

"Noel's Christmas Conjuring Trick" One of the Six Splendid
Stories for Schoolgirls Inside.

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EVERY FRIDAY.

Week Ending December 24th, 1938.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{2^d} WEEKLY



**ONLY NORMA KNEW
WHAT THAT BOX
CONTAINED!**

*A dramatic incident from "The
Girl Who Haunted Grey Gables"
—by Renee Frazer, inside.*

SECRET FRIENDS *of* the SPEED GIRL



FLORRIE'S BIG DISCOVERY

LINDA HALE, Terry O'Dare, and Mary Walton, Fourth Formers at the Abbey School, formed themselves into a secret society—the Secret Three—in order to help Miss Nemo, a mysterious girl racing motorist.

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

The Head appointed her niece junior mistress at the school, not knowing that she was Miss Nemo, and Florrie Mears was furious.

Miss Nemo was to take part in a championship motor-race, with Linda as passenger.

She and the Secret Three went for a trial run in the Red Star, and returned to garage it in a secret room in the Abbey ruins.

They little realised that Florrie Mears and her brother, Ralph, had been spying on them!

HER eyes glittering with triumph, Florrie Mears peered through the doorway of the ancient refectory.

She had discovered Miss Nemo's secret at last!

The massive fireplace in the vaulted room stood open, revealing the hiding-place of the wonder racing car, Red Star. Even as the prefect watched, Miss Nemo herself emerged. But no longer did she wear overalls and mask. She was revealed to all the world as Eileen Grange, the headmistress' niece.

Ignorant of the fact that she was being spied upon, the speed girl crossed to where Linda & Co. waited her. All four lingered there, talking, but after listening for a few moments, Florrie stole away as stealthily as she had come.

Her brother, crouching behind a heap of masonry, greeted her eagerly.

"Well, did you discover anything?" he asked.

"Rather!" Florrie grinned slyly. "I discovered everything we want to know. All we've got to do now is— She paused, and raised a warning finger to her lips. "Out of sight—quick—here they come," she whispered.

Both of them flattened themselves against the jagged pile of stone, but they need not have worried. Neither

Miss Nemo nor Linda & Co. had any suspicion of the truth.

Chatting light-heartedly, they strode through the ruins and disappeared through the trees. When they had gone Ralph Mears straightened up and seized his sister by the arm.

"Come on, let's get busy," he urged. "We'll grab the car, then we'll let the headmistress know a bit more about her niece."

But Florrie shook her head.

"No, I've got a better stunt than that. We want to catch not only Miss Nemo, but the Secret Three as well—we'll wait until after supper. The speed girl is coming back then to clean her car, and if we can only trick those three kids into joining her—"

She broke off with a frown, then the grin returned to her lips.

"Well?" asked her brother.

"You leave this to me," Florrie urged. "I'll fix things—fix them so that the Head will catch all four of them red-handed!"

She dropped her voice to a whisper, and Ralph chuckled as he heard her plan. Then they separated. Ralph went back to his hotel at Hanthorpe; Florrie returned to the school.

As she entered the hall, she saw Linda & Co. standing there, talking. Florrie said nothing, but there was a peculiar glitter in her eyes as she passed on.

"Let's decide what we're going to do to-night," Terry was saying, dropping her voice to a whisper until Florrie had disappeared. "I'm all for putting on our robes and slipping out to help Miss Nemo to clean her car."

"Same here," nodded Linda. "I'll take her hours to get the car ready on her own, but if we all buckle to—why, we'll get it done in no time."

How thankful the Secret Three were that they had not been found out of bounds. Happily they slipped into their beds, little realising that Miss Nemo had allowed herself to be caught in order that they might escape.

By GAIL WESTERN

Mary nodded, though a shade uncertainly.

"You know what Miss Nemo said when we suggested we should sneak out to help."

"Shure, the darlint was against it—we know that," Terry remarked. "But it wasn't because she didn't want our help. It was only because she didn't want us to get into trouble. She was afraid we might be caught and so—"

She broke off and they all turned as they heard themselves hailed.

"Excuse me, Miss Linda—" It was one of the maids, and in her hand she held a letter. "Miss Eileen asked me to give it to you and the other young ladies."

"Oh, thanks!"

Linda took the envelope with a smile, and as the maid departed she ripped it open. The message inside was typed, and a whoop of delight escaped her lips as she read it.

"Hurroosh!" she cried. "It's O.K., kiddlets. Miss Nemo's changed her mind."

She passed over the note, and Terry and Mary also laughed in delight as they scanned the few typewritten lines.

"Aunt's just asked me to go and see her, so I shan't get a chance to talk to you before Lights Out. But if you'd really like to help me to-night—well, come along. I'll be in the ruins at nine."

"E. G."

"Then that settles it, bedad!" exclaimed Terry.

Eagerly they waited for the time to arrive. Florrie Mears called the roll, and, instead of seeing them upstairs, as she usually did, she dismissed them at the foot of the stairs.

"I'll trust you to turn out the light yourselves," she said, "but—mind, no skylarking about."

And though she frowned warningly, there was the glimmer of a smile on her lips. Linda & Co., however, were too excited to notice it. They were impatient to join Miss Nemo. It would be fun helping her to clean the Red Star—get the glittering car ready for the all-important race on Saturday.

They followed the rest of the Form upstairs, but they made no attempt to get undressed. Betty Russell eyed them in surprise.

"Hallo, what's in the wind?" she asked. "Aren't you going to get into bed?"

Linda shook her head.

"Not yet—we've got a date elsewhere," she replied.

"A—a date?" Betty stared harder than ever. "D'you mean you're going to break bounds?" she gasped.

Linda smiled cryptically.

"The less you know the less you'll be able to tell if any Nosy Parker asks questions," she said. "Be a sport, Betty—mum's the word."

She hadn't to ask twice. Though curious, the Fourth was loyal. Not from them would Linda & Co.'s escapade leak out. So without fear of being given away, the chums slipped out on to the landing. From the store cupboard at the far end they collected their robes, and putting them on, they crossed to the window that gave access to the fire-escape.

"Softly does it," warned Linda, as she clambered over the sill.

Looking like three phantoms in the darkness, the Secret Three descended to the quad, and went running across to the ruins. As they reached the ancient refectory they saw a light glimmering at the far end.

"Coo-ee!" called Linda, and with a smile she stepped through into the secret room.

Miss Nemo, wearing her mask and overalls, was bending over the race car, but at the sudden hail she swung round and straightened up.

"You!" she gasped, staring in astonishment. "But what ever are you doing here? It was sweet of you to come, but I told you not to. It's too dangerous."

It was the Secret Three's turn to stare.

"But—but your note," stammered Linda. "You said we could come along and help."

"My—my note?" Miss Nemo gave a sudden gasp. "Have you still got it?" she asked.

"Shure, we have!" chimed in Terry O'Dare.

"Then let me see it. Oh, quickly—please! You have been tricked!"

"Tricked!" The blood drained from Linda's face, and in horror she stared at the speed girl; then, fumbling in her pocket, she produced the type-written message. "Here it is. Do you mean to say you didn't ask Tilly to hand us this?" she demanded.

Miss Nemo's fingers trembled as they grasped the note, and slowly she shook her head.

"It didn't come from me. Someone else must have written it. They must have bribed Tilly to take it to you. Oh, my goodness!" Her hand flew to her throat. "Suppose this is some of Florrie's treachery!"

"Florrie?" It was Terry who spoke. "But what object could she have, my darling? Besides, she knows nothing about this secret room. She doesn't suspect a thing."

"But she must—she must. No one else can have sent it!" cried Miss Nemo, and frantically she darted forward. "You must go; there's danger. Florrie's out to trap you. Perhaps she's bringing aunt here! Perhaps—"

Her voice died away, and both she and the Secret Three stood as if turned to stone; for in the sudden stillness they had heard the sound of footsteps—footsteps that were approaching the ruins!

Mary Walton, panic-stricken, turned

to flee, but Linda caught her by the arm. She realised it was too late to escape unseen. There was only one slim hope left to them.

"Close the fireplace," she whispered. "We must lie doggo. Perhaps Florrie doesn't know about this secret room."

It was Miss Nemo who darted across to the rusty lever that operated the mechanism controlling the massive door. As she pulled on it there came a low whirring sound, and the fireplace slid back into place. There was nothing now to indicate the existence of the secret chamber.

Putting out the lamp, the Secret Three stood huddled together. In the darkness they could hear Miss Nemo catch in her breath. Not only their fate but her own as well was at stake.

Discovery would mean expulsion for the Secret Three. For the speed girl it would mean the end of her career as a racing motorist; the end of all her plans to compete in the vital championship race on Saturday.

The footsteps drew nearer—and nearer still. Then suddenly from the refectory came a muffled voice.

"Are you sure you are not letting your imagination run away with you again, Florrie?"

It was the headmistress who spoke; and confidently came the prefect's answer:

"What I told you is true, Miss Grange—honestly it is. The Secret Three did arrange to meet Miss Nemo here."

"Then where are they? The place seems empty, except for ourselves. Flash your torch around, girl."

Linda & Co. hardly dared breathe. The perspiration was breaking out on their brows; never had they known such suspense. Then abruptly their worst fears were confirmed, for they could hear the prefect groping about on the other side of the fireplace, hammering and tugging at the ornamental carving.

"There's another room behind here," Florrie panted. "That's where they are hiding."

"Another room?" The headmistress looked incredulous. "Are you serious, Florrie?"

"Of course I am, Miss Grange. You'll see for yourself in a minute.

Just let me find the knob that works the mechanism."

In the secret room the chums listened in horror. For once, the situation was beyond them. Even Linda's sharp wits refused to work. It was Miss Nemo who took command.

"Our only hope is to bolt for it," she said. "If we're quick we may be able to escape before either aunt or Florrie recovers from the shock. Are you game to risk it?"

Slowly the Secret Three nodded. To stay here was to court certain capture. Miss Nemo crossed to the rusty lever that operated the fireplace and grasped it with one hand.

"Ready?" she asked. Again they nodded. "Then—charge!" the speed girl shouted, and down clanged the lever.

HER SECRET IS KNOWN

MISS GRANGE and Florrie were taken completely by surprise. As the secret door swung round and four phantom-like figures came leaping through the opening the headmistress recoiled in alarm. As for the prefect, she was knocked over by the moving fireplace, and the torch clattering from her hand, was extinguished.

"Stop! I order you all to come back!"

It was the Head who shouted, but the Secret Three paid no heed. They plunged through the arched doorway and went racing for the school grounds. Miss Nemo went with them, but when they reached the wicket-gate she stopped.

"You girls go on," she panted. "I'm going to hide here until the coast is clear, then I'll get back and try to get my car."

Linda pulled up in dismay. "But what if you're caught?" she cried. "No, Miss Nemo; if you stay, we'll all stay."

"Hear, hear!"

There came a chorus of agreement from the other two, and the speed girl's eyes glowed. What staunch friends Linda & Co. were! But, though she was grateful to them for their offer, she shook her head.

"No; you must get back to bed.



"If you stay, Miss Nemo—we'll all stay," Linda protested. But Miss Nemo shook her head. "No, you must go back to bed," she insisted. "I shall be perfectly safe."

Don't you realise the dormitories will be searched to discover who's missing? Please run on. I shall be perfectly safe."

"But—"
"Go! Oh, please, go! Quick! Here they come!"

Miss Nemo's voice was shrill with agitation; for from the darkness came the sound of voices and a rush of feet. Miss Grange and Florrie, having got over the first shock, had taken up the pursuit.

Linda cast one startled look around; then, realising that Miss Nemo was right, she nodded to her chums.

"Come on!" she ordered.
Off the Secret Three dashed, to be quickly swallowed up by the gloom. Miss Nemo, taking cover behind the trees, heaved a sigh of relief. At least Linda & Co. were safe.

But were they?
As Florrie and the headmistress loomed into sight the prefect gave an excited shout:

"Don't worry, Miss Grange; we'll catch them yet! It'll take them quite a time to undress and get into bed. If we hurry we'll discover who they are."

The speed girl's heart missed a beat. In despair she watched Florrie swing open the wicket-gate. What the prefect said was true. Despite their start, the Secret Three could not hope to escape detection unless their pursuers were detained.

But how?
Miss Nemo gulped, gritted her teeth, then deliberately stepped from behind the trees.

"Here I am!" she called breathlessly; then, as Miss Grange and Florrie gasped on seeing that masked figure in white overalls, she darted off.

Miss Nemo dodged and fled back towards the ruins. She could easily have out-distanced the stumbling prefect. She could easily have escaped. But deliberately she kept in sight. Her one thought was to give the Secret Three time to get into bed.

In and out of the trees she ran, luring the breathless Florrie on, now letting her draw nearer, now darting farther away.

Five minutes passed—ten, then Miss Nemo's worried frown faded.
"They'll have undressed now—they'll be safe and sound," she told herself. "I can try to escape myself now."

But it was not to be.
As she quickened her step her foot caught in a trailing root. She stumbled and fell. Instantly Florrie had pounced. Before the speed girl could scramble up, she found herself seized.

"Quick, Miss Grange! Miss Grange!"

The prefect's excited shouts rent the air, and Miss Nemo could hear the Head stumbling through the darkness. Frantically she struggled. Her mask had come off, yet, if only she could escape from Florrie's clawing hands, she might yet preserve the secret of her identity.

A violent wrench and she was free. She clambered to her feet, was in the very act of bolting, when:

Click!
The dazzling beam of a torch cleaved the darkness, and her white face was revealed for her pursuers to see.

"Eileen!"
Miss Grange gave an incredulous gasp. Keeping the torch levelled, she took a step forward, to gaze at her niece in amazement.

"Eileen, what does this mean?" she demanded. "Surely you cannot be that person known as Miss Nemo?"

It was Florrie who answered.

"Of course she is. Ralph and I have known it all along. Time and again we tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen."

Her eyes were full of triumph, but Miss Grange ignored her. Sternly she kept her gaze riveted on the pale-faced speed girl.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Eileen?" she asked.

Eileen faced her aunt pleadingly. "I'm sorry I had to deceive you, aunt," she gulped. "Honestly, I am! But there was no other way. You see, I promised Jack—"

"Jack!" Miss Grange's eyebrows met in an irate frown. "Is it possible that you are referring to Jack Naylor?" she exclaimed.
Miserably Eileen nodded.

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I distinctly told you to have nothing more to do with him. He is an utter waster—a despicable thief!" Eileen's cheeks flamed.

"He's not! Oh, it's not true! Jack's a splendid fellow! It was all lies Florrie's brother told! It wasn't reckless driving that caused that accident. And he isn't a thief. He didn't touch a penny of that missing money!"

"A likely story." It was Florrie who spoke, and gave a scoffing laugh. "If he's innocent, why doesn't he return to England and face the charges brought against him?" she jeered.

Eileen's eyes blazed. Angrily she whipped round on the sneering prefect. "That is just what he is doing," she retorted. "He's on his way back now, and if I can only win on Saturday—"

"Win!" Miss Grange raised her hands in horror. "You don't think I shall allow you to drive that dangerous car again, surely?" she cried. "You must be mad, Eileen. But I will deal with you later. Florrie!"

"Yes, Miss Grange?"
"Kindly return to the school and see if you can trace those three girls who call themselves the Secret Three."

"Very good, Miss Grange."
Reluctantly Florrie departed. When she had gone, the Head turned to her niece.

"You will come with me!" she said curtly. "This foolishness must be cleared up once and for all."

Meekly Eileen followed her aunt back through the trees, but inwardly she was boiling over with rebellion. She couldn't let Jack Naylor down—she couldn't withdraw from the championship race.

"I've got to defy aunt—there's no other way," she told herself, and when Miss Grange's private house was reached, she came to a sudden halt.

The Head, fumbling with her key, beckoned sharply.

"Come along, Eileen!" she ordered.
But Eileen, a stifled sob escaping her quivering lips, abruptly turned and went racing back across the quad. Her aunt stared blankly.

"Come back! Listen! Come back at once!" she called.

But Eileen went dashing on—on towards the ruins—on towards where the Red Star was garaged!

FLORRIE'S TRIUMPH

"ANYONE awake in here?"
There could be no mistaking that shrill voice, which sounded through the Fourth Form dormitory. It belonged to Florrie Mears, and eagerly she crossed to the beds occupied by Linda and her chums. An angry snort escaped her lips as she saw that all three beds were occupied, then she gave Linda a shake.

"So you got back, did you?" she snapped. "But you can't fool me. I know you're not asleep."

Linda's only response was to snore and roll over on her other side.

Florrie scowled.
"All right, pretend if you want to!" she cried. "But the game's up. Your precious Miss Nemo's been found out by the headmistress!"

Linda's face paled. She needed every ounce of self-control to stop herself from springing up in bed.

Miss Nemo caught! Could it be true? Desperately she forced herself to lie there, while the prefect grinned maliciously down at her; then, just when the suspense was becoming unbearable, the torch snapped off and Florrie departed.

Hardly had the door closed behind her than the three chums sat up to regard each other in horror.

"Did—did you hear what she said?" gulped Mary.

"Oh, it can't be true! It would be too cruel!" groaned Linda.

Terry was the only one to keep calm.

"Rats! She's only trying to frighten us!" she declared. "Go to sleep, my darlins! There's nothing to worry about!"

But for once the Irish girl was wrong—as they all discovered next morning. When they went into breakfast the whole school hummed with sensational news.

Not only had it been discovered that the mystery speed girl was the Head's own niece, but Eileen had actually had the audacity to run away from her temporary home. She had jumped into the Red Star, and driven off, though where to no one could even guess.

It was the biggest sensation that Abbey School had ever known, and most of the girls were quick to sympathise with Miss Grange. Not knowing the full circumstances, they condemned Eileen out of hand.

Only the Fourth Form remained loyal. Startled and shocked though they were by the news, yet they refused to believe anything bad of Miss Nemo—the girl they had all come to admire so much.

As for Linda & Co., they went about in a daze. They did not know what to do, what to say. Their only hope was that Eileen would write to them; would send them a letter of explanation.

For twenty-four hours they were kept in suspense; then, on Friday evening, the day before the championship race, the eagerly awaited letter arrived. It was short and to the point.

"I had to run away. If I had stayed, aunt would have forced me to withdraw. But I must race; everything depends on it. Don't worry, dears; I'm all right. No one will ever dream of looking for me here. And, Linda, I cannot let you ride with me on Saturday now. It's too risky. But Jack's boat docks in the morning. He will act as my mechanic. Love to you all. In haste—"

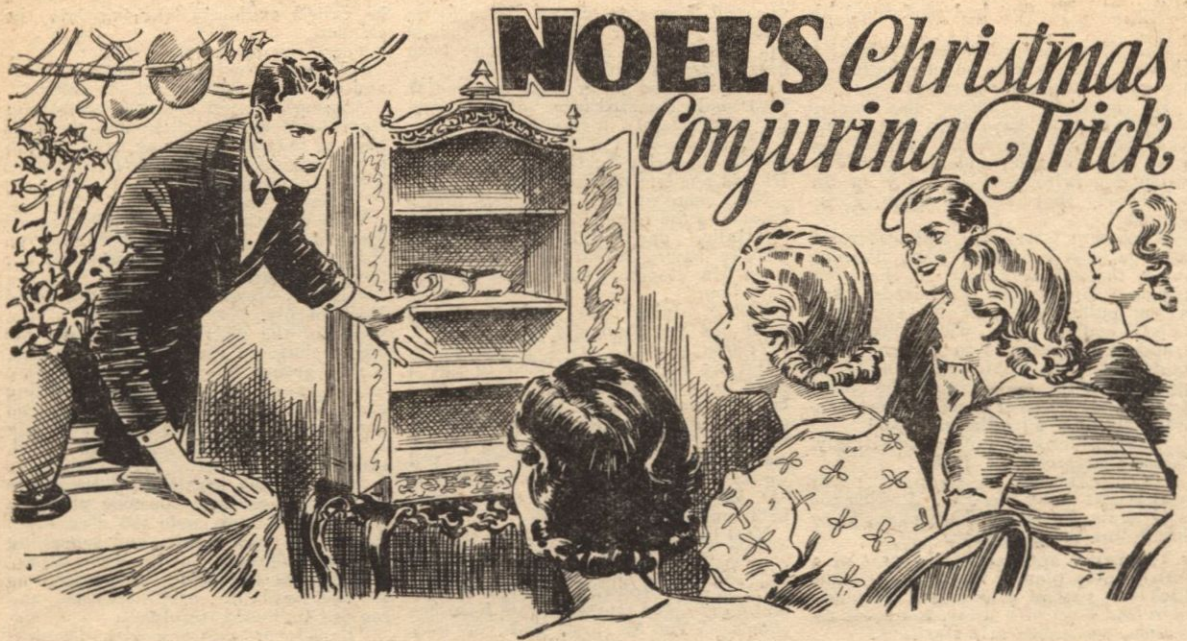
"MISS NEMO."

Thankfully Linda & Co. read those few hurried lines, then involuntarily their gaze went to the address scribbled at the top of the sheet of paper.

"George Street, Hanthorpe!" exclaimed Linda. "Why, that's quite near the race track. She'll only have to cross the street to get there. But I do hope no one finds out where she is. I do hope she'll be allowed to race."

"Shure she'll race!" declared Terry, all her Irish optimism coming to the surface again. "What's more, the darlint will win!"

(Please turn to the back page.)



A STRANGE LEGACY

NOEL RAYMOND grinned as he stamped the snow from his shoes, and tugged again at the rusted bell-pull at Farleigh Grange.

Welcoming lights streamed from within, and there came the sound of laughter and music.

The door was suddenly flung wide, revealing a lofty, panelled hall, decorated with holly and mistletoe, and a dozen laughing young girls in party dress.

"Miss Diana Clavering?" Noel inquired, raising his hat, and looking around the group. "My name is Raymond—Noel Raymond."

"Of course, Mr. Raymond, do come in. Daddy's expecting you."

A dark-haired, attractive girl stepped forward to greet him. Noel smiled at her, a look of interest in his eyes.

He and John Clavering had been friends for some years—ever since Noel had helped the older man in a business matter. Recently they had lost touch with each other; and then had come the invitation to Farleigh Grange, for the Christmas party Clavering was giving for his daughter.

Noel had gladly accepted—the more so because he had read, between the lines of the invitation, a hint of secret worry.

"You look very snug and festive in here," he remarked cheerfully. "It's nice to get into the warm."

"I am glad you like it," said Diana, with obvious pleasure. "We've done our best with the decorations, though it's a wonder we've managed to get anything done at all."

There came a ripple of laughter at that, and yet some of it seemed rather unsteady.

"Why, anything wrong?" Noel inquired, in some surprise.

"Not really," replied Diana, with a quick smile. "But haven't you heard about Uncle Jasper's legacy?"

"Not a thing," said the young detective. "I knew, of course, that you had an Uncle Jasper. Your father mentioned him. He was a famous conjurer and illusionist, I believe?"

Diana nodded, her dark eyes shining with excitement.

"He used to be known as 'Mervyn, the Mystery Man.' This was his house, and in his will he left daddy a lot of strange furniture that was locked away in an upstairs room. This Christmas daddy decided to get it out—it hadn't been disturbed—as we had a crowd of people coming.

"Then, when Jim arrived—Jim Tarrant, a friend of mine"—Diana blushed prettily—"he started to pry about, as boys will. Goodness knows what he discovered about that furniture, for since then things have been happening. Things disappearing, and reappearing again! Strange noises, rappings—almost like a haunted house. You never know what's going to happen next."

Noel laughed. "Conjuring tricks, eh?" he remarked. "Well, I hope you won't disappear for a moment, as I've brought a little parcel for you, with the compliments of the season."

"A parcel—for me? Oh, Mr. Raymond, thank you! Come into the library. I must open it now."

They all surged into the library, where a big log fire blazed and crackled in the open grate. The walls were hung with evergreen, and a large Christmas-tree stood in a corner.

Diana placed Noel's parcel on an elaborately carved table, and proceeded eagerly to unfasten the string.

At that instant, from a dim corner of the shadowy room, came a loud crash.

Several of the girls cried out in alarm, and everyone turned. But there was nothing to be seen.

"If that's that Jim Tarrant—" began Diana severely.

But she was smiling. She reached out to take the parcel.

Uncle Jasper's legacy of old conjuring gadgets was just so much junk to the owners. But Noel had an idea that it could bring Diana and her father every happiness—if only he could find Uncle Jasper's secret.

NOEL'S Christmas Conjuring Trick

By PETER LANGLEY

"One moment!" put in Noel swiftly. With a quick movement he jerked back the brown-paper wrapping on the parcel.

There was a faint explosion, and a cloud of smoke arose, enveloping the party.

"I guessed as much," declared Noel, with a grin. "A trick! The parcel was exchanged as our backs were turned. Who's guilty?"

There came a sudden chuckle from a corner of the room, and everyone turned as a fair-haired, good-looking boy emerged from the shadows.

"Jim," exclaimed Diana accusingly, "so it was you again. Where's my parcel?"

Jim Tarrant laughed, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Caught you that time, Di," he declared. "Now look behind you."

They all turned, and a faint gasp arose. For on the table, unharmed, stood the original parcel!

"Phew, that was smart!" the young detective admitted, frankly puzzled by the clever trick.

He unwrapped the parcel, producing the dainty bottle of scent that was his Christmas present to Diana.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Raymond!" the girl exclaimed, as she admired it. Then she turned rather indignantly to the boy. "Jim, you might have broken it. But how on earth did you do it?"

"That would be telling," grinned the boy tantalisingly. "You girls will never find out the secrets."

He made a dive for the door, chased by the indignant guests.

"I'll tell daddy you're here, Mr. Raymond," smiled Diana. And she, too, hurried away, leaving Noel alone in the room.

The young detective's smile faded as he stared at the strangely carved table on which lay the wrappings of his parcel.

He felt a vague uneasiness. Perhaps it was caused by the atmosphere of the firelit room; perhaps it was the grotesque shadow he had seen limned against the opposite wall—a moment

before Jim Tarrant had performed his trick.

But it was absurd to be afraid of a shadow. There was no one hiding in the room, as Noel ascertained.

He bent to examine the carved table. It must have been one of old Uncle Jasper's conjuring "props." He gave a low whistle suddenly as his sensitive fingers touched a portion of the woodwork that seemed slightly indented.

A moment later Noel had discovered a cunningly concealed wire, running down through a groove in the table leg, and through the floorboards. And as he pulled the wire there came a barely audible click, while through a trapdoor that opened in a flash in the middle of the table rose the trick parcel. At the same instant the empty paper and string of Noel's parcel vanished through an adjacent trap!

"Phew!" breathed Noel admiringly. "That's a clever—Hallo!"

He had noticed a scrap of paper caught just under the trap. Pulling the wire again, he snatched the paper away just before the trap closed.

The paper appeared to be part of a torn plan—a plan of the house. On the back was part of a message. The bulk of it had been torn away, but what remained was sufficiently startling:

" . . . old Mervyn . . . search
before . . . mas Day . . .
returned . . . urgent
danger . . . guests . . . "

For a moment Noel wondered if it could be some new prank of Jim Tarrant's. But the handwriting was that of an elderly man.

The reference to "old Mervyn" was unmistakable. That had been the stage name of Uncle Jasper. Then there was a mention of Christmas Day, and danger—to the guests?

Noel's questioning thoughts were interrupted by the entry of his friend, John Clavering.

Instinctively he slipped the paper into his pocket as he held out his hand. He would say nothing that might mar the Christmas festivities until he had more to go upon.

Clavering looked older, a little greyer than when Noel had last seen him. There were lines about his eyes, too.

But he smiled with unassuming pleasure as he shook Noel's hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Raymond! Hope you'll enjoy yourself while you are here. I hear you've already met Diana's chums. Bright crowd, aren't they? Always ragging each other. Ah, well, let them enjoy themselves while they may; they'll only be young once."

He spoke jerkily, his face twitching.

Noel glanced at his friend keenly. "What's the matter, Clavering?" he asked. "Own up, man! There's something worrying you."

The other nodded, with a hasty glance towards the door.

"Don't breathe a word of this to Diana," he said. "She doesn't know anything is wrong, and I just couldn't spoil her Christmas. But the fact is, I'm in Queer Street; my business has gone to pieces, my savings have dwindled. After Christmas I'll have to clear out of this place—can't afford to run it."

"I'd placed great hopes on Uncle Jasper's legacy. I believe you've been told about it," he went on. "The old man and I were great friends, and he always said he'd remember me in his will. But when he died it was found that he'd left me a lot of old conjuring junk—nothing else. No mention of money, nor even this house, though I

assumed I was to go on living here. Now some nearer relative has turned up, claiming the house, and I've been given notice to quit."

Noel whistled softly as he glanced at his friend's haggard face. John Clavering was certainly in trouble.

"But not a word of this to the others," he put in Clavering hastily. "Here come Di and her friends now."

Next moment Diana and her chums burst into the room.

"Hallo, dad!" Diana exclaimed. "We're having a gorgeous time! We want Mr. Raymond—if you've finished with him."

"Oh!" smiled her father. "And what has Mr. Raymond done?"

"Nothing yet!" cried Diana gaily. "But we girls have decided to put a stop to Jim Tarrant's tricks. He's been playing them on us ever since he arrived, and the other boys are backing him up. We saw him stealing off towards the writing-room just now, and we want to see what he's up to. And as Mr. Raymond is a detective, we hoped he'd come with us."

Noel laughed. "All right, then," he replied. "I'll have to take up the case."

"You're a sport!" declared Diana, and a delighted murmur arose from her chums. "You go first, and you may catch him in the act."

Noel smiled rather grimly as he proceeded alone along the corridor.

He caught sight of Jim as he reached the corner. The prankster was just disappearing into the writing-room, leaving the door ajar.

Noel raced the last few yards noiselessly, and entered the room. Then a surprised ejaculation escaped his lips, for there was no sign of Jim Tarrant! Yet there was only one entrance to the room, and the windows were securely shuttered.

His eyes narrowed thoughtfully, Noel crossed to a tall Eastern cabinet and tried the door. It appeared to be locked. He looked at several other massive pieces of furniture in the room.

There came a rush of footsteps, as Diana and her chums burst into the room.

"Where is he?" gasped Diana. "Gone," replied Noel dryly. "The young conjurer has vanished himself, so we'll have to search for him."

Amid excited laughter the search commenced. Diana crossed to the Eastern cabinet and shook the door. It flew open.

"Empty!" she exclaimed disappointedly. "But there may be some clue inside."

She made to step into the cabinet; but just then Noel, glancing across, caught sight of a shadow lurking in a dim corner near the cabinet—a grotesque, crouching shadow.

"Miss Clavering—Diana—be careful!" he exclaimed, starting forward. "Keep away from that cabinet—"

But even as he spoke, Diana gave a merry laugh and stepped into the cabinet. With a sharp click the door closed behind her.

A muffled, terrified scream rang out; followed by a dull thud; then silence.

Noel, his face pale, leaped across the room and opened the door of the cabinet. But there was no sign of Diana. The cabinet was empty!

THE TRICKSTER STRIKES AGAIN

"STAND back!" exclaimed Noel, as the anxious girls surged forward. "It's only a trick. Diana has probably been startled. All right, Miss Clavering?"

he called anxiously, peering into the cabinet.

There was no reply. Hurriedly Noel pulled out his torch and examined the back of the cabinet.

Anxiously he felt over the woodwork; there came a faint click—and the false back of the cabinet swung open, revealing a crumpled, girlish figure, huddled limply in a corner.

"Diana!" exclaimed Noel.

With a little moan, the girl sagged forward into his arms; there was an ugly bruise in her forehead, and her face was deathly pale.

"Quickly—fetch some water," ordered Noel sharply.

One of the girls raced to obey; the others clustered round in a frightened, hushed group.

Noel raised the water to the fainting girl's lips; after a moment she opened her eyes, staring round her dazedly.

"Feelin' better?" inquired Noel, smiling down at her.

"Oh!" Diana breathed. "It—it was that horrid cabinet; someone played a trick on me, and made the door shut! It was all dark inside, and something hit me—I s'pose it was the secret door."

Noel was examining the bruise on Diana's head; his eyes narrowed, and his lips tightened sternly.

"Remember anything else, Diana?" he asked.

"Not a thing; I—I must have fainted. It was awfully silly, but—"

Just then there came a cheery voice from the doorway.

"Hallo, you girls—what's up here? Anyone been looking for me?"

Jim Tarrant, his tousled hair a trifle more ruffled than usual, strolled into the room and grinned cheekily at the group.

There came indignant, accusing cries from the girls.

"I like that! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jim Tarrant!"

"A horrid trick to play on a girl!"

"But, look here—" began Jim, in seeming bewilderment.

Diana wriggled suddenly from Noel's grasp, and confronted the boy. Her attractive face was pale, but her eyes were stormy.

"Jim—how could you?" she gasped. "I think it was hateful of you!"

"Here, I say, you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick," declared Jim, his boyish face rather red. "It was only a lark—my disappearing trick, I mean."

"Just a minute, young man," cut in Noel, a trifle sternly. "Do you know anything about that cabinet?"

Jim started, a guarded expression crossing his good-looking face.

"That's telling, sir," he replied, with a faint grin.

"It's not a joking matter," cut in Noel sharply. "Diana was shut in that cabinet—by someone's trickery, and she met with an accident."

The smile faded from Jim's face; he took an impulsive step forward.

"You're not pulling my leg, are you?" he asked. Then he saw the bruise on Diana's forehead, and his face paled. "Crumbs—Di—I'm no end sorry! How did it happen?"

"You should know!" replied Diana, her lips trembling. "It was your trick."

"But I say—I know nothing about it!" declared Jim huskily. "On my honour, Di, I wasn't even in the room—"

"Oh, we saw you go in!" chorused the girls, accusingly.

Diana turned away. "Please don't make things worse by telling fibs, Jim," she said, with a little gulp. "I—I didn't think you'd do a thing like that to me. Come on, girls, let's go back to the library."

"But Di—" protested Jim, starting forward.

Diana turned her back on him and hurried from the room, followed by her chums.

"Well, I'll be dashed!" muttered Jim, his face crimson. "If that's not just like a girl."

Noel looked up from a close examination of the Eastern cabinet.

"Just a minute, Jim!" he said, as the boy made to hurry from the room. "I want a word with you. Now—on your word of honour—had you anything to do with shutting Diana in that cabinet?"

"Nothing, sir!" declared Jim, flushing. "Of course, I knew the trick about the cabinet—I know them all. But I wouldn't have been cad enough to scare Diana like that; let alone hurt her!"

Noel looked keenly into the boy's steady grey eyes; he was convinced that Jim Tarrant was telling the truth.

But that conclusion merely deepened the mystery. For Diana's mishap had been no mere accident.

"Where were you at the time, Jim?" he asked. "I saw you come into the room."

"That was just a trick of mine, sir," Jim explained. "There's a mirror in the passage, behind the door—one of Uncle Jasper's 'props.' And there's an alcove behind the mirror. When you thought you saw me coming into the room, I was hiding in the alcove; just for a lark and to mystify the girls."

Noel whistled softly.

"I see," he said. "Just one other thing—before you go, Jim."

With an unexpected movement he produced from his pocket the torn scrap of paper he had found in the library.

"Recognise this, Jim?" he asked, regarding the boy keenly.

Jim stared, evidently perplexed.

"Never seen it in my life before, sir," he declared.

"Good enough," Noel thrust the paper back into his pocket; his hand fell lightly on the boy's shoulder. "Take a tip from me, young man," he said gravely, "and lay off these tricks of yours, for a bit. They may be more dangerous than you imagine."

As the boy left the room, Noel looked around him. On the floor behind the cabinet he found an unmistakable footprint—and a trace of half-melted snow!

Yet none of the youthful guests had left the house—Noel was certain of that, and the footprint was too large for Jim Tarrant's.

Just then a gong boomed in the hall—a pleasant signal of the near approach of dinner.

Noel glanced at his watch; he might just have time to follow up the clue of the footprint before he changed. He was anxious at all costs not to allow any suspicion or hint of trouble to mar the festivities.

Unseen by anyone, he left the house—searching in the snow by the dimmed light of his torch.

When he made his appearance at dinner, twenty minutes later, he appeared as cheerfully unconcerned as anyone present; but there was a curious glint in his eyes.

The party was now complete; the elderly people, who had been resting or engaged in their own pursuits, joined the younger guests in the lofty dining-room, beneath the oak-beamed ceiling festooned with holly and paper chains.

Diana's chums were in high spirits—and so were the boys; but Diana herself was rather quiet and pale; while Jim Tarrant, on the opposite side of the table, stole a furtive glance at her now and then. Noel could see that the quarrel had not yet been healed!

The young detective sat on the left

of his host, while on his other side was a cheerful little man whom Diana addressed as Uncle Luke—and who, Noel gathered, was a distant relative lately returned from abroad.

In contrast to Uncle Luke was his next-door neighbour—a rather sour-faced individual whom Clavering had introduced as the family solicitor.

It was Uncle Luke who suggested an old-fashioned game of hide-and-seek—a suggestion loudly acclaimed by the younger members of the party.

The loudest acclamations came from the boys—and Noel glanced keenly at Jim Tarrant.

The young detective sensed instinctively that something was "in the air"; he could see the boys nudging one another, and Jim's face was rather red.

Carelessly he strolled past the group.

"Go on, Jim—don't be a funk!" one of the boys was whispering.

"You promised us a bit of sport," added another. "Now's your chance!"

Jim was obviously hesitating—torn two ways.

But just then the host called for silence.

"All ready for the game?" he inquired, with a cheerfulness that Noel alone knew was bravely assumed. "Boys versus girls—I think the sides are pretty even. You can hide any-

passage, waiting till his chums had departed; then, very stealthily, he made his way down the corridor—and turned in through the doorway of the forbidden drawing-room!

"The young mad-brain!" Noel muttered. "He's just asking for trouble!"

He quickened his pace—but when he reached the drawing-room door, he found that it was closed and locked!

Noel listened at the door, hearing a stealthy movement within. His eyes glinting, he drew a small instrument from his pocket and inserted it in the lock. There was a faint click, and he pushed the door open.

The large room was lit by pale, eerie moonlight that streamed through the windows.

Noel glanced round him swiftly; he could see no signs of anyone moving.

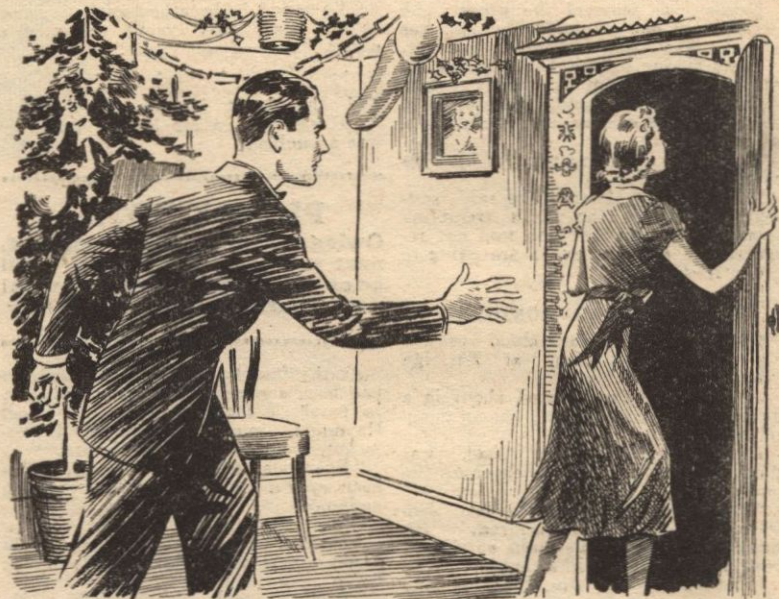
"Jim!" he breathed cautiously.

"Jim, you young idiot, come out of here. You're not playing the game."

There was no reply. Noel's lips tightened as he pulled out his torch, flashing it behind the furniture.

The gleam from his torch revealed something lying on the carpet—a curiously shaped bronze key.

As he bent to pick it up, a shadow moved across the wall behind him—a grotesque, crouching shadow, its arm upraised.



"Miss Clavering—Diana—be careful!" Noel exclaimed. "Keep away from that cabinet." But even as he spoke, Diana, with a merry laugh, stepped into the cabinet, and with a sharp click the door closed behind her.

where in the house—except in the drawing-room. I've got some valuable glass and ornaments in there, and I don't want any accidents!"

Uncle Luke then spun a coin—Jim Tarrant yelled "Heads!"

"Heads it is," declared Uncle Luke. "Boys to hide first."

There was an exchange of good-natured quips between the two sides—and then the boys raced off, headed by Jim Tarrant.

Noel, quickly excusing himself, followed in their wake.

Anxiously he hurried down the passage as he heard the boys racing ahead. The footsteps turned off in different directions—some hurrying upstairs, others into the conservatory, the library, and even the kitchen quarters.

But Noel was keeping his eye on one figure alone—Jim Tarrant.

That boy hesitated at the end of the

The young detective spun round as something whistled through the air. Too late he flung out a hand to protect himself; a heavy weapon, aimed with murderous intent, caught him a stunning blow on the side of his head.

NOEL opened his eyes dazedly, to find an excited group collected around him in the brilliantly lit drawing-room.

His host was there, looking pale and distracted; Diana was standing near her father, her eyes filled with tears. Uncle Luke was hovering round with a glass of water, and practically all the young people were present—except Jim Tarrant.

"Thank goodness you're all right, Raymond," exclaimed Clavering, in relief. "This is a dreadful business;

I can hardly believe it of young Tarrant."

Noel struggled to his feet, staring round him. He caught in his breath sharply. In one corner of the room lay an antique cabinet, shattered—its priceless contents of glass and china scattered in fragments on the carpet.

"Just a minute," he said unsteadily, "let me get this clear. Are you suggesting that it was Jim Tarrant who was responsible for this?"

He pointed to the shattered cabinet. His host gave a helpless gesture.

"I hate to say so, old man—but that's about the only explanation. Young Tarrant was seen to enter this room—in spite of my orders; and you were seen to follow him. Then came a crash. The girls rushed in first, and we others followed. We found that cabinet like that; and you were on the floor. There's the weapon that struck you."

He pointed to a heavy brass poker that lay on the floor.

"I'm not saying that young Tarrant hit you purposely; no doubt he was afraid of being caught, and struck out unthinkingly. Then, scared by what he had done, he made his escape."

"It wasn't Jim—it wasn't!" sobbed Diana wildly. "Mr. Raymond—you don't believe that Jim would do a thing like that!"

Noel's eyes scanned the group; he noticed that one person besides Jim was absent. The sour-faced family solicitor.

Then, taking out his handkerchief, he carefully picked up the heavy poker, weighing it in his hand. He crossed to the overturned cabinet, and stared down at it.

There was a curious glint in his eyes as he turned.

"Don't worry, Diana," he said, resting a hand on the girl's trembling shoulder. "Jim Tarrant was not responsible. And you and I are going to prove it—together."

NOEL RAYMOND—CONJURER

THERE was a dark cloud over the Christmas party at Farleigh Grange.

The guests moved about in a hushed fashion, whispering among themselves.

Diana, instructed by Noel, was pluckily doing her best to cheer up the party.

"Mr. Raymond is certain that Jim wasn't to blame," she declared. "He thinks it was someone from outside—a burglar, or someone like that."

"But where is Jim?" came the anxious question.

Diana bit her lip, fighting back her tears.

"I expect—he's just disappeared, for a prank; he's bound to turn up again later this evening. Let's switch on the wireless or something. Mr. Raymond is going to give us a surprise, later; though I don't know what it is!"

Meanwhile, Noel was carrying out an exhaustive search of the house.

His examination of the corridor had convinced him of one thing.

Jim Tarrant had never entered the drawing-room.

The swivel mirror, concealed in the corner between the writing-room and the drawing-room, had deceived the watchers—as Jim had doubtless planned.

It was the writing-room that he had entered—the room containing the bulk of old Jasper's strange illusions.

Noel's search was not in vain.

He remembered the bronze key that he had noticed on the floor in the drawing-room—the key that, later, had vanished.

A swift examination of the curious

carved furniture disclosed a significant fact.

The massive bronze fittings and padlock of an old oak chest were almost identical in appearance with the markings on the bronze key!

A closer examination revealed several perforations in the woodwork, that appeared to be part of the pattern.

Noel set to work grimly to force the padlock, hardly daring to think what he might find. At length he flung back the massive lid, and flashed his torch inside.

The chest was empty!

Momentarily baffled, the young detective bent closer. Though the sides of the chest were thick with dust and cobwebs, the bottom was almost free of dust.

His suspicions confirmed, Noel groped over the woodwork, seeking some hidden spring. There was a faint whirring sound—and with a dull thud the bottom of the chest swung down—revealing a flight of steps leading into a dark passage below.

His eyes glinting, Noel squeezed through the strange trapdoor, and descended the steps—almost stumbling over a prone figure that lay motionless at the foot of the steps.

With a swift intake of breath, the young detective dropped to his knee.

"Ye gods," he breathed softly, staring at the scarf that bound the other's wrists, "then—I was right!"

IN the firelit library of Farleigh Grange, a rather hushed company was assembled.

PLEASE NOTE—

Owing to the Christmas Holidays, next week's "Girls' Crystal" will be on sale a day earlier than usual—on Thursday instead of Friday.

At the far end of the room, curtains had been arranged to screen an alcove; in front of the curtains stood Noel Raymond, immaculate in a dinner-jacket, a curious smile on his lips.

"Everyone assembled?" he asked, his keen eyes scanning the attentive young audience.

Clavering nodded.

"I think we can start," he said, a shade impatiently. "Frankly, Raymond, we're all on edge."

"Right!" said Noel briefly. He noticed that there were two absentees, besides young Tarrant. Uncle Luke he could account for, as that obliging gentleman had volunteered to take an urgent telegram for him to the village.

The other absentee was the family solicitor.

Noel straightened his tie, assuming a professional air.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said pleasantly, "as you know, we are assembled here this evening to clear up a certain problem that has caused everyone a great deal of worry.

"I refer to the problem of Uncle Jasper's legacy!"

There was a slight stir in the attentive group, a faint ripple of excitement.

Noel encountered Diana Clavering's dark eyes, watching him in anxious suspense.

From his pocket the young detective drew a bundle of faded papers, secured by a red tape.

"In order to explain matters more clearly," he said, "I propose to give a practical demonstration of what has been happening since you arrived here

for Christmas. It is in the nature of a little conjuring trick—and I want you all to watch very closely!"

The excited murmurs increased; everyone craned forward.

With a dramatic movement, Noel pulled back the curtains that screened the alcove—revealing a tall Chinese cabinet that had been carried by his instructions from one of the upstairs rooms.

"As you know," he went on, "there are in this house a number of curious tricks and illusions that belonged to the late Uncle Jasper. This cabinet is a good example."

He opened the ornamented door, revealing a row of shelves.

"I'll place this bundle of papers on the middle shelf—so! Now I'll close the door and count twenty, very slowly." He slightly raised his voice. "One—two—three—"

The young detective proceeded no further. With an unexpected movement, he jerked open the door of the cabinet—and a shout of amazement arose from the youthful onlookers.

For, in place of the row of shelves, there crouched a grey-haired figure, and grasped in his hand was the bundle of yellow papers!

A dark opening at the rear of the cabinet showed the way by which he had come.

"Uncle Luke!" came the incredulous shout.

Uncle Luke made a hasty movement to dive through the opening, but Noel was too quick for him.

"Just a minute!" he said pleasantly, as he assisted the other firmly out of the cupboard. "Quite a surprise, eh? I presume you would have vanished before I'd counted twenty—and taken the papers as well!"

His face very pale, Uncle Luke made no reply.

"What is all this?" demanded Clavering, staring. "Part of the trick?"

"Precisely," snapped Noel, retaining his hold on the other's shoulder. "Part of Uncle Luke's trick—to rob you of your inheritance!"

"What?" ejaculated Clavering, starting forward.

"Listen," said Noel dryly, "and let Uncle Luke contradict me if he can. The late Uncle Jasper made two wills. Remember he was somewhat eccentric—and he was an illusionist. In one will he bequeathed to you his old conjuring equipment—and that was all. But among his illusions were concealed a second will—leaving you this house and his very substantial private fortune."

Clavering caught in his breath, incredulous; there came a faint cry from Diana.

Uncle Luke merely glared.

"A certain rogue discovered this fact," went on Noel calmly, "and he communicated with Uncle Luke here. I discovered part of a note he had sent. Uncle Luke was hard up, and he had been expecting the house and money to come to him in due course. But he knew that if this second will ever came to light—as it might easily do at this party—his chances would be lost. So he wangled an invitation to the party—and set to work to discover the missing will."

"Great Scott!" breathed Clavering unsteadily. "Then it was Luke—and not young Tarrant—"

"Exactly!" snapped Noel. "Uncle Luke was responsible for frightening Diana and for the attack on me. Both of us were unlucky enough to interrupt him in his search. It was he who

(Please turn to the back page)

Their QUEST at the WINTER SPORTS



LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS

DOREEN CARSDALE and Jean Hinton could hardly believe that they had actually arrived in Switzerland for a wonderful holiday with Doreen's Aunt Elizabeth. It seemed too good to be true.

At their hotel in St. Lauritz they met Mr. and Mrs. Ross and their daughter Irma. With them was Sylvia Drake, Mr. Ross' ward, about whom there seemed to be some mystery. The chums disliked the Ross family, but felt drawn towards Sylvia.

A strange old woman in the mountains offered to take Sylvia to a secret chalet, where there would be found the solution of the mystery about her.

Thanks to the scheming of the Rosses, Sylvia was unable to go, but Doreen persuaded the old woman, Madame Marie, to take her instead.

When they neared the chalet, however, they saw some gendarmes ahead. Madame Marie ordered Doreen to wait while she went on. But she did not return, and Doreen finally set off to search for her.

She lost her way, and a blizzard came on. Doreen desperately stumbled on, until finally she collapsed in the snow—utterly exhausted.

I WONDER where Doreen is now? My hat, but that was a brainwave of hers. We tricked Irma beautifully!"

And Jean smiled with satisfaction. She was standing in the spacious lounge of the Hotel Crestina, not long having returned from the ski-joring expedition through St. Lauritz. And again she chuckled as she thought of how she had decoyed Irma Ross, while Doreen, unobserved, had set out on her important mission.

"I'll bet Irma's mad," Jean chuckled. "And her precious parents will be mad, too—"

"Jean!" called a voice just then from the doorway.

"My guardians have just let me out," she told her friend. "And they seemed in an awful temper, too. But never mind that. Jean," she added anxiously, "did Doreen go?"

"You bet!" And eagerly Jean explained to Sylvia what had happened, and how they had tricked Irma.

Sylvia's eyes shone. "Oh, that's marvellous!" she exclaimed. "I was frantic when I thought everything was going to be ruined. But I knew Doreen would manage it somehow. You darlings!"

Jean laughed, her eyes twinkling as she glanced at her friend.

"Goodness, you look excited, Sylvia!"

"I am—I am!" Sylvia exclaimed. "She'll have met that strange woman in the black cloak by now, won't she? They'll be on their way to the secret chalet. Perhaps they're already there!"

She broke off as a cheery voice hailed them both. Tony Semers and Jack Huntley had entered the lounge.

"What about a game of ping-pong?" asked Tony.

"We thought we might have a doubles match in the recreation-room," added the other boy. "It's turned so beastly cold out. St. Lauritz is grand while it's sunny, but not quite so good on a day like this. So I'm all for fire-side fun. Are we agreed?"

"We are!" Jean grinned.

"And it's to be ping-pong?"

"Rather!"

"Good! Then let's get along and grab a table!"

So off to the recreation-room they went. They tossed for sides, and Sylvia got Tony as her partner. As the boys produced the balls and bats, they nodded towards the window.

"Just started to snow," announced Tony. "Thought it would, you know."

"Much?" asked Sylvia quickly, looking round.

"Oh, just a few flakes," Jack said.

"But let's get started. You serve, Sylvia."

Sylvia nodded. Why had the weather

Anxiously Jean and Sylvia looked out of the window. Snow was falling relentlessly. What had happened to Doreen, who had gone alone into the mountains?

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

had to change to-day? After all the days of warm sunshine it would have to turn cold and dull just because Doreen had gone into the mountains.

And now this snow. But the flakes were only light, as she saw by glancing through the windows. Doreen would be all right; she would go to the chalet with the woman in black.

Sylvia served—a sizzling ace that whipped over the net and left Jack staring. Ruefully he went diving under one of the amusement machines to retrieve the ball.

"Hot!" he said. "Any more of those in the bag?"

Sylvia served again. This time Jean was her victim, and again Jack had to go on his hands and knees diving for the ball.

"This is good!" chortled Tony. "Carry on, partner!"

Sylvia carried on, proving just how good she was. She and Tony easily won the first game, and they were leading in the second, when Sylvia, happening to gaze across to the window, gave a startled gasp.

"Oh, goodness! The snow—look at it!"

Thick and fast the snow was falling now—so thick that everything was becoming blotted out. The mountains could no longer be seen; other near-by hotels and buildings were lost to sight in the thickly whirling flakes that fell like a white pall, enveloping everything.

Swift anxiety stabbed at Sylvia's heart. Out in that snowstorm was Doreen. Oh goodness, she'd never dreamed this would happen.

Jean had joined her by the window now. Jean's face, too, took on an anxious expression.

Then, just at that moment, the door of the recreation-room opened. It was Aunt Elizabeth who came in, having hurriedly returned from her shopping expedition in St. Lauritz.

"Oh, here you are, girls!" she exclaimed, joining Sylvia and Jean by the window. "I'm so glad you're in out of this snow. But where is Doreen?"

Jean flushed a little. "Doreen hasn't come back yet, Miss Hill."

"Then I hope she hurries," Aunt Elizabeth said. "There's a blizzard blowing up. I understand it's already raging in the mountains—"

"A—a blizzard? In the mountains?" Sylvia gasped, her face paling.

"Yes; and it's likely to sweep down into the valley at any moment now," Aunt Elizabeth said. "I do wish Doreen was back!"

Rather anxiously she moved across to the fire, warming her hands in front of the blaze.

But Sylvia and Jean were gazing at each other in alarm.

"Oh, Jean, do you think Doreen will be all right?" Sylvia asked worriedly. "A blizzard—"

Jean tried to smile.

"We mustn't worry," she said, though the look in her eyes belied her words. "After all, she's with that woman. She'll know what to do. They'll be able to shelter somewhere. They may even be at the chalet now—"

"Come on, you two," broke in Tony's voice. "Haven't you ever seen snow before? Let's get on with the game."

Slowly the two girls returned to the table. Jean resumed her service. She started off with two faults, managed to get the next one over, which was completely missed by Sylvia.

Tony stared.

"My hat, what's come over you suddenly?" he asked in surprise.

"Sorry," Sylvia said.

But she was in no mood for ping-pong now—for any sort of game. She was as dull now as she had been brilliant before.

She could only think of Doreen.

Doreen, whom she had sent into the mountains because she herself had been unable to go. And now this blizzard had come. Doreen would be in the thick of it. Anything might happen—

The windows of the recreation room suddenly rattled. Outside the wind was whining, sweeping down from the mountains, driving the snow in whirling flurries before its icy breath.

"Fifteen—nine!" Tony exclaimed. "Here, I say, they're catching us up."

But Sylvia hardly heard him. Shot after shot she missed. Jean was just as bad. The two boys were practically playing themselves now.

Jean saw Aunt Elizabeth go out. Five minutes later Sylvia saw her come back.

"Oh dear, where can Doreen have got to?" Miss Hill asked agitatedly. "It's terrible outside now—"

"You mean Doreen's out in the blizzard?" Tony demanded in sudden alarm.

"Yes."

"Great Scott!"

Ping-pong was completely forgotten by them all now. Half an hour passed, with the fury of the blizzard increasing. Now Aunt Elizabeth was becoming more and more distracted.

"Where can she be? Where can she be?" she cried over and over again.

Sylvia's eyes were agonised. Dare she tell Miss Hill where Doreen had gone? She decided it was a secret she could no longer keep to herself, and Jean, realising her friend's thoughts, nodded.

"Miss Hill—" Sylvia began.

"What is it, girl?" Aunt Elizabeth spoke sharply in her state of distraught agitation.

"I think you—you ought to know," Sylvia went on, pale of face. "Doreen went for a trip into the mountains this morning—"

"What?" Aunt Elizabeth's voice was almost a shriek. Horror and consternation showed in her eyes. "Into the mountains—"

"Yes. But—but perhaps everything's all right, in spite of the blizzard," Sylvia rushed on. "We—we didn't

expect her back just yet, and I expect she's sheltering now. She's sure to be sheltering, somewhere. Oh, please don't look like that—"

But Aunt Elizabeth's face was working with the surge of emotions which were sweeping through her now.

"Why didn't I know before!" she cried. "Why didn't you tell me? Oh, this is terrible—dreadful! Doreen out in this blizzard—in the mountains! What can we do? We must find her—"

She broke off, her chest heaving, her eyes frantic.

"We must find her!" she cried again. "We must go and look for her. Don't you realise that she might be in dreadful danger? There will be avalanches—deep drifts of snow. Even if she has found shelter she might be blocked in. I'm going out to look for the poor child."

"But you can't!" someone said. "The blizzard—"

"I don't care. I'm going!"

"And we're coming with you!" Sylvia and Jean said simultaneously.

LOST IN THE SNOW

SOMETHING stirred in the snow.

An arm moved, then a leg—moved awkwardly because of the long ski that was still attached to the foot.

Doreen groaned—a low moan that came from between blue, frozen lips.

Dimly to her ears came the shriek of the wind as it roared about her. A great weight seemed to be pressing upon her numb body—the snow which was piling deeper and deeper about her.

How long she had lain there she did not know. Vaguely she remembered that frightening moment when, separated from Madame Marie, she had realised she was lost.

Lost amid these mountains, with the blizzard tearing about her with ever increasing violence.

Blindly she had stumbled on, stumbled on until she had collapsed. Then blackness. But now—

Now consciousness stirred once more. New realisation of her peril made her fight desperately for strength.

She must move. She must move before the icy cold froze her body so that movement was impossible.

Somehow she managed to regain her feet. And there she stood swaying, fighting the dizziness that threatened to overcome her again, buffeted by the madly whirling snow and the screaming wind.

Keep moving—keep moving. The thought hammered in her dazed brain, driving her on, giving her just sufficient strength to move her legs.

On she stumbled, unable to see, the flakes sticking to her lashes and blinding her, her face stiff and frozen.

If only she could find somewhere to shelter; just a rock that would give her protection from the wind and snow. Somewhere there must be one. She would come to it if she kept on—

Then suddenly a strangled cry of horror left her lips.

Her foot was sinking beneath her. She was falling, falling—

Desperately, frantically she tried to fling herself backwards, to save herself from disaster.

But disaster overtook her. Down and down she plunged, over the lip of a rocky ridge, amid a smother of snow. And then—

There was a thud that shook every bone in her body. A splintering sound as one of the skis snapped. A searing,

agonising pain in one ankle, bringing a hoarse gasp from her lips.

For a few moments Doreen lay there stunned and still. Then she again became aware of that throbbing pain in her ankle. Oh goodness, had she sprained it? But no; she could move her foot, though it felt stiff and hurt excruciatingly. In falling she must have bruised it.

As she lay there, feeling too dazed to try to struggle to her feet yet, she looked about her. And then she gasped, the shock of what she saw clearing her brain.

She was lying on a ledge of rock some fifteen feet below the top of the ridge. The thickness of the snow on that ledge had broken her fall. But below—there was a sheer drop of forty or more feet to the bottom of the crevasse.

"Golly!" Doreen muttered. "If it hadn't been for this ledge—"

She had had a marvellous escape. But—she gave another gasp as she realised that there was no way of getting back to the top of the ridge. Impossible to climb up the smooth rock, and below her was that forty-foot drop.

She was stranded on this ledge. Stranded!

Eyes wide and alarmed, she stared about her. More and more the peril of her plight came home to her. Unless she was seen here, unless she was rescued—

Doreen shuddered.

She struggled to her feet, biting her lip to keep back the gasp of pain as she moved her injured foot. Already she could feel that the ankle had swollen—was pressing agonisingly against the side of her boot.

The blizzard was dying down now. The wind was dropping, and the snow was not falling so thickly. By the end of half an hour it had stopped altogether, and an eerie stillness settled over the mountains.

Anxiously Doreen gazed upon that world of whiteness. Nothing stirred. Not anywhere could she see a sign of any human habitation—no sign of life at all.

She groaned, and in despair sank down again, huddling against the rocky wall that rose unclimbably behind her.

Now her thoughts began drifting. She thought of Madame Marie, of those gendarmes she had seen going towards the secret chalet; of the woman's fear, and her revelation that there was someone at the chalet. Who could it be? What was the significance behind this fresh development in the mystery surrounding Sylvia?

Sylvia! Now Doreen's mind switched to the Crestina, back at St. Lauritz—so cosily warm and luxurious. Then she was thinking of Jean, of Aunt Elizabeth.

Like a warming ray, sudden hope came to Doreen. Here she was, giving way to despair when there was no need for it.

Her absence would be noticed. Jean and Sylvia knew where she had gone, and when she failed to return they would come to search for her.

"I must keep watch," Doreen told herself. "They'll be certain to send out search-parties!"

Yes, she must keep watch. Again she stared around her, straining her eyes until they hurt in the glare of all that dazzling whiteness. An hour passed, but she saw no sign of any movement anywhere.

Dread gripped Doreen again. The coldness was getting into her very

bones now. A numbness was coming over her whole body. And then—

Suddenly she tensed. In the still air she heard the faint, far-off jingle of bells. Oh, could she really hear them, or was it her imagination? Could it be true that someone was coming?

It was true—it was! Now she saw something moving—a sleigh—figures. They were coming up the ridge, nearer and nearer. Doreen felt herself tremble. A terrific excitement swept over her.

"It's Jean—and Sylvia!" she cried. "And that's Aunt Elizabeth in the sleigh—"

She broke off, waving frantically, shouting wildly. And then back to her ears came answering cries:

"It's Doreen!"
"Doreen! Where are you?"
"On this ledge. Straight ahead of you!" Doreen shouted.

In a flash she had grabbed up one of her abandoned skis—had rammed her peaked skiing cap on one end of it and raised it on high—waving it to and fro.

A few minutes later Jean and Sylvia peered over the edge of the ridge above.

"Oh, thank goodness we've found you!" Jean panted. "We've been searching for hours—"

"Doreen! My poor child!" Aunt Elizabeth was standing beside them now, mingled relief and anxiety on her face. "But are you all right?"

"I've hurt my ankle, that's all. Oh, golly, it's wonderful to see you!" Doreen gasped. "I thought—but never mind. How am I going to get up? Have you any rope?"

The rescuers had come prepared for such an emergency as this. Now the sleigh-driver came running back, a coil of rope in his hands. In a moment he had thrown one end down, Doreen had caught it, and then she was being hauled up.

At last she stood on the ridge above, trembling and dizzy. And now that rescue had come at last, the reaction of all that she had gone through overcame her. Suddenly she swayed, sagged at the knees, and would have fallen had not Aunt Elizabeth caught her.

"Oh, the poor child!" Miss Hill cried. "She's fainted. She must be frozen through. Quickly, help me carry her to the sleigh. We must get her back to the hotel!"

And in the sleigh Doreen was raced back to St. Lauritz.

DOREEN DARED NOT EXPLAIN!

DOREEN! What happened yesterday? Did you see the woman? Did—did you go to the chalet?"

Doreen smiled, though her eyes were a trifle worried.

"I wondered when you were going to ask that, Sylvia," she said. "You and Jean have been so anxious inquiring after my health that I thought you must have forgotten."

"Your aunt wouldn't let us disturb you," Jean put in. "She said you were to have a thorough rest."

It was the following afternoon, and Doreen was seated in a comfortable armchair in her room at the Crestina.

And certainly she had made a marvellous recovery from her dreadful ordeal of the previous day. Immediately on arriving back at the hotel she had been put to bed between warmed

blankets and dosed up with medicine. And there in bed she had stayed until an hour ago, when Aunt Elizabeth had allowed her to get up. Now she was feeling as right as rain, save for a slight throbbing from her injured foot.

"Sylvia," she said now, "I'm afraid we didn't get to the chalet. Yes, I did see the woman. Her name, by the way, appears to be Madame Marie. We started out for the chalet, but then, just as the blizzard was blowing up—"

Swiftly she went on to tell what had happened. Sylvia looked startled as she heard about the gendarmes.

"Police? Going to the chalet?" she asked. "But—but what does that mean?"

"I don't know," Doreen confessed. "But Madame Marie was terribly agitated. That's when she went rushing off. But what mystifies me is who this person can be at the chalet!"

"You say it's a man?" Jean put in. "Well, presumably. But who the dickens is he? And why was Madame

abruptly became serious again. "But one thing," she added. "Aunt mustn't know why I went. She mustn't know it was Sylvia's suggestion I should go." Sylvia looked distressed.

"But I feel so guilty about it!"
"Then don't, old thing!" Doreen said. "It's better she shouldn't know anything!"

Hastily she broke off. The door had just opened, and in came Aunt Elizabeth herself.

"Doreen, my dear, and how are you feeling now? Are you sure there's nothing I can do or fetch you?"

"Nothing, thank you, aunt," Doreen smiled. "I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle. But I'm getting fed-up with staying in this room all the time! Can't I go out now? I could sit quietly and watch the skating—"

"Goodness, that reminds me!" Sylvia broke in. "There's going to be a practice on the rink by all the competitors who have entered for the championships. I said I would be there—"

Doreen's eyes sparkled.

"And I'm going to be there, too!"



"Miss Hill," Sylvia said tremulously. "I think you ought to know. Doreen went for a trip into the mountains this morning." "What!" Miss Hill's voice was almost a shriek as she realized the full significance of Sylvia's words.

Marie so frightened of the police finding him? It seems to me that he must have been hiding in the chalet!"

"Goodness!" Sylvia looked more than ever startled, increasingly bewildered. "Oh, Doreen, what is all this mystery?" she asked. "What is at the bottom of it all? And where do I come into it? How does it link up with the way my guardians have been treating me?"

Doreen shook her head. "I thought yesterday's trip was going to clear up everything," she said. "Instead of which, because of that beastly blizzard, the whole business has become more mysterious than ever. But we're going to get at the solution," she went on determinedly. "Don't you worry, Sylvia—we'll get to the bottom of it! And next time I won't make a mess of things!"

"But you didn't!" Sylvia protested indignantly. "You've been wonderful. Doreen. And I feel dreadful after what happened, sending you into such danger!"

"Skip it!" Doreen laughed, and then

she exclaimed. "Aunt, you will let me?"

"Very well, my dear, if you really feel well enough. But you must wrap yourself up thoroughly. Now, where is your thick coat?"

Sylvia went off. Aunt Elizabeth went across to the wardrobe to find Doreen's fur-lined outdoor coat.

"Doreen," she said, as she helped her niece into the coat, "there's just one thing I want to ask you. Why did you go into the mountains yesterday—and by yourself, too, without a guide or anything?"

Doreen bit her lip uneasily. "Oh, I—I just thought I'd like to go, aunt!" she said. "Of course, I never dreamed there would be a blizzard." "You haven't answered my question, Doreen!"

"Oh, haven't I? But, aunt, there was nothing to it, really. You see—"

Desperately she sought for an excuse she could give.
Tap, tap!
The door opened, and in came one of the smartly uniformed hotel page-boys.

"A telephone call for Mademoiselle Hill!" he announced.

"Why, that must be from the stores where I ordered some things!" Aunt Elizabeth said. "Thank you! I will come down immediately. Now, wrap yourself up, Doreen!"

"Yes, of course, aunt!" Aunt Elizabeth hurried away. Doreen gave a gasp of relief.

"Phew! What a bit of luck!" she exclaimed. "Come on, Jean! Let's go down to watch the skating before aunt comes back. Perhaps aunt'll forget her curiosity now."

So down to the skating rink they went. And there they met Tony and Jack, and, after the boys had made anxious inquiries and been assured that Doreen was fit again, they all found seats on the edge of the rink.

Once more the sun was streaming down from a cloudless blue sky, and Doreen glowed in its warming rays.

"Where's Sylvia?" she asked.

"She hasn't come out yet," Tony told her. "I say, it won't be long to the championships now, will it?"

Doreen tingled.

Fleeting she remembered that mysterious message she and Jean had found in the water-mill at Grimelle—the message which had said that it was vital Sylvia should keep up her skating.

Well, Sylvia was doing that all right. She had entered for the St. Lauritz skating championships; and, what was more, if Doreen knew anything about it, she was going to win them!

"Here she comes!" It was Tony who spoke. "And here's Irma, too! This is good! Now we'll have a chance of comparing the rivals!"

During the next half-hour everybody there saw an exhibition of figure skating that was a delight to watch. Other competitors for the coming championships joined in the practice, and so the spectators had a wonderful opportunity to judge for themselves the chances of the various rivals.

Presently Aunt Elizabeth rejoined them. She seemed to have forgotten her embarrassing questions, and smilingly watched the whirling, flying skaters.

"By Jove, I've never seen such skating!" Tony exclaimed.

"Sylvia's marvellous!" Doreen breathed. "Look at that! Perfect grace! Perfect balance! And now Irma's doing the same thing!"

"There's little to choose between them!"

"But Sylvia's just a shade better."

"Yes, I believe she is. My hat, if she doesn't win the championships—"

Doreen's eyes sparkled. She had known Sylvia was a marvellous skater—but now she knew just how marvellous.

Then a cheer went up. The skaters were coming off the rink. Sylvia, laughing happily, whirled across to where Doreen sat.

"How you feeling now?" she asked.

"Grand!" Doreen smiled. "Who wouldn't be after watching you!"

"Hear, hear!" supported Tony, and suddenly gave a whoop. "An idea!" he shouted. "It's my birthday to-day, and I suggest we get up a little tea-party!"

"Lovely!" exclaimed Doreen, clapping her hands.

"Then I'll fix it!" Tony said exuberantly. "You don't mind, Miss Hill? We'd love to have you, too!"

"No, I'd spoil it!" Aunt Elizabeth smiled. "I'm sure you youngsters would prefer to have it on your own."

"But we wouldn't!"

Aunt Elizabeth still laughingly refused, however. Tony grinned.

"Then I'll see you girls in an hour's time," he said. "I'll arrange to have

tea brought up to my room. Don't forget!"

"We're not likely to do that!" Doreen laughed.

The two boys went off to make the arrangements. The girls followed. Doreen limping a little as they all made their way up to their rooms.

"Come down to our room and change, Sylvia," Doreen suggested.

"I'd love to!"

Off went Sylvia. Doreen and Jean made a dive for their wardrobe.

Your Editor's Corner



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

MY DEAR READERS,—What a lucky Editor I am! By every post I receive the most dazzling collection of Christmas cards from you, my very kind readers, and I do want to thank you very much for them.

I only wish you could see them arranged on the office mantelpiece—along the top of the bookcase, and even filling the table where Penelope makes tea.

You must be all very excited by now about Christmas, for, of course, you'll be breaking-up this week—and then for fun!

Some of you will perhaps be going away for the holiday, while others will have relatives or friends to stay with you at home.

A DAY EARLY

I'm quite sure that your GIRLS' CRYSTAL will help to make the Great Occasion even more enjoyable still, and I have arranged for it to be on sale a day early next week so that you have yours in good time for Christmas.

It will be on sale on Thursday instead of Friday as usual—so run round to your newsagent right away to order it, won't you? And while you're there, ask him to show you "Waddy Productions." These are the most marvellous games ever invented—just right for Christmas and parties.

Now for next week's stories.

CHRISTMAS READING

"The Mystery of Aladdin's Lamp" is the title of the mystery and detective story featuring the one and only Noel Raymond—a story that will keep you breathless and enthralled from the first word to the last.

"Pat's Pursuit, Through the Snow" is the complete story of that delightful girl reporter, Pat Lovell, who is such a favourite with you all.

Another complete tale featuring Kaye Chalmers and her adorable pets will also appear, while our three serials will continue as excitingly as ever.

Good-bye until next week!

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR.

Excitedly they began changing. Sylvia joined them, bringing with her a pale green ruffled frock that caused Doreen to go into raptures.

"Golly, I'm always frightened of wearing that colour!" she said. "But it suits you to perfection, Sylvia!"

At last they were ready. Doreen looked at her little wristlet-watch.

"Better wait just a few more minutes," she said gaily. "An hour, Tony said, and we don't want to be too early, in case they're not quite ready."

She gave her hair a last pat in front of the mirror. Jean strolled across to the window.

"Hallo, there's Irma!" she muttered, gazing down into the drive below.

"Blow Irma!" Doreen said blithely.

"But she's talking to your aunt, and your aunt's not looking too pleased, either!"

In a moment Doreen was beside her chum. Down below she saw those two figures, and Miss Hill was certainly frowning.

But Doreen was in too happy a frame of mind to be concerned.

"Oh, rats!" she said. "Who cares, anyway? We're going to a party, and I'm not letting anything spoil the fun! Come on!"

Smiling and happy, they made their way towards the door. But even as Doreen opened it there came quick footsteps down the corridor. Then Aunt Elizabeth appeared.

If she had been frowning before, her face was now as black as a thundercloud.

Doreen stared, sudden apprehension coming over her.

"Aunt," she exclaimed. "What ever's the matter?"

"Matter enough!" Miss Hill cried, and angrily her gaze went to Sylvia. "Now I know the truth!" she went on. "Now I know why you went into the mountains yesterday, Doreen! It was Sylvia's fault!"

Sylvia drew back a pace before Miss Hill's glare.

"But, Miss Hill—"

"You sent Doreen!" Aunt Elizabeth went on, her eyes blazing. "You sent Doreen into danger! You very nearly caused her to meet with dreadful disaster!"

"Aunt," Doreen exclaimed—"oh, how can you say that! How do you know?"

"I know," Aunt Elizabeth said, "because Irma has just shown me this letter!"

Doreen stared in consternation. Deliberately she had refrained from making any mention as to why she had gone on that expedition the previous day.

And now in Aunt Elizabeth's hand was the letter which Sylvia had written her, asking her to go!

"But, aunt," Doreen said desperately. "Perhaps I did go because Sylvia asked me to. But she wasn't to know there would be a blizzard."

"Sylvia had no right to send you!" Aunt Elizabeth cried.

"Oh, Miss Hill—"

"This has been going on too long!" Aunt Elizabeth went on grimly. "Ever since you met Sylvia things have been going wrong! You have been disobedient; queer things have happened! Doreen! Jean! I forbid you to have anything more to do with Sylvia! Sylvia, you will leave this room immediately, and never again are you to speak to my niece or her friend!"

Their friendship with Sylvia forbidden! What a blow this is to Doreen and Jean! What will they do about it? How can they hope to win over Aunt Elizabeth? See the next thrilling instalment and don't forget that next week the GIRLS' CRYSTAL will be on sale on Thursday.

PAT LOVELL'S CIRCUS

SCOOP



The Girl Reporter in
an Enthralling Story

By ELIZABETH CHESTER

THE WONDER PONY!

PAT LOVELL, youngest girl reporter on the staff of the "Midshire Gazette," walked through the tent flap which was clearly marked "No Admittance," and showed her Press card to the attendant in uniform.

Not fifty yards away, outside the big marquee, a long queue was forming for the afternoon performance of Wommore's Wonder Circus. But there was no need for Pat to join queues. She was a reporter, and her Press ticket gave her special entry.

Pat had been told by her editor to write up the behind-the-scenes life, and she was thrilled at the prospect.

"So this is the circus," said Pat, smiling excitedly. "And the wonder circus, eh?"

"Yes, miss, that's so," said the attendant. "Best circus touring in this country—and especially good this Christmas. And I hope you'll put it in your paper."

"It's the Wonder Pony I particularly want to see," said Pat. "He's to have a special write-up all to himself."

The Wonder Pony had already been well advertised, for it was an animal able to spell when confronted with cards on which were printed the letters of the alphabet. Also he had a number of other ingenious and pleasing tricks that had added to his fame.

Pat had already made up her mind to interview him, and to get him to spell out his own answers! So she decided to make a bee-line for him right away.

But the attendant plucked her sleeve as she turned.

"I don't know that I should, right away, miss," he said a little uneasily.

"Why, anything wrong?" asked Pat quickly.

She did not want anything to be wrong, but she was a reporter, and she had to remember that when things went wrong, news was provided for the paper. She was here, after all, to find out things.

"I think the Wonder Pony's off colour just for a bit, miss," the attendant said, and then gave a frowning,

meaning look at someone over Pat's shoulder. "There's the boss!"

Pat turned, and saw a portly man dressed in the traditional riding boots, and breeches and red tail coat. A glossy topper graced his head, and he doffed it as Pat turned.

"Young lady from the Press, sir," said the attendant.

"Charmed to meet you. Glad to have the Press along!" beamed the boss. "I'm Signor Wommore—not really a signor—except that it seems to help in the show business. I really come from Yorkshire. What do you think of the show, eh?"

Pat looked about her. There were cages; there were stalls for ponies and horses; a band was playing, and in the centre was the sawdust-covered arena. A high wire ran aloft, and cleverly supported trapezes, too, so that Pat realised that nothing was lacking from this circus which should prove to be a really big draw.

"I think it looks grand," she said.

"I want to see the lions, and tigers, of course—all the ponies and horses, the girl tight-rope walker—everything. Especially the clowns!"

"Then you shall," he agreed.

"And the Wonder Pony," said Pat, with a quick side-glance at him.

His face clouded momentarily, but he did not hesitate, finding words instantly, even though they struck Pat as being false.

To go behind the scenes at the circus was a grand thrill for Pat Lovell. It would make a seasonable story for her newspaper. But that was not all Pat thought of when she met the girl whose father had vanished, and who refused to be parted from the Wonder Pony.

"Ah, the Wonder Pony—best turn of all!" he said. "Well, well, so you shall see him. But not before his act, I'm afraid. He's a little nervy, and suffers from stage-fright!"

He turned with Pat to lead her towards the menagerie where the animals were housed, when there came the sounds of commotion, angry shouts.

"Get out—get out, I say!" came a girl's voice. "He's my pony—you shan't come near him!"

"I have orders from the manager," answered a man's voice.

The manager, with a muttered apology to Pat, wheeled and ran to the stall near by from which the voices came. And Pat went after him, wondering what all the fuss was about.

The door of the side room of the stall opened, and a dark-faced man appeared. He, too, was dressed in showman's kit, but he was slim, and of quite different type from the boss.

He was turning as he came from the doorway, and Pat saw a girl of her own age, fair-skinned, eyes flashing with anger, while on her cheek was a glistening tear.

"You'll never have my pony," she said fiercely—"never!"

"Quiet—quiet, both of you!" fumed the boss. "Do we want a public scene? Get inside, Mariana! And you, Jensen, wait along by the ring!"

The man Jensen, scowling, went off, and Pat's sympathy went out to the girl, even though she did not know the cause of the trouble.

"Listen, Mr. Wommore," said the girl to the boss, her arms akimbo. "Although dad's not here—although he's gone away—"

"Shush!" said the boss fiercely, and indicated Pat. "This young lady is a newspaper reporter. Quiet—quiet!"

The girl looked at Pat, who smiled. "Yes, I'm all ears!" said Pat. "And I'm apt to write down any news, so I suppose you'd better be careful not to give away secrets!"

"It's no secret, so far as I am concerned," said the girl, with a toss of the head. "I want dad found, and as soon as possible!"

"We all want him found!" said the boss sharply, and then took Pat's arm. "Here, come and see the lions!"

Pat went with him, but turned her head to give a last intrigued glance at the girl Mariana, and in that

moment she caught a look and a meaningful signal from the girl.

Mariana was beckoning her!

But with the boss holding her arm, Pat could not slip away—not without some suggestion of struggle; but she instantly resolved that later she would return.

"And now," said the boss, "I'll show you round. Take no notice of Mariana. She's an excitable girl, that's all, and she objects to the man who has to take her father's pony into the ring for its tricks. That's all."

He showed Pat the lions, magnificent animals who roared at their trainer's bidding, and lifted paws to salute Pat; then the tigers, performing seals, the ponies. She shook hands with the trapeze artists, looking smart in their coloured dressing-gowns, strong, athletic people. She met the girl who rode standing on a horse's back, the clowns, the trick cyclists, and from them all Pat took a word or two, and made a note of descriptions.

But all the time her thoughts were with Mariana, and as soon as she possibly could she slipped away to the stall where the wonder pony and his young mistress were.

Pat tapped at the door and went inside.

"Hallo, Mariana!" she said. "You wanted to see me, didn't you?"

Mariana looked into Pat's eyes; read sympathy there, and then opened her heart.

"I hate worrying you," she said. "But you looked so kind, and I feel I must tell someone. It's all preying on my mind, so that I've just got to speak. Daddy has disappeared—gone, and I don't know where. It's just a bewildering mystery. He never said anything to make me think he might. He had no worries. But he has just vanished."

"And have the police been told?" asked Pat.

"The boss has seen to it all. He's been described, and there's a hunt going on now," said Mariana wretchedly. "Jensen—that's the man you saw, hated daddy, because our turn rivals his. We're the star turn here, and he's jealous. But that's not all. The boss wants him to take over Petkin until dad's found."

Pat saw Mariana's lip quiver, and she needed no telling just how hurt the girl was by that suggestion.

"Oh, but why?" Pat protested, astonished. "Why shouldn't you train him in the ring?"

Mariana turned to the pony.

"I'll show you why," she said.

She turned to the lovely pony which Pat had already petted and fondled.

"Now, darling," said Mariana, and held up a hat, "what is this?"

As she spoke she spread some square pieces of cardboard on the floor. They were nearly a foot square, and on each was a letter of the alphabet.

With deep interest, making mental notes of how she could describe this scene for her paper, Pat watched. She had already heard and read reports of the pony's wonderful sagacity, and she expected that he would without hesitation paw the letters h, a, and t in turn.

To her surprise, he indicated the letter d. From that he went to the letter a, and then to the d again.

"Dad," murmured Pat, surprised.

It did not seem at all clever of the pony, but she expected to see Mariana surprised and chagrined; but, instead of that, the circus girl turned to her in triumph.

"There!" she exclaimed. "He has done no other trick but that ever since

dad disappeared. He wants dad; he's asking for dad, and he'll never do his circus turn until dad comes back. That's what it means."

Pat's eyes widened in sympathy as she saw that Mariana looked near to tears.

Just then the boss' voice came, and appeared at the door.

"Mariana," he exclaimed, "what's this about the pony not doing his turn for you?"

Mariana and Pat then explained what had happened, and the manager's anxiety and gravity increased.

"If he won't spell anything but 'dad' to you, then you've got to let Jensen try. That's all about it. I must have this act. It's billed. If it doesn't go on, then there will be a mighty row, and I shall be disgraced."

Mariana drew up, chin in air.

"Jensen shan't steal our act, or learn our secrets!" she said defiantly. "In any case, Petkin wouldn't act for him," she said.

"He can do the simpler tricks. I know that, because when your father was here, Jensen tried one or two out, and he's learned the routine."

Mariana folded her arms, and her eyes glittered.

"I promised daddy that no one else should ever do our act with Petkin," she said. "And I'm not breaking the promise."

The manager did not reply. He eyed her coldly, however, and then glanced at his watch.

"I'll give you an hour to make up your mind," he said, and swung to the door, but there drew aside as Jensen entered.

"Mariana," he said, in smooth tone. "Get out!" said Mariana, a sob in her voice; and she went to the pony as though to hold him to her, to prevent his being taken from her.

"Very well," said Jensen, with a sneer. "But the show must go on."

He went from the stall, and Pat, filled with a sudden idea, turned to go after him.

"I'll see you later, Mariana," she said.

Then, catching up with Jensen, she spoke to him.

"I am a reporter. Would you, please, show me your horses?" she said. "And perhaps say a few words."

She took out her notebook, and Jensen pulled up, his expression thoughtful.

"Why, yes, it's the best show in the circus, bar the Wonder Pony," he said.

Pat was all eagerness to see his own horses, but not merely to glean further information about the circus. She wanted to see the men working for him. His whole manner proclaimed that he was jealous of the Wonder Pony's success—and she could see that he stood to gain by the present plight of Mariana and Petkin.

Had Jensen had a hand in the disappearance of Mariana's father? Had he kidnapped him in order to ruin the pony's show—to rid himself of his rivals?

That was what Pat meant to find out.

But disappointment awaited her. She admired the splendid horses, and she saw all the grooms, but Pat could find no clue that would help her solve the mystery.

"By the way," said Jensen suddenly, as she closed her book, "can you give me a sheet of that?"

Pat tore a sheet from the back to give him, and, with a nod of thanks, he folded it and turned away.

"If there's anything else you'd like to see, ask the men," he said. "I have something to see to."

Pat stayed a moment longer, and then, as the audience was now filling the seats and the clowns were running into the arena, she stayed to watch.

As the turn ended she went along to Petkin's stall, and drew up as she heard Jensen's voice.

"Well, now you know the truth," he said. "Perhaps I should have told you before, but we feared the shock would be too great."

Mariana made no reply, and Pat, turning away, moved amongst the crowd as Jensen opened the door and appeared.

When he was gone from sight, lost in the crowd, Pat went to the stall, and entered, finding Mariana, her face white, studying a slip of paper, which she crumpled as Pat entered.

"What's wrong?" asked Pat.

Mariana bit her lip.

"The mystery of dad is solved," she said heavily. "He—he ran away. He ran away from debts. He—he's deserted."

Pat, quite stunned, could not speak for a moment.

Then, puzzled, she asked how Mariana could be so sure.

"Did Jensen tell you?" she asked.

Mariana shook her head, her eyes heavy with sadness.

"No," she said huskily. "My father left a note—a good-bye note. He explained—and he told me to sell Petkin. Oh, please don't put any of this in your paper!" she burst out desperately. "I couldn't bear it."

Pat still puzzled, still suspicious of Jensen, looked down at the screwed-up paper in Mariana's hand, and then suddenly she recognised it.

It was the piece torn from her book a moment ago.

"Please let me see the message," she said. "Don't let me see what's written if you'd rather not. If it's only on one side, turn it over. I just want to see the paper," she said.

"But why?" asked Mariana.

"Because," said Pat, "it looks like the sheet of paper I gave to Jensen a few minutes ago. And if it is—if the note is written on that, then your father, if he did write it, cannot be far away. If he did not, then it's a forgery."

Mariana gave a start, and her eyebrows lifted.

"Can you prove it, if it is so?" she asked.

Pat opened her notebook to the torn page and held it to Mariana.

"Try for yourself," she said.

After a moment of hesitation, Mariana, with trembling fingers, unfolded the paper and matched it against the torn stub at the top of the page.

"Why," she cried, "it is—it matches—look—"

PAT GETS A CLUE

PAT looked, and drew in her breath.

"I'm right then," she said in low tones. "Either that message is a forgery by Jensen, or else your father wrote it and is somewhere near."

Mariana looked at Pat intently, and then took her arm.

"My father wrote this; but he must have been forced to. Find him—you must find him! Oh, please!" she implored Pat. "Please! I can't leave this stall. I'm terrified there'll be some attempt on Petkin."

Pat turned to the door then, but hesitated and looked at the pony.

"Mariana," she said, "would Petkin find your father—nose him out? Would he know when he is near him?"

"Yes, I think so; but he couldn't trail him, of course," said Mariana.

"I suppose not," murmured Pat. "But later perhaps—if I can get a clue."

Then she joined the throng. Standing still for a moment, Pat thought things over. If Jensen had obtained the written message so quickly, then the writer could not be very far away.

But where to start searching? Pat could not understand how Mariana's father could have been forced to write a message against his wish, and yet that seemed the only possible solution of this mystery.

Where was Mariana's father? Was he free, or was he a prisoner?

Pat thought hard, and presently an idea came to her—a trap which she could lay for Jensen; and no sooner did she conceive it than she hurried to find him.

The lion act was in progress, bringing applause. The mighty lions, roaring, were jumping on to stools and off. One jumped right over his trusting trainer, who lay flat on the floor, and the whole audience was hushed, wondering if the animal would turn upon the fallen man. But no—

For a moment Pat watched, and then she sought and found Jensen, who stood by his ponies, arms folded.

Pat approached him, assuming an air of excitement.

"Mr. Jensen—great news!" she said. "Eh—what? What do you mean?" he asked.

"Mariana's father," said Pat excitedly. "The show's saved—"

There was no mistaking Jensen's dismay and consternation.

"He's been found?" he jerked out.

"Well, not quite," said Pat. "They haven't actually got him yet, but—"

Jensen looked at her, eyes round.

"He has been seen around, you mean? Running away somewhere?"

"Come with me," said Pat.

And she led him outside the special entrance used by the staff and pointed.

"Across that field, I think," she said.

"At least, unless someone has blundered."

Then Pat bobbed back into the tent, knowing full well what Jensen would do.

She had fooled the man; she had alarmed him into thinking that Mariana's father had been seen—and, therefore, was free.

But if Jensen had made him prisoner—and if he wanted to assure himself whether or not it was his prisoner who had been seen—he would go straight to the place where his prisoner was hidden.

Pat, although she dodged back into the tent, peeped out a moment later and saw Jensen disappearing amongst the line of caravans.

She ran forward as hard as she could, and then wandered amongst them, lost, until she heard the slam of a door, and, glancing in that direction, she saw Jensen descending the steps of a blue caravan.

He was smiling; and with confident, easy strides returned to the circus.

Pat let him go, and then, making for the blue caravan, rapped on the door. There was no reply. She rapped again, and then tried to peer through the windows.

But to see in was impossible, and all the windows were fast closed.

Nevertheless, Pat was now convinced that she had learned half the truth; she had learned, at least, where Mariana's father was, although not why.

She hurried back to the Wonder Pony's stall and opened the door, to find Mariana doing her best to ease the

pony's worry, so that he would do his act.

"Mariana, I think I have found your father—or, anyhow, found where he is being kept prisoner," said Pat, leaning against the door. "But I haven't proof—and there's only one way of getting it."

Mariana, her face alight with hope and excitement, almost danced.

"Oh, tell me—where is he? How can we get proof?"

Pat lowered her voice, none too sure that there might not be listeners; and Mariana, hearing the plan, gave a little excited laugh, and then hugged the girl reporter.

"My goodness! How cute you are!" she exclaimed. "Of course I'll try it. I'll find the boss if you'll stay here with the pony."

And while Pat fondled the Wonder Pony and arranged his alphabet cards in a certain way of her own that she had planned, Mariana hurried away.



With trembling hands, Mariana took the sheet of paper and matched it against the torn portion in Pat's book. "Why—" she cried. "It matches!" Which proved that Mariana's missing father was not far away.

SOME MORE TRICKS

THE boss of the circus approached Jensen some minutes later and took his arm.

"I want you to come along to the Wonder Pony and try a few tricks," he said. "You have a moment to spare, and Mariana has at last agreed."

Jensen drew up, his eyes gleaming.

"She has? Fine!" he said. "I'll put over a turn such as you've never had before with that pony, boss. Just leave it to me. I'll come right along."

Mariana was awaiting him, and the Wonder Pony was ready for his act. Pat Lovell was there, too, notebook in hand; and Jensen gave her a nod.

"All right. What first?" he asked. He picked up the hat.

"What is this?" he asked.

The pony stretched out its forefoot and touched the letter d, then a, and then d again.

"Dad again," muttered the boss. "Huh!"

The Wonder Pony tossed his head.

"Let me ask him one," said Mariana. "Darling, who kidnapped dad?"

The boss gave a start; and Jensen shot her a quick, keen look. But the Wonder Pony did not hesitate.

He stretched out his forefoot and

touched the letter j, and then e, and after that n.

"Jen—" said Pat slowly. "My goodness! There is someone whose name begins with Jen—"

"Jenny," said Jensen uncomfortably. "But this is just twaddle! This pony had been coached to do this—"

"Not at all! You think the whole thing is a trick," retorted Mariana. "I'll ask him some more. Darling," she said to the Wonder Pony, "where is dad now?"

The Wonder Pony scraped the letter c forward, then a, and next r.

"Car?" scoffed Jensen.

"More, dear," said Mariana gently.

"Van," spelled the pony.

"Caravan!" cried Pat. "My goodness! How thrilling! Which caravan—"

Jensen gave a harsh laugh. "This is all twaddling rot!" he exclaimed. "Just a put-up job! I knew the whole thing was a trick from the

start. This pony can't spell. It's a code—a trick! He—"

Once again the pony spelled "Jen."

"Jensen's caravan—yours!" cried Pat to the horse trainer.

The boss stared from the pony to Jensen, who had changed colour. He was enraged, but he was also frightened, and turned to the door.

"I'm not standing for this!" he exclaimed. "Was I brought here to be insulted, boss?"

"Stop him!" cried Pat sharply.

The boss, a strange look on his face, caught Jensen by the sleeve.

"One moment, please!" he said. "You're the one who would gain by his disappearance, and you've a mighty funny look on your face."

Mariana produced the note supposed to have been left by her father, showed it to the boss, and explained how Jensen had brought it to her.

"It's your father's writing," mused the boss. "When did you get this, Jensen?" he asked.

"The day he disappeared," said Jensen sullenly. "He asked me to keep it, and let Mariana have it later."

Pat Lovell opened her notebook at the space where the torn page belonged, and passed it to the boss.

"Mr. Jensen borrowed that sheet of paper from me less than twenty minutes ago," she said. "You will see that it fits the page. That mes-age has been written this afternoon."

The boss looked at Jensen, and his eyes narrowed.

"I'm searching your caravan," he said, "right now. Come on, Mariana!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not leaving the Wonder Pony to his mercy," said Mariana.

"I'll go," said Pat eagerly.

And Pat, the boss, and Jensen went across to the trainer's caravan. Jensen, with shaking fingers, opened the door, and a man who had been lying on the bed sat up in alarm.

"The police!" he gasped.

The boss stared at him, blankly amazed.

"Jack, don't you recognise me?" he gasped. "The boss."

"No—I—don't," said Mariana's father. "I—I—"

He passed a hand across his forehead, and Pat started forward.

"Oh, poor man; he's lost his memory!" she cried.

The boss went to him, shocked to realise that it was true. Mariana's father had indeed lost his memory. He knew only what he had been told by Jensen—that he was wanted by the police. And believing that, he had willingly remained in hiding, not knowing that he was in the circus where he belonged, and within fifty yards of his own caravan.

"He fell," came Jensen's voice thickly. "Then he remembered nothing. I brought him here, and—"

But he gave no further explanation. Snatching a suitcase that stood near to the door, he bolted down the steps before the boss could even turn, slamming the door behind him.

"Let him go," said the boss grimly. "An understudy can manage his turn. The Wonder Pony is what matters.

Come, you've got to try it," he said to Mariana's father.

Pat Lovell, triumphant, excited, knowing that she had a wonderful story for her paper in addition to bringing happiness to Mariana and saving the circus show, went back to the big tent with the boss and Mariana's father.

It was a touching reunion she witnessed then, and most excited of all was the pony. But the unfortunate man did not recognise his daughter or pony, and stared at them, puzzled, a strained expression on his face.

Once again the Wonder Pony spelled the word dad; but he whinnied with joy now, and nuzzled against the lost master who had returned.

"Mariana, the show goes on," said the boss. "Five minutes and you must go on. If your father goes with you, there's a hope that familiarity will bring back his memory."

"Let's hope so!" breathed Pat. "Oh, Mariana, I wish you success! I'm so happy!"

"And I—I'm just crying with happiness," said Mariana, tears filling her eyes. "And thank you—thank you a thousand times for giving me that idea! Even if we did arrange the cards so that Petkin spelled Jensen and caravan, it was worth while."

"It certainly scared him," laughed Pat, "which was what we intended it should."

Then Pat rushed to the Big Top to see how the turn would go over with the audience.

To Pat's joy the Wonder Pony played up. He spelled hat; he spelled other words. And he was funny and obstinate, and everything that he had to be to make the turn amusing.

But it was Mariana who took charge, while her father, in his ring-kit, stood by, puzzled.

And then came the applause, deafening in its enthusiasm. Watching Mariana's father, Pat saw his manner change. She saw him give a start as

though he had suffered an electric shock, and then he suddenly swung round to Mariana and hugged her, petted the pony, and waved to the audience.

"Who am I?" he called to the pony, as the cheering died.

"Dad," spelled the Wonder Pony.

And the audience roared with mirth and delight.

Mariana's father insisted then on giving another show to the audience, taking Petkin through the most amazing tricks. Never had the two given such a performance, for Petkin was still excited at having his master back, and his trainer was simply on top of his form.

His memory fully recovered, all the worry and fear vanished from his mind, the lost showman put all he knew into the act. And the final applause simply shook the Big Top.

"YOU'VE certainly got the atmosphere of the circus," said Pat's editor, later that afternoon. "And a grand story, too. The pony unmasking the villain is good. That girl must be a wonderful trainer—though, of course, you asked him the right questions. Well done, Pat—well done!"

It was high praise enough for Pat, and she smiled, happily conscious that not only had she done her job well, but that in addition she had brought happiness to father, daughter, and the Wonder Pony—and to the worried boss. But, of course, she did not mention that bowling-out the villain had been a trick.

Next day Pat went to the circus again, but not to report—just to enjoy a wonderful dinner given in her honour, and to see the Wonder Pony spell out Pat when she was introduced.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

You must be sure not to miss next week's splendid story featuring Pat Lovell. Remember that your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale a day early—on Thursday—instead of Friday as usual. Order your copy in advance.

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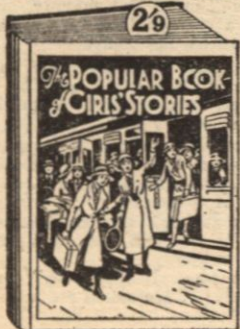


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TO-DAY!



The GIRL WHO Haunted GREY GABLES



WHO WAS THE MYSTERY THIEF?

WHEN Norma Royston arrived in the Cornish village of Clovellyn, she determined to search in Grey Gables, a near-by large house, to find a secret there connected with her dead father.

She distrusted Mr. Penhale, the owner of Grey Gables, but she liked Gerald Graham, a boy of her own age, who lived with Mr. Penhale.

Ben Tregellis, an old sailor who had warned her against Mr. Penhale, had disappeared, and Norma looked after his little shop, and his small grandchildren, Elsie and Martin.

At night, dressed in an old Tudor gown and headdress, Norma went to Grey Gables to search. She was seen by Gerald, who mistook her for Lady Rowena, the ghost of whom was supposed to haunt the house.

Norma managed to escape unrecognized, taking with her a small statuette which her father's diary had mentioned. Back at the shop, she hid this temporarily in an empty chocolate-box.

Next day, Gerald called on Norma, and she explained that the shop was in financial difficulties.

Later, Norma, alone in the shop, received a shock. For the chocolate-box containing the statuette had vanished!

THE box had gone—the box containing the precious statuette!

Her mind in a sickening whirl, Norma stared at the empty shelf. She had been in and out of the premises during the morning—serving occasional customers, while she assisted Gerald and the children in preparing the bran-tub.

But she had not left the shop for more than ten minutes at a time—and then it had always been within her view from the street.

No one could have entered the shop unseen, for the side door leading to the cottage was securely locked.

A swift search assured her that the box had not been hidden elsewhere in the shop.

White to the lips, Norma crossed unsteadily to the door—glancing out into the sunlit street, with its white carpet of trampled snow.

Quite a little crowd of curious villagers were assembled on the pavement, staring at the bran-tub, with its

gay paper decorations—speculating aloud as to its possible use, while Mr. Penhale was standing on the pavement by his car as he chatted to his nephew.

Gerald was joking in his usual light-hearted fashion, trying to persuade his guardian to stay and take a chance at the "Lucky Dip."

"Come on, uncle!" he urged. "Be a sport! It's not every day you get a chance like this. A magnificent selection of valuable presents—and only sixpence a time!"

As she heard his bantering voice, Norma felt suddenly choked. An incredible, horrified thought had flashed through her mind.

Only one person, to her knowledge, had been alone in the shop for any length of time. And that was Gerald!

Gerald had announced his intention of searching in the shop for crepe-paper to decorate the bran-tub; he had been in there at least ten minutes before his guardian's unexpected arrival on the scene.

"No!" breathed Norma, with a sharp revulsion of feeling, as she encountered the boy's friendly, quizzical smile. "It couldn't—it couldn't have been Gerald!"

Mr. Penhale made to step into his car; then abruptly he spun round—and for an instant Norma's heart stood still as she met his shrewd stare.

But he addressed himself to Gerald. "Are you coming back to Grey Gables, young man?"

"Not at the moment, uncle," rejoined the boy cheerfully, as he bent to pick up a hammer. "I'm staying to give Norma a hand. We've got to get this bran-tub ready by this afternoon; business is business, you know!"

For an instant Mr. Penhale's face clouded, and he bit his lip; but he quickly recovered himself.

"As you wish, my boy—as you wish,"

Norma could think of only one way to obtain the vital statuette which had found its way back to Grey Gables. Once more she must dress up as the phantom Lady Rowena and go to the mystery house to search.

By RENEE FRAZER

he rejoined. "Er—about this afternoon, though. I've got a ticket here for that show in Clinsdale you've been so anxious to see."

"One ticket?" asked Gerald. "One ticket," replied the other emphatically. "For this afternoon's performance; but you'd have to get there early. No time to waste."

He looked pointedly at the bran-tub, and Norma instantly guessed his meaning.

He did not approve of Gerald's staying here to help her!

Her face rather red, she stepped forward quickly.

"I think I can manage quite nicely on my own now, Gerald," she said.

"No, you can't!" rejoined Gerald, winking. "This tub is a man's job—say what you like. Thanks for the ticket, uncle! I promise I'll make good use of it."

Mr. Penhale nodded, and stepped into his car without another glance at Norma. A moment later he drove away.

Gerald grinned at Norma.

"Now uncle's gone, we can get to work!" he declared. "Lots to be done yet. We've got to put up a placard to tell these people what to expect—and we've got to announce the opening-time. I suggest immediately after lunch; what do you say?"

Norma nodded, her mind torn by conflicting thoughts. Though grateful for Gerald's help—more grateful than she could say—she was anxious now to be left on her own.

She wanted to search for the missing chocolate-box, with its precious—and incriminating—contents.

In the confusion, it might have been mislaid somehow; and she dared do nothing while Gerald was here.

But the boy showed no hurry to depart; he insisted on nailing the decorations on the bran-tub, and instructed Norma to hang up a large placard in the shop-window, announcing that the "Lucky Dip" would be open to all comers at two o'clock!

With her thoughts on the missing statuette, Norma found it difficult to concentrate on her task; but Gerald's enthusiasm was infectious, and she made a plucky attempt to thrust her worry aside as she put the final touches to the decorations.

Nor were the two children forgotten. "Come on, youngsters!" exclaimed Gerald, as they came running from the shop, their arms laden with packages. "Dump those things in the bran-tub—and collect all the snow you can lay hands on! We want to make the thing look really Christmasy—so we'll smother it with the real stuff!"

Delightedly, the children complied. There followed a regular "snow-storm," in the course of which both Gerald and Norma were smothered.

At length Gerald declared himself satisfied.

"That's all we can do, for the moment," he declared, as he donned his jacket and stood back to survey their handiwork. "I bet that's going to bring in the custom! Hope we'll have a fine afternoon for it!"

Norma glanced at him quickly. "You—you're going to that show in Clinsdale, aren't you?" she ventured.

Gerald started. "Oh—uncle's ticket! I'd clean forgotten." He grinned as though at some secret joke. "Yes, I'll have to make use of it. Well, so long, Norma—and good luck!"

He departed, with a careless smile and a wave of his hand—leaving Norma feeling suddenly dejected.

Perhaps, in his heart, Gerald regretted having wasted so much time on her and the affairs of the little shop.

After all, why should a boy in his position bother to interest himself in a girl who was little more than a penniless stranger; a girl who was staying on here in defiance of his own guardian's wishes?

Norma swallowed hard, as she beckoned the two children and returned to the shop.

It was time for lunch—and both young Martin and little Elsie were ravenously hungry.

Norma cooked them chops, which she had ordered that morning—and she wondered anxiously when the butcher's bill would be paid.

Over lunch, the children excitedly discussed the bran-tub.

"I bet it's goin' to be no end of fun!" declared Martin, his mouth full. "Gerald says we'll get crowds; I bet he's right."

Martin spoke with a hint of hero-worship in his tone; he was a great admirer of Gerald's.

Little Elsie nodded eagerly. "And we can have a dip, too, can't we?" she asked, smiling up at Norma.

"Only we haven't got sixpence. Martin's got threepence in his money-box—and I've got a new penny—"

Norma smiled faintly, trying to thrust aside her worried thoughts.

"You can both have a dip free," she said, "for helping so nicely."

"Hurrah!" shouted Martin. "Hope I get that toy pistol with the sweets tied to it!"

"And I hope I get that big box of chocolates—the one with the pink bow and the flowers on it!" began Elsie eagerly.

Norma started, dropping her knife and fork with a clatter.

Her heart had given a sudden, violent jump as she stared at the surprised children, trying desperately to regain her composure.

"Which—which box was that, dear?" she asked, endeavouring to speak steadily.

"The big box that was on the shelf in the shop," explained Martin airily. "I wrapped it up, an' put it near the bottom of the tub. I bet Elsie couldn't reach it!"

Norma rose to her feet, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry in her relief.

Of course, what a chump she had been not to have thought of it! The children, in their eagerness to help, had put the precious box into the bran-tub!

She glanced hastily at the clock, and her heart gave a violent jump.

The time had flown more quickly than she had imagined; it was nearly two o'clock. In five minutes the villagers would be arriving for the advertised "Lucky Dip."

"Oh goodness!" breathed Norma, in sudden panic. "Martin, can you tell me just whereabouts in the tub you put that box?"

Both children eyed her in perplexity. "Somewhere near the bottom," explained young Martin vaguely.

Norma bit her lip, coming to a swift decision.

"You children wait here till you've finished your lunch," she said. "I shan't be long."

"Where are you going?" they chorused.

But the door had closed, and Norma was racing swiftly out of the shop.

Luckily the village street was deserted for the moment. Norma gave a little sigh of relief as she set to work on the tub, feverishly pulling out the packages from the sawdust and groping round for the vital chocolate-box.

It was unmistakable, owing to its size and weight; but there were dozens of packages in the tub, and she pulled out practically every one but the right one.

There was soon a growing pile of packages on the pavement, and sawdust was scattered around on all sides. Norma herself was smothered in it, and her face was flushed and anxious.

And just then, to her horror, she heard the clatter of approaching feet—a loud buzz of talk and laughter.

The next moment there appeared round the corner an excited crowd of youthful villagers, headed by Gerald.

"What-ho, Norma!" he exclaimed, waving his hand. "I've brought the troops to start the attack! Is everything ready? Come on, my hearties, sixpence a time, and no shirking!"

THE BRAN-TUB'S SECRET!

"WAIT, Gerald—please wait!" Desperately Norma sprang forward, holding out her arms to bar their way.

Gerald immediately called a halt, and stepped forward on his own.

"I say, what's up here?" he demanded, grinning. "Had an earthquake or something? Here, let me help. I'll get 'em all back in no time!"

"But, Gerald, I—"

"Don't you worry," cut in the boy. "Accidents will happen. Here goes! Five, six, seven, eight, nine—that's the lot! Now the sawdust, and there we are!"

Norma swallowed hard, dismayed, but utterly helpless to intervene.

In a twinkling, Gerald had returned all the parcels into the tub, and was brushing his hands together cheerfully.

"That's better," he declared. "You see, I've brought some custom along with me—picked 'em up on the way. About twenty sixpences, for a start," he added, in an undertone. "Hope we'll have enough presents to go round. We'll probably have to pack in a few extra things!"

Norma was staring at him, trying hard to smile, but thinking all the time of that fateful box buried in the bran-tub.

"I thought you were going into Clinsdale, to a show," she remarked, with attempted carelessness.

Gerald chuckled.

"I didn't say so. I said I was going to make good use of uncle's ticket, and so I am. Look!"

Triumphantly he produced a small, square package, tied up in bright red paper, and bearing a label:

"ADMIT ONE TO GRAND SHOW AT CLINSDALE HIPPODROME."

"And this is where it's going!" he added, thrusting it deep into the bran-tub. "All for sixpence, and the good of the cause!"

Norma stared at him, her lips trembling, her eyes misted with gratitude.



To her astonishment, Norma saw that in her fall she had dislodged a piece of ancient stone-work. Now revealed was a dark opening leading underneath the old house.

Gerald turned away gaily, and waved his hand to the crowd of villagers, augmented now by several more.

"The bazaar is now open!" he declaimed. "Roll up and take your chance at Clovellyn's amazing lucky dip! Only sixpence—the chance of a lifetime! There's no telling what you'll find, if you're lucky!"

That, thought Norma with a sinking heart, was truer than he imagined.

There was a sudden rush of youthful villagers, and the tub was surrounded. There was nothing Norma could do, or say.

Martin and Elsie came running out, anxious not to miss the excitement.

"Order—order, please!" called Gerald, as he stemmed the rush. "One at a time, and no pushing! If anyone falls in the tub, they'll have to stay there as a penalty—till after Christmas!"

A burst of laughter greeted this threat, but the youthful villagers became more orderly. Older people were now beginning to arrive, attracted by the commotion.

Gerald, quite unaware of Norma's confusion, was busily selling tickets.

One by one the villagers stepped up to take a dip into the tub.

Norma stood by, superintending, watching with bated breath as each sawdust-smothered package emerged from the tub.

Desperately she tried to think what she would do if the fateful chocolate-box was discovered.

Could she say it was a mistake? There would be an immediate angry outcry. Supposing she offered to buy it back from its finder, and explained that it was a show-piece that belonged to the shop?

Yes, that might succeed!

Norma took out her purse and held it in readiness, as she watched the progress of the dip with strained anxiety.

The tub was more than half-empty now of its presents, and Gerald's pockets were beginning to jingle pleasantly with the weight of the sixpences and coppers they contained.

"About thirty bob, so far!" he breathed, nudging Norma.

Just then there came a sudden movement in the crowd; the villagers parted respectfully, their chatter dying away.

Norma looked up, and her heart gave a violent jump as she saw Mr. Penhale himself approaching the tub!

"Hallo, uncle!" exclaimed Gerald breezily. "Come to take a sporting chance after all?"

His guardian frowned slightly; but if he was annoyed, he did his best to conceal the fact. The eyes of all the villagers were watching him—some respectfully, others with curiosity or vague distrust.

For Mr. Penhale was a strange man. He could be benevolent at times—municipal, even; but his outbursts of unreasoning fury were a byword in the village.

Now he moved forward among the hushed crowd and glanced from Gerald to Norma.

"Well, well, young lady," he remarked, "you certainly appear to be making a success of your little plan; and I see that Gerald's decided to forego the pleasure of the show, after all."

"Found a better use for the ticket, uncle!" declared Gerald, with an easy grin. "Come on, try your luck!"

"Er—how much?" asked the other, thrusting a hand into his pocket.

Norma started forward involuntarily, the blood draining from her face.



From one Girl to Another

Cheery Chatter and Helpful Hints by Penelope

often these have no woodwork at all at the ends—I'm wondering how some girls will manage the stocking-hanging.

By pinning it to the blanket with a large safety-pin, perhaps!

I think the American idea of placing a lighted Christmas-tree in the porch of the home, so that all passers-by can see it, is a charming notion, don't you? (I'm afraid if we copied the idea, and had one in our porch at home—well, our porch is so small, we should all have to use the back door.)

USEFUL PRESENTS

If you have any friends who live right in the country, and still use the good old iron kettles and un-electric irons, then you'll know how much iron and kettle holders can still be appreciated as gifts.

They're so very useful—which is no reason, of course, why they

shouldn't be attractive as well—and they do make very welcome "little" presents for Christmas.

You'll want three or four thicknesses of heavy material—which can be as plain as you like, measuring seven inches across. (Use a small plate or large saucer as a guide.) But the two outside covers can be any cheery colour—blue, red, or green. Bind the edges with coloured ribbon or material cut "on the cross," and make a loop for hanging up.

Then, with a contrasting oddment of silk, cut out a cheery kettle or an iron, and sew this on to the holder.

A BRIGHT GUESS

Now just a Christmas smile. Small boy: "Please, teacher, who is Santa Claus' wife?"

Teacher looked baffled, until another small boy, piped up: "Please, miss, wasn't it Christmas Eve?"

Good-bye now until next week, all, when the GIRLS' CRYSTAL will be on sale a day early, don't forget.

Your own

PENELOPE

HALLO, EVERYBODY!—Just one more week, and then it's Christmas! Hurrah! Aren't you all excited?

I know I am.

We are having a Christmas "draw" in the office, which your Penelope has been organising, and it's great fun!

First I write down the names of all the many people who visit us in the office. There are authors, artists, other editors, and their staff—oh, tons of people!

CHRISTMAS FUN

As they enter I pounce on them and say "Sixpence, please!" Each person pays sixpence, you see, to enter the "draw," and is given a number in return. (If they like, the rich ones can pay more and have more than one number.)

When our list is full, and your Editor and I think we have enough cash, we send out and buy all sorts of goodies with the money.

There will be chocolates, mixed sweets, biscuits, cigarettes, some wine—and, of course, a "booby" prize, for fun.

Then, later in the week—I expect it will be next Friday, our "breaking-up" day at the office—we shall shake all the numbers together in the Editor's hat, and draw, inviting as many visitors as care to attend to make sure that we have "nothing up our sleeves."

I'm afraid I'm not a very lucky person at draws, so I shan't be in the least surprised if I don't win anything. All the same, you'll wish me luck, won't you?

Have you put up all your decorations? And have you saved a specially long and wide stocking to hang on your bed on Christmas Eve?

Now that divan beds are so much more popular than they were—and

Whatever happened, Mr. Penhale mustn't dip into that tub!

But Gerald, mistaking her action, winked at her reassuringly.

"Ten bob to you, uncle!" he declared, bold as brass. "All for the good of the cause!"

For a moment his guardian was taken aback; but the eyes of the villagers were upon him, and he was anxious to create a good impression.

"Well, well!" he shrugged, produc-

ing a bulky wallet and extracting a ten-shilling note. "It's sheer highway robbery, young man—but here you are!"

Gerald seized the note, waved it triumphantly, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Stand back!" he called gaily. "Mr. Penhale will now try his luck. Hope you get something really stunning, uncle—a nice packet of bullseyes, for instance!"

Mr. Penhale smiled, a trifle thinly, as he thrust his hand into the sawdust. "Oh!" breathed Norma, with a sobbing intake of breath.

For the first time Gerald realised that something was amiss. He glanced at her curiously, noting her pallor.

"I say, what's up, Norma?" he breathed.

Norma could not trust herself to reply; her heart standing still, she was watching Mr. Penhale as he fumbled round in the sawdust.

The crowd was pushing forward eagerly, anxious to see the fun. Young Martin and Elsie were peering over the other side of the tub.

"Ah!" said Mr. Penhale suddenly. Norma stiffened; there came a ripple of expectancy from the onlookers.

Mr. Penhale straightened himself suddenly, holding a large, oblong parcel.

"Oh!" exclaimed little Elsie's treble voice. "Look, Martin, he's got that big box of chocolates you put at the bottom of the tub!"

THE FORGOTTEN PASSAGE

NORMA felt as though the solid ground was giving way beneath her.

Mr. Penhale was standing there with the fateful box in his hand, the box containing the marble statuette. He was turning it over curiously, weighing it in his hand.

"Chocolates, eh?" he remarked. "Rather!" said Gerald. "Worth a guinea a box, any day."

He spoke in his usual light-hearted fashion, but he was looking curiously at Norma. There was an urgent question in his eyes.

"I say, what is it?" he breathed. "What's up?"

Norma clutched desperately at his sleeve.

"Gerald—that package—it's a mistake—"

Gerald raised his eyebrows, but he asked no questions.

"I say, uncle, I'll tell you what!" he exclaimed, as though struck by a bright idea. "You don't like chocolates; swap them for a packet of marvellous Turkish cigarettes. Here we are; the very thing you've always wanted!"

But Mr. Penhale shook his head, a trifle impatiently.

"I've wasted enough time, as it is," he said. "I'll keep the chocolates, and give them to Ethel."

He tucked the box under his arm, nodded briefly, and made his way to his car.

White as death, Norma watched him go—and her last hope went with him.

When he presented the box to his daughter, and it was opened, then the identity of the "Phantom" of Grey Gables would be known! It would be discovered that she herself had taken the precious statuette.

She would probably be turned out of the village, and the two children—

Gerald touched her arm, a curious gleam in his eyes.

"I say, Norma, mind if I buzz off now?" he asked. "Just remembered an appointment. See you later! Half a minute, uncle! I'm coming back."

He sprang on to the running-board as the car was about to move away.

A moment later it purred swiftly out of sight.

Norma stared after it with hazy, misted eyes; a feeling of dull despair swept over her.

She was roused by the children's voices, telling her it was all over, and the people were going.

A lump in her throat, Norma glanced down into the flushed faces of the two. Each had obtained a present from the tub. Elsie hugged a doll, while Martin flourished the treasured toy pistol.

Little Elsie slipped a small, confiding hand into hers.

"You're sad, Norma!" she whispered.

Norma gulped, forcing a quick smile.

"It's all right, darling," she said. "I expect I'm a bit tired. You children must be tired, too, after all this excitement. Let's shut up the shop now and have tea. It's too late for any more customers."

But there was one more customer that evening, as it happened.

Widowed Mrs. Tregurtha came in to buy some tea, and a few other groceries—and for a last-minute gossip.

The motherly old soul had quite taken to Norma.

"I hear your bran-tub was a great success, my dear," she declared, nodding her grey head. "You gave those upstart new store people a bit to think about—and serve them right!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Tregurtha," replied Norma gratefully.

Mrs. Tregurtha gathered up her purchases, and glanced shrewdly at Norma's pale face.

"You look tired, my dear," she said. "What you need now is a bit of a change. It's not right for a young girl like you to be cooped up in this shop all day without any amusement. You know, I'd gladly look after the bairns if you wanted to go out. I'm a lonely old woman, and their bright faces would cheer up my cottage. What about letting me have them this evening? It would be giving you a little time off."

Norma was about to refuse the kindly offer, though she fully appreciated the old lady's kindness; then abruptly her heart missed a beat.

If she could visit Grey Gables to-night there was a chance—a frail chance—that she might be able to retrieve that fatal box before it was opened!

"It's awfully kind of you, Mrs. Tregurtha," she said. "If you could have the children for this evening, there is something rather important I should like to do."

She hardly dared to meet the old lady's kindly eyes, for fear the other might read the reckless excitement in her own.

But Mrs. Tregurtha asked no questions; she seemed delighted at the opportunity of looking after the children for the night.

Martin and Elsie were informed of the plan—and they jumped at it with the eagerness of children at any fresh change.

Soon they were bustled away by the motherly neighbour—and Norma was alone.

She lost no time. Already the evening shadows were lengthening.

Making a few hasty preparations, she stole out of the cottage, the precious gown and headdress safely wrapped in a parcel under her arm.

Noiselessly she hurried down the deserted village street, to follow the lonely, winding path that led to Grey Gables.

She entered the grounds through the gap in the old wall, and paused in the shelter of the trees to don her phantom garments.

As yet it was early in the evening, and there were lights at several of the windows.

Norma realised the need for the utmost caution.

As before, she crept on to the paved terrace and tried the small postern door; but to her dismay it was securely locked!

The windows on the ground-floor, too, were all closed—and at some there were shutters.

For a moment Norma almost lost hope. Her heart in her mouth, she crept from the terrace, descending the flight of marble steps that led to the lawn.

The steps must have been slippery from the recent snow, or in her anxiety she did not look properly where she was treading. For Norma tripped suddenly, and with a stifled cry fell headlong down the steps.

The shock of her fall nearly dazed her, but quickly she pulled herself together.

She made to rise unsteadily to her feet, when abruptly she paused, her heart beating wildly.

For her fall had dislodged a piece of ancient stonework beneath the covering creeper; and Norma found herself staring in amazement at a dark opening in the wall—and a flight of crumbling steps that led down into the gloom beneath the old house.

Amazed, hardly able to believe her good luck, she crept through the opening—observing that the narrow entrance could be closed by a stone slab working on a rusty pivot.

Obviously, it was some secret entrance to the house—apparently unsuspected by the present owners!

Her heart thumping, Norma drew out her torch and made her way cautiously down the steps into a narrow brick tunnel.

She was conscious that the tunnel had a gradual upward slope as she followed it; the floor beneath her feet was thick with dust untrampled for years—the air was close and dank.

And then, as she turned a corner, a stifled cry was torn involuntarily from her lips.

Standing a few paces from her, glowing with a dim, spectral light, was the phantom figure of the Lady Rowena herself!

The apparition's eyes were glowing like fiery points; she was dressed as Norma had last seen her in the picture in the library—

Then, with a flash of amazed enlightenment, Norma realised the astounding truth.

"It—it is the picture!" she gasped. "The picture in the library. I'm standing behind it."

The solution to the mystery, though sufficiently startling, was simple enough. The secret passage had led her to the library of Grey Gables—and what she saw was the firelight glowing through the canvas of the old picture.

Relief gave place to swift excitement—her pulses racing, she crept up behind the picture and peered through the two holes that had been pierced in the painted eyes.

And then she caught in her breath sharply, instinctively drawing back.

For in the library stood Mr. Penhale and his daughter. And Gerald's guardian was holding the parcel containing the chocolate-box, with its incriminating contents!

As Norma watched, transfixed, Mr. Penhale picked up a penknife and prepared to cut the string.

Do not, on any account, miss the next instalment of this grand mystery serial. In it, Norma encounters more surprises and baffling developments in her quest. Don't forget that next week the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale a day earlier than usual. Get it on Thursday.

Kaye of the Kennels



It was the dogs that broke the friendship—and it was the dogs who mended it, in this delightful, complete story

By IDA MELBOURNE

thanks, then, ignoring each other's very existence, they marched off, stiff and angry.

KAYE had plenty to do when she returned to the kennels, but her first task was to dress the wounds of the two combatants. The wounds were not bad, and she soon made the dogs comfortable.

Brutus, Kaye's St. Bernard, had to inspect the two newcomers, and they were suitably awed by his size. Then, after locking up Nigger, Kaye took Brownie for a tour of the kennels, introducing him to the spaniels, to the Dalmatian, the terrier pup, Ming Wu the lordly Peke, the Dachshund—to the whole crowd of them, boarders, invalids, convalescents.

Then it was Nigger's turn. Kaye watched him particularly, for not all the dogs were friendly, and there were some spoiling for a fight—especially when they were safe behind bars. The terrier pup was apt to challenge even Brutus—until Kaye made pretence to open his door! That quietened him down.

He snarled at Nigger, baring his teeth in warlike manner. But Nigger did not even snarl back at him.

When her most urgent tasks were done, and it was time for her "elevenses"—tea and cake—Kaye set herself the task of making Brownie and Nigger good pals.

With Brutus standing by, she let them out of the kennels.

First she threw a ball. They both ran after it, and there was snarling as they reached the ball almost together.

"Fetch it, Brutus," commanded Kaye.

Brutus galloped up. There was no argument. Brownie and Nigger stood back and let him take the ball; head high, Brutus dropped the ball at Kaye's feet.

Back came Brownie and Nigger side by side.

Next Kaye put down two tin plates of biscuit mash for them. Agreeably enough they ate it, side by side. The meal finished, Kaye petted them to see if they were jealous, hugging Brownie and leaving Nigger aside, and then changing over.

But clearly they were not jealous, and there was no reason to suggest that Nigger was vicious, for the squabble about the ball had been as much Brownie's fault as his.

Remembering that only Millicent Dawson had said that Nigger had flown at Brownie, Kaye made up her mind to see Millicent, and find out just what

THE PETS WHO CAUSED TROUBLE

"A DOG-FIGHT! Stop, granddad!"

Kaye Chalmers, youthful manageress of the Chalmers Kennels, put a hand on her grandfather's arm, and he brought the car in which they were riding to a standstill.

Jumping out, Kaye ran across to the strip of common land on which the two dogs were fighting. She recognised them both, for Kaye knew most of the dogs in the district.

Brownie and Nigger were their names, and they were really going for each other hammer and tongs. Yet only yesterday, like their mistresses Violet Blake and Daisy Longrigg, they had been the best of friends. The dogs' owners were trying to end the fight, but Kaye quickly saw that their panic-stricken efforts were merely fanning the dogs' rage.

"Steady," she called. "Don't hit them!"

"Mind Nigger doesn't bite," warned Violet as Kaye rushed to intervene.

Kaye, who interrupted more dog-fights in a week than most people saw in a year, had no fear.

She put her left hand firmly on the back of Brownie's neck, and her right took the same grip on Nigger.

Frenzied, the dogs both turned their heads to snap. But Kaye's grip was too clever for that. They could not turn their heads far enough.

"Now, chaps—whoa," said Kaye soothingly. "Time!"

And she held them well apart. Separated, they became calmer, even though their lips twitched and their eyes flashed.

Violet took Brownie—a brown dog with a strain of Irish terrier, and Daisy took her black half-retriever, Nigger.

"There—all over," said Kaye, smiling.

But she noticed that the girls' eyes flashed almost as much as their pets' did. And considering that yesterday

they had been walking arm-in-arm, that was strange.

"Make Daisy put Nigger on a lead," said Violet indignantly. "He's a horrid, spiteful beast. He started it. He ought to be muzzled. Before he's finished he'll kill some dog."

"That's not fair," was Daisy's furious retort. "You don't know that he started it. We weren't here."

"Oh!" cried Violet. "Well, he started it yesterday. Millicent said so—"

"Millicent! I wouldn't believe a word she says," scoffed Daisy, tossing her head.

"Millicent was my friend before you were," Violet exclaimed. "And if you're bringing that beastly dog with you, I don't want to go walks with you again."

Kaye looked in distress from one to the other, hardly able to believe that yesterday they had been such close friends. But even now it was not their own quarrel—they were taking sides with their dogs, carrying on the dog-fight which Kaye had ended.

To end their wordy warfare Kaye turned to the dogs. She saw that Brownie's car was a little torn, and that Nigger had had a bite, too.

"Poor chaps," she said to the dogs. "Let this be a lesson to you. But there! I can soon make you well!" Then she turned to the girls.

"Your pets had both better have their injuries dressed," she said. "The car's over there, and I can take them along now. Probably you can collect them on your way back from school."

Because Kaye had a strong personality the two girls followed her with the dogs to the car. But reaching it, the dogs again started to snarl viciously.

Violet blamed Nigger, Daisy blamed Brownie. But Kaye just took Brownie and lifted him into the rear of the car.

"Stay there, bad chap!" she said. "And you Nigger—you come in front with me."

Violet and Daisy mumbled their

had happened. Meanwhile she tried the two dogs out in the large kennel, and without a murmur they suffered themselves to be enclosed in it. Not one growl was heard.

Brutus, who had wandered off, suddenly came back, barking excitedly—and in a way that told Kaye what the trouble was. Someone at the gate.

Hurrying down to the gate, Kaye saw a schoolgirl standing there.

Kaye always summed people up at a glance, and had found that her first impressions were usually right.

She took a sudden dislike to this girl. There was something furtive about her eyes.

But as Kaye was a business girl, she did her best not to show her feelings.

"I'm Kaye Chalmers. I suppose you have come to see me?" Kaye asked.

"Oh, yes—I have!" said the girl. "I—I was wondering if you have a pup for sale."

"A terrier pup, yes. A little rascal," said Kaye, with mingled feelings.

"Frisky, you know—"

And although she was prepared to let the girl see him, she determined not to sell him to her. When that pup found a home it would have to be with someone Kaye really liked.

As they approached the pup's kennel there was a tremendous barking, which Brutus' policeman's voice added to rather than stopped.

At Kaye's command the dogs were quiet, except Nigger and Brownie, who whined, and moved to the front of their combined kennel.

The girl pulled up short.

"Oh! You haven't put Nigger and Brownie in the same kennel?" she asked, aghast.

Kaye gave her a quick, puzzled look. "Yes, why ever not?" she asked.

"Why, Nigger's vicious, savage. He flew at poor Brownie yesterday. Why, if Vi knew, she'd be furious!"

Kaye resented being told her job.

"Really? Well, they seem to be the best of friends, don't they?" she said, and added keenly: "Are you their friend, Millicent?"

"Oh—yes! How did you know my name?" was the startled reply. "But I'm not Daisy's friend. I am Vi's," said Millicent.

Kaye eyed her shrewdly, and remembered what Daisy had said about not trusting the girl.

"I see—and you are the one who saw Nigger fly at Brownie yesterday. Did you see the fight this morning?"

"No. I wasn't there," said Millicent, and coloured.

She turned then, and moved aside as though listening.

"Your telephone, I think," she said.

Kaye had not heard it, but two dogs were barking, and she did not always hear it easily. With no suspicion that this was a trick, she turned and ran to the house.

No sooner was Kaye gone than Millicent turned to the kennel in which Brownie and Nigger were housed.

"Not savage, eh?" she asked mockingly. "We'll see!"

She pulled from her pocket a nice juicy bone on the end of a string, and pushed it through the bars of the kennel, offering it first to one and then the other. Nothing could have made a fight more certain than that. For one to see his bone taken and given to the other—it was too much.

"Go on, fight—fight!" urged Millicent.

She dropped the piece of newspaper in which the bone had been wrapped, and encouraged them to quarrel.

Brownie made a jump at the bone.

He got it—and he got Millicent's fingers, too!

"Oh!" she cried, and whipped back her injured hand.

The dogs, snarling, were now in combat, and every other dog in the place barked wildly.

But Millicent had received more than she bargained for, and frightened and hurt, she drew back. Nevertheless, as she heard Kaye shout she recovered her presence of mind.

The bone lay in the kennel, and tugging the string, she pulled it out—then, swinging it in her hand, she tossed it away over the sheds on to the grass behind.

Brutus rushed at the cage where the dogs were fighting, and himself snarled and roared thunderously. But neither was afraid of him when shut out by bars.

"Oh help—help!" cried Millicent. "I've been bitten. That awful dog Nigger flew at me when I was patting him."

Kaye, running hard, almost fell as she turned the corner, and jumped for a near-by bucket of water.

MILLICENT'S SPITE

KAYE hurled the bucketful of cold water into the kennel. It was quicker than opening the door, and it stopped the fight.

Swamped, the fighters fell back, and Kaye, whipping open the door, pulled out Nigger, the nearer of the two, dragging him to another free kennel, where she locked him in.

That done, she turned, breathing hard, to Millicent, who stood with one hand wrapped in her handkerchief.

"I've been bitten!" she said fiercely. "I was just patting Nigger, when he leaped at me. And then he turned on Brownie."

Kaye met her eyes, but she could not hold them.

"He wasn't just trying to pull your glove off?" she asked.

"No, he wasn't, because my glove was off," said Millicent.

Kaye was in grim mood, positive that Nigger would not have attacked unless provoked.

"Where is your glove?" she asked.

"My glove—what does that matter?" said Millicent crossly. "I tell you I wasn't wearing it! I want this dressed. I'll have to go and see a doctor."

Kaye looked at the wound, and nodded.

"I should see a doctor—yes," she said. "But I'm sure you must have been teasing Nigger."

"I wasn't. If dogs could talk, Brownie could tell you. Nigger's vicious, and it's your fault for putting him in with Brownie."

And, ignoring Kaye's offer to drive her to the doctor's, Millicent stamped off. Kaye watched her go with a worried frown.

"Oh, bother! Why had that to happen?" she groaned.

She went at once to the dogs to see if they were hurt, and, finding that they were not, Kaye heaved a mighty sigh of relief.

"If only you could speak," she sighed regretfully. "Then I'd get at the truth. What on earth did Millicent do when she came here?"

Kaye, thinking still that Nigger might have tried to take off the girl's gloves, searched the dual kennel for it. There was no sign of the glove, but on the ground was a piece of newspaper,

Kaye picked it up, screwing it into a ball.

Brutus, who had been trained to be tidy, ambled up and took it from her. It was one of the sights of the kennels to see Brutus collecting litter, and depositing it in the bin.

Instead of putting that paper away, however, he pulled it open with his teeth; and now he was licking it.

"Brutus, do you eat litter, or put it away?" asked Kaye, shocked.

Then, thinking it odd that he should find something enjoyable on that paper, she stooped to examine it.

It was a sheet torn carelessly from a pictorial daily. There were two greasy patches at the ends, which had been more screwed than the middle, and Kaye's experience told her what it meant.

A nice bone had been wrapped in that paper, and Brutus, looking up, tail swinging, knew it as well as Kaye did.

"A bone," Kaye mused. "Now that's queer. Who could have brought it, except Millicent? Ah!"

At once she guessed what must have happened. Millicent had brought a bone, and the dogs had quarrelled about it. Probably she had been bitten as she pushed the bone in.

Kaye went at once to the double kennel, but disappointment awaited her. There was no sign of a bone.

"She must have taken it away with her," she murmured. "Oh, the awful little sneak! She made them fight! She sent me away on a false errand, and, when my back was turned, set them on to each other. My goodness, if only I can prove it!"

It was ten minutes later, when she was indoors explaining things to her grandfather, that Brutus galloped up.

"Someone at the gate," said Kaye, and hurried out.

Brutus seemed tremendously agitated, and when they reached the gate Kaye found out why.

A policeman stood there, and he brought bad news. Millicent had reported the matter, and her father threatened to take out a summons.

"Nigger's a dear pet of a thing," Kaye said, almost fiercely. "And I think that girl teased him."

"Ah, we should need proof of that!" said the policeman. "No one's fonder of dogs than I am. But the law's the law. If he was proved to be really savage—well, then—"

He paused ominously, and Kaye's heart almost stood still. She had known Nigger only a little while. He was Daisy's pet, not hers, but he was a dog. And Kaye Chalmers was a friend of all dogs. The mere thought that poor Nigger might be sentenced to the longest sleep of all sent her heart stone cold.

No sooner had she answered all the policeman's questions, and escorted him to the gate, than Kaye ran to her cycle.

Violet had to be warned. If Violet were anything of a girl at all, if she had ever had a spark of real friendship for Daisy, then she would have to stand by Nigger. Unwarned, she might say that he was savage, and that would seal the poor dog's doom.

Brutus, left in charge, went sniffing about in the bushes behind the sheds. He sought the bone that he had seen flung there. Finding it, he took it to his kennel.

And if Brutus had had human powers, he would no doubt have been chuckling in anticipation of a feast to come.

KAYE SPRINGS A SURPRISE

"VIOLET," said Kaye, when she had managed to call Violet from morning lessons, "I've got bad news."

Violet, thinking the news referred to Brownie, went quite pale with fright.

"Violet," said Kaye quietly, "I know you have a kind heart. If you heard that Daisy's dog had to be had to be put to sleep, you'd be sorry, wouldn't you?"

Violet's eyes rounded, and she seemed to stop breathing for a moment.

"There! He really is vicious, then?" she asked.

"You're glad that it's ended like this?" asked Kaye. "That Daisy may never take her Nigger for a walk again—that she'll be broken-hearted, and—"

"Oh, no, no, of course not!" cried Violet, in dismay. "Oh, that's horrible! He can't be as bad as that. Why, he's always been so gentle until he—"

Kaye seized her chance.

"Until when?"

"Until yesterday, I suppose," said Violet slowly.

"And then?"

"Well, I didn't actually see it, but Millicent said Nigger flew at Brownie. And anyway, they were fighting this morning—and Brownie never has been a fighter."

"Has Nigger?"

"N-no, I don't think so," said Violet.

"Then you can't personally say anything against Nigger to prove him guilty?" said Kaye excitedly.

"I can't—and wouldn't," said Violet staunchly.

"Good, good," said Kaye, her eyes sparkling. "Then if you are asked questions, don't for goodness' sake say that he's vicious. Thank you, Violet—you're a pal. No wonder that Daisy's fond of you!"

She paused thoughtfully.

"Millicent is a friend of yours?" she asked.

"Y-yes. I haven't been with her so much lately. She isn't very fond of dogs, and—well, Daisy is, and she's got a dog."

That was all Kaye needed to hear. It provided a motive for Millicent wanting the two girls to quarrel. It was the dogs who had brought Violet and Daisy together—and led Violet from Millicent. A girl with a jealous disposition might consider that a strong enough motive to hate the dogs.

Returning to the kennels, however, Kaye's newly risen hopes were dashed. Millicent was there with her father, a stern, grim-looking man.

"Miss Chalmers," he said, "I understand that, knowing you had charge of a vicious dog, you kennelled it with another. And you further told my daughter that the dog was safe?"

"He is safe."

"Safe enough for her to pat?"

"Quite safe—and I have had plenty of experience with dogs, Mr. Dawson," retorted Kaye.

"Is that so? You do not seem to have learned from your experience. Naturally I shall claim damages—from you, as you were in charge of the dog."

Kaye looked at Millicent angrily, resentfully.

"You haven't told me yet exactly what happened," she said. "How were you bitten? I'm sure you must have been teasing the dogs—with a bone perhaps?" she added.

"Oh, no I wasn't," retorted M.

"If I had been teasing them with a bone you'd have seen it."

"Don't try to blame her," said her father sternly. "You can't wriggle from the responsibility, Miss Chalmers."

"I'm not trying to wriggle. But a dog's life is at stake," said Kaye. "And I mean to find the truth. What was it you brought wrapped up in that piece of newspaper, Millicent?"

Millicent changed colour for a moment.

"Nothing. I don't know what you mean," she retorted.

Kaye was baffled; she knew that she had not nearly enough proof, no chain of clues that could support her contention, strongly though she believed it herself.

She needed a link—clues. And suddenly, as an idea came, she turned to Mr. Dawson.

"I had better have your address, please, Mr. Dawson."

Not guessing what was in her mind, he gave it, and Kaye jotted it down. Hardly had she finished when the gate bell sounded.

No bark came from Brutus and then, suddenly, a deep, rolling one. Excusing herself, Kaye hurried to answer the summons, just as Brutus came rather guiltily from his kennel.

"Shirking duty, old boy?" she reproved him.

Brutus, who had been busy with the bone he had found, licked his lips, and followed her to the gate apologetically.

Daisy was outside and, standing a little way back, Violet.

"I've come for Nigger," said Daisy.

"Is he all right?"

"He's fine," said Kaye wretchedly.

"But—"

And she explained what had happened.

Daisy hurried with her to where the Dawsons, father and daughter, stood, and protested indignantly that Nigger had never bitten anyone before, ever.

Leaving them talking, Kaye slipped

away, but an odd sound from Brutus' kennel made her pause. The big St. Bernard was inside. He was gnawing a bone. In great excitement she ran to the house and spoke to her grandfather.

"Brutus has a bone in his kennel, granddad," she said. "You might go and look at it, and take Mr. Dawson, Millicent, Violet, and Daisy with you. They had all better see it."

Then as fast as she could go, Kaye rode to Millicent's house. Her knock was answered by the maid.

"Oh, I have just left Mr. Dawson and Millicent," said Kaye. "I wonder if you have a copy of yesterday's 'Daily Snap'? It's wanted rather urgently."

The maid departed and rustling sounds came from the kitchen cupboard where papers were kept. Presently she returned with the desired copy.

"It's torn through; there's a page missing," said the girl. "But I did see Miss Millicent tearing a page out."

Kaye skipped with joy, for a glance at the paper showed that the portion of the torn page still remaining matched the missing part she had found at the kennels.

Kaye hurried back, to find a group round Brutus' kennel.

The bone had been taken from the St. Bernard, who was frowning even more heavily than usual.

"Is the suggestion that my daughter brought this bone here?" asked Mr. Dawson. "On this piece of string?"

Kaye intervened. She reminded her grandfather of the sheet of paper he had found, and he brought it from his pocket.

"I have already shown this to Mr. Dawson," her grandfather said mildly. "He denies that it can have been Millicent's."

"Yes, what proof is it that it is mine?" Millicent scoffed.

Kaye brought the copy of the "Daily Snap" into view, put it on the ground, and fitted in the missing page.

"It looks as though an apology is required," said Kaye, with a wry smile. "It fits this paper exactly."

She knew that Mr. Dawson would not suspect that she had been to his house, and there was nothing visible on the open page to show it was his paper.

"Obviously it came from that paper," he said in triumph. "No magistrate could think anything else. And this paper is yours, of course."

"The owner's name is written in front in pencil," said Kaye.

Mr. Dawson stared at it. His own name jumped into view, and his scrawled address in the newsagent's scrawl.

He looked in silence at Millicent.

"Millicent was seen tearing a page from a paper, too," said Kaye in triumph. "Moreover, that is a mutton bone. It will be easy to find out if you have had mutton lately in your house. And if Millicent is not guilty, why does she deny she brought the bone here? Why did she bring it here? And why tie it to a piece of string? I can tell you! To tease the dogs—to draw it out of the kennel when she heard me coming back."

"It's not true!" cried Millicent. "You can't prove it."

Kaye laughed.

"No? Well, let me tell you I have a witness who saw the whole thing."

Daisy and Violet, as Kaye saw, were fixing their gaze upon Millicent's crimson face, suspiciously, indignantly.

"A witness—produce him," said Mr. Dawson.

"In court," said Kaye. "I have been accused of showing negligence. My witness can be called in court."

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Millicent quaked as her father glared at her.

"Millicent, I demand the truth," he said sternly.

Millicent became panic-stricken. "I—I brought Brownie a bone," she faltered. "That's all. He—he snatched it and bit me—by accident."

"Brownie bit you!" gasped Violet. "You said it was Nigger."

Mr. Dawson looked at his daughter sharply. His brows drew together in a frown, and his eyes glinted sternly.

"So, Millicent, you have been lying!" he said angrily. "You distinctly told me that this dog, Nigger, was savage, and bit you. Now you say it was the other dog. You have disgraced yourself and me by telling these deliberate untruths. I do not believe now that either of these dogs bit you, unless you provoked them into doing so. I cannot understand you at all."

Millicent's lip quivered; she lowered her head, while her father turned to Kaye.

"I am sorry. I was misled," he said thickly. "I am shocked that Millicent should tell such purposeless lies!"

"Not purposeless," cut in Kaye quickly. "She wanted to part Violet and Daisy. Jealousy was her motive."

Millicent gulped, and when her father demanded if it were true, she nodded her head. And the last they saw of her she was being led down to the gate.

"Well," said Daisy, aghast, "can you believe it?"

"Shake hands, you two," smiled Kaye. "I know you are friends at heart, because even though Violet said cross things about Nigger she was going to stand by him."

Violet smiled wanly. "I—I'm sorry, Daisy. Only, how could I guess?"

Daisy, happy that Nigger was cleared, was smiling happily, and impulsively she hugged Violet.

"I'm sorry I was rude and unkind," she said. "But, oh, I'm so happy about poor Nigger! How lucky you had that witness, Kaye!"

"Lucky? I should say so! I hope I never lose the old rascal," said Kaye. "Shall I let him have the bone of contention? I suppose so. Here, Brutus!" she added.

And, removing the string from the bone, she tossed it to the big St. Bernard—the witness whose testimony incourt Mr. Dawson and Millicent had so dreaded!

Violet and Daisy stared at Kaye in amazement.

"Brutus—your dog! Then—then he was the witness!" gasped Violet.

"And where could you find a better one?" asked Kaye, smiling, as she fondled the great, shaggy head of her faithful pet. "Brutus not only saw what happened, but he collected the evidence as well."

"He's a wonder," said Daisy. She turned to her chum. "Isn't he, Vi?"

And Kaye knew from the smile that passed between them that the breach completely healed.

She glanced down at Nigger and Brownie, sitting patiently at their mistress' feet, tongues lolling, eyes bright, without a hint of viciousness.

"Home, my lads," smiled Kaye. "And mind you keep the humans in order in future!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Another grand long story about Kay and her pets appear in next week's issue. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** now. It will be on sale a day early—on Thursday.

SECRET FRIENDS OF THE SPEED GIRL

(Continued from page 252.)

"Win? Who's that you're talking about?"

The chums swung round in alarm, then they let their tensed muscles relax as they saw that it was Betty Russell who had entered the Common-room. She stared at the three girls curiously.

"What are you all looking so secretive about?" she demanded.

Linda, holding the letter behind her, tried to laugh carelessly.

"Secretive! Who's looking secretive?" she said. "We were only talking about the race to-morrow. We're going over to Hanthorpe to watch it. Are you and the others going to attend?"

Betty frowned.

"Well, we were. We'd love to see Miss Nemo race again, of course; but it's no use now—not if what that sneak Ada Wilkes says is true, anyway."

"Ada Wilkes!" Linda took an alarmed step forward. "What nonsense has she been broadcasting?" she asked.

"It isn't nonsense. At least—"

Betty stopped and shook her head doubtfully. "It's about the Head and Miss Nemo," she explained. "According to Ada the Head rang up the race track this afternoon and demanded that the Red Star should be scratched. But the manager said he couldn't do that. Then the Head told him about Miss Nemo being her niece, and about her being under age."

"And—and what did he say to that?" asked Linda.

Betty shrugged her shoulders. "He said that would make a difference—if it were true. But he couldn't do anything without proof. Unless the Head could prove definitely that Miss Nemo was her niece—"

"And she can't do that!" cut in Linda excitedly. "So there's nothing to worry about. Miss Nemo will race after all."

"Oh, no, she won't!"

Again the interruption came from the doorway, and this time it was Florrie Mears who entered. It was clear that she had overheard at least part of the conversation, and, with a mocking grin she regarded Linda & Co.

"Your precious Miss Nemo is finished—finished for good," she jeered. Her scowl faded, and she laughed. "Still, it doesn't matter. Even if you are in touch with Miss Nemo you can't say her."

"What—what do you mean?" gasped Linda, and they all stared at Florrie in apprehension.

"I mean that her number's up. She won't be allowed to race. To-morrow the Head intends to drive down to the track."

"Drive down to the track?"

"You—you mean she's going to wait there for Miss Nemo to turn up?"

In helpless horror the Fourth Formers stood there. Florrie grinned.

"Exactly! She means to wait at the pits, and if Miss Nemo does turn up then she'll be caught for the last time." Gloatingly the prefect stood there, revelling in her triumph; then, with another chuckle, she turned and departed, leaving behind her utter consternation!

It certainly looks now as if it will be quite impossible for Miss Nemo to drive in the vital Championship Race. Be sure not to miss the next chapters of this exciting serial which appear in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**—on sale next **THURSDAY**, instead of Friday as usual.

NOEL'S CHRISTMAS CONJURING TRICK

(Continued from page 256.)

suggested the game of hide-and-seek, if you remember.

"As for Jim Tarrant, he was a thorn in Uncle Luke's side, for he had discovered most of the tricks; the boy was a danger to his plans. And so Uncle Luke tried to silence him. Jim was attacked, and then hidden away, gagged and bound, after I had been laid out."

Noel's eyes hardened, but there was a grim smile on his lips.

"What Uncle Luke did not know was that young Tarrant had accidentally discovered the missing will. I informed him of the fact this evening, pledging him to secrecy, and not allowing him to imagine that I suspected his part in the affair.

"In order to trap him, I explained that I would arrange to perform a conjuring trick—to spring the will as a pleasant surprise. Uncle Luke swallowed the bait and secretly hid himself in the cabinet.

"I had intended to give him an opportunity to escape—if he wished—but he chose the other course."

Uncle Luke laughed unsteadily.

"Very clever, Mr. Raymond!" he sneered, backing away. "An interesting story! But where's your proof? We've only your word for it that this is the missing will—"

"Look out!" cried Diana suddenly.

Her father sprang forward, but too late. With a swift movement, Uncle Luke thrust the bundle of papers into the blazing fire.

With a mocking laugh, he watched it crumble into ashes.

There was a tense, stunned silence—broken by a loud knock on the door.

"Come in!" called Noel, his eyes glinting.

There entered the white-bearded figure of Santa Claus, carrying an outsize in Christmas crackers!

A little gasp of bewilderment arose from the onlookers.

Santa Claus chuckled as he approached the amazed Diana.

"Pull a cracker with me, Di, for old times' sake!" he said—and his voice was the cheery voice of Jim Tarrant.

With a little cry of bewilderment, Diana started forward.

"Girls versus boys!" suggested Noel, grinning. "Pull away!"

There was a sudden, excited rush; the great cracker was pulled in half, and out fell a bundle of papers, neatly tied with red tape and decorated with holly!

Noel snatched it up, handing it to his friend.

"Uncle Jasper's will!" he declared. "The papers that were burnt were merely blank sheets. A merry Christmas!"

No one noticed Uncle Luke as he slipped silently out of the room—no one except Noel and his host.

They exchanged glances, and John Clavering smiled.

"It's Christmas," he said, "and I bear no grudge!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Next week's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale a day earlier than usual—on Thursday instead of Friday—and it will contain another grand Noel Raymond story, entitled: "The Mystery of Aladdin's Lamp."

G.C.W. 9

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