gloom, and caused a heavy trunk to go crashing over the counter.

For a few moments all was confusion. Sally felt herself pushed and almost knocked down, then abruptly the lights went on again.

"It's all right, ladies and gentlemen," an official called. "No cause for alarm. Someone accidentally knocked against the switch."

Sally, still bewildered and shaken, turned back to the counter, to see the Customs man continuing his search as though nothing had happened.

Desperately she tried to smother her agitation. With dull despair in her heart she waited for the incriminating jewel-cases to be found.

But to her surprise no accusing cry came from his lips. Though he had gone carefully through every garment, he did not seem to have found anything amiss.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, ma'mselle," he said with an apologetic smile, "but we have our duty to do, you know. However, I will try to re-pack everything carefully."

Sally stared blankly.

There was no sign of the three jewel-boxes in the suitcase! They had disappeared!

Speechless with wonder, she watched the official replace her clothes and then close the lid and put his chalk mark on it.

"There we are, ma'mselle," he said at last. "You are free to go now."

Mechanically Sally took the case, mechanically she flashed him a grateful smile. Then, her head in a whirl, she made her way to the doorway.

She felt a wave of relief flood over her. She had escaped detection, after all. But what had become of those jewel-cases?

She gave a startled gasp as she remembered the sudden extinction of the electric light.

"It wasn't an accident at all!" she told herself. "It was a cunning trick to smuggle out the jewels!"

But who had taken them under cover of darkness? The black-bearded stranger, of course. Either he or the porter.

Emerging from the shed, Sally paused, trying to decide what to do. She couldn't let the thieves get away with their booty; on the other hand, if she told the police, she herself might be arrested.

If they believed her story, they would think that she had tried to smuggle the cases through.

"I must get them back myself," she muttered. "Those villains can't have got far away, and if only I could see them—"

With sudden resolution she dropped her cases to the ground and hurried along the platform, scanning every passer-by, looking in the waiting-rooms, searching everywhere for the mysterious, black-bearded individual.

And then, suddenly, she glimpsed a vaguely familiar figure standing outside the station. He was clean-shaven, but there was no mistaking the black hat he wore.

"That's him—I'm sure of it!" Sally told herself. "That beard must have been false, and—yes, there's the porter! He's wearing an overcoat, but it's him, right enough!"

Breathlessly she stared over the station railings. The two men were whispering together. They seemed in the best of spirits.

As Sally stood there, racking her brains, she heard an agitated voice hailing her. Turning, she saw Mrs. van Dell waving from a window of the waiting train.

"Hurry up, my dear! The train's due to leave in a minute," the American woman cried.

But Sally, as she saw the two men hail a taxi, came to a desperate decision. Her own private affairs must wait. Impatient as she was to see her brother, she could not go on to Lucerne—not now.

The stolen jewels must be her first concern. She felt responsible for them. It was thanks to her, in a way, that they had been stolen. It was her duty to get them back.

Behind her, carriage doors slammed. An official nodded to the guard. A whistle shrilled.

Mrs. van Dell, frantic with anxiety, shouted again.

"Quick, quick, my dear! Hurry up, or you will be left behind!"

Sally ran forward. She clutched her companion's agitated hand.

"I'm sorry, but I can't come with you!" she gasped. "I must stay here. I know it's awfully rude, but—well, it's impossible to explain. But I must stay—must!"

Mrs. van Dell stared blankly.

"Stay here!" she echoed. "But—my dear! Ph-ee-p!"

The guard's whistle cut her short. There came the hiss of escaping steam, a snort from the engine, and the train began to move slowly forward.

"Sally! Sally!"

But the train was gathering speed. One last glimpse Sally had of her agitated escort staring out of the window, then the express had gone thundering out of the station. The girl gulped as she stared after it.

"Mrs. van Dell will never forgive me for this," she told herself. "But I had to do it. I must find out what has become of those jewels."

She darted back to the fence and stared anxiously over. She dreaded lest the thieves might have gone. But no, they still stood there, waiting for the taxi they had hailed to swing round to the kerb.

With never a thought for her dropped suitcases, Sally rushed out through the booking-hall. She reached the station yard just as the taxi containing her quarry moved away. Frantically she signalled another car.

The driver could not speak English. Sally

knew only a few words of French. Desperately she tried to explain her wants.

"Follow that taxi—that blue one!" she gasped.

"Follow? Taxi?"

The driver scratched his head in bewilderment. Sally pointed wildly. She racked her brains for the correct French phrase, blurted it out, and then, to her relief, the man nodded.

"Oui, oui! I understand!" he grinned.

But the blue taxi was already disappearing up the tree-lined street. Surely she could never hope to keep it in sight! Sally experienced a dozen alarms in the next ten minutes.

Once her taxi was held up by traffic lights. She was on pins and needles lest the trail should be lost, but the car ahead was also blocked, and when the lights blinked to green again it was still in sight.

The thieves seemed to be making for the poorer part of the town, and suddenly Sally saw the blue taxi jolt to a halt outside a ramshackle little cafe.

Tapping on the window, she signalled her own driver to pull up. Leaping out, she thrust a ten-franc note in his hand and almost ran up to the cafe.

The men had disappeared inside. She peered through the steamy window, could not see them, so boldly opened the door and entered.

It was a frightening establishment. There was sawdust on the floor, and the air was thick with smoke. A number of burly, tough-looking men propped up the zinc-topped counter, and a solitary man, with a scar down one cheek, occupied one of the marble tables.

Of the two thieves there was no sign, and, hesitating in the doorway, Sally knew a pang of dismay. Every instinct urged her to withdraw.

"But I must find them!" she muttered, and, screwing up her courage, she crossed to a table and sat down.

A waiter, in a greasy apron, stepped forward. There was a suspicious look in his eyes.

"What does mademoiselle desire?" he asked, a leer twisting his thick lips.

"A—A cup of coffee, please!" faltered Sally, more and more wishing she had never entered this place.

Sally recoiled from the greasy mixture when the waiter returned. Never for a moment could she bring herself to drink it. But she paid the waiter, with a smile, and, under cover of studying the torn and dirty menu, she looked around.

Where had the two thieves gone? She was certain they had entered the cafe.

A curtained doorway to the right of the counter attracted her attention. Beyond it she glimpsed a dusty staircase. That explained the mystery of their disappearance. But dare she follow?

The mere thought made her shiver. Yet she could not leave without discovering what had become of the jewels. But for her they would never have been stolen. Unwittingly she had helped to rob her only friend.

"I must get them back!" the girl muttered.

And, seeing that the men by the counter were not looking in her direction, she screwed up her courage, and, rising, darted across to the curtained doorway.

Her heart in her mouth, she tiptoed up the stairs. A dark passage confronted her at the top. She crept down it to where a light gleamed from under a door.

The door stood ajar. From the other side came the mumble of voices. Breathlessly Sally peered into the room. What she saw made her gasp. Seated at a dingy table in the centre of the room were the two men she had shadowed. One of them was emptying out on to the cloth a glittering heap of jewels.

The Van Dell heirlooms!

Then her suspicions had been right! These two rascals had sneaked the jewel-cases from under the Customs official's very nose!

But how to get them back? Dare she steal downstairs and summon the police?

Even as Sally hesitated, the tall man in the black trilby spoke. He seemed to be amused.

"It was a rare joke!" he declared. "That fool girl might suspect, but she cannot prove anything! When we write to Hunter he will be tickled to death!"

Write to Hunter!

Then her guardian was in the plot! Sally had been certain of it all along, but here was definite proof. Her guardian was a common thief!

The knowledge made her shudder.

But, though horrified, Sally yet knew a strange relief. At any rate, she at last knew the truth, and, knowing it, could make her plans for the future.

Never again would she return to the Priory. Never again would she have anything to do with George Hunter.

She would go to her brother, learn all about herself from him, then the two of them would go away—it didn't matter where



Her heart in her mouth, Sally watched the Customs official open her suitcase. If he found the jewels her rascally guardian had hidden there she would be arrested.

"But first I must get the jewels back!" Sally told herself. "If only I can do that—"

Desperately she looked around. The man in the black hat had risen to his feet.

He made for the doorway, and Sally, her heart palpitating, her lips livid with fear, pressed back into the dark shadows of an alcove.

If she were discovered there— But that thought did not bear thinking of. Holding her breath, she waited in trembling apprehension, but the thief did not give the alcove a glance. Whistling cheerfully, he descended the stairs, and hardly had he gone than his friend emerged.

"Hi, Jules!" he called. "Just a minute! Bring me some—"

Realising the other was out of earshot, he broke off, and also went lumbering down to the cafe.

Sally gave an excited gasp. Her luck was in. Here was her chance—her opportunity to seize the jewels before the conspirators returned!

She darted into the room, clutched with trembling hands at the gems that lay on the table, and, with frantic haste, stuffed them in her handbag.

But even as she rammed in the last one she heard sounds of commotion from downstairs. Jules' voice rose above the rest.

"A girl!" he was bellowing. "What kind of a girl? One wearing a green hat, and you say she didn't go out through the street door? Then— Sacre bleu, it must be Sally Blythe!"

He finished with an alarmed shout, and Sally could hear him yelling to his crony.

"It's that girl of Hunter's, I tell you!" he roared. "She must have followed us here! Quick, you fool! Upstairs! She must be hiding there!"

Sally made a wild dart for the door, but, with a shiver of despair, she drew back again. Heavy feet were already pounding on the staircase. Jules and his villainous crony were already on the way up.

Her only way of escape was cut off!

YET ANOTHER SHOCK

TERROR in her eyes, Sally glared around her. To be discovered now would be not only to lose the jewels, but bring the crook's anger down on her head.

Panic-stricken, the girl ran across to the window. Eagerly she peered out. It gave on to a grimy courtyard, littered with empty boxes, rusty tin cans, and other debris. But a drainpipe ran alongside. Dare she try to venture down it?

But there wasn't time. Already Jules and the other man were racing along the corridor. In another moment they would reach the room.

There was only one possible way of avoiding detection, and Sally took it.

Clutching the precious handbag in trembling hands, she dived under the table. Crouched there, hoping against hope that the long cloth would mask her shrinking figure.

She heard the two men plunge into the room, heard their furious shout when they saw that the heirlooms had gone, then heard them charge across to the window and peer out.

"The tricky wretch must have climbed down the pipe!" declared the bogus porter.

"But there wasn't time! She must be hiding somewhere!" objected Jules.

Both rascals glared around, then rushed back out of the room to search the rest of the premises.

Hardly had they gone than Sally emerged from under the table and darted to the window. The perilous nature of that downward climb did not worry her now. She was too terrified lest the crooks should return and catch her.

Trembling, she clambered over the sill, clutched the drain-pipe with desperate hands and began to descend.

Hand over hand, not giving herself time to be frightened, Sally half-climbed, half-slid down the pipe.

A jump and she was on the ground, dazed and breathless. Terror made her leap to her feet. One frantic glance she flung upwards, then blindly she took to her heels.

Even when she reached a quiet street she didn't slow down. Careless of the amazed glances of passers-by, she ran on, desperately, blindly. It was sheer exhaustion that brought her to a halt eventually, and gasping, she looked around her.

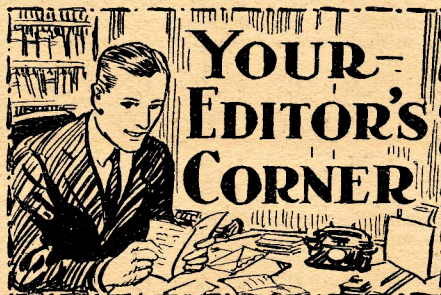
From the distance came the rattle of trams, the hooting of motor-cars. The noise brought the blood back to her cheeks. With a shiver of relief she realised that she was safe.

But what a nightmare it had been. Even now the memory of it made her heart thump madly. Not until she reached the railway station and sank breathlessly down on a seat on the platform did she recover from the shock.

Then, as she gazed down at the handbag that lay on her lap, she smiled shakily.

"I've got the jewels back, anyhow," she told herself.

And then a disturbing thought occurred to her. Suppose Jules and the other man succeeded in trailing her. Suppose they found her here? Despite the comforting presence of the railway officials, she did not feel safe, and agitatedly she jumped up and went to inquire about the next train to Lucerne.



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

HALLO, GIRLS!—When I picked up Jean Vernon's story for our next issue I got a terrific shock, for across the opening page was typed the title: "Miss Murdstone Tries To Be Popular."

Well, well, well, I thought, what is the world coming to. An icy shower bath in Iceland has a better chance of being hailed with glee than the tyrannical headmistress of St. Kilda's! Besides, what could Miss Murdstone's game be?

I was so intrigued that I couldn't rest until I'd read the story right through, and you will feel just the same, I'm sure.

The next Noel Raymond story is also unusually intriguing. Just listen to the title:

"The Mystery of the Talking Statue!"

The statue is a gigantic stone one that forms a landmark for sailors and it provides the foundation for detective adventures that will hold you spellbound. On no account miss reading about it.

Next Friday Tony tries her hand at a new kind of racing—she takes up speed-boating. The boat is owned by a mysterious young man she meets and, although the prize is only a cheap silver trophy, for some strange reason he is desperate to win it.

Then, of course, there will be another exploit of Poppy Binks. The factory girl countess becomes funnier every week, don't you think? I know she makes me roar with laughter.

Our three serials go from strength to strength. In fact I think you will agree that I have kept my New Year promise to make your favourite story paper better than ever, but I haven't finished the good work yet—not by long chalks! I have heaps of surprises in store for you, including another series of free gifts. It is too early to give details yet, but I can promise you that you will jump for joy when you read the glad news.

And now I must close. Cheerio till next Friday.

Your sincere friend,
THE EDITOR

To her delight one was due almost immediately. It was a slow train, but Sally did not care about that.

When the train steamed in, she clambered into a vacant compartment and waited fearfully, one eye on the station entrance. But to her relief there was no sign of the two men, and as the train drew out from the platform she realised her anxieties were over.

She was safe now. She could proceed to her brother's sanatorium, have a good talk with him, then return the jewels to Mrs. van Dell.

Thinking of the future, the tiresome train journey quickly passed. Once Lucerne was reached, Sally's first thought was to telephone to the hotel where Mrs. van Dell was staying.

The kindly American would be worried about her; at all costs she must put her mind at rest.

But when she got through to the hotel Sally learnt that Mrs. van Dell was out. So Sally left a message telling her she was safe and well.

She emerged from the telephone-booth and hailed a taxi. Now to go to Charlie! And wouldn't he be surprised to see her!

"Where to, ma'mselle?" asked the driver, as he held open the door.

Sally showed him the piece of paper she carried, containing the address of the sanatorium.

The driver frowned. "Reatox," he muttered. "I know that. It is a little village a few kilometres from here, but I did not know there was a sanatorium there."

Sally stared in surprise. "But there must be!" she protested.

"Well, we can but go and see," he said, and closed the door behind her.

Sally was too excited to look out of the window. For weeks past she had been worrying about Charlie. For weeks past she had been trying to get in touch with him, and now—at long last—she was on her way.

Immersed in her thoughts, she did not realise that the journey was over until the taxi jolted to a sudden standstill. She saw the driver descend and heard him questioning a passer-by. When he returned to the car he was smiling.

"The place you seek, ma'mselle, is at the end of the street," he said, "but it is not a real sanatorium. It is only a private house, where they take one or two patients."

Sally nodded in relief. The size of the place did not interest her. Impatiently she waited for the moment to come to make her call. The taxi whirled on for a couple of hundred yards and then stopped.

"This is it, ma'mselle," said the driver, and pointed to a card pinned on the gate. On it was printed the words: Reatox Sanatorium.

Sally paid the taxi off, then peered disapprovingly at the house.

"It doesn't look a very cheerful place," she told herself. "Still, it may be better inside than out."

Pushing open the gate, she walked up the weed-overgrown path, to knock at the front door. A gaunt, middle-aged woman in nurse's uniform answered. She stared at Sally surlily.

"Well?" she demanded. "Please I have come to see my brother," said Sally.

"Your brother?" "Yes, Blythe is his name. Charlie Blythe. He is a patient here."

"Oh, him!" The nurse gave a nod. "Well, I'm afraid you've come too late. He's gone."

"G-g-gone?" Sally gave an incredulous gasp. "Gone!" she echoed again. "But where to? When did he go?"

The nurse shrugged her angular shoulders. "He was taken away yesterday," she replied, "but I don't know where to. The people didn't say. If you want any information you had better communicate with his guardian—Monsieur Hunter."

And, with a nod to Sally, the matron closed the door.

What a shock this is for Sally, after all she has gone through! Don't miss next Friday's exciting chapters in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

The PERIL of the CHINESE SNAKE



Another Thrilling Adventure of Noel Raymond, Detective—Written By PETER LANGLEY

Her complexion was like ivory; her eyes dark and mysterious.

Others beside Noel were watching her; the buzz of talk was momentarily stilled.

Hesitatingly, the girl crossed the room, to pause at Noel's table. The young detective was conscious of her glance—a fleeting glance of strangely fixed intensity.

"The girl's afraid of something," decided Noel swiftly. "Scared stiff!"

He encountered her glance with a frank, boyish smile.

"I say, won't you sit down?" he asked, indicating the vacant chair. "Plenty of room."

With a graceful inclination of her head, the girl sank into the proffered chair; a little sigh escaped her lips, and her eyelids drooped wearily.

But the young detective sensed that this was a pose; the girl, he was convinced, was on tenterhooks—waiting for something to happen. From beneath her lashes she was watching him almost apprehensively.

Calmly he continued to smoke, as though unaware of the scrutiny. What on earth, he wondered, was a girl like this doing in Chang Fu's dive?

Something else puzzled him, too—puzzled and intrigued. The girl's features. They were scarcely Oriental, in spite of the yellow tinge of her complexion. An incredible suspicion took shape in Noel's mind. He determined to put it to the test.

"You smoke?" he asked, smilingly proffering his gold cigarette-case. "Good for the nerves, y'know."

The girl glanced at him quickly under her lashes then, hesitatingly, she reached out a slender hand for a cigarette.

Noel leaned forward with a lighted match, his interest quickening as he took the opportunity to study her face more closely.

He was convinced that he was right. The girl was acting a part—and secretly terrified! But—of what?

"You speak English?" inquired Noel casually.

The girl shook her head quickly.

"No—not much," she breathed.

"Too bad," said Noel, with a smile, and giving no hint of his thoughts.

His glance wandered from her face to her slender hand; she was nervously crumpling a roll on her plate. On one of her fingers she wore a ring—a curious ring, shaped like a twisted serpent, with a single ruby for an eye.

Casually he allowed his hand to rest for an instant on a tumbler of water, as he dipped his finger into the liquid.

"I say," he added boyishly, "that's a topping ring you're wearin'. May I see it?"

Without waiting for permission, he reached out, taking the girl's slender hand between his. With a moistened finger-tip he gently rubbed the ivory skin.

A glint of suppressed excitement crept into his eyes, as the yellow tinge came away—leaving a small patch of white skin.

As he had suspected—this beautiful girl was no Chinese; she was a white girl, masquerading for some desperate purpose of her own!

"A charmin' ring," said Noel softly. "But, tell me—why did you lie to me just now, when you said you couldn't speak English?"

The girl caught in her breath sharply, her dark eyes flashing a frightened warning.

"Don't worry," added the young detective, reading her thoughts. "I'm not goin' to give you away. But you're playing a dangerous game—coming to a place like this. If you want help, rely on me."

Unobtrusively, he pushed his card across the table. He saw the girl's glance fasten on it—her dark eyes light up. And then—

Noel turned his head sharply; his acute ears had detected a faint sound. Behind the girl's chair was a Chinese screen, embroidered with gold dragons. Even as Noel turned, he saw a hand—a yellow, claw-like hand—reaching out from behind the screen, towards the girl.

The young detective leapt like a panther; his hand closed like a vice on the yellow wrist.

"No you don't!" he rapped.

There was a crash as the screen overturned—revealing a wizened Chinaman, with a hideous scarred face, his yellow teeth bared in a snarl.

"You lettee me go!" panted the man.

"I'm not so sure about that," said Noel. "What's the game?"

A sudden commotion had arisen in the eating-house; there was a babel of excited voices. An evil-looking crowd commenced to surround Noel's table.

Noel flashed a glance at the girl; she was

This Week Noel Braves The House of Many Dangers in a Desperate Effort to Save Father and Daughter from the Vengeance of a Ruthless Secret Society

sitting, pale and motionless, like an ivory statue, her nervous fingers playing with a crumbled roll.

"It's all right," he said softly. "Let me handle this."

His grasp tightened on the Chinaman's wrist as the other attempted to wriggle free.

"You let me go," repeated the other hissing, "for my friends—"

Noel caught the glint of a knife as one of the approaching men slipped a hand from under his blue tunic.

In a flash Noel's free hand flew to his pocket.

"I suggest you fellows stand back," he drawled. "I'm a pretty good shot—an' if my finger slipped on the trigger it might be painful."

The group huddled back uneasily, staring at the ominous bulge in the young detective's pocket.

"Where's the owner of this dive?" demanded Noel.

An elderly, wrinkled Chinaman shuffled forward, rubbing his hands.

"I, Chang Fu," he announced in a sing-song voice. "That man my hon'able friend, Li Fang."

"That so?" inquired Noel. "Well, ask your honourable friend what he was doin' behind that screen, terrifying a young lady?"

Chang Fu spread out his hands.

"Which young lady?" he inquired blandly.

Noel glanced round and gave a violent start. For the chair behind him was vacant; the mysterious girl had vanished!

The young detective's face paled; his eyes glittered angrily as he released the cringing man and sprang back, overturning the table with a crash.

Incredulously he stared round the dingy restaurant. It seemed impossible that the girl could have gone without his seeing her—without a sound.

There was some scoundrelly trick here, and he meant to get to the bottom of it. Vividly he recollected the haunted terror in the girl's dark eyes.

"Look here," he rapped, "a young lady was sitting at my table a few minutes ago, and she's not left this room of her own accord. What's the game, Chang Fu? You speak up plenty quick, or I'll put a bullet through someone!"

The Chinaman cringed back.

"I not know what you mean," he whined. "Young lady maybe frightened and left by side door."

Noel eyed him narrowly, and his glance flashed to the evil faces of the other men. He took a step forward and his foot crunched on something.

Instinctively he looked down; beneath his foot was the roll of bread that the girl had crumpled. The young detective stiffened, a curious expression flashing into his eyes.

Protruding from the roll he could see the end of a scrap of paper.

Noel gave no hint of his discovery. Still confronting the menacing group, his hand thrust suggestively into his coat pocket, he backed away, kicking the roll with his heel.

"Where's that door behind you lead?" he demanded sharply, addressing Chang Fu.

Instinctively every eye was turned. Noel bent swiftly, and the scrap of paper was in his hand.

"That another door to steeet," explained the Chinaman. "You can search house—or sendee p'lice. Chang Fu got nothing to hide."

Noel was pretty sure of that. The girl, he was convinced, had been smuggled out of the restaurant! This disturbance had been a trick to lure his attention away while the girl was overpowered and whisked out of the cafe.

Still keeping the crowd covered, he backed towards the door and stepped through it swiftly into the narrow street.

The young detective smiled grimly as he produced the object that had bulged his pocket.

It was a battered briar pipe.

"It bluffed 'em!" he remarked, "but it was a near shave! And now—"

His smile faded suddenly as he unfolded the scrap of paper he had taken from the roll.

On it had been written the figure 9 in pencil, followed by a half-finished word: "Gelt—"

"The girl tried to leave a message for me,"

Noel told himself, "but the villains grabbed her before she could finish it—possibly they drugged her. But what does Gelt mean? It sounds like part of an address."

With sudden decision he raced to the end of the street, and, hailing a crawling taxicab, was driven to the nearest post office.

Here he consulted a street directory; and, in the end, his efforts were rewarded.

"Gelttham Street, East," muttered Noel. "No. 9, Gelttham Street!"

Ten minutes later he was ringing the bell of a big, gloomy house situated close to the river-side.

The door was opened noiselessly by a suave Chinese servant.

Noel put his foot in the door.

"I wish to see your mistress," he said calmly. "Is she at home?"

To his surprise, the other nodded.

"My hon'able mistress returned just now," he returned. "Will you come this way."

Noel showed no trace of his surprise, but his mind was racing.

Had the girl left the restaurant of her own accord? It was possible.

His pulses quickening, he followed the Chinese servant across a richly carpeted hall, furnished in typically Oriental fashion.

The man drew aside a beaded curtain and bowed.

"The gentleman is here," he announced.

Noel stepped swiftly into the room, allowing the curtain to fall behind.

He found himself in a boudoir, hung with silken curtains, embroidered with gold dragons.

On a low divan in the centre of the room beneath the soft light of a swinging lamp, reclined a girl, her face veiled.

"I've come," said Noel quietly, standing motionless.

The girl raised herself on her elbow, throwing back her veil.

The young detective started back.

For the girl on the divan was a Chinese—unmistakably! This was not the girl he had encountered in the restaurant.

He had been tricked!

THE HOUSE OF SECRETS

THE young detective's mind worked swiftly. In a flash he dismissed the thought that the girl in the restaurant could have been a party to the trick.

He remembered vividly the terror that had shone in her dark eyes as the claw-like hand came from behind the screen.

An English girl masquerading for some mysterious, urgent purpose, as a Chinese; a white girl who had fallen into a diabolical trap such as Chinese minds alone could devise!

And that message concealed in the crumpled roll—and intended for his eyes; it could only mean one thing. She had been afraid of what might happen—and had wished him to call at this house.

Well, he was here; and he intended to stay here till he got to the root of the mystery!

The Chinese girl on the divan smiled at him.

"You wish to see me—yes?" she inquired, in husky, broken English.

Noel determined not to beat about the bush.

"There is some mistake," he said bluntly. "I called to see a young English lady who, I believe, lives here."

He was watching the Chinese girl closely, but her slanting eyes betrayed nothing of her thoughts.

"No Engleesh lady lives here," she replied. "This is the house of my father, the hon'able Ki Ming. You have, perhaps, come to the wrong house?"

Noel's hands clenched at his sides. The girl was trying to bluff him—but she had not succeeded! There were certain aspects of the room not in keeping with its Oriental character—yet typically feminine.

A small writing-bureau, with a shelf of books—books of English verse and novels; a leather-bound diary; a dainty, silver-backed brush and comb on a table in the corner; and a silver inkstand with supports carved to represent a pair of hockey-sticks!

These things did not fit in with the languorous Chinese girl reclining on the divan.

This room, Noel was convinced, was not hers!

But how could he prove his suspicions? He returned the other's gaze steadily, determined to play for time.

"I'm awfully sorry," he remarked with apparent candour. "I seem to have made a stupid mistake. I suppose you couldn't help me? I have a packet to deliver, containing something of vital importance."

That was sheer bluff—but he could see by the slight narrowing of the girl's almond eyes that she was interested.

"You will leave the packet here—yes?" she murmured, leaning forward. "I will ask my father to make inquiries."

Noel smiled grimly; he had anticipated this.

"If your father would be kind enough to see me, Miss Ki Ming," he murmured. "Perhaps we could come to some arrangement."

Would the Chinese girl fall into the trap? He watched her narrowly, noting her suppressed eagerness. With an almost feline movement she rose to her feet.

"I will fetch my hon'able father," she murmured, "if you will wait here."

She glided across the room, and the curtains hid her from sight.

In a flash Noel's careless manner vanished; he was galvanised into activity.

A girl's life might depend on the next few minutes!

In one noiseless stride he reached the little writing-bureau and attempted to open it; but it was securely locked. Time would not permit of any attempt to force the lock.

Snatching up the little leather-covered diary, he glanced at it swiftly. It was a loose-leaf diary, and a number of pages were missing from the front; the remainder were blank.

The young detective was about to put it down in disgust, when he detected that the top-most leaf was faintly indented by the impression of pencil-marks.

His eyes glinted. Listening intently, to make sure that no one was approaching, he took from his pocket a small piece of charcoal, and, blackening his finger-tip, rubbed it lightly over the page.

Almost at once the indented writing was revealed, with a few gaps.

"Am worried . . . father . . . not returned . . . Chinese secretary . . . Limehouse . . . must do something . . . the Snake Tong . . ."

That was all; but it was sufficiently significant!

Swiftly tearing out the vital page, Noel slipped it into his pocket; his face was a rifle pale—his eyes grim.

The Snake Tong!

Noel knew something of Chinese secret societies and their diabolical methods. That brief, pitiful entry could mean only one thing.

The mysterious girl in the Chinese restaurant had gone there after making that entry.

"Father . . . not returned . . . must do something . . ."

A gallant, desperate effort on the part of a plucky, unprotected girl to probe the sinister secrets of the East for the sake of someone she loved!

Noel's heart turned cold as he thought of the girl's peril. Was he too late?

Who were the people in this house—and were they connected with the tong?

The young detective's eyes narrowed as he heard the soft sound of approaching footsteps.

Tearing another page out of the diary, he made a swift sketch of an entwined snake, with the word "Tong" beneath.

He was casually lighting a cigarette as the Chinese girl entered, followed by a Chinaman in immaculate morning dress.

"My father, the hon'able Ki Ming," she announced, glancing at Noel from under her lashes.

The young detective gave no hint of his discoveries; he smiled boyishly as he greeted the new-comer.

"There seems to have been some mistake, Mr. Ki Ming," he remarked. "I was given to understand that a young English lady lived here—with her father."

He was watching the man narrowly as he spoke, but the other's suave, parchment-like features were inscrutable.

"I believe," replied the Chinaman in perfect English, "that an English gentleman and his

daughter used to reside here. No doubt that is how the mistake occurred. I do not know their present address, but if you have any message, I will see that it is delivered to the proper quarters."

His tone was so convincing that, had it not been for that poignant message, Noel might have been swayed in spite of himself.

As it was, his lips tightened a shade more grimly. He realised that he was up against no common opponent.

"I'm sorry," returned Noel. "The message is of a private nature. I shall have to make inquiries elsewhere. I must apologise for troubling you, Mr. Ki Ming."

With a slight inclination of his head, and a bow to the girl, the young detective turned away. As he did so, he deliberately dropped the scrap of paper on which he had scribbled the word "Tong" and the mark of the entwined snake.

Concealed in the palm of his hand was a small circular mirror, and as he made a pretence of flicking the ash from his cigarette, he was watching the reflection of the man and the girl.

He saw the man stoop swiftly and pounce on the scrap of paper. For an instant the impassive yellow face was convulsed with fury. He signalled to the girl, who reached out to jerk a silken cord half concealed by the tapestries.

The young detective stiffened, prepared for a trap; he wished he had brought his revolver—but it was too late for regrets.

"I wish you good-evening," remarked the Chinaman. "My servant will show you out."

As noiseless as a shadow, the Chinese servant appeared in the doorway—a stooping, vulture-like figure in his loose-fitting blue tunic.

The young detective's nerves were taut; he knew that if he dared relax his vigilance for an instant, his life would not be worth a moment's purchase.

With apparent unconcern, he stepped through the doorway and across the thickly carpeted hall.

The servant was walking close behind him—and suddenly, in the surface of the little reflector, Noel caught the glint of steel!

He had been prepared for this—and he acted in a flash. Spinning on his heel, his right hand shot out, seizing a yellow arm as it descended, armed with an ugly knife!

Noel saw red. His bunched left fist came round with a swing; there was a dull crack—and the Chinese servant fell like a log, without a groan.

The whole thing had taken place in a matter of a few seconds and with scarcely a sound beyond a faint scuffle and a thud.

There were beads of perspiration on the young detective's forehead as he bent to pick up the ugly, twisted knife.

"The fiends!" he muttered, under his breath. "And they've got that girl in their power!"

There was not an instant to lose. Soon the suave Chinaman would appear to see if his instructions had been carried out.

Noel slipped the knife into the pocket of his overcoat and strode swiftly to the front door, flinging it open.

The slam it made in closing reverberated through the house.

The bead curtains were jerked aside, and the suave Ki Ming darted into the hall, followed by his daughter.

The girl pointed to the huddled figure of the servant, and with a furious ejaculation Ki Ming strode across to the unconscious man and kicked him.

The man merely groaned.

"The young fool has escaped us," said Ki Ming, in a soft, vindictive undertone, "but he has failed in his object. It shall be my pleasure, Yuni, to see that the doctor and his daughter undergo special suffering for this."

The girl flung back her head and laughed—a laugh of wicked anticipation.

"Come!" said Ki Ming softly. "We are due at the meeting."

He jerked aside a bead curtain, and, followed by the girl, vanished from sight.

For a moment nothing happened; then a tall lacquered cabinet, standing at the side of the hall, swung open noiselessly—and Noel

Raymond stepped out, his face grim, his eyes glinting.

The slamming of the front door had been a trick; not for an instant had Noel any intention of leaving this house of sinister secrets till he had solved the mystery of the English girl's fate.

He jerked aside the bead curtain—to find himself in a long, dimly lit passage.

Noel realised that he was taking his life into his hands in venturing thus far, but the thought of danger merely added zest to the adventure.

And before his eyes was the mental vision of a girl's tragic, beautiful face—and a pair of eyes that looked at him in silent pleading.

The passage wound and twisted interminably, but finally the young detective came to a curtained doorway.

Drawing a deep breath, he jerked aside the curtains—and entered a dim, barely furnished room.

The room was deserted! There appeared to be no other door, and the narrow, barred windows gave no possible means of exit.

And yet Ki Ming and the girl must have come this way!

IN THE SNAKE SOCIETY'S POWER

THE yellow-clad figure straightened itself, with an unpleasant, high-pitched laugh.

"A spy," came the husky mutter. "It is good. Our honourable leader, Ki Ming, will grant me honour for this work."

Stepping forward, the masked man peered into the young detective's pallid face. With a satisfied grunt, he grasped the muddled figure by the shoulders and dragged it across the room towards the door.

Then, bending down, he moved a small lever; immediately, a gaping opening appeared in the floor.

Below was a narrow cellar, dimly lit by a grating through which could be glimpsed the turbid waters of the Thames.

"At high tide," murmured the man softly, "there will be no trace."

He stooped to lift the motionless figure. At the same instant Noel's eyes opened and his muscles tensed.

He had sensed the would-be assassin's intention a moment before the latter fired, and had flung himself face down in the nick of time!

Now, with startling unexpectedness, he leapt



Noel had just discovered that the supposed Chinese girl was English when he got an even greater shock. Round the screen came a yellow, clutching hand!

Noel stared round in perplexity, his gaze passing from the bare, boarded floor to the peeling walls and sparse furniture.

Then his glance rested on the fireplace, and his eyes narrowed.

While the floor, for the most part, was thick with dust, there was a semicircle in front of the rather ornate mantelpiece that seemed to have been swept clean.

The young detective took a quick step forward, groping for his torch.

At the same instant, the curtains screening the door behind him parted noiselessly—and a tall, sinister figure stepped into the room, clad in a yellow silken robe, embroidered with a twisted serpent, and wearing a yellow mask.

Not a sound escaped the figure's lips, but its hand rose slowly from its side—and a revolver glinted wickedly in the dim light.

Noel was standing motionless, leaning forward, his gaze fixed on the polished surface of the marble mantelpiece.

The yellow-clad figure took deliberate, cold-blooded aim, and pressed the trigger.

There was a sharp, deafening report.

With a strangled groan, Noel Raymond fell face down on the floor.

to his feet—and closed with the astounded man.

The other, though taken by surprise, was not easily vanquished. Powerfully built and muscular, he fought with the strength of a madman.

Nearer and nearer to the dark opening they swayed; the young detective felt himself being forced backwards.

Death seemed very near; he could hear his opponent's heavy breathing, and could see the evil glitter of the man's eyes behind the slits in his mask.

And just then, through the silence of the sinister house, came a girl's muffled scream!

The sound seemed to brace the young detective's flagging strength; gritting his teeth, he braced himself for a final effort.

The girl was here—in this house—in the hands of the merciless Snake Tong!

IN a room draped in sombre black velvet, embroidered with golden serpents, were grouped eleven masked figures in robes of yellow silk.

In a high-backed chair at one end of the room, her wrists and ankles tightly secured

with thin cords, was the girl of the Chinese cafe, though no longer was she disguised.

Standing in front of her, a suave smile on his impassive face, stood the Chinese secretary, Ki Ming.

"I regret, Miss Elmsford, to have to take these extreme measures," he murmured, "but as you chose to interfere, you must take the consequences."

The girl stared at him unflinching, though her lips were trembling and her dark eyes were wide with horror.

"My father!" she whispered huskily. "Where is he?"

Ki Ming's features underwent a change; a sudden hatred glowed in his slit-like eyes.

"Your father is here," he said harshly, "to answer for his crimes before the Council of the Chinese Snake!"

As he spoke he reached out, striking a brass gong that hung against the wall.

As the booming note echoed through the room, the heavy hangings were drawn aside, and a grey-haired man, securely bound and gagged, was thrust into the room by two burly Chinese servants.

A choking cry escaped the girl's lips as she caught sight of him.

"Father!" she sobbed. "Father—what have they done to you?"

The man's face was convulsed with agony as he stared at his daughter, attempting to speak.

"Remove his gag," ordered Ki Ming. The order was obeyed.

"You—you unspeakable scoundrels!" choked Professor Elmsford. "You have brought my daughter here—"

"My dear professor," put in Ki Ming smoothly, "the young lady chose to interfere in matters that did not concern her. We would have been content with your death, but, in the circumstances, we are compelled also to kill your daughter."

"Doreen!" groaned the professor. "Doreen—why did you follow me? These scoundrels

drew, with his fountain-pen, the rough outline of a snake.

One by one the masked figures inserted a hand into the bowl and drew out a folded slip.

When all had drawn Ki Ming gave a signal for the papers to be unfolded.

Barely had he raised his hand, when No. 13 gave a husky shout, and held out his scrap of paper—bearing the fatal mark!

"You are honoured above all, brother," murmured Ki Ming. "The prisoners are yours—to do with as you will. We can rest assured that the punishment will be adequate."

No. 13 inclined his head.

From beneath his robes he took a knife—and, beckoning imperatively to the two prisoners, he led them towards the opening.

Father and daughter walked close together, neither speaking—their glances meeting as if for the last time.

Barely had the curtains fallen behind them than one of the other masked figures gave a sudden shout, flourishing a scrap of paper.

"Ki Ming! I, too, have the mark of the snake! There has been trickery!"

Ki Ming's face was suddenly convulsed.

"No. 13!" he choked. "An impostor! Quick—cut off their escape!"

The angry shout reached the ears of the two prisoners and their masked guide as they stepped through the secret door into the barely furnished room above.

In a flash the robbed figure snatched off his mask—revealing the white, tense features of Noel Raymond!

Checking the girl's startled cry, he snatched out his knife, cutting her bonds, then, turning swiftly, he cut the cruel cords that bound the professor's wrists.

"Great heavens!" gasped the professor. "Who—"

"No time for explanations!" rapped Noel. "They've seen through the trick. We've got to run for our lives! This way!"

Seizing the girl's arm, he raced for the door, the professor close at his heels.

daughter—get her out of here and secure help."

For a second or two the professor hesitated. He disliked leaving the young detective; on the other hand, he had his daughter's safety to think about, and Noel seemed to be getting the better of the snarling Chinaman.

"I won't be long," the professor declared. "I'll soon have the police here. Come on, my dear."

He grasped the frightened girl by the arm, and together they went racing on down the passage.

Noel heaved a sigh of relief when they had gone. He knew that he was not out of the wood yet. There were still plenty of other enemies lurking in this House of Secrets.

With a sudden twist he forced his assailant to drop the dagger, and then, tearing free his other hand, Noel sent it crashing out in a sledgehammer blow that sent the Chinaman toppling limply to the floor.

But even as the young detective straightened up, gasping, there came a chorus of angry yells, and he saw half a dozen other blue-bloused Orientals racing towards him.

His escape was cut off.

His enemies were between him and the street door!

Despite the desperate nature of his plight, Noel did not lose his head. Snatching up a heavy carved table that stood against one wall, he flung it at the on-charging Chinamen, then, turning, he flung open a near-by door and dived through into the room beyond.

With a gasp of relief he saw that the key was on the inside of the lock. In the nick of time he turned it. From the passage came furious howls, and fists banged on the door, then the whole structure quivered and rattled as the tong-men flung themselves against it, tried to batter it down.

Noel looked swiftly around, then raced to the window. Flinging it open, he clambered over the sill and let himself drop down to the path below.

As he fell on hands and knees, the door above burst open, and a horde of Chinamen surged into the room, to come leaping through the window after him.

One crashed on top of the young detective, knocking him flat. In a flash Noel found himself hemmed in, but, even as he started to fight desperately for freedom, he heard the screech of police whistles.

Help was at hand!

The professor and his daughter, having escaped, had raised the alarm and swiftly blue-uniformed figures came rushing to the rescue.

AFTERWARDS, when Ki Ming and his murderous compatriots had been led away by the police, Professor Elmsford explained.

"The tong have been on my tracks for years—ever since I helped to break up their organisation in China. I thought, though, that I had hoodwinked them.

"I never dreamed for a moment that my secretary, Ki Ming, was a leader of the order—or that he persuaded me to rent this house for a secret purpose of his own."

Noel looked at the girl, whose dark eyes were filled with tears as she clung to her father's arm.

"Miss Elmsford," he said, "why did you visit Chang Fu's cafe in that disguise?"

The girl swallowed hard, smiling through her tears.

"Daddy had gone," she whispered, "and I was afraid. You see, I'd heard about the Snake Tong. I found out that he had gone to Limehouse—and traced him to the cafe. But—but they were too clever for me, and while your attention was distracted they drugged and kidnapped me."

"Miss Elmsford," said Noel, his eyes gleaming admiringly, "had it not been for your plucky action, your father by now might have been a dead man. I thank my lucky stars for the fog that took me to that cafe!"

"And I," whispered the girl, her dark eyes shining with gratitude, "thank them, too!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE TALKING STATUE."—That is the title of next Friday's thrilling detective story. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL now.

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know no mercy. Merciful heavens—" He turned pleadingly to the impassive Ki Ming. "Have pity! Kill me, if you must—but my daughter—she has done nothing—"

"She is your daughter," put in Ki Ming unemotionally, "and she must die. We await but the coming of our thirteenth member—before drawing lots. He is engaged in silencing an interfering young fool who chose to cross our path—"

A choking sob escaped the girl's lips. "Noel Raymond!" she breathed. "Then—then all is lost—"

Just then, the velvet curtains parted—to admit a tall, masked figure clad in yellow silken robes, who bowed low before Ki Ming.

"The task is done?" inquired the secretary. The newcomer inclined his head.

"It is good," said Ki Ming. "One fool less to hamper the Society of the Chinese Snake."

He turned to his twelve masked companions and pointed dramatically at the grey-haired Professor Elmsford.

"This man," he said calmly, "saw fit to give information to the police in China of the activities of our brotherhood there. By his action we were forced to flee our country; and those of us who remain are determined to enact vengeance—in full!"

There came a low murmur of assent.

"The mode of his death," went on Ki Ming, "will be left to the brother who, by the turn of Fate is destined for the honour of executioner. Come, let us draw lots."

A big, lacquered bowl was placed on the table.

Into this, one by one Ki Ming dropped folded slips of paper—blank, except for one on which, before the eyes of the company, he

A rush of footsteps sounded behind them, as the masked brotherhood of the Chinese Snake streamed from the secret opening behind the fireplace.

"Run!" snapped Noel, releasing the girl's arm. "Escape and fetch the police!"

He halted, and, bending down swiftly, grasped the end of a long cord.

Even as Ki Ming reached the door Noel jerked the cord—which he had attached to the concealed spring of the trapdoor against an emergency such as this.

The trap opened with a thud—and, with a howl, Ki Ming vanished; two of his masked companions stumbled after him before the alarm was given.

In the confusion that followed the young detective beat a swift retreat, but as he went racing after the professor and his daughter he got a shock.

One of the Chinese servants had intercepted the two fugitives and was menacing them with a dagger.

For one startled moment Noel stared, then, charging round the corner, he flung himself at the Chinaman.

The rascal showed his teeth in a vicious snarl and lunged out with the keen-bladed weapon in his hand. But out shot the young detective's hand. His fingers closed around his assailant's wrist and arrested the downward stab.

Next moment they were both swaying and slithering across the passage, fighting desperately for possession of the dagger.

The professor made as though to come to Noel's aid, but the detective shook his head.

"Never mind me," he cried. "I'll soon settle with this blighter. You look after your

The GIRL WHO GAVE UP LUXURY



By
**DIANA
MARTIN**

STRANDED IN LONDON

WITH the chill rain beating into their faces Pamela Drake and Jenny Bright stood on the wharfside, staring silently at the sluggish, oily water of the river Thames as it rolled by.

Neither of them had a penny. Moreover, now that the excitement of the day had passed, they were both conscious of gnawing pains of hunger.

Since Pam had set out that morning on the track of Jenny, kidnapped by the orders of her scoundrelly uncle, James Thorpe, she had not had a bite to eat. Nor had it occurred to Sam and Ella Bright, Jenny's bogus parents, to offer their captive any food while she had remained in their clutches.

Apart from that, Jenny had received a really severe blow on the head during the fire in the slum house which had been her prison.

"We must find somewhere to sleep," cried Pam. "We haven't any money, so—" she broke off and gave vent to a sudden laugh. "Jenny, the barges!"

"Eh?"

"Supposing we sleep on one of the barges?"

"Oh, love us! One of them, you mean—"

And Jenny gazed down in wide-eyed surprise into the river, where a dozen empty barges lay all moored together. "But supposing," she asked doubtfully, "there's someone on them?"

But Pam wasn't supposing anything of the sort. The barges certainly looked deserted. Most of them were empty, but two or three, still awaiting complete unloading, showed tarpaulin sheets that glittered with an inviting sheen and certainly promised dry cover if nothing else.

With a gay laugh, she caught Jenny by the hand, tugging her towards the wharfside.

"Here we are," she said. "I'll go first, Jenny." And she tripped down two or three granite steps which ran right into the water, holding out her hand to Jenny at the bottom. "All right?"

"You bet!" Jenny cried.

"Right!" And Pam stepped aboard the first barge. "Oh, Jenny, what luck!" she cried

though I wouldn't be sure. Perhaps they have another name for it on barges. Be careful, Jenny."

"I am being careful, Pam," Jenny promised, "but, crumbs, don't you know a lot. You know, Pam. I wish I knewed—knew all the things you know; I'd just love to be as clever as you are, Pam. But I say, this is a bit of all right," she added admiringly as they stood knee-deep in warm hay under the tarpaulin sheet. "And dry, too. Love us, a reg'lar home from home, isn't it, Pam?"

Wasn't it just! Pam laughed. She loved the smell of hay. She loved the deliciously warm feel of it about her ankles. Under the protecting tarpaulin the two waded in the stuff, bundling it together to form a warm, soft bed. It was so snug, so warm, that Pam decided that they could each risk parting with their wet outer clothes, which they very gladly did.

"Oh, this is lovely," Jenny sighed, when at last in complete darkness they lay side by side. Pam smiled and nodded.

Such luxury it was after the draughty shelter of the wharfside! So utterly and comfortably peaceful somehow, with such a strangely tranquil sensation of being far away from the outer world and all its complexities and its problems.

But what an adventure it all was! That she, Pamela Drake, who until a few weeks ago had never known any resting-place other than the luxury of her divan bed at Thorpe's house, should be glad—and thankful—to find herself snatching a night's lodging in an old barge on the Thames!

Pam Revelled in Her New Life of Luxury—Little Did She Guess the Unhappiness it Would Bring to Her Friend, Jenny

delightedly. "It's hay, and—look, here's a little ladder running into the bottom of the hold."

"The what?" Jenny cried.

"The hold," Pam laughed. "This—this great place where the cargo is stored. At least," she added, with a laugh, "I think they call it a hold."

It was the queerest experience Pam had had since she had given up luxury and left her rascally uncle in order to make her own way in the world.

"What's the joke, Pam?" Jenny asked as her friend chuckled.

"Oh, nothing!" Pam said. "You go to sleep, Jenny. You must be frightfully tired after all you've gone through during the day."

"But I don't want to go to sleep," Jenny sighed. "You know, Pam, I can't hardly believe it even now. That you and me—you and I, I mean, should be friends, you know. I never thought a young lady like you are, Pam, would ever give me a second look. I sort of feel all funny inside when I think about it. It seems too good to be real, somehow; but it is, isn't it?"

"Of course it is, silly," Pam said. "Poor, dear Jenny! What a friend she was!"

Jenny, who had never known a mother's love nor a father's solicitude, who had been brought up in a school of hard knocks and blows, the prey of two brutal ruffians, who had passed themselves off as her parents, while she, Pamela Drake, had been enjoying the luxuries and the comforts that should have been hers.

Fiercer, stronger than ever that instinct of protection rose within Pam. They lay there talking for a while, then they fell asleep, and when they awoke it was morning.

The sun was shining, and from the wharf-side came shouts of activity.

"Goodness, we'd better hurry and dress!" Pam said. "We don't want to be caught here!"

They rose, hastily donning their clothes. Fortunately, they were almost dry now—dry enough, at least, to be wearable. Rather cautiously they crept from under the tarpaulin, across the floor of the barge, and stealthily mounted the ladder. Pam, with one quick, guilty look to right and left, whispered down:

"All right, Jenny! Nobody about! Come on!"

They crept out, not without apprehension, half-expecting any moment to hear some stern authoritative voice demanding to know what they had been doing. But everything was still and silent. A few figures moved farther along the wharf. Out in the middle of the river two tugs were getting under way, but they were the only signs of life.

Without mishap they reached the wharf-side, and there took counsel again. Now that the excitements of yesterday were over, they both became conscious of growing pangs of hunger, for it was twenty-four hours since either of them had eaten.

Apart from that, there was the question of morning toilet. Pam, at least, was very conscious of a certain crumpledness, and put even before the question of food the matter of a wash and brush-up and a general refresher.

For her own private part, Jenny would have vetoed the bath, contenting herself with a wash in the river; but respect for Pam's wishes, a desire to be a lady like Pam, made her refrain from saying so.

What she said was:

"Well, I do feel a bit of a tramp myself. I've got some of that hay down the back of my neck, you know, and it's tickling like fun. But how are we going to get a bath and breakfast, Pam, when we haven't got a penny between us?"

Pam smiled.

"But we've got my coat," she said.

"You mean—you're going to sell it?"

"Why not?" Pam asked.

"Oh, but look, Pam, it's a lovely coat!" Jenny said warmly. "And you know what they give for second-hand clothes!"

"Can't be helped!" Pam said cheerfully. "Come on!"

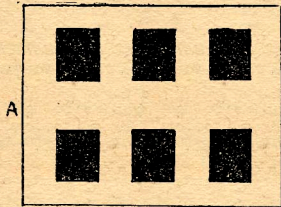
TRIXIE'S TRICKS



PENCILS and paper out, girls! Here are some more puzzles for you to exercise your wits on. And if any of them prove too difficult—the answers are on page 18.

FULL SPEED AHEAD!

The form monitress was late in filling up the ink-wells on each desk. To do this she had to enter the door at A on the diagram below, completely encircle each block of desks, and put the ink-bottle on the mistress' desk at B. What was her quickest way round?



(1)

Can you change SEED into TREE by changing one letter at a time? Only five changes are allowed, and each change must make a complete word. (2)

TAKE A DEEP BREATH—

and say this quickly: The beet that beat the beet that beat the other beet is now beaten by a beet that beats all the beets, whether

the original beet that beat the beet or the beet that beat the beet that beat the other beets!

You might not think so, but there are three GIRLS' CRYSTAL story titles written below. Unfortunately the printer for some reason has put X in the place of all the vowels.

XWXLXBXLXNDXNXSTXGXSTXR.
THXGXRLWHXGXVXXPLXXXRY.
PXPPYBXNKSCXXXTXSS. (3)

FIFTY-FIFTY!

The first word below contains the first three letters of an animal and the last three of a bird; while the second word contains the first three letters of the bird and the last three of the animal:

BANTED.
GRENIL. (4)

I'm afraid the Fourth-Former who gave this definition of an isosceles triangle didn't come top! "An isosceles triangle has three of its sides equal and any one of them parallel to the third!"

If a bottle and a cork cost three halfpence, and the bottle is worth 1d. more than the cork, how much did the cork cost? (5)

Can you think of a three-letter word which is an insect, yourself, and a drink, yet altogether is only a piece? (6)

They went on—rather vaguely for Pam, whose knowledge of London was confined to the West End, and was not familiar with this district.

But, presently, arriving at a high road full of shops, they came across a wardrobe dealer, and Pam, with the coat on her arm, stepped in. The man behind the counter stared at her when she made known her errand.

"Not bad!" he said, fingering the collar. "Real beaver collar that, isn't it? Give you ten bob!"

Ten shillings! Goodness knew how many guineas her uncle had given for that coat—and it was a Paris model at that! But Pam was growing wise, and, less inclined now to take the first offer that came along, shook her head.

"Make it a pound."
"Can't be done. But—look here, I'll give you twelve-and-six."

"Old robber!" Jenny sniffed.
But twelve-and-six it was. Coat and money changed hands. The old robber grinned, complimenting himself on a good bargain. Pam, without any regret, slipped the money into the pocket of the tweed costume she was wearing. She and Jenny turned to go, when the dealer's voice accosted them.

"Hey, wait a minute, miss. There's something in one of the pockets."

Pam turned back. And then her heart leapt. The dealer had fished out an envelope. Oh, great goodness! It was the envelope

containing the story she had intended to post to John Arnold, the editor of the "Modern Magazine," and which, in the excitement of past events, she had completely forgotten.

She remembered now the telegram he had sent her to let him have the story at the earliest possible moment.

"Oh, thank you!" she smiled, and then, seized with a new idea, turned excitedly to her little friend when they were outside. "Jenny!" she cried. "I've got it!"

"Eh?"
"Look—the story!" Pam laughed. "Jenny, after we've bathed and breakfasted, we'll go along and see Mr. Arnold. I'm dying to know what kind of man he is really. And—and if he likes this, perhaps he will pay for it—which means, old thing, that we shall have enough money to pay our fares back to Wrenborough. And— Oh, Jehosaphat!" she cried breathlessly. "Jenny, remember to-day? You're supposed to start work at Mr. Warren Walford's!"

Jenny laughed. Her eyes shone then. Her job—her job with Pam, helping Pam! It seemed all at once that the tide of fortune had turned. No longer penniless, they turned boldly into the first hotel they reached. A rather dingy and shabby hotel it was, but it had the virtue of being cheap, and the great luxury of possessing the bath which both of them so urgently needed.

Washed, dressed, smartened up, and with a good meal to hearten them, Pam and Jenny felt fit enough for anything.

"Now we've got four shillings left!" Pam cried delightedly, when they tripped out of the hotel. "Enough to see us to the 'Modern Magazine' offices, Jenny. Now, where is it—wait a minute. Oh, I know—the Strand! Keep your eyes open for a bus."

They kept their eyes open for a bus. One was soon forthcoming. Delightedly they boarded it, and at Jenny's eager suggestion, sat on top—to see, as Jenny described it, "the sights."

The bus rolled off through Chelsea, over Vauxhall Bridge, where Pam, with a shriek of delight, recognised Victoria Station, the first familiar landmark she knew.

Then a glimpse of Westminster Abbey. How Jenny's eyes widened at sight of that imposing structure! Along Whitehall, where she was goggle-eyed and entranced at sight of the colourful Life Guards. Round Trafalgar Square, down the Strand, and finally near the Lyceum Theatre, where they alighted.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Jenny.

She was quivering with happiness and excitement. Jenny had never seen London before. It gave Pam the keenest pleasure to point things out to her, to listen to her breathless and excited comments. But outside the new white office of the "Modern Magazine" she halted, just a little nervous.

"Oh, Pam, shall I wait outside? Mr. Arnold won't want to see me!"

"Rubbish! Come on!" Pam laughed.

They stepped into the marble-walled hall. A commissionaire approached, asking Pam her business. Jenny, licking her lips, shrank at sight of him.

"I want," Pam said impressively, "to see Mr. Arnold, please."

"Have you an appointment, miss?"

"No," Pam stated. And then, reflecting: "Well, I have. He sent me a wire yesterday. I've called in answer to that."

"I'll send up your name," the commissionaire told them. "Meanwhile, will you step into the waiting-room?"

Into the waiting-room they stepped, Jenny showing her awe as she looked about her.

She never could have believed, she throatily confided to Pam, that people really worked in such a place as this, and anxiously pushed her hair into place and took a critical survey of herself as she nervously seated herself on the edge of a chair. A smartly uniformed girl came in.

"Miss Drake, Mr. Arnold will see you at once!"

"Thank you," Pam said serenely. "Jenny, will you wait here?"

"Oh crumbs, dud-don't be long," Jenny stutted nervously.

Pam smiled. She left the room. The lift took her to the fifth floor of the building. Her heart was beating a little faster than usual for all her outward composure.

She had pictured John Arnold so many times in her fancy. Now that she was on the point of meeting him, she felt a sort of nervous terror take possession of her, but she did not show it. Head high, step firm and steady, manuscript in her hand, she followed the girl as she led the way along a tessellated corridor.

At a mahogany door labelled "J. Arnold, Private," the girl paused and knocked. A deep, pleasant voice bade her "Come in!"

"Miss Drake, sir," the girl said, and Pam found herself face to face with the editor.

PAM MEETS JOHN ARNOLD

JOHAN ARNOLD rose from his desk. The first sight of his face put Pam at her ease at once. She knew from that moment that she was going to like him. He was all—and more—that her imagination had pictured for her.

She saw a tall man with a strong yet studious face, hair that was naturally untidy, growing a little grey at the temples; but his smile, Pam thought, was the friendliest thing she had ever seen.

"Well," he said, and then again: "Well! This is indeed a pleasure Miss Drake!"—and

his eyes travelled over her admiringly. "You are even younger than I thought. Will you sit down—"

Courteously he drew an easy chair towards the fire for her.

Pam smiled. What was it about John Arnold that seemed to fascinate her, to compel her admiration? All the kindness in the world shone out from those eyes of his. The interest he showed in her, she sensed, was not merely superficial. Indeed, he was staring at her.

Had Pam not been staring equally hard at him, caught up suddenly in a most overwhelming sensation, she might have remarked that his interest was quite inordinate. She felt fascinated, thrilled.

"I see," his voice, gently caressing, broke upon her, wrenching her mind back from some nebulous plans which had no possible connection with the purpose of her visit, "that you have brought your manuscript in person, Miss Drake. I am glad. I was getting rather worried, as I send my copy to press tomorrow."

"Oh, yes," Pam voiced confusedly. "It—is here," she said.

"You would like me to read it now?"

"Oh, if you'd be so kind."

"A pleasure," he murmured.

He sat down, taking the manuscript. Again Pam, fascinated, thrilled, found her eyes upon his face.

What a kind, gentle face it was! How patient and yet bearing the marks quite patently of suffering—as if he, too, had had some big trouble in his life which had left its imprint upon him. He looked up.

"This is good stuff—very good stuff, Miss Drake," he said. He gazed at her again. "An improvement, if that is possible, on your first story."

Pam blushed.

"Oh, Mr. Arnold, it's nice of you to say that."

"Thank you. I don't usually say nice things, however, without meaning them." He gazed at her thoughtfully. "Miss Drake," he said, "I believe that you have a future in front of you as an author. You will write—yes, you will write things of which the world will be proud. At the moment you are inclined to be far too ambitious, however. You remember I told you in an earlier letter that what you required was experience of life?"

Pam smiled. Great goodness, what experience of life had she not had since that letter!

"Yes."

"I see," he added, "you took my advice seriously. Your recent work shows definitely that you are going out for that experience. But there is another sort of experience which you also require, Miss Drake—and that, if you do not mind me saying so, is editorial experience. There is nothing more valuable to a budding author than to serve some sort of apprenticeship in an editorial office. There, of course, you handle other people's manuscripts; you work upon them, read them, discuss them, train yourself to discover their faults."

Pam's eyes shone.

"Yes, of course; I see that."

"All of which, either consciously or unconsciously, must influence your own writing. I have always maintained that a year's experience on the staff of a paper is worth ten trying to fight your way in from outside. I am interested in you. I would like to help you. And—I do not know your circumstances, of course—but if ever you feel inclined to serve on the staff of a paper, Miss Drake, let me know."

Oh, he was ripping—ripping! To work on the staff of his paper! Pam's head was inclined to whirl at the very thought—but, of course, she could not desert Mr. Walford. How easy, though, it was to talk to this man. In a few minutes every barrier had been broken down. She found herself telling him eagerly of her hopes, her ambitions—yes, and even of her circumstances and her friend Jenny. He smiled.

"I see. Well, Miss Drake, you are certainly doing your best. Keep it up, keep it

up, and remember whenever you want a job, don't hesitate—come straight to me. Now, about payment for this story—"

Oh, it was all so delightfully easy. Apprehensive and nervous, Pam had gone into that office. Highly delighted, she came out, two guineas in her pocket, but feeling that she had indeed gained a friend. She was rapturously excited when she met Jenny.

"Oh, Jenny, I'd love you to meet him!" she enthused. "He's so kind, so gentle, somehow. And isn't it just lovely to think that I can have a job whenever I want one?"

"Yes," Jenny said, in a stifled voice, through which she tried desperately not to betray the twinge of jealousy which had nipped her.

But Pam didn't notice that. She was in high feather. Money they had now, and off at once they went to Euston. As luck would have it, a train was in the act of leaving for Wrenborough. Gaily they boarded it. Two hours later they were walking out of Wrenborough Station.

"And now," Pam said, with a laugh, as she fondly squeezed her little chum's arm, "to Walford Lodge, Jenny, and our job together. Aren't you excited?"

Jenny was. She was almost quivering with excitement indeed. Her eyes shone with happiness. To work with Pam! To be with Pam! To live with Pam! Surely little Jenny Bright could visualise no greater pleasure. With every fibre of her fierce little nature she loved Pam. She was jealous of Pam, jealous of every moment that she spent out of her chum's company.

She was trembling when finally Pam rang the bell of Walford Lodge. In the interval they waited with surreptitious and nervous hands brushing imaginary specks of dust from her clothes. She almost held her breath when the butler appeared.

And then—

The bottom fell completely out of Jenny's world and out of Pam's when the butler, with a grave face and a mournful shake of the head announced:

"I'm sorry to tell you, Miss Drake, that we have received orders to close the lodge for an indefinite period. Mr. Walford's little daughter, Peggy, has met with a serious accident in France, and Mr. Walford has decided for the time being to remain over there with her and his wife. He told me to tell you that he will see you upon his return, and meantime to hand you a week's salary in lieu of notice."

And he handed to the blank-faced Pam an envelope.

BACK TO LUXURY

"WELL!" was Jenny's forlorn verdict. "That's torn it, Pam! We're out of a job again."

"Oh Jenny, I'm sorry!" Pam said impulsively.

Jenny smiled twistedly.

"So am I. But you know I had a feeling that it was too good to be true. Well"—wearily—"I suppose you'll go to London now to take the job that Mr. Arnold offered. It's not right that you shouldn't, Pam." How it cut Jenny to the heart to say that! "You've got your way to make in the world. That job will help you to make it."

"But Jenny, you!" Pam cried.

Jenny shook her head.

"Oh, I'll get along!" she said. "Pam, you go—please. I don't want you to think of me. I ain't—aren't clever like you are, and it's not fair that I should keep you away."

Jenny tried hard not to be selfish, tried so desperately to think only of Pam's welfare.

But she ought to have known Pam better. She ought to have known that her friend wouldn't desert her.

"Jenny!" Pam said. "I'm going to London—but not without you. I'd rather not have the job if it's going to mean being separated from you."

"But, Pam—"

"Jenny, you'd like to go to London?"

"Oh, Pam, you know I would, but—"

"And see all the lovely sights? The cinemas, the theatres—" Pam laughed gaily. "Then that's settled, Jenny. Now, no more talk, please, because we've such heaps and heaps to do. First, back to Mrs. Sales and settle up with her. Then pack. Then some lunch. And—oh goodness, I simply must send a telegram to Mr. Arnold—right away! Jenny, come back with me to the post office and look up a train while I write the wire."

"Yes, Pam," Jenny said gulpingly, not knowing whether to be apprehensive or excited. So off to the post office they went. Then, as it was midday, to lunch. Two o'clock it was before they reached Mr. Sales' apartment-house, where that good lady was met and settled with. There followed all the excitement of packing. They were on the point of leaving when another telegram arrived.

"Oh crumbs, who's it from, Pam?" Jenny gasped.

Pam hurriedly tore it open. Then her face lit up.



"Jenny!" cried Pam in distress, but her friend rushed out of the room unheedingly. She could stand no more of Greta's spite.

"Shall not be at office when you arrive, but will meet you at Euston."

"JOHN ARNOLD."

"Oh laws!" Jenny gasped. "Pam, he must be fond of you."

Pam laughed. The telegram thrilled her. How nice of John Arnold, she thought, and dimpled again as she remembered her interview with him.

What a rush, then, to get to the station—catching the train with a second only to spare, with Pam in a gay, laughing mood, Jenny a little nervous, trying to share her friend's excitement, but rather nervous, if the truth be told, of the new life which awaited them.

Euston came, porters shouting. Pam laughingly lifted the bag out with one hand and extended the other to Jenny. Then a voice:

"Miss Drake!"

And there was John Arnold, quiet, courteous, smiling, with a girl of Pam's own age, dressed in a rich fur coat, standing by his side.

"My niece," he introduced her. "Greta Winch. Greta, this is Miss Drake, whose story you read and liked so much. Greta is staying with me until her parents come back from abroad," he said.

"Yes, rather," Greta dimpled. Her eyes fastened glowingly upon Pam. She extended one slim suede-gloved hand. "I'm frightfully pleased to meet you, Miss Drake—or let me call you Pam," she added.

Admiration shone in her eyes. Pam liked her at once. But Jenny, suspicious, hung back a little.

"This is my friend, Jenny Bright," Pam said.

"Oh!" Greta glanced at her. "I say, aren't you lucky—having a friend like Pam," she said.

But there was not the same welcome in her eyes as she stretched out a hand towards Jenny. There was, indeed, just the hint of supercilious disdain. She hardly touched Jenny's hand, before gushingly she had turned to Pam again.

"I say, this is really ripping!" she said. "Really. Uncle's got the car outside, and we're going to take you back home—that is, unless you have other plans."

"Oh, how nice of you!"

"Not at all."

In laughing group they walked on up the platform. Greta immediately appropriating Pam, linking her arm in that of her own. The action was noticed by Jenny. A fierce little pang of jealous resentment shot through her. That should be her place, she thought furiously.

But Mr. Arnold was speaking to her. Very nice Mr. Arnold was, thought Jenny, not like that starchy, stuck-up thing he called his niece.

"And you have plans, Miss Bright? Miss Drake has, of course, told me all about you. You will, of course, find some situation?"

"Y-yes, I—I suppose so," Jenny said.

"Are you fond of writing?"

"Who, me?" Jenny shook her head. "Not me," she said nervously. "I can't write for toffee. I'm not clever like Pam is, you know. She's got the brains. All I'm good for is working in a factory or scrubbing floors."

"Oh, come, Miss Bright."

"But I am!" Jenny insisted, anxious that he should run away with no false notions.

There was silence. But by now they had reached the car. Greta was laughingly bundling Pam in—just as if, Jenny thought resentfully, she had known her all her life. She climbed in herself. Mr. Arnold courteously assisted her, and Jenny, red with embarrassment, plunged down upon a seat. The car whirled off.

Where they went neither Pam nor Jenny knew at that time. Pam, happy, animated, was thrilled. The ride was a long one, but finally the car stopped outside a large detached house that was one of a street of other luxurious detached houses. John Arnold held the door open.

"Well, here we are, girls. Miss Drake, I forgot to mention it, but, knowing your circumstances, I have taken the liberty of setting aside a room for you and your friend. It would be a great pleasure to me if you would stop the night."

"Oh, Mr. Arnold!" Pam cried, overwhelmed.

In they went, Jenny glowing. How lovely the place was, she thought. Its magnificence almost scared her. Oh crumbs, how she wished she were like Pam—Pam, the lady born, seeming not one whit put out, looking so used to it all, acting with that dignity and grace which Jenny so enviously admired. Pam wouldn't be out of place in the king's palace, she thought. But she—

She caught the eye of Greta, smiling a little scornfully, a little contemptuously. She flushed.

"Oh, Pam, come up to my room and change!" Greta gushed.

"But Jenny—" Pam said.

"Oh, Jenny will be all right, won't you?"

"Y-yes," Jenny said, in a thin whisper.

But there was something like rage in her heart as the possessive Greta took Pam off upstairs. Very out of it, Jenny felt. Very frail, very forlorn all at once. Oh crumbs, she wasn't used to this! She was sure before long that she would do something to disgrace Pam. Eventually Pam reappeared.

"Why, Jenny dear, all alone?" she asked.

Jenny forced a smile.

"Oh, Pam—"

"What's the matter, old thing?"

"N-nothing," Jenny said, with a gulp. "Nothing," she repeated lifelessly. "But all this ain't—isn't— You know what I mean." then she jumped as the reverberating echoes of a gong pulsed through the air. "Oh, love us! What's that, Pam?"

"Only the dinner gong," Pam smiled.

"Oh laws, you don't mean we're going to have a meal?"

"Rather! Aren't you hungry?"

Jenny was. But she felt almost dismayed at the thought of eating among this luxury—in this fine house. When she saw the table, with its bewildering collection of knives and forks and silver spoons, and all its glitter, she knew almost a panic. But she was going through with it. Pam was a lady, and she was going to be a lady, too. She had to learn these sort of things. Might as well begin now.

"Oh, Jenny"—and Greta was at her side—"you sit here, will you—next to me? And which will you have—hors d'ouvres or grapefruit?"

"Gig-grapefruit," Jenny stuttered.

It sounded safer than the other thing.

"And you, Pam?"

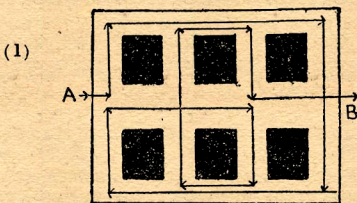
"Oh, grapefruit, please!"

The grapefruit came. Pam's eyes shone. She was hungry; happy, too. But Jenny was in the depths of apprehension. Frantically she looked to see what instrument Greta picked up, and Greta, with a sly smile, picked up a fork. Jenny picked up a fork, too.

Then:

From Greta:

SOLUTIONS TO TRIXIE'S TRICKS



2. SEED — Feed — FeET — FReT — FReE — TREE.

3. "I Will Be a London Stage Star"; "The Girl Who Gave Up Luxury"; "Poppy Binks—Countess."

4. Badger and linnet.

5. A farthing.

6. B—bee, I, T—tea; which altogether make BIT.

"Why, Jenny, do you usually eat grapefruit with a fork?"

And Jenny, flushing crimson with dismay, realised that the fork in Greta's hand had become a spoon. Hurriedly she changed.

That meal; it was torture to Jenny. It was rendered more of a torture by the sly, malicious treatment of Greta Winch.

Greta was laughing at her, she felt. Greta was sneering at her—she who had all those chances which had been denied her.

She hated Greta for the sly things she did. As, for instance, when a piece of grapefruit was clinging to the edge of her spoon, and she knocked her arm, causing it to fall to the floor.

Then again when Greta slyly kicked her ankle under the table, causing her to swallow a hot spoonful of soup at a spluttering gasp.

Jenny felt she was letting Pam down, and more than once she felt the eyes of John Arnold questioningly upon her. Worse still, Greta monopolised all Pam's attention—talking, laughing, joking with her, as unconcerned apparently by the process of eating as she herself was troubled. How she longed for the meal to finish! How she longed more feverishly and intensely to have Pam to herself.

Jenny felt she could manage the meat course fairly well—but she nearly sank through her chair when she found she was expected to help herself to vegetables from the soft-footed parlourmaid.

The girl held out the silver dish with potatoes in it.

Gingerly Jenny took the accompanying spoon and fork as she had seen Pam do.

"Oh—er—" Jenny nearly said. "How many shall I take, Pam?"

Then she saw Greta's eyes on her. So with a defiant gesture, Jenny took only one—the tiniest in the dish.

She didn't know whether she should thank the parlourmaid or not, or what to call her if she did.

So Jenny said nothing, and was just deciding she had come through an ordeal quite well, when down flopped her table napkin to the floor.

She bent to pick it up, and her confusion was even greater than before when she collided with the parlourmaid who had also stopped to retrieve it for her.

Never had Jenny enjoyed a meal less.

At last came the last course. It was strawberry-ice—well, at least, she could tackle that without making a fool of herself, Jenny told herself, and, snatching up a spoon, she commenced to convey it to her mouth.

Then:

"Oh, sorry!" Greta simpered.

Whoosh! The pile upon Jenny's spoon slipped; the ice fell. Jenny, with a yell, jumped up as it slid neatly down the neck of her blouse. She had seen that spiteful thrust at her elbow by Greta. She knew that had been no accident. Greta, monopolising Pam, was jealous of her. Greta wanted to show her up.

Jenny's resentment crystallised into flaming anger at the thought. She wasn't good enough for Pam.

Not for the life of her could Jenny suppress that fierce little instinct which rose within her then. Back went her chair as flaming in anger she rose. Crash went the chair against the sideboard. A glass toppled and crashed.

"You cat! You—you spiteful little cat!" Jenny panted. "You did that on purpose!"

"Jenny, I didn't!"

"Yes, you did!" sobbed Jenny. Then conscious of the disapproving faces, she ran out of the room. In a moment Pam was on her feet.

"Jenny—Jenny!" she cried palpitantly.

But the door slammed. In the hall Jenny's footsteps could be heard crossing the floor towards the door. The door opened and shut. Pam, with one wild look out of the window, saw Jenny running hatless down the drive as fast as her legs would carry her.

Will Greta's sly ways separate Pam and Jenny? (You will enjoy next Friday's instalment even more than you have done this. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.)

TONY THE SPEED GIRL



**THIS WEEK:
THE
BOGUS
CARNIVAL
QUEEN**

By GAIL WESTERN

THE GIRL WHO TOOK HER PLACE

I HOPE I come to a village before long. I don't want to have to camp out all night."

Tony Farrell's usually cheery face was just a shade anxious as she sent her racing car, the Silver Phantom, speeding along the lonely mountain road.

The Speed Girl was on her way to Monte Luna to take part in the annual carnival there. Not only had she been invited to become this year's carnival queen, but Don Baptista, the president of the fiesta committee, had asked her to become his guest during the gay celebrations in the popular Spanish resort.

It was a long run to Monte Luna, and as she was not expected until the following day, Tony intended to break her journey at the first village she came to.

But up here in the Pyrenees villages were few and far between, and now that it had become dark, the Speed Girl was getting just a little worried.

She sent the Silver Phantom roaring round a rocky bend, and then hurriedly slowed down, for ahead a warning red light could be seen.

And then, as she drew nearer, she saw that the light came from a lantern. A girl was running up the road, swinging the lantern as she came.

Seeing the Silver Phantom, she pulled up and waved frantically. Tony halted and anxiously surveyed the stranger over the wind-screen. The other girl was about her own age, with dark, flashing eyes, and hair dressed in Spanish style.

"What's the trouble?" Tony asked, speaking in French.

The stranger replied in the same language. "We have broken down—my brother and I!" she cried. "The car will not go. Do you understand the mechanics of the engine? My brother knows little, while I— Parbleu, but I am worse than helpless."

Tony smiled sympathetically. "Cheer up," she said. "I expect I can fix it, but I can understand how worried you must have been getting. There isn't much traffic along here at night, and it would be pretty beastly to be stranded all night."

"Beastly?" The other girl—Rosetta Huenz was her name—shivered. "It would be terrible. These mountains—I hate them! To spend the night amongst them—ugh!"

She made another gesture of disgust, then clutched Tony appealingly on the arm.

"But will you please come?" she asked. "The car is just round the bend."

Tony clambered down to the ground, took the tool-kit from the locker under the running-board, and followed Rosetta round the rocky bend.

The swarthy, thick-set young man who was

bending over the ramshackle two-seater straightened up as he heard the two girls approach. He hailed Tony with relief and in broken English began to express his gratitude.

The Speed Girl eyed the car wryly. It was a real old creak, only fit for the scrap heap. No wonder it had broken down on difficult roads like these.

"Will you hold the lantern for me?" she asked, bending over the open bonnet. "I do my own running repairs, so—"

She broke off and straightened up, for suddenly there had come the roar of another engine. There was something strangely familiar about its note, and the Speed Girl stared back along the road in startled surprise. "Why, that sounds like the Phantom!" she cried.

And the Phantom it was!
Too bewildered to move, the Speed Girl saw it swing round the rocky bend, an indistinct figure at the wheel. Then, before she could get over the first shock, she got another.

Rosetta brushed past her and jumped into the two-seater.

"Hold her while I start up!" she cried.

Next moment Tony found herself in the grip of the Spanish girl's brother. Furiously she struggled.

The Silver Phantom Was Given Pride Of Place In The Carnival —But It Was Tony's Enemy Who Was At The Wheel!

"Let me go! How dare you!" she gasped, and then, as the Silver Phantom went roaring by, and Rosetta switched on the other engine, she guessed the truth.

This hold-up was a plot to steal her car! The two-seater hadn't broken down at all. The waving lantern had simply been a ruse to lure her away from the Phantom while the third member of the gang boarded it.

Her face white with horror, her heart thudding madly, Tony wriggled and twisted in a desperate effort to tear herself free.

"You villains!" she cried. "To think that I was trying to help you when all the time you were—"

But that was as far as she got.

Suddenly her captor gave her a brutal push. For a few feet the Speed Girl tottered swayingly, then flat on her back she fell. Before she could scramble up, the swarthy man had leapt into the two-seater and shouted to his sister. She let in the clutch, and, bumping and rattling, the old creak lurched forward.

Frenziedly Tony regained her feet and flung herself forward.

"Stop!" she cried. "Stop!"
But only a jeering laugh answered her. The two-seater gathered speed and went whirling after the Silver Phantom; in another minute both cars had gone from sight.

The thought of spending the night in this desolate region galvanised Tony into action, so forcing her trembling limbs under control, she set off on foot.

It was a nightmare experience, trudging along that twisting, narrow road. The sharp flints cut through her shoes. The loose gravel made her slip, and it grew so inky black that she had to grope her way round the hairpin bends, clutching blindly at the rocky cliff, vividly conscious of the sheer precipices that yawned hungrily on the other side of the road.

Eagerly, desperately, she raked the darkness for a friendly light that would tell of some wayside cottage, but she failed to see one.

She might have been alone in a dead world. There was no trace of life anywhere—just rocks and gaunt trees and that narrow, terrible road sea-sawing up and down the mountainside.

Dawn found her still stumbling along, exhausted, aching, chilled to the bone by the clammy, early morning mist that had risen from the deep valleys.

And then, as she rounded yet another bend, her heart stopped still and the blood rushed back to her haggard face.

For there, beside a gigantic boulder, stood a car—the ramshackle two-seater Rosetta had driven!

Instinctively she looked around for the Silver Phantom, but there was no trace of it. No trace either of the three robbers.

Tony limped across to the deserted car, and when she had examined it she saw why the thieves had abandoned it. This time it really had broken down.

But lying on the back seat was her open tool-kit, and new hope crept back to her eyes.

"There's plenty of petrol in the tank!" she gasped. "So if only I can repair it I can drive on to the nearest village and get in touch with the police. Those villains may not have got very far. There's a chance of capturing them yet!"

Excitedly she set to work. It took her nearly half an hour to locate the exact trouble—more than two hours to rectify it. By the time, stiff and worn out, she clambered up behind the steering-wheel, the sun had risen and the morning was half over.

Catching a look of herself in the driving mirror, Tony gave a gasp.

"Goodness, what a fright I look!" she gasped.

Bumping and rattling, the ancient car lurched forward. The brakes were not reliable. Tony simply dared not open the throttle wide. Even as it was, it took all her skill to get the groaning, skidding two-seater round the dangerous bends.

But at last her pluck was rewarded. Ahead the mountains fell away, and in the distance she saw the grey roofs of a small village. It was nearly midday when she reached it, and by then she was at the end of her tether.

She had not eaten for over eighteen hours, and when finally she brought the car to a halt and stepped out she was so weak that she would have fallen if she had not clutched at the top of the door.

Seeing her swaying there, a blue-bloused peasant darted from a near-by house. He regarded her anxiously.

"Are you ill, *senorita*?" he asked in Spanish.

Tony shook her head and mustered together the few Spanish phrases she knew.

"N-n-no. I am all right!" she gasped. "But I want the police! Is there a police station here?"

"Police?" He shook his head. "No. The nearest police barracks is at Monte Luna. That is over sixty kilometres farther on!"

"Isn't there even a phone—you know, a telephone?"

Tony had a job to make him understand, but finally he again shook his head. No; also one must go to Monte Luna to telephone. The Speed Girl stared at him in dismay. It looked as if she must continue her bone-shaking journey; but, first, she must have something to eat, and a rest.

The peasant guided her to the local *posada*, or inn, and after hot coffee and warm food she felt her strength flowing back to her aching limbs.

Though she was desperate to put the police in search of the robbers, she forced herself to rest there an hour; then, after a refreshing wash, she drove off.

"I wonder what Don Baptista will think?" she asked herself, as she sent the ramshackle car slithering round a muddy bend. "I ought to have arrived there before now."

But it was no use thinking of that. Tony had more serious troubles to worry her, and before long she got another one. The two-seater again broke down.

This time even the Speed Girl despaired. Night had fallen before she managed to patch up the broken engine, and as there was no current in the batteries that worked the headlights she had to resign herself to putting up for the night. It would be inviting death to drive along these mountainous roads without lights.

She was fortunate enough to come across a cottage, and there she spent the night; but she was up early to continue her weary and seemingly never-ending journey.

What a nightmare it had been! And how thankful she was when at long last she saw the white stone buildings of Monte Luna glistening in the sunshine!

The roads were gaily decorated with flags and streamers, and the pavements were lined thick with people. As she coasted down the long hill that led into the town, Tony wondered for a moment what all the excitement was about, and then she remembered and smiled wryly.

Of course, the carnival! It was being held that morning, but there was no chance of her leading it. Her carnival costume was with the rest of her luggage in the Silver Phantom. Besides, by now the Pageant of Speed must have started.

The foot of the hill was blocked with a laughing, eagerly waiting crowd, and Tony had to pull up. As she looked around, hoping there might be a policeman on duty near by, she heard the strains of a brass band and the din of distant cheering.

The crowd in front of her began to shout excitedly.

"The pageant—look, here it comes!" yelled a peasant who had climbed a lamp-post in order to get a good view.

Realising it was impossible to proceed farther until the procession had passed, the Speed Girl stood upon the driving-seat and ruefully watched the head of the mile-long procession crawl round a bend in the road.

"I wonder who they made queen in my place?" she asked herself. "I wonder—"

Her voice trailed away and she stared incredulously. Surely she was mistaken! That couldn't be the Silver Phantom at the head of the procession!

Her eyes widened. Blankly she gaped. The procession drew nearer. Now the gaily decorated car at its head could be clearly seen and another startled gasp escaped the Speed Girl's lips.

It was the Silver Phantom! Her stolen racer was leading the procession, and at the wheel, smiling and proud, calmly waving her hand in response to the admiring cheers of the crowd, was—Rosetta, the girl who had been responsible for Tony losing her beloved car!

TONY IS NOT BELIEVED

THE Speed Girl could hardly believe her eyes.

Her first emotion was one of relief—relief at seeing the Phantom again. Then came a feeling of bewilderment. What did it all mean? Had her car been stolen in order that Rosetta could take her place in the carnival? It seemed so. And yet it seemed absurd. Surely the rascally trio would not risk prison in order to gratify Rosetta's whim?

And then, finally, boiling up from her heart, came anger—white-hot indignation.

The impudence of it!
To steal her car, to leave her to endure all the nightmare horrors of that wearisome journey down to Monte Luna, and then coolly to impersonate the girl she had robbed!

There seemed no limit to Rosetta's cheek, but she should not get away with this amazing impersonation unchallenged.

Impatiently Tony waited for the rest of the procession to pass by, then, when the crowd had thinned sufficiently, she started up the ramshackle old two-seater and swung it into the side road, attaching herself to the end of the pageant.

The procession ended in the market-square, and there was such utter confusion there that it took Tony nearly a quarter of an hour to push her way through the crowd.

By that time most of the competitors had dispersed, but a gendarme on duty outside the town hall told the Speed Girl that the carnival queen had gone up to the mayor's parlour.

"A reception is to be held there," he explained.

Tony thanked him and slipped by as soon as he turned away.

She had only one fierce thought in her mind—to confront Rosetta with her rascality at once!

Hearing voices from a near-by room, she darted across the wide reception hall. The guests were evidently gathered there, but before the Speed Girl could venture into the room the door opened, and out walked—Rosetta!

As she saw the grim-faced Tony the Spanish girl pulled up, as though shot.

"You!" she faltered, her cheeks going deathly white, and, panic-stricken, Rosetta rushed for the staircase.

"No, you don't!" Tony cried.

Like a deer she was after the Spanish girl. Thrusting out one hand, she grabbed the helmet the other girl clutched. Rosetta let go, and, the helmet in her grasp, Tony went lurching back.

Losing her balance, she crashed down the stairs. As she staggered to her feet there came startled shouts from the reception-room at the far end of the hall, and out through the doorway streamed the local mayor, Don Baptista, the carnival president, and a crowd of surprised guests.

They stared in bewilderment at the Speed Girl, who still clutched the helmet she had torn from Rosetta's grasp.

"How dare you create a disturbance here?" an official barked.

Wildly Tony faced the watching crowd.

"I—I'm sorry!" she panted. "I did not mean to create a scene, but I am the real Tony Farrell. That other girl is an impostor!"

"What?"

Grey-haired, distinguished-looking, Don Baptista strode forward. He stared incredulously at the dusty, dishevelled Speed Girl.

"What is this nonsense you say?" he demanded.

"It isn't nonsense!" gasped Tony. "It's the truth! That other girl is an impostor. She stole my car—"

"You mean you stole my car!" broke in a harsh voice.

Tony swung round in surprise. It was to see Rosetta's swarthy brother pushing his way through the crowd.

He bowed apologetically to Don Baptista, then pointed angrily at Tony.

"She stole my car!" he declared. "Left me stranded in the mountains!"

With an effort Tony took a grip on herself. She surveyed the swarthy rascal in horror.

"Oh, how can you tell such lies?" she cried. "It was you who stole the Phantom. You are in the plot with Rosetta—you and another man. Between you, you're responsible for Rosetta impersonating me."

Don Baptista stared blankly. The guests began to whisper amongst themselves. They hardly knew what to believe. It was Rosetta herself who settled the embarrassing situation.

No longer scared, but cool and haughty, she sauntered down the staircase.

"What does all this mean?" she demanded. "Surely you cannot believe that wretched girl. Just look at her!"

Tony, vividly conscious of her dusty overalls and oily face, blushed furiously, but before she could say a word Rosetta's brother chipped in.

"How did you get to Monte Luna?" he demanded.

"By car," faltered Tony. "In the car you abandoned."

"In the car you stole, you mean!" The man looked triumphantly around. "That proves it. Look!" He produced a document from his pocket. "That proves that the car belongs to me, and I say that girl stole it—I have witnesses to confirm it. Officer"—he turned to a gendarme—"arrest her! I charge her with theft!"

The Civil Guard reached out a detaining hand as Don Baptista, his kindly face grim and shocked, nodded.

"Take her away," he ordered. Angrily Tony struggled. But she was dragged across to the door and out into the market square.

Never had the Speed Girl known such humiliation before. She was almost glad when the police station was reached and she found herself pushed into a dark, gloomy cell.

The iron-barred door clanged behind her, and weakly she dropped down on to the wide wooden shelf which was to serve her as bed.

Even now her rioting brain found it difficult to grasp the nerve-shattering truth. Not only had she lost her beloved Silver Phantom, but she herself had been charged with theft.

HER RACE WITH THE EXPRESS TRAIN

"WHAT'S their game? Why have they taken so much trouble to prevent me becoming carnival queen?"

Tony asked herself the question as, the first shock over, she rose and examined the tiny room that would be her home until she could prove her innocence.

The iron-barred door looked out into a dark passage. The tiny window was set too high in the wall for her to look out. The only other feature of interest was a cupboard, containing a chipped mug, an enamelled plate, a knife, fork, and spoon, and a dilapidated time-table that some previous occupant of the cell had left behind.

Still wondering what deep motive was behind Rosetta's villainy, Tony returned to the wooden bed, to sit down and idly pick up her best driving helmet—the one which she had snatched from the impostor and which she had involuntarily clutched during all that hateful scene at the town hall.

"They must have some reason," she told herself. "Rosetta wouldn't act like this just to become Don Baptista's guest. Those three wretches must be playing some deep game."

But what could it be?

As she sat there, racking her brains, she kept twisting the white driving helmet in her agitated fingers. Suddenly she realised that the lining had been torn.

Angrily she surveyed the tear. "She can't even look after the clothes she's stolen!" she snapped.

She fingered the tear in the silk lining, and then suddenly her eyes opened in surprise. There was something hidden inside. Wonderingly she poked in her finger, to disclose a tiny scrap of folded paper.

Opening it out, she read the few words scribbled on it, and then her heart began to thump with shocked amazement.

"The combination is: MADRID. You should have no difficulty. Be wiser if we do not meet again until it is all over. Jean and myself will be at the station at five o'clock on Saturday. Train for France leaves at a quarter past. Pretend you have some shopping to do. You can easily fool Don B. Anyway, you must catch that train. It will be dangerous to stay on with the stuff. Don B. might have occasion to open safe, then the fat would be in the fire."

There was no signature, but Tony could guess who had written the startling message. Rosetta's brother! And clear as daylight was the whole villainous scheme.

Don Baptista was a collector of ancient jewellery. After receiving his invitation, Tony had looked him up in the Spanish equivalent of "Who's Who," and there she had learnt all about his wonderful collection of precious stones.

That was what Rosetta and her two accomplices were after!

Indeed, if Tony read this note correctly, the impostor had already secured possession of them.

No wonder the trio had waylaid her; no wonder Rosetta had impersonated the Speed Girl.

As Tony Farrell she was an honoured guest, and once her brother had discovered the secret of the safe's combination, it would be easy for her to open the safe, rob it of its precious contents, then calmly relock it again.

No doubt her brother had slipped her this note last night, and for safety Rosetta had tucked it away in the driving helmet. But for an accident Tony would never have discovered the truth—until the thieves had disappeared with their ill-gotten gains.

Jumping up, Tony crossed to the cupboard and took out the tattered time-table.

The 5.15 train, she discovered, ran non-stop to the French border. If once the crooks left the country it would be difficult to arrest them. At all costs they must be prevented from crossing the frontier.

But how—how?

Tony was still grappling with the problem when a gruff-looking gaoler brought her her dinner—a bowl of stew and a chunk of bread.

He laid it on the bed beside her without a word. The Speed Girl surveyed him keenly as he withdrew. Should she confide in him?

"No, I must do this on my own," she told herself. "It's useless trying to tell anyone. They'll only laugh at me. Now if only I could escape from here—"

But how? The door was locked, and the window, even if she could climb up to it, was too small for her to wriggle through.

Mechanically she ate her dinner, her desperate mind seeking some way of solving the problem of escape. All afternoon she spent in the same way, and then suddenly she jumped up with a gasp of despair.

Somewhere outside a clock was booming out the hour. White to the lips, she counted the resonant notes.

"—three—four—five!" she told herself, in horror. "Five o'clock already, and the train leaves at a quarter past! Oh, if only I could get out! If only—"

She finished with an excited gasp, and suddenly new hope flooded back into her veins. Through the bars of the door she could see a bunch of keys hanging up on the passage wall.

The keys of the cell doors!

If only she could reach them!

Desperately she racked her brains, then with trembling hands she took the belt off her dusty overalls. The buckle was fastened by means of a heavy, snake-like hook.

Swiftly she tied her helmet to the end of the belt, then, pushing it through the iron bars, she swung the weighted end to and fro,

jerking it convulsively so that the helmet hit the opposite wall of the passage.

Was the belt long enough to reach the vital bunch of keys? Yes! One wild swing caused the helmet to brush against the keys. Again she set it swinging.

Crash!

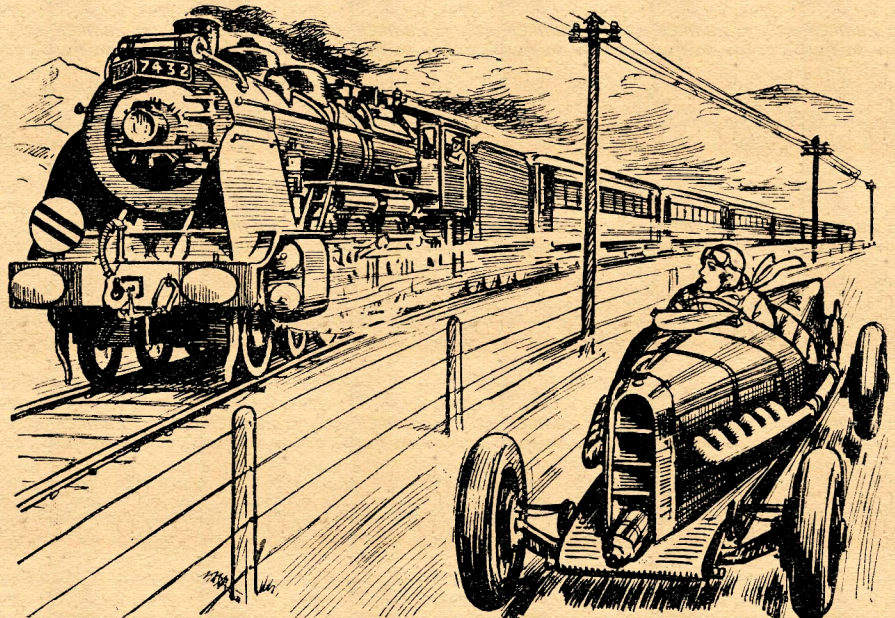
Jerked off their hook, the keys clattered to the stone floor. Tony held her breath. The blood was hammering in her veins. Had the surly gaoler heard the noise? The next few seconds were unbearable, but nothing happened, so the Speed Girl's fears faded.

With frenzied haste she tried to fish up the fallen bunch of keys. At last the hook on the belt fastened around the wire clip. Quivering, she cautiously drew in the belt. The keys jerked up from the floor, began to scrape up the door, and then—

Oh, what relief! What joy!

The precious bunch was in Tony's excited grasp. Hardly able to believe her luck, she tried them in the lock, one after the other. At last the lock clicked, and she was able to open the door.

Into the passage she stole. At the far end was a room. The door was open, and, peeping in, Tony saw her gaoler seated at a desk.



Desperately Tony strove to forge ahead. Unless she could reach the level crossing before the express, all hope would be gone of exposing the rascals who had been responsible for her arrest.

She went down on hands and knees, trembling with anxiety, she crept past the open door, crossed the passage, and then gleefully saw the front entrance of the police station before her, with the busy street beyond.

One desperate rush and she was free, but already it was nearly a quarter-past five. Could she possibly reach the station in time to prevent Rosetta & Co. from leaving?

The station was situated on the opposite side of the market square to police headquarters, but even as the Speed Girl reached it she heard the shrill blast of a whistle and the grinding of wheels.

Her eyes went up to the big clock over the entrance to the booking-hall. A quarter-past five! That must be the French express she had heard leaving.

Too late!

The crooks had gone, and once the French border was reached they would be safe.

But wait a minute. What was that standing over there, amongst a line of taxis and other parked cars? The Silver Phantom! Rosetta had used it to drive to the station, and had then abandoned it. But the sight of her beloved car made Tony gulp with joy.

Madly she rushed across to it, flung one glance at the petrol gauge, saw there was plenty of petrol in the tank, and scrambled aboard.

There was still a chance!

She might be able to race the train to the frontier station.

Switching on, she let in her clutch and sent the Phantom lurching forward. Out of the station yard she drove, out into the market square, and then, as she turned into the main road, her heart did a somersault.

From the police station angry shouts were coming. Her escape had been discovered! Looking back, the Speed Girl saw blue-uniformed figures yelling and gesticulating at her, but she paid no heed.

Down went her foot on the accelerator, and forward roared the Silver Phantom.

The desperate race had begun—express train versus racing-car. Which would win?

LIKE a silver thunderbolt the big racing-car went thundering along the road that led through the mountains.

Monte Luna had been left far behind. For two hours Tony had clung to the juddering steering-wheel. Only once had she stopped, and that had been for a quick survey of her road-map.

Piazza, the frontier station, where the express made its first stop, lay two hundred kilometres

to the north. For most of the way gaunt hills separated the railway from the road, but for the last ten kilometres the two ran side by side, crossing a wide plateau that led into Piazza.

The Speed Girl had no means of knowing whether she was winning or losing this desperate race against time. All she could do was to drive as fast as she dared and hope for the best.

The wind howled past her ears. The Phantom's madly whirling wheels flung showers of loose pebbles into the air. The super-charger screamed.

On the car rocketed—on and on. Hurling over narrow hump-backed bridges; slithering alarmingly round difficult bends; now charging savagely up steep, winding hills; now rushing at top speed down dizzy slopes.

Always there was a precipice on one side of the road. A slight slip, a momentary mistake, and the Silver Phantom would go crashing to the valley far below.

But Tony did not think of the danger. She did not even stop to wonder if the irate police were hot on her track. All she thought of was the vital necessity for speed.

Grimly she crouched over the wheel, measuring every bend, every treacherous section of the dusty road, with an expert eye.

Sw-oo-o-sh!

Round a jutting bluff of rock she hurtled, then under a natural arch, to drag on the wheel in the nick of time.

A rickety wooden bridge rushed to meet the car. Its crazy timbers cracked and snapped beneath the sudden weight. Tony held her breath. She caught a blurred glimpse of a rushing torrent two hundred feet below, then the bridge was past.

On and on! At times the speedometer needle flashed to the 100 m.p.h. mark; at others it sank to a mere 35.

A hundred kilometres. A hundred and ten—twenty—thirty! The miles went whizzing by, and at length the Speed Girl began to peer hopefully ahead.

Soon she would reach the open plateau. Then she would know the worst. Had she battled her way ahead of the train, or was the express still in front?

The suspense was agonising. So much was at stake. Only by securing the arrest of Rosetta and her accomplices could she prove her own innocence.

"I must expose them—must!" she told herself again and again, and in her frenzied anxiety she kept the throttle wide open.

But ahead now was open country. One last burst of speed, and the gaunt mountains were left behind.

With desperate eagerness the Speed Girl glared around. There, a hundred yards to the right, were the railway lines, but where was the express?

She looked, and then her heart sank.

It was still ahead!

White-painted coaches swaying, she could see the express in front, hurtling along at top

speed. Another ten kilometres, and it would be at Piazza. Once there, Rosetta and her companions would be safe.

Piazza was on French territory. The crooks could not be arrested without a lot of formalities. By the time Tony could convince the border officials of the truth, the rascals would have disappeared.

At all costs she must stop the train before the station was reached. But how? No time to think of that. First of all she must get ahead.

With trembling fingers she coaxed the controls; strove to get another ounce of speed out of the throbbing engine. Nobly the Phantom responded.

Faster, faster yet it went rocketing along the road. It was a race in grim earnest now. Despite her anxiety, Tony could not help but feel excited.

Racing an express train! What a thrill! Yes, and she was overhauling it now. She was sure of it. Every moment that passed saw the car creeping nearer and nearer.

Three kilometres whirled by, and less than twenty yards separated the Phantom from the tail coach of the express. Another kilometre, and Tony was drawing abreast of the engine.

Desperately she hugged the steering-wheel. Neck and neck the two giants of speed hurtled—on and on—and then suddenly Tony's pent-up feelings found relief in a wild, delirious whoop.

"Done it!" she cried.

The express had been left behind. The Phantom had leapt into the lead, and barely a kilometre ahead Tony saw a level-crossing. A daring idea in her mind, she sped for it.

The thunder of steel wheels and the hiss of escaping steam welled up from the distance, but all her attention was concentrated on that level-crossing now.

Whatever happened, she must reach it before the express.

And reach it she did, with half a minute to spare.

Bringing the Phantom to a slithering halt across the rails, she leapt out, beat a mad tattoo on the Klaxon horn, then, whipping off her driving-helmet, she went running back along the line, shouting and waving frantically.

Would the driver of the train see her? Would he at least see the Phantom?

There came a sudden snort of steam, the grinding of hastily applied brakes. The express was slowing down. Her desperate signals had been seen.

The driver was shouting to her. The fireman was leaping down to the metals. Carriage windows rattled down, there came a host of wondering cries as the train halted less than twenty feet from where the Phantom stood.

Tony, dazed and breathless, found the agitated guard running towards her.

"What is the matter?" he demanded. "Has there been an accident?"

Tony shook her head. Already she was clambering on to the footboard, tugging at a doorhandle.

"There are thieves aboard the train!" she gasped. "They must be arrested. Come with me. I will find them for you."

"T-t-thieves?"

The guard stared. The locomotive crew stared, too, then they leapt up after the Speed Girl. Breathlessly she led them along the corridor, peering into every compartment, ruthlessly pushing past the startled passengers who got in her way. And at last, in a first-class coach, she glimpsed three familiar figures.

Dramatically she flung open the sliding door; triumphantly she pointed.

"There they are!" she panted.

IT was a quarter of an hour later that the express was allowed to continue its journey. The police who had been pursuing Tony, Rosetta, her brother, and the Speed Girl herself, returned to Monte Luna. It was not the Speed Girl the Civil Guards escorted back under arrest—but Rosetta and her two rascally accomplices.

By now the whole truth had come out, and Tony's innocence had been proved beyond all doubt. But the apologetic policemen could not entirely undo all the wrong the Speed Girl had suffered. The carnival procession was over; she had been robbed of her proud role of carnival queen.

But there were still twelve more days of merrymaking in the town, and those, at least, Tony enjoyed—the conscience-stricken Don Baptista saw to that.

He, and Donna Baptista, his wife, could not do enough to make their English guest happy.

There were dances and parties in the evening. And during the day Tony was shown all the local sights.

She visited the schools and made friends with the children, who were so interested in the English senorita and her car that she hated leaving them.

He not only did his best to make Tony forget the terrible injustice that had been done her, but when, finally, after the happiest holiday of her life, she prepared to depart, he smilingly handed her a small packet.

"Just a little memento, senorita," he said. Wonderingly Tony opened the packet, then she gave a gasp of sheer delight.

"Surely—surely this isn't for me!" she cried. "But of course, senorita," he assured her. "I hope when you wear it you will think of Monte Luna and of me."

For a moment Tony could say nothing. Delight held her speechless; for the generous Spaniard's gift took the form of a brooch shaped in the form of a gold racing car, and in place of headlamps were two jewels—the pick of Don Baptista's collection!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Next Friday Tony goes in for speed-boat racing. Make certain of reading the exciting story of her adventures by ordering your GIRLS' CRYSTAL right away.

CLAUDINE'S CORNER



NOW THAT APRIL'S HERE

really isn't good enough if you're to be fresh and lovely.

Greasy hair also is not at all in keeping with April's mood. You can wash it quite regularly now that colds and draughts don't interrupt the ceremony so much.

THE SUN AS HAIR TONIC

If you're going without a hat this summer, now is the time to break yourself into the habit. When you go for walks, take your beret with you in case it rains—as it quite likely will!—but carry your beret when the sun comes out. All the bottled tonics on the market are not as beautifying as this, I can assure you.

Even the rain is good for your good looks. When you're out in it, don't keep your head down and huddle into your mae. Providing you are wisely clad in mac and stout shoes, there'll be no need to take shelter till the gentle shower is over.

Lift your face up to the rain and breathe deeply of the sweet air afterwards. At home again you'll be astonished at how smooth and clear and glowing your skin is. And that "good-to-be-alive" feeling will result from the deep breathing.

But there will be April sunshine as well as April showers this month, so your good looks must match this, too.

Pay special attention to your mouth. Keep your breath sweet and your teeth sparkling. A change of tooth paste is often very beneficial to the teeth, while a visit to the dentist will set any fears of decay at rest for at least another six months.

Then, knowing that your mouth is at its prettiest, you won't be afraid to smile.

No fear then of not looking your best!

WHAT exciting things there are to look forward to! Wild daffodils in the garden; a lucky wish when you hear the cuckoo for the first time; plans for the first outdoor bath; summer holidays to be talked over. Oh, no end of things now that April's here.

I'm certain you'll agree with me that April is one of the sweetest and freshest months of the year. Even the showers don't feel like ordinary rain, and the sun seems brighter and friendlier.

So your good looks must certainly be in keeping with this spirit of April.

YOUTHFUL CHARM

Freshness is one of a young girl's greatest charms, and regular bathing or washing is the first step towards this. It is the frequent cleansing of the skin that removes those impurities which tend to clog it during the indoor days of winter.

You may not be lucky enough to find a bath every single day possible, but you do make an effort to have a really thorough wash, don't you?

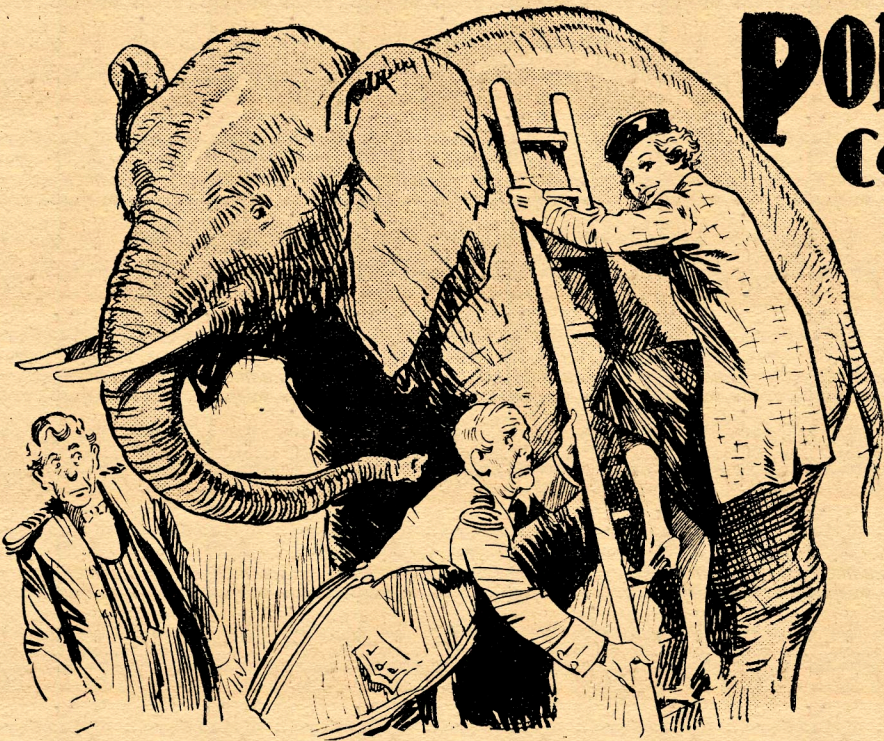
Not just a hasty smear over your face, and a half-hearted go at your neck? That

POPPY BINKS

Countess



By MAY STEVENS



THE DOWAGER DOESN'T APPROVE

HONK, honk!
The deep, vibrant hoot of the stately car belonging to the Countess of Sarfield sent forth its warning.

The narrow street in Sarfield village was crowded with children, all of them excited and shouting, and Poppy Binks leaned out of window to find out what the rumpus was.

If there was fun going, Poppy did not wish to miss it. Though Poppy was now a countess, she was still an ordinary girl at heart.

But as she rose, a stern, chiding voice spoke at her elbow: for beside Poppy was seated her aunt, the grim dowager.

"Poppy, sit down. Comport yourself with dignity, please!"

Poppy pretended not to hear.

"Hallo, what's the excitement?" she asked the nearest small boy.

"It's the treat, lady!" said the boy shrilly. "And it looks like being a real one!"

The crowd was clustering about a man who was pasting up some notice on a wall, but what it was Poppy couldn't see.

"The treat, aunt," she said. "They're excited about some treat that's to be given."

The dowager smiled stiffly.

"I am glad they are pleased," she said. "But I wish they would not bar my way. I am very glad indeed to see that my effort has been appreciated."

"Your effort?" asked Poppy, in surprise.

"Of course. It is the annual Sarfield treat for children. There is a free tea, to be followed this year by a lantern lecture. I have succeeded in engaging Professor Harper, the great geologist—"

Poppy had to laugh. The idea of kids going crazy about a lantern lecture by an old professor tickled her.

The car moved slowly on, and at that moment Poppy caught sight of the poster.

There was nothing on it about a lantern lecture. It advertised a circus.

"Whoopee!" cheered Poppy, her eyes dancing, and she turned in excitement. "Aunt, it's a circus."

The dowager's stiffness vanished.

"What!" she cried, aghast. "A circus! Where?"

"Here," said Poppy, hanging out of the window. "Hi, where's the circus, Tommy?"

"In the big field by t' pond, lady," answered the boy.

Poppy turned back excitedly.

"We'll be able to see it if we book early," she said eagerly. "It's in the big field."

Poppy expected the dowager to look thrilled, but she was disappointed. Snatching up the speaking-tube, she barked an order to the chauffeur:

"Stop!"

The car pulled up, and the dowager leapt out, to prod with her umbrella the man who was pasting up the poster.

With a gesture of annoyance, he swung round, wielding the pastebush.

"Oo done that?" he asked. "I'll give 'im a lick round the mug with the brush—"

"He, he, he!" tittered the crowd, backing.

Then the man saw the dowager.

"Was it you?" he asked.

"It was I," said the dowager grimly.

"Well, stop mucking about!" said the man aggressively.

The dowager glared.

"Take that poster down at once!" she ordered. "I am the owner of this property, and I hate circuses. Take it down at once!"

She revealed her identity, and the billposter was abashed.

"Sorry if I've done wrong," he said; "but the circus is having that field, so I thought I—"

"The circus is not having that field, nor any field in this district!" said the dowager tartly.

"And if you do not immediately tear down that poster, I shall sue for damages to my property."

Reluctantly the man tore down the poster, and there came gasps of dismay from the watching crowd of children. Poppy eyed them sympathetically.

"Aunt," she whispered, "can't it be fixed? The kids would just love it. A circus for the treat, you know."

The dowager gave her a crushing look.

"I have already arranged the treat," she said.

The children's faces brightened for a moment, and there was much nudging, Poppy noticed.

The Dowager's Idea Of A Treat Was A Stuffy Lecture, But Poppy Was Determined That The Village Children Should Really Enjoy Themselves

"What is it, lady?" asked a small boy with freckles.

"A lantern lecture by Professor Harper."

A terrible silence fell, then several of the children groaned.

The dowager wheeled round.

"How dare you act in such a vulgar manner!" she demanded. "If you are not grateful for what is being done, there will be no free tea at all. Any more of this nonsense and I will send a circular letter to your parents informing them of the reason."

She stalked back to the car, but Poppy loitered.

"Cheer up, kids!" she said. "Perhaps there's just a chance that the circus will be here to form part of the annual treat."

From the car the dowager called to her.

"Poppy, we shall miss the train!"

Poppy, with a last encouraging look at the youngsters, went to the car. The dowager scowled at her as they drove on.

"Really, Poppy, I do wish you would not interfere!" she said sharply. "I know how to handle these people, and you do not."

"I don't agree, aunt!" Poppy replied spiritedly. "And I don't see what harm a circus would do."

"I do not approve of circuses!"

"But the kids would love—" persisted Poppy.

The dowager compressed her lips and glared. "The subject is closed. Children do not know what is good or bad for them. The lecture will be good for them," she said. "And now let us drop the matter. I want to collect your Uncle Harold's present from the station."

Poppy sighed and relapsed into silence. She was not really interested in her Uncle Harold, whom she had never seen. He was in India, shooting tigers at the moment, and from all she had heard he seemed a little batty. The dowager said he was, and half expected a cobra for a present.

However, a present from India was interesting, and this one was probably odd as she had been asked to attend personally in order to sign for it.

"If it is a cobra we could start a circus of our own," mused Poppy.

The dowager did not reply, and for the rest of the journey she was silent.

But she was not silent when she reached the station and learned that, owing to a lamentable error, the present had been sent back in its crate to the junction, and no one knew when it would be likely to return.

"Goodness knows what it is!" said the dowager crossly. "If it causes any more bother, I shall regret he sent it."

Poppy was wondering how she could broach the subject of the circus again. The dowager was wondering if she could make quite sure that the circus would not be present.

To make quite sure she decided to visit her agent. There she learnt, to her dismay, that Mr. Meen, the agent, had given permission for the circus to visit the village. She was next handed a letter from her London solicitors.

"Pah!" she exclaimed. "Why am I surrounded by fools? This letter means that to-morrow I must go up to London. As for the circus, the permission is cancelled."

Poppy gave a slight start. "Isn't the treat to-morrow?"

"The treat? Oh, yes—yes! But that cannot be helped. You will have to act as

hostess, Poppy. It will be good training. It is imperative that I see my solicitors—the fools, the idiots!"

And the dowager stormed out of the office. But Poppy Binks brightened. Her face lit up; her eyes shone.

"Aunt," she said briskly, "I'll be the Lady Bountiful. I'll be O.C. Treat."

And in Poppy's mind there was developing a daring idea.

"Very well, then; but see there is good behaviour and sensible and reasonable enjoyment."

Poppy hardly heard her; she was thinking of the circus. With the dowager away the circus could take its pitch. The village children might be able to have their treat—a real treat, after all.

JUMBO CAUSES TROUBLE

"M'LADY!" Poppy Binks gave a start, and looked up from her book as Jenkins, the butler, approached.

She was lounging in a cosy chair in front of the roaring fire in the hall, and had not heard Jenkins' soft approach.

"Whatcheer, Jenks! Anything wrong?" she asked.

"The—elephant has arrived, m'lady."

Poppy jolted up, staring.

"The whatter?"

"The elephant, m'lady," said Jenkins.

"In advance of the circus for advertising purposes."

Poppy Binks leaped out of her chair.

"Golly, those people don't let the grass grow under their feet!" she said. "Has her ladyship seen it?"

"No, m'lady; not yet," said Jenkins. "But I doubt if her ladyship would approve."

"I jolly well know she wouldn't!" said Poppy. "It must be hidden."

Jenkins bowed.

"Yes, m'lady. It is—er—a somewhat large elephant."

Poppy Binks, greatly excited, hurried to the door.

The moment she had arrived home with the dowager she had got into touch with the circus people, and had discovered that the agent, Meen, had given permission for the field to be used. He had not bothered to ask the dowager, for he had been under the impression that she was going to London.

Poppy had arranged with the circus people to visit the village, after all, but she had not expected them to send an elephant in advance—and to the castle, too!

"Golly, I hope the dowager doesn't see the elephant!" Poppy muttered, as she hurried out into the castle grounds. "If she does, it's all up with my little plan."

The elephant was not immediately in view; for the grounds were extensive, and the drive wound down to the enormous gates.

But when Poppy was just out of sight of the castle, she saw the enormous animal advancing in charge of a clown.

"Hallo!" said Poppy excitedly. "Where's the rest of the circus?"

"On its way, m'lady," said the clown, who had been told who Poppy was by one of the gardeners who stood watching.

"Well, don't let them come yet," said Poppy. "And we've got to hide the elephant."

In a few words she explained the situation to the clown.

"Better take it back to the village—eh?" said the clown.

"No. Her ladyship will see it," said Poppy. "Can't be done. She would guess that the circus was coming. We've got to get the elephant into the fields at the back. There are some sheds there."

To Poppy's intense relief the elephant moved off without any fuss. He was a good-tempered elephant—at times.

Poppy tripped along beside him, and thought of the wonderful time she and the village kids were going to have at the circus.

For once Jumbo was hidden, there was no other clue to give away the fact that the circus was arriving.

But Poppy's hopes had risen too high.

Jumbo all of a sudden came to a halt, and gave a glare at a tall flower that perked up from beside a path.

"Hallo! What's wrong?" asked Poppy.

Jumbo made an odd noise.

"Made a face at me," he tried to say.

He glowered at the flower which bobbed in the wind, and then he backed.

"Whoa, fatnut!" urged the clown.

"There's a greenhouse behind you."

Jumbo did not care about greenhouses. He wasn't going to stand there and have a flower make a face at him.

"It's that flower," said Poppy puzzled, as she followed his glance.

Quick as a flash she snatched at the strong stem of the flower and tugged. It did not break easily, and for a moment there was what looked to Jumbo like a desperate struggle.

"Ooo, it's coming after me!" he whimpered, and backed still farther nearer the greenhouse.

"Golly, stop him!" said Poppy, in horror.

"Look out!"

The clown skipped away as Jumbo, terrified by the flower which Poppy unknowingly waved, waddled back into the greenhouse.

Thud! Crash!

The side of the greenhouse fell in with the tinkling of much glass, and Jumbo, pricked by a splinter, careered madly forward.

"Stop him!" shouted the clown.

"Stop him yourself!" retorted Poppy, jumping sideways.

Jumbo plodded on across the flower-bed, and through a small fence.

A sapling barred his path, but not for long. Jumbo wrapped his trunk round it, whipped it up, and tossed it lightly aside.

Skidding slightly on the wet grass, he knocked over a potting-shed with a clatter of pots and tools; but unconcerned, with a wary look back, he still went on and on.

Poppy raced after him.

"Get some buns or something!" she yelled to the clown.

Jumbo, turning round as he reached a solid stone wall, went down the wide pathway towards the castle.

"Oh!" gasped Poppy. "Oh crumbs! It's all up now! The dowager's bound to spot him. Look! There she is, coming out of the house!"

THE dowager was not in a good temper as she stepped out on to the drive. The unexpected visit to London annoyed her for one thing, and in addition the incident of the circus poster had rubbed her up the wrong way.

If anything additional were needed to make her really mad, it was that an enormous elephant should gambol towards her across the splendid castle lawns.

"Herbert," she called to the footman, who had accompanied her with an umbrella in case rain should fall, "what is that?"

Herbert stared and dropped the umbrella.

"An—an elephant, m'lady!"

"It cannot be an elephant!" gasped the dowager, in horror. "How can it be?"

Jumbo, breathing hard, eased to a walk and loitered towards the waiting car.

"Good gracious!" said the dowager feebly.

"An elephant—ruining my lawn! Herbert, take it away at once!"

Herbert, badly shaken, hesitated.

"Ta-ta-take it away, my lady?" he quavered.

"Certainly! Give it a sharp blow on the flank and cause it to turn to the gates."

Herbert, gulping, advanced to Jumbo.

Thud!

It was just a little flick to Jumbo, and he swung his trunk round in annoyance, thinking it was some kind of pest; but when he saw the liveried footman he brightened.

"One of the chaps from the circus," was the thought that passed in his brain, for Herbert did not look unlike a circus flunkey.

Jumbo, aware that he had a small audience in the dowager, Jenkins, and a gardener, decided to show them a few circus tricks.

Herbert did not know the tricks, but as he had to do was to be lifted up and swung upside down, that didn't matter. It was easy!

"Wowow!" yelped Herbert a second later, and the dowager reeled back.

Jumbo deftly wrapped his trunk round Herbert's waist and lifted the footman high into the air, upside down.

"Owowow!" yelled Herbert.

It was at that moment that Poppy, breathless from running, arrived on the scene.

But Poppy was no longer dismayed or perturbed. When Jumbo had galloped off, Poppy had thought that all her plans were in ruins, that the circus was off, that the dowager would be more furious than ever.

Now, however, an idea had come to her—a really first-rate idea. She saw the silver lining in the dark clouds.

"Aunt—aunt!" she called. "Don't let him do that to Herbert!"

The dowager was so surprised by that strange command that she just stared.

"What power have I over the wild beast?" she exclaimed at last.

Poppy's reply was artful, but seemed innocent.

"Don't you know Hindustani, aunt? Hasn't he brought any instructions with him? There ought to be a mahout."

The puzzling phrases soon made sense in the dowager's mind.

"Great goodness!" she moaned. "Harold's present! Oh! Can even he be lunatic enough to have sent a live elephant?"

Poppy managed not to laugh aloud or chortle with joy; but the dowager had made just the mistake she wanted her to make.

"Better than a dead one, aunt," she said.

"Where are we going to keep him?"

The dowager stood numbed. The use seemed to have gone from her lips; she was bereft of speech.

From complete bewilderment at the sight of the elephant, her feeling had changed to one of deep dismay and anger.

"Poppy, when I said that your Uncle Harold was crazy I did not speak lightly. An elephant here! A little pet to follow me around, perhaps, always at my heels," said the dowager sarcastically.

Herbert, plonked at last on the elephant's head, sat there wild-eyed, clutching the great animal's ears.

"Kik-can I get down, m'lady?" he quavered.

Poppy Binks chuckled.

"He's taken a fancy to you, Herbert," she said. "I bet he'll eat out of your hand. Get some buns and try."

Another little plan was humming in Poppy Binks' mind. If only the dowager could be persuaded to keep the elephant, then it would be there ready for the circus. So Poppy meant to see that Jumbo stayed.

So far things were going swimmingly, but Poppy could not tell what the next minute might bring.

"It must go! It must be got rid of!" said Poppy's aunt, recovering herself. "I cannot have an elephant here. The idea is utterly fantastic."

"Better get Jenkins to show him to the gates," said Poppy humorously. "But don't be too harsh, because an elephant never forgets, and he might come back in the night and knock the castle over. He's already bumped off a greenhouse and a potting-shed."

The dowager, shocked and horrified, insisted on investigating the damage at once, and hurried off, giving orders that the elephant was not to be encouraged in any way.

But Poppy Binks had sent for some buns. Herbert, having fallen off the elephant, went to get them. When he returned Poppy fed her new pet. They appeared to be of Jumbo's favourite variety, and he swallowed three in rapid succession. The disappearing bun trick was one of his best.

Poppy let him have no more than three, however, but hurried after the dowager, carrying the bag.

Naturally Jumbo hurried after Poppy. Wherever the buns went, there went Jumbo.

Poppy, running, caught up the dowager. Lady Sarfield was wearing her gardening hat—an old felt with a dent in the top.

That dent was where Poppy meant to put a bun for Jumbo.

"Aunt, look—he's coming after you! He knows he's yours!" called Poppy.

The dowager halted, and Poppy, reaching up, managed, unnoticed, to put a bun very gently into the top of the felt hat.

"Shoo! Go back!" cried the dowager. Jumbo came lolling on. "Hah! Gonna make me work for my buns, eh?" he was asking himself. Thud, thud, thud! he went, as he rolled the lawn free of charge. The dowager, looking round, saw Jumbo and halted.

Up he came with every sign of pleasure, fixing his eyes on the dowager's hat.

"He'll look you everywhere," said Poppy. "Sometimes people in India can put spells on elephants so that they follow their masters just as a dog would."

The dowager, goggling at Jumbo, turned hurriedly and rushed to a greenhouse. Considering that Jumbo was intent on following her, it was a silly thing to do.

"Don't you dare come in here!" warned the dowager.

Poppy gave a gurgle of mirth as Jumbo stepped forward, and then an exclamation of alarm.

"Whoa! Stop you mutt!" Jumbo did not stop. He pushed his head in through the door and sought to follow through himself.

With a creaking the roof of the greenhouse lifted, and there came a heavy, snapping sound. Up it went altogether.

Crash! Poppy caught hold of Jumbo's tail and pulled. A gardener tried pushing; but at that moment Jumbo took the bun from the dowager's hat and swallowed it.

He backed out of the greenhouse and, pushing and shoving, Poppy and the gardener tried to steer him out of the danger zone. There were other greenhouses in the vicinity and the elephant had done enough damage for one day.

The dowager tottered from the greenhouse, breathing hard. She waited until the elephant had been steered to safety, then she turned to Poppy.

"Poppy," she panted, "that elephant must go. I won't have it here. I'll write to Harold and tell him just what I think."

"Leave it to me, aunt," Poppy said. "I'll see he's not a nuisance any more."

The dowager let out a weary sigh. "But where can he go? Who'll take an elephant? The Zoo?"

Poppy Binks suddenly snapped her fingers. "Aunt—I've got it!" she cried. "The circus!"

The dowager started. "The circus? My goodness, yes, of course! The circus. They might take the animal."

"Shall I get the circus manager to come here?" asked Poppy. "If he sees that elephant, he may snap him up."

The dowager brightened. "Poppy, you are a girl with brains after all. Get that man here. I will see that he takes this elephant away."

Poppy hurried off to find the clown whom she had advised to keep in hiding. Then she hurried him off to the garages and ordered out a car.

In record time, Poppy would be back with the circus boss; but if the dowager thought he was going to take back that elephant with whoops of joy she was mistaken. Only at a price, and Poppy Binks would fix that!

POPPY'S ARTFUL RUSE

JUMBO the elephant was finding life good. A butler was holding out a dish of buns to him, and two footmen were bringing forward a large tub of water for him to drink.

But life to the dowager seemed far less good than it did to Jumbo.

She was still waiting for Poppy, walking up and down restlessly. Her friend, Sir Digby, was here, having been called to her aid by telephone.

He had not been a great deal of help, except that his hard felt hat had provided a spot of fun for everyone when Jumbo had whipped it off, put it down, and trodden on it.

Sir Digby was in riding kit, but he did not ride Jumbo, or even try to.

"The whole thing is completely and utterly ridiculous," he snorted. "How can you have

an elephant here. What can you do with it, Laura. You cannot ride it into the village. It isn't done. This isn't India. If we had some tigers, true we could use it for tiger-hunting."

He tugged at his moustache and glowered. Jumbo, dipping his trunk gratefully into the water drank, and then seemed to wink at Jenkins, the butler.

With a trunk full of water, Jumbo looked about him for a target. He spotted Sir Digby, and then, feeling that value had to be given for food supplied, he showed them all a clever trick.

"Let's pretend the man with the red nose is a fire," seemed to be the thought in Jumbo's mind.

Sir Digby, monocle in eye, surveyed Jumbo, as Jumbo surveyed him and took aim.

"What's the animal swinging its trunk like that for?" he asked.

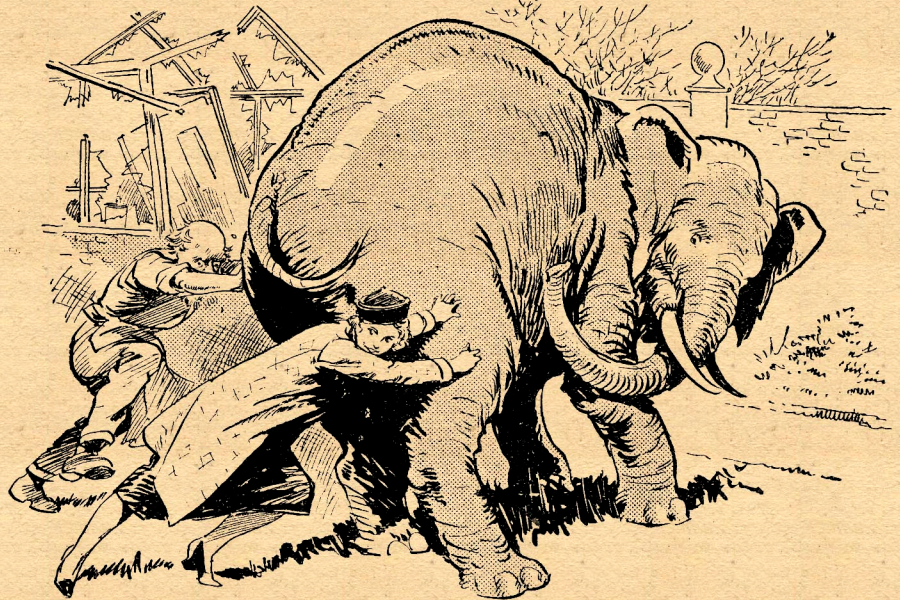
"He's pointing it at you," said the dowager. "Give him a bun."

"I'll give him a cut with my stick," glowered Sir Digby. "The creature's ruined my hat—"

S-s-s-s!

Jumbo took aim and fired. A powerful jet of water shot over Sir Digby—and that was the first thing that greeted Poppy Binks' eye as she came across the lawns with the boss of the circus.

"Now, don't forget," urged Poppy. "Do just as I said and all will be well."



Scared lest Jumbo should cause more damage, Poppy and the gardener pushed mightily, trying to steer the elephant away from the greenhouses.

The circus boss chuckled, remembering Poppy's instructions.

"O.K., my lady! Leave it to me."

With a swagger he went up to the dowager and lifted his cap. Jumbo, recognising him, looked pretty sheepish and guilty. The circus owner pretended not to recognise him.

"That the elephant?" he asked.

"Think I am?" demanded Sir Digby, who looked more like a drowned rat.

"Yes, yes," said the dowager, with a weary sigh. "That is the creature. I will sell him to you cheap."

The circus boss looked Jumbo over.

"I wouldn't give five pounds for him, thanks, m'lady," he said. "Not likely."

The dowager nearly swooned.

"Wha-at! Then why have you come?"

Poppy intervened.

"Elephants are cheap now, aunt," she said.

"And the circus has all it wants, but as a special favour perhaps—"

The dowager swallowed.

"The animal must go. I refuse to leave for London while it remains here. And I must go to London. So you must take him—I order you to!"

"No one can make me do it, m'lady," said the boss. "I'm not taking orders from you."

Poppy judged the time had arrived for her to butt in.

"I tell you what," she cried, "perhaps the circus man will take him if you do something for him."

"Do what?" asked the dowager. Poppy spoke as though it was an idea that had suddenly flashed into her brain.

"Why not offer to let him park his circus for three days in the village? One good turn deserves another—"

The dowager's eyes glittered momentarily; then she ducked as Jumbo took aim at her with his trunk. Hurriedly she decided to make the best of a bad job.

"Very well," she told the circus proprietor. "If you will take this creature away I am prepared to allow your circus to pitch here for a few days."

The boss hesitated and pursed his lips. "O.K.," he said. "That's a do. I'll get that elephant out of here and I'll see he never returns; and in return I can pitch my circus here for four days?"

The dowager swallowed hard. "Yes," she said.

And standing just behind her, Poppy Binks gave a little skip of joy.

The boss, looking at Jumbo, gave a whistle. "Come on, you!" he said.

And Jumbo, giving a quick snatch at the last bun on the butler's dish, ambled after the boss with a weary sigh.

ALL the fun of the fair." Poppy Binks, the young Countess of Sarfield, was in her element as she acted as hostess on the day of the great treat.

Every youngster in the village was there, and from neighbouring villages, too. There were swings and roundabouts, elephants, lions, beautiful horses, and everything that any lover of fairs and circuses could desire. And as it was the annual treat everything was free!

In one of the small tents the professor, with the aid of his lantern, was giving a lecture on geology to two people who had gone in there to sleep, and one or two parents who wanted a rest.

The greatest attraction of all was Jumbo. Everyone had a free ride on him—including Poppy.

Never in all recorded Sarfield history had there been such a treat as this! It was a success, a riot, a real wow, and the youngsters knew whom they had to thank, and thanked her.

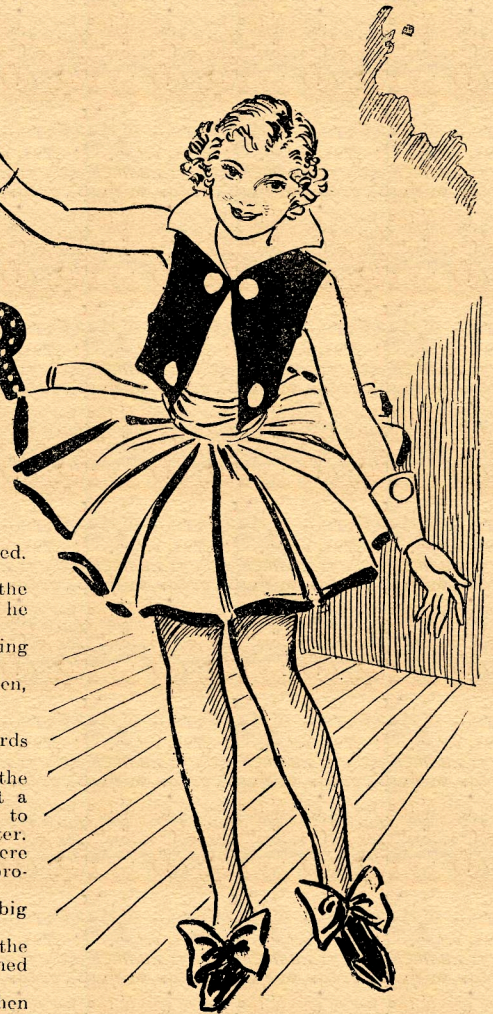
Poppy Binks was the heroine of the hour.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

More fun with Poppy Binks next Friday, girls. Make certain of your GIRLS' CRYSTAL by ordering it in advance.



I WILL BE A LONDON STAGE STAR



KAY JOINS A CIRCUS

By JUNE TURNER

KAY FORRESTER shook in every bone as the heavy lorry thundered over the cobbles.

The foreign highway was crude and primitive.

Behind her the lights of Cherbourg faded in the distance. Before her, the French countryside stretched away in a dark wilderness.

Kay shivered as the wind pierced through her coat, cutting like a knife through the thin frock she was wearing. These clothes were all that she possessed. Her purse was empty. She was exiled in a strange land—homeless and destitute.

The lorry sped on. Whither it was going Kay didn't know. In the panic of flight she had begged a lift from the first driver who passed. The man had assented, but he could answer none of her questions—could speak not a word of her tongue nor understand her own broken French.

The eerie journey brought Kay's plight home vividly to her mind.

She had been within sight of success on the London stage. Her life's ambition was centred there—a fortune awaited her the day she achieved fame! That fortune went to Philip Slade should she fail. It was Slade who had got her out of the country by a trick.

Kay remembered her desperate dash ashore when the boat had reached Cherbourg, her week's struggle to earn her passage home by singing and dancing in the cafe, then this disastrous climax to-night, when she had been forced to flee the town, penniless, to avoid arrest for landing with a false permit!

Her plight was now more desperate than ever.

But at all costs she must get back to England! That one thought was beating fiercely in Kay's brain. She must fight her way back to England, no matter what the odds against her—and she must act swiftly! Every hour was precious. Every day of exile was threatening her ruin and bringing the fortune nearer to Philip Slade!

Kay strained her eyes to see the signposts as the lorry flashed by. If only the journey were taking her nearer to Calais, where only the short Channel crossing separated her from England's shore!

But she soon realised that it was not. The road was winding inland, taking her still farther away from her goal.

Villages crept up in the darkness, and were left behind. Kay sat rigid, knowing that it would be fatal to land herself in one of those tiny places, where there would be no hope of earning the money she so desperately needed.

An hour passed, and at last the lorry trundled into the outskirts of a town.

Mayenne, the signposts named it.

Kay gazed out tensely at the deserted streets. She knew she must break her journey here, before she was carried any farther off her route. But where was she to go? Where was she to find shelter for the night? The houses were all shuttered, and in darkness, and she hadn't a franc in her purse.

Suddenly a queer patch of tents and gaudy caravans loomed up in a field skirting the road.

It was a fairground.

Kay turned excitedly to the driver. "Will you stop here, please?" she cried. "Halte, s'il vous plait!"

The driver understood, and stopped the lorry, though he looked at Kay as if he thought she were out of her mind.

She clambered down into the road, trying to express her gratitude to him.

"Thank you so much! Merci, merci bien, m'sieur!"

The man touched his cap and drove on. Kay groped her way in the darkness towards the white, ghostly tents of the fairground.

The whole place was closed down for the night. Not a light burned anywhere—not a sign of a living being. Kay had hoped to meet one of the show people, and beg shelter. After all, they, in their own sphere, were troupers, like herself—comrades of the profession.

She walked round to the back of the big main booth.

A caravan stood there. Kay climbed the steps, tapped at the big door, then opened it, as no one answered.

Lighting a match, she gazed about her. Then her heart glowed.

The caravan was empty, save for a store of clowns' costumes and stage property. It was obviously just a dressing-room for the use of the performers during working hours.

"What a bit of luck!" Kay breathed. "It's a roof for to-night, and that's all I want. Here I am, and here I stay!"

She lit the lamp, and with the clowns' costumes, she rigged up a makeshift bed on the floor. It was hard, and none too warm, but Kay just kicked off her shoes, put out the lamp, and sank down gratefully to rest.

The journey and excitement had worn her out. Her eyes closed, and she went straight off into a deep sleep.

The night passed in oblivion. It was a sudden shaft of daylight which awakened Kay.

She sat up with a start and saw the caravan door gaping open. A woman was standing on the steps, just gazing in speechlessly. But only for a second!

"Ma foi! What you do here?"

The woman rattled away with the fury of a machine-gun.

Kay didn't understand what she was saying, but she could very well guess. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and stared in awe.

PENILESS IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

But Kay's Spirit
Is Undaunted.
She Means To
Succeed Even
Yet

The woman was wearing gaudy gypsy colours, and with her flashing, dark eyes and booming voice, she was like a raging dynamo.

Want of breath checked the storm for an instant.

"I can't understand your language," Kay sighed, "but—"

"You speak English?" boomed the woman.

"I am English," Kay said, gasping at the sudden change of tongue.

"Zen get a load who I am!" And the woman's voice held a fierce American accent. "I am La Belle Leon, boss of zis show, an' I'm asking you what ze deuce you do in my caravan!"

"I popped in for a night's shelter," Kay said, and beamed up into the infuriated face of La Belle Leon. "I was hoping you might have a vacancy for a dancer."

"What you say?" thundered the woman.

"I'm looking for a job. Oh, please help me! I am a singer and dancer, and am working my way home to England. I—I desperately need money for my passage. So please give me a job! You'll find that I can put on a good show."

"You're telling me?" La Belle shouted. "Oh, ze cheek! I was five years in ze States and never hear such cheek like it. So you want to work for me!"

"Yes, please!" Kay said brightly. "It's a bargain, eh?"

La Belle stormed off into a mixture of French and several other languages.

"O.K.! You shall work for me!" she finished up grimly. "I make you work so's you fall to pieces. Now come wif me!"

Kay slipped her shoes on, and she followed the circus woman across the fairground to the dining-tent.

The other showpeople were eating at a long table, and Kay saw at once that they all held the "boss" in mortal terror. La Belle ruled

them with a rod of iron. But Kay suspected that her bark was much worse than her bite.

"You eat plenty! You will need it!" La Belle thundered at her.

And she served Kay with a magnificent breakfast of eggs, French jambon, and coffee and fruit.

At midday Kay gave her first performance in the big booth. It was an experience that would have tried the courage of the most hardened trouper.

Between every act in the show she was thrust on to the stage to sing and dance. While tight-ropes and trapezes were being fixed up overhead, Kay had to keep the audience entertained. The moment the acrobats finished, Kay was sent on again. She had only a few minutes' rest between the quick-fire turns. At the end of every hour the booth emptied, a fresh audience crowded in, and the entire show began again.

It was non-stop variety with a vengeance. It went on hour after hour until midnight. Kay stuck it gamely. In the wings La Belle herself was working like a Trojan—handling the curtains and the lights, lifting heavy scenery and props, counting the takings, bullying the whole company, and watching Kay all the time as a cat watches a mouse.

Kay knew that the woman was trying to wear out her spirit. It made her all the more determined to fight through. She would work till she dropped, but she was going to prove that an English trouper was the equal of any. The audience certainly thought so. They stormed their applause every time Kay appeared.

But La Belle once smiled a hard smile, and didn't pay Kay a cent when the performance ended.

"You still want to stay?" she asked. "Yes, please. I'm going to work till I've earned a bit of pay!" answered Kay.

"Not you!" And La Belle Leon laughed loudly. "Here, listen. I am fair. I pay for your lodging to-night—no more. Zen you go on your journey to-morrow!"

Kay put on her coat and walked with the woman to a quiet street near the fairground. All the company were lodging in different houses there. La Belle marched into each of them till she found a room vacant—a small but cosy enough bed-room on the top floor of a baker's shop. She paid the landlady, and bade Kay an ironical good-bye.

"See you to-morrow!" answered Kay. "Huh, you are not so tough as you pretends, little dancer!" scoffed La Belle, ducking her tall figure as she strode out of the doorway. "You no come back—nevaire!"

But Kay did go back to the fair—first thing next morning. She arrived in time for the excellent breakfast. Quite cheerfully she marched into the dining-tent, where the acrobats and the clowns were all eating; and at sight of her the show-woman went off into a tempest. Her voice thundered away in every language under the sun; but Kay fancied that she was even more astonished than angry.

"You are just little hothouse plant—you are no use in tough show like mine, it break you to bits!" roared La Belle. "I tell you to go, an' you snap your fingers in my face an' come back!"

"I did my job all right yesterday, m'dame," argued Kay, sitting down beside her, to the awe of everyone else. "I didn't complain. And you must admit I went down well. I shall stick it for a few more days! La Belle, I've got to," she pleaded. "I've got to earn money to get back home!"

"I no pay you one cent!" thundered La Belle, slapping an enormous breakfast of fried ham in front of Kay. "Eat zat up! Cheeky miss! I nevaire haf been defied like it!"

Kay clung to the fair for three days, despite every rebuff. She sang and danced in the big booth till she was nearly dropping, and each night La Belle Leon paid for her lodgings, but otherwise she did not give her a cent.

On the third day Kay finished her show at midnight as usual. She stepped out of the big main booth—and then her heart gave a jerk, for she saw the tents and sideshows being taken down, and the horses harnessed to the caravans.

The show was preparing to move off!

La Belle Leon was standing in the field, already giving orders for the dismantling of the big booth.

Kay hurried across to her side in the light of the flares.

"La Belle! Where are you moving to?" A trembling hope hovered in her heart. "Are you going my way—towards Calais?"

"No!" the woman snapped. "To Marseilles!"

Kay's spirits sank. She had worked so hard—she had hung on in face of every rebuff, hoping for a little money to start her on her journey. And now the show was moving away, and she had nothing—could demand nothing. Her time had all been wasted.

"You can come wif us, cheeky miss!" said La Belle, without looking up.

"I can't!" Kay said dully. "It wasn't just—just cheek that made me crash in here. I was really desperate for work. I'm desperate for money to get home!"

The big woman glared down at her, fierce as a lioness.

"And how much money you t'ink you earn—eh?"

"I was worth thirty francs, anyhow!" Kay said stoutly. "That's only ten francs a day. Still, you paid for my keep, so I guess we're quits." She held out her hand with a spontaneous smile. "Good-bye, La Belle! You're not such a bad sort as you pretend!"

She was turning to go, but La Belle fiercely held her hand.

"Where you t'ink you go now—eh?"

"Back to the road! I'm not beaten yet!" Kay said doggedly.

"Bah! You no tramp ze road!" boomed La Belle. "Your place belongs in ze London theatres. You is beautiful dancer—you waste yourself in France. Take zis money! You earn it every bit. Go straight back to England wif you, an' good luck, ma cherie! Bon voyage!"

Kay felt something crinkly being pressed into her hand. She opened her palm. Her head whirled, and she cried out to La Belle.

But the big woman had vanished in the darkness, and she had left three hundred-franc notes in Kay's hand! Enough to pay her passage home to England!

THE GIRL SHE BEFRIENDED

KAY rushed to the road—she felt she must be dreaming—she couldn't believe that such sweet fortune was true; but the tears of joy flooded her eyes, and all she could see was La Belle's caravan trundling away into the night.

That big soul had not waited for thanks. Kay's heart overflowed with the gratitude that she couldn't voice.

The dark skies were sunshine now—weary feet were lighter than air—as Kay walked through that lonely foreign town which had been her refuge in despair, yet had proved the scene of her deliverance.

She passed the railway station—closed now for the night—and her pulses throbbed with wild happiness, and she longed for the morning to come. It was only a few hours' journey by rail to Calais. Three hundred francs would take her aboard the waiting boat—take her to Dover, and then all the way to London!

Kay felt the blood racing in her veins. Before this time to-morrow night she would be in London again!

Back in London—pursuing her career once more, winning her way back to the footlights, to fight anew for success and a fortune!

She stopped at the all-night cafe on the way to her apartment, and went inside. For the first time she could afford the luxury of supper.

Kay sat down at a long table by the window. A girl was sipping a cup of coffee in the seat opposite her, and moodily passed her the menu.

"Thanks, but I can't read French. No comprez!" Kay said, with a chuckle.

The waiter came across; but, to Kay's surprise, the girl answered her now in excellent English.

"Perhaps I can help you. What would you wish to choose?"

Kay gave a start of wonder. "I say, that's marvellous! I would like a poached egg, if you will please explain."

She stared in interest at the girl. The other was not as well-dressed as a French girl; her features were thin and sallow, and she looked like a Southerner. She seemed to speak French as well as she spoke English.

"I have ordered it," she said listlessly to Kay. "A poached egg. Ah, you are lucky!"

"Lucky?" Kay repeated.

"I drink coffee. Even that is more than I can afford!"

Kay felt a warm pang of sympathy, and felt at the same time a little embarrassed. She saw the other girl hunch her shoulders in a gesture of hopelessness. It was quite tragic.

"I'm sorry. I know what it means." And Kay paused gently. "Don't be offended; but won't you please join me?"

The girl clasped her hands together pitifully.

"Oh, if only you would be so kind! I am hungry; I am faint! I would have been too proud to ask, but your great generosity is—"

"That's all right! You're welcome! Order



Kay awoke to find a grim-faced woman glaring in at her. It was the owner of the caravan. "What are you doing here?" she demanded angrily.

whatever you like!" Kay put in hastily. "My name's Kay Forrester. And yours?"

"Rosa! I am from the Argentine. I do not think you could pronounce my second name; it is not important," the other said, with a sad little smile.

She ordered a meal from the waiter, and Kay tried to turn the conversation into more cheerful channels. It was a treat to be able to speak English at last to someone who understood.

But Rosa was depressed and full of her troubles; she would talk of nothing else.

"I have tramped from place to place, looking for work, but everybody is unkind to me because I am not French. I work for a little while as children's governess. Then always they turn me out. They do not want me. They are so unkind!"

"Oh, I've found them just the opposite, and I'm not French!" Kay said at once, her heart warming as she thought of La Belle's kindness. "You mustn't blame the people, Rosa, or let yourself get downhearted. Luck runs in patches, you know—the rough then the smooth."

Rosa looked at her tragically.

"Ah, you say that, because you have never known trouble like mine! You have not known what it is to tramp a foreign country, without money, without friends, or a home, or—"

"Oh, haven't I?" put in Kay quietly. "I've been through it all myself, Rosa, and I know exactly what it means. But things get brighter if you keep a stiff upper lip; you'll find that the same as I did. And now here's the grub. Let's eat and be merry—eh?"

She noticed that Rosa had ordered herself veal cutlets and vegetables, and Kay was only too glad to see a good meal in front of her. It would put fresh spirit into her, maybe. In her own British way, Kay couldn't help thinking that this girl's troubles would be lighter if she faced them with a stouter heart and took a more friendly view of the French people. But the poor thing seemed utterly despondent.

Kay got on with her supper, and turned her mind to her own affairs; but it was disturbing to hear Rosa still fretting over her troubles.

"You are the first friend I have found in this country," she said shakily to Kay. "I am so grateful. It saddens me that I cannot repay you. But I shall see you again? You are staying here in Mayenne?"

Kay shook her head gently.

"No, I'm afraid not. I'm going back to England to-morrow. But you'll find lots of other friends, Rosa, and you'll soon get fresh work, I'm sure, with your wonderful gift of languages. Would you please ask the waiter to bring me the bill?"

The waiter came to the table, and Kay took one of the hundred-franc notes from her purse and paid him. She had nothing smaller. Rosa looked at her warningly, and helped her to count the change.

"It is correct," she said, "but one has to be careful. Me—I have never had so much money. But I find these people are not always honest with strangers."

"You're very hard on them," murmured Kay.

She put the change into her purse, and then got up to go.

"I'll say good-bye, Rosa, and wish you again the very best of luck!" she said, holding out her hand to the girl. "I don't know if you're coming my way? I dig at the top of this street."

Rosa's lip trembled, and tears came into her eyes.

"I—I have nowhere to go!" she choked out. "I—I was turned out of my room because I couldn't pay. That's why you found me sitting in here."

Kay's warm heart was wrung with compassion.

"Oh, but you can't sit in here all night!" she exclaimed.

"What else can I do?" faltered Rosa.

"Come along with me!" said Kay impulsively. "There are two beds in my room. You'll be quite comfortable, and you'll feel ever so much better in the morning."

Rosa's gratitude was touching. She put her head on Kay's shoulder and wept, and Kay

felt terribly sorry for her and terribly embarrassed. She was thankful when they got out of the cafe and away to the privacy of her little top-floor room.

It was scarcely more than an attic, but Rosa said that it was just beautiful, and she cried again, because she said she would never be able to repay Kay's kindness.

"Oh, forget it, dear!" Kay scolded her warmly. "You'd do the same for me!"

She straightened up the spare bed for Rosa, and she took an extra rug off her own bed and gave it to her. She hadn't any nightwear to lend her, but Rosa just slipped off her shoes and got thankfully into bed, dressed as she was.

"I've got to be up early in the morning, but there's no need for you to, dear," Kay told her. "You stay in and have your sleep out. I'll settle up with the landlady and make everything all right."

"Thank you—thank you! I'll never forget how kind you were to me!" Rosa said chokily; and she said it again and again till at last she sank off to sleep.

Kay stayed up and did her "packing." She had nothing to pack, really; only a few necessary odds and ends, and an old attache-case given her by one of the fairground women. But it was joy pretending to pack, and knowing that next morning she would be off on her journey home.

Kay undressed at last; she lifted the corner of her mattress and tucked her purse under it. Then she slid deliciously into bed, to enjoy the happiest night's sleep she'd had for weeks.

Her dreams took her back to England—back to London, and the footlights of a West-End stage. She dreamed that she was making her debut in a musical comedy. And at first the audience were very quiet, very critical—and then they began to like her—and in the end they were handing bouquets to her over the footlights! And the lawyer walked into her dreams and handed her a cheque for her grandfather's legacy. Five thousand pounds!

Kay's heart fluttered with excitement even in her dream, and she awakened, to find that it was morning. She got up and looked towards the other bed.

Then her eyes widened. That bed was empty! Rosa was gone—Rosa's coat and shoes were gone!

Something stirred wildly in Kay's brain.

She sprang out of bed. She lifted the edge of her mattress. Her fingers went numb. She stared, horrorstruck.

Her purse had vanished—her money had vanished!

The blood flew from Kay's head and left her brain like ice. The truth was stark. She had been robbed!

Robbed by the girl whom she had befriended!

The shock was as sickening as it was cruel. Kay stood there in the room—stunned. There would be no journey home to England! Her money was stolen! She had been robbed by the girl who had eaten her food and accepted her roof and her shelter!

PENILESS ONCE MORE

CARRYING her few bits of belongings in the attache case, Kay walked out penniless into the street. From the distant railway station she could hear the shriek of the train whistles. Overhead the sun smiled down and mocked her.

Kay gave way to no self-pity. It wasn't in her nature.

She was warm-hearted and ready enough to pity others in their troubles, and for this she had paid a bitter price. But she would bear her loss without squealing. She tried to forget what had happened.

She knew she must find work again, and immediately. She must earn money till she had scraped together her passage again. It might mean weeks more exile in a foreign land—but there was no other way now.

Kay tramped on through the cobbled streets, gazing at the different cafes as she passed them, and seeking for one that advertised "Musique-Variete." Such a place was her only chance of obtaining a paid

engagement. But mostly the cafes were small, and offered no variety entertainment.

Suddenly she emerged into the town square. Facing her on the corner Kay saw a large, music-hall cafe bearing the name: "La Cosmopole."

Across the window was a notice: "English spoken here."

Kay's hopes quickened, and she hurried into the cafe.

A pompous, immaculately dressed man was strolling up and down between the marble-topped tables, pausing here and there to bow to the more distinguished-looking customers. He was obviously the manager.

Kay went straight across to him, and suavely he asked her in French if he "could find ma'mselle a table."

"If you please, I am an artiste—an English dancer," Kay began, speaking with easy composure to disguise her neediness, as she hoped. "I am free for a few days, and if you would care to give me an audition, monsieur, I think my act would be suitable for your—"

But his smile had gone.

"No!" he cut in curtly.

"Monsieur is busy now?" And Kay smiled courteously. "Perhaps later to-day—"

"I do not engage my arteeste zis way. I deal with agents!" he snapped.

Kay hid a sigh, and with a polite nod she turned to go.

She was half-way to the door when he rapped out:

"Wait!"

Kay's hopes leapt, and she went with him into his office.

The manager did the talking, and he was not generous. But he admitted that she had "poise," and after giving her a brief audition at the piano, he booked her—on his own terms.

"I will pay you twenty francs each performance, ma'mselle. You sign wif me, and not play for any other cafe. There is my affaire. Take it or leave it!"

Kay took the offer, ungenerous though it was; she couldn't afford to refuse.

That night she appeared on the stage of the Cosmopole.

It was hard, thankless work. Monsieur gave his artistes no rest, and not even a chance to become popular with the audience and known to them. His policy was to clear the customers out as quickly as they had swallowed their refreshments, in order to make room for fresh customers.

For five nights Kay sang and danced on that stage without being really aware of her audience, they changed so swiftly. Strangers all—strange faces never to be seen again. It increased Kay's homesickness and her desperate longing to return to London.

One night—it was nearly midnight—she was giving her song-and-dance when the bustle of the waiters and the clatter of dishes almost drowned her voice. It was intolerable, having to entertain an audience under such conditions.

Then one of the waiters clumsily dropped a tray, and Kay glared across at him from the stage.

At the same instant the door opened.

A thin, sallow-faced girl walked into the cafe.

Kay's song broke off. She gave a little cry. That girl was Rosa—the Argentine girl who had robbed her of her money!

Kay leapt over the footlights on to the floor—forgetting her act, her audience, everything save that here was the thief who had robbed her. She rushed towards her between the tables.

Rosa saw her. The girl's sallow face blanched. She darted out through the door into the street again.

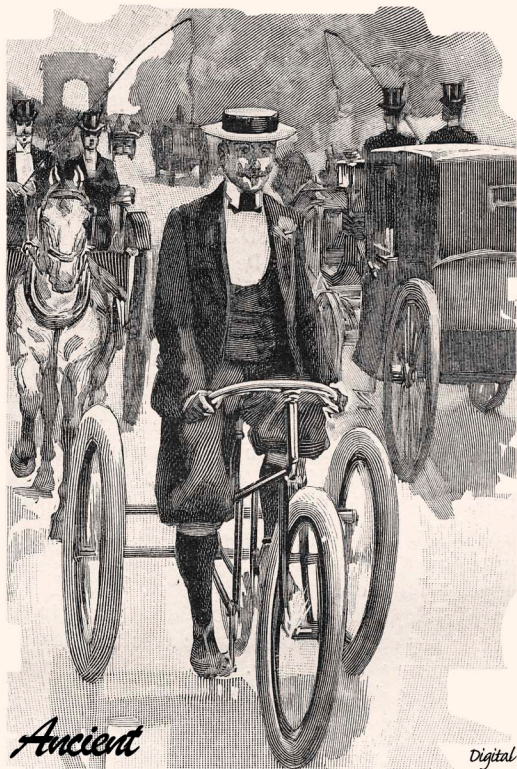
"Stop!" Kay panted. "Stop her, somebody!"

She made a grab to open the door. A heavy hand seized her shoulder. The pompous manager held her, his face purple with rage.

"Back to ze stage! Go back!" he hissed. "I pay you to work—not make exhibition like zis! You stop here—you gif your show!"

How can Kay possibly follow Rosa now? Dare she defy the manager? See next Friday's dramatic instalment.

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