

"THE BANDIT'S DAUGHTER" — One of the six splendid stories for schoolgirls inside.

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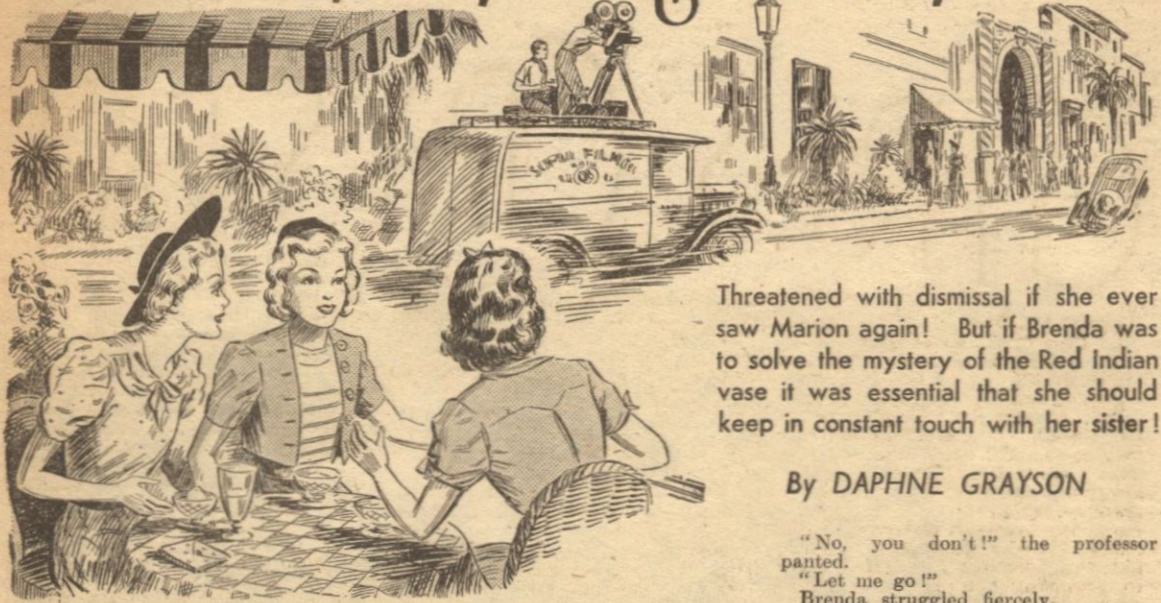
GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{2^D} WEEKLY



**WOULD THE MYSTERY
DOG LEAD THEM TO
THEIR VANISHED CHUM?**

(A dramatic incident from the exciting story, "The Puzzle of the Paper-Chase," within.)

Brenda's Mystery Task in Hollywood



MARION GETS THE VASE!

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, and a Professor Janson were the sisters' enemies, who had previously got Marion dismissed in disgrace by Mrs. Benson. To avert suspicion, Brenda had adopted the name of Collins.

During a carnival held at a film magnate's home Brenda arranged to recover a vase which had been stolen from Mrs. Benson's collection, and which might be vital to her and Marion.

She was to take the vase from a cupboard and pass it to Marion through the window. But even as she took the vase, Professor Janson, her enemy, appeared in the doorway!

BRENDA felt powerless to move as those green eyes looked into hers. She could only stare at her enemy.

Professor Janson advanced into the room.

He came towards her, his feet making no sound on the parquet flooring. There was an unpleasant smile on his scarred face.

"I think I will take the vase," he said, in a purring voice.

Brenda's fingers tightened about the vital vase. She still could not move, but her brain told her she must not part with that object which she had striven so desperately to gain.

To lose it now would be to lose everything she must achieve.

If only she could tear her gaze away from those glittering, hypnotic eyes! But she could not—for the life of her she could not!

The professor was less than five yards away from her now, moving with the stealth of a creature about to pounce.

In another moment he would have snatched the vase. But at that split second:

"Brenda! Don't, Brenda!"

Marion's voice, coming frantically through the window, broke the spell.

Brenda gasped, turned her head. And, escaping those piercing green eyes, strength coursed back through her. Suddenly she became vividly alive to the danger of the situation and the peril threatened.

Framed in the open window she saw her sister, eyes dismayed and desperate behind the disguising spectacles, face set and strained.

"Throw it! Don't let him get it!" Marion panted.

"Give me that vase—ah!"

The professor's grating voice ended on a harsh exclamation of fury.

For Brenda, her every nerve tinglingly alert now, had whirled into action. As the professor sprang forward she thrust out a foot, kicking a chair into his path.

He stumbled into it. Next moment he flung it across the room; but that second's delay had given Brenda her chance.

Two bounds forward towards the window, where Marion waited.

"Catch!" she gasped.

"Confound you—"

A lean hand shot over Brenda's shoulder, but too late.

Brenda had flung the vase. Through the open window it sailed, into Marion's sure hands.

"Got it! But, Brenda—"

"Run!" Brenda cried, as she saw her sister hesitate. "I'll be all right. Get the vase away!"

With a swift nod Marion was off. Into the bushes she darted, and became lost to sight. Brenda prepared to follow her through the window.

But even as she sought to scramble over the sill she felt two hands roughly grip her shoulder, felt herself being dragged back into the room.

Threatened with dismissal if she ever saw Marion again! But if Brenda was to solve the mystery of the Red Indian vase it was essential that she should keep in constant touch with her sister!

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

"No, you don't!" the professor panted.

"Let me go!"

Brenda struggled fiercely.

"Where's that girl gone?"

"Find out!"

"Where's she gone? You'll tell me!"

In his fury, the professor was shaking Brenda. Her eyes flamed angrily. She wrenched an arm free.

"You beast—"

Her hand rose to strike at him, to defend herself, but at that moment the door of the room flew open.

"Professor Janson! Brenda! Why, bless my soul, what ever's happening here?"

It was the startled voice of Mrs. Benson. She stood in the doorway, staring in amazement at the struggling figures over by the window.

Brenda drew a gasping intake of breath. She felt the professor's grip relax.

"Surely you two were quarrelling?" Mrs. Benson asked incredulously.

Brenda bit her lip uneasily. Dismay gripped her. Once the professor mentioned the vase, told Mrs. Benson that he had seen her give it to another girl—

Professor Janson coughed.

"Merely a misunderstanding, Mrs. Benson," he said smoothly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, I happened to come in here just as this girl was about to jump through the window—evidently, in high spirits. I thought it might be dangerous, and tried to restrain her. She, however, apparently misunderstood my motive, and resented my interference. Thus you caught us struggling, Mrs. Benson. Quite harmless, really, of course! I hope this explanation will clear me with the young lady herself."

He turned to stare at Brenda. She stared back at him, her eyes narrowing.

But relief swept through her. Of course, Professor Janson had dared make no mention of the vase, for fear of implicating himself. He was working in league with Ruby Fletcher, and Mrs. Benson must have no suspicion of his activities.

He had not exposed Brenda, knowing full well that she would not expose him.

He smiled coolly. Brenda gave a faint smile, too.

But Mrs. Benson did not smile.

"Brenda!" she said.

Her voice was grim, and Brenda started.

"Yes, Mrs. Benson."

"You are no doubt wondering how I came to be here when I had no ticket for the carnival."

"Well, yes, I am rather surprised. But—but it's lovely to see you. Molly and Audrey will be awfully pleased. Mrs. Benson—"

"I came, Brenda," Mrs. Benson interrupted, in the same grim voice, "because of some very disquieting news I learned after you had gone. I telephoned Mr. Vahl, and he was only too ready to help, and gave me permission to come along. Brenda, I want the truth!"

"I—I don't understand," Brenda faltered.

"I want to know if—"

And then Mrs. Benson broke off as from outside in the castle grounds came the sound of commotion, shouting voices, and running footsteps.

"Why, wasn't that Ruby's voice?" Mrs. Benson exclaimed, and hurried across to the still open window.

In a moment Brenda was there, too, staring out, and what she saw brought a gasp to her lips.

For, some twenty yards away, clearly revealed in the glow of the flood-lights that illuminated the castle were two struggling figures.

Ruby Fletcher was one of them.

And the other—

Marion!

A gasp broke from Brenda's lips. Then, even as she watched, all the colour drained from her cheeks.

For suddenly Ruby gave a triumphant cry. She broke away, and clutched in her hands now was the precious Redskin vase. While Marion, after one desperate effort to retrieve the vase, suddenly turned and took to her heels.

MRS. BENSON'S ULTIMATUM

BREND A stood rigid, numbed by shock and despair.

Ruby had got the vase. In spite of everything, she had got it! Consternation gripped Brenda. Swiftly her brain raced to meet this unexpected crisis.

She saw Ruby suddenly break into a run. But next moment Mrs. Benson's voice rang out:

"Ruby!"

Ruby halted as if pulled up by an invisible barrier. She swung round, a startled expression on her face.

"Isn't that the missing vase?" Mrs. Benson cried delightedly. "Oh, that's splendid! You've got it, Ruby! Bring it along to this room. Thank goodness we've recovered it!"

She stood watching as Ruby made her way to the side entrance of the castle.

Brenda stood biting her lip. A feeling of relief mingled with her dismay.

Ruby had obviously intended making away with the vase, but Mrs. Benson had prevented her from doing that.

But what was going to happen now? Had Ruby recognised Marion? A few moments later Brenda knew the answer.

Ruby came into the room, and Mrs. Benson's face lit up as she saw that the girl was carrying her treasured vase.

"How did you recover it?" she asked.

"I got it from the girl who stole it,"

Ruby replied. "From Marion Castle!"

Brenda's face went ashen.

"Marion Castle!" Mrs. Benson repeated the name in a voice that quivered with emotion.

"Yes, she was in disguise," Ruby went on, glancing vindictively at the silent, numbed Brenda. "She was wearing a wig and spectacles, but they moved as we struggled. It was Marion all right—no mistake about that!"

"So she did steal the vase!" Mrs. Benson said grimly. "I've suspected it all along. It's as I thought; the girl is nothing but a common thief!"

Brenda felt herself tremble. Something seemed to flame before her eyes. It was her own sister Mrs. Benson was talking about in that voice full of scornful contempt.

Angry words rose in a torrent to Brenda's lips.

"It's not true!" she cried passionately. "Marion isn't a thief—she never has been and never will!"

"She had the vase!" Ruby sneered. "You can't get away from facts. And what do you know about it, anyway, Brenda Collins? You seem to be jolly fond of sticking up for that girl—"

"And I'll go on doing it. I'm not going to hear these terrible things said against her!" Brenda defended vehemently.

"Hem!" It was a sudden cough from Professor Janson, who all the time had stood silent, looking as if he were bewildered by what was happening.

"Dear me," he added, "this is all very startling. You say, Mrs. Benson, that this vase was stolen? Really, I think it is my duty to mention that I happened to see this girl here—his gaze swung round on Brenda—"talking to a girl wearing spectacles!"

"I told you so!" Ruby shrieked.

"Brenda did meet Marion!"

Brenda gave a gasp, her face very pale. She felt that a trap was falling about her. She had a feeling that all this was prearranged, although how it could be so she did not understand.

But she understood the danger of her position; she saw that everything she was hoping to achieve hung in the balance.

What were Ruby and the professor, both as cunning as snakes, trying to do? To suggest that she, too, had

been involved in the supposed theft of the vase by Marion?

But no; obviously they did not intend to come outright with that accusation, or Professor Janson would have said that he had seen her throw the vase to Marion.

They were being more subtle. They were relying on Mrs. Benson's reaction to the fact that she had met Marion. Yes; that was it—that was their game, their trap.

"Brenda, is this true?" Mrs. Benson thundered. "Did you meet Marion to-night?"

Brenda could not deny it; she had no intention of denying it. But she must fight; Mrs. Benson should know the truth. Suddenly, impulsively, a torrent of words was pouring from her lips.

"What if I did meet her?" she cried passionately. "It's nothing to be ashamed of!"

"Brenda, how dared you see that wretched girl, when you knew—"

But Brenda didn't heed.

"And it's about time, Mrs. Benson, that you knew the real facts. I feel it is my duty to mention that Professor Janson had this vase in his possession!" Brenda rushed on. "When he was on the Jolly Roger, that floating restaurant anchored out in the Santa Monica Bay!"

"Brenda!"

"It's the truth! Also, Mrs. Benson, in the first place the vase was stolen by Ruby Fletcher, your secretary. She and the professor are working together. They have some underhand reason for wanting that vase and putting the blame on Marion!"

"Brenda! Not another word, Brenda!" Mrs. Benson was scandalised.

"Really, this is ridiculous—preposterous!" the professor bluffed.

"She's lying!" Ruby cried. "She's getting her own back because she's been found out!"

"Oh, no I'm not! Mrs. Benson—"

"Stop, Brenda!" Mrs. Benson cried.

"Professor, I am sorry—terribly sorry. This is a positive insult to a man of your reputation—"

"He's deceiving you!" Brenda said desperately. "Mrs. Benson, please—please believe me—"



"How did you recover the vase?" asked Mrs. Benson. Ruby flashed Brenda a spiteful smile. "I got it from the girl who stole it," she replied. "Marion Castle!"

"Be silent!"
And Brenda, with a little sob, was silent. The truth was of no avail. She realised that her employer would never believe her—never, until she had positive evidence to support her accusations.

Professor Janson was a well-known figure in Hollywood, respected and trusted. To persist in attacking him would only annoy Mrs. Benson all the more and make the position worse.

"Brenda, I can't say how deeply shocked I am!" Mrs. Benson exclaimed furiously. "I can see what has been happening. You have associated with Marion, and she has deliberately tried to cover up her own guilt by telling you this string of lies. Ruby said you had arranged to meet Marion, but I could not believe it. Now, however—"

"Ruby told you?" Brenda gasped.
"How did she know—"

"Through that telephone-call," Ruby cut in, with vindictive satisfaction. "I was suspicious it might be Marion, and I signalled Jenkins, the butler, to listen in on the telephone-extension in the study. I told you I was justified in doing it, Mrs. Benson."

"As it has turned out—yes, Ruby," Mrs. Benson agreed. "She did not tell me until after you had left Greenways, Brenda, and I followed you here to verify it for myself. But on your own admission you have met Marion. Brenda, I dismissed her, and now I've a very good mind—"

Mrs. Benson paused.
Brenda held her breath. Her face was white; her heart seemed hardly to be beating. If Mrs. Benson dismissed her now—

"She deserves to be dismissed, too!" Ruby put in maliciously.

"Be silent, Ruby. But, Brenda, I have come to like you," Mrs. Benson went on, a little huskily now. "I know Molly and Audrey think the world of you, and I have seen a friendship grow up between them that I would not wish to shatter unless for the gravest cause. But, Brenda, I warn you nothing like this must ever happen again. I shall let this matter drop on one condition."

Again she paused, staring directly into Brenda's eyes. Brenda was tense. She was not to be dismissed. Oh, thank goodness for that! But the condition—what was that to be?

"That condition, Brenda, is that from this moment on you have nothing whatsoever to do with Marion Castle!"

"Oh, Mrs. Benson—" Brenda cried tragically.

"I mean it, Brenda. I am in deadly earnest. That girl is dishonest, and a menace to anyone who mixes with her. You have heard what I said. You are not to communicate with her or ever see her again. I am giving you this one chance, Brenda. If you disobey my wishes—if it ever comes to my ears that you have associated in any way with Marion—then I shall instantly dismiss you!"

AN UNFORGETTABLE EVENING

"BRENDA, old thing, what's happened?"

"Yes, for goodness' sake, what's the matter?"

Molly and Audrey, meeting Brenda in the spacious hall of the castle, asked those questions anxiously.

One glance at their friend's face had told them that something very much was amiss.

Bleakly Brenda told them of the scene in the changing-room. She had left there, dazedly, bewildered by Mrs. Benson's decree—relieved, yet frantic.

She had not been dismissed. But never to see Marion again; never to communicate with her—

That was impossible—utterly impossible!

She must see her sister! Must see her so that they could discuss this awful set-back to their plans, when everything had been on the verge of success, when in a matter of hours they would have learned the solution of the secret that concerned them.

"Oh, my hat!" Molly whistled in dismay. "What beastly awful luck! Poor old Brenda!"

"That cat Ruby!" Audrey exclaimed indignantly.

"Yes, she had it all worked out nicely!" Brenda said bitterly. "She knew the time Marion would be there and everything, of course. Oh, goodness, what am I to do? What's to happen now?"

Molly squeezed her arm.
"Do?" she asked, with a smile. "You're coming out with us to watch the carnival. You're going to cheer up."

"But, Molly—" "It's just what you want. Oh, I know what a blow it's been. But you can't do anything now. Forget it and enjoy yourself! Grab her arm, Audrey!"

Audrey obliged. Between her two friends, Brenda found herself being rushed across the hall.

Molly was not being unsympathetic; she felt deeply for Brenda. She was terribly sorry this had happened. But Molly knew that it was best Brenda should be shaken out of herself—and watching the wonderful carnival would do that right enough.

"Give her a hot drink first," Audrey suggested.

"Rather. And a sandwich or something to eat!" Molly chuckled. "Everything's free at the buffet—Gloria said so."

"And Gloria said your mermaid scene was gorgeous!" Audrey added.

"And so did we!"

In spite of herself, Brenda had to smile. How could she help it in the company of these jolly friends of hers? And, goodness, they were right!

There was nothing at all she could do to-night. She was still in her job—that was the main thing. And, in the circumstances, that was something to be celebrated.

"Whoops!" she exclaimed. "I'm with you. I am going to enjoy the carnival. Where's this buffet?"

"Can't you see it, duffer? It's right in front of you!"

Brenda laughed. Of course it was—it ran the whole width of the stately hall.

They raced across to it. A liveried manservant was there to attend to their wants.

And as they sipped hot drinks and nibbled at delicious chicken sandwiches, they marvelled at the magnificence of the castle.

A wide gallery ran round the hall, and hanging on the panelled walls were costly tapestries and priceless masterpieces. Suits of armour were dotted at intervals on pedestals.

Ernst B. Vahl, the film magnate, had dipped deep into his millions in providing himself with this awe-inspiring castle home that was one of the sensations of Hollywood.

From outside in the floodlit grounds came a burst of applause; then a cannonade of explosions.

"More fireworks!" Molly cried excitedly. "Let's go out and watch them!"

"Coming!" Brenda laughed.
And outside they dashed, on to the wide terrace and down the stately steps.

The sky was filled with twinkling lights as a hundred rockets burst simultaneously.

There was a wild rushing sound close by, and another hundred whizzed into the air. Then another cannonade, another myriad coloured stars curved gracefully against the velvet sky.

"My hat, what a show!" Molly exclaimed.

"I say, what's that over there?" Audrey asked, pointing.

"Looks like a stage of some sort." "So it is. But the whole thing's shaped like half a dome!"

"Why, it's a replica of the famous Hollywood Bowl!" Brenda cried in amazement.

"What's that? We've heard of it." "It's an open-air theatre," Brenda explained—"a marvellous place set in a dip of the hills—a natural amphitheatre, as the guide books say. They hold symphony concerts there, and plays. It's famous for its acoustic properties. A whisper can be heard five hundred yards away."

"My hat!" "We'll have to go there!" "Rather!"

"And this is like it?" "Well, the stage is, although the setting isn't, of course," Brenda said. "But look, there's an orchestra on it now."

"They're just beginning to play." "Another wonderful treat!"

Loudspeakers picked up the soft music. And there the orchestra played in that replica of the Hollywood Bowl. A half-dome of brilliant light, it stood out with breath-taking magnificence against the darkness of the night.

The music came to a crashing end. There was loud applause. Then interest switched once again to the lake, where another tableau was being presented.

And so it went on, one gorgeous spectacle after another; then more music; then more fireworks.

At last Mrs. Benson came up, accompanied by Gloria. She gave no hint of what had transpired. Perhaps her eyes were a little cold as she saw Brenda, but she was not unfriendly.

"And now, my dears, I think we'd better be going," she said. "It's very late."

"Very late," Gloria laughed. "Goodness, the hours of beauty sleep I've missed! But it's been worth it! Now, will you girls be driving with me?"

They looked at Mrs. Benson, and she nodded. "Of course they are. They don't want to come with me when they can go with a famous and lovely star!"

Gloria pealed her merriment. "Come on, then!"

"I'll be taking Ruby," Mrs. Benson said.

And so that night of night came to an end. They were leaving the floodlit castle behind them, and the crowds, and the last scenes of the carnival.

"Oh, hasn't it been a dream night?" Molly sighed.

"I'll never forget it!" Audrey murmured.

Nor would Brenda. It would be a night of memories—of wonderful memories ever to be looked back upon with pride and happiness; and of other memories, too, that she would wish to forget.

They drove along the wide highway

(Please turn to the back page.)



The PUZZLE of the PAPER-CHASE

When the paper-chase came to an abrupt end by the edge of the quarry, the three chums thought their leader had played a mean trick on them. But Noel knew there was a more alarming explanation. Someone had deliberately laid a false trail!

By PETER LANGLEY

THEIR CHUM HAD DISAPPEARED!

"HALLO!" remarked Noel Raymond, a gleam of interest showing in his eyes as he caught sight of the fluttering white trail on the lonely footpath. "A paper-chase! Takes me back to college-days!"

It was fairly late in the afternoon and the famous young detective was on his way to the station, after a visit to an old friend of his—a retired police-inspector who lived in the little village of Cranfield.

"Dashed if I don't have a shot at following the trail!" he murmured. "I've lost my train, in any case—and there's no hurry."

Prompted solely by a spirit of fun, Noel set out to follow the zigzag trail of paper—scattered at intervals along the muddy track.

"Probably a local sports club," he decided, as he made his way briskly towards a bend in the path where the trail branched off abruptly into a shadowy tunnel, formed by the overhanging trees.

As he neared the trees a startling, unexpected sound cut through the dreamy stillness of the afternoon.

It was a girl's scream, followed by a distant clamour of voices.

The young detective's smile was frozen on his lips as he broke into a run, sprinting in the direction of the sound. He noticed that the trail of paper led among the trees in a scattered, haphazard fashion, as though it had been flung down in haste.

The trail led unexpectedly into a clearing—a barren, rather desolate spot, adjoining a disused quarry. It was overgrown by thorn and bramble, and hemmed in by frowning chalk cliffs.

Huddled in the shadow of the cliffs were three rather scared-looking girls, clad in running outfit—trim shorts and blouses.

They looked both startled and relieved by the young detective's unexpected arrival on the scene.

"Anything wrong here?" panted Noel, staring round in perplexity.

Two of the girls appeared a trifle shame-faced as they turned towards

him; their companion, obviously younger, made a plucky attempt to conceal the nervous tremor of her lips.

It was the eldest of the trio—a slim, auburn-haired girl—who replied, as she encountered Noel's questioning glance. "I'm so sorry—Lucy didn't mean to cry out; but we were all scared for a moment—by the dog."

"Dog?" repeated Noel in surprise. "Yes—a huge black dog; it sprang out at us from the bushes, snarling and showing its teeth."

"When was this?" Noel asked. "A few minutes ago," explained a serious, freckle-faced girl. "We were all feeling a bit fed-up and jumpy, owing to having been brought here on a wild-goose chase—"

"A mean trick!" declared the auburn-haired girl with a slight toss of her attractive head.

"Perhaps—perhaps Gwen meant it for a joke," suggested the younger girl, speaking for the first time.

"A nice sort of joke!" put in the other, her grey eyes indignant. "Suggesting this paper-chase and promising us a gorgeous surprise—and then stranding us out here—miles from anywhere!"

Noel was staring quizzically from one to the other, puzzled and rather intrigued by the swift exchange of girlish comment.

"Suppose you girls start at the beginning," he suggested gravely.

"Of course—I'm so sorry!" The auburn-haired girl glanced at him apologetically. "I'm afraid I rather lost my paddy—but it is a bit thick. We've just started a sports club; it was really Gwenda's suggestion—she's our captain, you see. And it was her idea that we should have this paper-chase."

"I take it that Gwenda is the hare?" inquired Noel.

"Yes; she's a jolly, sporting kind of girl—and we never dreamed she'd play a mean jape on us like this—"

"Are you sure it's a jape?" put in Noel, staring thoughtfully at a scattered heap of torn paper near the base of the cliff.

Three pairs of eyes stared at him curiously.

"Of course!" declared Julie Marsden—she of the auburn hair. "The trail's just come to a dead end; and look at the horrid place she's brought us to—all rocks and thistles. She told us she'd discovered a romantic new path, and that we'd find an exciting surprise waiting for us when we got there—"

"And it's the second time she's disappointed us," put in the freckle-faced girl, Audrey Dennis. "The paper-chase was really fixed for yesterday—but after we'd followed it for miles, Gwen met us—looking rather queer—and told us that it was off. She wouldn't explain why—but fixed another run for this afternoon."

The young detective whistled softly; he had picked up a scrap of the torn paper and was turning it over in his hand.

"Did you help your captain to tear up the paper for the chase?" he asked, with apparent inconsequence.

"Yes," replied Julie, staring.

"Why?"

"Where did you find the paper?"

"Some old newspapers that Audrey brought along."

Noel looked keenly at the freckle-faced girl.

"You didn't by any chance include a directory of the principal English museums?"

"Goodness, no!" gasped that girl in bewilderment. "I've never even heard of it!"

"I thought as much," said Noel dryly. "You girls had better follow me. There's something I want to show you." His manner was unusually grave as he led the surprised girls across the clearing, and along the dim pathway beneath the trees.

He halted as he reached a bend in the path, pointing to the spot where the paper trail diverged abruptly—leading through the trees to the deserted quarry.

"Notice anything?" he asked. Three heads were shaken in perplexity.

"It looks," said Julie, "as though Gwen changed her mind when she reached this point—and decided to cut through the trees."

Noel smiled grimly.

"I wonder!" He pointed to the paper lying on the muddy track across the fields. "There's the newspaper you helped Gwen to tear up—and it ends just here. The track leading to the quarry is different paper—thicker paper, torn from an old directory."

"I—I don't understand," breathed Julie, her attractive face turning a shade pale. "Do you mean—"

"I mean," said Noel gravely, "that from this point the trail was deliberately laid by someone else, with the purpose of misleading you!"

"Oh!" It was Lucy Trent, the youngest member of the trio, who gave the cry. "Then Gwen—something must have happened to her!"

The other two girls exchanged uneasy glances.

"But—but what could have happened to her—in broad daylight?" whispered Julie. "It doesn't make sense."

Noel was bending over the path, magnifying-glass in hand; his mind was working rapidly, attempting to find some clue to the unusual little mystery.

He dismissed the possibility of a jape on the part of the missing girl. There seemed to be no point in such a mean trick, and the girls' own description of their chum did not fit in with the suggestion.

The only other alternative was—foul play!

The three girls obviously sensed Noel's unspoken fears; they exchanged uneasy glances as they watched the young detective at work.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Noel suddenly. "What's this? Paw marks in the mud! Our friend, the elusive black dog, seems to have come this way. Wonder if it has anything to do with the mystery?"

He rose to his feet, glancing questioningly at the girls.

"What kind of dog was it?" he asked.

"A—a black retriever, I think," replied Julie. "We were too startled to look at it properly; it vanished among the trees as it heard you coming. But do you really think"—her voice broke—"do you really think anything dreadful could have happened to Gwen?"

Noel shook his head with a reassuring smile.

"I wouldn't say that! There may be some quite simple explanation. But I'd like to know why the trail was changed so abruptly, just here. The black dog might help us—if we could find it. We'll try!"

He whistled shrilly and waited; the girls stood in an anxious group, staring almost fearfully towards the trees.

Noel whistled again—but there was no answering bark, no movement in the bushes.

The young detective shrugged. "That's no good," he declared. "We'll just have to use our wits. We know by the trail that Gwen came as far as this—and her stock of paper had obviously not given out, as she'd been scattering it pretty freely."

"What—what about her footprints?" asked Julie, brightening. "Couldn't we trace them?"

Noel shook his head. "I've been trying—but they're obliterated by your own tracks, and mine. We'll have to seek farther afield."

He was staring round keenly. "Let's suppose for the moment that she reached this point—and was startled by someone, or something. Possibly the same thing that startled her yesterday. She may even have been prepared for it."

"Two courses would be open to her. She could retreat—or she could make a

dash for her objective. I rather fancy that she chose the latter course, intending probably to leave some message for you. Obviously she was not making for the quarry—so she must have turned off here to the right; the bushes are too thick on the left."

The girls were listening breathlessly, their anxiety tinged with a trace of excitement.

"Of course!" declared Julie eagerly. "Why didn't we think of it? It must have been the black dog that scared her. She may be hiding in the copse now. Come on—"

"Wait!" put in Noel, catching the impulsive girl by the arm. He was smiling, but there was a rather worried look in his eyes. "I think I'd better go first!"

He led the way along a narrow footpath through the trees, the girls crowding at his heels.

The young detective's keen eyes were scanning the ground as he attempted to discover a fresh trail.

Suddenly he halted, snatching up something that lay half hidden by the trailing brambles; it was a girl's rubber plimsoll, covered in mud.

A horrified gasp escaped Julie Marsden's lips as Noel held up his find.

"That—that's Gwen's!" she breathed. "What can have happened? She would never have left one of her shoes behind like that, unless—"

She did not complete her sentence; Noel's boyish face was rather grim.

Parting the bushes, he saw that the ground shelved abruptly into the disused quarry; and directly below him, half covered by weeds and nettles, was a tumble-down wooden structure.

"Wait here!" he said tersely. "I just want to scout round."

Julie seemed inclined to rebel, but her chums held her back.

Noel scrambled down the chalky slope; his keen eyes had detected certain significant marks that increased his fears. Pushing his way through a tangle of briar and nettles, he discovered an ancient wooden hut, obviously used at one time by the workmen in the quarry.

The door was roughly fastened, but Noel forced it open, flashing his torch inside.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

His face pale, he dropped to his knees beside the slight girlish figure who lay on the ground—one hand still grasping a haversack half filled with torn paper. The strap that had secured it to her shoulders had obviously been broken in a desperate struggle.

The girl's eyes were closed, and she was breathing jerkily; but to Noel's relief she did not appear to have been badly injured.

The young detective's face was stern as he lifted the unconscious girl in his arms, and carried her back to her chums.

Pale and horrified, they surrounded him; even Julie's reckless grey eyes were filled with anxious tears.

"Gwen!" she gulped. "Oh, Gwen, what happened?"

"Don't worry," put in Noel quietly. "She's only suffering from shock—but the sooner we get her to hospital, the better. Is there a main road near here?"

"About a quarter of a mile away," whispered Audrey Dennis. "But what—"

At that moment the unconscious girl stirred, clutching at Noel's arm. A low moan escaped her lips.

"Quickly!" she sobbed. "The black dog—follow—the secret is hidden—"

Her head fell back against the young detective's shoulder.

FOLLOWING THE MYSTERY DOG!

"WHAT does she mean?" breathed Julie. "The black dog—and the secret! What secret?"

Noel shook his head; there was a strangely intent look in his eyes as he stared towards the quarry.

But there was no time to indulge in guesswork.

Gwen was suffering from shock, and rest and medical attention were essential.

Carrying the unconscious girl, and accompanied by her three anxious chums, he hurried along the path that led to the nearest road.

Here they stopped a passing car, driven by a lady who happened to live in the neighbouring town. By a coincidence, she was slightly acquainted with Lucy, the youngest of the chums.

She willingly offered to drive Gwen to hospital, and Lucy begged to be allowed to accompany her friend.

The other two girls remained with Noel, watching the car out of sight.

"Now!" Julie whispered. "We've just got to find out what it all means. There's something on Gwen's mind—oh, I could kick myself when I think of the horrid things I said about her!"

She looked up at Noel, her eyes tearful yet determined.

"Will you help us?" she asked. "Will you help Audrey and me to clear up the mystery surrounding Gwen? Please!"

"Of course I'll help," Noel said.

"But don't you think it would be wise if I saw you girls home?"

Audrey and Julie, however, insisted on staying and helping in the investigations.

"Very well," said Noel. "Let's get back to the quarry—and we'll lay our plans there."

On the way, Noel cross-questioned the two girls. Their anxiety on behalf of their chum having been partly allayed, they were keener than ever to solve the mystery suggested by her last cryptic words.

Noel had his own theory as to the truth, but at the moment he was not prepared to disclose it; he required more definite proof.

"What we must do," he explained, "is to discover the path that Gwen originally intended to follow. It's fairly obvious that someone was anxious to put you girls off the track—for reasons unknown. Hence the red-herring trail of paper leading to the quarry. I'm convinced that the quarry was a blind, and has no connection with the mystery."

"But how can we discover what was in Gwen's mind?" protested Julie. "We've got nothing whatever to go on; she didn't even drop a hint."

"On the contrary," replied Noel dryly, "she left explicit instructions for finding the secret. Follow—the black dog!"

"Oh!" breathed Julie. "Do you think she really meant that? But—we don't know where to find the dog!"

"And it mightn't be friendly!" pointed out Audrey.

"I'm afraid we'll have to risk that," Noel said. "As to finding the dog, I'll admit we're handicapped—especially if it's wary of strangers. But we'll have to contrive some method to—"

His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. They had come within sight of the desolate quarry—the place where the dog had last been seen by the girls.

A grim smile curved his lips.

"It's worth trying, anyway!" he muttered.

"What is?" asked Julie, staring.

The young detective did not reply directly; he was staring across an adjoining field where a scarecrow had been erected, its tattered garments flapping grotesquely in the breeze.

Attached to one of its outstretched arms was a wooden rattle, operated by the movement of the wind.

"Wait here, please," said Noel. He sprinted across the field, to return with the rattle. "All right," he said dryly, as he encountered the girls' amazed stares. "This isn't a joke. The only way to locate that dog is to startle it into barking—and this should do the trick!"

He twirled the rattle suddenly. As the raucous clamour cut through the stillness, it was answered by a sharp, angry bark coming from the densest part of the bushes.

"Good enough!" remarked Noel, his eyes glinting. "With any luck I ought to be able to entice our elusive friend into the open. What have you got in that haversack of yours?" he asked, turning to Julie.

"Sandwiches," replied Julie, unfastening her satchel.

"Splendid!" Noel took the packet of sandwiches. "If the animal's a stray—as I suspect—it's probably hungry. Wait for me here."

He entered the bushes, walking cautiously, his keen ears strained for the slightest sound. He had covered a few hundred yards when a low, menacing growl brought him to a halt.

"All right, old fellow!" said Noel cheerfully. "I know just how you feel, but we're going to be friends."

He parted the bushes cautiously, to see a huge black retriever standing a few feet distant, its teeth bared. The animal was unkempt and obviously half-starved. Its eyes were bloodshot and mistrustful.

Noel tossed a few of the sandwiches to the ground and the dog, after sniffing them warily, took them at a gulp.

The young detective emerged from the trees, holding out the remaining sandwiches in the bag.

"Try them, old chap," he suggested coaxingly. "They're good!"

Very slowly the big dog approached and snatched at the remaining sandwiches; coolly and fearlessly Noel dropped a hand on its collar.

The dog started back, growling, but Noel retained his hold.

"Steady, old fellow—I'm not going to hurt you." He glanced at the collar. "No name, eh? But obviously Gwen knew something about you, or she wouldn't have gasped out those instructions. Come along and be introduced."

Very doubtfully the retriever permitted the young detective to lead it to the clearing where the two girls were anxiously waiting.

"All right!" said Noel, grinning reassuringly. "He's not nearly such a terror as he looks. The poor creature's half-starved, and I shouldn't be surprised if he's been ill-treated into the bargain. I'd give a lot to discover what your chum had in her mind. Is she fond of dogs?"

"Awfully," came the prompt reply. "She makes a fuss of every stray she comes across."

"Then I doubt if she was scared by this chap," said Noel. "More likely she followed him, at some time, and the place he led her to gave her the idea for the paper-chase."

"But why should anyone try to stop her?" asked Julie.

"That's what we've got to find out!" Noel's tone was crisply decisive. "And the dog's going to help us."

"But he'll never let you lead him,"

objected Julie—for the big dog was already making strenuous efforts to break from Noel's hold.

A thoughtful gleam crept into the young detective's eyes.

"Perhaps not; but there's no reason why he shouldn't lead us—at a distance! You've got that satchel of paper that Gwen was carrying? Good! Hand it over, and we'll try a little experiment."

While the two girls watched with bated breath, Noel made a small slit in the satchel with his knife; then, still retaining a hold on the restive dog, he secured the satchel firmly to its collar.

"That's the idea," he remarked, releasing his hold. "Run along, old fellow—and good luck!"

The dog needed no urging; it ran forward for a few yards, hesitated, looked round uncertainly, then shot amongst the trees as though released from a bow. A moment later it was out of sight; but on the path it had

spinney the trail of paper led over a ploughed field and along a steep, narrow path approaching the hills.

The scene became even more lonely and picturesque; it was hard to believe that they were only a few miles from a populous town. Owing to the steep and rugged nature of the path, very few hikers or picnickers came this way.

And then, without warning, the vital trail of paper completely disappeared.

Noel called a halt, staring round anxiously. On one side of the path towered a rugged cliff; on the other rose a densely wooded slope.

A strange, rather eerie silence brooded over the scene.

"The paper must have given out!" declared Julie, bitter disappointment in her tone. "Which way could the dog have gone from here?"

Noel was staring up at the wooded slope; he imagined he saw a speck of white among the bushes.

"Wait here," he said tersely.



"I mean that from this point the trail was deliberately laid by someone else, for the purpose of misleading you," said Noel gravely. The three chums looked serious. Could something have happened to their leader?

followed lay a scattered, zigzag trail of paper!

"Oh!" breathed Julie, her eyes alight with excitement. "A paper-chase!"

"Precisely," rejoined Noel, with a faint flicker of a smile. "It's our one chance of solving the mystery."

Then his expression became grave, and he glanced at his two young companions a trifle anxiously.

"I'm not sure that I ought to take you with me," he said. "There may be danger—"

"Goodness—you can't leave us behind now!" declared Julie, with a challenging glance. "You promised to help us solve the mystery—and, anyway, we could always follow the paper trail on our own."

Noel smiled faintly. "You win, young lady," he declared. "Come on then—we'd better get going—before dark."

The daylight was fading swiftly as they set out to follow the mysterious trail.

The two girls, their anxiety forgotten, were obviously agog with excitement; but Noel's expression was tense and watchful.

The dog seemed to have followed a curiously erratic course. From the

Julie pouted rebelliously. "Can't we come with you?" she asked.

"I want to reconnoitre first," replied Noel. "I shan't be a minute."

He climbed swiftly up the precipitous pathway that led to the bushes. But the speck of white was not paper; to Noel's amazement it was a handkerchief—a girl's handkerchief, with something knotted in one corner!

As the young detective endeavoured to loosen the knot, a sudden cry reached his ears—a muffled, pitiful cry for help.

Noel spun round, his hands clenched—to see Audrey, her face deathly pale, waving to him from the path below.

"Julie!" muttered Noel, his face paling. "Great Scott, what's happened to her?"

Thrusting the knotted handkerchief into his pocket, he raced down the slope.

THE SECRET OF THE WATERFALL

AS Noel raced down the slope he blamed himself bitterly for having left the two girls alone, though they had been out of his sight for less than five minutes.

In those few minutes had come unexpected disaster.

"Well?" he panted, as he reached Audrey and caught that agitated girl by the arm. "What happened? Where's Julie?"

Audrey shook her head with a little gulp.

"I—I don't know," she breathed, her frocked face very pale. "She was with me a few minutes ago. We saw something run across the path, in the dusk. Julie declared it was the dog. She hurried after it, though I warned her not to. Then I heard a scream. I ran, but there was no sign of Julie. She—she's disappeared!"

The girl was pluckily fighting back her tears as she clung to his arm.

Noel's eyes were grim as he stared round in the dusk.

"Which way did she go?" he demanded.

Audrey pointed, and the young detective broke into a run, the agitated girl following closely at his heels.

"It was just about here that the shadow crossed the path," she faltered. Noel halted, listening intently, but the only sounds that reached him were the whisper of the wind in the trees and the musical ripple of a near-by waterfall.

"Julie!" called Noel sharply. His own voice echoed mockingly from the cliffs.

The young detective pulled out his torch, flashing it among the bushes, seeking some trace of the reckless girl.

A soft ejaculation escaped his lips as he found the unmistakable trace of paw marks on the muddy ground, but no other tracks.

Julie had been right, then. The dog had come this way, and no doubt she had attempted to follow it.

The young detective attempted to judge the direction in which the animal had been running. He crossed the path—to find himself on the brink of a shallow, swiftly running stream, fed by the waterfall.

The fall itself, half-hidden by the bushes, formed a picturesque and romantic background—a glistening cascade, sparkling and foaming over the rocks.

But where was Julie?

The young detective stiffened suddenly, staring hard at the bank of the stream. He looked up, encountering Audrey's anxious, questioning gaze.

"I fancy that Julie's stumbled on the secret that Gwen has been hiding," he said cryptically.

"What—what do you mean?" breathed the girl.

Noel grasped her arm, assisting her down the sloping bank.

"The dog came this way," he explained, "and so did Julie. You can see where she slid down the bank. We're going to follow. I fancy that the cliff just here is not the impenetrable barrier that it seems."

He was staring up at the cascade, Audrey holding tightly to his arm, and just then, almost drowned by the noise of the rushing water, came a faint, stifled sob.

"All right!" called Noel. He turned to Audrey, who was gazing at the waterfall with something like horror in her eyes. "Hold your breath," he urged, "and make a jump for it—when I do. Ready?"

Together they sprang beneath the rushing fall, to find themselves in a natural cavern in the cliff, lit by a faint glimmer of daylight that crept through an opening at the far end.

"Julie!"

With a choking gasp of relief Audrey dropped to her knees beside her chum, who was huddled on the rocks, her face twisted with pain from a badly sprained ankle.

Noel swiftly administered first aid, and soon Julie was able to gasp out her story.

She had followed the black dog and seen it vanish beneath the cascade. She had followed, daringly—only to slip, and sprain her ankle.

"Then it was you who called for help?" asked Noel.

Julie shook her head, a startled look in her grey eyes.

"I thought I heard a cry as I fell, but I thought I'd imagined it. It seemed to come from the distance."

Noel whistled softly as he flashed his torch across the cavern. The mystery he had set out so lightheartedly to investigate was deepening with every moment!

"It's pretty clear that Gwen stumbled on this cavern accidentally," he said. "Possibly she had seen the black dog come this way. She was saving it up as a surprise for you girls, but someone chose to put a spoke in her plans."

"That cry we heard—frankly, I don't like the sound of it. I'd never have brought you girls with me if I'd realised where the trail would lead."

"Well, we're here now," put in Julie, with a wry smile. "It's just my luck to have crooked my ankle just when things are getting exciting."

The young detective's face was grave. "You two had better stay together," he said, "while I have a look round. Whatever happens, don't attempt to come any farther."

He made his way across the cavern and squeezed through the opening at the far end.

A soft ejaculation of surprise escaped his lips. Before him was a small, unsuspected valley, hemmed in on all sides by towering cliffs. The only entrance to it was by means of the secret cave behind the waterfall, and other caves burrowed into the cliffs at the far end of the valley. From one of them came a gleam of yellow light, showing that it was inhabited.

As Noel stared at it in perplexity, he suddenly recollected the curious clue he had discovered on the hillside. Thrusting a hand into his pocket, he pulled out the knotted handkerchief.

A careful scrutiny revealed teeth-marks in the linen.

"Great Scott!" he breathed. "The dog carried this!"

Feverishly he unfastened the knots, to disclose a folded sheet of notepaper. Scrawled across it was a disjointed message in pencil:

"Please bring help—quickly. We're imprisoned in the cave in the Secret Valley, and dad is—"

The message trailed away, as though the writer had been interrupted.

But Noel was staring at the paper on which it had been written; it was part of the fly-leaf torn from an old directory, and was identical with the paper used for the red-herring trail that had misled the girls!

Cautiously the young detective approached the inhabited cave, keeping in the shadow of the trees.

• • • • •

JULIE was growing restive as she and her chum huddled together in the gloom of the cave.

Noel had promised to return within five minutes, but almost a quarter of an hour had passed.

"I can't wait here any longer," declared Julie. "My ankle feels much better. Let's—let's explore!"

Audrey shook her head anxiously.

"Mr. Raymond warned us to stay here," she breathed. "He's bound to

be back soon. Julie, what are you going to do?"

Julie had risen to her feet, and was gingerly testing her ankle.

"I'm going to see where this cave leads," she declared.

She limped across the cavern, Audrey following her anxiously.

As the two girls emerged from the opening out into the secret valley they heard a scuffling, whining sound among the bushes.

"The dog!" ejaculated Julie. "It sounds as if he's been tied up!"

As she spoke a more alarming sound broke the stillness—the sound of a muffled shot.

The two girls stared towards the cave at the far end of the valley. Two figures were struggling at the entrance—Noel Raymond and another man.

As the girls watched in fearful fascination, another figure appeared to view, a heavy stick raised in his hand.

A warning scream broke from Julie. "Audrey, the dog!" she gasped.

In a flash her chum grasped her meaning. Together they made for the bushes, to find the big retriever tied to a tree, furiously worrying the rope that was secured to its collar.

Audrey fumbled for her clasp-knife, and Julie, snatching it, slashed fearlessly at the straining rope.

With a deep-throated bay, the animal sprang past them.

The two girls scarcely dared to look. They heard a shout, a scuffle. The retriever had brought one of Noel's assailants to the ground; the other had taken to his heels.

The young detective, pale and dishevelled, turned to wave a hand.

"Thanks, girls!" he shouted.

He bent to secure his prisoner; then, followed by the dog, he hurried into the large cavern.

A few minutes later he emerged, supporting a grey-haired old gentleman. They were accompanied by a dark-haired, attractive girl.

"That was a narrow shave for me, girls!" remarked Noel, with a wry smile. "You released the dog in the nick of time. Let me introduce Lucille Grayland and her father, Mr. Charles Grayland, the famous art expert."

"Their absence has been causing the police some concern. They were kidnapped a fortnight ago by certain scoundrels who have been using Mr. Grayland's skilled knowledge to assist them in faking 'antiques' to sell to wealthy collectors."

"Oh!" breathed Julie, in amazement. "And the dog—"

"Is Miss Grayland's dog, Rover. He's been trying to find his mistress. Your chum, Gwen, must have stumbled accidentally on the mystery. That is why the kidnapers had to take such drastic steps against her."

The elderly art expert smiled. "I should like to thank you two young ladies," he said unsteadily.

"Oh, you mustn't thank us!" put in Julie, flushing. "It's really all thanks to Gwen, who's in hospital!"

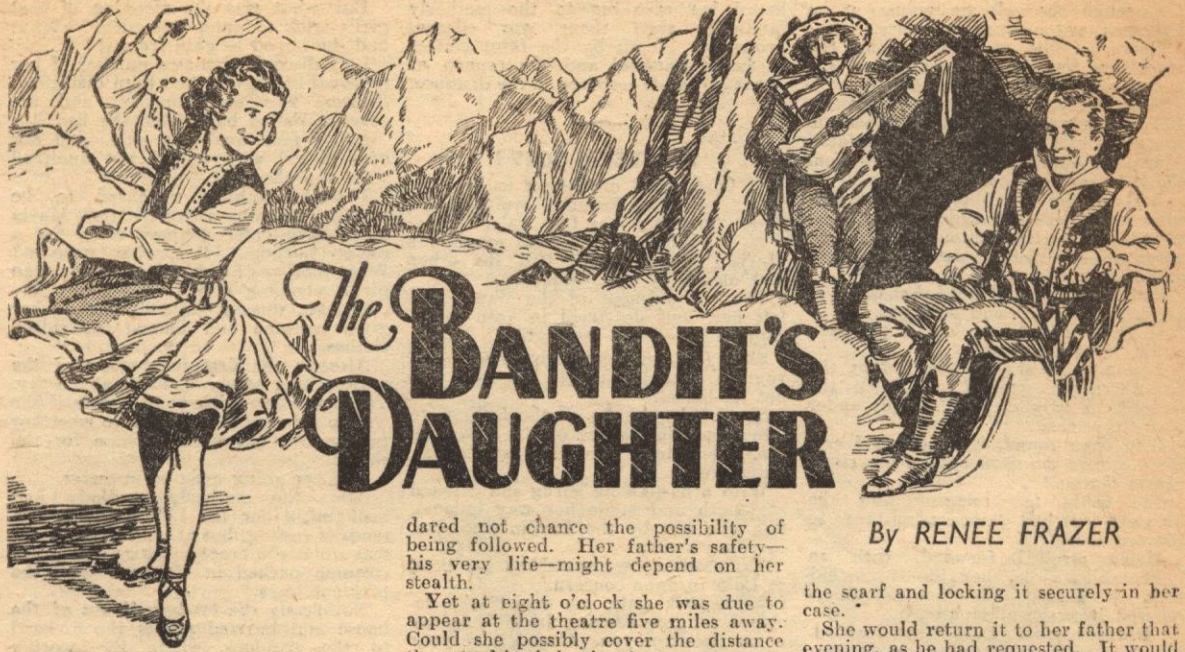
Noel's eyes twinkled.

"We'll go along and pay Gwen a visit," he declared. "I shall phone for a car. I understand that Mr. Grayland is anxious to show his appreciation in a practical form."

And the following day four delighted girls stared, awe-stricken, at a cheque for fifty pounds towards the funds of the newly founded girls' sports club.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"Peril at the Tower of London," is the title of next Friday's grand detective story. It features Noel's niece, June Gaynor. Don't miss it!



The BANDIT'S DAUGHTER

By RENEE FRAZER

LOLA MAKES HER CHOICE

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 offered a small part in a theatre show—a part which might lead to the fulfilment of all her hopes. But on the day the show was to open Lola received a note from her father.

He asked her to meet him in the hills that evening. And Lola knew she must go, even if it meant missing her big chance at the theatre.

LOLA'S face was pale as she re-read her father's message; it was a cruel trick of Fate that he should have sent for her that night of all nights.

Of course, he could not possibly have known that she had been cast to play her first real part on the stage—a part on which all her hopes depended.

News travelled slowly to the bandit's secret lair in the hills. She could not blame him; she did not blame him. But the blow was none the less shattering to her dreams.

Not for an instant did Lola hesitate in her decision. Her father needed her, and she would go to him, whatever the cost.

Biting back the momentary disappointment, she thrust the crumpled note into her pocket and sprang on to her waiting horse.

Lola urged the spirited animal to a gallop. The feeling of swift movement and the cool air rushing past her face helped to calm her feverish thoughts.

Her future—her career as a dancer—might well be jeopardised by her decision, yet there was no other course.

The message was urgent, and she knew her father too well to suppose that he would send for her without reason.

That evening? Yes. It would be too risky to set out before dusk. She

dared not chance the possibility of being followed. Her father's safety—his very life—might depend on her stealth.

Yet at eight o'clock she was due to appear at the theatre five miles away. Could she possibly cover the distance there and back in time?

There was just a frail possibility of being able to achieve that dual feat, and the chance, slight though it was, helped to buoy Lola's spirits.

She spurred her horse to a swifter gallop, realising that there were many preparations to be made before she could set out on her fateful errand.

Reaching the little farmhouse where she had lodgings, Lola hurried to her room, taking the precaution of turning the key in the lock.

It was not that she mistrusted her motherly landlady, the ranchera, but what she had hidden was for no eyes excepting her own.

Her heart beating rapidly, she rolled back the reed matting that covered the floor and raised a loosened board.

Beneath the board, wrapped securely in an old scarf, was the jewelled crescent headdress, her father's last present to her—the ill-fated tiara.

Her hand trembling, Lola removed the scarf, allowing the sunlight to flash and scintillate on the cluster of gems that formed the centre-piece.

A crescent—for good luck!

Lola's eyes became misted, and a little lump rose in her throat as she thought of the night on which her father's unexpected gift had come to her.

How delighted she had been! How thrilled! How the gleaming stones had flashed against her dark hair as she danced, like magic talismans of fortune!

But now the glittering headdress had lost its enchantment. With something akin to fear in her eyes, she thrust it away from her, wrapping it hastily in

What a shame it was that Lola's father should ask her to meet him on the very evening that was to see her first performance on the stage. But even if it meant losing her golden chance, Lola would not fail her bandit father!

the scarf and locking it securely in her case.

She would return it to her father that evening, as he had requested. It would be a load off her mind. She could not surmise how he had come by it. But she was convinced that the allegations against him that he had stolen it were untrue—cruelly unjust.

The whole world might consider him a scoundrel, but Lola knew differently. An outlaw and a bandit he might be, but he had been driven into his reckless career by circumstances of which the world knew nothing—circumstances that Lola herself could only dimly guess from the little that he had revealed.

Meanwhile, she was determined not to allow the thought of her secret errand to interfere with her preparations for the all-important dance.

Her gipsy costume had been provided, but she had brought it home to make certain minor alternations. And her dance, too, required perfecting in parts.

Her role was that of a young gipsy dancer accused of disloyalty to her tribe. Sentenced to expulsion from the Romany camp, she is given a last opportunity to dance before her accusers.

Into that dance Lola had woven a poignant, despairing appeal—an appeal calculated to touch the hearts of the assembled tribe.

It was a glamorous, yet difficult interpretation, and, though the rehearsals had gone smoothly, Lola was not quite happy.

She felt that there was something lacking—the vital spark that would lift the performance above a mere display of skilful dancing.

She wanted to convey to the audience something of the gipsy girl's feelings—to make them realise just what this dance meant to her; to arouse their pity, their sympathy for her last gallant bid for reprieve.

If only she could bring the dance to life!

There was still time. She would practise this afternoon; she would work at the dance till she was satisfied—till she had captured that elusive spark.

Lola lost no time. She worked on the costume till the blazing heat of the afternoon sun, streaming into the little room, became almost too intense to bear.

At last the final stitch was completed, and, slipping on the colourful dress,

Lola sought the welcome coolness of the little orchard behind the house.

There, in the clearing among the trees that formed a natural stage, she commenced to practise her dance.

Soon everything else was forgotten; Lola's own troubles faded. She became the gipsy girl of the play, the ill-fated Marquita, dancing to enlist mercy from the tribe that had condemned her.

And in the peace of the Mexican afternoon, with the whispering of the trees as her accompaniment, Lola captured the spirit of the dance—the gipsy girl's mingled anguish and hope.

She knew as she danced that this was the best thing she had done yet.

If only—if only she could get back to the theatre in time!

Just then a shadow fell aslant the smooth, mossy ground on which she danced. A twig snapped sharply under a stealthy tread.

Lola spun round, with a stifled cry, to encounter the dark eyes of her rival, Maria Garcia!

She could not imagine how the Mexican girl had gained admittance to the orchard.

Maria strolled forward, with an inscrutable smile, her hands on her hips, a shawl over her shoulders secured by a jewelled brooch.

"Brava, my dear Lola!" she drawled. "Please don't interrupt your dancing for me!"

"What do you want?" asked Lola. Maria shrugged elegantly.

"I have come to make friends," she rejoined, with a slow smile. "I have decided I was too hasty in accusing you, and I wish to make amends for my rudeness."

Lola encountered the other's smiling glance with distrust. After what had happened, she could not believe in Maria's sudden change of front. There was more behind the other girl's proffer of friendship than met the eye.

"That—that's all right," she rejoined, with forced carelessness. "I don't bear you any grudge, Maria. I'm willing to forget."

"That is good!" Maria showed her teeth in a flashing smile. "To prove that I am your friend, I have asked my father for the loan of his private carriage, and I am going to drive you to the theatre this evening in a state befitting to La Bella Lola, the rising young dancer!"

If there was mockery hidden beneath her words, she managed cleverly to conceal it; but Lola's face turned pale.

She could not accept Maria's offer, even had she wished. Her desperate errand to the hills forbade it.

Yet how could she refuse the offer without arousing the other girl's suspicions?

She was conscious that Maria was watching her closely.

"Why do you hesitate?" inquired the Mexican girl softly. "Is it that you have not forgiven me, or—"

Lola forced herself to meet the other's glance.

"It's kind of you, Maria," she said, "but," she lied desperately, "I have promised an old friend to allow him to take me to the theatre."

"So?" Maria's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "An old friend? The English boy, Tony Creswick, perhaps?"

"Perhaps," replied Lola evasively, seizing at the suggestion.

Maria's lips curled; a vindictive gleam flashed into her eyes.

"I see—you do not wish to be friends. You will regret it. I, Maria Garcia, would make a better friend—than an enemy!"

With that threat she turned on her heel and swept towards the house. Lola

heard her speaking to the motherly landlady, then there was silence, broken at length by the faint clatter of hoofs outside, and the crunch of carriage wheels receding in the distance.

THANKS TO TONY!

LOLA stood motionless in her picturesque costume, waiting and listening, her face pale.

What was the real reason for Maria's visit? What had the other girl meant by her threat?

The enchantment of the dance had left her, and she tried in vain to recapture its elusive inspiration.

She felt suddenly depressed—and vaguely afraid, though her fear was not for herself.

She tried to shake off the feeling—to lose herself in the dance; but it was no use. Her steps were just mechanical, uninspired.

With a despairing shrug she desisted at length and made her way indoors. She was met by the buxom ranchera, carrying a tray.

The motherly woman shook her head at Lola in some concern.

"You look pale, my dear!" she declared. "This dancing in the hot sun is not good for you. Come, have your tea, and rest in your room till it is time for the theatre. Your friend gave me your message."

"Message?" repeated Lola, uncomprehendingly.

"She told me that you wished her to fetch something from your room," replied the woman. "I hope it was all right. She seemed a very pleasant young lady."

A cold hand seemed to clutch at Lola's heart. Without a word to the well-meaning landlady she turned and raced up the narrow stairs, bursting into her little room.

Her first thought was for the precious tiara; she had hidden the case behind the old-fashioned dressing-table, and a gulp of relief escaped her lips as she found that it was safe, and intact!

Maria had obviously not searched far enough.

But what was the meaning of that girl's trick to enter her room? What had she hoped to gain from it?

Lola discovered that a number of her personal belongings had been disturbed, drawers had been opened, and the coverlet pulled back from the bed.

Lola's face was very pale, and her eyes blazed with anger, not unmixed with apprehension.

Though nothing appeared to be missing, she was convinced that Maria must have entered her room for a secret purpose. But what purpose? What plot was hatching in the Mexican girl's scheming mind?

Shaken, uneasy, Lola slipped off her gipsy costume and donned her riding clothes.

Already the first faint glow of the approaching sunset had tinged the sky. There was not a moment to lose if she was to ride out to the hills to meet her father and get back in time for the show!

And her going must be in secret. After the motherly landlady had brought in her tea Lola made a pretence of resting, but as soon as the house was quiet she crept upstairs, her gipsy costume packed in the case with the precious tiara.

Noiselessly she let herself out of the house and hurried across the orchard to the paddock where the worthy ranchero kept his horses.

There were several magnificent, high-spirited animals, especially trained for riding in the hilly district surrounding the farm.

Quickly Lola selected a small, graceful animal, with sweeping mane and silky coat, and swiftly she made friends with it.

Lola glanced up at the sky. The crimson glow was deepening behind the hills. Soon—within an hour—it would be dusk. Every moment was vital.

Lola sprang into the saddle, and without a backward glance, urged her horse into a canter.

A moment later they were in the open, galloping swiftly across the fertile valley, on towards the distant hills.

Luckily, there was no one to witness her secret departure. In a few scattered haciendas she passed, the occupants were at the evening meal. A peaceful silence brooded over the scene—a stillness broken only by the muffled sound of the horse's hoofs on the springy turf.

Soon the surroundings became wilder and more rugged; pastures and flowering orchards gave place to dark clumps of trees, scattered rocks.

The air became noticeably cooler as Lola rode on, her thoughts fixed only on her objective—the bandits' secret stronghold among the hills.

She had only visited the place once before—on that unforgettable night when she had learnt the truth of her father's identity; but the memory of the wild ride was imprinted on her mind.

She recognised the frowning rocks, the treacherous ravine that she would have to cross. Drawing rein at length, she sought anxiously for the narrow bridge that led across the gulf.

And just then, distant but unmistakable, she heard a sound that almost made her heart cease its beating—the ominous thud of pursuing hoofs, swiftly overtaking her!

The blood drained from Lola's face as she stared round her wildly.

Someone must have witnessed her departure—suspected her errand!

White to the lips, she spurred her horse into a gallop, riding along the treacherous path that skirted the ravine.

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Far below her she could hear the rush of the torrent as it foamed over the jagged rocks. She dared not look down—and she dared not glance behind.

But the sound of the pursuing hoofs was drawing closer with every moment.

The path became narrower—and suddenly Lola's horse stumbled; a choking cry was torn from her lips as she caught a momentary dizzy glimpse of the precipitous fall below her.

The startled horse seemed suddenly to lose its head; it reared violently, its fore-hoofs flailing the air. In vain Lola dragged at the rein; the animal had got the bit between its teeth—and for an instant a dreadful fate for both the horse and young rider seemed inevitable.

Just then there came a reassuring shout; dimly Lola saw a figure leap on to the path in front of the flailing hoofs, seizing the terrified horse by its bridle.

"Steady, old fellow!" panted a boyish voice. "Hold on, Lola—for your life!"

Lola obeyed, fighting against a dreadful feeling of faintness. After minutes that seemed an eternity, she felt herself lifted from the saddle.

With a choking sob, she collapsed in a dead faint in Tony Creswick's arms.

A DARING RISK

FEELING better, Lola?" Dazedly Lola opened her eyes, to encounter Tony's anxious gaze. The boy's good-looking face was rather pale, but he grinned in relief as Lola attempted to sit up.

"That's fine!" he declared. "Gosh—you gave me a turn for the moment."

He spoke lightly, but his voice was not entirely steady.

An involuntary shudder passed over Lola as she clung to the boy's arm; memory came rushing back, and with it a wave of gratitude.

"You—you saved my life," she whispered unsteadily.

"Rot!" rejoined Tony, a trifle brusquely. "I did nothing of the kind. Your horse was getting a bit out of control, and I was lucky enough to arrive in time to lend a hand."

He stared at her quizzically, his eyes a trifle perplexed.

"Are you in the habit of taking risks like that?" he asked. "I mean—do you often come out to the hills?"

Lola, despite her weakness, stiffened involuntarily; Tony's question put her immediately on her guard.

"Not—not often," she replied evasively.

"It's pretty dangerous—for a girl," went on Tony, shaking his head. "In more ways than one. I say"—he seemed to recollect something—"isn't it this evening that you're booked to appear at the new show?"

Lola clenched her hands, avoiding the boy's glance.

To what end were his questions leading? What did he suspect?

"Yes," she breathed. "I— She sought desperately for some excuse. "I thought a ride in the open air might help to steady my nerves."

Tony laughed.

"You seem to have been going the right way to wreck your nerves!" he declared. Then his smile faded. "But, seriously, Lola, you oughtn't to come out here on your own. This part of Mexico isn't exactly safe. Look here—how are you feeling now? When you're rested, I'll take you along with me to the theatre."

Lola's heart missed a beat as she drew away from him; instinctively she

looked round for her horse. It was standing near by, cropping the grass; the precious attache-case was still strapped to the saddle.

"It—it's awfully kind of you, Tony," she faltered, "but I wouldn't dream of it. I can find my way back on my own."

"Oh no, you can't!" declared Tony cheerfully. "Do you imagine I'd let you ride off on your own—when I'm here to escort you. A nice sort of friend I'd be. You're coming along with me, Lola—right now. You haven't got any too much time to spare!"

He glanced at the darkening sky, and Lola, following the direction of his glance, felt her heart sink.

It was impossible for her to accept his kindly meant offer; her desperate errand was not yet completed!

She looked at him steadily, her hands clenched.

"Please, Tony—I'd rather go on my own," she said.

A slight frown crossed the boy's face, to fade as quickly as it had come.

Tony's face clouded; his blue eyes were puzzled. His hand tightened on her arm.

"Dash it, Lola—be reasonable," he said. "I'm not going to let you run any more risks, if I know it."

Lola flushed at the note of command in his voice; she tossed her head slightly as she freed her arm.

"You can't stop me, Tony," she rejoined quickly, "and if you're really my friend—you won't try to."

She could have bitten out her tongue the next moment as she saw the boy crimson; it was a hateful thing to have said—after all he had done. But Lola was feeling desperate.

Somehow, at all costs, she must get away!

The boy's lips tightened.

"Because I'm your friend," he said, "I'm jolly well going to see you safely home—whether you like it or not—"

He broke off suddenly as there came the distant sound of a shot, the muffled clatter of hoofs.



"You don't understand, Tony; there's a reason why I must go on—on my own," said Lola. Tony's blue eyes were puzzled. "I'm not going to let you run any more risks," he insisted. And Lola realised that she must evade him somehow.

"Don't be a chump," he replied. "You're not feeling yourself. You're coming with me—or I'll know the reason. As a matter of fact"—he lowered his voice—"there's a particular danger I've not mentioned. That scoundrel, the Grey Shadow, has been seen again; I got news that he was out this way—and I came prepared!"

He patted the revolver in the holster at his belt.

Lola's face had turned deathly pale. "You came out here—to find the Grey Shadow?" she whispered.

"Yes—don't look so scared!" Tony grinned. "You'll be all right with me; it's a bit of luck for him that I came across you. It'll give him a few more hours of liberty."

At any other time Lola might have smiled at Tony's naive boast—knowing what she knew of her father's prowess, his uncanny skill as a horseman.

But just now she was in no mood for smiling.

"Please—I think I'd better be going," she whispered, as she rose unsteadily to her feet. "You don't understand, Tony; I—there's a reason why I must go—on my own."

Lola's face paled.

"What—what's that?" she breathed.

"The bandit!" snapped Tony, his hand falling on his revolver. "Garcia and his men must have got on his trail. That's their signal."

He clenched his hands, his eyes alight with sudden excitement.

"Wait here, Lola," he breathed. "You'll be all right, hidden by the bushes. I'll be back to fetch you when I've seen how the land lies. With any luck we'll take a prisoner back with us."

He dashed through the bushes, to be lost to sight.

In a moment Lola was galvanised into action; throwing off her weakness, she stumbled towards her waiting horse.

Her one thought was for her bandit father. She must find him somehow and warn him of the ambush.

But a fresh shock awaited her as she attempted to mount her horse; the animal reared, with a faint whinny of pain.

A moment's examination showed that it had injured its fetlock; it was lame.

A faint sob escaped her lips, and she stared around her desperately.

What could she do—alone and on foot—to aid her father? How could she hope to reach him in time?

She knew the way to the secret stronghold; at least she could try.

Swiftly unstrapping the precious case, she set off at an unsteady run towards the narrow, treacherous bridge that spanned the ravine.

From the distance came ominous shouts, voices answering; the enemy were surrounding the mountain fastness—to cut off the bandit's retreat.

But how had they received the information? Who had betrayed her father?

A moment later she was on the narrow, rocky ridge; fearfully she averted her gaze from the torrent below as she stumbled on, staring fixedly at her goal ahead.

Even as she reached the opposite bank a haggard and dishevelled figure broke from the bushes.

"Dad!" cried Lola brokenly.

"Lola, my dear!" her father breathed huskily. "I didn't mean to let you come as far as this; I intended to meet you, but I was cut off. Someone has betrayed me."

Lola clung to his arm, staring up into his lean face, still handsome, in spite of the grim lines around his mouth.

"But, father, who can have betrayed you?" she whispered. "Who knows of your hiding-place?"

The Grey Shadow shook his head.

"Heaven knows, my dear! I have many enemies in Mexico besides Ramon Garcia. One of them has been close on my trail for some time—a hare-brained young fellow with whom I have an old account to settle. His name is Creswick—Tony Creswick."

A stifled cry escaped Lola's lips; her father stared at her sharply.

"What is it, Lola?"

Lola clenched her hands, her lips trembling. How could she tell him that Tony Creswick was her friend?

What would her father say if she told him that the gay yet relentlessly determined young Englishman who was sparing no effort to track him down had befriended her, had helped her many times already during her short stay in the district?

Her outlaw father would be shocked—perhaps angry, even. How could she blame him, when he was relying so much on her? Yet she could hardly explain how obstinately Tony had attached himself to her; how, despite her attempted rebuffs, he had insisted on helping her, overwhelming her protests, refusing to take "no" for an answer.

For the present, Lola realised, she must say nothing about Tony Creswick. It hurt to have to keep anything from her father, yet she felt it was in his own interests, and for his own peace of mind.

He was looking at her anxiously now. "Lola, my dear, what's the matter? Are you feeling all right?" he asked.

She forced a tremulous smile to her lips.

"It—it's nothing!" she breathed. "Dad, we've no time to waste. Here is the tiara."

She thrust the case into his hand. Her father opened it, taking out the jewelled headdress.

A strange expression flashed into his eyes.

"So this was the tiara you received—with my message?" he asked huskily.

Lola nodded, staring at him, almost frightened by his tone.

"It—it's the one you sent me," she faltered.

The Grey Shadow took her arm, looking steadily into her eyes.

"Lola, my dear, this is not the one I sent you. We have both been tricked! There's a traitor at work, trying to cause my downfall—and yours!"

His expression changed suddenly: into his eyes flashed the daredevil gleam that Lola knew so well.

"But they've not beaten us yet—eh, Lola? This is only the beginning. We'll win through yet—and we'll make a famous dancer of you."

His expression softened.

"Rumours have reached me that La Bella Lola is already making a name for herself," he said quizzically. "Tell me all about it."

Lola swallowed hard, glancing anxiously over her shoulder.

"But, dad, there's no time. If you're discovered—"

Her father shook his head.

"Tell me!" he urged.

Unsteadily Lola gulped out the news—the news of her big chance.

Her father's tired grey eyes lit up.

"But that's splendid, my dear! If only I could be there to see you on the opening night! But that is impossible. When does the show open?"

"This—this evening," whispered Lola unsteadily.

"This evening?" The Grey Shadow stared at her sharply. "You mean you have lost your chance for my sake?"

Lola glanced at the darkening sky and bit back her tears.

"I had to come when you sent for me, dad," she whispered. "I couldn't let you down."

"What time does the show commence?" asked her father, a strange expression in his eyes.

"At eight o'clock," faltered Lola.

"In an hour's time?" The bandit's arm tightened suddenly round her shoulder; from the distance came the sound of shouts and galloping hoofs—swiftly approaching.

"Quickly—this way!" he breathed.

In a clearing among the bushes was tethered the great black horse that Lola had seen once before.

Without a word he lifted her into the saddle, springing up behind her.

A shot rang out as he spurred the horse into a gallop; a bullet whined through the trees.

"Duck down!" he panted. "We've been spotted, but they'll never overtake us!"

"Where—where are we going?" gasped Lola. "To the stronghold?"

Her father laughed—that gay, reckless laugh that she knew so well.

"To the theatre," he rejoined, "where my daughter is going to dance—to fame!"

What a daring risk this is that Lola's father is taking for her sake! Will he be able to reach the theatre safely? Don't miss next Friday's chapters of this enthralling serial. Order your GIRL'S CRYSTAL infadvance.

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Pat and the Mystery Professor

The professor at Lord Murne's house seemed very anxious to give the impression that he was absent-minded. But Pat Lovell had an idea that it was all a pretence on his part.

By ELIZABETH CHESTER

THE DISFIGURED PICTURE

GOOD-MORNING! I'm representing the 'Midshire Gazette,' and I've an appointment with Miss Straker."

Pat Lovell, girl reporter, smiled cheerfully at the portly butler who faced her in the magnificent hall of Mawlfleet, the famous country house of Lord Murne.

This ancient mansion, which housed an almost priceless art collection, was to be featured in a new series of articles on "The Stately Homes of Midshire" in the "Gazette," and Pat had been given the job of "writing it up."

Lord Murne was away on the Continent, but she had a letter of introduction from him, and she was to be shown round by Miss Straker, his private secretary, who was in charge.

In particular, she wanted to see the celebrated picture by Van Hofen, "Madame de Verne," which was the gem of the collection.

The grave-faced butler faced her now, and was about to reply. But before he could do so, a dark-haired, attractive girl came down the wide staircase.

"Who is this, Vaughan?" she asked. "A young person representing a newspaper, Miss Straker."

"Oh, already!" exclaimed the girl in a tone of dismay. "How ever did it leak out so soon?"

Pat stared at her wonderingly. "Leak out?" she asked. "I don't understand. I have come by appointment. Lord Murne has written a letter—"

She found the letter and gave it to Miss Straker, who took it and slit the envelope, reddening a little.

Pat had not missed her agitation nor the question asking how she had learned something. It was quite obvious to her that something worth a newspaper's interest had happened here. By accident she had stumbled on news!

"Has anything happened?" she asked.

Miss Straker read the letter and folded it. She took her time, and Pat guessed that she was considering what to say.

"No; nothing has happened," she said. "Not at all. I thought—"

She did not finish the train of thought. "I shall be most happy to show you round," she said, pulling herself together. "In the excitement I had forgotten about your coming. Silly of me!"

But she did not say what the excitement was that had made her forget Pat's coming. Instead, she turned and looked about her in the wonderful old hall.

"This is the main hall," she said in a guide-book voice. "As you will see, there is a musicians' gallery running round it. Some of the most famous musicians have used it, and at one time there was a highly talented orchestra. The sixth earl was a keen musician—"

Before she could say more someone else came on to the landing above, started to descend the stairs, and hesitated. An old man, grey-bearded, he was of shabby, almost eccentric appearance, and Pat wondered who he was.

"All right, professor!" said Miss Straker. "It's Miss Lovell, from the 'Gazette.' I mentioned her, you remember. She wants to be shown over the house."

"Oh, yes, of course! I quite forgot!" he exclaimed.

"Professor Lawson!" said Miss Straker to Pat, making the introduction.

Pat eyed the professor, and took him to be a typical absent-minded specimen of his kind. She smiled to herself as she noticed that part of his tie was tied outside his collar and part inside, and that one of his brown walking shoes was fastened with a black lace.

"Most interesting, historic place!" he murmured. "Your editor is very wise in deciding to write an account of it. Is there anything in particular you want to see?"

"I suppose it's all interesting—the remains of the moat; the tree where the murdered earl was hidden; the secret panel—oh, and perhaps, most of all," ended Pat, "Madame de Verne!"

Miss Straker gave a noticeable start at the mention of the famous picture, and the colour that had come to her cheeks faded.

"Oh, that's impossible, I'm afraid!" she said quickly.

"Impossible! I can't see it?" asked Pat, disappointed.

The secretary shook her head,

"No. You see," she murmured, as though groping for an excuse, "Lord Murne locked the door of the gallery before he went away. I can't get in there. As it is so priceless, I'm glad he did, although it's unfortunate to-day."

"Oh!" said Pat, and it struck her that there was something strange in the air.

It struck her, too, that it had some connection with the famous picture. And she remembered that it was something the newspapers might be interested in.

Instantly Pat jumped to a conclusion. The picture had been stolen, and for the time being that fact was to be kept secret.

"I see!" she murmured, with suppressed excitement. "But it really is rather sad, because I'm supposed to write a special description of it. Lord Murne has said I can see everything. Isn't there possibly a duplicate key?"

"No! There is not!" answered Miss Straker, quite curtly.

Pat did not press the point, but she meant to find out in a moment where the gallery was. Outwardly she seemed resigned to the disappointment as she walked around the hall with Miss Straker, and then examined the musicians' gallery, and saw the chair where Sasz, the composer, had played, and the broken rail which a Stuart king had smashed when enraged that he himself could not master a certain tune.

But all the while Pat had the picture-gallery in mind. And when, a moment later, she saw Miss Straker give the professor a key—at a moment when Pat's attention was seemingly diverted—she guessed what it was—the key to the gallery!

The professor walked away, and Pat listened. Thrilled, she heard the click of a key in a lock not far away.

When, a moment later, Pat was shown into a large bed-room, she pretended that she had dropped her pencil. Slipping back to the gallery, she hurried in the direction taken a moment before by the professor.

Turning the corridor at the end, she looked left and right, and saw an open door. It was open but a short way, but

enough to let her get a glimpse of pictures on the wall.

The gallery! It had been locked; but Miss Straker had had the key after all. Why, then, had she not wanted Pat to look inside? Had the picture been stolen—was there a gaping frame?

Pat went to the door, hesitated there, feeling guilty, and then peeped in. She saw walls covered with pictures; she saw the professor standing back from one of them on the long wall opposite the door, and then she gasped aloud in horror and amazement.

For the picture before which he stood was disfigured. Some fluid was splashed over it, blurring the wonderful painting of a woman in blue—a picture that was nevertheless still recognisable as the priceless, irreplaceable "Madame de Verne."

Gasping, Pat forgot caution; and before she could move back, there were running steps in the corridor, and the secretary caught her by the shoulder. "You spy!"

AN IMPOSTOR IN THE HOUSE!

YOU spy!" The angry, scornful, frightened words brought a flood of colour to Pat's cheeks as she turned to the secretary.

"I—Is that 'Madame de Verne'?" asked Pat.

"You've seen, then?" said the secretary, her eyes wider, more frightened.

"I've seen, yes," admitted Pat quietly. "I came here to see it, and with Lord Murne's permission. Is it damaged beyond repair?"

Pat spoke quietly, hiding her excitement. She had no wish to argue; and she did not trouble to defend herself from the charge of spying. The house belonged to Lord Murne, not to the secretary; and if he knew that the picture was damaged, and wanted that knowledge kept secret, he would have telegraphed to cancel her visit. It was quite evident to Pat that Lord Murne did not yet know of this terrible disaster.

"I—I don't know. You had no right to look in here," said Miss Straker. But her tone was less angry; there was little conviction in her words.

"Does Lord Murne know that it is damaged?" asked Pat bluntly.

The secretary did not reply. Her lip quivered; tears filled her eyes, and she turned away. Covering her face with her hands, her shoulders heaving, she leaned against the wall.

After her somewhat haughty manner, her rage and indignation, the change was sudden, and Pat's heart softened.

"Miss Straker," she murmured softly, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to distress you. But it's bound to leak out—"

The secretary wheeled round, tears wet on her cheeks, and caught Pat's hand.

"No; it must not," she choked. "No, please! Don't mention this. Not yet. If the picture can be cleaned, renovated, it must be before Lord Murne comes back. I—I—I never guessed you'd see it."

The professor came from the room, closing the door, and turning the key in the lock. He eyed Pat severely.

"You had no right to see it, to look in," he said sternly. "But now that you have, the least you can do is to keep quiet about it. I am hopeful that the expert I am calling in can repair the damage."

Then, patting Miss Straker consolingly on the shoulder, he gave her a key.

"That is the key of the gallery," he said. "You had better keep it."

But Pat Lovell intervened. Pat had keen eyes, and her experience as a reporter had sharpened her observation so that she noticed a good many seemingly trivial details which others were apt to miss. And she had noticed that the professor, taking the key from the door, had slipped it into his right-hand pocket.

That, in itself, was nothing out of the way—but the key he now gave Miss Straker was taken from his left-hand pocket!

"One moment," said Pat. "I think you have made a mistake, professor."

"Mistake?" he said, frowning.

"That isn't the key," said Pat. Miss Straker looked at the key in her hand, and the professor looked at it, too.

"It looks all right," said the girl secretary.

"Of course it is," said the professor, with a frowning glance at Pat. "I have just opened and shut the door with it."

But Pat stuck to her point. "I'm afraid you professors are absent-minded," she murmured. "You put the key from the door in the other pocket. Anyway—try it in the lock."

The professor now glared at her.

"Rubbish!" he said sharply. "I may be absent-minded, but I am not a fool. Apparently you have come into this house to make a fool of yourself. The sooner you go, the better."

Pat did not mistake his resentment and anger; but she saw no cause for it. Anyone who tried to ride rough-shod over Pat Lovell was making a very grave error.

"If I am wrong I will apologise and go," she said. "But as the picture has been damaged, and as others may be damaged, it must be a matter of importance to know who has the key of that gallery."

Miss Straker put the key in the lock. "We may as well settle this," she said.

She turned the key, but it did not operate the lock. She tried again, and gave a gasp of astonishment.

"You're right!" she said, in surprise.

Pat looked measurably at the professor, who shot up his eyebrows in a somewhat exaggerated expression of surprise.

"Pon my word, the girl must be right," he said, and groped in his right-hand trousers pocket. "Ah! She is!" he ended, pulling out the key he had put there.

Miss Straker took it, tried it in the lock, and opened the door. Almost immediately she closed and re-locked it.

"Well, that's settled!" she said, and smiled at Pat. "How quick of you to notice that! It may have saved us a lot of bother."

"My fault entirely," said the professor. "I apologise. More absent-minded than I thought. H'm! Very sorry I spoke so harshly," he said to Pat.

But Pat saw no hint of regret in his expression. There was an even angrier, more resentful glint in his eyes as, with a slight bow, he turned and walked away.

Pat looked after him thoughtfully, and her heart-beats quickened with excitement. For she knew now that the professor had not made a mistake. He had deliberately given the secretary the wrong key; and that was why he had been so angry and resentful, why he had glared.

"Queer!" mused Pat.

"Oh, they're all absent-minded, these professors!" sighed the secretary. "But at least they're clever. And he's my

best friend at the moment. He knows another kind of professor who can skim the surface of old masters, or something of the sort, and make them like new without hurting them."

But Pat did not answer, for already suspicion of the professor's good intentions was dawning in her mind. If he had played one trick on the secretary, he might play another; he might have some deep plot in mind—perhaps even to steal the damaged picture.

On the instant Pat jumped to a conclusion. It was possible, even probable. On the pretext of having the painting repaired, the professor might take it, with permission, from the house—or even without permission if he had kept the key.

Pat thrilled at the thought. But wisely she decided to keep her suspicions to herself.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"A school friend of Lord Murne's. He's had a standing invitation to come here and stay for years—I mean he's had the invitation for years," corrected the secretary. "He's brought enough luggage for a month or two, though."

"How long has he been here?" Pat asked.

"Oh, a week!"

"A week!" Pat exclaimed, surprised. "But Lord Murne has been away for a month, surely?"

"Yes, rather more," nodded the girl. "but he knows that the professor is here. There's nothing unusual in visitors arriving and staying when Lord Murne's away, you know."

"Um!" said Pat, musingly.

And the thought that struck her was that it would be childishly easy for anyone to arrive at the house claiming to be an old friend—provided the "old friend" was not known to the staff by sight!

Pat came from her day-dream of thought when the secretary took her arm and spoke earnestly.

"Please don't mention this in your paper," she implored. "If the picture can't be repaired, then—then it will have to come out, and that'll be the end of my happiness. But I'm hoping against hope—I'm pinning my faith to the professor's friend."

Pat met her pleading eyes and was touched.

"How do you mean—the end of your happiness?" she asked.

Vere Straker shrugged her shoulders.

"I should be dismissed in disgrace," she said. "How the damage happened I just don't know, but Lord Murne will blame me. He will say that I was careless and left the door open, or left the key about. And—and he's been so kind and generous; he's arranging to let mother have a lovely cottage on the estate. Now—if the worst happens," she gulped miserably. "Well—"

Pat squeezed her arm.

"I won't mention it until you say I can—unless in some other way it leaks out," she promised. "But tell me how it happened. How did the picture come to be disfigured like that?"

The secretary could not tell her. She guessed that a footman who had been sacked was to blame; but it could not be proved. He had stayed only a week, had insulted the butler, had stayed out of the house until the early hours of the morning, had made a nuisance of himself, threatened vengeance when sacked—and then had gone suddenly in the night. The next day the damage to the picture had been discovered. Acid had been flung on to it. And that was all that was known.

"Listen," said Pat quietly, glancing

back down the corridor in the direction taken by the professor. "Show me more of the house, please. I have a dim suspicion dawning that may lead to helping you; but as yet it's only a suspicion."

Vere Straker pulled herself together. She was relieved now that she had told someone, and Pat's open, honest manner had inspired confidence. From room to room she led Pat, explaining and answering questions, giving a list of famous people who had used the rooms, and giving all the details of furnishing Pat needed.

"Which is the professor's room?" Pat asked presently. "Would he mind my seeing it?"

"I don't think so," said Vere Straker. "I'll find him."

She went off in search of him, and returned to say that he gladly gave his permission. His room was an historic one used once by Charles the Second.

The room was tidy, and Pat saw two suitcases, a gladstone bag, golf clubs, and a trunk, but nothing of the professor's lying about.

"H'm! Very tidy for a professor," she murmured.

"Yes, strange; but, of course, the servants tidy it," smiled Vere Straker.

Pat looked at the luggage, her eyes narrowing.

"He's brought enough to last him a month. Does he wear a different suit every day?" she asked.

"Gracious, no! He's worn the same suit since he's been here," said Vere Straker, amused.

"H'm! What does he need the suitcases and trunks for?" asked Pat keenly.

The door opened, and the professor looked in, shooting a keen glance at Pat, and then smiling amiably at the secretary. His smile creased his face in what seemed to Pat a rather odd manner. There was a stiffness about it, and something unusual, though what she could not quite determine.

Pat looked at him closely as he walked across the room; and then suddenly a suspicion jumped to her mind—something that would account for the odd creasing of his face when he smiled.

If she had not already suspected him of duplicity that other suspicion would not have entered her mind; but Pat was positive that the man was a fraud. Next, almost automatically, came the idea that he was disguised. And if disguised, then surely his beard was false!

"Oh, professor—what is that?" asked Pat, pointing through the window at the distant countryside.

She was pointing towards the village, and he joined her at the window.

"What are you pointing to—the village, the trees, or the church?" he asked, in an unfriendly tone.

"The tall building in the village," said Pat, to distract his attention while she studied his face.

He did not suspect her true motive, and stared at the tall building. His face was in the sunlight, and Pat stared at it intently. But she was allowed to do so only for a moment; then, with a quick movement and a flashing, alarmed glance at her, he moved out of the sunlight.

Too late! Pat, her heart throbbing with excitement, had noticed the slight difference between his own slight growth of beard and—the false one. The two merged. His own short beard covered the hard line of the false one—covered it securely enough for a casual glance. But Pat had studied it close

to with the sun on it. And now she knew the truth.

The professor's beard was false—false as he was himself.

"That is the water-tower," he said, frowning at her.

"You're not as short-sighted as I am," smiled Pat.

And she nearly chuckled at his obvious relief.

"Short-sighted, are you?" he murmured. "You should have glasses.

This room was used by Charles II, you know," he added.

"Any secret panels?" asked Pat casually.

"One," answered Vere Straker; "but it has been screwed up. There it is."

She pointed to a panel, and Pat saw a dozen counter-sunk brass-headed screws studded round the edges.

"Quite interesting," she murmured, turning away.

And so casual did she seem that neither the professor nor the secretary guessed the thrill that ran through her. A secret panel in the professor's room!

not screwed up, even if before the professor's arrival it had been. There were only dummy screws now, just screw-heads.

Pat groped over the panel, and, looking sideways, saw in the sunlight that flashed on it the mark of finger-prints. Pressing the spot where they were, she gasped aloud as the spring mechanism clicked and the panel flew open.

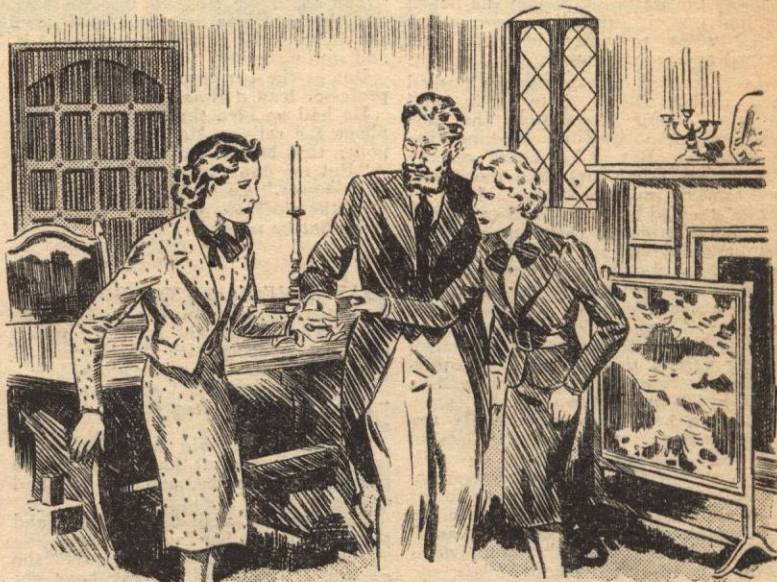
Black, musty darkness was beyond, a gap large enough for her to walk through.

"My word, I wonder—" she murmured softly.

But she murmured no more, for suddenly someone pushed her in the back, pushed her so violently that she stumbled through into the darkness on all fours, bumping her head against the inside opposite wall.

She had just time to see the furious, glaring eyes of the professor, and then the panel slammed to, and she was in darkness.

"Perhaps that'll teach you not to snoop around," said the professor.



"That isn't the key," said Pat. "Of course it is," snapped the professor. "I have just opened and shut the door with it." But Pat stuck to her point. "I'm afraid you professors are absent-minded," she murmured. "You put the key in the other pocket!"

Just what he might need either for the purpose of hiding stolen goods, or himself!

Yet it was obviously screwed up. Or—was it?

Pat did not look at the screws. She asked questions about the old Jacobean four-poster bed, a splendid thing with carved posts and dainty canopy; about a prime minister who had slept there; about the supposed ghost; and then went from that room to see another.

Ten minutes later it was tea-time, and Pat excused herself to go to wash. Assured that the professor was in the hall, where a footman had served the tea, she went lightly upstairs, past the bath-room on the landing, and then to the professor's room.

Opening the door, she went at once to the panel, and, taking out her small nail-file, applied the rounded end to one of the screws. The head moved easily, and three turns were enough to free it. Out it came—a mere screw-head with but a turn or two of thread. It was a blind! It served no purpose at all.

None of them did. Pat's heart thumped as she realised that another suspicion was justified. The panel was

THE SECRET PASSAGE

PAT scrambled up in the darkness. She was shaking with shock, and her heart was bumping wildly. Too late she realised that she had been unguarded, that the professor had guessed that she might explore his room. And now she was a prisoner.

She had no matches, and in the darkness she groped on the inside of the panel, trying to find the secret catch. But as she groped she heard sounds on the far side, a soft, grinding sound against the panel that she had opened.

Pausing in her efforts, Pat listened. The sound was soft but recognisable. The professor was screwing up the panel!

For a moment Pat could hardly believe it. Then the full horror of her plight dawned upon her. She was being locked in with no means of escape. She might shout for hours without being heard.

And, meanwhile, the professor would escape—escape with whatever he had come here to steal. Without suspicion he might even take away the precious "Madame de Verne."

"Let me out!" cried Pat, thumping

on the nearest panel. "Open this—let me out!"

The sound of screwing ceased, and Pat, groping, found the mechanism of the panel that operated its secret hinge. But although she could bring a click, she could not open the panel. It was now genuinely screwed up.

Calming herself, Pat groped to the left. But she found herself against a dead end. Turning back, she went warily along the musty, airless, narrow corridor in inky darkness.

A dozen yards farther on she stumbled as the ground seemed suddenly to fall away beneath her feet, and only by clutching at the walls did she manage to save herself. Very cautiously then, hands pressing on the walls on either side of her, she groped forward with her foot, and found that just in front of her was a stairway.

Heart in mouth, she went down the steep steps, and it seemed that she was going down, down to the basement itself. Every now and then, hoping to find another secret panel, Pat groped against the walls. Although she hoped to find one, it came as a tremendous shock when, presently, her left hand jarred against metalwork.

In quivering excitement, she pushed and pulled at the bars, rods, and springs, hoping desperately that she would find a way of working the mechanism. But in her heart was the dread that this panel, like the other, was screwed up on the other side.

She strained and tugged, then—click! Something swung back, banging her arm, and daylight streamed in. Staring out through the opening, Pat saw some banister rails in front of her, and recognized where she was. The minstrels' gallery! Stepping out, hardly able to believe her luck, she closed the panel, noting grimly that it, too, had brass-headed screws—dummy screws like those in the professor's room.

But she had no time to study the panel further, for she heard voices in the hall, and, peeping over the rail, saw Vere Straker below—and the professor. The professor wore an overcoat, and beside him was a suitcase.

"I can't tell you how excited I am," murmured Vere Straker. "Your friend really says that there's hope?"

"Almost a certainty. He has done a similar thing before. There will be no trace that the accident ever happened," said the professor briskly. "Did you order the car? I must not miss the train."

"Yes; it will be at the door in a moment. I didn't hear the phone ring."

"No, no—I took the call in the study," said the professor. "Say goodbye to the newspaper girl for me, please. Very intelligent girl, that. I rather fancy she is exploring the house. I should keep track of her. I heard someone moving on the second floor."

"Oh dear—I will!" murmured the secretary.

"Yes—no telling who she may be," nodded the professor artfully.

Pat held her breath. The rogue had obviously pretended to have a telephone-call from his "friend" necessitating his hurrying away immediately. And the picture?

Pat did not move. If she denounced the man, he could still escape—two girls could not hold him, and before help came he could be gone.

The car had already drawn up at the door.

Pat thought quickly. Then drawing back, she screamed. Twice she screamed as loudly as she could, and then crouched behind the curtains at the end of the gallery.

Confusion reigned in the hall. The

secretary appealed to the professor, and he hurried up the stairs, Vere Straker in great agitation following.

On the landing they paused, and then hurried down the corridor, calling out. They were obscured from Pat's view, and she, therefore, from theirs. So clambering on to the rail of the gallery, she climbed over, lowered herself until she gripped the floor with her fingers, and poised over the grand piano down in the hall, dropped.

It was a drop of only a foot, and no sooner did she land than she sprang to the floor, and rushed out through the doors.

In the drive the car and chauffeur waited, and Pat confronted the man. But she had time only for a word with him before the professor rushed from the house, carrying suitcase and golf clubs.

"The station—quick as you can!" he snapped to the man; he stared amazed at Pat, and hurled himself into the car.

"Yes, sir—"

The chauffeur climbed into his seat, and the luxurious limousine sped down the drive to the gates. Pat watched it, and smiling grimly to herself, returned.

But as the car reached the gates the professor leaned from the window.

He had an idea that Pat might telephone the railway station, or warn the police that he was going there.

"Put me down in the village—at the clock tower," he said.

At the clock tower was a taxi-rank—just what he needed.

PAT LOVELL and Vere Straker met face to face in the hall a few minutes later, and the secretary pulled up short, panting with the exertion of running up and down corridors.

"So there you are!" she gasped out. "What have you been doing, roaming about this house?"

"I'll tell you," said Pat crisply, and explained just what had happened in the professor's room, and how she had escaped.

Vere listened, at first incredulous, and then, convinced, her face whitened.

"Then he is a crook, a fraud!" she gasped. "And—and he may have got away with all manner of things, even—oh, the picture!"

"Has he taken it?" cried Pat sharply.

"I don't know. Not unless he has another key to the gallery, or has taken mine—no! I have it still," said Vere, taking it from her skirt pocket.

"There may be a secret panel in the picture gallery," said Pat. "We'd better go there at once. He's had time to take the picture. It's more than queer that it got damaged while he was in the house. I should say it isn't damaged harmfully at all. That stuff he says is acid can perhaps be wiped off in a moment."

They ran to the gallery, and with trembling fingers, near to tears, Vere Straker opened the door. Together they burst in, and then drew up, relieved.

The picture was still on the wall, still marked with the ugly disfiguring stain. Whatever he had taken, it was not "Madame de Verne."

Pat, still wondering if the damage to the picture was more apparent than real, crossed to it; and only a moment's examination was needed to show that it was indeed burned with acid, disfigured, and apparently beyond hope of repair, for the burns had gone through to the canvas.

"Oh—oh goodness—far worse than I thought!" choked Vere in horror.

"It's ruined—ruined—oh my goodness! Lord Murne will be broken-hearted. I—I daren't face him. I can't. Oh! And mummy—when she knows I'm sacked, when she finds she won't have the cottage—"

She was struck dumb by the full horror of the situation, now beyond even tears. For Lord Murne would blame her, refuse to believe that she had shown a proper sense of responsibility.

But Pat was examining the surface of the picture closely. The paint had cracked in several places, and there were one or two tiny blisters. It seemed to her that the cracks were due not so much to great age, but to heat; and as the thought came, light dawned on Pat.

"My goodness!" she cried. "I believe I see it now. This isn't the genuine picture—it's a fake! The real picture probably hasn't been mutilated at all."

Vere Straker looked at her in amazement.

"This—this isn't the genuine one—" she repeated.

"No! Don't you see? Lord Murne will see this, and think it is the genuine one, mutilated. Actually the real one has been stolen. The professor's got it!"

And at that moment the telephone shrilled, down in the hall. Pat took the receiver, and found she was speaking to someone she had rung ten minutes before; the sergeant at the village police station.

"Hallo, Miss Straker! You were right; this professor we're holding is a fake. He has a false beard. And we've found what looks like a valuable picture—an Old Master—rolled around one of his golf clubs. It's a picture of a woman in blue—"

"Correct," broke in Pat. "We'll come and claim it as soon as we can."

She hung up, and confronted Vere Straker.

"Sorry I had to use your name," smiled Pat. "But it was the only thing possible. I told that chauffeur to take him to the police station at once, as something valuable had been stolen, and he was to take no notice if the professor said 'railway station' instead of 'police station'—because he was absent-minded. To make sure of things I telephoned the police and told them that a man had been staying here, that he was suspected of being an impostor, and might have stolen property. Would they stop the car and hold him."

Vere Straker flung her arms round Pat's neck.

"You're the cleverest reporter in the whole world!" she cried.

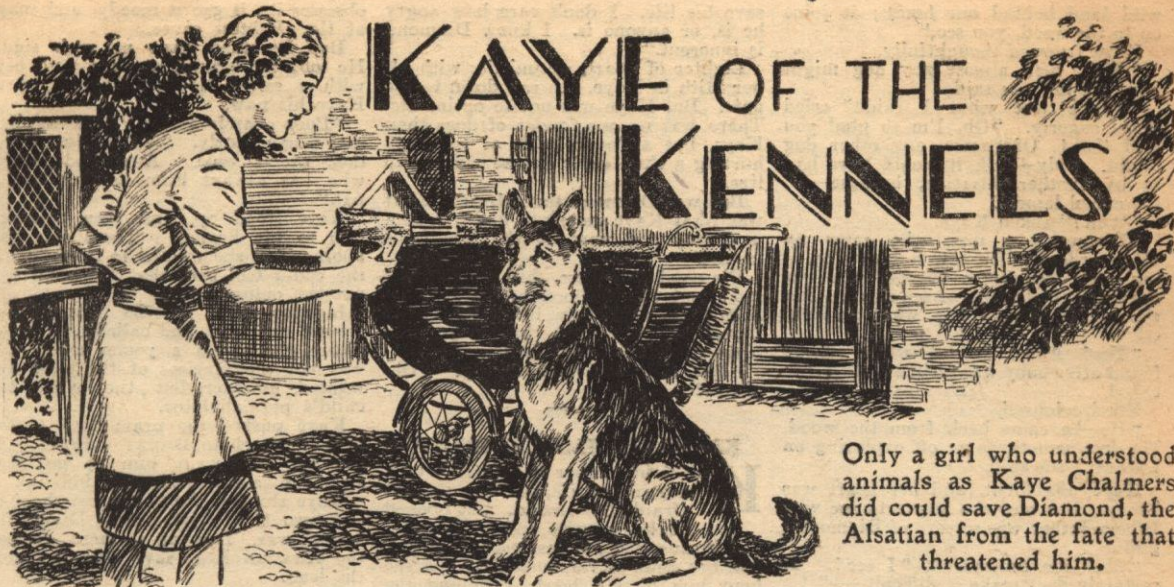
PAT learned more about the professor later on. He had been that same footman who'd been dismissed, and having familiarised himself with the layout of the house, had returned as the "old friend" of Lord Murne.

The story was a great scoop for the "Gazette," and Pat herself received full praise.

"Madame de Verne" was returned to her old position in the gallery, and there, calmly as she had done for hundreds of years, she looked down from her frame in serene beauty, aloof beyond the world—yet (as Pat thought), frowning slightly, as though the indignity of being carried rolled round a golf club had not been quite forgotten!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

There will be another grand story of Pat Lovell's adventures in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Make sure you get your copy; order it from your news-agent to-day.



KAYE OF THE KENNELS

Only a girl who understood animals as Kaye Chalmers did could save Diamond, the Alsatian from the fate that threatened him.

By IDA MELBOURNE

HER PET IN DANGER

"MISS CHALMERS! Miss Chalmers! Let me in, please—quickly!"

Kaye Chalmers, busy bandaging the foot of a terrier which had trod on broken glass, turned her head in amazement as that shrill, anxious cry came from the gates.

She had heard the bell ringing and Brutus' frantic barking, and had meant to answer the summons as soon as the bandage was tied, for she could not leave her work at a moment's notice.

But this panic-stricken cry told her that there was some very urgent need for help. The first thought that leaped to her mind was that some poor animal had been run over.

Hurriedly she fixed the bandage in position, put the terrier into his kennel, then ran to the gate. Brutus, her great St. Bernard, was there, greatly agitated by the girl's shouting.

"All right! I'm here!" called Kaye, and pulled open the gate.

A white-faced schoolgirl hurried breathlessly in, leading a magnificent Alsatian dog.

"What ever is the trouble?" asked Kaye, for she could tell at a glance that there was nothing wrong with the Alsatian.

"Take him to a kennel! Lock him in!" sobbed the girl. "Don't let anyone take him! Promise!"

She was so frantic that Kaye did not argue or question, but took the lead from her and ran up the drive. She had to tug the lead, for the Alsatian was disinclined to leave the girl and follow a stranger.

"This way, old chap," Kaye said in kindly, persuasive tones. "What have you been up to—eh?"

The Alsatian's ears went back, and his tail dropped. He seemed to wince at the words as though he understood them and they recalled some painful memory he would rather forget.

With a backward glance at the girl at the gate, he walked into the kennel that Kaye reserved for big dogs. He seemed almost pleased to be shut in, she noticed, as though this meant safety from some terrible peril.

"He's in!" she called to the girl. The girl, gulping back her tears, came running forward.

"Don't let him be shot!" she blurted out. "Please promise!"

Kaye stared at her, quite distressed

herself by the girl's fear and deep emotion.

"Dogs aren't shot without a trial," she said. "But who suggests he should be shot?"

"Father. He thinks that Diamond has been terribly wicked. He thinks that—"

The girl's voice quivered and broke. Soothingly Kaye put an arm around her.

"Tell me all about it," she urged. "What does your father think he did?"

Pluckily the girl tried to check her emotion.

"Some—someone took baby from the pram," she faltered; "dragged him out—dragged him from where he was put for a sleep under the trees at the bottom of our garden! He—he was found yards away, screaming, and his hand had been bitten! And they blame Diamond! Daddy has a gun with him! He'll—he'll shoot Diamond at sight!"

Kaye stared at the girl in horror, struck dumb by the moment by this terrible recital. She had heard of such cases, but never before had she had personal experience of one. That a dog might drag a child from a pram was possible, though hardly likely.

"How really dreadful!" Kaye gasped.

"And the baby—is it seriously hurt?"

The girl shook her head.

"No; not badly, the doctor says. But it's frightened, and there's a bite on his hand, poor darling pet! And they think Diamond did it," she burst out—"my Diamond!"

Kaye led her towards the house. It was not a thing that could be discussed in a few sentences, nor while the girl was overwrought. What she needed was strong tea and soothing words. There was a kettle on in the kitchen for the cup Kaye herself usually had at this time in the morning, so she called to the maid, and asked for a tray with two cups and some biscuits. Then she led the girl into her sitting-room.

"I think I've seen you in the town with Diamond," she said. "Don't you live at the White House?"

"Yes. My name is Beaumont—Eihel Beaumont," said the girl.

"And Diamond—how long have you had him?"

Ethel's eyes shone.

"Two years—ever since he was a tiny pup. Such a pet, too! Oh, he was lovely, the way he used to scamper

about! He knows everything I say—really, he does!"

Less agitated now, Ethel talked freely. She told a few stories of Diamond—of his courage; his intelligence; his skill in ball-catching; the way he followed her to school; the way he waited for her to come back; how he knew every sound of every tradesman, so that really he could almost tell the time.

"And your father likes him?" asked Kaye.

The girl shivered a little, and a touch of colour came to her cheeks.

"Daddy has always loved him until to-day," she said.

"And baby—how old is baby? Too young to understand?"

"Y—yes; only ten months," said Ethel.

"Oh, but Diamond loved him! He always stands guard. Whenever I'm not home, and baby is sleeping in the garden, Diamond sits by him, and when anyone comes near he growls. Oh, I'm certain he wouldn't hurt baby!"

Kaye sat with hands clasped, linking and unlinking her fingers as she thought.

"And he isn't a teeny bit jealous? He isn't turned out of the room when baby's there, or anything like that? He didn't lose his runs, or have less fuss made of him?"

Ethel shook her head almost indignantly.

"Oh, no! We all thought he'd be jealous, and we've been ever so careful to make sure that he isn't neglected. I don't neglect him. It doesn't make any difference to me, and I'm his real—his real pal. And—and he does need a pal now!"

At that moment the maid brought in the tea. Kaye poured out two cups, giving a strong one to Ethel, telling her to drink it down as hot as she could, for the girl was clearly suffering from shock.

"I see! So he isn't jealous. Is there anything that makes your father think he might be to blame?" she asked.

"No. Nothing, except the teeth marks, you see. The first thing anyone knew was when baby screamed, and mummy, who was upstairs, went helter-skelter down. Diamond wasn't anywhere to be seen, and baby had been dragged through the gate into the field. There's

wild land behind our house; it joins on to the wood, you see."

Kaye frowned thoughtfully.

"Well, then almost any dog might have got in," she said.

"That's just what I said!" cried Ethel eagerly. "Oh, I'm so glad you said that! Of course, any other dog might. Only—well, it would have had to be another Alsatian, because—"

she ended lamely.

"Well?" asked Kaye.

"Because a—a man who came up afterwards said he saw a grey dog, a big dog, dragging a bundle. He was too far away to help or see clearly. He shouted, and the dog went slinking off."

"Yes? And Diamond—where was he found after baby was picked up?" Kaye asked.

Ethel coloured.

"He—he came back from the wood. He does sometimes go off exploring on his own," she said.

Kaye was silent, and her heart was heavy. For now she began to see why Ethel's father was so sure of Diamond's guilt.

"Oh," she murmured. "I see! It certainly does make it difficult—"

Before anything more could be said the telephone-bell rang, and Kaye turned to the instrument, which stood on the bureau, and lifted the hand-piece.

"Chalmers Kennels," she said.

"I am looking for a grey Alsatian dog. It may be brought to your kennels," said an excited voice.

Kaye gave a jump. She guessed who the speaker was—Ethel's father!

"An Alsatian?" she said. "You want me to come and collect it? Is it ill?"

She bluffed so that she could discuss it with Ethel.

"No, no. I thought it might have been brought to you. My daughter has run off with it. It's a dangerous dog. It must be destroyed at once. If it comes to your kennels, keep it and telephone me. My name is Beaumont, and I live at the White House. The dog answers to the name of Diamond. The girl will be distressed. If she says the dog is not dangerous, pay no heed at all. It has just mauled a baby."

"Very well," said Kaye. "I will note your address, Mr. Beaumont."

She hung up the receiver and looked at Ethel, who stood as one stricken.

"What did he say?" she breathed.

"I'm to hold the dog until—"

"No! Don't give him up!" cried Ethel wildly. "Daddy has a gun with him. He'll shoot him on sight, he said. Oh, Diamond didn't do it! I know he didn't!"

She clung to Kaye, whose heart was very heavy; for, having heard the evidence, she could not deny that the case looked black against Diamond.

"Listen!" she said. "Trust me. Your father is excited. He is justly angry, but in his haste he may do what can't be undone. I have the dog safe where he can harm no one. What you tell your father I leave to your own judgment, Ethel. But I am going to give Diamond a trial. I can easily find out if he is savage or treacherous. And if he is—"

"He isn't!" said Ethel, her eyes shining. "Oh, you're a darling!" she added impulsively. "A darling! Because I know he's not treacherous, and you'll prove it. And you'll never give him up?"

"Not if he proves good—not without warning you," promised Kaye.

Ethel went to the door.

"I'm running home. I'm going to let daddy think I've set him free to

save his life. I don't care how angry he is, or anyone is. I know Diamond is innocent."

Lighter of heart, optimistic, with all her faith in Kaye, she ran down to the gate. But Kaye was not so optimistic. There was no one fonder of dogs than Kaye, but a dog capable of wantonly hurting a child could not be suffered to live.

But was Diamond the culprit? That was what Kaye meant to find out, and anxiously she went to the Alsatian's kennel.

Diamond sat there, his golden eyes sad; and as she stood at the bars he lifted his right paw beseechingly, as though he seemed to know that on Kaye's judgment his life depended.

"Please," he seemed to say. "Oh, please!"

KAYE'S STARTLING DISCOVERY

KAYE had never been afraid of a dog in her life, and she was not afraid of Diamond. She opened his kennel gate and let him out.

But because she was fearless she did not lose her sense of responsibility, and she kept him on the leash, fastening the free end of it securely to the bars of the gate, but low down so that he had some free movement.

"Now, Diamond," she murmured, "are you savage? Treacherous? Jealous? Didn't you like the crying baby? Was it that that caused you to hurt him? Or are you completely innocent?"

Kaye stood away and surveyed him sternly. He did not cringe. He was proud, although sad. He had not a furtive look; he did not pant, nor did his tongue loll out.

She knew the symptoms of savagery in dogs; she knew that a savage dog is generally nervy. He is savage from fright, from nerves, like an irritable human being.

But Diamond was not a nervy dog. "Bad tempered?" asked Kaye. "Let's see."

Kaye did not tease dogs; there was nothing she disapproved of more strongly than that form of silly cruelty. But as she had to learn the secrets of Diamond's nature she broke her rule.

When a dog is teased its nature comes out, for its temper is then frayed. Most dogs will snap as a warning that the torment must stop; some whine pathetically in appeal. But there are some whose teeth snap to bite, whose eyes flash, whose anger is dangerous.

Kaye flicked Diamond's face with one of her gloves. He was shocked and pained, and drew back his head.

Then she teased him in earnest, flicking one side of his face, and then the other with the thick glove.

"Now, Diamond—now!" she said. "Take that, laddie—"

She flicked him again, and he snarled, lips farther back, neck muscles tautened. If he bit at her, Kaye would not have blamed him. But he only gave an angry click of the teeth and snarled.

Kaye drew back. She dropped the glove, trod on it, as a symbol that all was over, and then gave it to him to worry if he would. But he ignored it.

Fearlessly she put out her hand and patted him, then took from her pocket one of the small biscuits she kept for dogs. She was puzzled. A dog who had recently mauled anyone does not forget. Once the old wild instincts rise to the surface, something has snapped in the dog's mind—something that cannot be mended. Guiltiness

obsesses it; it grows moody, and snaps at the slightest cause.

But Diamond gave no such signs. He took the biscuit, another, and then, with a softer look in his eyes, gave Kaye his paw.

"Poor chap! I won't tease again," said Kaye gently. "You're just a pet dog, aren't you? A spoiled fellow, who has always been treated like a pal."

Kaye stood up, and then returned him to the kennel. There was still another test she wanted to make before she could feel sure that Diamond was not the culprit.

Leaving him in the kennel, she crossed the road, and called at a house where there was a young child. It was not the services of the child she wanted, however, but the loan of the child's perambulator.

Kaye pushed the pram back to the kennels, much to Brutus' surprise. As she did not want him to go near Diamond, she had chained him up.

Kaye stopped the pram just short of the turn to the left where Diamond's kennel was. Leaving it there, she set the Alsatian free; save that she held the lead.

Diamond walked eagerly to the end of the line of empty kennels, and then turned right towards the gate.

He halted suddenly. He stiffened, and his ears went back; for a few yards in front of him was the pram. "So you think you know it, eh?" said Kaye, watching him keenly.

Diamond, moving forward, sniffed, went to the pram, and looked inside. Then, perplexed, he looked at Kaye, for plainly he realised that that was not his young master's pram.

"You don't look very guilty," said Kaye gladly. "In fact, not guilty at all after the first shock of seeing it. Diamond," she added, "I think you're innocent."

Diamond wagged his tail, and looked up at her expectantly; then he nuzzled his nose to the biscuit pocket and barked. He had his biscuit, and Kaye returned him to a kennel out of sight from the main path—one reserved for dogs who had to be kept quiet.

"Diamond, my lad," she said, "I'm going to your house, and if I can make your master understand that you may not be guilty, I'll take you there and see how you behave. I'll find foot-prints and I'll compare them with your feet. I'll look for other prints."

She left a message with the maid for her grandfather, who would take charge. Then, mounting her cycle, she rode to the White House, which was situated a mile away.

She was within sight of it, when down the road came cycling Ethel. On recognising Kaye the schoolgirl slammed on her brakes, and slithered to a stop.

"Where is he?" she gasped. "At the kennels. Don't look so scared. He's in a back kennel. No one can find him. Whatever's happened?" asked Kaye, alarmed.

Ethel was almost in tears. "We had a fearful quarrel—daddy and me. I—I let it out. I said you didn't think he was to blame, and now he knows where Diamond is. He'll come in the car."

She raced off, but Kaye continued on her way to the White House. As she neared it a car swept out of the drive at speed. In vain she waved to the driver. It raced on down the road as fast as it could be driven.

Kaye, though upset, knew it was impossible to overtake Mr. Beaumont, so she dismounted and went down the side path to the garden at the rear.

The pram was there, still overturned, the bedding on the grass. She walked beyond the pram to the gate that still swung open, and passed through it to the thick grass and undergrowth beyond.

On the grass were telltale marks showing where the baby had been dragged, and Kaye, stooping, parted the grass.

She found what she sought—prints. The ground was soft, and the prints were clearly marked. One set moved to the gate, and another away from it. There was a separate trail from the garden leading to the left.

Kaye puzzled over them for a moment; for they told a strange story. There were two sets of prints going out, and one coming in. That suggested that there had been two dogs in the garden.

"One dog came in," Kaye murmured, "took the baby, and went, Diamond went out. But why didn't he attack the other dog? His prints go to the left. Does that mean he went out before the other dog came?"

Kaye decided to follow that trail to the left. If it circled round and joined the other that came in, then there had been only one dog, Diamond.

She followed the trail, and saw that the dog had galloped. The depth and manner of prints told that unmistakably. Diamond had had some good reason for hurrying out.

But suddenly Kaye halted. She stood petrified.

In the grass ahead was a still, grey shape.

"An Alsatian!" she blurted out, and stepped forward to it.

A foot away she stopped short, peered closely, and gasped. The dog was dead, killed by a fatal bite at the throat. But it was not that that filled her with horror. It was the fact that that grey shape was not an Alsatian dog at all. It was a wolf!

menagerie. They are roving the woods," said the policeman. "Keep to the roads. If you see anything like an Alsatian dog, ride on! If you really think they're wolves, ring the police station. We've got men with guns trying to trail them before they do any damage."

Kaye's eyes rounded with horror. "Two of them? How awful! But, anyway, there's only one now. You'll find one dead, at the back of the White House, killed by an Alsatian."

She left the policeman gasping, and rode on like the wind. When she reached the kennels she was exhausted and gasping, but somehow she struggled up to the house.

Her grandfather was there, looking bewildered and upset, but he was tremendously glad to see her.

"Kaye, thank goodness you've come back!" he cried. "There's been an awful scene here. A man with a gun came to shoot the Alsatian."

"And has he?" cried Kaye, in horror.

"I don't know. I said you'd taken the dog. Then, while we were arguing, a girl came in. She sneaked behind the kennels, and somehow she found the rest-home. Next thing I knew, she'd set the dog free."

"Oh, good!" gasped Kaye, in relief. "And now—"

"The dog went running for the woods. The girl and the man followed. From what they shouted, I gather that the man is her father."

Kaye grabbed up her cycle, mounted it, and rode down to the gates.

"Brutus!" she called. "Brutus—quick!"

Brutus came galloping across the yard, and together they set off for the woods. As they reached them, Kaye dismounted. At top speed, gasping, stumbling, she ran on, with Brutus

lumbering behind her. The woods were silent, but as she ran she kept her eyes open for a cunning, lurking grey shape.

And then, when she was slowing, short of wind, her heart thumping madly, she heard a girl's cry:

"Daddy, you dare!"

Kaye plunged through the trees, only to pull up in alarm as ahead she saw a grey shape. It was moving swiftly through the grass, crouching low. Brutus halted, too. His hackles rose, and he gave a deep, rumbling growl. Watching the wolf warily, Kaye ran on, shouting.

Fifty yards on she saw Ethel, arguing with a tall man armed with a gun.

"No—daddy!" she cried.

Diamond, stock still, tail drooping, stood in the line of fire, staring at his master. Ethel was paralysed with horror, but Kaye sprang to action. She snatched up a stone and hurled it. Never before had she thrown a stone at a dog; but this one was well-flung. It struck Diamond; he yelped and dodged.

At the same moment the gun flashed flame, and the loud report echoed in the woods. With a wild howl, the Alsatian leaped through the trees, and Ethel, with a cry of horror, crumpled up.

Kaye, chalk white, ran forward. "You've hit him!" she cried.

"Stand back!" shouted Ethel's father. "After him, Brutus!" cried Kaye.

"Seek him out!"

Brutus looked at the gun and then at Kaye. Next moment he went galloping through the undergrowth after the wounded Alsatian. Kaye followed, while Mr. Beaumont, pale and shaken, stood with the smoking gun in his hands.

He stood there silent, horrified. He had not intended to be cruel; he had intended to kill what he thought was a savage dog.

Something made him turn—a soft sound. He wheeled, and then drew back, his eyes wide, as from the undergrowth behind him moved a grey streak, jaws agape, eyes flashing red.

Without a sound, the wolf sprang at him. He beat it back, yelled, and fought for his life. In his agitation he did not see Diamond, but Diamond, dragging a wounded left leg, came from the bushes, snarled, and, as his master tripped and fell, caught the wolf by the leg.

Kaye, ten yards away, saw it all. So did Brutus, and as the wolf snapped round venomously, Brutus sprang. Eleven stone of dog landed on the wolf; there was a snarling and a flurry; and then Brutus stood back and Diamond limped clear.

Mr. Beaumont, dazed and speechless, stared in bewilderment at that silent grey shape on the grass.

"A wolf!" he said at last.

"There were two," said Kaye. "They escaped from a menagerie. One got your baby. Diamond killed him. And this one met more than his match."

"And—Diamond?" he gasped.

"Oh, great goodness, I—I shot him."

Kaye looked up from her examination of the Alsatian.

"A broken leg!" she said. "No worse. I'll mend that in no time. Thank goodness Ethel did not see that last scene—"

"But I did!" came Ethel's weak voice. "Brave Diamond—brave St. Bernard."

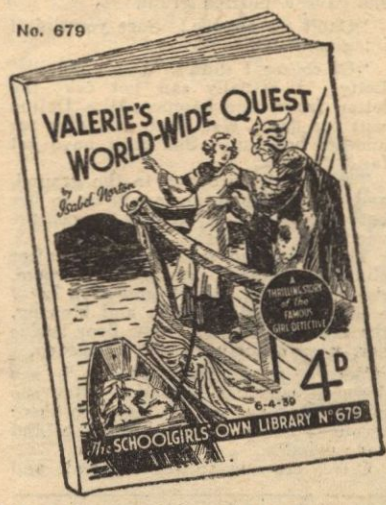
Then she dropped down to the panting Diamond and put her arms about his neck. Her pet had no more to fear.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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DIAMOND TO THE RESCUE

KAYE, recovering from the first shock, stooped and looked at the wolf's jaws, and caught in the fangs was a strip of white fabric.

Kaye wheeled round and ran. She charged through the gates to the house, and banged at the door. It flew open, and she ran into the house, calling excitedly, but not a sound came in reply.

No one was at home. She ran upstairs to make sure, but no one was there. Down she ran, and then jumped on to her cycle, and trod madly at the pedals.

"It must have been Diamond who killed the wolf!" she breathed. "He scented it, and knew it was a killer, so went out to fight it. Oh, it will be cruel if Ethel's pet is shot! Oh, I must stop Mr. Beaumont—must explain matters before it's too late!"

Tears blinded her as she rode. Never had she ridden so swiftly in her life before. She swerved round the stationary cars, skidded round the bends; went racing on. A policeman seeing her coming tearing down the road, held up his hand for her to stop. So fearful was Kaye of Diamond's fate that she had half a mind to ignore the signal. But at the last minute she clapped on her brakes.

"Steady, there—steady!" the constable urged, catching hold of her handlebars. "By the look of you, I'd say you'd seen them."

"Seen who?" Kaye gasped.

"The wolves! Two escaped from a



Her UNKNOWN ENEMY at School

By
GAIL
WESTERN



JESS' ENEMY REAPPEARS

OLIVE FRENCH, Fourth Form captain of 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.

Then a hamper from Miss Dalton, the mysterious lady who was paying Jess' school fees, arrived for Jess. It was locked away in a store-room, but Olive and Letty determined to get it so that they could get in touch with Miss Dalton.

At night they went to the store-room window, and Olive, standing on Letty's back, peered in. Then she gasped. For inside was Jess' enemy—and she was taking Miss Dalton's message from the hamper!

IN angry surprise Olive gazed through the dusty panes of the window. The store-room was in darkness, so it was impossible to identify that shadowy figure that stood beside the tuck hamper. But who else could it be but the anonymous letter-writer—the unknown enemy who for so long had schemed against Olive's chum?

Perched precariously on Letty's back, Olive crouched there for a moment, too startled to move, then, as she saw the intruder move away from the hamper, letter in hand, a spirit of desperation seized her.

At all costs the mystery girl must be unmasked! At all costs that vital letter must be secured from her! It was the only clue they had to Miss Dalton's address—the only clue that could help them to clear up the mystery that surrounded Jess Grant.

Frantically Olive clutched at the window and tried to open it, but it was stiff. As unconsciously she pressed down on her human platform, there came an agitated cry of protest.

"Steady on, old scout!" Letty, her plump legs wobbling under the increased strain, finished with a gasp of despair, for suddenly the weight became too much for her and

down she flopped, the Form captain tumbling on top of her.

"Oh dear!" panted Letty. "You silly chump, what did you want—"

"S'sh!" As she hastily scrambled to her feet, Olive raised a warning finger to her lips. "Quiet! Jess' enemy is in the store-room—and she's got that letter out of the tuck hamper!"

"Wh-aaa-t!" Her plump face registering amazement, Letty sat up with a jerk.

"Jess' enemy there!" she gasped. "Well, let's catch her—quick!"

And, getting up, she made a wild leap for the window above her head. Her upflung hands managed to get a grip on the sill, and after a struggle she was able to draw herself high enough up to gaze through the dusty panes. Eagerly she peered through them, then she gave a puzzled grunt.

"Can't see anyone! Sure you didn't imagine it, Olive?"

"Of course I didn't. Don't be silly, Letty. I actually saw her take the letter from that hamper Miss Dalton sent for Jess. Get down and give me another bunk up. She can't have got far."

The fat girl dropped to the ground, and Olive, clambering again on to her back, made another attempt to open the window.

This time she succeeded, and after climbing through into the store-room, she leaned over the sill and gave Letty a helping hand. Puffing and blowing, the fat girl dropped to the floor beside her, to give another grunt of dismay.

"She's gone, right enough," she declared, glaring around. "But she must have been pretty nippy to shoot through the door and lock it behind her again."

Olive, crossing to the far wall and

Chatting chummily, the prefect kept close beside Olive and Letty, not giving them a chance to slip away. Could she possibly suspect where the chums were going—and for what reason?

clicking on the electric light, gave a grim laugh.

"If she did escape by the door," she commented.

Letty gazed at her blankly. "What d'you mean?" she demanded. "Of course she must have scooted through the door. There's no other way out, except the window, and obviously she couldn't have escaped that way."

Olive made no reply, but there was a thoughtful gleam in her eyes as she looked around the room, its floor piled up with packing-cases, school requisites, and oddsments of all kinds. She could not forget how surprised she had been when that shadowy figure had suddenly loomed into view. It had not been from the direction of the door she had come but from the opposite way.

"I'm certain she wasn't in the room when I first looked," Olive murmured to herself. "And I was looking at the door. If she'd entered by that I'd have been bound to have noticed."

While Letty watched in bewilderment, Olive walked across to where two or three old blackboards and easels stood against one panelled wall, and with an excited cry she suddenly bent and snatched something up from the floor.

It was a handkerchief, and by its condition it had plainly not lain there for long.

"That mystery girl must have dropped it!" Olive exclaimed, and eagerly she examined it. A gleam crept into her eyes as she saw the initials embroidered in one corner. "W.B.," she announced.

"W.B.!" Letty gave a gasp. "Golly, that must stand for Winifred Butler! Then that proves it! Winifred is Jess' unknown enemy! We've half-suspected it all along, but this settles it!"

The fat girl's cheeks were aglow with triumph, but Olive was not so ready to jump to conclusions. She knew how cunning the unknown schemer was.

"Don't forget that she loves to leave false trails behind her," she pointed out. "The first time she appeared she was wearing Stephanie's shoes. Another time she had on Lorna Meredith's raincoat—"

"Yes, that was a bit too thick," Letty cut in. "As if Lorna—the sportiest prefect you've ever had—could be Jess'

unknown enemy! Why, the idea's absurd!"

Olive nodded.

"It certainly takes a bit of believing," she agreed. "But if we rule out Lorna, then there's only Winifred Butler and Billie Carlton left. One of them must be the culprit!"

"Then I vote for Winifred!" snapped Letty. "She's always had her knife in the Fourth."

"Well, we'll find out for certain before long," said Olive. "But the first thing is to try to discover how she managed to pop in and out of here so mysteriously. I'm positive she didn't come through the door, so—"

Leaving the sentence unfinished, she removed the blackboards and easels, and an excited cry escaped her lips as in the dust-rift against the panelled wall she saw the imprint of a shoe. Instantly she began to hammer on the ancient panels, pressing and tugging at the beading. Letty, watching her, gave a shout of understanding.

"You think there's a secret entrance, is that it?" she gasped. "My giddy aunt—"

That was as far as she got, for suddenly, without the slightest warning, there came a metallic click and a section of the panelling swung back on invisible hinges, revealing a black cavity beyond.

Her eyes shining with triumph, Olive felt in her pockets.

"Got a match?" she asked.

Letty nodded, and producing a box, she struck one and pushed her hand through the cavity. The flickering light revealed a low-roofed, brick tunnel.

"Come on," the fat girl urged. "You've hit the nail on the head right enough, Olive. This is how she managed to vanish so quickly."

Lighting their way by the aid of Letty's matches, the two girls stepped through the secret doorway and stole down the tunnel. Their hearts were beating fast; there was a flush on their cheeks. For both felt that at long last they were on the verge of important discoveries.

Where did the underground passage lead? And would they succeed in tracking down Jess' unknown enemy?

Twenty yards from the entrance the tunnel forked and the chums halted in doubt.

"Which way did she go? That's the question?" said Olive.

"I vote we turn right—the right's bound to be right," said Letty, chuckling at her own joke.

"Right-o-o! One way's as good as another!" agreed the Form captain, so they continued on their exciting trip of exploration.

The passage seemed never-ending, and now from the roof came the pattering of dripping water. Olive, remembering the chart they had found, gave a startled cry.

"I believe we're under the lake near Fenleigh!" she exclaimed.

"Under the lake!"

Letty's eyes widened. In blank amazement she stared. Olive nodded.

"Yes, don't you remember that chart? On it was marked a secret passage!"

"But that led from Peewit Isle to a house—not to St. Kit's!" objected the fat girl.

"I know. But this one may connect up with it. Look, there is a regular labyrinth of them!"

As she spoke, Olive pointed to a number of arched openings ahead—obviously the entrances to branch passages.

"If you ask me—" she began, then abruptly she broke off, for from her

chum there had come an excited gasp.

"Look—down there on the floor! A hat—a school hat!"

As she yelled out the words, Letty plunged forward and snatched up the hat, then her face paled, and in wondering apprehension she turned and surveyed her chum.

"It's Jess'!" she announced huskily.

"Jess'!"

"Yes! Her name's on the band! Look for yourself!"

Letty held out the hat, and Olive's own heart began to thump as she saw that the fat girl was right. Undoubtedly this was their missing chum's hat.

But what had she been doing down here? And—where was she now?

THE FORM MUST NOT KNOW!

It was Letty who suggested a possible explanation. Clutching at Olive's arm, she surveyed her eagerly.

"Perhaps this is where she's been all along," she said. "She may have discovered this passage and decided to use it as a hiding-place."

As she spoke, she ran forward, and cupping her hands to her mouth, began to shout:

"Jess! Jess!"

Olive joined in the shouts, though none too optimistically.

Their voices came echoing back to them, but there came no other sound. Jess did not reply, and after a few minutes Letty's eager look of hope faded.

"She—she doesn't seem to be here," she murmured disappointedly.

Olive shook her head and her face went grim.

"No—not unless she's locked up somewhere!" she said.

"L-l-locked up!" Letty's jaw dropped. "Oh golly!" she gasped. "Surely you don't think she's a prisoner?"

Olive gave a sigh.

"I hardly know what to think, Letty. But I'm scared. If she was all right, Jess would hardly be likely to leave her hat behind. That's why—" She smothered another sigh and strode purposefully forward. "Come on, let's start

searching," she suggested. "We might run across another clue!"

Striking match after match to light their way, they pressed forward, exploring first one tunnel, then another. But there was no sign of their missing chum, and then, unexpectedly, they found their way barred. The passage into which they had turned was a cul-de-sac. It was impossible to proceed any farther along it.

"We'd better turn back," said Olive, "and try one of the others, though I'm beginning to think—"

She finished with an excited gasp, for as Letty struck yet another match her gaze had gone to the wall, wet and covered with moss. Something was scratched there—something that looked like a message!

"Quick, hold the light nearer!" she urged. "I think— Yes, it is a message! And it must have been Jess who scratched it there! Oh, goodness, what's happened to her?"

Their hearts pounding, they stared at the cryptic message carved in the moss. It only consisted of three words:

"TWIN TOWERS! GO—"

Olive caught in her breath.

"Twin Towers!" she murmured. "Why, that's that big house just outside Fenleigh! A Mrs. Malvering lives there. But why does Jess want us to go there?"

Letty shook her head in bewilderment.

"It beats me, unless Jess is a prisoner there. But that's silly! Old Mrs. Malvering is a magistrate; one of the big noises of the district. Why should she want to lock up Jess?"

Nonplussed, they stood there, and then Olive's lips grew taut with decision.

"Whether it's silly or not, we've got to visit Twin Towers," she declared. "Thank goodness it's a halfer tomorrow, and there's no hockey, so we can slip over to Fenleigh and investigate! But I wish—"

She paused as Letty, glancing at her wrist-watch, gave a sudden gasp of alarm.

"Oh crumbs!" she exclaimed. "D'you know the time? It's turned six!"



Olive caught in her breath as she made out the message carved in the moss. "Twin Towers," she murmured. "Why, that's the big house just outside Fenleigh." But why should their missing chum want them to go there?

"Six!" Olive was as dismayed as her chum. The dress rehearsal had been called for then, and Stephanie could be counted upon to cause trouble if they did not turn up. "Here, we must fly!" she cried. "This wretched mystery must wait. Anyway, we can't do anything until to-morrow. But I do wish I knew whether poor Jess is all right or not!"

She shook her head worriedly, then grabbed the fat girl by the arm.

"Come on, let's run for it!" she urged.

And together they went stumbling back along the dark, underground labyrinth.

IN the Junior Common Room, where the play rehearsal was to be held, Stephanie Warner was holding forth.

"A quarter-past six," she commented, "and still there's no sign of them. A fine pair they are—I don't think!"

She finished with a scornful sniff, and her chum, Iris Watts, took up the tale.

"I thought Olive French was going to turn over a new leaf!" she said, and snorted in disgust. "Huh! It looks like it! She ought to be jolly well ashamed of herself, keeping us waiting like this!"

Molly Barker, always ready to fly to Olive's defence, glared.

"Oh, for goodness' sake keep quiet, you two!" she urged. "I don't suppose it's Olive's fault! Perhaps old Brammy's sent for her!"

"Rats!" jeered Iris, while Stephanie, eager to create all the mischief she could, looked meaningly at the rest of the girls.

"If you ask me," she said, "I wouldn't mind betting that she and Letty have gone off on some stunt connected with Jess Grant."

"Wh-a-a-t!"

"Here, draw it mild, Stephanie! That girl's miles away!"

There came cries of protest from many of the girls, and Molly Barker glared harder than ever.

"You're talking rot, and you know it, Stephanie Warner," she declared heatedly. "Olive and Letty have forgotten all about Jess Grant."

"That's what you say!" sneered Stephanie.

"I say it because it's true!"

"Oh, yes? Then how do you account for this?"

And with a triumphant grin Stephanie pulled a sheet of crumpled paper out of her pocket.

"I found this on the floor just now," she explained. "Someone must have thrown it through the window when we were all gassing."

Molly took one look at what was written on the paper, then she gave a startled gasp.

"Why, it's from that anonymous letter-writer!" she exclaimed. "From that person who tried to stir up trouble before!"

Stephanie tossed her head.

"Maybe it is," she snapped, "but that doesn't make what's written here any less true. Gather round, girls, and take a dekkko!"

Excitedly the rest of the Form surged forward, and startled shouts went up as the message was read:

"Olive and Letty are too interested in Jess Grant to bother about the rest of the Form. Ask them where they've been! Unless they forget all about that thief the Fourth will know no peace!"

And underneath was scribbled that

all-too-familiar signature—"Well-Wisher."

Triumphantly Stephanie stared around, then her malicious eyes settled on Molly Barker.

"Now perhaps you'll realise that I'm talking sense!" she snapped.

"That precious pair have been fooling you. They still believe in that wretched interloper. They are still hoping to find her and bring her back to St. Kit's."

"Bring Jess back to St. Kit's?"

"Golly, we don't want her back here!"

"And we don't want any more rows, either! If Olive has let us down in order to go in search of that nuisance—"

The last speaker broke off, and they all turned, for the door had opened and, looking flushed and breathless, in had walked Letty and the Form captain.

Apologetically they surveyed the Fourth Formers.

"Awfully sorry, girls," began Olive.

"I know you must be fed-up hanging about like this, but—" She stopped, suddenly aware of the tense atmosphere. "Why, what's up?" she asked.

Stephanie gave a jarring laugh.

"The Form wants to know where you two have been!" she cried.

"That's what's up. And it's no good you lying, either."

"L-lying?"

"Yes, we know where you've been! You've been out searching for that wretched Jess Grant. You've broken your promise to the Form, that's what you've done!"

"Promise!" Quickly Olive recovered from the shock of this unexpected attack. "I made no promise!" she declared. "And if you must know, Stephanie, Letty and I have been in the store-room!"

"Store-room!" gasped Stephanie, while the other girls stared in surprise.

Then Edith Fox stepped forward, her long nose twitching inquisitively.

"What were you doing there?" she inquired.

"Minding our own business!" said Letty promptly.

A laugh greeted this sally, for Edith was a real nousey parker, and the Fourth always liked to see her squashed. But Stephanie scowled.

"That's not answering Edith's question!" she snapped. "What were you doing there?"

Olive gave what seemed like a careless laugh.

"What does one usually do in a store-room?" she countered. "Why, getting our stores, of course. Now, if the inquisition's over, we'll get on with the rehearsal."

"Hear, hear!" cried Molly Barker.

"We've wasted enough time as it is, thanks to Stephanie's tomfool notion."

Stephanie glared.

"It isn't a tomfool notion!" she retorted, and she again produced the anonymous note, thrusting it right under Olive's nose. "Take a look at that!" she ordered.

With difficulty, Olive smothered a dismayed gasp, as she read the accusing words written by "Well-Wisher." So Jess' unknown enemy had not been deceived; she still suspected that Olive and Letty were out to unmask her.

And having got Jess in disgrace, she had turned her attention to the two chums.

"Well, what have you got to say?" demanded Stephanie

Olive forced herself to appear calm.

"Nothing," she answered. "The girl who wrote that ought to be ashamed of herself! It's just a spiteful trick to try to cause more trouble."

"Hear, hear!" cried Letty, and plump cheeks aglow, she glowered at the rest of the Form. "And you chumps ought to be kicked, too, for believing what a rotter like that says. Considering that you passed a vote of confidence in Olive only a day or two ago, you ought to jolly well trust her!"

Several of the girls flushed under the rebuke.

"We do!" Molly Barker protested hurriedly. "We don't believe what that note says. It's only Stephanie who does. The rest of us know it's all rot!"

"O.K., then," said Letty. "Let's forget all about it."

"Yes," urged Olive. "We are all one happy family, so please don't let's start wrangling again. Both Letty and I are awfully sorry to keep you waiting, but we couldn't help it." Appealingly she surveyed them all. "Are we forgiven?" she asked.

There came a chorus of agreement, and Olive and Letty heaved a sigh of relief. They had only narrowly escaped from a ticklish situation.

"Right," said Olive. "Let's get on, then."

She crossed to the table where the playbooks were stacked, but as she did so she frowned worriedly, for there was a glitter in Stephanie's grey eyes. Only too obviously that girl was far from satisfied. If she got the chance she would cause more mischief.

"We'll have to watch our step," Olive told herself. "If anyone finds out we're still trying to help Jess, there'll be trouble. Stephanie will see to that."

She distributed the parts to the various characters, but she could not suppress a wistful sigh. Oh, if only all this mystery could be cleared up! After all, to-morrow they would be able to follow up that important clue, and who could tell what they might find at Twin Towers?

Forcing herself to forget her worries, she threw herself heart and soul into the rehearsal. Encouraged by her example, the rest of the Form quickly forgot the unpleasant impression left by Stephanie's suspicions, and soon the Common Room rang with happy laughter.

The play had amusing situations, as well as thrills, and as a fat Spanish matron Letty had a part that gave her plenty of scope to display her sense of the comic.

Olive beamed across at her chum.

"Splendid, Letty!" she cried. "Keep it up. The play's going great guns!"

"Rather!" chipped in Molly, her cheeks flushed with delight. "Ours is going to be the best party St. Kit's has ever seen!"

There came shouts of agreement, and lightheartedly the rehearsal proceeded. Only Olive and Letty had occasional twinges of apprehension.

What had become of their missing chum? And what did that cryptic instruction for them to go to Twin Towers really mean?

ANOTHER SUSPECT!

WATCH your step! Stephanie and Edith are over there!"

As she spoke, Olive caught her chum warningly by the arm. It was the following afternoon, and it being Saturday, there were no

lessons, so Olive and Letty had hurried through their dinner, both of them being eager to set out for Twin Towers.

But at sight of those two familiar figures loitering in the gateway, the Form captain drew back.

"Let's slip out through the side door," she said. "You know what a nosy parker Edith is. She's bound to ask where we're going, and all the rest of the rigmarole, and we don't want to arouse Stephanie's suspicions."

"I'll say we don't," agreed Letty. "Side door it is, old scout!"

As if going for a stroll, they sauntered across the quad, but once out of sight of Edith and Stephanie, they dived amongst the trees and gained the road by the little door set in the school wall.

Olive led the way towards Fenleigh, but as Letty made to follow, from behind came a hail:

"Just a minute there!"

For a moment they thought it was Stephanie, but when they turned, it was to see a tall, slender Sixth Former waving to them. It was Billie Carlton, one of the prefects.

"Wonder what she wants?" Letty muttered under her breath. "Hope we're not booked for trouble."

But there was a smile on Billie's face and it was pleasantly that she greeted them.

"Going into town?" she inquired. "Right, then I'll walk with you, if you don't mind."

The chums could hardly refuse, but secretly they were dismayed, for it would be wise if they kept their destination a secret. Besides, Billie Carlton was on their list of suspects. They didn't really think she was Jess' unknown enemy, but until they knew definitely, they did not intend to rule her out completely.

The prefect, oblivious of the fact that her company was not wanted, chattered gaily about school affairs, as they all went striding down the winding road through the marshes.

At last the grey roofs of Fenleigh loomed in sight, and Olive and Letty came to a halt.

"Fraid we turn off here," the Form captain announced.

Billie opened her eyes in surprise.

"What, you going down that muddy lane, too?" she said. "Well, how strange. I'm going that way also!"

Olive and Letty exchanged covert glances. What could their companion want down there? The lane was only a cart-track—a short cut leading to the private road in which was situated Mrs. Malvering's picturesque old house.

Puzzled and feeling a little uneasy, the chums followed the prefect into the side-turning. Presently they reached a spot where the track forked. One way led over a stile and across the fields to Twin Towers. The other twisted back to Fenleigh.

Billie eyed them inquiringly.

"Which way are you going now?" she asked.

The Fourth Formers hesitated, then Letty pointed to the stile. To her dismay, the prefect smiled.

"Splendid! I'll come with you!" she said.

There was more than dismay in the chums' hearts now. Suspicion was growing there, too. Was it possible that the prefect was deliberately sticking to them? Did she guess where they were going, and did she intend to follow them to their secret destination?

Olive smothered a startled gasp.

Suppose, after all, they had been on the wrong track! Suppose Winifred Butler wasn't their quarry! Suppose that—

"But, no!" the Form captain told



FROM ONE GIRL TO ANOTHER

Cheery Chatter and Helpful Hints by Penelope

(small), one teacup, one jug, and one mirror. So I'm hoping that's the lot—and that next week I shall start all fresh again.

The window wasn't exactly my fault; I was trying to open it, and my fist went right through it, and I received a cut wrist—poor me!

The teacup just dropped for no reason at all. The jug I banged against the tap in the kitchen when washing it up.

The mirror—a hand-mirror it was, belonging to my dressing-table set—fell right out of its casing. So whether that means that I get the seven years' bad luck, or whether the makers do, I don't know.

But actually, I'm afraid this bad luck over breaking mirrors doesn't worry me, for I've broken an unbelievable number since I've been nearly grown-up—since I've had handbags of my own, in fact.

HALLO, EVERYBODY!—Here is your Penelope—feeling as breezy as April itself! Or perhaps it should be March, since that's the month of winds.

First I must tell you of two new colours whose names you have to learn.

They have been chosen by the Queen in honour of her trip to Canada and the U.S.A.

Regina Blue is one. Mayflower Pink is the other.

Both very suitable, don't you agree?

I like Regina Blue particularly, for, as you all know, Regina means queen (as Rex means king). Then there is also a town in Canada called Regina—so that is an extra compliment to all Canadians, isn't it?

It's difficult to describe this new shade of blue to you unless you already know the Wedgwood blue, which is very true, something like a strong Cambridge blue, if you can imagine such a thing.

Mayflower Pink is rather mauvy, the colour of lilac, and I don't need to tell you what the Mayflower means to people of the United States, do I?

Anyhow, I think they're a very happy choice of names—and colours. So summery and gay.

TRY IT

I've been trying to say "Mm—I thang yew!" like Arthur Askey—Big-hearted Arthur—does. But I'm afraid I'm not very good at it, and only succeed in sounding as if I've got a shockig code coming.

But I have heard bus conductors saying it beautifully.

And I was also amused to read that certain schoolboys have been warned that there's a punishment awaiting the next daring lad who answers his schoolmaster with "I thang yew!"

CLUMSY ME

Do you ever have spasms of breaking things?

I think most of us do—for this week has certainly been "breaking week" for me!

So far I have crashed one window



TWO BELTS

If you're like me, I expect you are already thinking about wearing your pretty summery frocks again.

You'll fish them out of suitcases—or from the loft—or wherever mother stores the summer clothes, and look at them critically.

I'm sorry to have to be so hard on you,

but I do warn you that you'll find even your nicest dresses look a bit weary after their winter rest.

But cheer up! There are lots of ways in which you can gay them up again to make them as good as new—if not better!

A belt made of two bands of narrow velvet ribbon is one way of making a silky dress look very sweet and expensive.

You'll want two yards of this velvet ribbon, in any of the modern colours. Just catch it at intervals to the frock and fasten with a narrow bow. Leave a space of three inches or so between the two rows of velvet, and it will look so charming.

Bye-bye now until next week, all!

Your own

PENELOPE

herself. "That's silly! Billie's a decent sort. Winifred's much more likely to be Jess' unknown enemy!"

Reluctantly the two girls made to follow the prefect over the stile, but suddenly Olive gave a dismayed cry, and clapped her hand in her blazer pocket.

"That letter!" she exclaimed.

"Letty, I've clean forgotten all about it!"

The fat girl quickly realised what Olive was getting at, and she forced herself to look as alarmed as her chum.

"Golly, then we'll have to make tracks for Fenleigh!" she cried. "Otherwise we'll miss the post!"

Billie gazed at them disappointedly. "Oh, come along!" she urged. "You can post it later."

But the chums shook their heads. "Sorry, Billie, but it can't be done!" said Olive. "Fraid we'll have to go the other way. But thanks for your company. We've enjoyed the chat."

She nodded and smiled, then she crossed to the other path. Letty followed, and to their relief, the prefect made no attempt to come with them. Both of them heaved a sigh of relief as they saw her go striding across the fields.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Olive. "We'll wait a minute or two, then we'll go the same way, but—Letty!" Worriedly she caught at the fat girl's sleeve. "D'you think she really had any reason for wanting to hang on like that? I mean—it's queer—her coming the same way. That path only leads to the marshes and Twin Towers."

Letty caught in her breath.

back to Hollywood, the powerful headlights of Gloria's beautiful car cutting twin beams of blinding light through the darkness.

The girls nestled back, realising now just how tired they were.

At last they were in Hollywood, were sweeping through the drive up to Greenways.

"Leave you here, girls," Gloria smiled. "I'll give you a ring to-morrow, perhaps."

"Oh, will you?"

"That's lovely."

"Don't want to lose sight of you, you know," Gloria told them.

The girls glowed. That, coming from Gloria!

"But I'm afraid I shall have to soon," the famous star went on.

"Why, Gloria?"

"The company's going on location to the Arizona desert in a day or two."

"Sounds thrilling! Couldn't we come?" Molly asked.

"Afraid not. And we shall be away perhaps a week or more. Well, well, I must be going. Good-night, girls!"

"Good-night, Gloria!"

And so they trooped up to bed.

Brenda was awake at her usual time the following morning. She dressed and went downstairs. Mrs. Benson was there in the breakfast-room. She smiled. It might not have been her smile of old, but it had a friendliness that touched Brenda's heart.

How Mrs. Benson must have been shocked last night—as much as she had been shocked, perhaps.

Brenda's heart went out to this kindly woman. If only she could tell her everything, say how sorry she was that these things had to happen.

But no; that was out of the question—yet, at any rate.

"Molly and Audrey aren't up yet," Mrs. Benson told her. "I think I'll let them have a good lie-in this morning. But if you're feeling energetic, Brenda, I have something I'd like you to do."

"Of course," Brenda smiled.

"Then will you finish off that cataloguing?"

"With pleasure," Brenda said.

She saw Mrs. Benson's eyes upon her. And then Brenda knew why her employer had given her this task.

It was a test. By now the vase would have been returned to the treasure-room. Brenda would see it as she was busy cataloguing Mrs. Benson's latest acquisitions to her collection.

"You—you think she may be 'Well Wisher'!" she gasped. "My giddy aunt, another of them! First there was Stephanie, then there was Lorna Meredith, then Winifred Butler—and now Billie Carlton! Phew!" She blew out her cheeks, then shook her head. "No, I can't believe Billie's the culprit!" she declared.

"Nor me, either," said Olive. "Still, it's jolly funny!" She shook her head doubtfully, then walked back to the stile. "But come on, it's no good worrying. She's out of sight now, so let's get to Twin Towers."

Impatient to carry out their investigation—though what they could do when they did reach Mrs. Malvering's house they hardly knew—they set off across the fields.

There was no sign of the prefect, and at last the trees and shrubbery that surrounded the ancient house appeared ahead. At the entrance to the drive they halted, staring about them wonderingly.

"What's next on the list?" asked Letty. "Shall we get into the grounds and see what we can discover?"

Olive nodded, though not very surely. "I—I suppose so," she said.

They pushed open the gate and went walking up the winding gravel drive. Suddenly the ivy-covered, picturesque residence loomed right before them, and as they again paused uncertainly, Olive grabbed her chum by the arm.

"Look!" she implored, her voice shrill with excitement.

Letty stared in the direction of her pointing arm, and then she gasped, for, standing in the porch was a tall, slender figure. Billie Carlton!

What can Billie want here at Twin Towers? Is it possible that, after all, Olive and Letty have been on the wrong track? Can the Mystery Girl be the pleasant prefect who had forced her company on them on the way from the school? Don't miss a word of next Friday's splendid chapters of this grand mystery story.

BRENDA'S MYSTERY TASK IN HOLLYWOOD

(Continued from page 4.)

Mrs. Benson had given her a chance, and now she wanted to see how Brenda reacted to it.

But Brenda was glad Mrs. Benson had put this trust in her. Gladly, after breakfast, she went into the treasure-room.

Yes, there was the vase, in its case with the others.

Seeing it there, all Brenda's worries and anxieties returned. That vase, with its weird, queerly shaped Redskin symbols, holding the secret that she and Marion were seeking; that Ruby, too, was seeking.

Now it was here, where it would be missed the instant anyone took it.

Oh, what was she to do—what, what? How to discover the secret? How, more baffling in view of Mrs. Benson's decree, to communicate with Marion?

Marion had said she knew of someone who could decipher those symbols. Then she must see her sister—must. It was a dreadful risk that would have to be taken.

Yet there was just one consolation.

The fact that the vase was now here surely thwarted Ruby as much as it thwarted herself. Ruby, as desperate as she, would try to think of some way of overcoming this barrier. She, Brenda, must think of a way, too—and think of it before Ruby could act.

Brenda settled down to her cataloguing. It was interesting work, and time flew swiftly.

She heard Molly and Audrey come down, their voices gay. Then she heard footsteps approaching the door of the treasure-room.

The door opened, and in came Mrs. Benson. And with her was—

Professor Janson!

Brenda, seated at the little typing table by the window, gave a start.

"Good-morning!" the professor said.

Brenda returned the greeting as curtly as she dared in Mrs. Benson's presence. No use creating another scene, she thought.

"You certainly have a marvellous collection, my dear Mrs. Benson," Professor Janson said critically.

"That, from you, professor, is praise indeed," Mrs. Benson beamed.

Brenda went on with her work. Professor Janson, she knew, was quite

a friend of Mrs. Benson's, and no doubt he had just looked in to admire her treasures. Not yet did Brenda suspect the shock that was coming!

She wrote the details of a small Egyptian statuette, found in the tomb of some ancient Pharaoh, on an index card.

Professor Janson was strolling round with Mrs. Benson.

"Then you are quite agreeable to my suggestion?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed. I think it is extremely kind of you, professor."

"It will be safer," he smiled. "It would be heart-breaking if, while you were away, some of these treasures should be stolen. They will be perfectly safe in my keeping."

"Of course. You suggest removing the most valuable?"

"Yes."

Again Brenda started. Again she swung round, her glance darting to the mirror on the wall. And what she saw there startled her—sent a dismaying train of thought racing through her brain.

Professor Janson had his back turned to Mrs. Benson as he examined one of the show-cases. And the glittering look of triumph in those large green eyes of his was plain to see.

Brenda gasped. What was it Mrs. Benson and the professor had been saying?

That she was going away—that Professor Janson was going to look after some of her treasures.

A trembling seized Brenda.

"These Grecian vases, for instance," the professor said—"they are perfect specimens. And these Egyptian relics—really priceless. And—yes, I would suggest these Redskin vases, my dear Mrs. Benson. Unique—a wonderful set. They must be guarded, too!"

"As you say, professor," Mrs. Benson smiled.

But Brenda sat transfixed.

She had known Ruby and the professor would act—and they had acted!

Professor Janson, among the other treasures he was to guard, was once more securing possession of the precious Redskin vase.

He and Ruby would outwit her after all!

What will Brenda do in the face of this disaster? You will be enthralled by every word of next Friday's fine long instalment of this intriguing serial. Don't miss it!