

"THE CLUE OF THE EASTER EGGS" — One of the six grand stories for school-girls inside.

No. 182. Vol. 7.

EVERY FRIDAY.

Week Ending April 15th, 1939

GIRLS' CRYSTAL^{2^D} WEEKLY



THE HAMPER FROM THE MYSTERIOUS MISS DALTON!

Would it help Olive and Letty to solve the strange secret connected with their missing chum?

(See "Her Unknown Enemy at School," inside.)

Brenda's Mystery Task in Hollywood



"BRENDA WINS!"

BRENDA CASTLE, who was employed in Hollywood by a Mrs. Benson as guide to her English nieces, Molly and Audrey Duncan, had a strange task to carry out.

She and her sister, Marion, had to discover a secret, involving their future happiness, which was hidden among the curios in Mrs Benson's "treasure-room."

Ruby Fletcher, Mrs. Benson's secretary, was the sisters' enemy, and she had previously got Marion dismissed in disgrace by Mrs. Benson. So that she should not be known as Marion's sister, Brenda had adopted the name of Collins.

Brenda realised that she must recover a vase, stolen by Ruby from Mrs. Benson's treasure-room, which had by accident been taken to a film magnate's home where a carnival was to be held.

Brenda could only gain admittance if she won a swimming contest; then she could take part in the carnival. But Ruby, too, was determined to get the vase. And, thanks to her treachery, Brenda's rival was leading in the contest by several points!

SHE'D got to win!

That thought hammered in Brenda's brain even as the cheers still rang out, applauding Ruby Fletcher's victory in the under-water swimming contest.

Everything depended on the diving event now. Not only had she got to win, but she must win so overwhelmingly as to wipe off the lead in points that Ruby had established for herself.

"Hard luck, Brenda!"

It was Gloria Deane who spoke. The famous film star had come across to where Brenda stood with Molly and Audrey, and she was smiling in that sweet, friendly way of hers.

"What happened?" she added. "I don't wish to belittle Ruby's splendid

effort, but I really thought you were going to be the winner."

Brenda bit her lip.

On her arm now showed a little red mark, and that proved to Brenda, at least, what had happened. Ruby had pinched her arm while they were under water, had deliberately contrived to make her lose.

But apparently no one else had seen the incident, and Brenda realised that the mark in itself would be insufficient proof to expose her rival's despicable action.

So Brenda merely said, trying to keep the bitterness out of her voice:

"Oh, just the luck of things, Gloria. But I'm not beaten yet, you know."

Gloria laughed.

"Of course you're not. Well, I'll just give you girls a few minutes to recover your breaths, and then we'll get straight on with the diving contest."

With another smile she moved away, mingling with her other guests, whereupon Molly quickly grabbed at her friend's arm, studying it intently.

"So that's the explanation," she said indignantly. "Ruby, eh? It was her fault you had to come to the surface so quickly. Why didn't you tell Gloria?"

"Shush!" Brenda shook her head.

"It wouldn't do any good, Molly."

"Perhaps you're right. But now we're warned, anyway. We'll jolly well watch Ruby every second during the diving, and see that she doesn't get up to any more of her beastly tricks," Molly said.

"Yes, rather," Audrey supported.

"But I don't think she'll find it so easy this time. We shall be diving one by one, and we'll soon spot anything out of the ordinary."

They sank down into three long, low sun-bathing chairs. Already the hot sun had dried their bodies and was bringing a tan to their limbs.

In front of them was the magnificent swimming pool, green lawns and beds of fragrant flowers, everywhere a riot of gay colours—the huge orange sun-umbrellas, beneath them orange wicker-tables, at which sat Gloria's guests, in

The swimming and diving contest meant more to Brenda than the mere honour of winning. For if she were successful, she would win a ticket to the carnival. And there she might have the chance to obtain that vase which was so vital to her sister and herself.

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

dazzling swim-suits or beach-pyjamas, in cool summery frocks or white flannels.

"Isn't this gorgeous?" Molly breathed.

"Hallo, get ready!" Audrey put in. "Gloria's going to announce the diving."

Gloria, graceful and lovely, stood on the broad, white surround of the pool.

"And now, everybody, we're going to have the diving contest!" she announced gaily.

There was a cheer from the guests. Gloria's idea of organising these contests had undoubtedly added to the success of her party.

Brenda rose, tense and tingling.

Now for it; now for the great effort she must make if she were to win that place in the morrow's carnival tableau, and so get on the track of the Redskin vase she was so desperately seeking.

With Molly and Audrey and the other competitors, she moved towards the tall diving tower. She saw Ruby, smiling and confident.

Brenda's hands clenched. Ruby shouldn't win! Ruby shouldn't forestall her in gaining possession of the vase.

"Each competitor will make four dives, one from each of the three boards, ending up with a swallow dive," Gloria announced. "A maximum of twenty-five points will be awarded for each dive. Now, who's going first?"

"I will," Ruby volunteered.

On to the first board she climbed, poised herself, and then down into the water she flashed.

"She splashed a little," Molly cried.

"Too confident," Brenda opined, and glanced across to where the judges stood.

Gloria, herself an expert swimmer, was one of them; and with her were two famous film actors who had themselves been champion swimmers before gaining renown on the screen.

"Twenty-two points," Gloria announced.

"You go now, Brenda," Molly said

eagerly. "Here's your chance to pick up three points!"

Trembling just a little, Brenda mounted to the first board. She must put everything she knew into every dive. Now! Through the air her body flashed, arms cleaving the water.

"Perfect!" went up a cry. And perfect the judges themselves thought it to be.

"Twenty-five points!" Gloria called out.

Brenda thrilled. Three points gained of the seven by which Ruby had been leading.

"Keep it up, Brenda!" Audrey cried excitedly. "My hat, look at Ruby scowling!"

And Brenda did keep it up. As in the under-water swimming, it soon became apparent that Brenda and Ruby were outstanding among the competitors. But this time, too, it was also apparent that, good as Ruby was at diving, Brenda was even better. But could she make up the leeway she had lost in the previous event?

Excitement grew as the diving continued and Brenda gained point after point.

Splash!
That was Ruby making her first dive from the topmost board.

"Twenty-two points!" Gloria cried. Brenda followed. And then, as Gloria called out the score, Molly gave an excited cheer.

"Hear that, Audrey? Twenty-three points. That makes Brenda level! Oh, goodness, everything depends on the final swallow dive now! I'm sure I shall faint with all this excitement!"

Level on points Brenda and Ruby were. There was an expectant hush when at last Ruby once more climbed to the highest board for the final dive.

Brenda watched tensely. Outlined against the blue of the sky she could see Ruby's face, grim and furious. For seconds, it seemed, her rival stood poised there. Then down she flashed.

"The best she's done!" Brenda murmured, admiration mingling with her anxiety.

"Twenty-three points!" Gloria cried. There was a cheer from the guests, then all eyes went to Brenda.

"You can do it!" Molly breathed, squeezing Brenda's arm.

But could she? Brenda's heart thumped inside her. A perfect swallow dive if she were to win—if she were to beat Ruby in their struggle for which the prize, over and beyond the honour of appearing in the carnival, was the vase they both so desperately wanted!

Now Brenda stood at the extreme edge of the board. Below her—so far below it looked—the unruffled, sparkling blue water. Up went her arms over her head.

She dived. Her body flashed through the air, arms spreading out as she dropped. Graceful as a swallow on the wing she looked. The surface of the water seemed to leap towards her.

Arms swept together again, and then she was plunging down into the blue depths, the water rippling over her.

Up she came again, shaking her dripping, helmeted head, her eyes flashing towards the judges. Had she done it? Had she won? Then Gloria's voice:

"Twenty-five points! Brenda wins—Brenda wins!" And the famous star laughed excitedly. "Oh, well done, Brenda! That last dive was beautiful!"

"Brenda wins!" Molly and Audrey shrieked in chorus, and rushed forward to hug their friend as she climbed up the steps of the pool.

MORE NEWS FROM MARION!

"CONGRATULATIONS, my dear!"

It was Mrs. Benson who spoke, beaming and delighted as she laid a hand on Brenda's shoulder.

"Thank you, Mrs. Benson!" Brenda laughed happily.

"A really splendid effort," her employer added. "I must say I thought Ruby was going to win. Where is Ruby?" she asked, looking around.

"Over there," Molly replied, her eyes twinkling. "And I must say she looks in a bit of a huff."

But that description was putting it very mildly. Over on the other side of the pool, Ruby Fletcher was stamping away, obviously in a tearing rage, unable to conceal her chagrin. One or two people were looking at her in surprise and with disapproval.

"Dear me!" Mrs. Benson frowned. "But then, I suppose she must be very disappointed."

"And so are Audrey and I," Molly said. "Here's Brenda going to take part in the carnival at this wonderful castle to-morrow, and we shan't be there to watch her."

Mrs. Benson smiled. "Perhaps you will be," she said rather mysteriously.

"But how can we? All the tickets are sold and we'll never be able to get in."

"I won't tantalise you," Mrs. Benson laughed. "You see, Molly, I have two tickets—"

"What?"

"Yes. It was rather awkward," Mrs. Benson continued. "I know how friendly you three girls have become and how you like to go about together everywhere, and, as I only had two tickets, I must confess I was going to use them myself. But now that Brenda's taking part in the carnival, you—"

"Auntie!"

"You and Audrey shall have the tickets!" Mrs. Benson finished.

"Hurrah!" Molly cried jubilantly,

her eyes shining. "Oh, that's ripping! That's marvellous! You darling—"

"Now run along and enjoy yourselves," Mrs. Benson laughingly cut in. Happily the three girls scampered off.

"We'll be able to help you find that vase after all, Brenda," Audrey said eagerly.

"One thing, Ruby's squashed now," Molly put in. "She won't be able to get it. Without a ticket she'll never get into the castle!"

Brenda nodded excitedly. She was confident now. By being a performer in the carnival she would have easy access to the basket wherein she had hidden the vase. Ruby was indeed thwarted.

And once she had the vase—a thrill went through Brenda. Did it hold the key to this mysterious secret which she and her sister Marion were trying to solve? This secret which, in some remarkable way, concerned their very destiny—which Ruby, too, was seeking.

But Brenda was not allowed to ponder over the problem. She was rushed into the gaiety of Gloria's party—and what fun it was! They were all tired when at last it broke up and they departed, Gloria having promised to call for them to-morrow evening and drive them to the carnival at the castle.

The three chums were up early the following morning despite their late night. Brenda glowed as she thought of the excitement awaiting her that evening.

Then suddenly, soon after breakfast, the telephone shrilled in the hall. Ruby, who happened to be passing, rushed to answer it.

"Yes, this is Greenways," she said. "Who— Oh! Who is it? Who is it, I say? Oh, all right; hang on! For you!" she said, turning to Brenda.

Brenda took the phone.

"Hallo!"

"Careful—careful, Brenda!" came a girlish voice over the wire. "No names. You know who it is?"

Brenda gave a gasp. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Ruby hovering near by.

"Yes," she said guardedly.



"Who was that?" Ruby asked, just as Brenda replaced the receiver. "Is that any business of yours?" asked Brenda coolly. She certainly had no intention of telling Ruby that she had just been speaking to her sister Marion.

But she was thrilled with eagerness. For the girl speaking to her was Marion, her sister.

"Brenda, we've got to get that vase back somehow," Marion said, an urgent note in her voice. "I've heard all about what happened—"

"I couldn't help it," Brenda said.

"I know. Ruby saw Professor Janson yesterday, and I listened in to what they were saying. Brenda, that definitely is the vase we want. The secret, whatever it is—I still don't know that—is to be found in those weird-looking symbols on it!"

"My hat!" Brenda whistled; found herself quivering.

"We've got to decipher them. But first we've got to get the vase. You're taking part in the carnival, aren't you?" Marion asked.

"Yes!"

"Fine! I shall be there, too. They're filming one of the tableaux and I wangled a job with the unit. Now listen, Brenda! I know the room where the basket is, but I shan't be able to get the vase. You will, but it'll be risky if you try to smuggle it out. So what I propose is this. You can hear me?"

"Yes," Brenda breathed, holding the receiver close to her ear, for now Marion was speaking softly but clearly.

"I'm going to hide in some bushes immediately outside that room," Marion went on. "I'll be there at eleven o'clock. Your tableau will be finished by then. Get the vase, and then give it to me through the window. I shall be leaving with the film unit shortly afterwards, so I'll be able to smuggle it out easily. Is that all clear, Brenda?"

"Perfectly!"

"But there's one thing we've got to be careful of," Marion continued. "Professor Janson is going to be there, too!"

"I see."

"Remember I told you he's a man with the greenest eyes I've ever seen. They positively glitter; you can't mistake him once you see him. Watch him, Brenda. Ruby's told him to get the vase at all costs. So be on your guard. Act as you think best if he tries to get it. But remember I shall be outside that room at eleven o'clock."

"I'll do as you say," Brenda said, still aware that Ruby was watching and listening from the other side of the hall.

"Good egg!" Marion's voice suddenly trembled with emotion. "Brenda, old thing, we're definitely on the track now. Once we get the vase the whole mystery will soon be cleared up. I know somebody who can do the deciphering for us—someone we can absolutely trust. And now, until tonight—good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Brenda replaced the receiver, her eyes shining.

"Here, who was that?" Ruby came striding forward, her eyes gleaming with mingled suspicion and fear.

Brenda surveyed her coolly.

"That any business of yours?"

"It was a girl—"

"Well, what of it? You seem to forget I've spent most of my life in Hollywood. Nothing strange to have a girl friend here, is it?"

And Brenda brushed past Ruby and hurried upstairs to tell Molly and Audrey the latest news.

"HERE I am, girls!"

"Hallo, Gloria!"
Gloria, exquisite in a beautiful, flowing, white gown, a costly fur wrap

about her slender shoulders, had just arrived in her glittering limousine.

"Come on, then. Jump in!" she cried gaily.

The three girls ran down the steps and swarmed into the car.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Benson!" Brenda called, leaning through the open window and waving.

"Good-bye, aunty!"

The car swept out of the drive, and then they were bowling along swiftly under the starry sky.

"What's Brenda going to be in this tableau?" Molly asked Gloria eagerly.

"She's going to be a mermaid," Gloria told them.

"My hat!"

"And she's going to wear a phosphorescent costume," the film-star went on.

"Lovely! And how effective! We'll be able to see her swimming about in the water, even though it's dark?"

"That's the idea," Gloria laughed. "And wait till you see the castle! It's one of the best show places in all California."

Excitedly the girls looked at each other. The car sped on towards the Hollywood hills, but suddenly Gloria began to apply the brakes.

"Are we there already?" Brenda asked eagerly.

"Hardly!" Gloria replied. "But an acquaintance who's going to the carnival asked if I'd mind taking him. He's an awfully interesting man— But here he is waiting for us."

The car glided to a standstill. For a moment Brenda caught a glimpse of a tall figure standing in the glare of the headlights; then, as he came quickly towards the door of the car, she suddenly went rigid.

For this man—he had a pair of piercing, green eyes that glittered with a baleful, uncanny intensity in the darkness.

"Girls, meet Professor Janson!" Gloria said gaily, as she flung open the door for him to enter.

BRENDA MEETS HER ENEMY

"DELIGHTED to know you!" The professor's thin lips parted in a smile as he surveyed the girls.

"And this is Brenda," Gloria said, having already introduced Molly and Audrey.

"Charmed!"

Brenda nodded weakly. Those incredibly green eyes of his were fixed on hers, holding her fascinated stare. She shuddered a little. Clever, Professor Janson might be—he looked terribly clever with his tall, dome-shaped forehead—but his lean face, disfigured by a long scar on his chin, gave him a sinister appearance.

And this was the man who was working in league with Ruby against her and her sister!

Suddenly Brenda saw the significance of this situation. It had been cleverly and deliberately contrived.

Ruby had found out that the girls were being taken by Gloria to the carnival. She did not know that Brenda was aware of the professor's description, and would know him instantly. Ruby had planned that Professor Janson should make sure of meeting Brenda so that he could watch her at the castle grounds.

He would wait for her to find the vase, and then, when she had it, make a desperate attempt to gain possession of it.

Brenda smiled grimly. Thank goodness it was Marion, and not she, who would smuggle away the vase. The professor would not know that; he would be watching her while Marion safely got away with it.

But she must watch him—yes, watch him closely, as, no doubt, he would be observing her every movement.

Gloria drove on. Now they were on the fringe of the Hollywood hills. And then ahead of them a pale glow lighted the dark sky. Molly suddenly gave an excited cry.

"Look! The castle!"

"Floodlit!" Audrey added.

They swept towards it. And now they could see the castle, its towers and turrets bathed in glaring white light. They turned through massive gates into a wide drive, illuminated its whole length by powerful arc lamps.

Ernst B. Vahl's wonder-home now became revealed in all its magnificence—a replica of a famous and historic English castle, breath-taking, awe-inspiring in its grandeur, made all the more beautiful by the elaborate floodlights which shone up to its battlements.

"My hat! What a marvellous place!" Molly gasped.

"And look at the lake!" Brenda cried.

The large ornamental lake stretched away at one side of the castle, fountains throwing up cascades of what appeared to be coloured water, but which was due to the effect of the illuminations strung about it.

Crowds were everywhere. Long rows of seats had been arranged on the banks of the lake. Lights blazed everywhere, turning the whole place into a coloured fairyland.

"Come on, Brenda," Gloria said merrily. "We'll look round for the other performers in your tableau and get you introduced. No need to hurry to your seats yet," she added, turning to Molly and Audrey.

They all climbed out of the car. The professor, Brenda noticed, kept close to them.

Famous film actors and actresses nodded greetings to Gloria and her companions. It was one long whirl of excitement for the friends. Then Gloria was leading them towards one of the side entrances to the castle.

"We'll go along to the dressing-rooms," she said.

Down an oak-panelled corridor they passed, and then Gloria paused at one of the doors.

"Here we are!" she cried.

The professor, with one last searching look at Brenda, passed on down the corridor; then Gloria was ushering the friends into the room.

There were some dozen girls there, all changing into their costumes. But now, at sight of Gloria, they came rushing forward, shouting greetings. They all seemed to know her and Gloria to know them.

"Here's Brenda! She's in the mermaid scene, taking Hildreth's place! And, my word, can she swim, girls!" Gloria exclaimed.

"Glad to know you, Brenda!"

They were all friendly, all chattering away, all laughing, until Brenda felt quite dazed and breathless.

"Now we'll have to be going," Gloria said, turning to Molly and Audrey. "See you later, Brenda!"

With gay waves, the three of them departed, leaving Brenda with the crowd.

"Here's your costume?" one girl cried. "Say, you'll look swell in it!"

(Please turn to the back page.)

The CLUE of the EASTER EGGS



By
PETER
LANGLEY

THE GIRL WHO VANISHED

"IT looks a jolly kind of place," remarked Noel Raymond, as he paused at the gateway leading up to the picturesque hotel that stood on the edge of the cliffs.

The young detective, having decided to spend the Easter holiday by the sea, had booked a room at the Southdene Private Hotel on the recommendation of a friend, and now, as he got his first look of the place, he was well pleased with his choice.

Its position on the cliffs was ideal, and a further attraction was that it made a point of catering for young holiday-makers.

He went striding up the drive, but suddenly halted as his attention was attracted by something that glittered among the bushes. On investigation, he discovered that lying there were a number of broken chocolate Easter eggs, still in their silver foil.

"Hallo," Noel murmured, with a faint grin, "it looks as if someone has been throwing away their presents."

He continued on his way to the house, and his ring was answered by a trim-looking, but rather agitated maid. She ushered him into the hall, then asked him to wait while she fetched Mrs. Graham, the proprietress.

Noel was struck by the unusual quietness of the house; the laughter and merriment generally associated with an hotel for young people was completely lacking.

"I suppose your visitors are out on an excursion?" he ventured.

The girl shook her head. "N-no, sir," she faltered. "They—they are all in the lounge with Mrs. Graham. Something—something dreadful has happened."

Instantly Noel was all sympathy. "Tell me about it," he said. "Perhaps I can help!"

"It's not really my place to talk about it, sir," the maid replied, "but Miss Lucy was such a dear—"

"Miss Lucy?" echoed Noel. "Yes, sir, the young lady who was engaged to act as hostess. Mrs.

Graham thought worlds of her, and it doesn't seem possible that she could have run away in the night with all the club money. You see—"

The maid broke off as the door leading to the lounge opened and a frail-looking woman with greying hair appeared. It was Mrs. Graham, the proprietress, and appealingly she looked at the young detective when he had introduced himself.

"Perhaps you could help us," she breathed.

"I'd love to," said Noel, with a boyish smile. "Tell me exactly what the trouble is."

But, before Mrs. Graham could do so, the lounge door again opened, and out into the hall came a crowd of guests, chiefly youths and girls. They stared curiously at Noel, then, when they learnt of his identity, they added their appeals to that of the proprietress.

"Our holiday will be spoilt unless this mystery is cleared up," declared one girl. "We were all relying on Lucy. We never dreamt she'd let us down."

"It was a rotten trick on her part," put in a dark, elegant youth. "To steal all our funds—"

"Steady on, Standish," cut in a freckle-faced, cheery young man, named Dick Clancey. "We can't judge Lucy without knowing all the facts."

"Exactly," put in Noel. "Perhaps you'd be good enough to give them to

Three broken Easter eggs in the garden of the little hotel! Noel Raymond felt sure that they were the clue to the mystery of Lucy Hargrove's disappearance. For though the other guests at the hotel thought she had vanished of her own free will, Noel thought differently. He was sure she had been kidnapped!

me. Mrs. Graham, please tell me what happened."

The proprietress, her lips trembling, complied. It seemed that for several years, since her husband's death, she had run the hotel on her own. But recently, owing to ill-health, she had found the task of organising too much for her, so she had engaged Lucy Hargrove, the daughter of an old friend, as hostess.

Lucy had entered into the work with enthusiasm, and had won general popularity. Then something had happened.

"I don't know what it was," faltered the old lady, "but something seemed to come over Lucy all at once. I noticed the change in her a few days ago—when we were making plans for Easter. Bob, my eldest son, is coming home from abroad—and he and Lucy are very fond of each other. She was as excited as I was, and appeared very happy. Then suddenly she seemed to change; I came across her tearing up a letter, and she looked very upset.

"When the visitors began to arrive, for the Easter holidays, Lucy brightened up; but I noticed her behaving very strangely at times. I thought that some news might be worrying her, but she only laughed when I taxed her with it.

"Then—then, last night—" Her voice faltered.

"Last night," supplied the dark-haired young man bluntly, "she just slipped out of the house—after dark—and took our funds with her. All the money we'd subscribed towards the outings she was going to arrange for us—the charabanc excursion to the castle, the steamer trip—everything!" he concluded in disgust.

"Mr. Raymond—I just can't believe it!" declared the old lady. "Lucy was a dear child—loyal, honest as the day. Something dreadful must have happened to make her do a thing like this."

Noel looked round at the crowd of youthful faces—some sympathetic, others openly rebellious.

"It's not fair!" burst out one of the girls. "Our holiday's been ruined; we've no plans, now, and hardly any money. What can we do?"

Thoughtfully Noel lit a cigarette, his practised mind swiftly running over the few facts in his possession.

"Have you a photograph of the missing girl?" he asked.

One of the guests handed him a cabinet-portrait from the mantelpiece.

Noel stared keenly at the attractive face smiling at him from the portrait—the laughing eyes and firmly moulded chin.

"That girl's no more capable of a low-down trick than the old lady herself," he decided. "There's a lot more behind this business than meets the eye!"

But his expression betrayed nothing of his thoughts as he replaced the photograph on the table, and glanced keenly round the group.

"When was Miss Hargrove's absence first discovered?" he asked.

"This morning," replied one of the

girls. "She did not come down to breakfast, and Mrs. Graham asked me to go to her room. She wasn't there, and the bed hadn't been slept in."

"And who was the last to see her last night?" Noel inquired. It was Mrs. Graham who replied, her voice shaking:

"Nellie—the maid who let you in. Would you like to question her?"

"If you please."

A moment later the maid entered, looking pale and nervous. Noel questioned her gently, anxious not to scare her. The girl proved eager to tell her story.

"It was yesterday evening, sir, and everyone was out, except Mrs. Graham, who was lying down in her room. Miss Lucy had gone out to buy the Easter eggs. She went out soon after tea."

"Just a minute!" cut in Noel, with a slight start. "Did you say Easter eggs?"

"Yes, sir," replied the maid, obviously surprised by the young detective's tone. "Miss Lucy had decided to buy them as a surprise for the guests. She went out about five, and I hadn't heard her come in when I started to lay supper—"

"What time was that?" cut in Noel.

"Just after eight, sir. I know, because I looked at the dining-room clock. I was laying the table for supper, when I heard someone moving about in the small sitting-room."

"Go on!" said Noel, his interest quickening.

He was thinking, inconsequently, of the broken chocolate Easter eggs in the shrubbery.

"Well, sir, I wondered who it could be, as I hadn't heard anyone come in. I knocked at the door, and Miss Lucy replied: 'She said 'All right, Nellie, it's only me.'"

"Well—and then?" prompted Noel, as the girl hesitated.

"I didn't go in, sir. The door was locked. I said: 'I suppose you're arranging the Easter eggs, miss?' You see, sir, it was to have been a surprise for the visitors; but Miss Lucy had told me about it, and I'd promised not to breathe a word."

"Yes, Nellie!" she called back. "I locked the door, as I was afraid the others might come in. I didn't think any more of it at the time, sir, but went on with my work."

"And did you see anything of Miss Lucy after that?" asked Noel.

"No, sir. She didn't come in to supper; but I wasn't surprised, because lately she's been going to bed early, and writing in her room. Mrs. Graham told me I wasn't to disturb her."

"So her absence wasn't discovered till this morning?" muttered Noel. He whistled softly, and stared sharply round the group. "What about the Easter eggs?" he demanded.

"They were there, Mr. Raymond—arranged in the sitting-room, when we came down to breakfast this morning," replied one of the girls. "The sitting-room was locked when we came home last night, and Nellie told us that Miss Lucy was arranging a surprise."

"Yet the door was unlocked this morning?" muttered Noel. "Queer! Lucy must have unlocked it before leaving the house!" He tossed his cigarette into the grate. "I'd like to have a look at those Easter eggs!" he remarked.

Nellie led the way to the sitting-room, Noel following with the guests. The young detective glanced keenly round the daintily furnished room. The Easter eggs were arranged on

tables, cabinets, and shelves, making an attractive show in the sunlight.

Noel strolled round the room, examining them keenly, picking them up, one by one, and replacing them exactly as he had found them.

There was a curious gleam in his blue eyes as he turned to confront the group of young guests.

"I'd like to try an experiment," he said. "Will one of you girls kindly hand me the large Easter egg on the shelf above the clock?"

It was Jean Maitland, the auburn-haired girl, who stepped forward. She couldn't quite reach the shelf, and looked round for something to stand on.

"Never mind," said Noel. "One of you other girls might try."

They all tried in turn, but only one of them could reach it—a tall, blonde girl named Vera Haslett.

"Thanks!" said Noel, taking the large chocolate egg, and turning it over in his hand. "How tall was Lucy Hargrove?"

The guests stared.

"About my height," explained Jean Maitland. "Perhaps a little shorter."

"Queer," murmured Noel. "Yet she reached that shelf, and apparently without standing on a chair. The seats are plush, and would show the impression of high heels."

His eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he picked up another chocolate egg from the table, and glanced at the torn portion of a price label attached to the ribbon.

Then a soft whistle escaped his lips. He stiffened suddenly, staring sharply round the group.

"I think I understand," he said. "It would explain why the door was locked."

"What are you getting at?" demanded the dark-haired Roger Standish, with a frown.

Noel's boyish face was rather grim as he replied:

"You're all mistaken about Lucy Hargrove. She did not run away. She was kidnapped!"

The stunned, incredulous silence that followed his dramatic statement was broken by a horrified cry.

Old Mrs. Graham stood in the doorway, her face as pale as death. Noel sprang to catch her as she fell forward in a dead faint.

NOEL'S SURPRISING DISCOVERY

"MR. RAYMOND, for goodness' sake explain!"

It was young Dick Clancey, of the freckled face and unruly hair, who spoke for the others.

The agitated group of youthful guests surrounded Noel on the veranda outside the house.

Mrs. Graham had been carried to her room, and a doctor had been urgently sent for. The medical man looked grave, but declared that there was no immediate cause for worry.

The old lady was suffering from heart trouble. She had been warned to avoid any excitement or agitation. The disappearance of Lucy Hargrove must have upset her more than had been apparent. The shock of accidentally overhearing Noel's remark had brought on one of her attacks.

"You say Lucy was kidnapped?" asked Dick Clancey. "But why? What on earth makes you think that?"

"It's seems impossible," whispered the auburn-haired Jean. "Why should anyone want to kidnap Lucy?"

"Fantastic nonsense!" cut in Roger Standish, with a sneer.

Noel glanced at him sharply.

"That remains to be seen," he rejoined. "I've certain grounds for my statement. One or two will suffice, for the moment. If Lucy Hargrove had intended to steal out in the night, she wouldn't have gone to the trouble of buying those Easter eggs—let alone spent time in arranging them! That's one point. Another is the fact that her bed-room is undisturbed; apparently she didn't stop to pack her things."

"No time," suggested Standish.

"She had all night—if your suspicions are correct," rejoined Noel. "My argument is that she did not even go to her room! Who was the last to see her?"

"Nellie, the maid," said young Clancey.

"Nellie spoke to her, but she didn't see her," replied Noel. "She can't tell us whether Lucy looked pale, agitated—or just her usual self. Did anyone see her before she went shopping?"

"I did," put in Jean. "She looked a little pale, but was smiling quite happily. She was carrying a large shopping-basket and her handbag. She waved her hand as she passed me, on the way to the village."

"And the next person to see—or rather hear her—was Nellie," said Noel thoughtfully. "At about eight o'clock. Presumably she had just returned from shopping. After that—she just vanished!"

"I get you, sir!" exclaimed young Clancey excitedly. "You suggest that Lucy must have been kidnapped between the time she spoke to Nellie—and the time we others came in for supper. No one could have left the house after that without being seen."

"Precisely," said Noel. "Lucy Hargrove was apparently kidnapped some time between eight o'clock and ten-thirty. We don't know why—or by whom; but it's fairly certain that the kidnapper was someone who knew the movements of the household—possibly someone actually staying at the hotel!"

"Look here," exclaimed Roger Standish angrily, "are you trying to suggest that one of us—"

"Just a minute," cut in Noel. "I'm merely trying to get at the facts. It should be a fairly simple matter for everyone to account for their movements during the evening."

"That's fair enough, sir!" declared young Clancey. "I'm willing, for one. Let me see. After tea I went out for some cigarettes; then I strolled along the prom, listened to the band, and met Jean—Miss Maitland—at exactly eight o'clock outside the Palais de Danse. I was with her all the evening, and we came back to the hotel in time for a late supper."

The auburn-haired Jean Maitland confirmed his story. A number of the others had made up a party and visited the cinema; their movements could all be checked between the vital hours of eight o'clock and supper-time.

The only member of the party who could not satisfactorily account for his movements was the dark-haired Roger Standish.

He declared that he had gone for a country walk—and had not met a soul. He had come back late—nearly eleven.

"But if you think I'm your mysterious kidnapper," he sneered, "you can go on thinking it—for all I care!"

And turning on his heel, he strode away across the grounds.

A rather awkward silence followed his departure; the young guests were obviously upset and ill-at-ease.

"Look here," cut in Noel, in an attempt to cheer them up, "for goodness' sake don't worry. I won't let

you down! I'll find Miss Hargrove before long—never fear! And you can help me!"

"We can?" chorused a dozen eager voices.

"Detective work," put in Noel, with a flicker of a smile. "It's not so hard as it seems. You say you haven't any plans? Well, what about looking on this mystery as a kind of holiday task—something to exercise your wits? After all, fifteen minds should be better than one!"

An excited murmur of agreement greeted this suggestion.

"We'll start by searching the grounds," said Noel. "I suggest you spread out and hunt in couples. We'll meet at lunch-time and exchange notes."

Filled with enthusiasm, the crowd of youthful guests took their departure. As Noel also went out into the grounds, Nellie, the maid, came running after him.

"Excuse me, sir," she faltered, "but I couldn't help hearing what you said to the others. Couldn't I help, too? I was so fond of Miss Lucy!"

Noel rested a hand in a kindly fashion on her shoulder.

"Perhaps you can help, Nellie," he said. "I want you to repeat that last conversation you had with Miss Lucy—about the Easter eggs."

Nellie looked surprised, but she complied obediently, repeating the conversation word for word.

"Did Miss Lucy tell you how many eggs she was going to buy?" Noel asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the girl promptly. "One for each of the guests—fifteen altogether."

"And there are exactly fifteen eggs in the sitting-room—I counted them," remarked Noel. "Then why did she buy the odd three?"

Nellie stared at him in bewilderment. "Come and look," said the young detective. He led the way along the drive, and pulled aside the shrubbery—pointing to the three broken chocolate eggs.

"Know anything about these?" he asked.

"No, sir!" gasped the girl, staring. "It looks—it looks as if someone's trampled on them!"

"Exactly!" said Noel grimly. "If we can explain these broken eggs, Nellie, we can solve the mystery of Miss Lucy's disappearance!"

"What are you going to do?" the girl asked breathlessly.

"I'm going to follow the trail from here, Nellie," said Noel, "and you can come with me, if you like."

"Thank—thank you, sir!" the girl cried in delight.

Noel led the way into the shrubbery, his keen eyes scanning the ground.

"You can see that someone came this way," he explained, "and pretty recently. Those twigs are freshly snapped. That's queer, though!"

He picked up one of the twigs, pointing to a trace of yellow mud that had been washed down from an adjacent bank.

"This twig was broken before the heavy-rain yesterday evening."

"But it stopped raining at six, sir," objected Nellie, flushing at her own boldness. "And Miss Lucy couldn't have been kidnapped till after eight o'clock, when she spoke to me."

There was a puzzled frown in Noel's eyes.

"That's what's worrying me, Nellie," he said. "But I'm convinced we're on the right track. Keep your eyes open, and see if you can spot any clue."

The girl was obviously delighted at

the trust implied. Very earnestly she followed at Noel's heels, scanning the ground.

"Look, sir!" she exclaimed suddenly. "It looks as if a fire's been lit over there!"

She pointed through the undergrowth towards a pile of dull grey ashes, still damp from the previous night's rain.

Noel, who had reached a gap in the wall, turned, with a smile.

"Splendid!" he said. "We'll examine that in a minute. I just want to see where this leads. Wait here for me."

He climbed through the gap, to find himself on a narrow path skirting the cliffs. His eyes narrowed as he saw that there was an ugly gap where the chalk had recently given way, and near the gap the grass was muddy and trampled.

His face paling, Noel started forward, dropping to his knees on the muddy ground.

Far below him, he could see the waves, swirling and foaming against the cliffs. But he saw something else.

On a ledge just below where he knelt something had been caught up in the stunted bushes.

The ledge could be approached only by a narrow, treacherous slope, but Noel did not hesitate. Swinging him-

self over the brink of the cliff, he commenced the precarious climb. Breathless and dishevelled, he reached the ledge, and reached out for the object caught up in the bush. It was a basket, half-filled with chocolate and cardboard Easter eggs.

And just then the peaceful silence was shattered by a girl's terrified scream.

"Mr. Raymond, sir, look out!"

Instinctively Noel leaped to his feet as an ominous rumbling greeted his ears. He stared up, in time to see a massive boulder lurch forward over the edge of the cliff and hurtle down towards the ledge on which he stood.

THE TORN-UP LETTER

WHITE to the lips, Noel sprang backwards, flattening himself against the cliff.

Only in the nick of time! With a hideous crash, the boulder hit the ledge where he had been standing, then plunged down into the sea. Gasping at the narrowness of his escape, Noel looked up, to see the maid gazing down at him in alarm.

"All right, Nellie!" he called.

Slinging the basket over his arm, he climbed to the top of the cliff, to find the girl almost sobbing in relief.

Noel took her by the shoulders.

"Thanks—a lot!" he said gravely.

"If you hadn't called out—"

He shrugged, leaving his sentence uncompleted.



"It looks as though this has been opened recently," declared Noel. He pulled apart the two portions of the Easter egg, and out of it fluttered several torn scraps of paper. Was this a clue to the vanished girl's whereabouts?

self over the brink of the cliff, he commenced the precarious climb. Breathless and dishevelled, he reached the ledge, and reached out for the object caught up in the bush. It was a basket, half-filled with chocolate and cardboard Easter eggs.

"Well, I'll be dashed!" exclaimed Noel.

He counted the eggs; there were twelve—just three short of the required number. Those broken eggs must have fallen from the basket. But what of the other fifteen eggs in the sitting-room at the hotel?

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Noel, his eyes flashing. "I believe I've got it! I can see how the blighter tricked us all! If only I could hit on the motive for—"

Headless of everything else, Noel knelt there on the ledge, turning the Easter eggs over in the basket.

"I—I saw the boulder move!" Nellie whispered. "I just screamed—"

Noel strode to the jagged gap above which the rock had been precariously balanced. A startled ejaculation escaped his lips as he snatched up a piece of twisted iron piping.

"That was used to lever the boulder over the edge!" he told himself, and turned to Nellie. "When the boulder moved, did you see anything else?" he asked.

The girl shook her head.

"I—I was trying to attract your attention over the cliff," she faltered, "to show you what I'd found."

Noel glanced at the object the girl held in her hand.

"Hallo! What's this?" he ejaculated.

"It—it was among those ashes, sir," whispered the girl.

Noel snatched it from her, his eyes narrowing. It was a man's chamois-

leather glove, badly charred, and bearing traces of tar.

"This may be a valuable clue, Nellie," he said, as he slipped the glove into his pocket. "Meanwhile, what do you make of these?"

He held out the basket of Easter eggs.

"Why, sir, that's Miss Lucy's basket," gasped the girl—"the one she took out with her yesterday afternoon!"

"I thought as much!" said Noel grimly. "And these, apparently, are the eggs she bought, less the three that were dropped in the bushes. We're getting warmer!"

"I don't understand, sir," whispered Nellie. "Did Miss Lucy buy two lots of Easter eggs? Those in the sitting-room—"

"I think I've an answer to that puzzle," said Noel, his eyes gleaming. "But the chief thing at the moment is to find out why Miss Lucy was kidnapped. If only we could find the solution to that—Hullo!"

He broke off, staring at one of the cardboard Easter eggs that he had turned out of the basket.

"It looks as though this has been opened recently," he declared.

Hastily he untied the ribbon and pulled apart the two portions of the cardboard egg. Out of it fluttered several torn scraps of paper. Noel and the little maid scrambled for them.

"A letter!" jerked Noel, as he pieced them together. "Phew! This must be the letter that Lucy was tearing up when Mrs. Graham came into the room."

"What does it say, sir?" whispered Nellie, her voice trembling with excitement.

Noel was scanning the tersely-worded message. There was no clue to whom it had been addressed. It began, without preamble:

"Arranging to have Donald Graham arrested on his return home. Make sure he doesn't give us the slip. Keep an eye on the girl—she's dangerous.—F."

"Great Scott!" gasped Noel. "Donald Graham—that's the old lady's son! So that's why Lucy tore up the letter! She was afraid of the shock to the old lady. She must have tumbled to the plot, and that's why she was kidnapped!"

His mind was working swiftly as the disjointed pieces of the baffling mystery fell into place.

"She must have intended to show this to someone. She took it out with her. The kidnapper followed her on her return home. Lucy, suspecting that she was being tracked, hid the torn letter in the cardboard egg."

"The man concealed himself in the shrubbery and sprang out at her. There was a struggle. Three of the eggs fell out of her basket. She broke away and ran towards the cliffs. The sounder overlooked her; and she probably threw the basket over the cliff—"

"But, sir, she came back to the house at eight o'clock!" gasped Nellie.

"I wonder!" returned Noel. "Look here, Nellie, we've got to work quickly, you and I. I've got to find Miss Lucy. She's the only one who can clear up the mystery and save the old lady from a shock that may jeopardise her life!"

"And what—what am I to do, sir?" whispered the girl.

"Go back to the house—as quickly as you can," ordered Noel. "If Donald Graham turns up, warn him of the plot. At all costs, prevent any rumours from

reaching the old lady's ears. I'll get back—as quickly as I can."

The young detective watched Nellie dart away on her urgent errand. His boyish face grave and troubled, he took the charred glove from his pocket and examined it.

"The last clue," he muttered, "and the most important of the lot! Why did he burn his gloves? The answer is—tar! But where did he pick up the tar?"

Noel's restless gaze searched the trees and cliffs, finally becoming riveted on the black hulk of an old barge, lying at anchor in the bay.

"Did the tar come off that?" he muttered. "Can Lucy be imprisoned there?"

He raced along the top of the cliff till he came to a zig-zag path that led to the beach; then eagerly he went scrambling down the treacherous slope.

WHEN Nellie reached the house she found that the young guests had all returned. They were clustering round a tall, bronze-faced young man, whose handsome features bore a striking resemblance to Mrs. Graham's.

Nellie's heart missed a beat. Though she had never before seen the young man, she knew at once that he was Donald Graham, the old lady's son!

The others were telling him about Lucy Hargrove's disappearance. There was a worried, perplexed look in the young man's eyes.

"But Lucy wouldn't do a thing like that!" he declared hotly. "Confound it! There's some other explanation. Mother's no end cut up about it, but she's insisted on getting up for lunch. Hullo! What is it?"

He turned as Nellie plucked frantically at his sleeve.

"Please, sir, may I—may I speak to you?" she faltered.

Just then there came a loud knocking at the front door.

"I'll go!" announced Donald.

"No, sir—please!" Nellie desperately barred his way. She had caught a glimpse of a uniformed figure waiting on the drive. "Let—let me go!"

She darted out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Her heart beating quickly, she approached the front door. The knocking was repeated, more loudly. Fearful that Mrs. Graham might hear, Nellie hastily opened the door.

A police inspector stood there. "Donald Graham live here?" he asked curtly.

He took Nellie's hesitation for a reply and pushed his way into the hall.

"You can't come in!" she gasped. "Please—please, wait. I'll tell Mr. Graham—"

The inspector shook his head grimly. "I've a warrant for the young man's arrest—" he began.

While they stood there arguing a car drew up at the door and Noel Raymond sprang out.

"Just a minute!" he called.

The inspector recognised the famous young detective, and he halted.

"I—I tried to stop him, sir," whispered Nellie brokenly.

"Good girl!" breathed Noel. "Just step in and ask Donald Graham, Dick Clancey and Roger Standish to step out here, will you?"

A moment later Donald Graham strode out, followed by young Dick Clancey and Roger Standish.

"What's all this—" began Donald Graham truculently.

"Just a minute, Graham," put in Noel. "We don't want to disturb your mother. The inspector, here, has a warrant for your arrest—"

"What?" gasped Donald, paling. "On what charge?"

"Embezzlement," said the inspector.

There came a broken cry from the car. Noel started forward, to assist a white-faced girl to alight.

"Lucy!" exclaimed Donald.

"Don't!" Lucy Hargrove clung to his arm. "Don, they shan't arrest you! I've got the proof—the proof of your innocence. It was all a plot. The letters and papers are hidden in a bureau in the sitting-room—"

"No, you don't!" rapped Noel.

With a sudden bound he sprang at young Dick Clancey as the latter made for the veranda. A pair of handcuffs snapped on the young man's wrists.

"What's the idea?" he panted, his face convulsed.

"You're under arrest," said Noel.

"On what charge?" gasped Clancey.

"The attempted kidnaping of Miss Lucy Hargrove!" rejoined Noel. "I found her imprisoned in an old barge."

Dick Clancey laughed scornfully.

"That won't do," he shouted. "I've got an alibi—a complete alibi—from eight o'clock last night to half-past ten—"

"I don't doubt it," replied Noel.

"But, as it happens, Miss Hargrove was kidnapped at six o'clock!"

"You're mad!" rejoined the young man, his face paling. "She was in the house, arranging Easter eggs, at eight o'clock. The maid spoke to her—"

"On the contrary!" interrupted Noel grimly. "The maid spoke to someone who was locked in the sitting-room. That someone was you, Clancey! You'd come back to the house in an attempt to find those papers hidden by Lucy. It was a quarter to eight; the dining-room clock was slow. When the maid called out, you answered—in Lucy Hargrove's voice. You've not been a music-hall artist for nothing. I found some old press cuttings in your room—Dick Clancey, Impersonator."

"Nellie's question about the Easter eggs rather upset you. You'd not reckoned on that. So you slipped out early this morning before the others were about and bought some more eggs. Unluckily for you, you left a price-label attached to one of them—and the label was stamped on the back with *to-day's date!*"

"Obviously, Miss Hargrove couldn't have bought it yesterday, so your clever alibi fell through."

"Confound you!" spluttered Clancey, struggling to free himself. "Why should I have kidnapped the girl—?"

"To prevent her from exposing the plot against her fiance," snapped Noel.

"You wanted him disgraced—for business reasons."

The old lady appeared in the doorway, leaning on Nellie's arm.

"Why, what has happened, Donald?" she asked. "Lucy—my dear!"

Noel motioned the inspector to remove his prisoner.

"Just a little misunderstanding, Mrs. Graham," he replied. "But it might have been more serious if it hadn't been for two very plucky girls."

Briefly he explained Nellie's part in the affair.

"Well—well," remarked the old lady, taking her big son by the arm. "Really, I don't understand, even now. I'm sure Mr. Raymond wouldn't mind telling me the whole story while we have lunch."

"Rather not!" declared Noel. "I bet we're all ready for lunch—and a happy Easter to everyone!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"THE PUZZLE OF THE PAPER-CHASE"—that is the title of next Friday's detective story, featuring Noel Raymond. Don't miss it.



Her Unknown Enemy at School

By GAIL WESTERN

THE FOURTH FORM VOTES

OLIVE FRENCH, Fourth Form captain at St. Kit's School, and Letty Johnson, her chum, had been helping Jess Grant, a newcomer to the Fourth, to unmask a mysterious enemy at the school who was trying to get Jess expelled.

They knew that in the village lived a girl who was Jess' very double, and who was helping the unknown enemy.

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

Olive and Letty searched for her in vain. When they returned to St. Kit's the Head informed them that the Senior Sports Club funds had been stolen—and it seemed certain that the missing Jess was the thief!

IN horror Olive and Letty stared at the penknife that Lorna Meredith held out.

If what the prefect had said was true, then their missing chum had not run away in order to save Olive from losing the Fourth Form captaincy. She was a thief, and she had run away in order to escape the consequences of her own folly.

Winifred Butler, the Fifth Former whom Olive and Letty half suspected of being Jess' unknown enemy, sniggered as she saw their distress.

"So what everyone's been saying about that new girl is true," she commented. "But fancy her having the nerve to burgle the Sports Fund cash-box!"

Her sneering words roused Olive. She flung the Fifth Former a look of contempt, then stormily she faced Lorna Meredith and the headmistress.

"It's not true!" she cried. "It's all some horrible mistake!"

"It's more than that," burst out Letty, her plump cheeks red with anger. "It's a plot!"

"Letty!"

Miss Bramleigh raised her hands in scandalised horror, but the plump girl was too excited to pick her words.

"It is, Miss Bramleigh, I know it is," she cried. "It wasn't Jess who stole that money at all. It was that enemy of hers. It's a frame-up, that's what it is."

The Head frowned.

"Please stop talking nonsense, Letty," she commanded, "and please be good enough to refrain from using that dreadful slang in my presence. The evidence is clear enough; there can be no mistake. Jess Grant is the thief."

"But she isn't—oh, she isn't!" blurted out Letty desperately, while Olive surveyed the headmistress appealingly.

"Letty's right, Miss Bramleigh," she declared. "It is a plot. It must be Jess' unknown enemy who has taken the money. Jess is as honest as the day. She'd never steal anything—oh, I know she wouldn't! And then there's that note she left; surely that proves it was to help me that Jess ran away?"

The Head pressed her lips together.

"That note only proves how cunning Jess Grant is," she answered. "No, I am sorry, girls. Your loyalty does you credit, but there can be no going against facts. Jess is the thief."

"But, Miss Bramleigh—"

Both Olive and Letty uttered a sharp cry of protest, but the Head refused to listen.

"That will do, please," she said. "Be good enough to return to your dormitories. And, Lorna—" She turned to the prefect. "Call in everyone. It is useless to carry on with the search. By now that wretched girl will have made herself scarce. We must inform the police to-morrow."

The police!

Olive and Letty exchanged anguished looks. Their missing chum was in danger of arrest.

"Oh, poor Jess!" muttered Olive, with a groan, and agitatedly she clutched at Letty's sleeve. "You agree with me, don't you?" she gulped. "You really do think that Jess is innocent?"

The Fourth-Formers little realised how it hurt Olive to say that she would forget all about Jess Grant. But Olive realised that it was the only way—if she was to continue her task to find Jess' unknown enemy.

Her plump chum nodded vigorously. "Of course I do, old scout. The whole business is a frame-up. It's that unknown enemy we've got to thank for all this." As she spoke, Letty's gaze went across to Winifred Butler, who was walking back to the school ahead of them. "I wonder if she is the wretch we've been trying to trap for so long," she murmured.

Olive shook her head.

"I don't know, but I mean to find out. Yes, Letty, that's what we've got to do—unmask Jess' enemy here at school. That's the only way of discovering the truth. Poor Jess can't do anything to help herself now, but we can! It's up to us. Now, more than ever, we've got to solve the mystery that surrounds her."

"Hear, hear," agreed Letty.

As they entered the school and made their way upstairs both lapsed into silence. Both were wondering what had become of their missing chum. Was she wandering about in the darkness? Was she searching in vain for some place of refuge?

When they entered the dormitory it was to find it in darkness; all the girls were asleep. Apparently the alarm had not extended to the Fourth.

Letty gave a sigh of relief, as she flopped down on the edge of her bed and began to unlace her shoes.

"Thank goodness for that," she said. "I couldn't stand any of Stephanie's sneers to-night."

"Nor me," agreed Olive; and then her lips pursed thoughtfully. "I say, Letty," she whispered, "it's just occurred to me that it might be wise if we keep our suspicions to ourselves."

"About Jess being innocent, you mean?" Letty asked.

Olive nodded.

"Yes. I'm thinking of the real thief. If she learns that we intend to find her, then she'll be on her guard. But if she thinks we've—well, have cut Jess right out of our lives, then she'll think she's got nothing to fear."

Letty nodded vigorous agreement.

"Mum's the word, old scout," she said. "It's a whale of an idea. But come on—let's get into bed, otherwise we'll never get up in the morning."

They undressed and slipped between the sheets, but, despite the lateness of the hour, it was a long time before they got to sleep, for try as they would, they

could not help worrying about their missing chum, could not help speculating where she was.

But little did they suspect the truth! Little did they guess that at that very moment Jess was a prisoner—a prisoner in the house that was connected with Peewit Isle by a secret tunnel!

NEXT morning, of course, the Fourth Form learnt the news. And what a sensation it caused! Stephanie Warner, naturally enough, made the most of her opportunity. In the junior Common-room she looked triumphantly around.

"I knew all along the girl was no good," she declared. "I kept on telling you chumps not to trust her! I warned you to have nothing to do with her, but you would listen to Olive French. Well, perhaps now you'll agree that I was right."

She smiled with self-satisfaction, and her glittering eyes went to where Olive and Letty stood, silently gazing out of the window.

"Well, what have you two got to say?" she asked. "Feeling pretty sick, eh? Fancy the girl you were so keen on turning out to be a giddy thief! But maybe you still think she's innocent! Maybe you'll call on her in prison, and take her flowers and things."

Iris Watts sniggered at the crude joke. But both Olive and Letty flushed angrily. Indeed, the fat girl, her eyes ablaze, opened her lips to give vent to a fierce retort, but the Form captain gave her a warning nudge.

"Steady!" she whispered. "Don't forget the bargain we made."

Reluctantly Letty smothered her outburst, and Stephanie, misunderstanding their silence, grinned maliciously.

"Feeling too ashamed to speak, eh?" she said. "Well, I'm not surprised. It is a bit thick when the Form captain prefers the company of a low-down thief to that of the rest of the Fourth. If you ask me—"

But there came a murmur of disapproval from several of the girls then. Molly Barker, who had always been one of Olive's staunchest supporters, sprang forward indignantly.

"For goodness' sake put a sock in it, Stephanie!" she cried. "Slinging mud about won't do anyone any good. Besides, it's a pretty horrid thing to do."

"Hear, hear!"

There came a chorus of agreement. Cecily Savage, until now one of Stephanie's allies, expressed the general feeling of the room.

"I vote we forget Jess Grant, and all the trouble she caused," she said. "After all, she's cleared out, and that's all that matters! Now it's up to us to stop quarrelling amongst ourselves."

Stephanie glared in amazement, furious at Cecily's sudden change of front.

"Well, of all the turncoats!" she gasped. "Forget that wretched interloper, eh? Huh! It's easy enough to talk about forgetting her—but what about Olive French? I bet she'll keep on about her—keep on trying to kid us she's innocent."

Instantly every eye turned in Olive's direction. She went red, then white. It went against the grain to say nothing in Jess' defence; her whole being rose up in arms at the thought of ignoring Stephanie's challenge. But if Jess' innocence were to be proved, if her unknown enemy, the real thief,

was to be bowled out, then she must keep to the bargain she had made with Letty.

Trying to speak calmly, she faced the Form.

"I agree with Cecily," Olive said. "Let's forget Jess—let's forget all the recent unpleasantness. Instead of squabbling amongst ourselves, let's try to work together."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the idea!"

"Well said, Olive!"

There came a delighted shout from all around, and Stephanie glared more furiously than ever. It looked as if all her hopes to supplant Olive as captain were doomed to failure. Whatever the truth about Jess' disappearance, her running away had not been in vain. It had made it probable that to-night Olive would receive her vote of confidence.

But neither Olive nor Letty were thinking of the Form meeting that the headmistress had insisted should be called. They were thinking about their missing chum. All that day they waited anxiously for news of her, fearing every moment to be told that she had been caught.

But no news of any kind came. It was as if the ground had opened, and swallowed up the runaway. Though search parties scoured the countryside, she could not be found.

But the rest of the Form were no longer interested in Jess. It was the meeting that excited them, and as they filed out of the dining-room after tea, Molly Barker caught eagerly at Olive's arm.

"Come along!" she urged. "Lorna will be waiting for us. Old Brammy's asked her to take charge of the meeting, you know."

"Meeting!" Olive, still worrying about Jess, looked bewildered. "What meeting?" she asked.

Molly gazed at her incredulously. "Why, the meeting to decide whether you're to remain captain or not, of course!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, that!" Olive's tone lacked interest. "I don't care tuppence whether the Form votes for me or not!" she declared—which was true, for in face of what had happened, her own position seemed unimportant.

Molly gazed at her in horror. "But you must care!" she protested. "We're relying on you, aren't we, girls?"

Eagerly she looked around. A number of them nodded.

"Rather!"

"It's either you or Stephanie, and we don't want Stephanie bossing us about," said one of them.

"Of course we don't!" cried Molly, and her fingers closed around Olive's arm. "Don't hold against us all the spiteful things that were said," she pleaded. "Now that Jess Grant has gone, we all want to be friends, and we're relying on you, Olive—relying on you to make the Fourth top-dog at St. Kit's."

With an effort Olive shook off her worries, and smiled.

"Right-ho!" she said. "If you still want me as captain, I'll carry on. But let's see how the voting goes first."

They all went along to the Junior Common-room, Lorna Meredith, their idol, was already there waiting for them, and in a few quiet words she explained the position.

"There's beer, a suggestion that Olive doesn't enjoy your confidence," she explained, "so Miss Bramleigh thought it would be wise to call this meeting. She thinks it essential that

the Fourth should have a strong and popular leader. Whether Olive remains your captain depends entirely on you. If you want a new leader, then you vote against her. If you want her to carry on, then, of course, you'll vote for her."

She paused and looked around. "Anyone want to say anything?" she asked. No one spoke, and her eyes went to Olive. "What about you, Olive?" she asked. Olive shook her head. "Very well, then," went on Lorna, "I'll put it to the vote. All those who want Olive to remain captain please signify in the usual way."

Instantly a forest of hands shot up. There was no need to count them, for the only ones who stood silent and motionless were Stephanie and Iris Watts.

There came a cheer of delight from Molly Barker—a cheer that was echoed all around. But though Olive's cheeks were flushed with gratification, yet there was a bitter feeling in her heart. For this last-minute success had only been brought about by the big sacrifice that Jess had made.

If Jess had not run away, if the Fourth had not been convinced that they had finished with her for good, then the vote of confidence might have failed.

ANOTHER BIG SURPRISE!

WELL, that seems fairly conclusive," Lorna said, with a smile. "But I hope you are all in earnest. I hope that this decisive vote means that you're all going to rally round Olive in future."

There came an almost unanimous shout of agreement from the Fourth Formers, and Molly Barker surveyed the prefect with sparkling eyes.

"You needn't worry, Lorna," she declared. "There'll be no more squabbling. Jess was the only bone of contention between us, and now that she's gone—well, we'll all be one happy family."

"Hear, hear!"

There came another shout of approval. Only Stephanie and Iris Watts remained silent. Lorna surveyed them both, her pleasant face a little stern.

"What have you two got to say?" she asked. "Do you accept Olive as captain?"

For a moment neither of them spoke; then Stephanie nodded rather sullenly.

"I suppose so," she muttered. "As long as there's no more nonsense about that wretched runaway, I'm willing to give Olive a chance to show what she can do. But if she starts defending Jess Grant, if she tries to push her giddy virtues down our throats—"

Lorna cut her short.

"I'm sure Olive will do nothing of the sort, Stephanie," she said sharply. "Jess Grant has left the school of her own accord and that's the end of the matter. The sooner you all forget her the better."

"Hear, hear!" cried Cecily Savage.

Stephanie gave a harsh laugh. "Forget her? That'll be easy enough," she snapped. "I shouldn't think anyone here wants to remember that thieving interloper."

As she spoke she looked challengingly across at Olive and Letty, but neither was to be drawn. Difficult though it was, they meant to keep their real feelings to themselves.

Lorna gathered up her books and papers. Then, as she crossed to the door, she paused and surveyed them all, a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh, I nearly forgot, girls!" she said.

"I have a little surprise in store for you. Miss Bramleigh is anxious to forget all the recent unpleasantness. She wants the Fourth to have a brand-new start, so—" She paused tantalizingly, and the Fourth Formers gazed at her eagerly. "So," she concluded, "I have managed to persuade her to withdraw all the restrictions that have been placed on the Form."

For a moment the girls stood there, silent and wondering. Then Stephanie gave an excited cry:

"You mean, we're to have our studies back?" she gasped.

"And we're not to be shepherded to bed like a lot of kids?" asked Molly Barker.

Lorna smiled assent, and a wild cheer went up. This was the best news the Fourth had received for weeks.

"Good old Brammy!" went up the cry, and it was quickly followed by another admiring shout: "And good old Lorna!" Gratefully, the girls surged around the prefect. If she had been their idol before, then doubly was she their idol now! Laughingly she pushed her way through the yelling, cheering crowd.

"Thanks for all the compliments," she said, "but if you really want to please me—well, show everyone that the Fourth has really something to be proud of. For instance, there's the Form party—that'll soon be coming off. Try to make it a real success!"

"Rather!"

"Don't worry, Lorna, we will!"

And then, when the prefect had departed, the happy, excited girls surged around their Form captain.

"What about the party?" asked Molly Barker. "We've hardly started planning the play we were going to give. I say, let's have a rehearsal right away!"

The suggestion was hailed with approval on all sides, and though she would have preferred to have had a quiet chat with Letty, would have preferred to have discussed their missing chum, Olive was forced to agree.

So enthusiastic were the Fourth that, despite herself, she found her old keenness returning, and when the school bell called them all to prep everyone was in the best of spirits.

"The party's going to be a grand success," declared Molly Barker, and impulsively she gave Olive a hug. "Oh, but I can hardly believe we're not all dreaming!" she went on. "Yesterday we were all squabbling and quarrelling, but to-day—" She gave a happy sigh. "It's wonderful, Olive, to have you really in charge again; to see you once more the heroine of the Form!"

Olive gave her a smile, but the sigh she gave was a wistful one. Not until the truth about Jess was cleared up could she really enjoy herself. Where was Jess now? How was she faring? Did she know that the police were watching for her?

Those questions were still hammering on Olive's mind the next day. For not a scrap of news about the missing girl reached the school. She seemed to have vanished completely.

"I—I hope nothing's happened to her," Olive whispered to Letty, as they went into lessons together a day or so later. "She's got no friends—no money—it seems so queer that no one has ever caught sight of her."

Letty nodded moodily. She was uneasy herself. But they had to keep their fears to themselves. No sympathy could they expect from the rest of the Fourth. Indeed, most of them seemed to have forgotten that anyone named Jess Grant had ever existed. For they

were all wrapt up in their preparations for the forthcoming Form party. A real red-letter affair it promised to be. Not only was there to be a mouth-watering supper, a multitude of grand games, but, above all, there was to be the entertainment.

The rehearsals for it went on apace, and on Friday morning—the day fixed for the dress rehearsal—everyone was agog with excitement. Even Stephanie forgot to be jealous.

"It'll put the Fourth right on the map," she told Olive. "Even I couldn't have planned things much better."

Olive smiled, but that disappointed look remained in her eyes. She was thinking, not so much of Jess as the fact that she and Letty had done nothing to track down their chum's secret enemy. Indeed, they had had no opportunity of doing so, for the mystery girl had shown no signs of life. With Jess' departure, she seemed to be content.

And then, as they filed out from the class-room after morning lessons, Olive and Letty received a surprise.

Standing on the hall table was a big, interesting-looking hamper. Letty's mouth watered as she regarded it.

we've been trying to get in touch with Miss Dalton, and, now that Jess has disappeared, she bobs up from nowhere. It's a real knock-out, that's what it is!"

Olive nodded. Eagerly she tugged at the cord that fastened down the lid of the hamper.

"Perhaps there's a note inside!" she cried. "Yes, there's bound to be! Come on! Let's open it! If we can only discover Miss Dalton's address, then we needn't wait for Jess' unknown enemy to move. We can find out the truth without her."

"I'll say we can," agreed Letty, her plump cheeks aglow with excitement. "Buck up and undo those giddy knots!" she added impatiently.

But before they could undo the hamper footsteps sounded behind them. Straightening up, the chums saw Lorna Meredith and Winifred Butler approaching. At sight of the big hamper both girls stopped.

"Hallo! Who's that for?" asked the prefect.

"For Jess Grant!" Letty said, with a whoop. "We were just opening it to see if there's a message inside."

"For Jess Grant!"

It was Winifred Butler who uttered



"I'm sorry, girls," said Miss Bramleigh firmly. "Your loyalty does you credit, but there can be no going against facts. Jess Grant is the thief!"

"Tuck!" she exclaimed. "Golly, someone's in luck! Wonder who it's for?"

She crossed over to the table and bent over the label. Then her eyes opened wide, and, with a gasp, she whirled on the Form-captain.

"It's for Jess!" she gasped. "For Jess!" echoed Olive incredulously; and she darted forward. "But who—who can have sent her a tuck hamper?"

She bent over the fat girl's shoulder. They both felt a thrill sweep through them as they read the short inscription that was written under Jess' name and address:

"With Love from Amelia Dalton." The hamper had been sent by Jess' mysterious benefactress—by the woman who had vanished completely after she had sent Jess to St. Kit's!

"WELL, if this doesn't take the biscuit!" exclaimed Letty, staring in wonderment. "For weeks

the exclamation. She took a quick step forward, but Lorna Meredith was frowning.

"For Jess Grant!" she repeated, in astonishment. "But who can be sending her presents?"

"It's from Miss Dalton," explained Olive—"from the lady who sent her to St. Kit's. I suppose she doesn't know what's happened to poor Jess, so—"

She broke off, her lips quivering as she thought of the disgrace that had overtaken her missing chum. Winifred grinned maliciously as she noted the Form captain's agitation, but Lorna still looked surprised and disapproving.

"If it's addressed to Jess Grant," she said, with unusual sharpness, "then what were you girls doing opening it?"

Letty flushed a little sheepishly, but Olive faced the prefect eagerly.

"Why, we wanted to see if there's a note inside!" she explained again. "No one knows where Miss Dalton lives; no one at St. Kit's has ever seen her, so we thought that if only we could discover her address—"

She broke off in dismay, for Lorna's frown had deepened, and she stepped forward as if to take charge of the hamper.

"You had no right to interfere, Olive!" the prefect declared. "Jess has gone, and so this hamper must be sent back unopened. In any case, it is not your business to pry inside it! It's for Miss Bramleigh to decide!"

"But, Lorna—"

Olive's dismayed protest, however, came to an end, for at that moment Miss Charters, the Fourth Form mistress, strolled on to the scene. Hearing their raised voices, she regarded them inquiringly.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

Lorna explained her point of view, and the Form-mistress nodded approval. "You are quite right, Lorna," she declared. "The only person who can decide what to do with this hamper is Miss Bramleigh. She is away to-day, so until she comes back the hamper had better be locked up."

Olive and Letty eyed her in dismay. They were certain that the hamper contained a valuable clue. And if only they could discover Miss Dalton's address—

Appealingly they faced Miss Charters. "I'm sure Jess wouldn't mind us opening it," said Olive. "You see—"

The Form-mistress held up her hand. "That will do, Olive. In the circumstances, Jess Grant's wishes in the matter are of no consequence. The hamper will be locked up until Miss Bramleigh decides what shall be done with it. Be good enough to carry it to the store-room."

Reluctantly Olive and Letty obeyed. Under Miss Charters' sharp eyes, they dumped the hamper in a corner of the room, then retreated, gloomily watching the Form-mistress lock the door and pocket the key.

Thanks to her interference, it looked as if all hope of getting in touch with Miss Dalton had gone.

OLIVE'S DARING PLAN

"LETTY!"

"Yes, old scout?"

Letty looked up from the book she was reading, surprised by the intensity in her chum's voice.

It was after dinner, and the two girls were filling in the time before the bell went for afternoon lessons by doing a little quiet reading. For nearly half an hour there had been silence in the study, but suddenly Olive had jumped to her feet. Now she was regarding the fat girl with gleaming eyes.

"I've been thinking about that hamper, Letty," she declared. "I can't get it out of my mind. I feel in my bones that there's a letter inside it; a letter from Miss Dalton. And if only we could get hold of it—"

She paused significantly. Letty gave a quick nod.

"I know, old scout. If only we could read it we might be able to get in touch with Miss Dalton. But there's not a hope. You know what a stickler old Brammy is. She'll send the hamper back to the caterers who sent it without opening it."

"That's what I'm afraid of," declared Olive, a desperate glint in her eyes. "And that's why we've got to get busy before old Brammy gets a chance to return it."

Letty sat up with a jerk.

"Golly, what are you getting at, old scout?" she gasped. "Surely you're not suggesting that we should disobey orders—open the hamper ourselves?"

Your Editor's Corner



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

MY DEAR READERS,—It may seem very early to all you young things, but here in the GIRLS' CRYSTAL office is great excitement because of the "Holiday List."

This is a list which I prepare each year round about this time and pass round to the office staff so that they can mark down the dates when they will take their summer holiday.

It all sounds very simple, doesn't it? But actually it isn't a bit, really.

There are some people who simply must have August—which is always a busy month in the office—and some who wouldn't have August if you gave them a hundred pounds to go away then.

July used to be a favourite month for holidays with my staff, but lately this seems to have become unpopular, because it had been such a rainy one for the past two years or so.

I think we shall all manage to fit our holidays in, somehow. The great thing we have to guard against is that the office isn't deserted by us all at once. For I don't know what would happen to the GIRLS' CRYSTAL if we did that, do you?

SIX FINE TALES

Don't you think we have been having some particularly good complete stories just lately?

Next week's programme, too, is especially good. "THE PUZZLE OF THE PAPER-CHASE" is the title of the complete tale featuring that very popular young detective, Noel Raymond.

Pat Lovell will appear in another exciting complete story, entitled "PAT AND THE MYSTERY PROFESSOR."

Kaye of the Kennels will appear as usual in a complete story, and our three serials will be every bit as exciting as usual.

Be sure to order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance, won't you?
Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR

Olive nodded, and the fat girl gave another gasp.

"But we can't," she protested. "Miss Charters locked the store-room and she pocketed the giddy key! We couldn't get in even if we wanted to."

"There's the window," Olive pointed out quietly.

"The—window?"

"Yes; it's not very high up from the ground. I could reach it by standing on your back, and I don't suppose the window's kept fastened."

"But—suppose anyone spotted us? There'd be a frightful row, especially now that everything's going so swimmingly!"

Olive's lips set fiercely.

"We've got to risk that," she

declared. "Don't you see, Letty, this is our only chance. Jess' unknown enemy seems to have stopped her activities for good. So our only hope is to get in touch with Miss Dalton." She paused and surveyed the fat girl appealingly. "Are you game to chance it?" she asked.

Despite her inward feelings of impending trouble, Letty nodded.

"Of course I am, old scout. But when do you suggest we get busy—after tea?"

Olive nodded.

"Yes; it'll be dark then and there'll be plenty of time before the dress rehearsal starts."

There was no time for further discussion, for the school bell clanged out, summoning them to the Form-room. But never had Olive felt less like lessons. She could not stop speculating on the possible result of their secret visit to the store-room, and she was all impatience to put her plan into action.

The afternoon dragged slowly by; but at long last Miss Charters dismissed them. With sighs of relief, the Fourth Formers surged out, some to have tea in their studies, others to make their way to the dining-room.

Outside it was already dusk, and as soon as they had gulped down a cup of tea and a sandwich, Olive and Letty made their way along the corridor. Both were quivering with excitement, for their missing chum's whole future might depend on to-night's adventure.

Very cautiously, the chums stole outside and hurried round the angle of the building to the wing in which the store-room was situated. The window was about six feet from the ground, but by clambering on to her chum's back Olive managed to reach up high enough to open the window. For a few moments she fumbled about, and from below came an anxious whisper:

"It isn't fastened, is it?"

Olive shook her head.

"No, but it's stiff. Keep steady there while I—"

Olive's voice trailed away, and sharply she drew in her breath. Warned by the agitated movement on her back that something was wrong, Letty screwed round her head.

"What's up, old scout?" she asked.

Olive did not reply. She was staring in amazement through the dusty panes of the window. Though she was certain that the store-room door had not opened, though she was certain that a moment before there had been no one in the room, yet now she could discern a shadowy, indistinct shape in the darkness.

In some mysterious way someone had gained entrance to the locked store-room—someone who was now crossing the room on tiptoe. It was a girl, a tall, slender girl wearing a school hat and a blue raincoat.

Olive gave another gasp.

"It's Jess' unknown enemy!" she exclaimed. "It must be! But how did she get in? How—"

Again she broke off, for now the mysterious girl was bending over the hamper Miss Dalton had sent. With one vicious wrench of her hand she tore off the lid, and eagerly she rummaged amongst the contents.

Olive, too surprised to move, saw the intruder suddenly straighten up, something white grasped between her fingers. A letter! So that was it! She had come for the message Miss Dalton had placed in the hamper.

Jess' unknown enemy had acted first!

Will the chums at last be able to trap Jess' mystery enemy? Will they discover her identity? You'll be enthralled by next Friday's gripping long instalment. Don't miss it!



Only Pat knew Her Secret

By ELIZABETH CHESTER

A THEATRE THRILL

PAT LOVELL, her eyes shining brightly, smiled at her landlady, who stood nodding her head with approval.

"Well, how do I look?" asked Pat. "Wonderful, my dear," said the kindly soul. "And aren't you the lucky one, eh, going to the theatre free of charge, sitting in one of the best seats, and then interviewing one of the stars afterwards?"

Pat did not deny her luck. But then she had always thought that her job, reporter on the "Midshire Gazette," was one of the best a girl could possibly have. There were dull, routine jobs sometimes, but there were compensations in plenty, and being given a free seat at the theatre was one of them.

Pat was wearing a dainty, attractive evening frock, blue cloak, and smart shoes that completed the picture. A newspaper scoop had earned her some extra money, and she had spent it on this outfit. She was pleased, therefore, that she had occasion to wear it so soon.

"Is the taxi there, Mrs. Smith?" she asked, as she glanced at the clock.

"If I'm not mistaken, that's his ring now," said the landlady. "You'll be home late, I suppose?"

"Well, fairly. It depends," answered Pat, as she took her dainty handbag, and made sure that the little notebook she used for special occasions in the "evening" was tucked down in it. "You see, perhaps I shall be asked to supper afterwards by Marianne Zigalda."

There was a faint chance of it, for Pat had met Marianne Zigalda once before, and the famous girl illusionist had been most charming and kind. The meeting had been a chance one on a train, but Marianne had given Pat an interview after a most interesting chat.

Marianne Zigalda was being starred to-night at the Theatre Royal, and because it was known that she had had a special invitation to visit a certain important house near by, she was "news"; for the occupant of that house was a European king who no longer had a country to rule, or throne to sit on, but who was nevertheless still a person of considerable importance and influence, whose doings were worthy of report in all the papers.

Although Pat was the youngest girl reporter, and not as experienced as others of the "Gazette" staff, the fact that she had met Marianne before had decided the editor to send her instead of a senior to the Theatre Royal.

"And am I glad?" Pat asked herself, as she settled down in the taxicab that was to take her to the theatre. "Lucky me!"

She felt even luckier when she found that the house was full, and that people were already being turned away from the doors.

Pat's seat was an excellent one in the front row of the stalls.

Long before the curtain rose on the first item the house was crowded, and the orchestra played as never before. But the large box on the right to which everyone looked at intervals of a few seconds remained empty.

A singer started the performance, and was warmly applauded; a comedian followed; then came some acrobats, and next Marianne. But at the moment when her number flashed on the box was empty.

But then, just as the curtains twitched, a murmur of interest ran through the house, and into the box walked a middle-aged man of somewhat haughty appearance in evening dress, followed by a grey-haired woman, and another couple.

"Aha!" murmured Pat. It was something to write about.

She noted the fact that the audience after a ragged start gave warm applause, and the ex-king rose and bowed, while the queen, without rising, inclined her head.

Pat turned her attention then to the stage where Marianne had entered, or was due to enter. But apparently her

Pat Lovell knew for certain that danger threatened the ex-king. Anxiously she went to his palatial house to warn him. But the ex-king would not listen, and the girl reporter was obliged to unmask his enemies herself!

assistant came on first. The assistant was so like Marianne that the audience, apparently thinking it was the famous girl illusionist, applauded.

Pat smiled to herself. Knowing Marianne by sight, having spoken to her during a long train journey, she, at least, knew that this was not the illusionist.

A minute passed. The assistant performed a trick, and performed it quite well. But there was no sign of Marianne. Two minutes passed, and still she was alone on the stage.

Pat Lovell sat up, surprised. And of a sudden she knew that she was wrong in supposing that this was not the turn itself. For no one else came on to the stage. And, furthermore, this girl, who was definitely not Marianne, performed that star's tricks.

"Mum-my golly, what's wrong?" Pat murmured, surprised.

She was puzzled, and she grew more puzzled still as every one of Marianne's tricks was performed by this girl. The tricks were most ingenious, and no one quite knew how they were done. Slight of build, the girl could baffle strong men, making it impossible to twist a stick from her hands, standing in such a manner that they could not lift her from the ground by her elbows. And then as though she were a Hercules, instead of a slip of a girl, she lifted a foot clear of the ground a chair on which two men were sitting.

Pat stared more and more intently. Then she looked at her programme. There was no mention of Marianne's indisposition, or that someone was taking her place. Nor had any such announcement been made.

If this girl was an impostor, therefore, the management was ignorant of the fact. She was deceiving them as well as the audience.

"Marianne must be ill or something," Pat told herself worriedly. "And the management have got this girl, almost her double, to take her place."

And yet even that seemed hardly a satisfactory solution. Silent and bewildered, Pat watched the performance until the curtain dropped. Then, as she had planned to do before, she rose, and hurried to the foyer.

Pat had planned to send a message to Marianne, recalling their meeting in the train; but now she was not so sure that she could do that. For this girl would know nothing about it.

"Unless," Pat mused, "this is something Marianne has planned. But, in any case, perhaps I can get a story."

She hurried round to the stage door down the alleyway beside the theatre. Outside it stood three men, looking dejected, muttering amongst themselves. All three were known to Pat—rival reporters.

"Ha! The 'Gazette'—last, as usual!" scoffed a tall young man. "Now watch Pat Lovell work magic, and get in."

"No luck, Pat," said another, a plump, genial fellow. "Reporters barred."

Pat laughed.

"You mean you boys are taking 'no' for an answer?" she asked. "Tut, tut! Just watch how the 'Gazette' does things."

Pat rapped on the door, and the doorman looked out.

"No reporters," he said.

"Oh, I've no connection with these persons," said Pat, in her loftiest tone. "I am a personal friend of Miss Zigalda's. Will you please take her a message from me?"

The sergeant eyed her narrowly.

"Yes, miss," he said, "I'll do that."

Pat's eyes glimmered with fun as she heard the three reporters gasp and exchange whispers; then, moving to the street lamp near by, she wrote a message on a sheet from her small notebook, folded it, and gave it to the sergeant, who closed the door before taking it away.

"A friend?" said the tall, scoffing reporter. "It's an old dodge, but it won't work, my dear girl. What did you write on that piece of paper?"

"Just mentioned my paper," said Pat lightly, "and added a private message, you know."

"Is that so?" mocked the tall one. "Then get ready to laugh, chaps. The doorman's coming back—clatter, crash, bang of approaching steps!"

The door was opened, and the sergeant looked out.

"This way, miss," he said. "She'll see you."

Pat flashed a smile at the rivals and blew them a light kiss of farewell.

"Maybe I'll grant you an interview myself later," she said.

In the cold stone corridor of the theatre a man awaited her. He was slim, slight, saturnine, and stood with hands clasped until Pat was within a yard or two of him. Then, in a marked foreign accent, he spoke.

"Miss Pat Lovell?" he said. "Please to accompany me towards Marianne Zigalda. I am her relation."

He turned, and Pat, rather wondering that Marianne should have a foreign relation, walked after him. For, in spite of her name, Marianne was English. At the end of the corridor her guide turned right, and then left.

"Miss Zigalda is in the property-room, making selections of things she shall take for King Alberto," he explained, as he opened a door and switched on a light.

The room was littered with theatre props but there was no sign of Marianne, or of the impostor. But he crossed the room, calling her by name, opened another door, and held it wide. The light was on in the room, and Pat crossed the threshold. But the room was empty, save for stage lumber, chairs, tables, boxes, curtains, clothes.

Marianne, or her substitute, was not there.

In sudden alarm, Pat wheeled, and as she did so, the silent, saturnine man came to life. He sprang forward, and his outstretched hand pushed her, sent her staggering into the room. Then, leaping back, he slammed the door.

Before Pat had fully recovered her balance the key grated and clicked in the lock.

A DEEP-LAID PLOT

PAT LOVELL rushed to the door and thumped the panels with her clenched hands in fury.

"Let me out!" she cried.

The man's voice answered softly.

"Quiet!" Shouting will not bring someone."

"Oh, won't it? We'll see!" retorted Pat. "You can't stop me from speaking the truth by locking me in here. I know that the girl on the stage to-night was not Marianne Zigalda."

His voice was cold when he replied

"Then you know too much. Be careful. To know too much is sometimes unwise."

Pat's heart thumped. His tone was sinister and menacing. What had seemed to her a bewildering puzzle became now something more sinister. It was obvious at once that Marianne was not a willing party to this impersonation, but a victim. She had been robbed of her chance to appear before the ex-king—a chance that might have meant everything to her in her career.

"What game are you playing?" asked Pat grimly. "Where is Marianne?"

"She is, like you, a prisoner," he retorted. "But unharmed. However, I am not here to argue," he said, in clipped, cold tones. "I offer you ten pounds to keep silent for four hours. At night, the fireman he shall come to patrol these passages. Then you may shout."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Pat sarcastically. "I was wondering when I could begin."

"Don't joke!" he snapped. "I have a ten-pound note here. I will tear it in two. One half I will push under the door to you. Neither half, without the other, is of use to exchange for money. Therefore, I shall not wish to keep my half. You understand? If you do not escape from here for four hours, then it shall be arranged that you have also the other half. If not, you have but half a note, worth—nothing at all."

Pat's eyes gleamed. Ten pounds was a tempting sum of money, but not enough to tempt her to betray her chief's trust, nor her friend, Marianne Zigalda, now held prisoner, to be robbed of her chance of meeting the ex-king.

But Pat was determined to teach this rascal a lesson.

"Push the half through," she said. "Something rustled under the door, and picking it up, she saw that it was indeed half of a ten-pound note—one of the few she had seen.

"Ah! For four hours you will now be silent?" he said.

"No," said Pat curtly.

"What? But you do not then get the other half!" he exclaimed.

"Who cares?" Pat retorted. "You won't get this half back, either. I got this half just to teach you a little lesson not to try bribing people. For all the good it is to you, you can keep the other half. I'm getting out of here as quickly as I can. I'm telling the police, and I'm going to warn King Alberto and free Marianne, wherever she is."

There was no reply from the other side of the door, but she heard the man's departing steps, and then the sound of the outer door being closed.

"My golly, a nice little plot!" Pat muttered anxiously. "Marianne a prisoner! This girl taking her place."

Was it possible that the foreigner had some political reason for wanting to get into the ex-king's house with his accomplice?

Pat gave a soft gasp as that idea came to her, for she saw political enmity was the most likely solution of this mystery.

Ex-King Alberto was innocently inviting enemies into his house. Once there, they—

But Pat could not guess at their reasons or plans. All that she had to concern herself with was getting out of this small prison. As soon as possible ex-King Alberto must be warned; and then Marianne must be rescued.

Pat jumped towards the table. The time had come for action. She must escape. She must warn the ex-king that the people he would entertain were impostors—perhaps enemies.

High in one of the walls was a window, long and narrow, of frosted glass. It was closed at the moment, but when this room was in use it served as a ventilator.

Pat dragged the table forward, found a box, and placed it on top. Standing on the box, then, she could reach the window. Balancing herself precariously, she next took off her right shoe, and, holding it by the toe, swung her arm back.

Hard as she could she slammed the heel at the glass. With a sharp, pistol-like report, the glass cracked. One more blow, and a tinkling piece fell out, dropping outside on to the concrete path.

At the top of her voice, Pat yelled; and she was still yelling when a man's voice answered her.

"Hallo, there! What's wrong?" he asked.

Pat recognised the voice of the plump, genial rival reporter, and was glad that it was he and not the scoffing tall one who had heard her. She told him quickly that she was a prisoner in the property-room, and asked him to go and find the doorman.

Five minutes later she heard voices beyond the door, and the grate of a key in the lock.

"Thank goodness," breathed Pat in relief, as she saw the doorman and the genial reporter.

The sergeant was frowning at her, as though it were her own fault, but Pat decided not to explain everything to him in the presence of this rival reporter. For, after all, it was news, and her duty was to keep to herself the fact that Marianne Zigalda had been impersonated at the performance that night.

"Got into the wrong room," she said, in brief explanation. "A poor sort of joke. Where is Marianne Zigalda now?"

"Where you won't be able to interview her—at King Alberto's private residence," said the sergeant.

"And you certainly missed something when she and her cousin were called for by the king in person," said the rival reporter.

Pat gave a jump of horror. She had not supposed that the king would leave the theatre so quickly, or that the impostors would move so swiftly to their objective. But, if her supposition was correct, then the ex-king was driving with impostors, enemies, perhaps dangerous enemies.

"You're sure?" Pat asked swiftly. "They went with him?"

"Of course—" said her rival.

Pat pushed past the sergeant, ran down the corridor, and did not stop running until she reached the street and hailed a taxicab.

THE EX-KING IS GRATEFUL

PAT LOVELL was amazed at her own effrontery. The taxicab had been allowed to drive in through the imposing gates of the splendid country house that was the ex-king's English home. She had not been questioned, and now, as she paid off the taxicab, a footman, armed with a large umbrella, advanced to shield her from the thin drizzle of rain that was falling.

Pat held her breath as she crossed the threshold. There were glittering lights; there was a scene of splendour, gaiety and bright colour, while the furnishing was so elaborate that the entrance-hall seemed more like a set for a film than something real in the county of Midshire. Yet real it was; and the murmuring, laughing people were real. The ex-king and queen at the head of the stairs were real, too.

Men and women were mounting the stairs, and Pat followed a woman to a room where she left her cloak, and tidied her hair. For even though she had a dramatic announcement to make, she had no wish to make it by rushing at once to the ex-monarch. Presumably mistaken for a guest, she would meet him in a moment. Then would be the time to speak.

With suppressed excitement Pat walked from the room, and heard a footman murmur something to her. She gathered that he asked her name, so she gave it.

"Miss Pat Lovell," he announced.

People turned their heads, and Pat, colouring slightly, advanced towards the ex-king and queen, wondering if she should curtsy, extend her hand, or just bow.

Before Pat could solve her problem in etiquette a man stepped forward, a slim, small man of saturnine countenance. He almost jumped forward in his eagerness, and stood between Pat and the king, bowing deeply to the latter.

"Sire," he said. "This girl—I must give warning. Everywhere she has followed us, Marianne and myself. She is a little how you say—crazy. She will cry out soon that we are impostors—"

Pat drew back startled, as every head was turned to her, and there came an amazed murmur. A man in black court dress stepped forward swiftly to her side; another followed.

"Her name is unfamiliar to me," said the ex-king. "Was she invited?" he asked a man who sat near by.

The man rapidly consulted a list.

"No, sire. Her name is not here."

Pat stepped forward.

"I have come to warn you," she said to the ex-king. "I have never seen these people before to-night, but I know Marianne Zigalda. And that girl is not Marianne. She is an impostor."

Another excited murmur rose, and here and there laughter; but the king frowned in reproof.

"This is most unseemly," he said. "Please take the girl away." He turned to the man with the list of guests. "Make sure that this does not happen again. I do not want my guests insulted." And he gave a reassuring smile to the girl who called herself Marianne Zigalda.

Pat coloured hotly, and her eyes flashed.

"But, sir," she protested, "what I say—"

She broke off and winced as she was turned quickly—so quickly that the tug hurt her arm.

"This way," muttered one of the men in black. "Down the stairs as quickly as possible, or you may suffer."

Backwards Pat was led in humiliating confusion to the staircase, and then almost pushed down to the door. Her cloak was brought for her, she was hustled out, and, with no sheltering umbrella, she stood in the rain.

Pat was furious. It had not occurred to her that she could have been baffled so easily. She had supposed that at the word impostor there would have been a sensation—but of another kind. She had pictured the impostors as being concerned, alarmed—perhaps taking flight. But their coolness and resource had been too great.

Hardly heeding the thin rain that soaked her cloak, Pat wondered what to do.



Even as Pat's name was announced to the ex-king, a man stepped in front of her. "Sire," he said, "I must give warning!" And Pat realised that he meant to prevent her telling the ex-king of the plot against him.

"Outside, please!" said a voice behind her.

Pat did not pause; she ran—she ran into the darkness as hard as she could—then swerved amongst the wet leaves of the shrubbery, and there took shelter under a tree.

She was unhappy and bewildered, for she could not think what to do next. With no clues to aid her, there seemed no hope of finding Marianne. And even if she were to go to the police, was there any reason why they should give her story greater heed than the king or his guests had done?

"But I'm right!" Pat told herself fiercely. "After what that rascal admitted I can't be wrong. But proof—proof—"

She had no proof. No one had overheard that conversation in the lumber-room. They would say that she had invented it.

"But I'm not beaten. By golly, I'm not!" Pat told herself.

For a few minutes she waited in hiding, wondering if the servants would search for her; but apparently, regarding her as harmless, they were not worrying.

Pat crept nearer to the house, draw-

ing back wherever a car sweeping down the drive sent bright shafts of light through the trees. It was while she was watching one of the cars disgorge its gay women and dapper men that she saw the saturnine man again. He emerged from the house, holding an umbrella over himself, and stepped on to the drive.

"No, I need no assistance. It is a small thing I have to bring," he said in reply to a footman's question.

He turned the drive, going along it past the house towards where it ended by the large garages. And Pat, finding cover between trees, followed him.

She saw then that there was a large van parked on the concrete in front of the garages. As he neared it the man whistled, and the twin rear doors opened. From the lighted interior of the van another man stepped down, and the two spoke in a foreign language.

Inside the van were "props" used by the illusionists; and now, after conversation, the man who had stepped

from the van handed to the other some sticks, a small table, and a chair.

"Shall I come, too?" the man from the van asked.

"No, Sabian, better not leave it. She might be heard. I can manage."

Pat Lovell did not miss a word, and as the significance of what she heard dawned upon her, she held her breath.

"So-ho!" she murmured.

The saturnine man, armed with the apparatus, walked back down the drive and turned to the front of the house; the other, stretching himself, looked into the van and muttered something.

Pat stared into the lighted van. She recognised there some of the paraphernalia used in the show, and in addition a long cabinet. It was of the kind used by illusionists for the "disappearing lady" trick.

Pat Lovell jumped nearly out of her skin.

"Disappearing lady," she murmured to herself. "My golly! And what was it he said? 'No, Sabian, better not leave it. She might be heard—'"

That was what the saturnine man had said; and what he meant was crystal clear. Marianne might be heard—Marianne was hidden in that stage

cabinet, guarded, a prisoner in the van.

Pat thought quickly and clearly. The man was stretching his arms, breathing in the damp air for a while before once again shutting himself in the van. Now was Pat's chance.

She ran back amongst the trees, then turned on to the path. With quick, light steps she ran to the van.

The man wheeled, hearing her steps, and eyed her in some surprise, but she gave him no time to wonder who she was or why she had come.

"Oh, are you the man Sabian?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, taken aback because she knew his name.

"The illusionist has an urgent message for you; he cannot come at the moment. Most urgent!" said Pat.

She saw the man's alarm, and her heart leaped, for it meant that her plan must succeed. She had taken the right line; for, like most crooks, he was a mass of nerves, ready at any moment for something to go wrong.

"Is that so?" he asked thickly, and hesitated for a moment before shutting the van doors. "I will go."

Pat turned and went down the drive slowly to give him the impression that she, too, was returning to the house; and, as she guessed he would do, he overtook her, running.

Round Pat wheeled, and, running to the van, pulled wide the doors and stepped in.

"Marianne!" she cried.

A faint murmur came from the cabinet; but, reaching it, Pat found that there was no door, no sign of any join.

"How can I open it? It's Pat—Pat Lovell!" she cried.

A rap came on the side of the cabinet.

"Press just there," was the faint reply.

Pat pressed. A click sounded; and then, as a slat of wood swung outwards, swiftly she dodged back—only just in time to avoid being struck by it.

Amazed, but overjoyed, she looked into the secret cabinet and saw Marianne. Wearing a stage frock, and crouched into an amazingly small space, the girl illusionist looked up at Pat, blinking in the light.

Swiftly Pat helped her out of the cabinet, and then from the van, pushing the doors to. Already returning steps could be heard; and, without a word, Pat dragged Marianne round to the side of the van.

There they crouched, silent, hearts thumping, as the man Sabian returned muttering. He opened the doors of the van and climbed in. Next moment the light that had come through them was shut off as the doors were banged to.

"Now," breathed Pat, as they moved to the shadow of some bushes, "tell me about it."

"It is an attempt to kidnap the crown prince, the young prince," said Marianne in choking tone, "by means of these trick cabinets! It will succeed if we are not in time!"

"Then come on!" cried Pat. "We'll be in time!"

But as they reached the doors of the house, two men in plain clothes stepped forward and barred their way.

"One moment!" said one of them to Pat. "No entry for you!"

"Oh, yes, there is!" snapped Pat. "There's to be an attempt to kidnap the crown prince! These so-called illusionists are impostors—"

"That's enough!" said the man, and turned to his companion. "Hold the other one, Browning! Take them to the side room!"

"Detectives?" asked Pat.

"Yes, we are! You're out of luck!" said one grimly.

"In luck, you mean!" Pat retorted. "Just the men we want!"

And with Marianne she went quietly with the two detectives into the side room where visitors waited the royal pleasure.

"Now," said Pat quietly, "this girl is Marianne Zigalda. The one upstairs is an impostor. I am Pat Lovell, 'Gazette' reporter. Don't interrupt! Just listen, please!"

Pat told the whole story, while the detectives, unconvinced, listened.

"You don't believe it?" Pat exclaimed.

"I've heard worse," said the detective, smiling. "But I don't have to believe what I'm told. I'm not a reporter."

"And you're not a fool!" retorted Pat, opening her handbag and bringing out a crackly piece of paper. "Here's the half a ten-pound note he gave me. Search the man, and you'll find the other half. And if you don't believe this is Marianne Zigalda, let her try one of her tricks on you."

Marianne smiled, and, seeing a walking-stick in a corner of the room, took it up.

"You are a strong man," she said to the detective. "I will hold this stick lightly upright, or nearly upright—so. Take it in your hands; press as hard as you like without twisting or wrenching or turning it. See if you can press it to the ground."

The burly detective shrugged, took the stick, and pressed down. His face grew red. He used more force; he strained and gasped, and then ceased his efforts and stared blankly.

"You must be a girl Hercules!" he protested.

"I am Marianne. It is one of my tricks," she replied.

The detectives stared at her, and then exchanged looks. Both nodded, and turned to the door.

"Come on," they said, "and keep behind!"

Pat and Marianne followed them up the stairs, and along a corridor to a large room that was almost a hall in size. On chairs sat the guests forming an audience, while on a dais stood the impostor and a boy of fifteen, the crown prince.

"Now, Highness, you would like to know the secret of the disappearing lady trick. If you promise not to tell anyone you shall learn it. You shall disappear yourself," said Marianne.

A murmur of amusement and approval came from the audience, and Pat looked sharply towards the corner of the room where a cabinet stood. A curtain had been so arranged that it could be drawn across the cabinet, shielding it. Just behind was a door leading to the next room.

"Just a moment!" said the senior detective, striding forward. "Before the crown prince disappears I'd like a word with your majesty, please, and with this lady and gentleman."

The man turned, and saw Marianne. He drew up, dodged back, and ran to the door. But, even as he started to run, the other detective was after him. The impostor Marianne, white as a sheet, turned right and left, as though to effect escape, and then, with a shrug of the shoulders, stood still. The game was up.

Consternation reigned. Everyone started talking, and Marianne, curtsying to King Alberto, introduced herself. Pat Lovell did the same, and, without waste of words or time, explained the situation.

"To kidnap my son?" gasped the king, dumbfounded. "Ah, in the disappearing cabinet—"

"Through the door while the curtain was drawn to hide what the cabinet revealed to him," said Marianne quickly. "Perhaps he would have been carried away in the cabinet by innocent footmen, while Marianne went on talking to cover it. Before the trick was suspected, he would be far away in a private car on his way to an aerodrome. It was carefully planned."

The king turned to Pat, smiling.

"And you, my dear young lady, your quick wits save this disaster," he exclaimed—"a disaster the full magnitude of which you cannot appreciate! I cannot tell you how grateful I am—how sorry that I ordered you out in my stupid ignorance! Please accept my apology for that! You have acted in a most admirable, courageous, and intelligent manner! It shall not be forgotten!"

Pat smiled in embarrassment, and then took out her small notebook.

"As I am a newspaper reporter, perhaps an exclusive story—an interview—"

she murmured.

"By all means," he said readily. "It is the very least I can do in return."

THE performance that Marianne Zigalda gave far excelled that of her impostor, which had been an imitation based upon experience gained as Marianne's assistant.

In certain tricks of illusion, when Marianne had needed a double to appear where she was supposed to be, the girl had taken her part, so that it was quite easy for her to act the impostor.

It had always been the girl's ambition to take Marianne's place, so the kidnapers, learning that the king had read of Marianne's performances, and was eager to try his strength against her skill, had found the assistant easy to bribe.

The mere thought of appearing before the ex-king was temptation enough, but jewels, a large sum of money, and a promise that she should be smuggled abroad and her future safely assured, had turned her head, causing her to betray Marianne into their hands. Whether she had realised the full enormity of the plot was never known, but she had been a party to it.

What pleased Pat was the fact that the other half of the ten-pound note was found on the man and used as evidence against him. It was Pat's possession of the first half that had convinced the detectives that her story was true, and she took care to know that the man realised it.

The copy of the "Gazette" containing the exclusive interview with King Alberto sold like hot cakes, and Pat's article was quoted by other papers.

The publicity did Marianne so much good that her vaudeville fees were doubled, thus providing ample compensation for what she had suffered as a prisoner in her own secret cabinet.

The next time Pat visited King Alberto's house she was an honoured guest, not a gate-crasher, and the two men in black looked quite humble and contrite.

And when she left the house of the ex-king, Pat's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes sparkled. For he had presented her with a diamond clip; small and simple in design, yet beautiful beyond words—a token of his esteem!

Another complete tale featuring Pat Lovell will appear in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Don't forget to order it in advance, will you?



Kaye of the Kennels

THE DOG-THIEF

"SLOW up, granddad, will you, please? I want to watch that man with the dog."

Kaye Chalmers had not taken her eyes off the man since he had come into sight farther down the road along which she was driving in her grandfather's car. The man was being followed by a small, intelligent-looking terrier, and something about the two had struck Kaye and held her interest.

Her grandfather, without knowing what the matter was, slowed, and looked at the man and dog, now only about fifty yards ahead of them. But he saw nothing odd about either, and said so.

"It's just that the man is luring the dog to follow him," said Kaye. "If you go on slowly I'll watch them."

The man, who walked ahead of the dog, every now and again dropped something on to the pavement. The dog would snatch up what was dropped, wolf it down, then expectantly follow the man again.

Not knowing that he was being watched, he suddenly began to fondle the terrier; then he made as if to snatch him up.

"Stop, granddad!" cried Kaye. "He means to steal the dog!"

Her grandfather stopped the car, and, leaping out, Kaye went running forward.

The man, on hearing approaching footsteps, gave a guilty start, and hurriedly released the dog.

"One moment, please!" said Kaye sharply. "What are you doing with this dog?"

He scowled, "Nothing!" he declared. "Is it my fault if the animal took a liking to me and followed? I tried to send it back."

Kaye shook her head. "Oh, no, you didn't! I saw you dropping bait for him to follow you!" she said. "But this time you've failed."

The man, a touch of colour in his cheeks, an angry gleam in his eyes, seemed to have a hot retort trembling on his lips. But he did not utter it. When he spoke his tone was mild.

"He's not your dog, anyway," he answered. "I saw him with his owner yesterday—a girl with a dark suit."

"No, he's not mine," replied Kaye. "But I'm taking charge of him. And if you want to know who I am—"

She took a business card from her pocket and handed it to him. "I'll report finding the dog at the police station, and he'll be at my kennels if you should happen to see the owner."

The man studied her card, put it in his pocket, and nodded.

"Most likely you'll find her on the common," he said, and walked off. But he muttered to himself as he glanced back: "I'll get him, though! That dog's worth a fortune to me!"

THE bright-eyed little terrier looked after him, barked, and stood with tail wagging for a moment until the man showed that he had no intention of returning or dropping more pieces of meat. Then he grew a little worried and sad.

Kaye, turning his collar, found the name-plate, and so learned that his name was Chris. The owner's name was Forrest, but the address—in London—had been mostly obliterated, as though it was his no longer.

"Chris, you're a nice, bright, cheeky chappie," said Kaye, "but a bad dog to wander off! But, as the nasty man was dropping tit-bits, you can't be blamed, can you?"

Chris wagged his tail. He liked Kaye, and put his head on one side, then barked.

Kaye lifted him into the car, and her grandfather petted him.

"He seems a nice fellow," he said. "But fancy a dog-thief bothering with him. He's not a pup, although hardly more than a year old, and he's certainly not valuable."

"Except to his owner, and I dare say he's all the world to her," said Kaye. "Anyway, she'll be just thrilled to have him back again. Let's go on to the common, granddad. The man said she might be there, and I bet he knows where she was. The poor girl is probably searching all over the place for her pet."

They went to the common, where several other dogs were being exercised by their owners; but, to Kaye's surprise, there was no one there calling a dog in vain. For five or six minutes she remained, but did not care to let Chris off the lead in case he roamed away. As she had taken charge of him, she felt responsible for his welfare until she handed him over to his mistress.

Chris wasn't a very valuable dog to look at, but he was worth his weight in gold to his young owner. And even though she needed money badly, she would not sell her pet!

By IDA MELBOURNE

As she could not spend the whole day searching, and it was nearly tea-time, Kaye decided to report the matter at the police station, where, if she had any sense, the owner would report her loss, too.

Kaye gave one last look about her, and then returned to the car. By some ironic twist of Fate, as the car drove off, a girl carrying a lead in one hand and a dog's ball in the other came over the crest of the rise in the centre of the common.

"Chris! Chris!" she called. But the car with Chris in it was out of sight, and certainly out of earshot, and once again she called in vain.

"Oh, Chris, Chris," she murmured miserably, "if you've really been taken from me, I believe my luck will never change!"

The bright-eyed mongrel terrier was Celia Forrest's one pal. A dancer by profession, life had seemed wonderful to Celia until three months ago, when a slip while dancing had strained a muscle in her leg. She had struggled on, but dancing had not helped matters, and gradually what had seemed at first but a minor ailment became so serious that her career was abruptly ended. Celia's dancing days were over. To earn her living she must find other work. But up till now all her efforts to do so had failed.

To Celia, as she looked about her on the common now, the world seemed suddenly empty, as though the sunlight had been taken from it. Then came a sudden ray of hope. Chris might have wandered home. No sooner the thought than she was hurrying homeward as fast as her limp would allow to the house where she had her room.

As her landlady opened the door Celia, full of hope, shot out a question. "Chris—is he home yet?" she cried.

"I lost him on the common when he chased a ball over the hill."

The landlady frowned heavily.

"No, he's not. And a good thing if you haven't that dog to buy food for when you can't afford to buy it for yourself! I'm keeping that dog; that's what it amounts to when you owe me thirty shillings!"

Celia bit her lip.

"Oh, don't Mrs. Giles! I'll pay up when I get a job—you know I will. And I must get one soon. It's Chris I'm worrying about now—"

Celia broke off because she heard footsteps behind her. Turning, she saw a man in a light grey suit smiling at her. It was the man Kaye of the Kennels had recently encountered.

"Good-afternoon!" he said. "I think you own a little dog named Chris?"

"Chris! My goodness, yes!" exclaimed Celia excitedly. "Have you seen him? Aren't you the man he followed yesterday, the scamp?"

"I am. And he followed me again to-day; seems to have taken a liking to me," the man said. "That's why I have come to make a suggestion. I have taken a liking to that little dog, and he's got fond of me, it seems. I'd like a cute little fellow like that, and I'm willing to pay a good price—"

"Price!" echoed Celia, shocked. "Oh, but I'm not selling Chris! I just couldn't!"

She was in the doorway of the house, and the landlady stood behind her. Now she burst in.

"Couldn't? Not when you need money so badly?" she exclaimed. "Huh! I'd like to see thirty bob of it, anyway!"

To Celia's horror, the man pulled out his notecase.

"Two pounds is what I am prepared to pay," he said. "It's a good price for a mongrel, but I have taken a liking to him."

To Celia the whole world seemed to whirl round as the landlady nudged her fiercely and the man temptingly flicked the two pound notes. To sell Chris! Oh, no. She wouldn't do it!

"You must!" hissed the landlady. "If you don't, then out you go, my girl, to-night."

Celia swallowed hard.

"But—but in any case Chris is lost. I haven't him to sell—"

The man took out his wallet, opened it, and held out a card.

"Some girl thought I was trying to steal him; that's her card. Unless she did steal him, he's at the kennels now."

Celia took the card, saw it mistily through tears; and then, without a word to either the man or the landlady, she went scurrying down the steps.

"I won't sell him—I won't!" she sobbed to herself as she ran. "Oh, poor Chris; he'd never, never understand. I just couldn't! I'd rather starve!"

She slowed to a walk, looked at the card again to note the address of the kennels, and then, her mind in turmoil, turned her steps in the right direction. A hundred yards behind, the man in the light grey suit followed.

CHRIS SURPRISES KAYE

KAYE had taken a great liking to Chris. He was a splendid little dog, unusually bright and keen.

She had introduced him to Brutus, and the other dogs at the kennels.

He made friends with them, then suddenly dived off to return with a ball he had found. He dropped it at Kaye's feet and gave an eager bark.

"Want a game, eh?" asked Kaye, smiling.

She tossed it to him, and Chris bounced it with his paw. Then, dipping his nose under it, he held it balanced for a moment and rose on his hind legs. That done, he tossed the ball up and caught it.

Kaye stood amazed.

"My goodness, that's worth paying to see!" she laughed. "Here, Chris, try again!"

That clever feat might have been a mere accident, so Kaye gave him another chance. She tossed the ball to him. As before, he patted it with his paw, bouncing it down again, and then knocked it up with his nose and caught it between his teeth. It was a neat trick, and not one that could have been taught to many dogs.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Kaye. "You're a very smart dog, Chris. I wonder if your mistress taught you that?"

Chris barked and quickly showed that this was not the only trick he knew. It soon became obvious that the little terrier was no ordinary dog. Either he had had some special professional training, or else his ancestors had. He was born with a flair for tricks.

Chris was still showing off when the gate bell rang. Brutus barked warning and went rushing off to see who it was.

The visitor was none other than Chris' owner; and as she walked in and saw him she gave a cry of delight. Chris dashed across to her, leaping up in wild joy and excitement, as though he had been parted from her for hours instead of merely minutes.

"Hallo, hallo! I take it that you are Chris' owner?" smiled Kaye.

In a moment she and Celia had introduced themselves and exchanged their high opinions of Chris, Celia expressing gratitude for Kaye's trouble and kindness.

"I shall be sorry to see him go," said Kaye. "He's awfully cute, and he can do really clever tricks."

Celia smiled proudly.

"He can. Why, he even sits at my hired typewriter and pretends to type! It's screamingly funny. What I should do without him I just daren't think—"

Her face clouded as she said that, a fact which Kaye was quick to notice.

"If you keep your eyes open for a rather flashily dressed man in a light grey suit, I don't think you'll lose Chris again," she said, and told her story.

Celia's eyes rounded as she listened; for she had not suspected that her pet had narrowly escaped being stolen.

"My word! What an amazing thing!" she gasped. "Why, that's the man who has offered me two pounds for Chris! Two pounds for my darling pet!" she added, fondling him. "As if I could sell, even though—"

"Sell? Oh, you couldn't do that!" protested Kaye. "Why, look, he loves you. I can always tell. He's wrapped up in you, and you love him. You aren't tempted to sell, surely?"

Celia, looking gravely troubled, told Kaye the whole story of her difficulties.

"What will happen when I take Chris back? I hardly dare do it!" She shivered. "My landlady will turn me out—I know she will—and keep the few things I've got. She's been very

kind, really; but she's hard and practical, and she thinks that as I'm so hard up I've no right to keep Chris. And now that two pounds has been offered for him—well!"

Kaye's eyes rounded. She looked at Chris intently, and wondered why, nice dog though he was, he should seem worth two pounds to someone, considering that he was only a mongrel, whose market price was a matter of shillings.

And then, quite suddenly, an idea struck Kaye. She thought she saw why the man wanted him.

"My goodness! Has he seen Chris do tricks?" she asked. "If so, he may think he could be taught more. The man may be connected with a circus."

Celia jumped. That idea had not entered her head until now.

"Phew! That might be so. I dare say Chris would be some good at the circus," she said.

Kaye snapped her fingers; there was a gleam of excitement in her eyes, and she almost shouted out the idea that now came to her.

"A circus! You've been on the stage?"

"As a dancer—yes."

"But why couldn't you train him?" Why couldn't you get a job at a circus or on the stage?" cried Kaye. "There was a dog turn at the theatre here not so long ago."

Celia looked quite dazed by the idea.

"Oh, but—" she murmured.

"But nothing," said Kaye briskly.

"Between us we've got to teach young Chris a routine of tricks. And as for your landlady's bill, if I'm not offending you," she added, "I'm in funds myself at the moment, and I would gladly tide you over this bad spell."

Celia was deeply touched—as touched by this kind offer which she could not refuse, as she was thrilled by the idea of Chris' being trained for the stage.

"Train him for the stage? Oh, yes, Yes! What an idea! Oh, we must!" she cried. "And I have a feeling you're right about that man. He wanted Chris to teach him tricks. He must have seen Chris doing his ball trick. Now you mention it, I've seen him loitering around a good deal. He followed us home once, and that's how he knew where I lived. Hurrah! If he knows anything about dog performers, and wants to buy Chris, that in itself is hopeful."

At the gate, his hand raised to press the bell, stood the man in the light grey suit, a frown on his face. He did not press the bell, for he had heard clearly what they said.

Instead, muttering to himself, he turned away.

"Confound that kennels girl!" he muttered. "But I'll soon ruin her hopes for them! That dog has got to be mine!"

CHRIS SHOULD HAVE HIS CHANCE

NOW for it!" said Kaye Chalmers. "Chris is in fine fettle."

It was three days after Kaye had had her wonderful idea, and she and Celia together had trained him, studied him, and encouraged him. There was never a better, more willing learner than Chris. He threw himself into the games with real zest.

Some of the tricks he seemed to know almost by instinct, so quickly

did he pick them up. He could balance things, poise himself, dance, and Kaye and Celia racked their brains to think up suitable stunts for stage work.

Now, convinced that he was already good enough to give a trial performance, they were visiting the Grand Theatre in the nearest town.

Kaye had fixed the appointment by telephone, and the manager had booked the stage for them at eleven o'clock this morning.

Celia wore a stage frock that she had saved because it was so attractive, and Chris wore a special fluted, coloured collar, and was groomed as for a show.

Filled with confidence they entered the theatre, and awaited the manager in the foyer, while the doorman called Chris, and patted him.

Someone else called Chris, too, a man who stood behind some velvet curtains. He whistled very softly, but Chris heard the call, turned, and ran to him.

Rushing through the curtains, he stopped, and then leaped up with pleasure at the man who stood there—the man in the light grey suit.

Tossing down a piece of liver, the man then lured him with another tit-bit to a room near by; and Chris innocently followed him in. On the floor of that room was a large plate of raw meat, and Chris, who had not had his meal yet, wagged his tail, and gobbled it up.

"Good dog!" mocked the man. "There's something in that that won't hurt you, but will make you nice and sluggish, laddie."

Chris, intelligent though he was, could not possibly know that, even though he had a rather guilty feeling about eating the meat.

Celia was calling him, but through the closed door he could not hear. Presently she pushed through the curtains with Kaye, and went in search of him.

The man waited until Chris had finished his meal, and then, first peeping out through the part-open door to make sure that the coast was clear, sent him out.

"There he is!" exclaimed Kaye.

Celia took charge of Chris, and did not suspect that he had been fed, and hurried with him through the curtains. But Kaye loitered. A shoelace had come untied. And as she knelt to fasten it the man emerged from the room. He had heard Celia hurry away with Chris, and thought that there was no one remaining to watch him.

Kaye looked up with a start of surprise as she saw him. With a quick glance at her he swung round, re-entered the room, and banged the door.

"Well, my goodness!" Kaye murmured, surprised.

She stood quite still, dumbfounded, and then hurried after Celia to tell her this amazing discovery. But Celia had gone on to the stage, and as she was in conference with the manager, Kaye did not like interrupting. Standing near by in the wings, however, was another performer—a girl—so Kaye, with the idea of making inquiries about the man, approached her.

They chatted for a moment about Chris, and then Kaye mentioned the man in the light grey suit.

"Oh, that's the captain!" nodded the girl. "He has an act here—performing bears."

"Performing bears!" murmured Kaye, surprised. "Has he? Well, he

wanted to get hold of this dog for his turn."

The girl gave a surprised start.

"Did he? Well, that's news to me. His bear act hasn't been going too well, and he's not being re-engaged. Perhaps he thought a dog would liven it up."

"Perhaps so," murmured Kaye, and then gave her attention to the stage where Celia and Chris were going through their tricks.

Chris went through the hoop Celia held up—but only just. And Kaye, watching keenly, began to realise that something was wrong. Chris was sluggish, slow.

With growing dismay Kaye watched. She saw that the manager was not looking pleased. Nor was it to be wondered at, for Chris was not at his best. He was lacking his usual eagerness.

Kaye's heart sank as she saw the manager frown and shake his head.

"No good," he said. "He might improve. He's got the right idea, but he lacks pep. His mind's not on the job."

"It isn't," murmured Kaye. "In fact—"

And then as she saw Chris turn away from the tit-bit Celia held out to him, a suspicion leaped to her mind.

"My goodness—that man!" she exclaimed.

"Man! What man?" the manager asked.

"The man in the light grey suit—the captain!" exclaimed Kaye in wrath. "He lured Chris away again. He fed him; and that's why Chris has lost his pep. He's sleepy after a meal. He's not hungry, and he'd just as soon leave the tit-bits as eat them."

"Kaye! You don't mean that?"

A STORY YOU MUST NOT MISS

No. 678



Also ask your newsagent for these other three April volumes of the

SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY

No. 676. "The Fourth Form Mistress's Sister," by Hilda Richards.

No. 677. "Must Morcove Expel Her?" By Marjorie Stanton.

No. 679. "Valerie's World-Wide Quest," by Isabel Norton.

NOW ON SALE—4d. EACH.

gasped Celia. "But that man isn't in the theatre!"

"He is. He does a turn here!" cried Kaye. "And out of spite or jealousy, he's ruined your try-out!"

The manager knit his brows. He asked questions, and then he sent for the man with the light grey suit; but that artful rascal was no longer in the theatre.

"I'm sorry," the manager said. "But that explanation may be just an excuse, you know. I have to decide to-night what I shall fix in the way of turns, and there's no time for another try-out, so I am afraid I can't engage you!"

Kaye did her best to console Celia, but the girl was almost broken-hearted.

In glum mood, Kaye and Celia watched the next turn, a rehearsal of a juggling act that was being shown that week. A new trick had been included and it was being tried out. Chris, watching, too, wanted to rush on again, but he was held back.

"Poor Chris!" said Kaye. "If only you had had a fair chance—"

Kaye's voice trailed away, and a gleam came to her eyes. For an idea had occurred to her. If only the juggler would help, Chris should have his chance yet!

THAT evening Kaye, Celia, and Chris stood in the wings of the theatre. The "captain" had just finished his act with the bears—and he'd certainly not made a success. Gloomily he left the stage, not noticing the girls.

The next turn was the juggling act, and Chris grew excited. On came the juggler, juggling first of all very cleverly. Then he tried a balancing trick with a ball. He tried to balance it on his nose. Three times he tried and failed.

"Now," whispered Kaye. Celia released Chris, who, looking like a cheeky stray, wandered on to the stage and took the ball. The audience, thinking he had roamed there by chance, roared with laughter as he snatched the ball and dodged away.

But the juggler, shooting him away, snatched at the ball while Chris sat and watched. Once again the juggler tried to balance it on his nose and failed. Away bounced the ball.

Quick as a flash Chris was on to it. He patted it down with his paw so that it bounced. Then, neatly and easily, he did the trick that the juggler had tried to do. He balanced the ball on his nose and walked with it, standing on his hind legs.

It was a novelty trick that could not fail. The audience rose to it, laughed and applauded, as Chris swaggered round. Then they became hysterical as the juggler, playing up, tried again, shrugged in despair, persuaded the "stray" to show him, and then at last succeeded—with Chris doing another of his tricks, standing up and clapping with his forepaws.

"We've won—or rather Chris has," said Kaye softly.

And when Chris returned from the stage he was hugged and petted and kissed. The manager, hurrying up, took Celia's arm.

"That dog—he's booked," he said. "I'll put off my other appointment to-morrow. Come and see me at half-past ten, and make sure there are no tricks!"

Kaye made sure of that, and it was one of the proudest moments of her life when the manager signed on Celia.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Another delightful dog story, featuring Kaye of the Kennels next week. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL now.

The BANDIT'S DAUGHTER



LOLA TAKES A CHANCE

LOLA SHARMAN was thrilled at the thought of joining her father in Mexico and taking up a dancing career.

But what a shock it was when she discovered that her father was a bandit known as the Grey Shadow! And Tony Creswick, an English lad who had befriended her, was out to capture the bandit!

Lola determined to keep her father's identity a secret.

She was engaged to dance at the house of Ramon Garcia—her father's greatest enemy! Garcia's unpleasant niece, Maria, accused Lola of having worn a tiara which had been stolen by the bandit.

Just when Lola believed she had averted Ramon Garcia's suspicious news came that the Grey Shadow had been seen in the grounds—and was believed to be already trapped!

“THE Grey Shadow—the bandit!”

The dramatic cry was echoed by everyone present; the hacienda rang with startled shouts—the sound of hurrying feet.

Lola stood as though carved from stone, her face deathly pale, her hand pressed to her racing heart.

For the moment she was forgotten. Even Maria's startling accusation had paled to insignificance beside the new alarm.

Lola felt almost faint from the reaction—the swift, almost incredible turn of events.

A moment ago she had been faced by the danger of discovery—the exposure of her desperate trick to conceal the stolen tiara and substitute it for another.

The danger had been momentarily averted. But Lola's relief gave place to a sharper, more poignant anxiety—fear, not for herself, but for her bandit father!

Why—why had he returned to the hacienda that he had been accused of robbing?

Tony had leapt to the window at the first alarm; throwing open the casement, he leaned out, his boyish face pale and grim in the red glare of the torches carried by the men outside.

“Which way did he go?” he shouted. “Round to the orchard at the back of the hacienda, señor!” came the breathless reply. “A party of men have gone to cut off his retreat.”

“Right!” shouted Tony. “I'll be with you in a minute!”

He turned on his heel—and his glance encountered Lola's. She met his gaze steadily, trying desperately to hide her fear.

Tony caught her by the arm. “You hear that, Lola?” he breathed. “The scoundrel has had the audacity to come back—but we'll get him this time, never fear!”

His expression softened as he caught sight of her trembling lips; but he mistook the reason for her agitation.

“Don't worry about that headdress, Lola,” he breathed, drawing her aside. “Anyone in their senses would know that you're not mixed up in the theft. Maria's just raging jealous—that's all. I'll have a word with Senor Garcia, later, and put things right for you.”

He grinned at her reassuringly, pressed her arm, and sprinted out of the room.

Meanwhile, the alarm had spread. Ramon Garcia, his face pallid with anger, whipped a pistol from his belt and shouted orders to his men from the window.

“Five hundred pesetas to the man who captures the bandit—alive or dead!”

Lola, her heart cold as ice, seized her chance to slip from the room.

She would cheerfully have faced any disappointment to have assured her father's safety.

She darted to the main doors, to find

Her father's pursuers were close at hand. Lola knew she must do something—anything—to prevent his discovery. So she danced as she had never danced before. And that dance of desperation held the watchers spell-bound.

By RENEE FRAZER

her way barred by a crowd of startled, chattering guests.

It was impossible to force her way through the crush.

Snatches of panic-stricken conversation reached her ears—mostly in Spanish.

“The Grey Shadow—he will rob us all!”

“No one is safe while that scoundrel is at liberty!”

“Hark! They are shouting! Do you suppose he is caught?”

Once again the clatter of hoofs—the sound of distant shouts.

With a little sob, Lola backed away, staring desperately towards the high windows. Out there, in the gathering dusk, her father was being hunted by his enemies—like a gallant stag pursued by a pack of hounds.

A reckless gleam flashed into Lola's eyes; no one in all that chattering crowd had so much as glanced at her.

Gathering up her flimsy, petal frock—the romantic dress round which she had woven so many dreams—Lola climbed on to the broad sill of one of the windows.

Her heart beating madly, she threw open the casement, and stood for a moment staring out across the grounds.

Then, plucking up her courage, she sprang from the window into the courtyard.

At the moment, it was deserted; the sounds of the pursuit had died away in the distance.

Lola stared round her, her breath coming quickly. She had no idea which way to go, or what she hoped to do. She longed desperately to catch a glimpse of her father—yet she hoped fervently that he had escaped his pursuers.

As in a dream she set off across the courtyard—running swiftly in the shadows, sometimes pausing anxiously as the shouting seemed to draw nearer.

Her heart thumping, she halted at length among the trees. Here the shadows were impenetrable; strange whisperings and rustlings reached her ears.

Lola caught in her breath sharply; from close at hand she imagined she heard a stealthy movement—as though someone was approaching in the darkness.

Then, in a gap between the trees, she saw a tall, ghostly figure silhouetted against the fading light!

The figure stood motionless, in an

attitude of listening; the distant sounds of the pursuit seemed to hold his attention. Lola could never have mistaken that shadowy form—dressed entirely in grey; his tense, reckless bearing—the proud poise of his head.

She started from her concealment. "Dad!" she whispered brokenly. "Dad!"

The grey figure spun on its heel. "Lola!" came the husky, incredulous whisper. "You—here?"

The next instant Lola was in her father's powerful arms, half sobbing as she clung to him.

"Fate is playing strange tricks to-night, Lola," he said huskily. "I never dreamed to find you here. I thought you would be dancing at the cafe—"

Lola clutched warningly at his arm, as she imagined she heard a distant crashing among the bushes. "Dad—why did you come here?" she whispered brokenly. "If you're captured—"

A soft, reckless laugh interrupted her. "My dear Lola—let them try! I'm here for a purpose—and that purpose is not yet completed. But you've not answered my question." He took her by the shoulders, looking into her eyes. "What are you doing at this house?"

Lola met his gaze squarely, plucking up her courage. "I came here—to dance," she breathed.

"At Senor Garcia's invitation?" he demanded her bandit father, a swift shadow crossing his handsome face.

Lola shook her head quickly. "I wouldn't have come if I had known it was his house; a friend of mine invited me. He—" She bit her lip in sudden confusion.

How could she admit to her bandit father that her friend, Tony Creswick, was the boy who had sworn to capture the Grey Shadow?

But her father's questioning gaze compelled her to go on.

"He told me it would be a wonderful chance. I never dreamed—" Her voice broke as she stared into her father's grey eyes. "I never dreamed that it was the house that you—you—"

She couldn't bring herself to say the dreadful thing that faltered on her lips—the house that her father had robbed!

"Oh, dad," she burst out chokingly. "why—why did you do it? And why did you send me the stolen headdress?"

She felt her father stiffen. A strange, incredulous look flashed into his eyes.

"Lola, what do you mean?" he demanded huskily. "What are you talking about, child?"

She was startled by the sound of his voice.

"The headdress, dad, the diamond tiara!" she breathed. "Your present to me! It—it was stolen from Senor Garcia's house!"

Her father's handsome face had turned suddenly white. His hands gripped her shoulders.

Half-fearfully she encountered his gaze, expecting anger, swift reproach, but she saw neither.

A momentary spasm of pain crossed her father's face. His lips twisted in a faint, sardonic smile.

"So my little daughter believes I am a thorough-going scoundrel?" he asked.

"I don't!" gasped Lola chokingly. "I—I don't know what to think. But whatever you have done, daddy, it won't make any difference to us. Let me come with you, please—to stay with you always!"

Her father's hand tightened on her

arm. There was a puzzled, yet strangely tender look in his eyes.

"No, dear," he said huskily. "My little daughter is cut out for greater things than for living in a bandit's camp!"

His voice shook slightly, but he was smiling into her eyes—the gay, bantering smile she knew of old.

"Do you think I haven't heard of the success of La Bella Lola, the young dancer? Why, your fame is spreading, my dear! They talk about you in the wayside cafes and inns—travellers who have come from Santa Crede! Whispers of your reputation have even reached villages among the hills!"

For an instant a faint sparkle crept into Lola's tearful eyes.

"Daddy, really?" she whispered. "Really, my dear! I'm proud of you, Lola, and I'll be even prouder as you climb the ladder to fame! You must go on, for both our sakes."

He spoke earnestly, his arm round her shoulder, yet all the time Lola was conscious that he was listening, alert for the slightest hint of danger.

The fact drove home the true nature of their position—the dreadful possibility of it all.

"But, dad, how can I dance," she whispered, "when I'm thinking all the time that you—that you—"

The Grey Shadow took her gently by the chin, tilting her head till her eyes looked into his.

"You still think I'm a rogue, Lola?" he asked whimsically.

"No, daddy; but—"

"But you believe I stole that headdress?" His smile faded suddenly.

"Lola, my dear, I swear—"

He broke off sharply, and Lola stifled a cry.

There came a crashing among the bushes, the sound of running footsteps, voices.

The lurid glare of torchlights flickered among the trees.

"They're coming!" gasped Lola. "Dad—quickly—you must escape!"

Her father stood motionless as a statue, his hand tightening on her arm.

"I must see you again, Lola!" he

said huskily. "That headdress—guard it at all costs! I'll get in touch with you—"

The shouting came nearer.

"Quickly, dad!" gasped Lola, almost sobbing in her anxiety. "They're coming this way!"

She broke from him and darted to a clump of bushes, cautiously parting the foliage.

What she saw caused her heart to turn cold.

In a clearing among the trees stood a crowd of armed men, some of them carrying torches.

Tony Creswick was with them, his boyish face flushed. Senor Garcia was rapping out his orders.

"Search the bushes!" he shouted. "The scoundrel can't be far distant! He's hiding somewhere near the house! Spread out, you men!"

Horrified, Lola realised her father's danger. Her intervention had delayed his escape, and now it was too late!

THE DANCE OF DESPERATION

THE Grey Shadow himself seemed to realise the fact. His face was pale, but his eyes glittered with a familiar, reckless light.

"Don't worry about me, Lola!" he breathed, close to her ear. "I'll make a dash for it! Whatever happens, you mustn't be found here with me! Go now, and, remember, your dancing first and always!"

He pushed her gently towards the house and sprang back into the shadows.

Lola, pale and agitated, found herself on the outskirts of the clearing.

The men were already spreading out to search. Her father's escape would be cut off!

If only she could cause some diversion—anything—to give her father a chance to get away!

In a flash a strange, reckless idea came to her.

The clearing, lit by the dancing flames of the torches, was a natural



"Quickly, dad!" Lola gasped. "They're coming this way!" Whatever happened, she must distract the crowd's attention until her bandit father had a chance to escape.

stage—a fantastic yet effective setting for a dance.

Lola did not stop to think. It was just a chance—a frail, incredible chance—and there was not a second to lose!

Plucking up her courage, she darted out into the clearing.

Her appearance in her dainty, petal frock, her pale face and dark hair lit by the glare of the torches, caused a momentary, startled diversion.

"Lola," exclaimed Tony, hurrying to her side, "go back into the house, please! This is no place for a girl!"

Lola laughed gaily, evading his grasp and darting into the centre of the clearing.

Her father's last words still echoed in her ears:

"Remember, a dancer first, and always!"

And she meant to dance now for her father's sake!

She waved her hand to the surprised searchers.

"Senors," she exclaimed, "wait! I have thought of a new dance; it came to me as an inspiration—the dance of the hunted fawn! Spare me just a few minutes, I beg of you!"

With a gay smile, she stared round at the bewildered onlookers.

"Caramba!" exclaimed Senor Garcia furiously. "What folly is this?"

"It is no folly, senor," rejoined Lola swiftly. "The magic of the night compels me to dance! And you will watch, all of you!"

Intrigued, the crowd of watchers drew nearer as Lola commenced her dance.

There was no music, except the rustle of the wind in the trees, the spluttering of the torches, but Lola danced as though inspired.

At all costs she must hold their attention—long enough to give her father a chance to escape.

The fawn hunted by the merciless hounds! It was a theme that even Lola would never have dreamed of interpreting; but the idea had come to her like a flash of light, inspired by her father's peril.

A desperation lent genius to her dancing feet. The strange audience stared, silent, fascinated. Senor Garcia alone was biting his lips in impatient fury.

He was about to shout to the gaping searchers, but at that instant another figure appeared on the outskirts of the group.

It was James Radcliffe, the famous English producer. Tony was with him, and the boy's eyes were alight with excitement.

"Look, sir!" he breathed. "You say she was a failure, but look at this!"

"The girl's mad!" declared Ramon Garcia angrily. "Stop her, or we'll let the bandit slip through our fingers!"

As he spoke there came a distant shot, the muffled clatter of hoofs.

The spell was broken.

As the distant, ominous sounds reached Lola's ears her steps faltered; the flush of excitement ebbed from her cheeks, leaving her deathly pale.

The onlookers, startled out of their gaping silence, were galvanised into action.

"Caramba—what is that?" shouted Senor Garcia hoarsely.

The reply came swiftly, with the arrival of a dusty, dishevelled messenger.

"El ladrone—the bandit has escaped! He broke through the outer guards, and is making for the hills!"

A stifled sob of relief escaped Lola's lips; she felt suddenly weak and faint. Her daring ruse, conceived on the spur

of the moment, had succeeded beyond her wildest hopes.

Her father was safe! Once on the open road none could hope to overtake the Grey Shadow.

The group of watchers had broken up; some were heading for trees, urged by Ramon Garcia's frantic orders; others, less interested in the chase, were returning to the house to reassure the frightened guests.

Lola managed to slip unnoticed in the wake of the latter group.

Now that the suspense was over, her one thought was to get away—to be alone, to think.

The memory of the ill-fated tiara—thrust from her mind by the dramatic events of the last few minutes—returned like a troubled ghost to mock her.

Her father had escaped—but even now she did not know the truth. What was it that he had been about to say when the arrival of the pursuers had so dramatically interrupted him?

"Lola, my dear, I swear—"
If only she could have read what was in his mind—behind those bantering, inscrutable grey eyes of his!

But there was no time to indulge in vain regrets; she would have to decide—and decide quickly—what she was to do with the incriminating headdress.

Reaching the house, Lola's first act was to seek out the little maidservant, Carlotta, and retrieve the tiara.

The girl had hidden it safely in a cupboard, and she loyally repeated her promise to remain silent about the whole affair.

"It is nothing, senorita," she breathed in reply to Lola's breathless thanks. "You were kind to me—and I have not forgotten."

Her fingers closed suddenly on Lola's arm.

"Hark! Someone comes."

Hastily Lola thrust the glittering circlet into her case—only in the nick of time.

As she hurried to the door a hand fell on her shoulder.

"No, you don't, Lola!" exclaimed Tony's voice, bantering, yet determined. "You can't slip away like that. There's a friend of mine here who's anxious to have a word with you."

Lola turned, her heart missing a beat—to encounter the keenly interested gaze of James Radcliffe, the famous producer.

Tony, grinning boyishly, proceeded to make the introduction. He had overcome his momentary disappointment at the bandit's escape—possibly convinced that the Grey Shadow's capture was only a matter of time.

"Here you are, Mr. Radcliffe," he said. "Allow me to present the elusive young dancer—in person! Lola, meet the gentleman who has travelled halfway across the world to find someone like you."

Lola, her face nervously flushed, encountered the stranger's appraising glance. Tony was joking, of course!

The producer smiled gravely as he shook hands.

"Your friend is inclined to exaggerate," he said; "but, frankly, I am interested in your dancing. I was disappointed—I will not mince words—more than disappointed with the show you put up in the ball-room—"

Lola winced. The producer's words merely added to the smarting chagrin she already felt—the knowledge of her failure. Yet why should he have taken the trouble to speak to her?

"But," he went on, after a deliberate pause, "my opinion altered completely when I chanced, quite by

accident, on your amazing performance just now—in the clearing."

Lola stared at him incredulously. Surely he could not be referring to the strange, desperate little dance she had contrived on the spur of the moment—to outwit her father's enemies!

Mr. Radcliffe's next words banished her doubts.

"The dance of the hunted fawn," he remarked thoughtfully. "It was an inspiration, young lady. What gave you the idea?"

Lola encountered his shrewd gaze, her thoughts racing. What could she say to him? How could she explain that the dance had been inspired by the peril menacing her bandit father?

"It—it was as I felt at the moment," she replied lamely, evading Tony's quizzical glance. "I didn't know it was good."

"Good? It was superb!" replied the famous producer quietly; and Lola's heart raced madly at this unexpected praise.

"I'll say it was!" declared Tony enthusiastically. "Takes a lot to hold me spellbound; but that about describes how I felt. Same with the rest of the crowd; all gaping with mouths wide open when they ought to have been rounding up that precious bandit. Thanks to you, Lola, the blighter gave us the slip!"

For a moment Lola felt a stab of apprehension. Did Tony suspect?

But the boy's bantering grin reassured her.

"Got clean away," he added, "while we all stood looking on like frozen muffs. If that's not a good advert for your dancing, Lola, then nothing is!"

Lola smiled tremulously, the colour returning to her face.

"It's nice of you to say so."

"Nice be bothered!" rejoined Tony cheerfully. "I'm just stating plain facts—eh, Mr. Radcliffe?"

The producer nodded.

"As a matter of fact, Miss Sharman," he said, "I've a proposition to make. As you may know, I'm interested in a chain of theatres—in London and out here in Mexico. I'm putting on a musical play at the small theatre in Varona, a few miles from here. There is a minor role in the play—the part of a young gipsy dancer—that had not been filled."

He regarded her shrewdly; and Lola felt the blood coursing madly through her veins.

"I wonder if you would care to take the part at such short notice?" he added.

Would she!

Lola felt almost too choked to reply; her heart was pounding with mingled excitement and apprehension.

Dared she accept the wonderful, unlooked-for offer, knowing the grim shadow that hung over her head? Yet why not? Her father himself had urged her to put her dancing first—to fight through to her goal, in spite of everything!

She looked up, encountering the eager, almost pleading expression on Tony's face—Tony, her loyal friend, who had worked so hard to get her this wonderful chance.

Mr. Radcliffe was regarding her keenly, apparently noting her hesitation.

"It would be a big opportunity," he said, "but, of course—if you'd rather not—"

"But—I'd love to!" burst out Lola, thrusting aside her stupid doubts and fears. "I—I hardly know how to thank you enough!" Her eyes were shining—bright with dreams. "There's only one thing—I mean, my work at

the cafe. Would it interfere with that? You see, Senor Lopez gave me my first chance, and—"

Mr. Radcliffe smiled, and Tony laughed, grabbing Lola by the hand.

"That's the spirit!" he declared. "And you needn't worry about your job at the cafe. Mr. Radcliffe will arrange about that."

The producer nodded.

"As it happens, Senor Lopez is an old friend of mine—and we'll arrange things between us. The show won't be on for another week—and the rehearsal needn't interfere with your dancing at the cafe."

The matter was left there, for the time being—as the searchers, led by Senor Garcia, returned from their fruitless pursuit of the Grey Shadow.

The senor was in a raging temper; and shortly afterwards the party broke up, the guests only too glad to get away.

As Lola drove away with Tony in the trap, her mind in a whirl of excitement, she was unaware of the vindictive eyes watching her from one of the windows of the hacienda.

Maria Garcia had not forgotten the rebuff she had received over the question of the stolen headdress—the ill-fated tiara now hidden safely in Lola's case!

The dramatic appearance of the bandit had effectively overshadowed the affair—for the time being.

But Maria was content to bide her time.

An unpleasant sneer curled the Mexican girl's lips as she watched the trap swing out of sight in the dusk—Lola's slim figure close to Tony's.

"The little fool!" she breathed. "She may hoodwink the others, but she'll never deceive me. Soon, I—Maria Garcia—will ferret out the truth—then let her look to herself!"

LOLA MUST DECIDE!

THE trap clattered on in the deepening twilight. Lola's eyes were misted with dreams.

"Penny for your thoughts?" said Tony, suddenly, grinning down at her.

Lola started, flushing nervously. "I—I was just thinking— She faltered, and broke off, unable to meet the boy's quizzical glance.

How could she tell him that she was thinking of her bandit father—wondering how soon the cloud of doubt and suspicion would be lifted, enabling them to be together once again?

Tony jumped to conclusions. "Thinking out your next dance, I'll bet! You're a wonder, Lola—the way you invent them, and put them over! If you please Radcliffe, there's no telling how high you'll climb. Ever thought about London?"

London! Lola drew in her breath quickly, her eyes shining. It was her goal—the final dazzling pinnacle of her hopes.

She nodded quickly; then a shadow crossed her face.

She could not—dared not—think about London, while her father remained an outlaw. Her place was here, in Mexico, until his name was cleared.

Tony drove her back to the little farmhouse where she was lodging.

Lola endeavoured to thank him for all he had done for her—but the boy merely laughed.

"Glad to have been able to put the chance in your way," he replied lightly. "What's the use of a friend, if he can't do a little thing like that?" Then his smile faded. "Afraid I shan't be



FROM ONE GIRL TO ANOTHER

Cheery Chatter and Helpful Hints by Penelope

shop—the one-of-many-counters—and buy a threepenny cardboard egg.

I shall place the stockings in this, and then tie a bow of ribbon from my store of "bits and pieces," so that it'll look quite expensive—I hope!

HALLO, EVERYBODY!—Here is your Penelope just in time to wish all you nice young people a Happy Easter!

I'm very lucky myself, for you see, I'm going away.

A good many of you know Lulworth Cove in Dorset, don't you? Well, I'm going, with my friend, Margaret, to stay at a tiny place near there for a few days. So if any of you are around and should spot two very beautiful, handsome, young and attractive girls looking at you, you'll know that's us!

On reading that last sentence again, I think perhaps I'd better, in case you didn't realise it was meant to be a joke, explain that actually your Penelope and her friend Margaret are two quite ordinary girls. So perhaps you won't recognise us, after all!

Mind you, you might spot my red walking-stick. I had this elegant thing given me a week or two ago—just one of those surprise presents that wasn't a bit expensive, and wasn't meant for any special occasion.

Apparently many mannequins carried them at the Paris dress shows, and they look like becoming fashionable this year.

Not that I shall carry my red one only because it's fashionable, but because I do like a stick when I'm out for a hike. It's as useful as a third leg, I always think.

And the fact of its being red will certainly add a cheerful note to my green skirt and jacket, won't it?

ALL SORTS OF EGGS

I wonder what sort of Easter Eggs you like best?

Do you like chocolate ones, or those others that contain useful presents?

When I was younger I used to like big, chocolate ones—and the bigger the better.

But now my taste has changed—though only a little. I still vote for the chocolate eggs, I'm afraid. The only difference is that I don't mind if they're not terribly big, as long as they are filled—either with chocolates or other sweets.

My friend, Margaret, on the other hand, isn't very keen on chocolate. She'd much rather have a cardboard egg that contained a gift. So I think I'll buy her a pair of silk stockings, then dash along to my favourite

HAND-KNITTERS

I wonder how many new jumpers we shall see being worn on Easter Sunday?

Judging by the numbers of girls and women I have seen knitting in every spare moment lately—a good many, I should say. And the knitters have all been working away at top-speed, too—in order to have that "something new" for Easter, I'm sure.

The one thing that most knitters are not keen on is the sewing together of the seams of a jumper, I've always discovered. And certainly this can be a slow task, for it must be done very carefully if the seams are to be neat.

I've found, and so have a lot of other knitters, that the best way of joining seams, is not to oversew them in wool, but to crochet them.

You who can wield a crochet-hook neatly should try this. It's surprising what a "finished" look it gives to the home-made jumper. And, of course, to other garments as well.

INITIAL BROOCHES

Brooches made from scraps of felt with your own initial on them sound a good idea, don't they?

If you have some odd pieces of coloured felt you could easily make some of these fashionable brooches for yourself and for your chums.

First, you must sketch the letter you require on the felt—using chalk for the sketching, for this brushes off afterwards. Then cut around it.

Next attach the initial to a square, an oval, or a triangle of different coloured felt, with an invisible stitch. Sew a tiny safety-pin at the back for attaching. These initials can be worn on your hat, your coat lapel, or the bodice of your dress, or on a handbag. And they look so smart and colourful. The joy of making them in felt is that this needs no stitching.

Enjoy yourselves over Easter, won't you?

Your own,

PENELOPE



seeing much of you for the next week. Lola. I've got to get on the trail of that bandit. He's a more slippery customer than I imagined. Well—good luck to your dancing! I'll try to slip over to see you one day, before the new show starts; in any case, I'll make a point of being there on the opening night. Here's luck—to both of us!"

THE next few days passed swiftly for Lola. She was kept so busy that she had little time to indulge in troubled thoughts.

True to his promise, James Radcliffe called to see the astute cafe proprietor, and all arrangements were made for Lola to join the cast of the musical play: "Romany Nights."

Rehearsals took place in the morning, and Lola had a five mile ride to the theatre—through wildly picturesque country, in the shadow of the snow-capped hills.

In the afternoon and evenings she appeared at the cafe, where she was already a great favourite with the customers.

Once or twice Lola was able to speak to her little Mexican friend, Carlotta—when Maria was out of the way. From Carlotta she learnt that much activity was going on at the Hacienda Barranca. Señor Garcia was in touch with the chief of the police, and elaborate plans were being laid for trapping the elusive Grey Shadow.

But even as Brenda took the shimmering costume, her gaze went round the room. Was that basket in which she had concealed the vase here in this room?

Then her eyes shone. Yes, there it was, over in one corner by a cupboard. She peeped in. The vase was still there, safe and unharmed beneath the costumes.

"They're for a later tableau," one of the girls informed her. "Better hurry. We're due to appear shortly."

Brenda felt a sudden spasm of anxiety. Professor Janson might know the vase was in this particular room. He might be able to sneak in when it was empty. Or the girls who would later be changing into the costumes the basket contained might see the vase, wonder what it was doing there, and start making inquiries.

She must hide the vase somewhere until eleven o'clock, when she could give it to Marion as they had arranged.

She hesitated, biting her lip. Suddenly to produce the vase now would be sure to invite comment. At the back of that cupboard would make an ideal hiding-place; but how to slip it there without the girls seeing?

Her opportunity came unexpectedly. Outside in the castle grounds came the sound of explosions.

"Fireworks! They're letting off some of the rockets!" went up an excited cry.

There was an eager rush to the windows to watch. Brenda smiled. In a flash she had taken the vase out of the basket—had slipped it behind the cupboard.

Quickly she changed. She put on her swim suit, then over it the mermaid costume. Cleverly it had been made in such a way as to give the legs full freedom for swimming.

Brenda flung a bathing wrap around her shoulders, and then, as a buzzer sounded, trooped out with the others.

Of Tony she heard no news—excepting one brief message sent by a carrier, repeating his wishes for her success, and affirming his determination to be present at the opening performance.

It was on the morning of that great event that Lola rode back from the final rehearsal, her cheeks still flushed with the memory of Mr. Radcliffe's praise her eyes shimming with anticipation at the thought of that evening.

Her part in the musical play was small—yet it would mean her big chance to prove herself.

For five minutes—in a scene representing the gipsy encampment by night—she held the centre of the stage, dancing by firelight to the tune of strumming guitars.

Mr. Radcliffe had hinted that if she was a success on the opening night, it might lead to even greater things!

Lola was dreaming of the future—barely conscious of the wild and rugged scenery through which she was passing.

Her horse, a docile and well-trained animal, lent to her by Señor Lopez, knew the road well, and Lola had only to keep a light hold on the reins.

She was more surprised than startled when she felt the docile animal shy suddenly, jerking at the reins.

Lola's hand tightened swiftly on the reins as she stared round her. She was passing along a narrow, winding road shadowed by frowning cliffs, and for an instant she imagined she saw a man's head and shoulders vanish from a dark crevice above her.

BRENDA'S MYSTERY TASK IN HOLLYWOOD

(Continued from page 640.)

Loud cheers and applause greeted them. Brenda caught a glimpse of Molly and Audrey in the sea of faces surrounding her, and waved. She saw, too, Professor Janson sitting near them; no one could ever miss those piercing green eyes of his.

Boats stood waiting to take them out to the floating stage in mid-lake. The boats were outlined in coloured lights; the stage was, too.

"Six of us pose on the stage," the girl next to Brenda said. "You're one of the swimmers. Gee, but doesn't your phosphorescent costume show up? It'll look grand when the lights are turned off and you're swimming about in the darkness!"

Soon all was ready. Girls had taken up their positions on the stage, now in darkness. Brenda and five other girls had been rowed across to the diving-tower.

There came a signal. Suddenly the floating stage became a blaze of light. Everywhere else in the vicinity of the lake all the lights had been extinguished.

There on the stage sat Father Neptune on a golden throne, trident in hand, surrounded by a bevy of beautiful mermaids.

There was another signal. "That's us!" said a girl close to Brenda. "In we go!"

Brenda, her eyes sparkling, took a deep breath. Then into the water her luminous body flashed. The others flashed in with her.

It was marvellously effective—those half-dozen glowing forms turning and twisting in the water, swimming round and round the floating stage.

Then, one by one, they took it in turns to dive from the tower, gleaming

The next moment she saw the reason for the horse's sudden fright.

Something had been flung into the road directly beneath the animal's flailing hoofs—a folded sheet of paper, weighted by a stone!

Lola's heart missed a beat as she pulled up her restive steed, and slipped from the saddle, snatching up the strange missile.

Her hands shook slightly as she unfolded it, and her heart gave a violent bound as she recognised her father's characteristic, dashing handwriting:

"Lola, my dear,—I must see you this evening, without fail. Come to the secret retreat, and bring the tiara with you. Remember the signal.—DAD."

Lola's face paled; her mind was torn by conflicting feelings.

Her first thought was for her father. What could have happened? Was some fresh danger threatening him?

Then, as she reread the note, its full significance dawned on her.

Her father urged her to meet him that evening; yet that evening was to see the opening performance of the musical play—the play in which she was booked to appear for her first real part—the dancing role on which she had based all her hopes!

What should Lola do? If she meets her father, it means that she cannot be present at the first night of the show. Yet if she doesn't—Don't miss a word of next Friday's splendid instalment of this serial. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.

bodies that flashed through the darkness.

At last it was all over. Cheers rang out from the spectators. The floating stage was plunged into darkness, to prepare for the next tableau; lights blazed on throughout the grounds, while the illuminated boats took Brenda and the other performers back to the bank.

Suddenly Brenda's gaze went to the large clock set on one of the castle towers. Half-past ten!

In half an hour's time Marion would be waiting outside, ready to receive the vase and make off with it. Tingling, she accompanied the girls back to their dressing-room, where she changed back into the pretty red party dress she had been wearing.

The other girls had all departed. She went to the window; looked out. There was a rustle in the bushes which grew close by. A figure cautiously emerged.

"Marion!" Brenda gasped excitedly. "Have you got it?"

"Yes. Won't be a tick."

Swiftly Brenda turned; darted back towards the cupboard. She stooped to pick up the vase which now had become so precious—which held the secret that was bound up in their future and their happiness. She straightened up, holding it carefully.

And at that moment the door of the room swung open. Brenda heard a movement; swung round with a gasp.

Then her face went ashen. A terrible fear swept through her. Standing in the doorway was Professor Janson, his piercing green eyes fixed on hers, holding her motionless and helpless by their very intensity!

Who will get the precious vase after all—Brenda or the sinister Professor Janson? You must not miss next Friday's grand, long, complete instalment, so order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL to-day!