

*I Will be a London Stage Star*

ONE OF THE 7 FINE  
STORIES INSIDE!

# GIRLS' CRYSTAL WEEKLY



**Too Late to Stop  
the Mystery Girl!**

A THRILLING INCIDENT FROM  
"DANGER AT THE FUN FAIR"  
WITHIN.

# PENELOPE'S PAGE

## OF NOVELTY NOTIONS



**HAPPY EASTER, EVERYBODY!**—May you have lots of hot cross buns on Good Friday—and may they be very, very hot!

Which sounds rather as if I hope you're going to have indigestion as well, but you know I don't mean that, don't you?

I expect father will be doing a bit of pottering around the garden—I know mine will, and expecting a lot of interest to be shown by the family, too.

I wonder why gardening on Good Friday is supposed to be so lucky. It's said that anything planted on that day will flourish, isn't it?

On Saturday you'll be eyeing those monster Easter eggs in the shops, I expect, and wondering whether they're hollow or packed with glorious mysteries.

My young cousin Kathleen will certainly receive one from me, and as I shall get the shop to send it, I must remember to tell them to rub the price off.

For I shall certainly choose one that costs about two-and-six, yet looks worth an easy ten shillings!

Then will come Easter Day, with the inevitable coloured eggs for breakfast, if your family's like mine!

Oh, I do hope it's fine so that we can all wear our new clothes! You will wear something new—even if it's only a pair of penny shoelaces, or a twopenny hankie, won't you?

This again is supposed to be lucky. I can't think why it should be, specially—for new things are always lucky in my opinion. (Oh, except that time I fell off the bus! Remember?)

I've told you before about my weaknesses, haven't I? You know, marshmallow, whipped cream walnuts, new stockings—and so on, and so on.

I also have another! It is that I have an idea I look nice in skirts.

You must admit that skirts and jerseys or blouses don't suit everyone, so it either speaks well for my shape—or my vanity!—that I should think they suit me.

No, seriously I'm terribly fond of them. They're such useful things—and so economical, for you can make yourself look as if you have a wardrobe like a mannequin, just by changing jerseys from day to day.

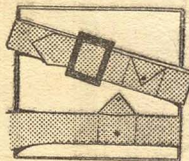
I'm sure I must have had enough skirts in my time to equip a new force of women

police—provided they could get into them, of course, and didn't mind some with very snappy slits at the sides.

My latest is a trouser skirt—more elegantly called a divided skirt. (I'm not too sure that a policeman would be allowed to wear that!)

It sounds a little daring, doesn't it? But, believe me, it's most modest, and really a very sensible garment.

When standing up, the skirt just looks like an ordinary one. For, you see, over the trouser division folds a flap. But when climbing stiles, or flopping on the ground at picnics, the advantages of the trouser are very obvious, aren't they?



silly self. What I'm leading up to is the rather nice skirt in the picture here.

I don't think there's anything that suits a young girl more—particularly at this in-betweenish season of the year when one day it's cold and a warm jumper can be worn over it, and the next day, when it's hot, a cool blouse.

But, alas!—favourite skirts have a way of growing too short for growing schoolgirls!

So here comes your Penelope with almost-a-brainwave for lengthening it. (Even if your skirt's not too short you can still make use of this idea, for it's terribly smart and very new.)

You know how fashionable braid is this year? (If you don't, you jolly well should, and do me a hundred lines, those who said they didn't!)

A row of fairly wide braid sewn around the bottom of the skirt will lengthen said skirt the extent of the braid—naturally.

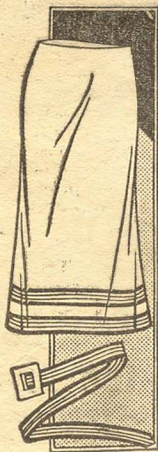
If still not long enough another row of braid will double this addition. Clever me!

Now a belt to match—just a waist-length of braid with a buckle at one end—adds the touch of genius.

It also gives your skirt an easy thirty-shilling look, even if it did only cost five!

You'll measure carefully round the waist and hem of your skirt before expending your hard-won savings on it, won't you, for braid's not a halfpenny a yard, like liquorice strips.

Four and a half yards should be ample for even the most buxom, and even if it does cost you over two shillings, I don't think you'll ever regret it.



I'm having it shortened at the moment, but I know I'm going to get a lot of wear out of it, for it has all the easy-to-wear-ness of shorts, with all the grace of a very feminine-looking skirt. See?

But I like the way I'm prattling on about my

It'll mean you can step out afresh in a skirt that you had feared would have to go for a kettle-holder—or something similar, because it was too small!

Are you one of those people who're always shedding hankies all over the place?

I am, I confess. I mark them. I tuck them up my sleeve. I clutch them convulsively to me—and yet, wherever I go, I seem to leave a trail of them.

You might think I do it on purpose, but I don't, honest! I simply can't help it. Another of my weaknesses, I suppose.

Of course, it's partly that I don't carry my handbag around with me, and haven't pockets in all my frocks, I suppose.

So as we've agreed it's jersey-or-blouse-and-skirt time again, I've decided I must do something about it.

It's no use tucking my hankie into my skirt top, for it just disappears—inside.

And as I'm rather partial to a belt worn over a jersey—(it's very flattering to the waistline, as well as keeping said jersey in position, let me add!)—I had an idea.

A secret pocket in a belt! Good?

If you're not the sort to lose hankies, you can always keep pennies, or tram tickets, or whatever you collect, in it.

An excellent way to make this belt is to use two pieces of stout ribbon or any other favourite material. These will need to be about thirty-two inches long and four inches deep—for wide belts are fashionable.

Join the pieces along one edge, and then along the other, leaving a little unjoined to make the pocket.

Cut the little pocket flap and sew it to the back of the belt so that it will fold over the front, fastening with a press-stud or a button.

If you're not in need of a brand new belt, you can just sew the pocket piece inside a present, fairly wide belt, making it measure about four inches wide by four inches deep.

You could even rush this new belt through in time for Easter, couldn't you? Especially if you're wondering what you can wear to entice good luck.

But now another blouse and skirt idea—which I know will be welcome, because one of you asked me for it.

You know how a skirt will sometimes bulge at the sides between the patent fasteners?

Then here's a cure, and it's an attractive one, too. All you want is a length of cord.

Make ten small holes, either side of the skirt opening, and buttonhole around these. Thread the cord through, and tie in a bow.

Have a blouse to match. With holes and cord, you can make it fasten in the same style as the skirt.

Wear both together—and you'll look simply charming!

The trimming will be simple, it is true, but isn't that the essence of charm?

I shall look forward to seeing you around in this outfit—so don't forget!

Again, my dears, a very happy and joyful Easter to you, from your now really serious-for-once

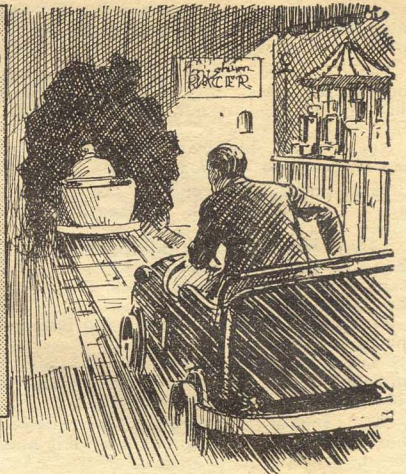


PENELOPE

18/4/36  
GIRLS' CRYSTAL



# DANGER AT THE FUN FAIR



By  
**PETER LANGLEY**

"That girl's scared of something—or I'm a Dutchman!"

His interest was aroused, but he had no intention of revealing the fact. Strolling casually to the rail, he took up his position behind another automatic machine and kept watch.

The girl hesitated in the middle of the pier, glancing apprehensively over her shoulder. Then, as though making up her mind, she walked quickly to the group of automatic machines and fumbled in her purse for a coin.

Noel's eyes narrowed in perplexity. Surely a simple matter like purchasing a packet of chocolates from a machine did not require such elaborate stealth. Then his perplexity deepened to bewilderment as he saw the girl insert a penny in the machine marked "Out of Order," and, pulling out a drawer, pick up a box of matches!

"Well—I'll be dashed!" exclaimed Noel, and impulsively he strolled across to the girl.

"Excuse me," he said, with a smile, "but could you oblige me with a light?"

The girl caught in her breath sharply, the blood draining from her face. Her dark eyes encountered Noel's smiling gaze, something almost like terror in their depths.

"Who—" she began falteringly. Noel slipped a card from his pocket and handed it to her.

"I was wonderin', as a matter of fact," he remarked, "if I could be of any assistance. I don't want to butt in, but—"

He got no further. A little gasp escaped the girl's lips; the card fluttered from her nerveless fingers, and, turning swiftly, she darted away towards the pierhead.

Noel whistled softly. There was something more grim behind this than he had first imagined.

He glanced swiftly at the machine; he'd investigate that later. His first concern was for the girl.

His lips tightening, he started in pursuit. A few holiday-makers stared after him in bewilderment, but Noel paid them no

attention. He was determined not to lose sight of the girl.

She was making for the gates of the fun fair; Noel reached the barrier in time to see her pushing her way frantically through the little crowd surrounding an ingenious electrical device known as the "Ghost Racer."

This consisted of two electrically driven cars, controlled by the passengers, running on adjoining rails through a dark and winding tunnel.

Noel, in a light-hearted moment, had tried it himself on the previous day. It was a fairly stiff test of the passenger's nerve—for during the course of the journey there were shrieks and groans, flashing lights, and apparently unsurmountable obstacles in the way.

The whole thing, of course, was clever—"hokum," but it proved a big attraction—as much for the onlookers as the actual contestants.

As Noel neared the barrier, he saw the girl push her way through the crowd and climb into the vacant car of the "Ghost Racer."

The young detective raced forward—to find his way barred by the showman.

"Too late, sir; only two can go at a time. Right away, there—hold tight!"

He pulled the lever that set the car in motion. Once started, its speed could be controlled by the passenger—but the journey through the tunnel had to be completed.

Noel drew back. The girl could not escape him so easily. He had merely to wait at the other end of the tunnel for the car to appear.

He was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery—to discover the reason for the girl's secret terror. He'd have to find some way of persuading her to speak.

With this decision, the young detective hurried round to the folding canvas doors through which the cars emerged from the tunnel into the daylight.

From within came a dull rumbling, accompanied by mechanical shrieks and groans and a girl's shrill laughter. The rumbling came nearer, and the doors swung open to admit one of the cars, a young girl clinging to the wheel, helpless with laughter.

The doors swung to again, and Noel stepped forward, waiting intently, as the rumbling of the other car came closer.

Once again the canvas doors swung wide—and the other car swung out into the daylight.

A startled ejaculation escaped the young detective's lips and he sprang forward incredulously.

For the second car was empty! Incredible though it seemed, the mysterious girl passenger had vanished in the tunnel!

## THE DROPPED DIAMOND CLUE

"GREAT Scott!" gasped Noel.

The mystery had taken a sudden, startlingly unexpected turn. He attempted to wrench open the doors, to find that they were locked by some mechanical device that could only be opened by the passing of the cars.

His face pale, the young detective sprinted round to the main entrance. People were

## THE MYSTERY GIRL WHO VANISHED

"BOTHER!" exclaimed Noel Raymond. "There goes my last match!"

The young detective, immaculate in college blazer and white flannels, was standing in a sheltered part of the long pier at Shingford-on-Sea.

It was a fresh, breezy day—and Noel had already made three attempts to light a cigarette. A gust of wind had just blown out his last match, in spite of his precautions.

The young detective laughed. After a series of trying cases, he had decided to spend the Easter holiday by the sea, and already was feeling the benefit of the change.

The afternoon was at his disposal and he had the pier almost to himself. A keen nip in the wind had driven most of the early holiday-makers into the amusement arcade and refreshment-rooms.

Noel looked round for a kiosk where he could purchase a box of matches. A row of automatic machines, standing in a sheltered corner, drew his attention.

"Ought to be able to get a box from one of those," he murmured, strolling towards them.

The first machine he came to bore the welcome inscription—"Chocolates, Cigarettes, and Matches"; but even as he prepared to insert a penny in the slot, Noel saw a notice pasted prominently across the front:

"THIS MACHINE OUT OF ORDER."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" remarked Noel. "Looks as though my luck's out."

He glanced ruefully at his unlit cigarette, shrugged, and prepared to take a stroll to the pierhead.

But he had barely walked a few yards, when a sound of hurried footsteps caused him to turn. A girl had come out from one of the shelters, and was crossing the pier in a hasty, curiously furtive manner, as though afraid of being observed.

Noel was intrigued. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the girl's face—pale and strikingly attractive above the fur collar of her coat.

"Hallo!" thought the young detective.

THIS WEEK NOEL RAYMOND  
INVESTIGATES  
THE TUNNEL  
OF  
DISAPPEARING PEOPLE

scrambling for places; in the general excitement no one appeared aware of the extraordinary disappearance.

The red-faced showman, busily taking in money, seemed equally oblivious to the fact that one of the cars had returned without its passenger.

Noel pushed his way through the crowd and tapped the showman on the arm.

"I say, what's happened to the other young lady?" he demanded. "She hasn't come out—"

"Eh? What are you talking about?" The showman frowned at the interruption. "If you want a ticket, take your place at the end of the queue—"

Noel's lips tightened as his hand fastened on the man's arm.

"Listen to me!" he rapped. "A girl went into that tunnel just now—and she hasn't come out! There's been an accident."

Noel's tone even more than his words caused the other's expression to change. His manner became a shade more respectful.

"You must be mistaken, sir," he said. "Probably the young lady jumped out of the car before it stopped, and mingled with the crowd. If you take a look round—"

"I tell you, there's no mistake!" snapped Noel, his eyes glinting. "I was watching the cars as they came out—and the second car was empty."

Was it his imagination, or did the man's face change colour?

"Are you sure?" he demanded. "One minute, sir, I'll look into this. P'r'aps the girl in the other car could tell us something. If you'll wait here—"

"There's no time for waiting," interrupted Noel sharply. "Dash it, man, the young lady may be lying on the track now—unconscious! While you're questioning the other girl, I'll search the tunnel. You'd better detain her till I get back."

He snatched a torch from his pocket and started towards the dark entrance of the tunnel. The showman hastily barred his way.

"Not so fast, sir," he said. "It's as much as my job's worth to let you go in there without authority—"

Noel cut him short, thrusting a card into the man's hand.

"That's my authority!" he snapped. "Keep the crowd back. Is there any other entrance to the tunnel?"

"No, sir, only this." The showman's attitude had undergone a distinct change, as he stared at Noel's card. He seemed anxious to propitiate the young detective. "There's never been an accident on the 'Racer' before, sir. I still think you've made a mistake—"

But Noel was striding into the tunnel, flashing his torch in front of him as he went.

The walls of the tunnel were made of stout canvas, painted a dark green to resemble a cave. Eerie shapes peered from dark corners—skeletons, witches, and masked bandits. Cunningly contrived doors that looked, at first glance, like impassable brick walls, opened at a touch.

The sound apparatus that gave out the terrifying shrieks and groans was operated by the moving cars pressing on levers inserted beneath the rails.

All this Noel took in at a glance as he pressed forward, anxiously scanning the double line of rails for a motionless figure.

But as he reached the end of the tunnel, without making any discovery, bewildering doubts crept into his mind.

Could he possibly have been mistaken? Had the seemingly empty car been a trick of his eyesight?

He dismissed the thought from his mind almost before it was formed. But still the amazing mystery confronted him.

Where was the girl?

She had gone into the tunnel—and she had not come out!

"Dash it!" breathed Noel softly. "There must be an explanation!"

He retraced his steps more slowly, scrutinising every inch of the ground—searching the canvas walls for possible openings.

Suddenly he bent forward, his eyes glinting. The beam from his torch reflected on something lying between the rails—something that

flashed and sparkled from a dozen gleaming facets.

A soft whistle escaped the young detective's lips as he picked up the object, allowing it to rest on his palm.

"A diamond!" he exclaimed. "And a beauty at that!"

It was an amazing discovery—though its connection with the disappearing girl evaded him. That there was some connection, he was convinced.

A diamond like this was not the sort of thing a casual visitor to the amusement arcade would be likely to possess; and even in that unlikely case, the loss would have been reported immediately and a search instigated.

Taking out a powerful magnifying-glass, Noel scrutinised the stone more closely. It was undeniably genuine, and probably worth a hundred pounds or more.

But it was something else that interested him at the moment—a trace of metal, invisible to the naked eye.

"Hallo!" muttered Noel. "This has recently come out of a setting of some sort. That may prove useful."

He placed the stone carefully in his wallet and continued his search of the tunnel. But he found nothing else of interest—and no trace whatever of the missing girl.

Perplexed and ill-at-ease, but with a deepening conviction that there was some sinister connection between the diamond and the missing girl, Noel left the tunnel.

He found a curious crowd collected, surrounding the red-faced showman and a burly constable.

The policeman was busily making notes, and as Noel appeared from the tunnel the showman stepped hurriedly towards him.

"Did you find the young lady, sir?" he demanded.

Noel shook his head; he had no intention of mentioning his discovery of the diamond, or his amazing suspicions.

"What did I tell you?" demanded the showman triumphantly, turning to the constable. "The gentleman must have been mistaken!"

The policeman questioned Noel respectfully, obviously aware of his identity.

Noel replied briefly and concisely, describing what he had seen. His story was not to be shaken, and the constable scratched his head, evidently perplexed.

"It's certainly a queer business, sir," he remarked. "But as the young lady's not in the tunnel, what are we to think?"

"I leave that to you," returned Noel dryly. "Personally I'm not satisfied. Have you questioned this girl?"

He nodded towards the young girl who had been the passenger in the other car.

"She can't tell us anything, sir," replied the constable, "except that she heard a lot of shrieks and groans—"

"Those are mechanical devices," put in the showman hurriedly.

"That's right," agreed Noel. "I tested them myself."

There was a little furrow between his eyes as his active mind sought for some solution to the baffling mystery.

Two possible alternatives confronted him. Either the girl had deliberately tricked him in order to escape, or she was the victim of foul play.

Noel, remembering the girl's obvious terror, inclined to the latter solution.

In that case, how had the kidnapping been contrived? And what part did the diamond play in the mystery?

The diamond! It was as yet his only tangible clue, and the young detective was determined to follow it up.

Questioning the constable, he learnt that Inspector Smythe was in charge at the local police-station. Noel grinned with satisfaction. The inspector happened to be an old acquaintance of his.

A quarter of an hour later he was interviewing the inspector in the latter's office.

"Thought you were supposed to be on holiday, Mr. Raymond," remarked the inspector curiously. "What brings you here?"

Noel smiled mysteriously as, taking out his wallet, he laid something on the desk.

"Ever seen that before, inspector?" he asked.

Inspector Smythe leaned forward. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed, as he picked up the diamond and held it to the light. "Where did you find this?"

"Never mind where I found it," returned Noel. "The point is—do you recognise it?"

"You bet I do!" returned the inspector grimly. "Unless I'm mistaken, it's one of the Rathcart diamonds."

The young detective whistled softly.

"Part of Lady Rathcart's famous necklace?" he asked. "I read about the case. She was robbed of her jewel-case while staying at an hotel down here?"

"That's right!" grunted the inspector, tugging at his moustache. "Between you and me, Mr. Raymond, it's not a case we like to be reminded about. I had some of my smartest men on it, but the thieves were a bit too slippery for us. Matter of fact, we had our eyes on a gang—"

"The Carson gang?" suggested Noel quickly.

The inspector stared. "How the deuce did you know?"

"Guessed," replied Noel, grinning at the inspector's chagrined expression. "I happen to be interested in the Carson gang myself. Last I heard of them they were in this part of the world."

"And that's about as much as we know about them!" growled the inspector aggrievedly. "They're as tricky as a wagonload of monkeys. We suspect that they've got a secret hide-away down here, but we can't get so much as a smell of it."

Noel's eyes narrow thoughtfully.

"A hide-away—eh?" he murmured. "But surely they must communicate with each other—pass messages?"

"That's the rub!" grunted the inspector. "They've got some cunning way of keeping in touch which we haven't rumbled. I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Raymond," he went on confidentially—"we're pretty certain there's a girl in it."

"A girl?" echoed Noel, with a barely perceptible start. "What's she like?"

The inspector shrugged.

"One of my men caught a glimpse of her talking to a member of the gang, but he didn't see her face; and the doorkeeper at the Imperial stated that he saw a young woman, closely muffled, hurrying out of the hotel lobby shortly before the theft was discovered. Pretty significant—eh?"

The young detective bit his lip, his face a trifle pale.

As clearly as though she had been in the room, he could see the beautiful, terrified features of the girl on the pier. That the mystery girl should be an associate of thieves seemed incredible.

And yet the inspector's story pointed to that conclusion.

But guilty or not, the girl was in deadly peril; Noel was convinced of it.

He rose quickly to his feet, making up his mind in a flash.

"Look here, inspector," he said, "I'm going to have a shot at this affair, and I'm going to handle it in my own way. If I get any results, I'll report to you."

Shaking hands with the inspector, he left the station, his active mind already planning out a course of action.

He hated to believe that his supposition was correct, but there was no time for sentiment. The mystery girl must be found, even though it might mean her arrest. It was from some more sinister peril than the long arm of the law that she had been attempting to escape.

Noel was convinced that her very life was in danger!

Swiftly hailing a taxi, he made his way back to the pier.

Luckily for his purpose, a faint drizzle was falling, driving into shelter all but the hardiest promenaders. Dusk was falling rapidly.

His coat collar turned up against the drizzle, a cigarette glowing between his lips, Noel strolled along the pier, taking up his stand in a shelter within sight of the automatic machines.

The young detective had a theory that the slot-machine was used as a means of exchanging messages, and he meant to put his suspicion to the test.

But as half an hour dragged past, and the shadows deepened, Noel began to lose hope. He began to wonder if, after all, he was running up a blind alley.

He had already examined the machine marked "Out of Order"; it was empty, as he had anticipated, but the drawer worked with suspicious smoothness as though recently oiled.

He was loath to abandon the vigil as yet.

A sudden thought occurred to him, and his eyes narrowed. From where he stood he was hidden from chance passers-by; but it was just possible that someone interested might have seen him enter the shelter.

He smiled grimly as he decided to change his tactics.

Strolling from the shelter, he walked casually towards the pierhead; then, stepping quickly behind an awning raised to screen the wind, he climbed on to a pile of deckchairs.

From where he stood he could watch the automatic machines at a distance. Taking out a small pair of binoculars, he waited.

In a few moments his strategy was rewarded. A man stepped from the shadows; there was something vaguely familiar about his burly, muffled figure. While Noel watched, his eyes gleaming with suppressed excitement, the man crossed to the machines. Putting a penny in the slot of the match machine, he pulled out the drawer, inserted something in it, then reclosed the drawer.

Noel sprang noiselessly from the pile of deckchairs, and sprinted back along the pier, keeping in the shadows.

By the time he reached the machines the burly man had vanished; another slighter figure had taken his place—a mere youth, who, with a hurried, furtive glance over his shoulder, inserted a penny in the match machine and produced a box.

The young detective stepped forward swiftly, his eyes glinting as he laid a hand on the youth's shoulder.

"Good-evenin', young man!" he drawled.

The other spun round, with a choking gasp, to blink into the glare of Noel's torch. His good-looking, rather weak face was pale and haggard; his eyes dark and dilated.

A soft whistle escaped Noel's lips, for the young man's twitching features bore a striking resemblance to the face of the vanished girl.

"I say, young man," remarked Noel, "I'd like a word with you."

The other did not reply; instead, with startling unexpectedness he ducked, aiming a blow at Noel's face. The young detective, though taken completely by surprise, parried the blow neatly and endeavoured to seize the other by the arm.

But the young man sprang backwards and made off into the gloom towards the pierhead. Noel, recovering himself swiftly, sped in pursuit.

This was the second chase he had had on the pier that day, and this time there was a hard, determined glint in his eyes.

That the young man was related to the girl in some way—possibly her brother—was evident. Evidently, too, he was scared of something, or someone, and was desperate.

He had a good start, but Noel gained on him steadily. He saw his quarry reach the barrier that enclosed the amusement arcade, and, ignoring a large notice that had been erected stating that the arcade was closed to the public, climb over the turnstile.

With a sudden premonition Noel sped after him, leaping the barrier just as the young man made a dash towards the Ghost Racer.

"Come back, you young idiot!" rapped Noel breathlessly. "There's danger—"

If he heard, the young man paid no attention; he sprang into one of the empty cars and reached for the lever. There was a dull rumbling as the cars started to move.

Noel did not hesitate. With a final breathless sprint he drew level with the cars and sprang, tumbling into the vacant car as it plunged into the dark tunnel.

The other car was speeding ahead, travelling at full speed, its driver entirely heedless of the slamming doors, groans, and flashing lights.

Noel, his face pale and grim, fixed his gaze on the car ahead while his foot pressed on the accelerator.

"Stop!" he shouted breathlessly, but his

voice was drowned by the clanging and rumbling of the racing cars.

A sharp bend came in view; the other car shot round the corner, out of sight. Noel sprang to his feet, whipping out his torch as his own car followed at a breakneck speed.

Then a strange ejaculation escaped his lips; for as the torch-light shone on the car ahead he saw the astounding, incredible fact.

It was empty!

### THE SECRET OF THE TUNNEL

"GREAT heavens!" ejaculated Noel, hardly able to believe his eyes.

He attempted to stop his car, but realised that it was impossible; the journey had to be completed before the current was broken.

There was only one other course open to him, and the young detective took a reckless chance. Tensing himself, he sprang out of the car, to land on his hands and knees on the track.

Bruised and shaken, he scrambled to his feet and groped for his torch, which had been jerked from his grasp. Luckily, it had

green canvas of the tunnel he saw a grotesque shadow, arm uplifted.

Instinctively the young detective ducked, spinning round. Something whizzed harmlessly over his head, to land with a clatter on the track.

There was a flashing and hissing as it encountered the electric rail, followed by a distant explosion as the fuses were blown.

The next moment Noel was struggling in the darkness with a powerful adversary. His torch lay on the ground, trampled underfoot. The heavy breathing of his opponent came stertorously to his ears.

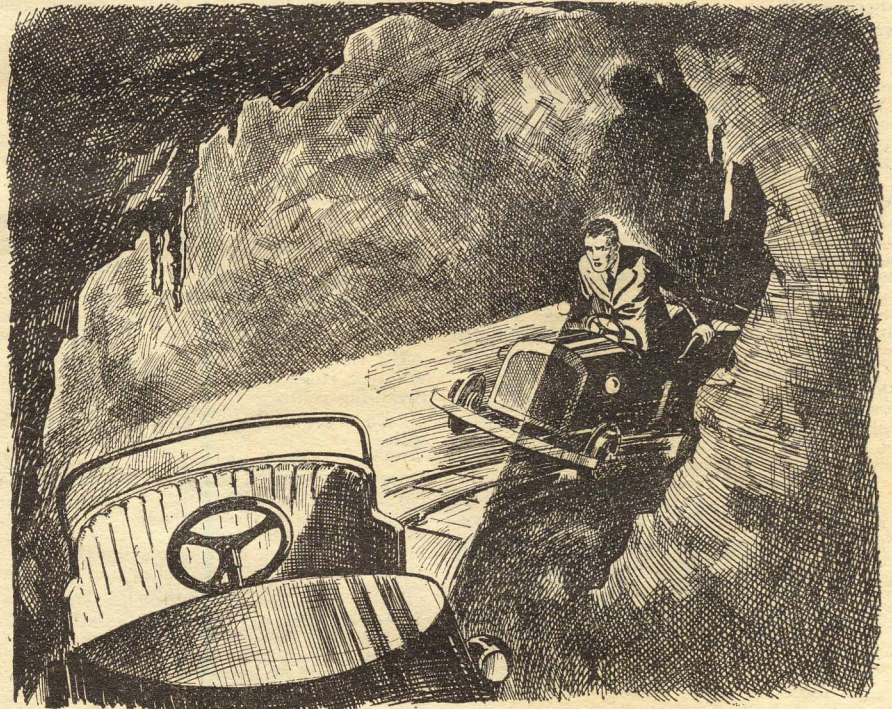
The other fought with the strength of a madman, and the young detective felt himself losing ground.

Then swiftly and unexpectedly he stooped, and, employing an old ju-jitsu trick, caught his adversary round the ankles.

The man went over like a log, falling with a dull crash and lying still.

Noel, breathing hard, fumbled for his matches. A faint, spluttering flame lit up the tunnel; it revealed a burly man dressed in a leather storm coat.

The young detective dropped to his knees



Noel Raymond got the shock of his life when he switched on his torch. The other car was empty; the man he had been chasing had vanished!

escaped serious damage, and by its aid he scrutinised the green canvas walls and roof, searching vainly and with growing bewilderment for the means by which the young man could have been spirited out of the racing car.

Then, struck by a sudden thought, he bent to examine the track. It had been near here that he had discovered the diamond. Was it possible that there was some secret exit?

He stiffened suddenly, a soft ejaculation escaping his lips, as his gaze fastened on a battered and splintered matchbox.

It might have seemed an insignificant discovery but for his observations on the pier. His eyes glinting, Noel opened the box—and there surely enough was a crumpled scrap of paper, on which was scrawled an almost illegible pencilled message:

"Jim,—I need your help. Meet me at eight o'clock in the tunnel.

"JOAN."

Noel's eyes narrowed as he examined the handwriting.

"A fake message," he muttered. "That was never written by a girl. The man I saw must have been—"

He broke off abruptly, conscious of a furtive movement behind him. Silhouetted on the

and peered into the other's face. In spite of himself, a startled ejaculation escaped his lips as he recognised the burly showman of the fun fair.

Noel smiled grimly. He had no pity to waste on the scoundrel who had made a deliberate attempt on his life. Doubtless he was one of the gang responsible for the mystery girl's disappearance and the theft of the Rathcart diamonds.

Taking out his handkerchief, Noel ripped it in two and tied the man's wrists behind his back.

Then, struck by a sudden thought, he ran his hands through the man's coat pockets. A soft whistle escaped his lips as, one by one, he produced a dozen empty matchboxes.

"The plot thickens," the young detective told himself.

He noticed that certain numbers were pencilled on the outside of the boxes—numbers doubtless relating to members of the gang.

Probably this man acted as an intermediary between the chief of the gang and his confederates. The matchboxes, as Noel had suspected, were used as a means of passing messages. No doubt the man had witnessed the recent pursuit, and had followed him into the tunnel.

The young detective straightened himself, his face grave.

Where on earth was the secret hide-away into which the girl and the scared young man had both been spirited?

Search though he might, Noel could find no trace of an opening.

The thing was baffling uncanny.

Very carefully he went through the remainder of the man's pockets. First of all he found a curiously shaped key, one which Noel guessed fitted the lock of the automatic match machine; then he came across several folded scraps of paper—some of them blank, others bearing a hastily scrawled message, with a number corresponding to the numbers on the boxes.

"No. 4. Stand by entrance," read one.

"No. 7. Have car ready at turnstile," ran another.

The young detective caught in his breath sharply, his eyes glinting, as a plan for outwitting the villains flashed into his mind.

Taking several of the blank pieces of paper, he filled them in with a message of his own, carefully copying the other's handwriting.

The message ran:

"Come to the meeting-place, via tunnel, without delay!"

Smiling grimly, Noel proceeded to place the scraps of paper into their respective boxes. Then, seizing his late adversary by the shoulders, he dragged him through the tunnel, rolling him beneath a canvas awning near the entrance.

A few minutes later, attired in the man's leather coat and slouch hat, he strolled back along the pier. Unlocking the empty compartment of the match machine, he placed in the boxes, then locking up the machine again, he took up his stand in the shadows.

Ten minutes passed, and then, one by one, furtive figures appeared, crossing to the machine and inserting coins. One by one the figures melted away into the gloom.

Noel tracked them, at a distance, his hand closing on the butt of his revolver. He followed them into the tunnel. One of the men carried a torch, and by the flashing light the young detective saw the men collect in a group close to the bend.

He saw one of them stoop down, and his eyes glittered as a trapdoor rose between the rails at the touch of a concealed spring. So cunningly contrived was the trap that when closed it was impossible for anyone not in the secret to discover a trace of its existence.

One by one the men descended through the trap, until all but one had vanished from sight. The last man, however, showed no signs of following.

Instead he closed the trap-door and remained there, fumbling in his pocket for a cigarette.

Evidently he had been left to keep guard.

For a moment Noel hesitated, then stealthily he crept forward. He was almost alongside the sentry when the rascal turned.

He gave a gasp as he saw the crouching detective, and cigarette dropped from his mouth.

"Where've you sprung from?" he snarled. "A spy, hey?"

As he spoke his hand flew to his hip pocket, but Noel gave him no opportunity to draw a gun.

Like a panther the young detective hurled himself on the rascal.

The man swung a vicious blow at Noel, but he ducked, and before his assailant could recover, the young detective's own fist had lashed out.

The blow sent the man reeling back, and as the rascal staggered, Noel flung his arms around the man's waist.

Next moment, and he had pressed into service a ju-jitsu throw that had often served him in such desperate moments as this.

Helpless in the detective's grip, the snarling struggling man was swept off his feet and sent somersaulting across the tunnel.

This was no time for kid-glove methods. A girl's life might be in danger.

Like a sack of coals, the guard crashed against the canvas wall of the tunnel, and, catching his head against an iron stanchion, he slid to the ground senseless.

Swiftly Noel gagged and bound him and dragged him into a dark alcove, then eagerly he set to work to reopen the secret trapdoor.

It proved a difficult job, so ingeniously constructed was it. Indeed, if Noel had not seen the gangsters operate it, he would never have discovered its existence, let alone got it open.

As it was, his perseverance was rewarded, and suddenly, with a whirring creak, the trapdoor swung open.

A moment later Noel was climbing swiftly down a rusted iron ladder in the wake of the other men.

His pulses were racing. In a few minutes he would have reached the end of his quest!

**I**N a curious cell-like room, situated beneath the pier pavilion, a girl sat, bound hand and foot, in a chair.

Confronting her, across the room, was a pale-faced youth, a year or two younger than herself, powerless in the grip of two burly seamen.

There was another man present—tall, lean, and well dressed, a mask concealing his face.

"I regret, Miss Drayfield," he remarked smoothly, "that I should have been compelled to take these measures. Have you anything to say?"

"Let—let Jim go!" cried the girl.

The masked man laughed, lighting a cigarette.

"That," he sneered, "will depend on you, Miss Drayfield. Allow me to recapitulate the position. Your brother was paid by me to execute a certain commission—"

"You mean you forced him to—steal for you!" exclaimed the girl, her dark eyes flashing.

The other shrugged.

"Put it as you wish. The fact remains that I expect results from my employees. If they fail, or double-cross me—"

He smiled unpleasantly as he produced a revolver from his pocket and aimed it at the shrinking youth.

"No!" screamed the girl, her face deathly white.

"Then I trust you will be sensible, Miss Drayfield," snarled the man, his smooth manner slipping from him like a cloak. "Your young fool of a brother passed the diamonds over to you. Don't deny it! Humphries saw him in the crowd waiting outside the Racer—and he saw him slip a packet into your hand just before you jumped into the car.

"Luckily, we got the signal, and were ready for you, but, meanwhile, you'd got rid of the packet. Where did you hide it?"

Menacingly he stood over the girl.

"I—I shan't tell you!" declared Joan Drayfield defiantly. "It's stolen property, and—"

"Bring that boy over here!" rapped the man, losing patience.

The white-faced youth was dragged across the room. With an unpleasant smile the masked man stooped, lifting an iron grating in the floor.

From below came the lapping gurgle of the sea as it washed between the massive piles that supported the pier.

"Tie up the young fool," rapped the man, "and throw him down there!"

A horrified scream escaped the girl's lips as she attempted to struggle out of her chair.

"Stop! I'll—I'll tell you!"

"Good!" snapped the masked man. "Let the boy go!"

With a groan, the youth crumpled to the floor in a dead faint.

"Now, Miss Drayfield," snarled the man, "before I change my mind!"

"I—I hid it—behind the painted witch in the tunnel."

The masked man exchanged a glance with his confederates.

"Is that the truth?" he rapped.

"I—I swear it!"

The other grunted. Leaning forward, he cut the ropes that secured the girl to the chair.

"We'll put your story to the test, Miss Drayfield," he sneered. "You'll come with us into the tunnel and—"

He broke off with a start, glaring towards the door. Just then it burst open, to admit three breathless men.

"Parker—Burkin—Danby! What the dickens are you doing here?" demanded the chief furiously.

The men stared.

"We got your message, chief," began one.

"My message?" shouted the other. "But I told you to have a car ready, and to wait at the turnstile—"

For reply, the man thrust out a crumpled scrap of paper. The chief snatched it, glaring at it through the slits in his mask.

"By thunder, this is a trick!" he grated. "Someone's on our trail. Quick, we'll get the stones and clear out! Leave the boy here, but bring the girl with you. We've got to prove her story."

Joan was seized by rough hands and hustled through the narrow door to an iron grating that ran for several yards beneath the pier.

Finally, she was forced to climb an iron ladder that led through the trapdoor into the tunnel. There was no sign of Noel, but if the crooks had only known it, he was not far away.

The elaborate hide-away, as Noel had already surmised, had been put at the gang's disposal by the showman, Humphries, part owner of the amusement arcade.

White-faced, shrinking at the thought of what she had to do, yet not daring to refuse, for her brother's sake, Joan Drayfield led the way through the tunnel, in the grasp of two of the gang.

Finally, she halted, pointing to a grotesque, painted figure, perched on a broomstick in a shadowy corner.

"I threw it behind there!" she faltered.

The masked man chuckled as he stepped forward, flashing his torch on the figure.

"If you're telling lies, Miss Drayfield, it'll be the worse for you—and your brother!" he declared.

He reached out to grope behind the painted figure; then he stiffened, his eyes dilating, as the figure appeared to speak, its words cold and menacing.

"Stand just where you are, Carson, and put your hands above your head! I've got you covered!"

Fantastic though it seemed, a revolver glinted in the figure's hand as its arm was raised.

"And the rest of you!" rapped the voice.

"The first to move is a dead man!"

From behind the cardboard figure stepped Noel Raymond, a grim smile on his lips.

"It's all right, Miss Drayfield," he remarked, smiling at the terrified girl. "I'm a friend, y'know, though you doubted it at first. You'll find a telephone in the office, at the end of the tunnel. I'll keep these blighters covered while you phone the police."

**J**OAN DRAYFIELD'S story was simple and poignant. She and her brother, Jim, had been left orphans, and Jim had got into bad company.

Suspecting it, she had tried to persuade him to break away, but the boy was weak, and the gang had a hold over him.

After the hotel robbery remorse had gripped him, and he had promised to hand over the diamonds to his sister, so that she could return them.

But their little plan had been nipped in the bud.

The rest Noel had already discovered.

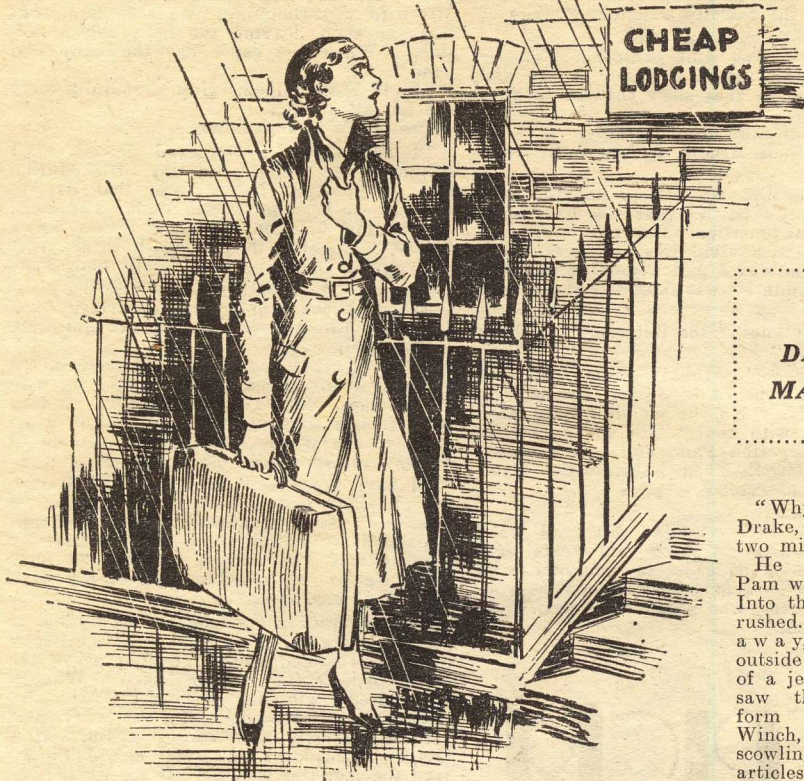
Carson and his gang were duly handed over to the police, and met with their just deserts. Noel used his influence to save Jim from arrest, and was able to find the youth a steady job.

Joan Drayfield, now an assistant in a tobacconist's kiosk on the pier, is the happiest girl in Shingford-on-Sea, and during the holiday season she has a frequent customer in a young detective from London, whose name is a household word.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"THE RING THAT BROUGHT FEAR." That is the title of next Friday's fascinating detective story. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL now!

# The GIRL WHO GAVE UP LUXURY



By  
**DIANA  
MARTIN**

## A VICTIM OF GRETA'S SPITE

**I**N the office of the "Modern Magazine," Pamela Drake, her face white and dismayed, stared at the door through which Jenny, her friend from the slums, had passed.

She had no more doubt than Jenny Bright herself that the spilling of the vase of flowers over the beautiful water-colour had been Jenny's fault, never suspecting the treacherous depths to which Greta Winch had descended to get her own back upon the girl of whom she was so jealous.

Miserably she turned.

"Mr. Arnold!" she cried.

The editor, who had been such a wonderful friend to her, was standing at the side of her desk. He had the painting in his hand, and he was shaking his head as he looked at it. He seemed a little disconcerted by Pam's gaze.

"Pamela—"

"Oh, I—I'm sorry," Pam gasped. "But it was an accident, Mr. Arnold—a pure accident. Jenny must have accidentally touched the vase. It was my fault for having the vase there. I—I— And she bit her lip. "I—I suppose you're still angry with me?"

The man drew in a deep breath.

"No," he said. "I—I was a minute ago. I— And he shook his head again. "I'm sorry, Pam, for losing my temper—even momentarily. But, of course, the sketch is ruined. You'd better get the artist on the phone and ask him to come along. He will have to do a new one."

"Yes, Mr. Arnold," Pam gulped.

"And—and—" He paused. "No, never mind! I'll ring up the artist. Better run after Jenny and Greta," he added. "I'm sorry I lost my temper, but, after all, I've got to account for the fifty guineas that sketch will cost. Go down and bring them up, Pam."

Gladly Pam departed. She did not trouble to wait for the lift. She skimmed down the stairs. Breathlessly she accosted the commissionaire in the hall below.

"Miss Bright and Miss Winch—have they gone out?" she gasped.

in the window. She caught her arm.

"Greta!"

"Why, Pam!"

"Greta, where's Jenny!" Pam gasped.

"Jenny?" And Greta looked round. She looked round, shaking her head, though very plainly she had seen Jenny board a bus just half a minute ago.

The bus, if Pam had only known it, was even at the moment stationary on the opposite side of the road, containing a white-faced Jenny, who was doing her best to fight back the tears.

"Why, goodness, she was here a minute ago," Greta cried, staring round in pretended amazement.

"Oh dear! Didn't you see which way she went?"

"No, I didn't!"

Pam gulped. She stared round. But there was no Jenny among the pedestrians who thronged the pavement, and at that moment the bus containing her was starting off.

Jenny, Jenny—where was she? She took a faltering turn up and down the pavement with Greta at her side.

"Must have gone home, Pam," Greta said. "I shouldn't worry. She was a bit upset, you know. She'll be there right enough when you get back. How's that old idiot now?"

"Eh? Who?"

"My uncle."

"Oh!" And Pam stared. It hurt her somehow, despite the scene of a few minutes before,

## FACE TO FACE WITH THE NURSE OF HER DREAMS

Does This Mean  
That At Last  
Jenny Will Discover  
The Truth  
About Herself?

to hear Mr. Arnold so disrespectfully referred to. "If you mean Mr. Arnold, he's all right," she said rather curtly. "He lost his temper for a moment—but who wouldn't, I'd like to know. He told me to fetch you and Jenny."

"Well, you can tell him I'm not coming," Greta said, with a bad-tempered pout. "Dash it all, he had no right to make me suffer for what that little guttersnipe did."

Pam's lips tightened.

"Are you referring to Jenny?"

"I am!"

"Then," Pam said, a sudden swift revulsion of feeling taking possession of her, "do please remember that she's my friend. Yes, and my very best friend," she added, a little colour coming into her cheeks as she saw the gleam of resentment gathering in the other's eyes. "Good-bye!"

"But—here, I say—"

But Pam, head in the air, walked on. It was she who was seething now—seething against this girl—this Greta. In those few words Greta had revealed quite a lot of that character she had been so careful to hide from Pam, never realising that the one thing calculated to put Pam's back up more than anything else was to speak of her friend disparagingly.

She bit her lip as she saw Pam, in high dudgeon, stride off into the building, then, with a sulky, irritable shrug, turned away.

Well, bother Pam! Anyway, she thought, with a flash of spite, she had landed that little hooligan Jenny into disgrace. She'd put a spoke in her wheel.

Pam, meantime, went on up the stairs. John Arnold was waiting for her.

"You didn't find them?" he asked.

"I found Greta. Jenny—Jenny has gone home," Pam said, with a catch in her voice. And she thought of Jenny, sad, heart-broken as she trailed her weary homeward way. "Greta has—has some shopping to do," Pam went on.

"I see!" But his eyes were very tired, very tender all at once.

"Poor Jenny! I'm sorry I went off at her like that, Pam! But still, never mind," he added, "we'll make it up to her. Pam, here's five shillings. I want you to go out and buy me the nicest box of chocolates you can get for the money."

Pam blinked.

"For Jenny," he smiled, "just as a little peace-offering."

"Oh, Mr. Arnold!"

But gladly she flew. What a dear, kind man he was! Chocolates—how Jenny would love a box all to herself. What a sweet thought of his it was. At the confectioner's a few doors away she bought the box and carried it in triumph to her room.

"Right, Pam. Do it up in a nice parcel," John Arnold ordered her, and again Pam found his eyes fixed upon her with that magnetic concentration which stirred her somehow to such bewildering, unexplainable emotion. She blushed and withdrew.

From then until half-past five Pam worked hard. There were so many things to attend to. Proofs to send off to the printers, rough sketches from artists to pass. Readers to write to, a perfect pile of manuscripts to go through. But she got through it, visualising with delight Jenny's happy face when she arrived home, and quiveringly eager as the time came and Mr. Arnold's chauffeur brought the car to the front of the building. As usual, John Arnold beckoned her in first.

"Got the chocolates, Pam?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, of course," Pam answered happily.

"You think Jenny will be pleased?" he asked anxiously as the car bowled off, and then for a moment fell silent. "You know, Pam, I think this is the most extraordinary thing I have ever met in my career," he added. "This friendship of yours with Jenny, I mean. Don't tell me if you don't want to, but what exactly

did inspire you to take Jenny up in the first place?"

Pam hesitated. Her face clouded a little. She had, of course, told John Arnold quite a lot of her story, but she had never told him about the great secret that was between her and Jenny—that she suspected that Jenny had been cheated of her wealth by her own scoundrelly uncle, James Thorpe, and that James Thorpe had brought her—Pam—up in Jenny's place.

She was convinced of that in her own mind. She had sworn by hook or by crook to bring it home to James Thorpe, and to win back for Jenny her rights.

But lack of tangible proof had held her back from telling John Arnold.

"Pam," he said gently—and invitation was in his tone—"as I say, don't tell me if you don't want to, but"—he turned suddenly, gazing at her keenly—"I feel that there is something—don't ask me what, Pam—that affects me in all this."

"You?" asked Pam, her eyes wide. "Yes, me," the editor shrugged. "I can't tell you, but since you've been in my home, since I've known you so well, Pam, since I've watched you and listened to you— Oh, girl, you do not know what strange memories you have called up in me!

"I know that there is a lot you haven't told me about yourself and Jenny. I feel somehow that there is a link in my own affairs. Pam, you know me well enough now, surely, to be able to confide completely in me?"

"Oh, Mr. Arnold, of course!" "Then—" "Well," Pam said, in a stifled voice, "I'll

tell you. I would have told you before, but I had no proof."

And as the car bowled on its way she told him, starting from the very moment she had run away from James Thorpe's home, and got her first clue to Jenny's real identity in the office of the rascally solicitor, Morrim.

John Arnold's eyes narrowed. "I see," he said, and paused. "Then—then, Pam, this means if Jenny is the girl you think she is, that she's entitled to your name."

"Yes," Pam said uncomfortably. "Then," John Arnold flashed out, "who are you?"

Pam bit her lip. So anxious had she been to fight Jenny's battles that she had never pondered that question. But now it rushed to her mind with vivid force. She saw suddenly that she was a girl without a name—a girl whose childhood was shrouded in mystery. Who was she?

"I—I don't know," she faltered. "Perhaps Thorpe knows."

"I wonder—" Arnold's brow furrowed. "I have never heard of James Thorpe," he said presently. "No, he couldn't have anything to do with that." He spoke now as if he had forgotten Pam, and was communing with himself. Then he turned. "Pam, I, too, have a secret."

Pam stared. "Yes." A little emotion betrayed itself upon his features. "Years and years ago. Pam, I had a daughter—a daughter who to-day would be about the same age as you. A girl, moreover, who might have been strikingly like you."

"Oh!" Pam's face softened. "Did—did she die?"

"No," John Arnold said. "But—"

"She was stolen, Pam—stolen out of her pram when she was a mite of twelve months. My wife was shopping, you see. She went into the shop, leaving the baby asleep outside. When she came out the baby had gone."

"Oh!" Pam gulped. How dreadfully sorry she felt all at once.

The man's face worked.

"I advertised; I employed detectives; I employed the police. But our little Marion had disappeared. Never from that day to this has she been recovered, Pam. The shock started my wife on the long illness which finally culminated in her death three years ago, and I have been a lonely man since then, Pam—a very, very lonely man."

Again he looked at her—that staring, steadfast look which sent Pam's heart fluttering in her chest.

"Pam, I said something just now—about you and Jenny perhaps being mixed up with my troubles. Now I'll tell you why. It may seem foolish to you, Pam, and yet it is no more foolish than that strange dream of Jenny's you have told me about.

"I have a feeling," he added, "that some day I shall find my daughter again. I have—" And he checked himself. "Pam," he added, switching off at such a startling tangent that Pam almost jumped, "I have never shown you a photograph of my wife, have I? Look at it."

With a quick movement his hand flew to his breast pocket. Pam blinked at the photograph he handed to her, feeling again the queer little flutter at her heart. What a sweet-faced, winsome woman she thought, staring at it! How beautiful she was! And yet, she stared and stared again. How familiar, somehow! How startlingly familiar! Had she met this woman? If so, where?

"Why, goodness, I—I seem to know her!" she cried.

John Arnold smiled strangely.

"You know why, Pam?" "Know?" Pam gazed at him wonderingly.

"Why, no." "Because," John Arnold said, gently taking the photograph from her, "you are so like her yourself. That is why—you see, Pam?"

Pam did see. Oh, great goodness! But no, it couldn't be—it couldn't! John Arnold's daughter! Was she that girl? Was she, Pamela Drake, the baby who had been stolen from the perambulator so many years ago? It was impossible!

And yet—the likeness of herself to that photograph! John Arnold's tender solicitude for her! He half-believed it, anyway.

Silent and stunned she sat till the house was reached. She was trembling suddenly—trembling with joy. She dared not let herself think about it. No, it was too wonderful, too utterly good to be true!

Strangely enough John Arnold himself never made a further reference to the incident. It was as though he, too, were fearing that his dreams were too rosy to be real. How could it be proved, anyway—how?

Obvious the answer. Only James Thorpe could reveal the truth; settle her doubts. She must go to Thorpe—must take Mr. Arnold and Jenny with her! She would find Mr. Warren Walford, of whom Thorpe had always stood in such terror, and he, who she felt sure were also held some threads in the mystery, should go, too.

So engrossing were Pam's thoughts that they reached Mr. Arnold's home before she realised it.

Excitedly she burst into the house. "Jenny—Jenny!" she called.

But there was no Jenny; only Greta—a Greta with a slyly satisfied smile upon her face, who handed her a letter.

With a wondering stare Pam took it, and then, as she read it, she gasped.

For the letter was that which Jenny had written in the Strand Post Office earlier in the day. It announced that Jenny had gone away for ever!

# TRIXIE'S TRICKS



**P**ENCILS and paper forward, please! Ready? Right, then try your hand at some of these puzzles. You'll find the correct solutions on page 10. We'll start with—

## A REMARKABLE WORD

The first two letters of this word signify a man; the first three letters a woman; the first four letters mean a brave man—and the whole signifies a brave woman. What is the word? (1)

## MENUS FORWARD!

Insert the name of an expensive food, which some people love—though I don't!—between the two rows of letters below, and you will find that it completes seven three-letter words, reading downwards:

C B A I O E U  
\* \* \* \* \*  
N E P S R A E (2)

By the way, what is the difference between twice twenty-two and twice two and twenty? (3)

## THIS WEEK'S MASTERPIECE

Said four little humble BBBB  
To their teacher, "Let us CCCC!"

Our mathematics please XQQQQ,  
And let us rest the brains we UUUU."  
The teacher gazed into their IIII  
And said, "If you would all be YYYYY,  
Your teacher you would never TTTT,  
And at school never take your EEEE!"

Can you change FEW into LOT by changing one letter at a time? Only four changes are allowed, and each change must result in a complete word. (4)

## DISTANCE JUDGING

You all know what an optical illusion is and how easy it is to mistake distances. Well, can you tell me which two figures in the line below are farthest apart? Look carefully! (5)

1 2 3 4

If you saw a taxi-driver take the money out of his meter, should you: (a) report him to a policeman, or (b) ask someone to stop him, or (c) do nothing about it? (6)

## NO CHANCE OF MISTAKE!

There is an English word which not only looks the same when read backwards or forwards, but can also appear the same when you turn it upside down. What is it? (7)



## JENNY ON HER OWN

**B**y the time the train reached Wrenborough Station, Jenny Bright had fought her fierce little battle out with herself, and had her future plans all out and dried.

She was right, she told herself, to leave Pam. She wasn't Pam's sort. Pam, among folks of her own class again, had no use for the likes of her, though goodness knows, this last week she had desperately tried to improve herself.

But she wasn't a lady yet—a long way from being one. Until she was a lady, until she could appear with Pam again without fear of letting Pam down and disgracing her, it was better that the two should part.

So Jenny, with many sniffs and many hard little clenchings of the hands, told herself. She wasn't going to give up Pam—oh, no! Life without Pam, Jenny just couldn't visualise. But life with Pam, being like Pam—ah, how different that was.

She was going to learn, she was going to educate herself. At last, when she could feel she was no longer likely to be a handicap to Pam, she would go back to her. But how to do that?

Surprisingly Jenny had found a way. It was a way which a fortnight ago she would never have visualised without Pam. In that fortnight a change deeper than even Pam had suspected had taken place within her.

She was no longer the nervous, ignorant slum girl who had met Pam those many weeks ago. No longer was she afraid of people whom she considered to be above her. Her short training in John Arnold's house, her own diligence to her studies, had given Jenny a new confidence, a new poise.

She felt that if she wasn't a lady yet, she was well on the way to becoming one. So Jenny, remembering that Mr. Warren Walford had promised her a job through Pam, was going to call at Walford Lodge and see Mr. Walford.

If he had remembered, well and good. If not—well, she had a little money. She supposed she could find a cheap boarding-house and hang on there till he did.

That was Jenny's plan. But her heart ached, her head spun. She felt lonely, forlorn. Though the sun shone when she stepped out of the train, Jenny's little world was very drear and empty without Pam. At the barrier she gave up her ticket, and entering the cloak-room, smartened herself up.

Slowly through the park she walked on, on to Walford Lodge.

She stopped half-way through the park, the memory of what she was about to do surging upon her. Dare she face up to Mr. Walford? How to explain her separation from Pam? Then she remembered him as she had seen him that first and only time at the police station—kind, gentle, such a heart-melting, understanding old man that her face involuntarily broke into a smile.

He reminded her in some vague, intangible way of that wonderful woman she so often saw in her dreams.

She walked on, thoughts changing now, unaccountably going back to that so oft-repeated dream. Always the same—she a baby in a cot on board a ship, that lovely tender face bending over her—the face of her nurse.

Then the crash, the terror of icy cold water. Pam said that that must have been when the ship was wrecked. But she never remembered any more. Pam said that when she had that nurse she was the rich baby of whom James Thorpe had since cheated of her inheritance. Clever old Pam, she knew such a lot of things.

Jenny never for a moment doubted that. If there was any significance in her dream, Pam had hit upon it.

But how far riches seemed to be from her still. Was that dream just a dream after all? Not, as Pam said, some childish picture she had carried in her mind. Funny she could never seem to remember anything after that.

Well, here she was—at the gates of the drive of Walford Lodge. Oh crumbs! And Jenny for a moment stared up at them with something like terror in her heart, feeling suddenly nervous, half-hoping, indeed, that Mr. Walford would prove to be out.

But the gates were open, which seemed to point to the fact that the house was occupied. Further, there was a car standing in the drive outside the entrance to the house, which gave further evidence of that fact.

Jenny's blood turned to water suddenly, and then, thinking of Pam, she set her teeth.

"Oh blow!" she said. "He can't eat me! And anyway, if Pam had made up her mind to do something, she'd jolly well do it, wouldn't she? Don't be a funk, Jenny Bright!"

Thought of Pam comforted her. Ambition to be like Pam inspired her. Nevertheless, she felt very uncertain when at last she found herself walking up the drive. Almost quivering at her own temerity, she rang the bell, and then stood holding her breath.

Inside there came a movement, then a woman's voice, the sound of which seemed to send a strange shiver right through her frame.

The door opened, and Jenny stood still. It was not the butler who had answered her summons, but a woman—a woman with her hair greying at the temples, but with the kindest face that Jenny had ever seen. A woman who stared at her with friendly, if puzzled, eyes. The woman—Jenny felt like shrieking—yes, yes, it was! The nurse of her dreams!



In wondering surprise Jenny stared at the woman who had answered her knock. It was the nurse of her dreams—the one person who might be able to tell her the truth about herself!

"I—I—" she stammered.

"You want someone?" the woman asked kindly, and just for a moment her eyes misted as though some forgotten remembrance welled up from the past. "Mr. Walford is not in at the moment."

"Oh, yes, I—I—" And then Jenny found herself stammering, her mission completely and entirely flown from her head.

The nurse—it was her voice!

"I am Mrs. Walford," the woman added.

"Oh, are—are you?" Jenny stuttered, and the red went up into her face.

She gasped; she flushed so hotly that it felt as if the fire from a vast furnace struck her in the face.

"I—I—" And what then—what made her do it? She could not say.

But a sudden terror of fright took possession of her, making her stare at this woman now as if she was no longer human but a ghost—as indeed she was—the ghost of that dream.

"I—I'm sorry!" she stammered incoherently, and obeying the impulse of the moment, turned on her heel and fled.

Mrs. Walford stared after her.

"Well, goodness me, what an extraordinary girl!"

What caused Jenny's terror she did not know. She was shaking as she ran. Tumultuous, warring the emotion which tore her. Why was she running? She did not know, did not care.

Why run, when every impulse urged her to turn back, to fling her arms around the woman's neck and cry: "Nurse! Nurse!" just as she dimly remembered saying in her dreams.

Quickly she sped, with gasping breath and thudding heart, never stopping till at last the street was reached.

Then suddenly she came to herself.

"Oh, my goodness, what a silly I've been!"

And then an arm linked in one of hers, the hand of the other arm was forcibly clasped. And Jenny, wheeling round, almost fell down as she beheld the faces of two people she hated.

"Well," said Sam Bright, "if it ain't our little Jenny come back home to us again! And we looking for you everywhere. Why, Jenny!"

"Yes, Jenny!" smirked shrewish Ella. "Dear Jenny! How nice to, see you again. Come home, dear—do!"

And with a firmness that showed they did not mean to let her go, Jenny found herself being tugged along the pavement.

## BACK TO RENTS COURT

**J**ENNY did not cry out. She did not even struggle. So shaken was she, indeed, by that encounter with the figure which had haunted her dreams, that she was hardly conscious of any other feeling.

It seemed, somehow, quite natural that she should find herself escorted up the road by these two people who had been her brutal parents, from whom she had run away.

"And don't," Sam hissed, in an undertone, "make a bother about it, young 'un. Remember"—threateningly—"we've still got the birth certificate wot proves you're our one and only daughter. Besides which," he added, incongruously enough, "there's that fire in London you was responsible for. The police still want to know about that, don't they, Ella?"

"Not half they don't!" Ella asserted. "So just you behave yourself, Jenny. Anyway, where have you been all this time, a-scaring the wits out of poor Sam and me?"

Jenny shrugged. She felt merely irritated. Oh, bother! Why couldn't they leave her alone? She did think for one passing instant of tearing herself free and making a dash for it; but she didn't.

Quite suddenly, and certainly very oddly, Jenny had a feeling that this meeting, so far from reacting to her disadvantage, was going to help her out. Just a feeling it was at the time—a dimly perceived glimpse into the future, which she couldn't have analysed for anything.

She did not reply. She walked on. Her mind was busy thinking of her nurse, thinking of Pam, of all those disturbing events that had led to the present situation.

Sam chattered, Ella simpered, and presently, plunging into the well-known purlieus of Rents Court, they came to the shabby, down-at-heel house which had been Jenny's home for so long.

Sam pushed her over the threshold, and Ella, slipping in quickly, shut the door and locked it, with a breath of relief.

"Well," said Sam, and his ugly lips wreathed back in a snarl, "so you've come home, eh?"

Jenny sat down. She eyed him, but she did not speak.

"And where," demanded Ella, "have you been?"

"That's my business," Jenny answered calmly.

"Ho, it is, is it?" Sam sneered. "Where's your high-and-mighty friend, Pamela?"

"That also," Jenny stated, "is my business."

"That also! My heye!" Sam stared. "Corks, we're getting a lady, ain't we? But where is she?"

"In London," Jenny said.

"What is she doing?"

"Working."

"Ho, is she! Then where's she living?"

"That," Jenny said calmly, "I'm not going to tell you."

Sam's eyes glittered.

"Not going to tell me, hey?" he growled. "Now, look here, me gal, I don't want any sauce from you! You'll tell me all I want to know. Ella and me's been looking for you ever since you vanished. And if you've come back to Wrenborough, then that other girl's not far away. Where is she?"

"I won't tell you!" snapped Jenny again.

"No?" Sam's face turned ugly. Up went his hand, and off came his belt. "Then perhaps," he said, "I'll make you change your mind!"

And down came the belt across her shoulders!"

With a cry of pain Jenny struggled, then, as the belt came hissing through the air again, she bolted desperately for the stairs. Up them she rushed, two at a time, reached the little room on the landing, and, quickly turning, locked herself in. Like some angry bull Sam blundered after her.

Bang, bang, bang! his fists went on the door, accompanied by his furious stentorian voice. "Come out! Open this door!"

"I won't," Jenny panted. "You leave me alone, or there'll be trouble! You're not going to bully me any more!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, come on," Ella's voice broke in testily; "leave her! She'll come soon enough when she gets hungry. Even Jenny won't stand for dying of hunger. Besides, if you go on making all this row you'll have the neighbours wanting to know what's happening. Come on!"

Growls from Sam, but apparently he allowed himself to be led away. Jenny, rubbing her shoulder, heard him at last, presumably tugged by Ella, plodding down the stairs. She heard the precious pair tramp into the living-room.

On the old bed which had been hers before that new life which Pamela Drake had opened up to her, she sat down, her head in her hands, her head throbbing hotly, her brain spinning. Oh, why had she allowed herself to be dragged back here to this awful place?

But she knew. Without Pam she was helpless. She and Ella had proof that she was their daughter. They could force her to stay. But she wasn't their daughter! She wasn't—she wasn't! She was—

James Thorpe's niece—Pamela Drake!"

Jenny caught in her breath. That thought always made the world an unreal place somehow. But Pam had told her—Pam, with her

own lips. Sam and Ella knew. Pam had been trying to prove that. Pam had—

Jenny stopped. Downstairs the voices of Sam and Ella came to her ears.

They came with a plainness which Sam and Ella would have been considerably startled to realise. Neither of them had exactly modulated voices, even when they spoke in undertones, and the house, one of the jerry-built variety when it was new, and considerably the worse for wear now that it was old, carried every sound through its thin walls and its cracked and holed ceilings.

"Well," Sam was saying, "we've got 'er. Got 'er easy, the little baggage. What's the next move? Tell Thorpe?"

"And supposing," Ella asked, "we do?"

"Well, he'll want her, won't he? Didn't he tell us that if we got hold of her to tell him at once?"

They were talking about her. Jenny had no compunction in listening.

"Mighty anxious he is to get hold of 'er, ain't he?" Ella sneered. "And we know why, eh? Well, supposing we do tell him that we've got 'er, and supposing we 'and 'er over to him—what do we get out of it? Ten quid! No, Sam, I've got a better idea than that."

"Oh, have you?" Jenny muttered.

"Sam, listen!" Ella's voice rose excitedly.

"Sam, you and me haven't been dealt fairly with in all this. What are we getting out of it? We know that Thorpe's in mortal terror of Jenny showing up at them Walfords' 'Cos why?"

"'Cos if certain things comes out, then away goes Thorpe to gaol, and away goes his fortune to Jenny! Once Thorpe is sure Jenny's out of the way, he can sit back and grin like the sour-faced Cheshire cat he is. But getting hold of Jenny is worth his fortune to him. It should be worth a fortune to us."

"Well?" Sam grunted.

"My idea." Ella went on cunningly, "is to take Jenny away and 'ide 'er. Then we can go up to Thorpe. 'Thorpe,' we can say, 'we've got Jenny, and you can 'ave 'er, but only at our price.' And that price"—she paused—"a thousand quid, Sam!"

Jenny sat up with a jerk. Oh, what utter treacherous scoundrels these two were! They were planning to blackmail Thorpe, with herself the prize to be won!

Well, she didn't care about that. She had little or no interest in the amiable intentions of her bogus guardians towards Thorpe. But Pam was right, then—Pam was always right. That conversation proved it. She was the rich girl Pam had told her she was.

But how could she prove it? Could the Walfords prove her real identity?

Jenny pondered the problem.

The Walfords were mixed up in this. Again her mind returned to Mrs. Walford—that nurse of her dreams, filling her with the queerest of sensations. Well, she would go to the Walfords. She would! She would find out with all possible speed exactly what Mrs. Walford knew about her.

She turned quickly to the window. It was a small window, looking out into a refuse littered yard below. There was a drop of twenty feet or more.

Jenny looked and then looked again.

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## SOLUTIONS TO TRIXIE'S TRICKS

1. Heroine. (He—her—hero—heroine.)
  2. Oysters.
  3. Twice 22 equals 44; twice 2 equals 4 plus 20 equals 24. Thus the difference is 20.
  4. FEW—feE—LeE—LeT—LOT.
  5. The one and the four!
  6. A taxi-driver has no money in his meter, so it couldn't happen!
  7. Noon.
- 

Twenty feet! And not a drainpipe nearer than ten feet below her.

"No joke!" Jenny told herself. But she must reach the ground—she must!

How?

Frantically Jenny looked around the poorly furnished bed-room. How different it was from the other rooms she had grown used to lately. The ugly, old-fashioned iron bedstead, the little-used wash-stand, the cheap lace curtains trailing from the ceiling to floor in the dust.

"And I never used to notice it even," Jenny murmured to herself. She compared the gas bracket on the wall—without shade or mantle—with the ornate chandeliers, and the simple but costly electric fittings in John Arnold's home.

But it was not time to think of such things now. She must escape from here—to the Walfords.

Jenny thought of making a rope from sheets, but there were no sheets on the bed.

She looked at the curtains. Ah, they'd do! She gave them a tug. Down they came clattering, large wooden rings jangling on the ugly bamboo cane that supported them.

Jenny tested them. Would they hold her weight? A pull, and then—rip-p-p!

The curtains were useless as a rope; exposure and the dust of months had rotted the cheap material.

Hopelessly Jenny looked round again.

"Got it!" she cried suddenly. "Good old Jenny!"

Pushing at the rickety wash-stand, she got it close to the window. Down on the floor she dumped the basin and jug. Where they had been she placed a chair.

Then up Jenny climbed, recklessly, having no thought of care. Her very speed made her task simpler. If she had paused to get her balance, undoubtedly she would have fallen.

A second later, Jenny was on the floor again, the long curtain pole in her arms.

She looked out of the window again. Yes, the drainpipe below had a wire-covered mouth.

Out of the window Jenny pushed the pole, and prodded it into the pipe. Then she made the other end rigid to the window-sill by fastening several thicknesses of the curtaining through a ring, and tying it to the wash-stand leg.

Jenny enjoyed her daring slide down the bamboo pole, and the climb down the drainpipe was "just jam," as Jenny told herself.

Thud! She jumped the last three feet. From inside the house came a startled cry in Ella's voice.

"It's Jenny! She's getting away!"

Jenny gasped. She heard a movement. Then, like a flash, she was across the yard. A rotten door set in the wall gave on to a mews. Desperately she tugged at it. The lock came away in her hand, just as a furious Sam and Ella appeared at the kitchen door. She heard Sam's shout to stop!

She didn't; she flew.

"Come on, after her!" Sam shouted.

Up the mews Jenny fled. In the half-darkness she stumbled against a battered pail thrown with the rubbish out of one of the houses. Down went Jenny, grazing her knees. Up again, with Sam only half a dozen yards behind her.

Sam gave a roar. Jenny, aware of a searing pain in her foot, rushed on. Now she was out of the mews, into the street, Sam and Ella yelling as they pursued her. She reached the main thoroughfare.

"Stop!" yelled Sam.

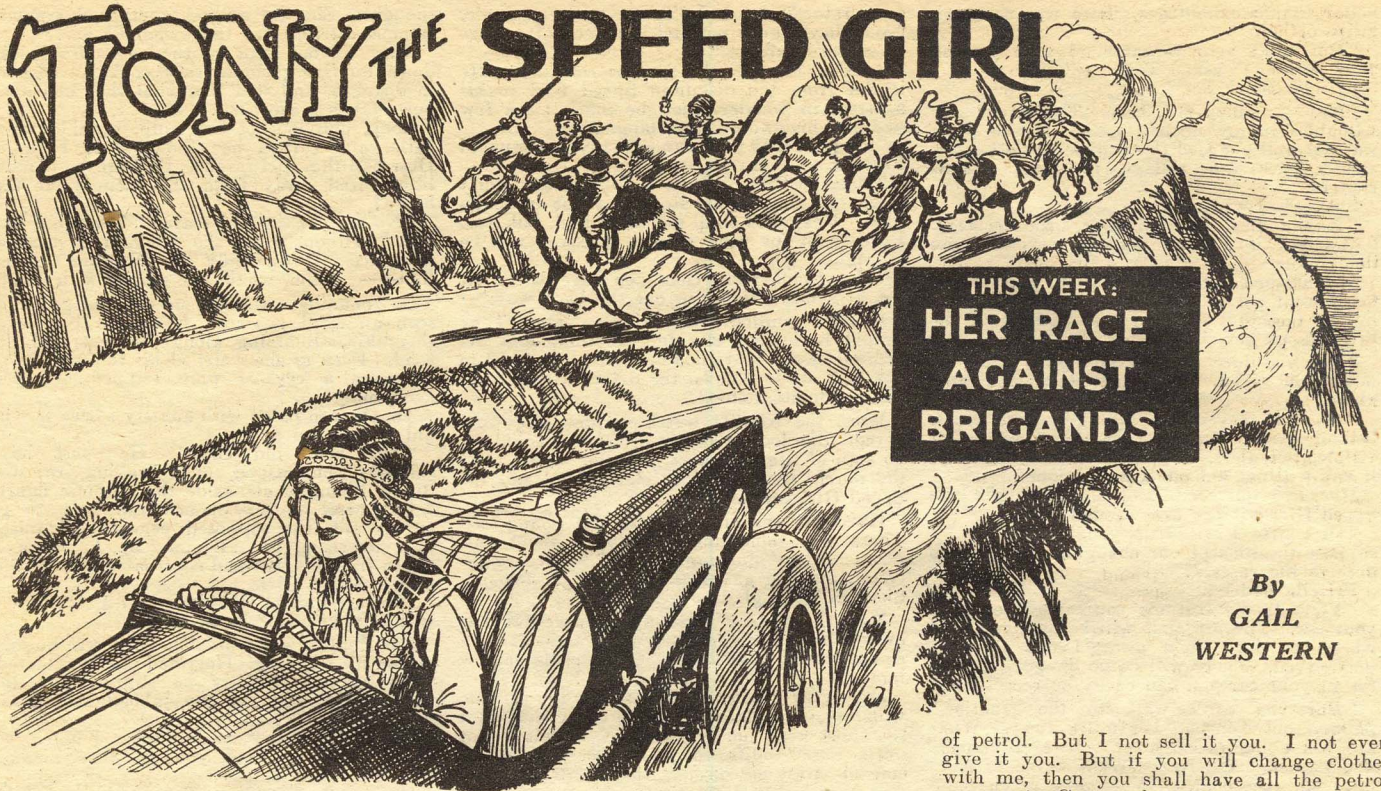
"Stop!" shrieked Ella.

But Jenny did not stop. Neither did she look. Without thinking, anxious to get away, she darted across the road.

She did not see the omnibus which, rushing down the road, applied too late its screaming brakes. She just felt suddenly a great numbing pain in her side, found herself being flung in the gutter, then her senses left her.

There are surprising developments next Friday. Make certain of reading all about them by ordering your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance.

# TONY THE SPEED GIRL



THIS WEEK:  
**HER RACE  
AGAINST  
BRIGANDS**

By  
**GAIL  
WESTERN**

## A STRANGE REQUEST

**T**HIS doesn't look much like Europe. It's more like the back of beyond! There was a worried frown on Tony Farrell's face. After scanning the desolate hills that shut in the road, she glanced down at the dashboard, and her lips tightened as she read the petrol gauge.

There was less than two gallons in the tank! The outlook for the Speed Girl certainly was not pleasant. There was not even a village in sight, and yet she had only sufficient petrol to take her a further ten miles.

Unless she managed to replenish her supply, she and the Silver Phantom would find themselves stranded—marooned in the heart of the Balkans!

Tony had hoped to cross the frontier in time for lunch, but here it was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, and she was still winding her way through the bleak mountains.

Mile after mile she covered, and it was late afternoon before Tony came to any sign of human habitation.

Well back from the road, almost hidden by trees, was a green-painted house, built in Oriental style.

It was an eerie place, and the Speed Girl wondered what kind of people chose to live up here, countless miles from the nearest neighbour.

Resolutely Tony drove up to the house and knocked.

At first there came no answer to her knock; then suddenly she became aware of a gleaming pair of eyes surveying her through a little trap-door set in one panel.

The eyes stared suspiciously, and then came the creak of heavy bolts, and the door swung open, to reveal a burly manservant, dressed in the picturesque blouse and sash and wide, baggy trousers of the country.

Grimly, almost fiercely, he surveyed Tony, and a brusque question fell from his lips.

Tony smiled and pointed to her car. "Sorry to bother you, but have you any petrol?" she asked. "Comprez petrol?"

To her dismay the surly-looking man did not seem to understand, even though Tony tried a few words of French, German, and Spanish. Instead, he grunted and abruptly slammed the door in her face.

In blank dismay she stared, then to her relief the door was again opened, and now confronting her was a girl of her own age.

For a moment Tony stared in frank admiration. It was not that the other girl was so beautiful, though she was pretty enough, but her costume held her spellbound.

Over a richly ornamented native blouse the girl wore a silken waistcoat-like jacket, embroidered in gold and silver. Her short skirt stood out stiffly like a ballet dancer's, and a band of solid gold stretched from ear to ear, supporting a flimsy veil that emphasised rather than hid her features—features that were strangely pale and apprehensive.

Indeed, there was fear in her eyes, and it was with a nervous hand that she clutched Tony and almost pulled her into the dark hall.

"Come in here. It is not safe to stay outside," she whispered, and her English was almost perfect.

"Not safe!" Tony stared blankly. What queer kind of a household was this?

The veiled girl shook her head, and, nodding to the manservant, led Tony into a large room, furnished chiefly with divans and piles of cushions.

The manservant planted himself alertly in the doorway, one hand on a glittering haft that jutted from his sash—a dagger!

Despite herself, Tony knew a thrill. Excitedly she turned to the other girl.

"Why are you so frightened?" she asked. "What is the matter? Is there anything I can do for you?"

The other girl nodded. Frizella was her name.

"Yes, yes; you can help me much. Listen! It is petrol you have come for—is that not so?"

Tony nodded. "Good! Then I make a bargain. My uncle—he is not at home now—he have plenty

## SHE PROMISED TO HELP FRIZELLA

|| But Little Did  
She Guess The  
Danger Involved

of petrol. But I not sell it you. I not even give it you. But if you will change clothes with me, then you shall have all the petrol you want. Come, what you say? You give me your clothes, and I give you the petrol."

Excitedly Frizella stretched out one brown arm. Some of the fear vanished from her eyes, and eagerly she surveyed the Speed Girl, a feverish flush on her cheeks.

Tony was too amazed to answer. She could only gaze at Frizella in bewilderment. What lay behind this surprising offer? Why was this mystery girl so anxious to change clothes with her? And why did the surly manservant continue to stand guard in the doorway?

Tony's search for petrol had led her into one of the most thrilling adventures of her life.

## CHASED BY BRIGANDS

**P**LEASE explain!" Seating herself on the edge of a divan, Tony faced Frizella with sympathy. She could see that the foreign girl, despite her excitement, was suffering from a great fear, and she was anxious to help her if she could.

"Who is it you're frightened of?" she asked. Frizella looked apprehensively about, and then pointed dramatically to the window.

"The bandits!" she cried. "They have been watching the house for days. Night and day they are always there, waiting and watching. They dare not break in. My uncle's servants are strong and loyal. They would protect me, but if I ventured outside—ah, but it is terrible! To be shut up like a prisoner, to know that at any moment those villains may pounce!"

Her voice broke, and appealingly she leaned across to the Speed Girl.

"You will help me—please!" she implored. "I must join my uncle in Bulgaria. Three days ago he sent me a telegram, telling me to come to him. There is money involved. I not understand business, but I must cross the frontier. You understand?"

Slowly Tony nodded. She was beginning to realise the truth.

One of the ruthless bands of brigands that infested these primitive Balkan hills was out to kidnap Frizella—hold her to ransom possibly.

If the girl ventured outside she would be captured, and in these hilly wilds, countless miles from the nearest town, connected with civilisation by only a single road that was little

better than a mule-track, there was no possibility of help.

"But can't your servants go with you on your journey?" asked Tony.

Frizella shook her head.

"Nay, they must stay here. There are many valuables in my uncle's house. If the place was not well guarded those abominable bandits would loot and pillage to their heart's content."

She sighed wistfully.

"Nay, I must journey alone," she declared. "And yet if I once venture beyond these domains—"

She finished with another gulp, and Tony's heart went out to her, though she was puzzled by the fact that she had seen nothing of the brigands on her way up.

"Are you sure they haven't gone away by now?" she asked. "I saw no one when I came along."

"Ah, but they are in hiding—behind rocks, behind trees. Like shadows they are. Invisible, but alert, impatient to pounce. Nay, if you will not aid me, I am undone!"

Her lips quivered, and encouragingly the Speed Girl put her arm around her.

"Of course I will help you," she said. "I suppose the idea of our changing clothes is to deceive the rascals?"

Frizella nodded.

"Yes. In my costume you can drive off in your car. The brigands will be deceived, and while you lure them away I can slip out unobserved. There will be no danger for you, for in your car you can easily outtrace them."

"But you can't walk to the frontier," pointed out Tony. "It's miles away. What are you going to do after you've—I know!" She paused excitedly. "We'll agree to meet later on," she said. "When I've given those rascals the slip I will meet you and drive you across the frontier. How's that?"

The foreign girl clapped her hands. Her fear seemed to have vanished, and it was excitedly that she developed Tony's suggestion. It appeared that ten miles farther along the road was a huge cliff, shaped by the wind and the rain into the form of a vulture.

It was here that Frizella arranged for the Speed Girl to pick her up.

"Though Vulture Rock is many kilometres from here by road, on foot I can take a short cut and quickly reach it," she said. "There I will wait for you, but—oh, how can I express my gratitude! You are so calm, so brave, so cheerful. Never have I met such a friend before."

Tony blushed.

"Oh, rubbish!" she protested. "Now let's get changed. Your servant can be filling up my petrol tank while we dress."

Frizella nodded, and at a word from her the surly looking man—he looked like a bandit himself—disappeared.

Though she had light-heartedly adopted Frizella's plan, Tony felt anything but easy in her mind. She had heard terrifying stories about the cruelty of these Balkan bandits.

If she did fall into their hands—But that was a thought better forgotten. In an effort to banish it, Tony admiringly surveyed the picturesque costume the other girl was unbuttoning.

"It's a real picture!" she declared. "And so quaint!"

Frizella smiled.

"You like it?"

"Rather! And that dinky little veil!"

Thrilled at the prospect of dressing-up, Tony slipped out of her overalls and excitedly led the other girl help her to put on the colourful Balkan costume. When the veil had been adjusted across her face she pirouetted around on one toe.

"Well, how do I look?" she demanded.

Frizella clapped her hands.

"Wonderful! A real Balkan princess!" she declared. "Our native dress suits you. The brigands will never guess the truth. Abruptly her smile died, and impulsively she caught Tony by the arm. "There is no danger for you—I swear it. Not until you are well away from the house will the brigands dare show themselves, and then—"

"Then down will go my foot on the

accelerator," finished Tony, with a smile, "and they'll grab nothing but smoke from the Phantom's exhaust."

At that moment the servant returned. He stared from the disguised Speed Girl to his mistress in wonder, then he muttered a few words in his own guttural language.

"He says that your car is ready," whispered Frizella.

"Good! Then I'll be going. Now, don't forget. By the Vulture Rock in about an hour's time. I expect I shall get there first, but if so I will wait for you. You're sure you will be all right?"

"Yes, thank you. Once you have drawn off the brigands I will slip out the back way."

Frizella smiled reassuringly, and Tony smiled back, but she felt anything but reassured as she said good-bye, with one hand to her veil, walked down the drive to where the Silver Phantom stood.

Were the bandits watching now, she wondered. She looked keenly around, but could see no sign of life anywhere. Frizella waved from the porch, then the door clanged to, and the Speed Girl was alone.

Hurriedly she climbed into the racing car. There was something forbidding about this place, with its unkempt garden, its dreary firs, and the gaunt, silent hills all around. She would be glad to get away.

Yet, though she was apprehensive for her own safety, her thoughts were with Frizella as she turned the Phantom out into the narrow lane.

Her every instinct bade her fling the throttle wide open. Danger lurked on every side. But she must keep her side of the bargain. Not until the bandits saw and recognised her costume must she speed. At all costs she must lure them away from the house.

Bumping and slithering on the pebbly road, the Phantom crawled onward. Soon the main road could be seen, and Tony was beginning to think that Frizella had let her fears run away with her, when—

C-rack!

With startling suddenness a rifle shot rang out. Tony was so alarmed that she nearly let go of the steering-wheel.

C-rack!

Another whip-like report came from the huddled masses of boulders beside the road, and a bullet went screaming through the air.

One apprehensive glance Tony cast around her, and then, as she saw two men rise from behind the rocks, her heart did a mad somersault.

"They're there right enough!" she gasped. "And real ruffians they look, too!"

The brigands wore sheepskin coats and big, bushy-like hats also of woolly skin. All had knives thrust in their belts, and many carried old-fashioned muskets.

As they saw the Silver Phantom go speeding by they leapt out into the road, stared, then broke into angry shouts.

"It is she—there is no mistaking that costume!"

"Stop her—she must not escape!"

Guns cracked, and then, as the terrified Tony accelerated and went driving on, head bent low, shoulders hunched over the wheel, there was a rush for the horses tethered amongst the trees.

Tony's heart did another crazy somersault as she heard the clop-clop-clop of horses' hoofs behind her.

The brigands, completely deceived, were giving chase. They did not mean to lose their prey!

The junction of the two roads loomed ahead. With desperate haste Tony dragged on the steering-wheel. The Phantom lurched perilously up. On two wheels it skidded round the corner, then—

Br-uuu-u-m!

Forward it hurtled. Faster and faster. Expert horsemen though they were, the bandits could not keep up the dizzy pace. Another minute of nerve-racking suspense, and then Tony's pursuers dropped from sight. The Speed Girl gasped with relief.

"Thank goodness!" she gasped and mopped at her brow.

Now there was nothing to fear—or so Tony

thought. She did not realise that this mountainous district was the brigands' home.

They seldom kept to the road. By riding down terrifying slopes they could save miles in distance, and that was what they had done now—taken a short cut.

Tony, oblivious of the truth, eased down a little, and turned her thoughts to Frizella. How had that girl fared? Had all the bandits been lured away from the vicinity of the house?

"No wonder she was scared," Tony told herself. "Without a car she wouldn't have stood a chance. It was only the Phantom's speed that—Hallo, what's the matter with him?"

On rounding a rocky bend she had suddenly seen an aged peasant, dressed in the usual sheepskin, stumbling along the centre of the road. Even as she watched his tottering steps he gave a cry of pain, tripped, and fell headlong.

Tony's face paled with anxiety as she saw he did not get up again.

"The poor old chap! He must have fainted!" he gasped, and, braking, ran the Silver Phantom alongside the pathetic figure.

But even as she opened the door to go to his aid, the supposed peasant galvanised into surprising life. Leaping up, he whipped a gun from his belt and confronted the flabbergasted Speed Girl.

"In car—quick! You go where I say, or you will be punished!" he snarled.

His English was poor, but there was no mistaking his meaning. Horrified and bewildered, Tony obeyed. Swiftly he slipped into the vacant seat, and his gun jabbed her in the side.

"Drive quickly!" he ordered. "When we come to other road, you go there—understand?"

Her hands trembling, Tony nodded, and let in the clutch. Who was this horrible-looking man? Was he one of the bandits, or was he just a lone-hand robber?

The gun boring into her side made her shiver. It was useless expecting help. This was the Balkans, not England. This man would not be frightened to shoot. If she dared disobey him—

Tony gulped. She was getting more adventure than she liked. Fearfully she drove onward, dragging at the steering-wheel as a narrow break appeared in the cliffs. Her captor nodded approvingly.

"That the road—not much farther now!" he growled.

The rough track was dangerous for a car to negotiate. Every few moments Tony had to swerve in order to avoid a jagged boulder, but at last the nightmare journey came to an end.

Her captor signalled her to stop, and in the distance the Speed Girl saw a huge cavern burrowing deep into the mountainside. Horses were tethered outside, and around a camp-fire stood a dozen men, armed to the teeth.

At sight of the slowing car they uttered cries of triumph and came rushing forward.

Tony's heart sank. She knew the truth now. These were the bandits that had chased her. They must have taken a short cut, and now, thanks to their cunning ruse, she was their prisoner.

Apprehensively she stopped the car, and at a gesture from her captor descended. One of the bandits—a giant of a man, with a tawny beard and hands the size of hams—outstripped the others and pulled up in front of the quaking Tony with a mocking smile.

"You think you get away," he said in his own language, "but we are too clever for you! You must stay with us until your uncle pays us the ransom money."

As he spoke he raised one huge hand, and, clutching Tony's veil, tore it from its supporting gold band.

Tony cowered back, and the bandit chief uttered a bull-like roar.

"Per Zacco, but this is not her!" he bellowed. "This is the wrong girl! We have been tricked!"

For a moment the band stared in speechless surprise at the shrinking Speed Girl; then knives were plucked from their belts, and the brigands surged forward.

"Kill her! She has tricked us!" they roared, and their barbaric eyes gleamed pitilessly.

## HER SACRIFICE WAS IN VAIN

**D**ESPERATELY the Speed Girl glared around her, seeking some way of escape, but the brigands encircled her.

Quivering and deathly pale, she tried to prevent herself from breaking down. She would at least try to appear brave. But actually her heart was pounding madly; her legs, quivering, threatened to collapse from under her.

The furious shouts rang in her ears, she glimpsed upraised knives, and then, as she battled with faintness, she heard the giant leader bellowing to his men, pushing and kicking them back.

"Fools, would you lose all hope of ransom?" he roared. "Stand back there! We are not beaten yet! This girl must know where the other one is! She shall be made to confess!"

Instantly there came shouts of approval. "Well spoken, Grika! To the torture tree with her! When she hears our knives humming about her head, she will speak the truth!"

Grika, their chief, waved back the impatient mob.

"Wait! I will deal with this girl!" he said, and turned to the Speed Girl.

His heavy, bearded face split into a rough smile.

"There is no need for alarm," he told her, speaking English with difficulty. "If you are sensible, no harm will befall you. But why are you wearing this pretty dress?"

He pointed to Tony's picturesque costume, and desperately she collected together her scattered wits. Grave though was her own peril, she must protect Frizella. At all costs she must keep the truth from these glowering ruffians.

"I—I liked it, and—and so Frizella gave it to me!" she stammered.

He frowned.

"And where is Frizella now?" he demanded.

"I—I don't know."

He advanced a step nearer. One huge hand lunged out and closed around her trembling wrist.

"Where is this other girl?" he demanded. "Speak before it is too late! I do not like hurting pretty girls, but my comrades are not so patient. Confess—at once! Tell us the truth, or—"

He nodded significantly to his muttering, knife-fingering men. Tony repressed a shudder.

By now Frizella must have reached Vulture Rock. All unsuspectingly she would wait there for the Silver Phantom; but if the Speed Girl opened her lips, then it would be the brigands who would keep the appointment.

Grika glared at her.

"Answer!" he roared, his great chest swelling, his tawny beard bristling with impatience.

"I—I don't know!" gulped Tony. "Oh, how can you be so cruel! I have never done you any harm! Let me go!"

Her voice trailed away, and she gave a gasp as the brigand leader dragged her over to the camp-fire. There he pushed her to the ground, beckoning to two of his henchmen.

"Guard her well! I hold you responsible for her!" Grika said. "We will give her half an hour in which to reflect! If she does not confess then—"

He broke off as suddenly there came the clatter of hoofs. A horseman was riding up the rocky trail. Grika turned as the newcomer hailed him, and for a minute or two the pair conversed excitedly.

Wonderingly Tony watched and waited. Suddenly she saw the other bandits leaping up. They were saddling their horses, making ready for a hurried departure.

Tony had no time even to speculate as to the reason for their haste, for Grika again strode over to her.

"There is no need for you to speak," he told her. "We have discovered the truth."

Tony stared at him in horror.

"Impossible!" she gasped. "Who could have told you?"

"One of her servants!" he laughed. "The fool quickly opened his lips when he felt a knife tickling his ribs! I regret we must ask you to stay here, but until we capture the real girl we cannot let you go. Good-bye!"

He bowed mockingly and then went striding across to his horse. Tony stumbled desperately

to her feet. Frizella must be warned. She had not an inkling of the terrible danger she was in. These ruffians were off to Vulture Rock. Unless they were stopped they would capture the waiting girl.

Already the majority of the band was in the saddle, and at a word from their leader they sank home their spurs.

"Stop—you mustn't harm her! That servant told you lies. She isn't at the Vulture Rock at all. You're only going off on a wild goose chase!"

Wildly Tony shouted and wildly she tried to dart forward, but one of the two guards who had been deputed to stay behind caught her by the wrist and flung her to the ground.

"You move—you sorry!" he growled, and he fingered the knife at his belt.

Horried, helpless, Tony watched the brigands ride off. It looked as if she had made her sacrifice in vain. Nothing now, it seemed, could save Frizella from capture!

**"WHEN** your friends come back you let me go, eh?"

Tony's smile gave no hint of her agitation.



The bandit chief gave an angry bellow as he tore off Tony's veil. Thanks to the Speed Girl having changed clothes with Frizella the brigands had kidnapped the wrong girl.

In friendly fashion she turned and surveyed her two guards. One of them nodded, and the Speed Girl gave a sigh of relief.

"Good, then there is no need to worry," she declared. "After all, this other girl is a stranger; why should I worry my head about her?"

She shrugged carelessly then, noticing a queer, guitar-like instrument lying on the heap of stores inside the cave, she gave a cry of delight.

"You play!" she cried. "You make music, eh?"

She nodded to the instrument, and, grinning sheepishly, one man rose and brought it over. Tony fingered its beribboned handle admiringly.

"But what a beautiful guitar!" she cried. "Do play for me. I love music, and I am sure you can play nicely."

Completely disarmed by her manner, the owner of the native guitar plucked at the strings. It was not long before both the men

were singing lustily, a wild, barbaric song of the hills.

Tony looked as if she was thoroughly enjoying it; actually her gaze was centred on the Silver Phantom, standing less than fifty yards away. If only she could reach her beloved car! There would be a chance of saving Frizella then. On horseback it would take the brigands nearly two hours to reach the Vulture Rock.

The song came to an end, and the Speed Girl clapped enthusiastically.

"Lovely!" she cried. "Now play something else. I tell you what, I will dance for you, if you like!"

She jumped up and struck a pose. The men nodded, the one with the instrument plucking at the strings.

Apart from an ordinary waltz or fox-trot, Tony could not dance, but desperately she improvised, flinging out her arms dramatically, whirling round on one toe, pirouetting and capering.

And all the time she was secretly edging towards the Silver Phantom. When the dance came to an end Tony was actually standing

beside the car. Flushed and breathless, she surveyed the guards.

"Now I will play and you shall dance," she declared. "But I cannot play the guitar. Wait a minute. I have a better instrument here."

Waving her hand in friendly fashion, she jumped into the car and bent down as though in search of something.

By now completely disarmed, the bandits watched curiously. They had no suspicion of the truth until suddenly—

Br-uuuuu-m!

The Silver Phantom's engine awoke to noisy life!

For a moment the guards stood gaping, then, snatching up their guns, they charged angrily forward.

"Stop!" they bellowed. "What means this trick?"

They quickly discovered.

Desperately Tony let in the clutch. Desperately she dragged at the steering-wheel. Forward whirled the Phantom, causing the two

brigands to leap for their lives. Before they could recover from the first shock the Speed Girl had turned the car, and then down on the accelerator went her foot.

Onward hurtled the racing car. Back down the narrow trail it rocketed. From behind came savage shouts, the whip-like crack of guns, and bullets began to scream by overhead.

Frenziedly Tony ducked. Her heart in her mouth, she sent the car racing on. The junction with the main road was very near now. One more moment of suspense, then the charging guards were left far behind.

Ahead Tony had a clear road. It was non-stop for Vulture Rock, but could she get there before the brigands? They had not gone this way; they had taken to the mule-track through the hills—a much shorter distance.

The road twisted and wound back on itself like a snake. On one side was a sheer precipice. On the other the cliff rose black and sheer. Loose pebbles caused the car to slither dangerously. Fallen boulders blocked the way. Tony had to steer skilfully between them.

Great as was her anxiety, she dared not let the Phantom fully out. As it was, every bend was a danger spot. Several times the revving back wheels overhung empty spaces. More than once Tony narrowly escaped crashing.

But the thought of Frizella kept her going. Her heart was palpitating. Her white face was strained and grim.

Every moment she expected the car to slither to its doom, and then, when she had covered several nightmare miles, she got another shock.

From somewhere high up came bellowing shouts. Craning her neck, she saw a galloping band of horsemen glaring down at her.

The brigands! She had overtaken them, and now they had spotted her! Some unloosed their guns. The remainder savagely spurred their horses on. It was a race in grim earnest now.

Despite its powerful engine, the odds were against the Silver Phantom. There were so many bends and the car could not take short cuts like her rivals higher up.

Desperately Tony opened the throttle wide. Careless of the risk, she flogged the speed up to sixty-five miles an hour. The brigands were left behind, but not for long. Another short cut again put them ahead.

Madly Tony set once more to make up the leeway. Surely Vulture Rock could not be much farther, she thought, and even as she asked herself the question, she saw it.

A huge, wind-swept rock that stood isolated in the centre of a vast valley. It could be glimpsed over the precipice, for the road twisted and wound down to it.

Tony was too far away to see Frizella, but suddenly she realised that the bandits had left the mule track. Though behind, they still held the advantage. Their object was plain. They meant to cross the road and ride down the steep, smooth slope that led straight to the Vulture Rock.

Tony's heart failed her. She knew that if she kept to the road she would be beaten. Unless she, too, took the short cut, she would never save the waiting girl below.

But no car could travel down the grassy slope. It was as steep as a toboggan run. All Tony's experience told her it would be madness to attempt it, and yet the bandits had gained the road now, were about to put their horses to the steep dip.

Tony flung them one backward glance, then, though her hands were trembling, she wrenched at the wheel. Round slithered the Silver Phantom. For one terrifying moment its front wheels overhung the edge of the precipice, then down its nose dipped.

To the agitated Speed Girl the car seemed to stand up on end. She had already shut off her engine, and now grimly she stepped on her brakes. But though the wheels were locked, the car was rushing headlong downwards.

Faster and faster, stirring up clouds of dust, lurching and rocking, threatening every moment to overturn and go tumbling to disaster.

The brigands were away to the right. Their shouts told that they had seen Tony's daring ruse, and soon bullets came screaming and hissing across the slope.

But the Speed Girl paid them no heed. All her attention was concentrated on that

steep dip ahead. What would happen when the madly careering Phantom gained the bottom of the slope? Would she be able to get it back under control, or would it crash to destruction?

White-faced Tony clung to the wheel, engulfed in the rising dust, tobogganing onward at dizzy speed.

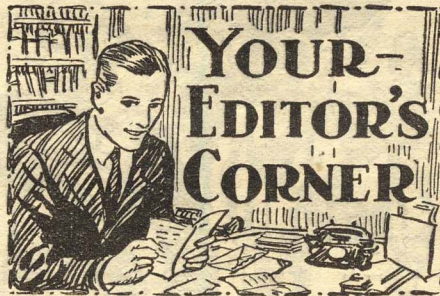
"THE brigands! Our ruse did not fool them. They know where I am!"

Frizella, dressed in Tony's white overalls, and patiently waiting in the shadow of the gigantic rock, stared in undisguised terror as, far away in the distance, she saw a long column of horses plunging and careering down the steep slope.

And then she got a fresh shock. From amid a cloud of white dust came a musical honking. The Silver Phantom's klaxon!

In bewilderment Frizella stared: and then, with a gulp, she went running forward. Tony was signalling to her to get ready to jump aboard.

But would the Speed Girl reach her first? The brigands were very near the bottom of the slope now. Her heart in her mouth, the foreign girl watched and waited, then a cry of despair escaped her lips. Turning, she made to flee.



Girls' Crystal Office,  
The Fleetway House,  
Farrington Street,  
London, E.C.A.

HALLO, GIRLS!—I expect you are all getting excited about Easter. I know I am, though I am writing this a long time before the holiday.

Here's hoping you will all have a good time, and not have your high spirits dampened by even so much as a single drop of rain.

I hope that in the excitement of the first holiday of the year you will not forget to order in advance your next copy of your favourite weekly, for the next GIRLS' CRYSTAL will be an unusually good number. It would be a terrible pity if you missed it, wouldn't it?

I am sure you simply revelled in Noel Raymond's Easter adventure, but next Friday he takes up an even more intriguing case. "The Ring That Brought Fear" the story is entitled, and it will simply keep you on tenterhooks of excitement.

Though Miss Desmond has been able to keep the flag flying in the Fourth Form at St. Kilda's, the rest of the school is definitely on the down grade, thanks to Miss Murdstone's unpleasant ways. Next Friday the tyrannical headmistress makes a special effort to cause chaos in the Fourth. She even threatens to expel Pat Derwent and several other girls.

What the result of this latest ruthless attack is, you will discover when you read "When Expulsion Threatened."

Tony the Speed Girl visits Paris next week, and thanks to "The Partner She Could Not Trust," she has a very nerve-racking time—and a thrilling one.

Poppy Binks you will find as entertaining as ever and, in addition, of course, there will be dramatic instalments of our three serials. Cheerio, till next Friday.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR

Several of the bandits were streaming towards her, at their head the giant Grika. Tony's desperate toboggan ride had been made in vain. Even as Frizella realised her danger, the brigand chief galloped alongside.

"You cannot escape!" he roared. "It is useless to resist!"

His huge hand reached down to grab the terrified girl. Other bandits closed in, but, even as Frizella was about to be seized, there came a thunderous roar from the slope to the right, mingled with the frenzied honking of the Phantom's klaxon horn.

Tony, desperate, was out to scare the horses—and she succeeded. Driven frantic by the sudden din, several of them threw their riders and reared up. The others took the bit between their teeth and bolted.

Grika, tugging savagely at the reins, strove to calm his frightened steed, and then he lost his nerve. Out of control, roaring like some nightmare monster, the Silver Phantom had reached the bottom of the slope, and, like a shot from a gun, it was thundering straight for him.

Snarling, scared himself, he jabbed home his spurs. His horse leapt forward, to miss the down-charging car by bare inches.

Tony was tugging at the wheel. Though her last-minute plan had succeeded, though all the brigands were in flight, carried headlong away by their panic-stricken steeds, the Speed Girl knew a terrible anxiety.

Ahead reared the Vulture Rock. Carried on by its own crazy momentum, the Phantom was rocketing straight for it. Desperately Tony applied her brakes.

The racing car bumped and lurched alarmingly. That gigantic rock ahead seemed to be rushing to meet it. Nearer and nearer—

Tony closed her eyes. Her dizzy brain threatened to engulf her in oblivion. Her limbs were shivering.

And then suddenly, magically, the wheels skidded on a patch of dry sand. Round swung the Phantom's nose. The huge rock seemed to leap away, and next moment, shaken and exhausted, Tony managed to bring the car to a jolting halt.

Through the flying dust a frantic figure rushed.

"Are you hurt? Are you hurt? Ah, to think that I should expose you to such danger!"

It was Frizella. Shakily Tony smiled at her as she dabbed agitatedly at her moist brow.

"I'm all right—thanks!" she gasped. "But we'd better get a move on. It won't take those rascals long to get their horses back under control. Come on, hop aboard!"

Frizella obeyed, and, though she would dearly have loved to rest, the Speed Girl once more started up the engine. Regaining the main road, she jammed her foot hard on the accelerator.

Ahead the mountains opened out. In the far distance the grey roofs of a village could be seen. With every second that passed the Phantom was rocketing them nearer and nearer civilisation.

The worst was over. Despite her nightmare adventures, Tony had won through. Single-handed, she had outwitted the brigands of the hills, and half an hour later the frontier was reached.

There was no train to Belgrade, Frizella's destination, until morning, and so the two girls put up for the night at a local hotel. Next day Frizella did not don her picturesque costume; instead, she put on the frock she had ordered over the phone.

"This costume you must have," she declared, smiling at Tony. "Just a little memento of me. In your country you have the fancy dress ball—yes?"

Tony nodded.

"Good! You wear this, then you win a prize."

And she was right.

Less than a week later, Tony, back in Austria, wore the wonderful peasant costume at a motoring ball in Vienna, and as a result added another trophy to her collection!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

More speed-thrills and excitement in next Friday's story of Tony the Speed Girl! Don't miss it. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL  
18/4/36

# THE MADCAP FORM MISTRESS



❖ THIS WEEK ❖  
**THE FOURTH  
 FORM  
 CASTAWAYS**

By  
**JEAN VERNON**

## !TROUBLE OVER THE PICNIC

**L**ESSON books away, girls!" exclaimed Miss Vera Desmond gaily. "You all worked splendidly this morning, and you deserve a change. What would you say to a picnic on Falcon Island this afternoon?"

There came a gasp of incredulous delight from the juniors assembled in the Fourth Form class-room at St. Kilda's.

"Do you really mean it?" asked Pat Derwent anxiously.

The Madcap Form-mistress smiled.

"Of course I do!" she declared.

"But, Miss Desmond, Falcon Island's out of bounds!" put in Lucy Granger.

"It was," Miss Desmond admitted, "but I happened to meet Mr. Hicks, the new governor, yesterday. We got chatting on one thing and another, and I mentioned that Falcon Castle was of great historical interest to schoolgirls; and, as a matter of fact, he suggested this excursion himself."

Miss Desmond failed to add that she had cleverly directed the conversation to this end, but the girls, knowing their Madcap Form-mistress, could guess it.

"Hurry up and have your lunch," Miss Desmond said. "We want to make an early start."

Eagerly the girls scampered out of the class-room. They were impatient to make a start. To-day lunch had little attraction for them, and an hour later they trooped excitedly along to the Madcap Form-mistress's study.

"All ready?" smiled Miss Desmond, picking up a large picnic basket from the table. "Off we go, then!"

They trooped out into the quadrangle, but as they emerged they were dismayed to see Miss Murdstone, the tyrannical headmistress, in the distance. With her was a stout, rather pompous man.

The headmistress started at the sight of the unusual procession, and her eyes narrowed.

"Miss Desmond!" she exclaimed sharply. "What—what is the meaning of this?"

"Which?" inquired the Madcap Form-mistress, smiling pleasantly. "Oh, you mean the hamper? The juniors and I are taking a little excursion to Falcon Island. It's a topping day for a picnic, don't you think?"

"What?" rapped Miss Murdstone. "You say you are taking the juniors to Falcon Island? By whose permission—"

"Mr. Hicks' suggestion," replied Miss Desmond, smiling at the pompous governor. "He agrees with me that Falcon Island is of great historical interest to schoolgirls. Is that not so, Mr. Hicks?"

The governor coughed. "Er—quite," he said. "Without doubt."

Miss Murdstone bit her lip, secretly furious. She hated to be got the better of by anyone—especially by Miss Desmond, the one person who refused to knuckle under to her tyrannical ways.

"The land is dangerous," she declared, turning to the governor. "It was for that reason that I put it out of bounds. I was thinking only of the safety of the girls. Miss Desmond, in my opinion, is not a fit and proper person to take charge of the girls on such an excursion."

"My hat!" thought Miss Desmond, her eyes flashing. "The old hypocrite!"

She could see that Mr. Hicks was wavering. "Ahem! Of course, Miss Murdstone," he began, "if it is a question of danger—"

Vera intervened hastily, realising that the girls' treat was at stake.

"I say, Mr. Hicks," she put in brightly, "I thought you made a topping speech at the governor's dinner the other night. I was reading the report in the local paper."

Mr. Hicks looked flattered. "Indeed? And what part appealed to you, young lady?"

Vera's eyes twinkled. "The part about the 'spirit of adventure' being kept alive among young people. I thought that was splendid! And your description of some of your own adventures abroad, especially that one where you were presented with a golden casket by an Eastern potentate for quelling a revolt. I wish you would show it to us some time."

Mr. Hicks swelled visibly, evidently pleased

## MAROONED ON FALCON ISLAND

But The Girls Didn't Get Downhearted—Miss Desmond Saw To That!

to be reminded of that episode of his daring youth. He shook his head regretfully.

"Unfortunately, the casket was stolen from me some months ago, or I should be glad to do so," he replied. "Adventure is a grand thing for young people."

"That's just what I think!" declared Miss Desmond, pressing her advantage. "Adventure is a splendid stimulant to the mind, especially when combined with a really educative purpose, such as a visit to Falcon Castle—"

"That is all very well," rapped Miss Murdstone, pale with annoyance. "But I still consider that Miss Desmond is not to be trusted to take charge of the girls on such an outing."

"Suppose we put it to the girls?" suggested the Madcap Form-mistress, smiling. "If they trust me—"

"We do!" came the enthusiastic shout, echoing across the quadrangle.

Mr. Hicks coughed, still under the influence of Miss Desmond's subtle flattery. The girls' enthusiasm clinched his decision.

"I think, Miss Murdstone," he said, "that we should give Miss Desmond the opportunity to prove—ahem!—her mettle. This excursion will be allowed on condition that Miss Desmond takes every proper care. Mind this, young lady," he added, turning to Vera, "the headmistress is naturally—and properly—concerned for the safety of the girls. Should you in any way jeopardise their safety, the governors will be forced to take the gravest view of the matter. You understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Miss Desmond, smiling. "I can assure you that you have no reason to worry." She flashed a triumphant glance at the scowling headmistress. "Come along, girls! Take your hamper, and we'll be getting along!"

The delighted juniors set out on the two-mile walk to the seashore, the Madcap Form-mistress striding at their head.

Ada Fengrove, who had witnessed the scene, nudged the scowling Miss Murdstone when Mr. Hicks had walked on.

"She's got the better of us again, aunt!" she muttered. "It's your fault—"

The headmistress's eyes glittered as she drew her niece aside.

"Do you imagine I'm going to leave it at that?" she demanded harshly. "She's played right into our hands!"

"What—what do you mean?" demanded Ada, staring.

"Use your wits, if you have any," snapped Miss Murdstone. "You heard what Mr. Hicks said about jeopardising the safety of the girls? It's up to you to see that she makes a hash of things!"

"How?" asked Ada blankly. Miss Murdstone leaned forward, dropping her voice to a vindictive whisper.

"Falcon Island is some way from the mainland," she said meaningly. "Supposing something should happen to prevent their getting back—"

The prefect caught in her breath sharply, her eyes gleaming spitefully.

"I get you, aunt!" she breathed. "Leave it to me! Miss Clever Desmond will grin on the other side of her face!"

"HERE we are, girls! Pat, you take charge of the picnic-basket. Lucy, you help me to moor the boat!"

Her unruly hair waving in the breeze, the Madcap Form-mistress gaily surveyed the laughing girls, who had just scrambled out of the big rowing-boat they had hired to take them to Falcon Island.

Falcon Island was actually a huge rock, rising sheerly out of the sea, and covered with fern, gorse, and stunted bushes. It was an ideal spot for a picnic.

On the crest of the island, standing out grey and weather-beaten against the sky, were the ruins of an ancient castle, built centuries before, when the rock was part of the mainland. There were local rumours—quite unfounded—that the castle was haunted!

Neither Miss Desmond nor the girls believed the old legend, but it helped to make the prospect of a visit to the ruins all the more thrilling.

When the boat had been moored Pat dumped the picnic basket down on a rock; then they all set out on an exploration trip.

They spent a happy half-hour, and then, to their dismay, a cold wind sprang up and the sky clouded over.

"Goodness," exclaimed Pat, "it looks like rain! What a nuisance!"

Miss Desmond pursed her lips as she eyed the heavy bank of cloud that had crept across the sun. Not only rain, but thunder, was in the offing.

"Never mind!" she remarked cheerfully. "There's plenty of shelter in the ruins. Have you girls all brought your macs?"

"Goodness—I've left mine in the boat?" exclaimed Lucy. "I'll run back for it—"

"Hurry, then!" laughed Miss Desmond. "Mind you don't fall. We'll wait for you here."

Lucy waved her hand and scrambled down the slope to be lost to sight among the bushes. Barely two minutes later a distant, startled cry reached Miss Desmond's ears.

The young Form-mistress stiffened, an anxious expression flashing into her eyes.

"Wait here, girls!" she said tersely. "I'm afraid something's happened."

She commenced to scramble down the slope, a vague foreboding at her heart. She blamed herself for letting Lucy out of her sight.

But just then that girl reappeared from the bushes—white-faced and agitated, and without her mac. She almost fell over in her haste to reach Miss Desmond.

"Lucy—what is it?" demanded Miss Desmond, her momentary relief giving place to a fresh anxiety. "What's happened?"

Lucy gulped, panting for breath. Her expression was tragic.

"Miss Desmond—the boat!" she gasped. "It—it's gone!"

There came a horrified gasp from the juniors. "Gone?" echoed Miss Desmond, her attractive face paling suddenly. "What do you mean? How could the rope have come unfastened—"

"It—it didn't!" gulped Lucy dramatically. "It—it's snapped, or something—and the boat's drifting out to sea!"

## THE SURPRISE-PACKET HAMPER

ONLY for a moment was the Madcap Form-mistress stunned by the shock of the announcement; then she pulled herself together, realising the urgent need for action.

"Quick, girls!" she exclaimed. "There may still be time to save it!"

Down the slope she raced, the anxious girls crowding behind her.

In another moment they came in sight of the tree-stump with a short length of rope still attached to it.

Once glance out to sea—at the black speck bobbing over the crested waves—and Miss Desmond realised, with a sinking heart, that their boat was lost beyond recovery.

White faced, she dropped to her knees beside the tree-stump and examined the dangling rope. Then she caught in her breath sharply, and her eyes glittered with angry amazement as she saw that the rope had been cut clean through with a sharp knife!

Who had done it—and why?

Her restless gaze, scrutinising the trampled fern in the vicinity of the stump, fastened suddenly on something white and fluttering caught up in a gorse-bush. A lace-edged handkerchief!

She bent forward swiftly to retrieve it—and her lips tightened as she saw the initials in the corner.

"A. F."

"I might have guessed it!" breathed Miss Desmond.

So she had Ada to thank for this—Ada, acting doubtlessly at Miss Murdstone's instigation!

Was the prefect still on the island? It was doubtful. Having played her spiteful trick, Ada would have made good her retreat.

Not by word or gesture did Miss Desmond give a hint of her discovery to the juniors.

"Well, girls," she remarked, forcing a smile, "this is a pretty kettle of fish!"

The juniors eyed her in blank consternation; one or two of the more timid among them looked rather near to tears as they gazed out to sea at the receding boat.

"Miss Desmond—what ever shall we do?" asked Pat Derwent unsteadily.

Miss Desmond laughed, determined at all costs to keep up the girls' spirits.

"Goodness," she said, "we're not going to let a little mishap like this spoil our outing! The Fourth Form Castaways—how's that for a headline in the local paper?"

Miss Desmond's cheery spirits were infectious, and the girls found themselves laughing in spite of the quandary.

"I suggest," went on Miss Desmond, "that we fetch our picnic-basket and climb up to the ruins. We'll be able to signal to the mainland from there. Someone's bound to see us."

This suggestion was eagerly welcomed; the girls, having recovered from their shock, were beginning to discover that they were hungry. The exercise and sea air combined had sharpened their appetites.

Once again the climb commenced—perhaps not so light-heartedly, but with a new sensation of adventure that was both novel and exciting.

Miss Desmond alone, her object achieved, relapsed into thoughtful silence, her eyes troubled.

Only too well she guessed the reason for Ada's spiteful act. It was an attempt to blacken her in the eyes of the school governors—to make it appear as though she were not fit to take charge of the girls!

"So!" thought Miss Desmond, her lips tightening. "We'll see!"

She glanced at her wrist-watch. There was still an hour or two to spare before they were due to leave the island; anything might happen before then.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a cry from Pat Derwent, who was leading the girls.

"Our hamper! It—it's gone!"

Miss Desmond's heart gave a jump; her eyes suddenly grim, she hurried to Pat's side.

"Where did you put it?" she asked.

The other girls clustered round anxiously as Pat pointed at a flat rock.

"On there," she declared. "Didn't we, Lucy!"

Lucy nodded in confirmation, staring helplessly round at the bushes. The Madcap Form-mistress clenched her hands.

For a moment the suspicion flashed into her mind that Ada was still hiding on the island, and had taken the girls' hamper! But she dismissed the idea as improbable.

Not that Ada was above purloining the hamper, to add to the girls' discomfort—but the prefect was far too cunning to have risked discovery by such a purposeless move.

There must be some other explanation—

Struck by a sudden idea, she crossed to the flat rock and peered over the top of it.

She found herself staring down into a grassy hollow, and a smile crossed her face.

"There you are, girls!" she called, pointing to something lodged in a bed of thistles below. "There's your hamper! You must have put it too near the edge and it slipped off."

There was a laugh of relief from the hungry juniors as they crowded round her, following the direction of her pointing finger.

Only Pat and Lucy looked perplexed.

"I can't understand it," declared Pat. "I don't see how it could have slipped."

"Never mind," laughed Miss Desmond. "There it is; and so long as the vacuum flask isn't broken, you've nothing to worry about. Let's go and fetch it."

Gaily she led the scramble down into the hollow, determined not to let the vague uneasiness that gripped her communicate itself to the juniors.

There was something strange going on on this island—some mystery that eluded her. The darkening sky and the eerie sighing of the wind among the gorse-bushes added to that impression.

"Fiddlesticks!" breathed Miss Desmond.

But the thought persisted.

Assisted by Pat, she dislodged the hamper from the bed of thistles. It seemed surprisingly light.

"I'll just see if there's been any damage," she declared, as she knelt down and proceeded to unstrap the lid. "It would be too bad if our prawn pattie had got mixed up with the fruit tart— Oh!"

The startled ejaculation that escaped her lips was echoed by the bewildered juniors.

Blankly Miss Desmond stared at the contents of the hamper.

For instead of the neatly packed sandwiches, prawn patties, and fruit tarts, were several strange and utterly baffling objects.

A brightly coloured shawl and a crimson skirt; a bright yellow scarf knotted together at the corners; a pair of high-heeled red shoes; and, most surprising of all, an ivory-inlaid guitar.

Miss Desmond ran her fingers in a comical fashion through her unruly fair hair.

"Why, this isn't our hamper, girls!" she exclaimed. "What on earth does it mean?"

The juniors exchanged bewildered glances; the whole thing was utterly beyond them.

"There—there must be someone else on the island," muttered Pat uneasily.

"A—a ghost?" suggested Jessie tremulously. Miss Desmond laughed, her eyes twinkling.

"Ghosts," she pointed out, "don't play guitars. It looks as though someone got hungry and left us these things in exchange for our picnic."

But, in spite of her lighthearted attitude, there was a perplexed expression in her eyes. She was more puzzled than she was inclined to admit.

"What—what are we going to do about it?" asked Lucy Granger in a whisper.

A low, distant mutter of thunder came as an echo to her words. The juniors' faces paled.

Miss Desmond scrambled to her feet.

"I tell you what, girls," she said cheerfully. "We'll try to imagine that we're marooned on a desert island peopled by mysterious genii, who are guarding a fabulous treasure. We've got to hoodwink the genii and discover the treasure. How's that?"

The suggestion was accepted enthusiastically by even the more timid girls. Miss Desmond had turned the whole thing into a thrilling adventure—a play in which they were the principal actors.

"Now," ordered Miss Desmond, "shut your eyes, all of you, while I count up to fifty. No peeping, now!"

Grinning, mystified, the girls obeyed, wondering what new surprise their Madcap Form-mistress had up her sleeve.

Miss Desmond counted slowly and deliberately.

"Now!" she exclaimed, as she reached fifty.

The girls opened their eyes; there was a moment's startled silence, followed by an amazed shout.

"Miss Desmond!"

For Vera Desmond was transformed; she had donned the gypsy costume, and now she twanged the guitar.



"You've lucky faces, young ladies," she murmured, her eyes twinkling. "The gipsy is pleased to meet you!"

"Miss Desmond," exclaimed Pat breathlessly, "you—you look topping!" "Thank you," murmured Miss Desmond, smiling. "And now, girls," she added, her manner becoming suddenly brisk and business-like, "we're going to explore. I suggest we go up to the ruins, for a start. We'll have a good view of the island from there, and we can also signal to the mainland. In fact," she added, her eyes twinkling, "I might play a few tunes on my guitar to attract attention."

"Are you—are you going to keep those things on?" gasped Lucy.

"Of course!" smiled Miss Desmond. "Why not? Fair exchange is no robbery. If anyone wants the costume, they must give us back our picnic hamper in exchange."

The girls exchanged delighted glances. This was Miss Desmond in her merriest and most madcap mood. It was impossible to be gloomy in such care-free company.

The little procession set out for the ruined castle, Miss Desmond leading, twanging a little tune on the guitar.

But, in spite of her merry make-believe, her thoughts were serious.

She realised only too well that this was no lighthearted adventure. They had been marooned by deliberate spite on this desolate island rock; their food had been mysteriously spirited away; and, to add to the discomfort of the situation, a storm was brewing.

Even now she could hear the distant rolling of the thunder coming unpleasantly close. If only she could contrive to keep up the girls' spirits till rescue could be obtained—

Occupied with her thoughts, Miss Desmond was walking some way ahead, and now a bend in the path hid the girls from view.

Instinctively she halted, waiting for them to catch her up, and just then something happened—so startling and unexpected that the Madcap Form-mistress was unable to collect her wits in time to cry out, or give a warning.

A swarthy hand reached out from the bushes, seizing her by the arm and jerking her from the path; at the same moment another hand was clapped over her mouth.

"Quiet, Zonia!" grated a voice. "There are strangers on the island, and we are suspected. Take the box and wait in the ruined castle till you get the signal—the hoot of an owl."

### TRAPPED IN THE RUINS

MISS DESMOND stood stock-still, her eyes wide with bewilderment, her heart thudding.

Swiftly she checked her first inclination to struggle; it was as though a warning voice had whispered in her ear:

"Careful! There's danger—danger for the girls! Never mind about yourself; you must think of them! This man's mistaken you for someone else. If he find out his mistake, he'll hold you prisoner and give the alarm. The girls will be trapped—"

Still as a statue the young Form-mistress stood, her mind working rapidly.

The man's mistake was not unnatural. Thanks to the gathering thunder clouds, the island had become suddenly almost like night, and the bushes enhanced the gloom. But no doubt her costume was the original cause of the error.

She could hear the girls hurrying past—talking in breathless whispers.

"She went straight ahead!" declared Pat. "Hurry, girls, or we'll lose sight of her!"

It was as much as Miss Desmond could do to suppress a desire to call out to them, now that her captor's hand had relaxed.

But she kept a firm grip on herself. She must play for time and give the girls a chance to get away.

The man gave a grunt of relief as the footsteps and voices died away.

"So you found the costumes all right?" he growled.

Miss Desmond simply nodded, not trusting herself to speak. The other appeared satisfied.

"I'll dig up the box now," he said. "Stand by and keep your mouth shut!"

That was exactly what Miss Desmond

intended to do—though she did not care for the tone in which the command was given.

Her eyes gleaming, she watched the other as he flung a boat-hook and a coil of rope on to the ground and picked up a spade.

Turning his back on her, he commenced to dig in the soft soil.

The Madcap Form-mistress was thinking quickly—and her thoughts were concentrated on one object—the boat-hook! Whoever the man might be—or whatever his mysterious purpose—he must have had some means of reaching the island.

In other words—a boat!

And if there was a boat, she and the girls could use it to make their escape!

Miss Desmond had no scruples on that score. This man, by his very actions, was up to no good. Possibly he had stolen their picnic-hamper. In any case, he was engaged in some nefarious plan.

Holding her breath, she watched him as he continued his digging, and a sudden, daring gleam leapt into her eyes as there flashed into her mind a characteristically madcap plan.

Hardly pausing to think, she bent swiftly and picked up the coil of rope, tying one end round a tree.

Taking the other end, she approached the

"Hey—you!" he spluttered. "You're not Zonia!"

"Not ever so slightly," agreed the Madcap Form-mistress coolly, as she stepped back.

"A spy!" shouted the man furiously. "Give me that box—"

And he made to leap forward—only to be brought up with a jerk by the rope through his belt and sent sprawling to his hands and knees.

The Madcap Form-mistress, clutching the mysterious box, took to her heels and fled. It would take the snorting man some time to unstrap his belt. Indeed, he was making no effort to undo it. In his fury and bewilderment, he had become hopelessly entangled in the long rope, and was now rending, pulling, and clawing at it.

Away Miss Desmond raced, climbing swiftly to the ruins; a clap of thunder greeted her ears, accompanied by a spatter of rain, as she entered the crumbling walls.

There came a delighted shout, and a crowd of youthful figures clustered round her in the eerie gloom.

"Miss Desmond!" gasped Lucy. "We thought—we thought that something had happened to you."

Miss Desmond forced her usually cheery laugh, giving no hint of the lurking danger.



Stealthily the Madcap Form-mistress got to work. She had a clever scheme to outwit the rascally digger, but would he detect what she was up to?

man with infinite caution as he bent over his task.

He wore a leather belt, and stealthily she slipped the free end of the rope through a steel ring fastened to the belt, tying it securely.

The man grunted suddenly and straightened himself. In his hand was an oblong wooden box, tied with cord, and with scraps of mud and chalk clinging to it.

"Here y'are!" he growled, thrusting the box into Miss Desmond's hands. "Clear off—quick—an' wait for the signal!"

The Madcap Form-mistress drew a deep breath, and ventured to speak. Everything depended on her getting the answer to her question.

"Where did you leave the boat?" she demanded huskily.

The man eyed her sharply, suspiciously.

"Where d'you think?" he demanded.

"Down by the east cliff, o' course, where we always leave it—"

He broke off suddenly, a startled grunt escaping his lips; the clouds had lifted slightly, and he caught a glimpse of Miss Desmond's face.

"Girls, I've found a boat!" she declared breathlessly. "Down by the east cliff of the island—that's only a few hundred yards from here. Keep together and follow me."

She gathered the girls together, counting them to make sure that all were present; then, with a sudden, uneasy start, she discovered that one was missing.

"Where's Pat?" she demanded anxiously.

"She was here a minute ago," declared Lucy.

"I believe she went to look for—"

Her words were interrupted by a stifled scream that came from the dimness of the ruins.

"That—that's Pat!" gasped Joyce, her face pallid.

A cold premonition gripped Miss Desmond's heart.

"Wait here, girls!" she breathed tersely, and raced into the shadowy ruins.

"Pat!" she called. "Pat!"

A vivid flash of lightning flung its lurid glare through the windows; it revealed a motionless figure huddled at the bottom of a flight of broken steps—and, standing above the figure, a white, spectral shape, its hands upraised!

Then the darkness descended like a thick pall, and the thunder rolled and crashed round the ruined walls.

Miss Desmond stumbled down the flight of steps, to drop to her knees beside the motionless figure.

Pat groaned faintly, and clung to Miss Desmond's arm.

"The ghost!" she breathed. "I saw it—" "Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Desmond. "There's no ghost. It's someone playing a despicable trick!"

She raised her voice loudly, peering into the darkness.

Just then there came a rush of footsteps, and the other girls appeared in a huddled group, headed by Lucy with a torch.

"We had to come," declared Lucy. "We knew that something had happened, Pat!"

She dropped to her knees beside her chum. "Hand me your torch, Lucy," said Miss Desmond grimly. "You girls stay here with Pat. Whoever's trying to scare us is going to get more than he or she bargained for!"

A strange, muffled crash echoed through the ruins as the Madcap Form-mistress raced up the steps.

Then abruptly she came to a halt, her heart sinking.

For a massive oak door had been shut across the top of the steps.

They were trapped!

**MISS DESMOND**, her face white and anxious, desisted from her vain efforts to open the massive door.

Whoever had trapped them in here obviously had a desperate reason.

She glanced at the luminous dial of her wrist-watch.

Six o'clock!

By now she should be on the way back to school with the girls.

Miss Murdstone's rascally plot had succeeded even better than the tyrant headmistress had planned. To all appearances she and the girls would have to spend the night here, in these ruins!

Miss Desmond's hands clenched suddenly, and her slight figure stiffened.

Through a gap in the ruined wall above her head came a mutter of voices—a man's harsh voice and a girl's.

Miss Desmond stared up at the gap; another moment and she was climbing the wall, though hampered by her gipsy costume—using the ornamental stonework to gain a footing.

Peering through the gap, she could see a clearing among the bushes behind the ruins. A flicker of lightning revealed several dozen gorse-bushes that had been uprooted and piled near the wall—possibly with the idea of forming a temporary shelter.

Beyond them was the flickering glow of a camp-fire; and two figures stood revealed in the glow—a man and a girl.

The man Miss Desmond recognised instantly. It was the rascal she had outwitted. The girl was obviously a gipsy, and she wore a ragged white sheet pinned across her clothes.

"Just wait till I lay my hands on 'em!" snarled the man.

The girl raised her hand cautioningly.

"Careful, father," she breathed. "There may be others on the island. Those girls are safe for the time being—and they've got the box. I trapped them in the crypt."

The man grunted.

"What happened about that costume?" he demanded. "You were supposed to wear it to throw suspicion on the local gipsies if anyone caught sight of us on the island."

The girl shrugged.

"I know, father. I took the wrong basket by mistake; they must have found the basket you left for me. But don't worry. You'd better stay here on guard while I take a look round."

The man nodded, taking up his stand on the other side of the fire, a heavy stick in his hand.

Miss Desmond, her face pale, scrambled down from her perch.

So the two mysterious occupants of the island were engaged in some villainy—as she had suspected.

What did the wooden box contain?

There was no time to waste in idle surmise; the girls' safety was her first concern.

A moment later, she had rejoined her scared class. Pat, she discovered to her relief, was more shaken than hurt.

"Quickly, girls!" breathed Miss Desmond, still keeping up the pretence of light-hearted adventure. "We've got to escape from the brigands!"

"How?" came a dozen eager voices.

"I'll show you," whispered Miss Desmond. "Not a sound!"

A few minutes later a slim figure squeezed through a gap in the ruined wall and dropped noiselessly to the ground.

It was Miss Desmond!

A few yards away, squatting on the other side of the fire, was the burly gipsy.

The Madcap Form-mistress was taking a daring risk—for the sake of her girls.

Cautiously removing one of the uprooted gorse-bushes, she crouched down behind it and commenced to creep forward, carrying the bush.

A slight sound caused the gipsy to turn, glaring in her direction.

Miss Desmond paused, still as a statue, the gorse-bush screening her from view.

With a grunt, the man turned away and commenced to light a pipe.

Once again Miss Desmond started forward, carrying the bush. She had to pass within a few feet of the man in order to obtain entrance to the ruins.

But though he stared round suspiciously once or twice, his gaze merely rested on the gorse-bush—apparently growing among the other bushes.

And then, to her horror, Miss Desmond felt herself about to sneeze!

Desperately she fought against the desire, realising that it would mean instant exposure.

The next few minutes were the worst in her life; she could not keep the sneeze back any longer.

"A—tishoo!"

Fate was on her side. Even as she sneezed, there came a terrific clap of thunder, drowning every other sound.

Dropping the gorse-bush, Miss Desmond fled into the ruins.

A moment later she had unfastened the great oak door, and the girls were streaming out. Pat handed her the wooden box.

"Down that path!" she whispered. "I'll follow you!"

She waited till the girls were out of sight; then, deliberately, she grasped the now empty box and flung it down the flight of steps with a clatter.

There came a startled shout, and Miss Desmond concealed herself behind the door.

A moment later the burly gipsy appeared, carrying a lantern. He strode through the doorway and down the steps, bending excitedly over the wooden box.

Excitedly Miss Desmond leapt forward. If only she could imprison the gipsy she and the girls could make their escape from the island in his boat.

But even as the Madcap Form-mistress seized the massive door, there came an angry shout from behind her.

"Father! Father! Look out, she's trying to lock you in!"

Miss Desmond whirled in dismay, to see the gipsy girl running towards her, and at the same moment there came a startled bellow from below.

"What's that?" growled the gipsy, peering upward.

Desperately Miss Desmond strove to slam the door, but the other girl had reached her now, was clutching at her arms, trying to prevent her from achieving her object.

It looked as if the Madcap Form-mistress' scheme was doomed to failure.

Heavy footsteps were thudding on the steps. The gipsy was rushing up to his daughter's aid.

Frantically Miss Desmond tore herself free, gave the shouting gipsy girl a push, and then, panting, she pushed at the heavy door.

The gipsy, realising her intention, redoubled his efforts to gain the doorway. Miss Desmond gave a gulp of dismay as she glimpsed his angry, brutal face, and madly slammed home the door.

A savage hand fumbled for the latch, but

before the man could open the door, the Madcap Form-mistress managed to shoot home the bolts.

Gasping her relief, she stood there for a few moments, trying to regain her breath. Then, ignoring both the imprisoned man's furious yells and the glaring gipsy girl, Miss Desmond swept up the mysterious object that the box had contained and fled—went racing in pursuit of Pat and the other Fourth Formers!

**ON** the beach of the mainland a little group was assembled.

Mr. Hicks, pale and agitated, was staring through a pair of binoculars at the distant island. Miss Murdstone, a thin smile on her lips, stood near to him, with Ada Fengrove.

"What did I tell you?" she sneered. "That young woman is not a fit person to have charge of schoolgirls. You see what has happened? It is past six o'clock, and they have not returned."

The governor bit his lip, his face grave and stern.

"I thought I could have trusted her," he muttered. "She struck me as a reliable, trustworthy young woman—"

He stiffened suddenly, focusing his glasses on the billowing sea.

"A boat!" he exclaimed. "Coming from the island!"

Miss Murdstone and Ada exchanged uneasy glances, as they stared out to sea.

A boat was approaching—slowly, but surely. Mr. Hicks flashed his torch as a signal—and there came an answering flash.

Five minutes later the boat approached the shore, grounding on the shingle.

Out of it sprang a slim figure, clad in a garish gipsy costume.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Mr. Hicks, staring, as the gipsy figure approached, followed by a little troop of weary but smiling girls.

"Who—who is this?"

"I might have guessed it!" sneered Miss Murdstone. "Miss Desmond has betrayed her trust. These unfortunate girls have been left to the care of some wandering gipsy—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed the wandering gipsy cheerfully. "Here we are—a little late, but none the worse for wear, eh, girls?"

"Rather not, Miss Desmond!" came the eager chorus.

"Miss—Miss Desmond!" spluttered Miss Murdstone. "What does this—this ridiculous masquerade mean?"

"Explain yourself, young woman!" snapped Mr. Hicks.

"With pleasure!" smiled Miss Desmond. "I believe this belongs to you, Mr. Hicks."

As she spoke, she held out a bundle wrapped in a gipsy shawl.

Frowning, the governor took it, removing the shawl. Something shone and glitered in the faint light.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Mr. Hicks, his face lighting up. "The stolen casket! Young lady, how did you come by this?"

"It's a long story," replied Miss Desmond, her eyes twinkling.

Mr. Hicks seized her hand and shook it warmly.

"Young woman," he said huskily, "I take back all I may have said about you. You and the girls will accompany me to my house for dinner. Then you'll be able to tell me everything."

"Dinner!" murmured Miss Desmond. "It sounds good—eh, girls?"

"Rather!" came the hungry reply, and, leaving Miss Murdstone and Ada glaring helplessly, the girls eagerly followed Mr. Hicks to his house.

Later, the man and the girl on the island were arrested. It appeared that they had been responsible for the theft of the valuable casket, but, knowing they were under suspicion, they had buried it. Thinking that the robbery had been forgotten, they had returned to the island to retrieve their ill-gotten loot, and but for the Madcap Form-mistress they would undoubtedly have got clean away with it.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

**"WHEN EXPULSION THREATENED."**  
That is the title of next week's school story. In it you'll read of Miss Desmond's desperate efforts to save Pat and three other girls from disgrace. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** now.

**GIRLS' CRYSTAL**  
18/4/36



# I WILL BE A LONDON STAGE STAR

By JUNE TURNER

## KAY GETS ANOTHER CHANCE

**K**AY FORRESTER walked out of the theatre into the lighted streets. She was stranded and almost penniless—she was practically destitute in this French town.

It was no use looking back on her misfortunes. Another girl had impersonated her on the stage—and that girl was now arrested for fraud and theft. There had been a scene in full view of the audience, and Kay's own name had figured in all the trouble.

It had ruined her chances of work.

The theatre director had sworn that she would never perform again in any other theatre or cafe in this town. And he was president of the entertainment bureau! His threat was sweeping and final.

Kay tramped on through the strange, foreign streets, racking her brains for some plan of action.

She found herself in the vicinity of the railway station. Its bustling yard, filled with eager travellers, was a mocking sight. For the sum of three hundred francs Kay could have boarded a boat train here for Calais—and England! She could have returned to London and the West End footlights, where her interrupted stage career awaited her, and a fortune should she achieve success!

Her one desperate need was to return to England!

What irony it was! Kay had exactly eight francs between herself and starvation—the little sum left over from the ten francs the police had given her!

A sigh caught in her throat.

There were others little better off than she. The station yard was filled with poor-looking men and women and kiddies—shabby families clustered in groups, and with their ragged bits of baggage lying on the cobbles beside them.

Kay gazed at them and understood.

They were going off to the vine fields to earn a little pay, picking grapes for the wine industry. It meant a week or two's work for them, and it was the one bright change in their drab lives.

Kay's eyes wandered to the bills plastered on the station wall. They were printed in French, but they were easy to understand.

The railway company was offering special cheap fares for the vine-pickers. They were issuing tickets to the wine country at eight francs per person.

Kay gave a sudden start.

The wine district was a step nearer to Calais—and a long step, although not on the direct route!

Could she gain one of those cheap tickets for herself? She had just enough money. And the terms were offered to poor people. Surely she was as poor as any?

Kay made up her mind instantly. She hurried into the station and joined a shabby queue lined up at the special booking-office. Her own clothes were not shabby, and did not betray her poverty.

Kay was wondering tensely if she would be able to gain a cheap ticket, when a motherly woman in the queue began talking to her in French.

"Pardon, madame," Kay said, and explained with a smile that she didn't understand French.

She stooped to pat the cheek of a bonny little girl, who was holding tightly to the woman's hand.

"Ah! You are Engleesh?" the woman exclaimed, and to Kay's surprise she went on: "I understand just a leetle. I was domestique—I was servant in Engleesh family long ago. Now I am a widow, and must work in the vine fields, for I am poor. And you yourself, mam'selle?"

"I'm poor, too, that is why I must travel cheap. Madame—oh, please will you help me?" Kay said breathlessly. "Would you please get my ticket for me? I—I think they will refuse me, for I do not look poor!"

Madame Julie looked quickly into Kay's face, and asked no questions. She realised her need. She was only too pleased to befriend the "Engleesh," who had once been so good to her.

"You mind my leetle Bebe, I get your ticket, cherie!" she said instantly, taking the francs Kay gave her. "Aftairwards, you be company for us in the train—yes?"

Overjoyed, Kay waited outside the queue with the tiny French girl. And the mite chattered to her in baby French. And Kay gathered that Bebe was five years old, very bright for her years, and could dance, too! The word sounded just the same in French—"danse"—and when Kay used that word the child was quick to understand, and would talk of nothing else.

Then her mother returned from the booking-office with a ticket for each of them, and Kay thanked her gratefully.

It was a stroke of real luck to have met that friendly soul.

When Kay walked with her on to the platform she found the train packed to suffocation, and a good deal of squabbling going on amongst the harassed folks. A solitary stranger would have been very unwelcome.

There were no compartments—only huge goods trucks, and everyone had to squeeze inside with their baggage as best they could.

Thanks to Madame Julie—who was good-humoured but determined, and knew exactly how to deal with her own people—Kay found herself wedged inside one of the trucks.

All night long the train thundered over the metals. Kay hadn't room to lie full-length, but she managed to doze a little, and Bebe

## NO HARDSHIP TOO GREAT FOR KAY

As Long As It Takes  
Her A Step Nearer  
London And Fame

tucked herself between Kay and "Mamma" and slept as peacefully as an angel till morning.

The sun was up, and it was nine o'clock when the train stopped at a wayside station near Rheims.

Across the landscape Kay looked out, fascinated, at miles of green vines standing tall and slender in the sunshine.

"Is it au revoir so soon, Meess Kay?" Madame Julie asked wistfully, as they scrambled out on to the platform amongst the chattering crowds and endless baggage. "Where do you go now?"

Kay shook her head glumly. She hadn't a cent left in the world, and all she knew was that she must find work, must earn something, before she could hope to move farther on her journey.

"I've got nowhere to go, madame," she murmured, "until I've found a job!"

"Why not come with us?" madame asked quickly. "Little Bebe and me—we have shelter; we would so enjoy you with us, cherie!"

Kay's eyes lit up.

"I'd be ever so grateful, madame! If only it will be no expense to you—"

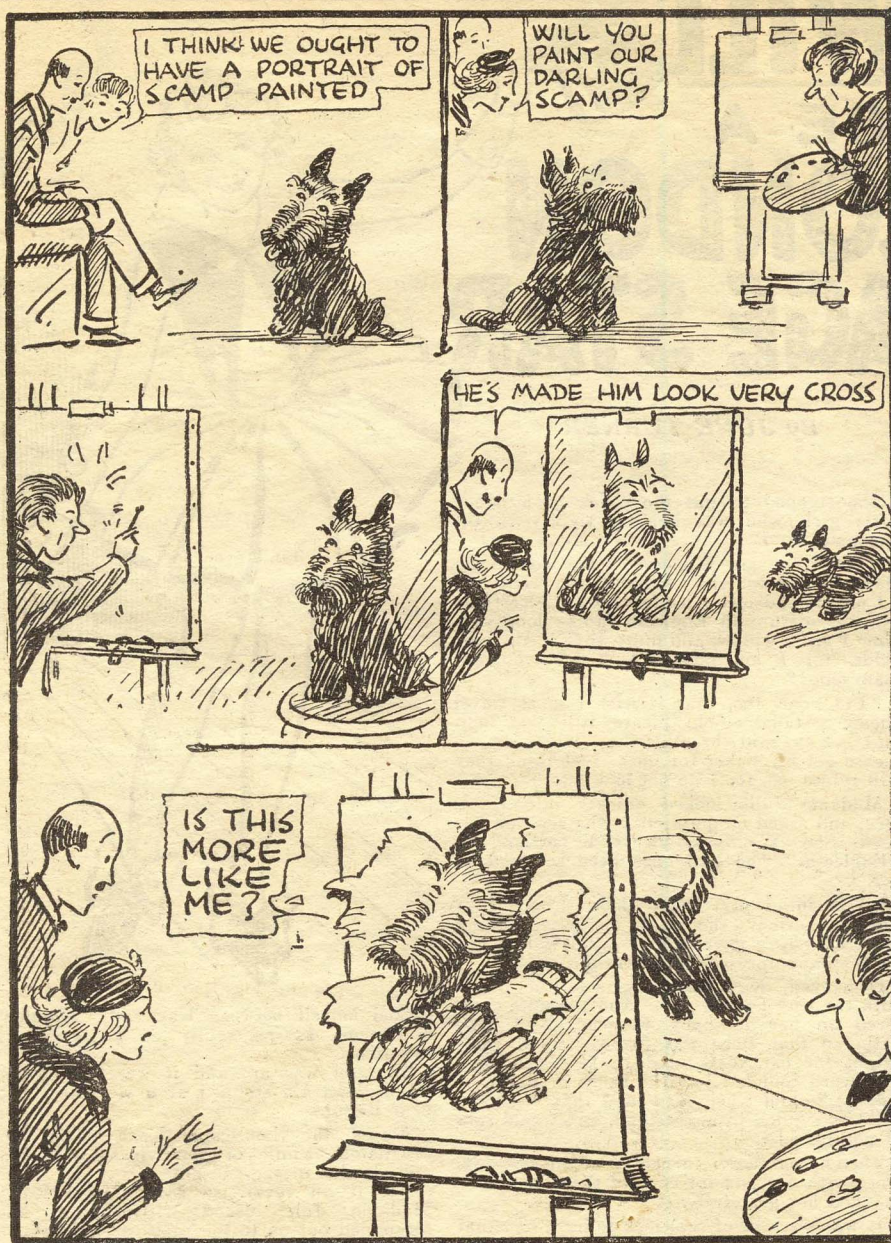
Madame vigorously took her arm and would listen to no more. She was delighted to have Kay's companionship, and so was little Bebe.

Kay walked with them through the country lanes, following the crowds of vine-pickers till they came to rows and rows of little white huts—called chalets—nestling beside the vine fields. They were the workers' living quarters.

Madame Julie quickly found the chalet that had been allotted to her own use, and as they stepped inside Kay gazed about her, quite charmed.

"Why, it's lovely! It's just dinky!"

# THAT SCAMP SCOTTIE



"Deenky?" inquired madame, seizing eagerly on a new word.

"Dainty; and sort of novel," laughed Kay. "I love it!"

The hut was furnished with two beds, a table, chairs, and at the extreme end a sink and kitchenette—all done in spotless white. From the window the sunny vine fields made a picturesque outlook.

"I couldn't wish for lovelier digs—if I can only get a job," Kay breathed.

She had a good wash at the sink, and then helped madame cook an excellent breakfast of omelettes, followed by luscious grapes.

"How far is it to Rheims, Madame Julie?" Kay asked, turning over plans in her mind.

"Only twenty minutes to walk. You will see ze cathedral spire from ze hill," madame answered. "Or you can go by autobus, cherie."

Kay brushed her clothes carefully, and then set out on her walk to the romantic old town. She passed the cloisters; she wended her way past colleges and innumerable seminaries, and then came to the heart of the town and the amusement centre.

A gaily fronted building stood prominent in the square. Across its portico was the name:

## "CABARET DE FOLIES."

Kay's heart quickened. The Follies' Cabaret! If only she could gain a short engagement there, and earn money to proceed on her journey home, it was just the show she would love to be in.

Hardly daring to hope, Kay marched boldly up the steps and into the vestibule. The place was deserted. There was no performance at this hour of day. She walked down the silent corridor, in search of the manager or some official.

A door opened behind her. Her steps had been heard, and a woman rapped out a question in French, asking Fay what her business was.

Turning quickly, Kay saw the name on the door panel: "Directeuse." It was the lady director herself who was speaking.

"Pardon, madame; I am an English artiste seeking an engagement," Kay said, returning and approaching the lady.

The directeuse looked Kay up and down, then beckoned her into the office. Its walls were decorated with photos of stars, and it gave the place a wistful London touch to Kay.

"By your walk I see you are a dancer.

Tell me about yourself, ma'mselle," the lady said briskly.

Kay stated what her experience was on the English stage, and at madame's request she gave a brief audition—a few steps of dancing, then a song at the piano.

Madame leaned back in her chair at the finish.

"Our show gairls are more experienced than you," she said. "And my gairls must be mannequins, and show off the Paris dresses for the big shops here. You have grace, and you have carriage, ma'mselle. Yet it is odd for English gairl to show off French dresses. Do you not see that?"

"But, madame," Kay said swiftly, "in England we often have French mannequins to show off our dresses."

Madame threw up her hands and laughed helplessly.

"Oh, but you are droll!" she said.

Kay talked to her for twenty minutes. And sometimes madame laughed again, and said how "droll" she was, and at other times madame argued and grew irritably stubborn.

But Kay got that job.

When she walked out into the street again her eyes were shining, and she was booked to appear that evening in the Cabaret de Folies.

## THE RUINED FROCK

IT was a joy to Kay—dancing again in the brilliant limelights, with a first-class orchestra accompanying her.

Her fellow troupers didn't know a word of her language.

But that didn't matter. They liked Kay, and Kay liked them all.

The Cabaret de Folies was just like a theatre—and a handsome one—except that the audience sat at tables in both stalls and circle, and ate refreshments while the show was going on.

Kay's work was novel and varied.

She gave her usual song-and-dance acts, and she took part in the troupe numbers. But at intervals the curtain went down. Kay and the others changed into lovely gowns loaned by the local shops. Then the spotlights shone down into the auditorium, and each girl walked slowly in and out between the tables, followed by the spotlight, while ladies in the audience eagerly scrutinised the dresses.

They were all gorgeous gowns straight from Paris, and fabulously expensive.

It made Kay sigh to herself when she took part in the parade, wearing several thousand francs' worth of finery, and reflected that a fraction of that sum would have paid her passage home to England, and bought her all the frocks she wanted into the bargain.

But she was saving carefully out of her small salary of twenty-five francs per night.

And out of this she insisted on Madame Julie taking ten francs for her board and lodging.

Little Bebe was simply enchanted by Kay, and she made her mamma tell her in French all about the cabaret, and she played at being a "danseuse" all day long.

"You make the leetle one—how you say it?—stage struck," smiled Madame Julie to Kay. "She has been always ze same—so fond of ze dancing and playing at theatres. It is droll—her so tiny."

"Bless her! I was the same when I was her age," laughed Kay. "I am still, Madame Julie. I was born stage struck. Oh, we shall have to take the darling to see the show. She'll love it so."

This was translated to Bebe by her mother. And it would have broken the mite's heart if Kay had disappointed her after that.

So Kay wheedled two tickets at half price from the box-office. And one evening Madame Julie and little Bebe came with her to the cabaret.

Even from the stage Kay could see the child's delight, and could understand how that imaginative little mind was picturing itself in the same glamorous part. Bebe would "play at cabaret" every moment of the day after this.

Kay continued late in the show that night, long after madame had taken the child home to bed. It was turned midnight when a lady in the audience begged to see the mannequin parade, having missed it earlier in the evening.

"It is annoying, but we must not refuse a patronne," sighed the lady director.

So Kay and the other show-girls changed again into the Paris gowns, and paraded slowly down the aisle—to be delayed at almost every table while the ladies eagerly inspected the frocks.

By the time they returned to the dressing-room, the lights were out behind-stage, and the theatre staff had gone.

Madame la Directeuse was in a rage. "The foolish men; they haf locked the store-room, and taken the keys," she explained to Kay. "I cannot haf these gowns left here; they are valuable, and it would not be safe. You must each be responsible for your own, and take it home with you."

Kay carefully folded the gown she was wearing and packed it in a box. It was a gorgeous evening model in turquoise blue, and priced at two thousand francs—twenty-five pounds in English money. She took the box under her arm, and went home to the little chalet by the last autobus that night.

Next morning Kay set out as usual with the shopping bag to get in the day's provisions, while Madame Julie was at work in the fields.

The nearest shops were on the outskirts of Rheims, and Kay was away about an hour.

She returned to the chalet refreshed after her sunny walk and opened the door.

Then she stopped with a gasp.

On the floor lay the box in which she had carried home the turquoise gown.

The box was empty, the lid lay open. The gown had gone!

For one second Kay had the frantic fear that it had been stolen.

Then she saw Bebe's wee frock lying crumpled on the floor, and in a burst of relief she understood.

The mite had peeped into the box and seen the gown, and, child-like, she had dressed up in it; she was "playing at dancers" again.

"Bebe!" Kay ran swiftly out of the hut. "Bebe dear!" she called.

And then in the distance, right across the vine fields, Kay saw the child. In spite of herself, she laughed helplessly as she ran after her. It was the quaintest sight imaginable.

The mite was wearing that lady's evening gown—she was absolutely swallowed up in it—and she was holding its long skirts above her tiny ankles and toddling away eagerly across the fields.

She was going to show mamma.

"Bebe!" Kay shouted to her, running hard to catch up to the tot. "Bebe, wait for me!"

The child didn't hear her, and was obviously much too excited for anything to divert her attention just now.

Suddenly Kay's heart turned over.

In front of the child she saw a strip of water; it was a dyke, and used for irrigating the vine field. The child was running straight towards it. She had seen her mamma on the other side of the field, working in the vines, but in her infant excitement she hadn't seen the dyke. Her little feet were toddling straight towards the water.

"Bebe! Bebe cherie!" Kay shrieked.

She was still fifty yards from the child. The mite heard nothing. For another instant Kay saw that little running figure in front of her; the next instant there was a scream, a splash—and the child had disappeared!

Kay's heart went into her throat. She fairly flew across the field. There wasn't a second to lose. The water was deep; the child would drown!

Panting, Kay rushed to the edge of the dyke and plunged in.

She saw a tiny figure unconscious in the water, sinking—sinking again—dragged down by the entangling dress.

Kay struck out wildly and reached the child's side; she seized the little thing as she was sinking for the third time. That voluminous gown had wrapped itself round the child's mouth and was suffocating her. Kay tore it away.

Holding Bebe's little face above water, she grabbed at the bank and tried to hoist herself aground.

The vine pickers came rushing to the scene; they had heard the child's scream.

"Ma bebe! Oh, ma bebe!" Madame Julie was crying frantically.

Then the people dragged Kay on to the bank, and the child in her arms cried out pitifully, and mamma knew she was safe.

Mamma Julie hugged them both, and she wept with her head on Kay's shoulder. It was many moments before she could grasp what had happened. She only knew that her child had been drowning, and Kay had saved her.

And then Madame Julie saw the odd garb that the child was wearing. The gorgeous blue silk was soaked with water and slimy mud; it was torn into ribbons. But madame recognised it in horror as the gown Kay had brought home from the cabaret, and in a flash she understood.

"Oh, Meess Kay—Meess Kay—" And she broke down and wept again. "Ze beautiful dress, it is ruined! It is my Bebe who has ruined it for you! But she deen't mean it for mischief; she deen't understand. She is leetle!"

Bebe was weeping now in mamma's arms and explaining it all brokenheartedly in baby French.

Kay bent over her and kissed her.

"Of course she didn't mean it. It doesn't matter. Tell her it doesn't matter, Madame Julie. She has come to no harm, bless her little heart—and that's all that matters!"

Kay went back with mamma and Bebe to the chalet, and she changed her own soaked clothes, and she washed and dried the turquoise gown.

But it was a pitiable ruin; nothing could ever restore it. It could only serve now as evidence of the unhappy explanation she was bound to give.

Hiding her distress from madame and the child, Kay packed up the gown, took it under her arm, and went by bus to the Cabaret de Folies.

With anxious heart she tapped at the lady director's door and a voice bade her come in.

"I have bad news for you, madame," Kay said sadly. "There has been an accident and my show model is ruined."

Madame looked at her with eyes grown suddenly hard.

"It is not your model and not mine, either; it belongs to the shop, ma'mselle. What has happened?"

The hard eyes didn't soften while Kay explained; madame stretched out her hand and pointed harshly to the box.

"Show it to me!" she ordered. "Open the box!"

Kay had only time to remove the lid. Madame took one look at the gown, realised that it was irretrievably ruined, and threw herself into a wild paroxysm of fury; she stormed up from her desk, she shouted and raged and beat at the box with her clenched fists. No human being could have reasoned with her.

"It will cost me two thousand francs!" she cried. "You can't pay! No, no! You'll ruin me, but you can't pay! Get out! You're dismissed! Get out of my sight—and let me nevaire see you again!"

Kay bowed dumbly and walked out!

## NEAR TO HOME

IT was the end of her job in the Cabaret de Folies.

Kay couldn't even feel bitter over her dismissal. A costly accident had happened, and no one was to blame. One couldn't blame a little five-year-old kiddie who had only been innocently playing.

But the accident had thrown Kay out of work again, and it had left her penniless.

In a side street she passed the vaults of one of the big wine companies. Huge motor-trolleys, like mill floats, were lined up in the roadway, and men in baize aprons were loading barrels aboard them.

Kay was passing on, absorbed in her affairs, when suddenly she saw the magic name Calais staring at her from the side of one of the barrels. She stopped with a jerk. She saw the men loading a score of other barrels, all similarly labelled, on to one of the trolleys.

Kay's heart quickened wildly. That trolley was bound for Calais; it was taking a consignment of wine there. She flew across to the driver, and quite forgot in her excitement that he wouldn't understand English.



Madame took one look at the ruined frock, then she glared at Kay. "Get out—you are dismissed!" she cried.

"Driver"—she grabbed at his shirt-sleeved arm—"will you be a sport—will you give me a lift and take me along with you to Calais?"

The plump driver gaped, and his mates gathered round Kay in amusement; they were bluff, genial fellows, all of them, and they were most interested to know what the English demoiselle was saying.

Kay tried signs and gestures. "You"—she tapped the corpulent driver—"take me"—she indicated herself—"to Calais? Please! S'il vous plait, m'sieur! Terribly important! Compris?"

There was a lot more laughing, but finally the friendly driver nodded.

A few minutes later, and the lorry was loaded ready to go off. With a swing of his mighty arm the driver pulled Kay up to the seat beside him. She could have hugged the good fellow.

Hour upon hour, through the dusty French roads, the trolley bowled on its way to the coast.

The driver couldn't talk to Kay, so he sang little French songs instead; and Kay sang English songs to him. They were the best of friends. They stopped at a wayside cafe in the early afternoon, and Kay shared with him a meal of bread and cheese and apple cider.

The journey continued; and towards evening Kay saw the magic name "Calais" springing up on the signposts.

The ancient and rather grubby seaport looked like a fairyland to Kay when at last she saw its lights twinkling in the distance. Wasn't it the gateway to England—the nearest port of France to her own loved shore?

"Calais!" she whooped.

"Calais, voila!" boomed the bluff driver.

He swung the trolley through the back streets and downhill towards the dockside. Kay saw the ships anchored there. Some of them were English ships, and her heart almost burst with longing.

The driver helped her down outside the little working-men's cafe on the dockside, and invited her genially to join him for a cup of coffee before they said adieu.

Kay followed him inside gratefully. She hadn't a cent—not even a purse of her own.

It was a quaint little place, with sawdust on the floor, and a tall counter, at which seafaring men were jabbering in every language under the sun. It was crowded with men. Kay would have felt quite lost if it hadn't been for the mademoiselle serving behind the counter.

She sipped the coffee the driver bought her, and he proceeded to tell two of his mates about their journey together. Kay caught the word "musique," and guessed that he was speaking about the songs she had sung to him.

"More musique—eh, driver?" she said, with a laugh.

A piano was standing in the corner, and Kay went across to it and struck up the latest English song.

A gasp went up from a group of seamen sitting in the corner. They said something to each other. Then, to Kay's amazement, they all joined in the chorus in plain Cockney English.

"You're English?" Kay cried, swinging round from the piano.

"Not 'arf! And so are you, else I'm a Dutchman!" bellowed one of the men.

They all came swarming across to Kay. They shook her hand in good old English fashion, they clapped her on the shoulder, they bought her enough coffee to float a ship, and they wouldn't let her get up from the piano.

It was not fatigue that made Kay take a rest at last.

She heard the Englishmen saying reluctantly that it was time they were getting back to the boat. Each of them clamoured round her to wish her good-bye and thank her for her show.

Kay gripped the sleeve of the humorous Cockney and held him back, as the others went out.

"I want to speak to you," she whispered to him, ignoring the foreigners, who were beseeching her to sing again.

"Right-ho, missy! Can't stop a jiffy," he sighed. "We sail in 'arf an hour!"

"Where to?" Kay asked breathlessly.

"Ome! Straight 'ome to England this trip!"

"That's where I want to go! I've got to!" Kay hurried on excitedly. "What boat are you on?"

"Jest a tramp steamer. I'm a stoker, see? And—"

"Can you take me?" Kay burst in.

"Eh?" The stoker looked at her, stupefied. "Can't take passengers aboard a cargo boat, missy! Why, the Board o' Trade's that hot that—"

"I know; but it's desperate. I've got to get back to England!" Kay raced on, panting.

"I've been working my way right from Cherbourg. I haven't a cent. I'm stranded here in France. Be a sport, stoker. I'll take any risk, only I want you to help me get aboard your boat to-night. You must!"

"But, missy, it's impossible! The skipper and the whole blooming crew 'ud see you, and—"

"Not if you're as smart as I think you are! Listen!" Kay pleaded with him breathlessly.

"You wouldn't leave a sister of yours stranded out here. You'd get her aboard somehow, and you're going to do the same for me, aren't you?"

She saw the sailor grin doggedly. "Wait a mo'!" he murmured.

Kay held her breath while he went to the door and called to some of his mates. There were gasps from all of them while he talked. Then back he came into the cafe, carrying an oilskin jacket, leggings, and a cap.

"Put these on you, missy," he whispered hoarsely; "then join me and my mates outside. They're all in the know. They won't split on you!"

Kay rushed to the back of the piano, dragged the oilskins on, then joined the seamen in the dark dockside street.

They linked arms with her and marched across the quays.

The ship's mate was waiting at the top of the gangway.

"Hurry aboard, there!" he roared. "Look slippery!"

Kay stumbled down a smoky companionway feeling almost paralysed with relief. The stoker grabbed her arm and led her down to the coal bunkers in the hold of the ship. He opened a door, and pushed her into hiding inside one of the bunkers—just in the nick of time. The next second Kay heard the engineer-officer outside.

"All correct, here?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the stoker. Kay leaned back against the coals hardly daring to breathe. Every second was like an eternity.

Then all at once she heard the shriek of the siren. The great engines rumbled, and she felt the lurch of the vessel as it glided out of harbour.

Kay throbbed with relief and joy. She was smuggled down in the stokehold—a stowaway! But she was on her voyage back to England at last!

For the moment Kay is safe, but will she reach England without being discovered? There are exciting developments in next Friday's instalment. Book your GIRLS' CRYSTAL right away.

## CLAUDINE'S CORNER



# EGGS ARE SO BEAUTIFYING

It'll be decidedly slippery, so mind you catch it; but the stopper will be in the basin in case you miss.

Rub it well into your hair and scalp, until every hair feels really sticky.

You'll be surprised and yet delighted with the amount of dirt this treatment will expel.

Then comes the rinsing. Lots of these, please, in warm, less warm, cool, and then cold water. (Leave out the cold rinse if you're not used to it.)

When dry, your hair will be a riot of beauty—just see. It will gleam and shine with that well-nourished look that only really expensive heads have as a rule.

You see, using no soap will mean that none will remain, as it tends to after a soapy shampoo, in spite of the most constant rinsing.

### ANOTHER TREAT

If there's another egg going spare—or rather, just the white—after mother has used the yolk, why not give your face a real treat.

Using just the white, smear it all over your face—protecting your nice, clean hair this time.

Allow it to dry on. It'll be a creepy-crawly feeling, I warn you—but rather fun.

Sit down quietly, without smiling or yawning or talking, for five minutes, until your face "mask" is quite dry.

Then rinse it off with cool water.

A radiant you will then peep from the mirror, however tired you were looking before.

A tonic like this even for the youngest face is really beneficial occasionally. You see, it closes enlarged pores and stimulates the natural colour.

**I** LOOK as if I'm just about to make an omelette in the picture, don't I?

Until you see my costume, and you realise that no cook, however inexperienced, would dream of doing that in a dressing-gown! (Which is, perhaps, just as well, for I'm sure I couldn't make a really successful one!)

What I'm really doing is preparing a very, very special shampoo. And since it is Easter-time and eggs are cheap—cheaper, in fact, than my usual brand of shampoo—it isn't extravagant, either.

And egg shampoo is a marvellous tonic for the hair, nourishing it and making it soft and lovely.

It's so easy, too, that I'm sure you'd like to try it now that hatless days are coming and your hair must look its very, very best.

All you want is one egg if you have short hair, or two if you have very long, thick hair.

### A SLIPPERY BUSINESS

Break the egg into a basin or cup, and then tie yourself to the bath-room.

There, hold your head over the basin—with the stopper in—and pour the egg quite carefully over your head.



# AN IMPOSTOR AGAINST HER WILL



By SYLVIA MACRAE

## PARTED FROM HER BROTHER

HER imposture was at an end! Sally Blythe had feared as much the moment the grim-faced hospital Sister had grasped her by the arm. Now, as she saw the American doctor striding down the corridor her last hope died.

This doctor had forbidden her to enter the Swiss-American Hospital at Bernine. He believed she was a trickster, who had fled to Europe in order to escape arrest at the hands of the American police. She could expect no mercy from him.

Sally was a girl without a memory. That was why she had been so desperately anxious to gain admittance to the hospital. Her brother was a patient here, and he was the only one who could clear up the mystery that surrounded her past life.

Wearing a wig that covered her own pretty hair, Sally got a job as wardmaid under a false name, but she had evoked the suspicions of one of the Sisters, and now this woman had just caught her trying to enter the private ward where her brother lay in bed.

In the struggle Sally's wig had slipped, and now, easily recognisable, she stared ruefully at the approaching doctor.

Seeing the pair struggling, he gave a startled gasp.

"What does this disgraceful scene mean?" he demanded. "Sister—"

He broke off, and an angry frown appeared above his eyes as he realised who the wardmaid was.

"Sally Blythe!" he ejaculated. "What does this mean? What are you doing here? Didn't I forbid you ever to enter this place again? and where did you get those hospital clothes?"

The Sister gave a malicious sniff. "Just what I want to know, M'sieur le Docteur," she cried. "The minx is an impostor. She got in here by false pretences. I was just taking her to the matron."

The doctor gave a nod of approval.

"You're to be congratulated on your sharpness, Sister," he said. "I don't know what this girl's game is, but she's not fit to associate with decent folks. She's wanted by the police, and theft is the least of her crimes."

He turned with a glare on the white-faced girl.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" he barked. "How dare you cause a disturbance? You'd better leave—at once! And take off those hospital clothes. You're not fit to wear them!"

Sally angrily faced the doctor. "You have no right to talk to me like that," she stormed. "I'm not Sally Blythe at all. It's all a horrible mistake. I came here to see my brother."

"Your brother!" The Sister laughed harshly. "Ma foi, what a likely story! I think you came to steal. Your brother! Pah! You have no brother here. The garcon in that ward is named Staines!"

"And that is my name—Mary Staines!" gasped Sally desperately.

"Oh, ho! You've given yourself another alias now, have you?" said the doctor. "When I saw you last time you said your name was Sally Blythe!"

"Yes, and when she applied here for work she called herself Edith Young," put in the Sister sardonically. "It seems that she has a fresh name for every day of the week."

Seeing their incredulity, Sally gulped. How was she to explain?

But she had no chance. The doctor lost patience.

"Guess I've had enough of this!" he declared.

Plunging forward, he grabbed Sally by the other arm and nodded grimly to the Sister.

"Come on, and help me get her away!" he snapped. "She's caused enough trouble."

Between them, he and the Sister dragged the protesting Sally along the corridor and down the stairs. Before the girl could realise what had happened, she found her outdoor clothes thrust in her hands and herself whirled to the staff entrance.

"Now get out, and stay out!" ordered the doctor. "If you dare come here again I'll have you arrested!"

Never had Sally felt so miserable before.

She thought of her brother, lying helplessly in bed, eagerly waiting for her to visit him again. Though he had not penetrated her disguise when she had entered his room the previous day, he had been delighted to see her. Her short visit had done him good, and he had pleaded with her to visit him again.

"And to-day Charlie's being sent away!" she thought, with a sob. "I'll never see him again. My guardian's determined to keep us apart!"

## SALLY'S TOFFEE-MAKING RUSE HELPED HER TO UNMASK THE SECRET OF THE FORBIDDEN ROOM

As she thought of George Hunter, the rascally guardian who had been responsible for all her troubles, her tears went and her eyes flashed.

How hateful the man was! Deliberately he was trying to keep brother and sister apart. He was afraid lest Charlie should tell Sally the truth. That was why he had hustled Charlie out to Switzerland; and now he had given instructions for the sick boy to be taken away from the hospital. That very afternoon Charlie was to leave.

Where was he to be taken? As she asked herself the question, Sally recovered all her old fighting spirit.

"They shan't keep us apart!" she snapped. "I'll find out where they're sending him, and I'll follow him—follow him right across Europe, if necessary!"

Her lips set with grim determination, and then, as she heard feet crunching on the gravel path, she looked up, to see a uniformed porter approaching.

He was a middle-aged man, with plump cheeks and kindly eyes, and as he saw the girl on the seat surveying him, he nervously fingered his peaked hat.

"I'm sorry, ma'mselle," he said, "but I'm afraid you can't stay here."

Listlessly Sally rose.

"I'm sorry, ma'mselle," the man mumbled. "I hope you don't think that I've anything to do with it. I'm only obeying orders, you know."

"Of course you are!" Abruptly Sally's indignation vanished, and she smiled. "Don't you worry," she said. "You're not to blame. It's only those—"

She broke off, a sudden thought humming through her brain. This man seemed a friendly fellow. Perhaps he might be able to help her. Anyway, it was worth trying.

Appealingly, she put one slim hand on his arm.

"I only came here to see my brother," she said. "He's a patient here, and he's very ill. Oh, I can't explain, but they won't believe that I am his sister, and"—despite her new-found courage Sally's voice broke—"and they're sending him away to-day!" she gulped. "I must find out where he's going to. Surely I have a right to know! I am his sister."

The porter eyed her compassionately. "If what you say is true, ma'mselle, you are certainly being badly treated. What is your brother's name?"

"Staines—Charlie Staines!"

"Staines!" The porter rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Oh, yes, I know of him. The motor-ambulance has been ordered for three o'clock. The young garcon is being sent to a sanatorium in England."

Sally's heart gave a wild leap. A ray of hope caused her pulses to throb. Thanks to this sympathetic porter she was learning the truth, after all.

"What sanatorium is it?" she asked eagerly. "That, I am afraid, ma'mselle, I do not know."

"But you could find out?"

"Y-yes, I suppose so—if I cared to make the necessary inquiries."

"Then, will you make them? Oh, please,

do! You don't know what this means to me! Horrible people are trying to keep us apart! Oh, please find out the address for me!"

Agitatedly Sally clutched his arm. Through tear-laden eyes she surveyed him.

Her heart in her mouth, Sally waited for his answer. He shuffled his feet, he rubbed his chin, and doubtfully he stared at the white hospital building. Finally he nodded.

"Yes, I see no reason why I should not help you," he said.

Sally was tempted to throw her arms about him. Through misty eyes she surveyed him gratefully.

"You darling!" she cried. "Oh, I shall never forget your kindness! How can I ever thank you?"

He blushed in embarrassment.

"I do not want your thanks, ma'mselle. I have a daughter of my own," he growled. "But this address—you must not come here for it. That would cause trouble. I had better post you on the information."

"Please," said Sally, and wrote him out the address of her lodgings. "But you won't forget, will you?" she asked pleadingly.

"No; I will keep my promise," he said. "But you must go now. If anyone should see us talking here—"

He finished with a wry shrug, and, all her troubles forgotten, a sparkle in her eyes, Sally left him.

Long before she had reached the street she had made her plans. She would catch the night boat-train back to England. The porter had promised to post the vital information almost at once, so she would get his letter by the last post.

"My guardian thinks he's clever, but I'll beat him yet," she told herself, and straight away went to the nearest tourist agency to buy her travel tickets.

But, though she was certain that the porter would not let her down, she could not resist the temptation that afternoon to return to the hospital. Despite the ban placed on her, she felt she must catch at least one glimpse of Charlie before he left.

She knew she would not be allowed to talk to him, but surely she would be able to leave him a note—an affectionate little message, telling him to keep his spirits up, and promising him that it would not be long before he and his sister were reunited.

Purposely, Sally did not venture near the hospital until the very last minute. She did not want to be recognised and turned away.

The town hall clock was striking three when she reached the hospital gates. A motor-ambulance was drawn up outside the main entrance, and she was just in time to see a stretcher being carried out to it.

She got a glimpse of Charlie's white, haggard face, then, the ban forgotten, only her fondness for this helpless brother of hers in her mind, she impulsively darted through the gateway.

"Charlie!" she gulped, and, note in hand, made to run forward, but even as she approached the distant ambulance a blue-uniformed figure loomed from behind the trees.

"No, you don't!" snapped a brusque voice, and next moment the agitated girl found herself struggling in the grip of a gendarme.

"Let me go!" she gasped. "I was only going to give this letter to my brother. I only came to say good-bye to him."

"You will give him nothing and say nothing!" the policeman declared. "We have been warned who you are, and we do not want you in this country! You must come with me, ma'mselle! You will stay at police headquarters until arrangements can be made for you to leave Switzerland!"

And forcibly he dragged her back through the gateway. One desperate glance Sally flung at the white-faced figure that was being carried to the ambulance, then she was hustled round the corner, and the hospital and ambulance faded from sight.

### GEORGE HUNTER HAS HIS PLANS

SALLY was too distressed to sense the full horror of the next few hours. Only later, when she was on the boat-train, sitting alone in a third-class compartment, did she remember all that she had gone through.

First of all had come that humiliating walk through the crowded streets, with the passers-by eyeing her curiously, plainly wondering what her crime had been.

Then had come hours spent in a police cell. The Swiss gendarmes had been polite but firm. They had taken her finger-prints, questioned her until her tensed nerves threatened to collapse, and finally two plain-clothes officers had accompanied her to the station.

In vain Sally had pleaded to be allowed to return to her lodgings. In vain she had asked them to collect the letter she knew must be waiting for her. Their only encouragement had been that if there was a letter it would be forwarded on to the Priory—the only address Sally had been able to give them.

From Bernine to the French frontier the plain-clothes policemen travelled with her, then they left her, and Sally continued the journey on her own.

How was she to get in touch with Charlie? That was the thought that worried Sally during the journey. There were hundreds of sanatoriums in England. Remembering the porter's promise, she felt a slim thread of hope steal through her.

"The letter will be forwarded," she told herself. "It'll be sent on to the Priory."

That knowledge, and that alone, made her cheerfully face the prospect of returning to her guardian's house. How she hated that old, forbidding house, with its even more forbidding occupants.

Her guardian, she knew, was a thief, and his two rascally servants were just as bad. But she had no choice. For Charlie's sake she must return there, continue to pose as Sally Blythe—remain an impostor against her will.

"SHE'S back! She's coming up the drive now! She's come back, I tell you, as calm as you please!"

It was Mrs. Jarvis, the gaunt housekeeper at the Priory, who gulped out the words. Her face red with surprise and excitement, she burst into the study.

George Hunter and Slim Jarvis, the housekeeper's burly husband, looked up with a start.

"You mean Sally?" exclaimed Hunter.

"Who else? There she is—strolling up the drive as though she owned it. And yet it was her who robbed us of those jewels. A fortune went west through her meddling!" Mrs. Jarvis' eyes snapped savagely. "Law, but what wouldn't I like to do to her!" she snarled.

Her husband nodded viciously.

"Me, too!"

George Hunter was the only one to remain calm. He crossed to the window, took a long look at the slim, girlish figure that was approaching the house; then he smiled—a thin-lipped smile that seemed much more sinister than his companion's angry words.

"Let her in," he told Mrs. Jarvis, as there came a ring at the front door, "and keep control of yourself. Treat her with respect."

"With respect—her who lost us a fortune!" exploded the angry woman.

George Hunter frowned.

"I'm boss here, and what I say goes!" he snapped. "Just listen to me a minute—both of you. We brought that girl here because she could be useful to us—well, she can still be useful. She may suspect a lot, but she can't prove anything, so we can still use her."

Slim Jarvis leaned eagerly forward.

"You—you mean, use her to bring off another coup, chief?" he asked.

Hunter nodded.

"Exactly—many more!" he said, and grinned cunningly.

"SO you've come back, have you?"

Despite George Hunter's orders, Mrs. Jarvis could not keep the sneer out of her voice.

"Come in, then!" she added impatiently. "Don't stand here gaping. You'll find the gov'nor in his study—and he wants to see you. Better look out for yourself, too, you had!"

She grinned unpleasantly, and, despite herself, Sally knew a moment's qualm. Had she been wise to return to this house of crooks?

Then, as she thought of Charlie, her lips tightened, and, putting down her suitcase, she brushed past the malicious housekeeper and crossed the hall.

"Come in, my dear."

That was the invitation that came in response to her knock, and when she opened the study door George Hunter rose with a welcoming smile.

"Well, my dear, and how have you enjoyed yourself?" he asked. "I hope you found your brother better."

Sally stared, too taken aback to speak for a moment; then, like a tidal wave, white-hot indignation swept over her.

"I haven't seen him!" she cried. "You know I haven't seen him. You had him moved—you've brought him back to England. And I want to know where he is. Tell me at once! I demand to know. What have you done with Charlie?"

A frown crossed his face, for a moment he looked puzzled, then, with a sigh, he shook his head.

"Poor girl—poor girl!" he sighed. "The doctor was right. You should never have gone abroad. You're not strong enough. The accident that made you lose your memory has left you hysterical and a prey to all kinds of illusions."

He crossed the room and made to pat her sympathetically on the shoulder; but fiercely Sally thrust aside his arm.

"Don't touch me!" she panted. "And don't lie to me! All this soft-soaping rubbish doesn't mean anything to me. I know you know where Charlie is—you must know! It was you who gave orders for him to be returned to England."

"But I didn't, my dear." His acting was superb. He really looked distressed. "If your brother has been moved, then the hospital authorities must have acted on their own initiative. I haven't the slightest idea where he is."

"You lie—and you know it! You do know—you do know! Next you will be saying you didn't know anything about the Van Dell jewels," she added bitterly. "I suppose you deny hiding them in my suitcase?"

"Hiding them in your suitcase—the Van Dell heirlooms? My dear, what are you talking about! Now please go and rest."

"I'll go!" stormed Sally. "But not to rest—not until I've found Charlie! You can plan and scheme as much as you like, but you shan't keep us apart—you shan't!"

And, her eyes flashing fiercely, her chest rising and falling stormily, she fled from the room.

When she had gone her guardian mopped his brow.

"The little spitfire," he muttered. "But she'll soon learn sense. She's found it easy enough to come back, but she won't find it so easy to leave again—not until she's served our purpose; then out she goes—back to the hovel I took her from!"

And he grinned viciously, a grin of inexpressible evil.

### THE SECRET OF THE MYSTERY ROOM

DURING the next few days Sally saw little of her guardian. When they did meet they hardly spoke. Only the prospect of receiving that vital letter from Switzerland buoyed the girl up; but as the days passed and the letter did not arrive her eager expectancy died.

"Did the porter ever write?" she asked herself. "If he did, surely the Swiss police would have forwarded it on."

Then a new suspicion occurred to her. What if her guardian or one of the Jarvisses had intercepted the letter and destroyed it? But that hardly seemed possible.

Sally was always careful to be near the front door when the postman arrived. She always took in the letters herself. Her guardian had no chance to steal the letter.

"Then that porter can't have sent it," she gulped. "It's no good hoping any more. I shall have to find some other means of getting in touch with Charlie."

She surveyed through misty eyes the pile of letters the postman had handed her, then, as her guardian hailed her, she turned, to see him emerge from the doorway that led to the cellars.



He wore the long white coat he usually donned when conducting his mysterious experiments, and as she turned Sally felt her pulses leap.

That cellar might put her in touch with the truth. She remembered what she had discovered on her first visit down there—a secret bed-room.

Before leaving for Switzerland she had intended to explore that forbidden underground apartment again, but had not had a chance to do so. But now—

What if the secret bed-room was occupied by the real Sally Blythe!

She knew now that her own name was Mary Staines. She knew that she was an impostor; what, then, was more likely than that the real Sally was a prisoner in this house!

It was an exciting theory, and one that Sally meant to put to the test as quickly as possible. The difficulty would be to gain entrance to the cellars. The door was always kept locked and the key usually hung in the kitchen.

It would be difficult to borrow the key for any length of time, but what about secretly taking an impression of it and getting a duplicate made. Then she could explore underground whenever she wanted!

Sally's eyes gleamed. "Yes, that's what I'll do—get another key made," she told herself.

It was too late to do anything that day, but next morning after breakfast Mrs. Jarvis was surprised to see the girl appear in the kitchen. She glared suspiciously.

"What d'you want here?" she demanded. "You stick to your own part of the house. I don't want you prying around here."

Sally smiled innocently. "Prying around?" she repeated. "Why, what do you mean? You haven't any guilty secret to hide, have you? But don't get scared. I won't split if I see you stealing the sugar. As a matter of fact, I want to bag some myself. I want to try my hand at toffee-making."

"Toffee-making!" Mrs. Jarvis sniffed her contempt. "A girl of your age! Pity you haven't something better to do. Anyway, I won't have you messing up my pots and pans."

"I won't," promised Sally. "I'll wash everything up after me, and if you're nice I may give you a piece of stickjaw all to yourself."

And, smiling at the glowering housekeeper, Sally put on an apron and got busy. But as she measured out the sugar, treacle, and other ingredients her eyes were centred on the rusty hook to the right of the range! There hung the vital cellar key!

Mrs. Jarvis, however, seemed suspicious of her. It was almost as if she guessed Sally's secret thoughts. Never once did she leave the kitchen, and the girl began to despair.

Sally realised she must do something. When the toffee was done and she was pouring it out into a biscuit-tin lid to set, she looked up sharply.

"That sounded like a knock!" she cried. "Someone at the door, Mrs. Jarvis."

"Rubbish! I heard nothing. Anyway, let 'em knock again."

And the woman returned to her potato-peeling. Sally smothered a sigh. In another few minutes she would have no excuse for lingering in the kitchen. Unless the housekeeper left the room quickly she would lose her chance to get hold of the vital key.

Desperate, she lifted up the tin of hot, liquid toffee, and then suddenly she seemed to stumble. With a cry of alarm she dropped the tin, and the toffee went streaming all over the red-flagged floor.

"Ooer! It was hot!" she gasped, sucking her thumb.

Mrs. Jarvis leapt up in fury. "You clumsy wretch!" she hooted. "Look at my clean floor! That comes of letting you fool around. Get out of here—and stay out! If you dare show your nose in my kitchen again—"

Still shouting angrily, she plunged into the scullery for a cloth. It was Sally's chance, and she took it. Smiling her triumph, she whipped a bar of soap from the pocket of her apron and darted across to the fireplace. With trembling eagerness she unhooked the key and pressed it firmly against the soap.

But Mrs. Jarvis, still shrieling out threats, was returning. Hurriedly Sally replaced the key and pushed the soap back in her pocket.

"I'm awfully sorry," she gasped. "Let me clean up the mess, Mrs. Jarvis."

"That you won't! I'll do it myself. You clear off—d'you hear? Clear off!"

And aggrieved, the woman got down to the floor. Sally made herself scarce. Her ruse had succeeded. At last she had obtained an impression of the key.

Putting on her hat and coat, she took the bus to the near-by town, to learn that it would take a couple of days for the key to be made.

Sally arranged to call for it on Wednesday afternoon, and she could hardly restrain her impatience during the next two days. But at last the key was ready, and on Wednesday evening, pleading a headache, Sally retired to her room early.

But she did not undress and go to bed. Instead, she sat on the edge of her bed, excitedly fingering the duplicate key, anxiously waiting for the rest of the household to come upstairs.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before she heard Slim Jarvis, who was always the last up, come clumping along the corridor. She waited another half-hour, then a quiver with excitement, she opened her door and crept out.

There was still a light on the landing, but Sally did not take much notice of that. She

"Catch me death in this draughty house!" Sally heard his muttering voice. Then her heart stood still as he paused outside the bath-room door. "Landing light on—must've forgot it," he mumbled.

After going to switch it off he entered the bath-room, filled the tumbler at the basin, and shambled off.

As soon as his bed-room door closed again a head rose from the old-fashioned linen basket that stood behind the bath-room door.

Softly Sally climbed out, and made her way to the head of the stairs.

The house was now in darkness, but Sally had a torch. By its light she made her way downstairs, and after one anxious look around, she fitted the duplicate key into the lock of the cellar door.

It turned easily, and next moment she was tiptoeing down the dusty steps. Reaching the main cellar, she crossed to the door of the secret bed-room.

A light gleamed through the keyhole, and as she stood there listening she heard the sound of movement on the other side.

Who was it who lived there? Could it be the real Sally Blythe?

Her heart palpitated. There was an excited



Even as Sally darted forward to where her brother was being carried to the waiting ambulance a strong hand seized her. "No, you don't," snapped a brusque voice, and she found herself helpless in the grip of a grim-faced gendarme.

guessed that it might easily have been left on purposely, for the old house was full of unsuspected corners and outjutting walls.

Along the landing she crept, her heart in her mouth.

Fearfully she looked over her shoulder at every step. But fortunately thick carpets covered the floor, and her footsteps made no sound.

Then all at once she stopped, her hand going to her head.

Voices! She could hear them plainly.

Tensely Sally listened. They came from the Jarvises' room. Then Slim Jarvis must be near the door, otherwise she would not have heard him speaking.

Did that mean he was coming out—or was his voice merely raised?

Desperately Sally strained her ears, and stood motionless.

"Why you didn't feel thirsty before I don't know!" she heard Slim's harsh tones grumbling.

Then a pause before:

"Oh, all right; but I'm not going downstairs—"

Without listening for more, Sally jumped through the nearest door—the bath-room.

The Jarvises' door opened, heavy but muffled footsteps shuffled along the corridor.

gleam in her eyes. She was certain that she was on the eve of an important discovery.

Gently she clutched the latch; without a sound she lifted it and pressed the door inward.

She saw that the light came from a small table-lamp. Someone was seated by it writing.

A girl!

A girl in silk pyjamas and an expensive Chinese kimono.

Was this girl a friend or an enemy? Dare she risk making her presence here known? Suppose the unknown was one of the gang; suppose she gave the alarm?

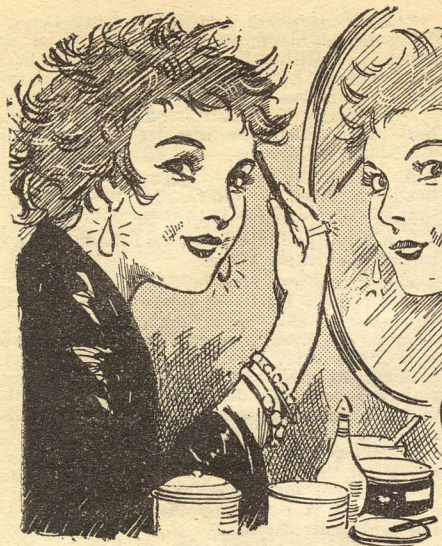
Her heart in her mouth, Sally stood there undecided, and then suddenly a board creaked under her slipped feet.

The girl in the kimono looked up sharply. The doorway was in darkness, so she could not see Sally clearly; she could only dimly make out that someone was there.

For a moment the girl peered incredulously, then, with a gasp of alarm, she leapt to her feet.

It was as though she were looking into a mirror. The mystery girl might have been her own twin.

Is Sally on the track of solving the mystery that surrounds her at last? Don't miss next Friday's thrilling chapters. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.



# POPPY BINKS- Countess

By MAY STEVENS



## NOT WANTED AT THE PARTY

**H**HEY, aunt! My new evening frock for the party!" Poppy Binks, Countess of Sarfield, her eyes dancing with delight, tripped lightly into her great-aunt's room and held out a ravishing evening frock.

It was of palest grey ninon over a slip of rich blue satin. Though simple, it was cut with exquisite art; the accordion-pleated skirt falling in a graceful cascade to the ankles.

But beautiful though that frock was, the beauty of it made no appeal to Poppy Binks' great-aunt, the Dowager Countess of Sarfield.

Poppy's face fell as she saw her aunt's look. "Anything wrong?" she asked anxiously. "I think it's a peach! And it cost twenty pounds—"

"Wow!" said the dowager, or words to that effect.

Poppy frowned. She could not understand her great-aunt's attitude at all. What were twenty pounds to a rich countess? Nothing at all.

True, when Poppy was a factory girl she would have had to work months for a sum like that, and she couldn't have "blewed" it all on one frock.

But she was a factory girl no longer. Owing to the unexpected demise of several prior claimants to the Earldom of Sarfield, Poppy, only child of the last male of the line, stepped into everything.

So here she was, with every intention of enjoying herself.

Even the wet-blanket, severe dowager, with her creased, disapproving face, couldn't damp Poppy for long.

"Well, I like it, aunt," said Poppy defensively. "And so does Jenkins."

The dowager was jolted again.

"The butler?"

"Yes, of course, aunt." Poppy knew of only one Jenkins at Castle Sarfield.

But the dowager turned pale. The mere idea of Poppy, the mistress of the castle, asking the butler's opinion of a new frock sent shudders right through her. For the dowager countess was one of the old school. Dignity was everything, and Poppy Binks, ex-factory girl, had very little of it.

Poppy's idea was to be pals with everyone, including the domestic staff.

"And I bet Aunt Sarah will like it, too," added Poppy. "Considering that Royalty's going to that party, we want to look our best, you know."

The dowager breathed hard.

"I was in two minds whether to take you there or not. Your Aunt Sarah is a very dignified woman, with very strict ideas of propriety."

Poppy heaved a sigh. She was sick of being told that everything she did and said was wrong. She was natural, and that was all that really seemed to matter to her.

A little dashed in spirit, she went out of the room. Dispiritedly she went down to the hall.

Jenkins, the butler, was there, looking a telegram envelope over before he deposited it on the salver.

"Hallo! For me?" asked Poppy eagerly.

Jenkins turned.

"No, m'lady; for her ladyship."

"Oh! Well, toss it over," said Poppy cheerily, "and I'll take it up."

Jenkins bowed. He was the perfect servant.

"Thank you, m'lady; but please do not take the trouble. I will go up."

"Think of the old legs!" said Poppy, with a grin. "I'm half your age. I'll trot it up."

She took it from the salver before Jenkins could make a protest, and charged up the staircase two at a time.

Barging into the dowager's boudoir, Poppy held out the telegram.

"You've won," she said teasingly.

"Won?" said the dowager. "Won what?"

"The horse you put a bob on has come home," said Poppy flippantly.

The dowager sniffed and took the telegram.

"I do not back horses," she said, tearing the telegram open.

She pulled out the flimsy and stared at it. But she did not read it, for she had lost her lorgnettes, and a search failed to reveal them.

"Shall I read it to you?" asked Poppy.

The dowager, with a nod, handed it to her.

But after one glance Poppy's cheeks paled. The telegram was from Lady Wrivenfold. It was a short message, but every word told.

The joy went from Poppy's face, and her lip quivered.

"Good gracious, child, what's wrong?" asked the countess anxiously. "Is it bad news?"

Poppy shook her head.

"I oughtn't to have read this, I suppose. You see—"

And Poppy, putting the telegram down on the table, turned suddenly to the door, tears in her eyes.

Never had the Dowager Lady Sarfield been so startled. She actually sprang from her chair to intercept Poppy, who, however, was far too quick, and had sprung out through the doorway before the dowager could take even one step forward.

Turning, the dowager saw her lorgnettes—on her chair. By a miracle, she had managed not to sit on them. So now, taking them up, she read the telegram.

"Expecting you Friday for week-end, but please in no circumstances whatsoever bring the new family discovery."

The dowager needed no telling that the

"new family discovery" was Poppy Binks, factory girl.

Poppy was not wanted.

**I**N her room Poppy lay on her bed, crying bitter tears of humiliation and disappointment.

Never for a moment had it occurred to her that she might not go to the party. For a whole week she had thought of nothing else.

She had planned her frock, she had studied books on etiquette, and, in preparation for meeting Royalty, she had practised her curtsy.

It was to be a great moment in her life. She had written telling all her friends about it, that she was going, and they had written back asking her to promise to send full details of everything.

Poppy's cheeks burned with shame, and her heart was like lead. In her throat was a lump too large to swallow.

But when she heard the dowager's steps she pulled herself together and dashed tears from her eyes, frantically using her handkerchief to hide the traces of crying.

For Poppy's pride would not let her show how much this invitation mattered to her—just what the party meant.

But the dowager, entering her room, looked almost as distressed as Poppy, for at heart she was kind, and very fond of her new niece.

"Don't worry, Poppy. I'll explain," she said, quite gently. "And if you don't go—well, I won't go, either," said the dowager.

Poppy shook her head. It was a sporting offer that went to her heart; but she knew how much this party meant to the dowager, experienced in such things though she was.

"You go, aunt," she said. "This is between Aunt Sarah and me."

Poppy's tone was grim, and there was a glint in her eyes. She meant business! She spoke as though she were making a declaration of war, and the dowager knew Poppy! Poppy was not to be sat upon.

With folded arms Poppy stood there frowning and thinking of her planning and all her preparation.

"Aunt Sarah shall invite me to that party," said Poppy. "But don't ask me how—"

And, to make sure that there was no argument, Poppy slipped away. Already an idea was dawning in her mind!

## POPPY'S DISGUISE DOES THE TRICK

**I**T was Friday morning, and great preparations were being made in Castle Sarfield, for the Dowager Lady Sarfield was taking a journey.

The occasion was always ceremonial, and her personal maid and half a dozen other members of the staff were kept hopping and skipping about the place.

Usually someone was in tears before the dowager was finally out of the place, and the

Poppy's New-Found Relations  
Were Stupid Snobs—So She  
Meant To Give Them a Lesson

sigh that went up when she was gone sounded like a hurricane.

But the young countess, Poppy Binks, had already departed; and, although the dowager didn't know it, she was bound for the same destination.

Poppy Binks, in her own sporting two-seater, with a large suitcase on the rear, was already driving at her best speed along country lanes, and singing merrily.

She was feeling cheery again, really cheery, and every now and then she chuckled.

If the dowager had seen Poppy now she would have had a shock; for Poppy Binks looked just the sort of girl the grim Victorian Aunt Sarah expected to see.

Over a gaudy silk frock she wore a sporting red-and-yellow jumper, with odd dashes of colour here and there; she wore no stockings, but had a pair of evening shoes.

She wore three bracelets, and a ring on every finger. As she only had two good ones, she pulled up at a sixpenny store for the others.

In case the rings weren't enough, she had added a necklet that was well worth its sixpence in weight alone.

To crown it all was a very dashing hat, to which she had fixed a little medallion and added a feather. But Poppy wasn't wearing the hat; she kept that for her arrival, also the white kid gloves.

But the thing that would have surprised the dowager most of all was Poppy's red wig fitted carefully over her own sleek head of hair. It was a wow!

Poppy was hardly recognisable—for she was in disguise.

She was Poppy—and yet, in a way, she wasn't.

Lady Wrivenfold would accept this gaudily dressed girl as the new countess; it would be just what she expected, this vulgarity. And the way Poppy intended behaving would be what her aunt expected, too!

The shock would come, of course, when Aunt Sarah had been taken in, and then the real Poppy, without the wig and make-up, arrived in her most dignified manner!

Poppy now was going to breeze up to the Wrivenfold "palace" as a new kitchen-maid. She wasn't going to pretend to be Lady Sarfield, even. It was Aunt Sarah who was going to make that mistake.

It was nearly lunch-time when Poppy reached the village of Wrivenfold, and she drove at once to a garage, parked her own little sports car, and then hired a landaulette.

"Wrivenfold Court!" Poppy told the driver.

"Front entrance, or back?"

"Front," said Poppy. "But stop on the way at a cheap trunk shop."

There were cheap trunks in plenty at one of the small leather and harness shops, and Poppy bought three, and a rusty tin trunk, which was so battered that the shopman blushed when he brought it out.

"Old-iron shop near here?" asked Poppy next.

The local blacksmith obliged with that.

"What, fill the trunks with old iron?" he asked blankly, when Poppy stated her requirements. "I could have it delivered. Pity to spoil the trunks."

"Nothing would spoil those trunks!" chuckled Poppy.

They were a disgrace. Lady Wrivenfold, when she saw them arrive at her house, would probably faint away.

The blacksmith, scratching his ear, thought a bit, and then gave way. The trunks were filled with scrap and packed in with some old sacking, then hoisted on to the groaning hired car.

MEANWHILE, in Wrivenfold Court, news had arrived that young Lady Sarfield was coming, wanted or not.

Lady Wrivenfold, seething with rage, had called a family meeting in the library. Her husband was there, Lord Wrivenfold, and her daughter Hermione, and her son Egbert.

"This creature must not stay," said Lady Wrivenfold, shaking with rage. "How dare she force herself on us! I know what she will be like—"

Lord Wrivenfold tried for the tenth time to get a word in.

"But, my dear, how can we judge of her before we have seen her?" he asked reasonably.

"Don't interrupt me," said his wife angrily.

"If you have no sense of dignity or propriety, I have. And I am glad that Hermione and Egbert have the sense to support me."

"Yes, mother," said Hermione. "I shall just refuse to know her."

Hermione was a girl with a permanently curled lip, lofty expression, and inflated idea of her own importance.

"Absolutely," said her brother, Egbert. "Low creature."

Poppy, at that moment, was driving up to the house hanging out of the car, and Lady Wrivenfold, happening to glance out of the window, saw her.

"Here she comes!" she gasped.

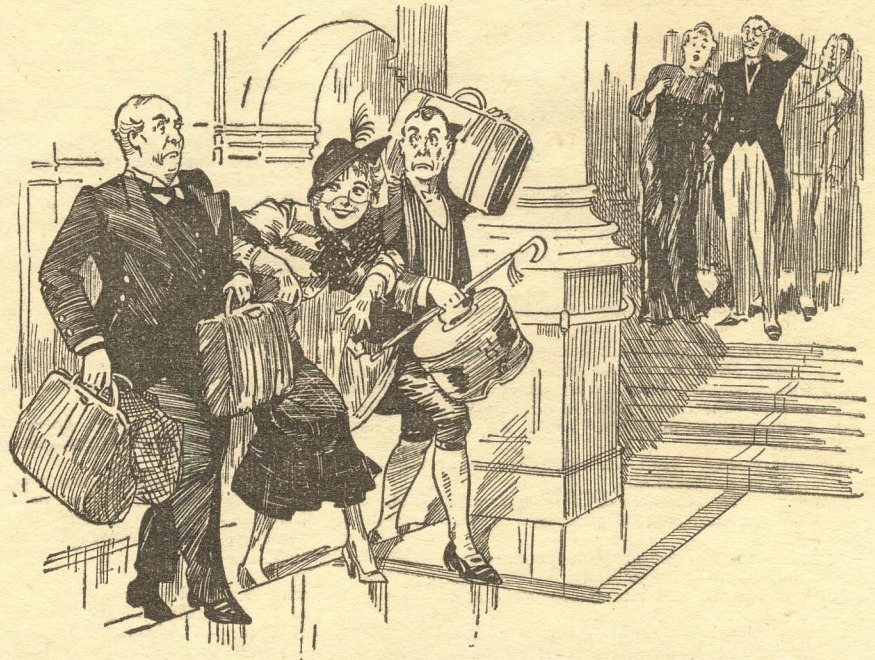
"This is where we snub her," said Hermione fiercely. "Come on."

"Absolutely!" said her brother Egbert. "Put her in her place, what?"

Poppy Binks, arriving at the front door of the court, stepped down from the car.

"This the place?" she asked the driver, and then looked Wrivenfold Court over and gave a nod of approval.

The butler opened the door, and in his stately manner stepped forward.



Linking arms with the horrified butler and footman, Poppy insisted on them marching up the steps with her. She wanted to give her snobbish relatives a shock.

Poppy flung up her hand, gave a chirp of joy, and sprang forward.

"Golly me, the butler! I bet my best boots you're the butler," she said. "Coo, I'm going to like this place, eh?"

And Poppy, flinging out her hand, took hold of the butler's and shook it vigorously.

"Proper butler you are, and no mistake!" said Poppy, giving him a bang on the back. Stodgers reeled and coughed.

"Ugugug!" he said.

"Nice place you've got here," said Poppy. In the doorway, speechless with horror, stood Lady Wrivenfold.

"Oh, Hermione! Egbert! Look, look! Worse even than we supposed!"

Poppy saw her and waved.

"Wotcher!" she said, hurrying forward. "I call this a proper welcome. First the butler and now the cook. How are you? Reckon we'll hit it off all right?"

Lady Wrivenfold paled.

"The cook!" gasped Hermione. "Why, you—this is my mother! This is Lady Wrivenfold!"

Poppy gave a merry laugh.

"Well, fancy me thinking it was the cook," she said. "Can you beat that? But no offence meant, your ladyship."

And Poppy did a clumsy curtsy and slipped.

Rising, she gave a chuckle, and then indicated the scowling Egbert with her thumb. "I suppose the footman will bring in my things. Careful with the big one," she warned Egbert.

The expression on Egbert's face nearly made Poppy double up with hysteria.

"Mistaking me for a footman!" said Egbert feebly.

"Brought enough luggage, haven't I?" said Poppy, apparently unconscious of the glares she was receiving. "No one's going to get me out of here under a month. How do you like the hat?"

Lady Wrivenfold, red in the face, shuddered with horror as she saw another car coming up the drive.

"Oh, oh, here is the marquis!" she groaned. She hurried down the steps and took Poppy by the arm.

"Come inside!" she exclaimed. "Quickly!"

Poppy, looking back, saw the other car, and guessed that the idea was to smuggle her into the house before she shamed them all.

"Hey! Whoa! No rough stuff!" she said. "What's the idea?"

Lady Wrivenfold clasped and unclasped her hands in despair.

"Stodgers, bring in her ladyship's luggage," she said.

Poppy gave a little chirp of joy. Without her saying one word, she had been taken for Lady Sarfield. Now the fun could begin.

"Meaning me?" she said. "Don't half sound funny, being called her ladyship."

"It is normal!" snarled Lady Wrivenfold, little guessing that she had made the very mistake Poppy had hoped she would.

The marquis, a stately woman whose ancestors had been famous in Europe for hundred of years, descended from her car. She was enormously wealthy, and a very important personage in Court circles.

"Who is this young person?" said the marquis, looking Poppy up and down.

Poppy dodged the answer by turning aside to the butler and footman who were bringing in her luggage. She took them by the arm and insisted on accompanying them up the steps and across the hall.

"Careful with that bag," she told the butler. "It's got the family jewels in it!"

Lady Wrivenfold skipped round.

"The family jewels?" she gasped in horror.

"You have brought the family jewels?" She had a picture of Poppy decked out in strings of diamonds and pearls, complete with tiara, bracelets, medallions, and pendants.

Wryly she turned to the marquise. "That's my—my niece, Lady Sarfield," she said weakly. "A factory girl! I asked her not to come. I will get rid of her—"

Poppy, meanwhile, had released the two servants and walked across the great hall, and into the room where Egbert and Hermione stood arguing. As they saw her they paused, and stared haughtily.

"How do you like my hat?" asked Poppy, taking it off and holding it out to Hermione. "Try it on."

Hermione drew up and glared, but did not speak.

Usually that look had succeeded in crushing people; but Poppy, at the moment, was uncrushable.

"Don't be shy," she urged, and put it on to Hermione's head.

Hermione snatched it off in fury. "Hey, whoa, my hat!" said Poppy warningly, and snatched it back. "Now, now, spiteful. Just because I've got a smart new hat, that isn't the way to behave."

"Smart hat!" said Hermione icily. "It is the most hideous, vulgar creation I have ever seen!"

Poppy looked at the hat and turned to the marquise, who had just entered with Lady Wrivenfold.

"I say, do you think this hat is vulgar?" she asked.

Lady Wrivenfold breathed hard and looked at the marquise.

"Humour the poor creature," said the marquise.

"No, it is a nice hat," said Lady Wrivenfold through her teeth. "It suits you perfectly. I do not think you have been previously introduced to the Marquise de Casa Billoni?"

"That you?" said Poppy, looking up at the marquise. "Ooer! Ow are you?"

And dropping a curtsy in passing, as it were, Poppy advanced with hands outstretched. The marquise, playing up, held out a hand and Poppy took it, gave it a hearty, homely grip that made the marquise wince and yelp, her hand in the air.

"Well, I must say you're all being nice and friendly," said Poppy. "Here am I, just a working girl, and you treat me as an equal."

"An equal!" said Lady Wrivenfold faintly. "But I know my manners," said Poppy with a wink.

"How interesting," said the marquise, and a snort came from Hermione.

The butler announced that luncheon was served, and the marquise was shown to her room.

"Do you want to go to your room—er—Betty, is your name?" asked Lady Wrivenfold, who knew it was an odd name, but could not think of Poppy.

"Call me Virginia," said Poppy. "It's not my name, but it sounds sort-of swanky, don't it?"

"Very well, Virginia," said Lady Wrivenfold. "Doubtless you wish to tidy after your journey, and wash—"

"Oh, I washed this morning," said Poppy. "Hermione, my daughter will show you to your room," said Lady Wrivenfold coldly.

Hermione, with a glint in her eyes, led Poppy upstairs through a door leading to the servants' staircase and down into the servants' quarters, where there was a spare room.

"This is your room, Virginia," she said. Poppy chuckled.

"Nice room after what I've been used to," she said.

"I dare say," said Hermione, who had expected Poppy to be indignant, horrified, taken aback.

When Poppy finally strolled into lunch, she was five minutes late. The others were already present.

"Hallo, don't I have meals in the kitchen, then?" she asked. "That's what I'm used to."

She seated herself at the table, and beamed about her.

"I dare say," said Lady Wrivenfold, "if you prefer it, that it could easily be arranged now."

"Easily," said Hermione, "if the servants didn't object."

"Oh, I'm here and I'll stay here," said Poppy. "And if I use the wrong knife or

fork, just whistle or kick me under the table."

The horrified glances that passed satisfied Poppy that her plans were going well. All she had to do now was to await the opportunity to tell them she was the new kitchenmaid.

Then she could reappear as herself—and would be welcomed with outstretched arms.

Poppy was just going to pretend that she had never had any table manners when a footman entered.

"The Honourable Frederick Clitheroe," he announced.

Poppy's grin faded. A sudden chill went to her heart.

Freddie, her new-found cousin and friend!

He would know her as Lady Sarfield, know that she was only pretending to be someone else for some reason of her own.

Once it was proved she was Lady Sarfield—how could she live this down? They wouldn't believe it was only a joke! They would think she really did behave like that.

"Wow!" wailed Poppy, to herself.

The door opened and Freddie entered. Poppy bobbed down as though to pick up something, and only her red wig showed.

"Sorry about the tardiness, aunt. Car broke down, or, rather, up," said Freddie cheerily. "I met Hermione in the hall—said Lady Sarfield was here—"

Poppy remained with head showing, and Lady Wrivenfold, forgetting the rule for the hostess for once, lifted her hand and pointed to Poppy's red head.

"That," she said, and broke another rule.

Freddie gave a jump.

"Poppy hasn't red hair"

Poppy sat up and fixed him with a steady look.

Freddie Clitheroe looked at her.

The game was up!

#### TURNING THE TABLES

POPPY BINKS, countess, gulped. She tried to speak, and then tried to fix Freddie with an even more meaning look.

"Poppy, what's the idea?" asked Freddie.

Then Poppy's brain worked. An idea came, and she jumped up.

"Here, what's the idea, getting fresh like this? Who are you calling Poppy, funny-face? I'm Virginia."

Freddie Clitheroe, despite his face, was no fool. He saw that Poppy did not want to be recognised as herself, and he played up.

"Oh—ah—not Poppy—er—my mistake. Well, who are you?"

"Me?" said Poppy.

Lady Wrivenfold gaped at her.

"Aren't you Lady Sarfield?" she asked.

"Me?" said Poppy. "Whatever made you think that? Is that why the butler called me his lady?"

There was a bustle at the table. Egbert gaped, Lord Wrivenfold gaped, and the marquise goggled her large eyes.

"Then what are you—and who? And why did you bring all that luggage?" panted Lady Wrivenfold.

Poppy clucked her tongue.

"Why, I'm the new kitchenmaid, of course," she said. "Lumme, so that's it. You've been making a mistake. Fancy! And that's why you're all so pally. Think I'm a real lady—me! He, he, he!"

"Good gracious! A—mistake! You're not Lady Sarfield!" gasped Lady Wrivenfold.

"Why—how dare you! Leave this house immediately!"

Poppy rose, chin in air.

"And glad to," she said, with dignity. "Lot of stuck-up pots! You made the mistake. I didn't."

The footman reappeared.

"The Dowager Lady Sarfield!" he said.

Poppy did not hesitate. She made a rush for the door, hauled it open, and charged down the corridor.

The dowager, pausing at the dining-room door, saw a red-haired girl rushing out of view.

"Who was the creature with red hair?" she asked.

Aunt Sarah, looking confused and embarrassed, hemmed and ha'd.

"A kitchenmaid," said Freddie. "Aunt Sarah thought it was Poppy."

The dowager drew up and glared.

"Thought a kitchenmaid was Poppy!" she said, aghast. "A girl with red hair! What's been going on around here?"

"Well—er—I naturally thought, when I saw the girl—"

began Lady Wrivenfold, and was cut short by the dowager.

"Ridiculous! I have never heard of such an insult. Never! Poppy is a charming girl."

The argument was still proceeding when the footman came in again, this time with a telephone message.

"Lady Sarfield has telephoned to inquire which road her ladyship should take from Brominworth to reach here, m'lady," he said.

Lady Wrivenfold eagerly told him. She was wringing her hands with despair.

"Oh, she must not know of our dreadful mistake!" she groaned. "Oh dear! She might be furious—"

"Yes, don't let her know," said Lord Wrivenfold, in earnest pleading.

The dowager's eyes glimmered.

"Very well. If she is treated well, I will overlook this dreadful business."

And so it was that when Poppy, in suitable attire, looking herself, arrived half an hour later in her little car, with her own suitcase that she had left in the station, she was welcomed.

It was a surprising welcome she received. She arrived with some trepidation; but even Hermione and Egbert fussed, and Aunt Sarah kissed her on both cheeks and the back of the neck.

"My dear," Lady Wrivenfold purred. "How sweet you are. I never dreamed—"

"Thank you," Poppy smiled demurely, and then added, a twinkle in her eye: "What were you expecting then? Not a cross between a hottentot and a scullery-maid, I hope?"

"Er—er—a scullery-maid!" laughed her ladyship, infusing a merry peal into the sound.

"How quaint you are, my dear! Though mind you—Poppy, isn't it?—kitchen-maids—I mean, scullery-maids—these days are really no different from us. I always say, and we must never forget—"

"How modern you are, aunt!" Poppy broke in, as her aunt paused for effect. "You and I have a lot in common, for I always say that just because I'm a countess, I'm no different from the Poppy I used to be."

The stately, but friendly Lord Wrivenfold appeared just then.

"It's nice to hear you talk like that, child," he said, and his cultured voice was sincere. So was his kiss when he told Poppy he was delighted to meet her. "And you, too, my dear," he added, turning to his wife.

There was something significant in his look, for his wife coloured.

"But I'm sure you must be tired, Poppy," she said hastily. "Come, I'll show you your room."

Happily Poppy followed, with a beaming smile for her host.

"I shall never forgive myself for that crazy mistake," said Lady Wrivenfold to the dowager later; and Poppy, overhearing, heaved a sigh of pleasure.

But when she and Freddie were alone he gave an enormous wink.

"Y'know," he said, "you're oddly like a kitchenmaid named Virginia!"

Poppy closed one eye.

"I had to do it, Freddie!" she grinned.

"Well, it was worth it," Freddie said.

And Poppy Binks didn't worry any more. She was looking forward to the party and wearing that wonderful frock.

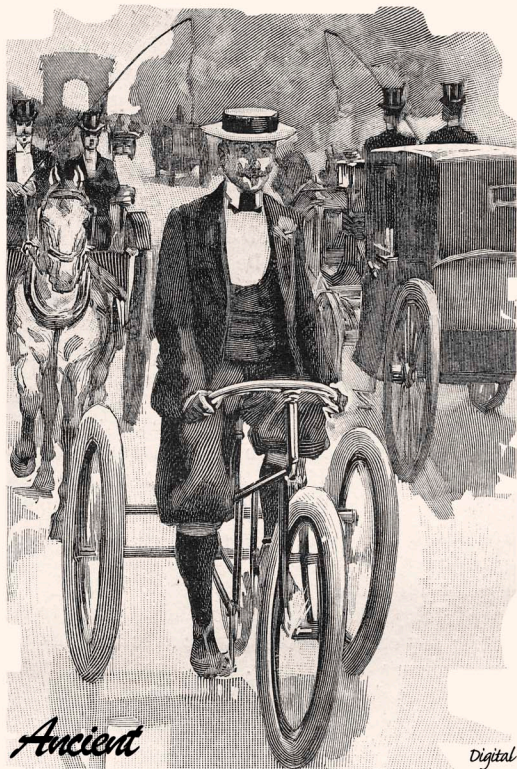
It was a party worth waiting for, and Poppy had the thrill of her life. If anything were needed to fill her cup of happiness, it was the fact that her dress was commented on favourably in whispers by everyone!

Poppy Binks, countess, shook hands with herself, and had reason to!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY

Don't miss next Friday's mirthful story of Poppy Binks. You'll enjoy every word... Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance—2d., every Friday.

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