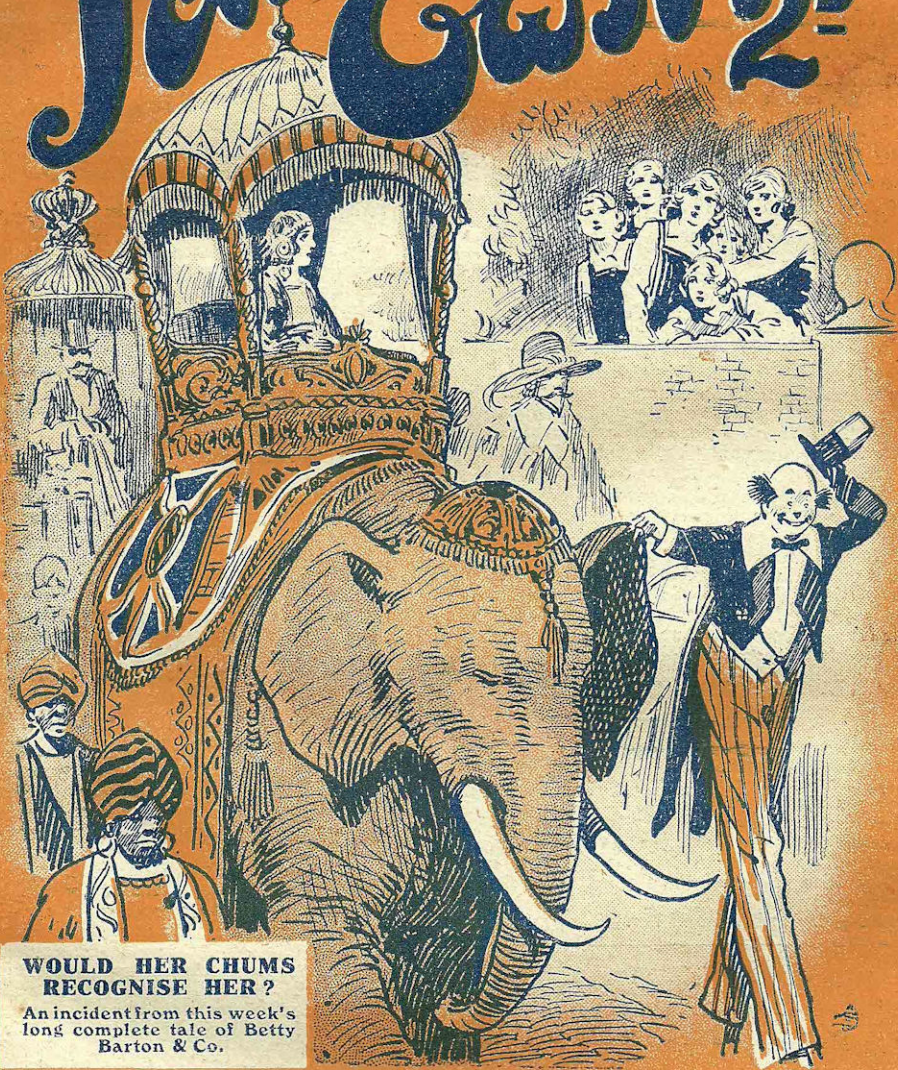


NOTE  
"THE MYSTERY GIRL OF SANDSTONE!" MAGNIFICENT NEW SERIAL  
COMMENCES IN THIS ISSUE!

# The Schoolgirl's Own 2<sup>d</sup>



**WOULD HER CHUMS  
RECOGNISE HER?**  
An incident from this week's  
long complete tale of Betty  
Barton & Co.



An Enthralling Tale of Betty Barton & Co. and Zonia Moore.



# THE CIRCUS GIRL'S SECRET!

Just Before School.

**P**OLLY LINTON came walking away from the tennis courts at Morcove School, giving a breathless:

"Pouf! A fast game, that!"

"Bai Jove," palpitated that amiable duffer, Paula Creel, as she came trailing after the madcap, "more than fast, geals! A wregular expwess, what? I weally didn't know wheah I was!"

Then Madge Minden and Naomer Nakara came up, the latter doing such acrobatic performances with her tennis-racquet that Paula Creel took care to keep at a distance.

"Pouf!" said Naomer. "I am blown!"

"Blown, Naomer darling," Madge corrected, smiling. "And even 'blown' is rather a slangy word for a crowned queen to use, you know!"

"Yes, wather! Naomer darling, it is a mattah of gweat wegwet to me that, after all this time, your English does not impwove," Paula remarked, starting to look at herself in a pocket mirror. "The polite expwession would be: 'Out of bweath,' or 'prowstwate.' How often have you heard me use the wovd prowstwate?"

"How often? I tell you; feefty million time, yes!" grinned Naomer, skirmishing towards the amiable one. "You are always perwostate, you are, and it mean you are a lazybones!"

"Naomer——"

"You are perwostate now, yes?" Naomer continued, with an ominous flourish of her tennis-racquet.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove——"

"Then I soon cure you—like this! Ha, ha, ha——"

"Ow! Naomer! Dwp it!"

"All right, I will drop it!"

And Naomer did. She let the tennis-racquet come down with a more or less gentle pat upon Paula's head, then moved the thing so that the criss-cross strings left the duffer's hair nicely ruffled.

"Ow!"

Paula had the usual dismal look as she started to push streaks of hair out of her eyes.

"The life I am led, bai Jove! Weally, Naomer, it's dweadful. I shall wun away!"

Then Betty Barton came out of a fit of musing, as she sat on the velvet turf under the girls' favourite old elm.

"Oh, don't talk of running away. Paula, even in fun! I was just then trying to stop brooding

Zonia Moore, the runaway schoolgirl, is forced to appear in the circus ring before the very girls who are seeking her all over the countryside. With her heart beating furiously, Zonia enters the ring. Will Betty & Co. recognise her?

By MARJORIE STANTON.

about poor Zonia, for brooding does no good, we know. We don't want any more runaways from school!"

Betty added that with a forced smile, and jumped up vivaciously, as if to prevent her chums from having their spirits dashed by the sudden sad allusion to the girl who was missing from Stormwood School. But Polly and the rest would not have been the girls they were had they failed to drop all banter and larking about for the moment.

"Tuesday!" murmured Polly impressively. "Nearly ten days ago, to-day, we heard how Zonia had gone off like that from Stormwood——"

"And still no news of her," Madge took up the talk, softly; "not a clue—nothing!"

"I know, geals; it's weally tewwibly sad," Paula said, with a heavy sigh. "When we wealise all the effowts that have been made, bai Jove, to twace the geal! We must only hope and pway that she is going on all wight. Still——"

"I'd give anything to have this suspense ended," came from Polly desperately. "As you were saying, Betty, it does no good to brood, and here we are, often going on with our games just as usual. Only it is ro use pretending that life is as it should be. It can't be, whilst we still have to wonder—where is poor Zonia?"

Betty saw nothing but saddened faces around her, and again she made a praiseworthy attempt to dispel the gloom which the mention of Zonia's name had caused.

"I am sorry I spoke about it at all just then, girls. We know that everything is being done that can be done——"

"Yes, wather!"

"Then it is not a bit of use fretting. There's a court vacant—none of the other Forms seem to want it. What about another set of doubles, just to——"

Betty's desperately cheerful voice was suddenly overwhelmed by an excitable cry from Naomer.

"Ooo, look—look! Ooo, the bad raskikkle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

For the moment the Study 12 chums were all laughing in the old hearty way, as they saw Naomer, after flinging aside her racquet, make a dancing run towards a big, black-plumaged bird

that was saucily approaching the tennis party with a cheeky:

"Squawk, squawk-ahk!"

"My Jimmy, the raskikkle!" shrilled Naomer. "Ooo, you are a bad one to get out of your cage and—"

"Squawk, squawk!"

As the tame jackdaw cheekily answered his royal mistress the girls gave another peal of laughter. Jimmy the jackdaw was proving a regular imp for mischief. He stood in no dread of anyone, and now hopped around, squawking defiance to Naomer as she attempted to catch him.

"Come here, you bad raskikkle! What you mean by opening ze door of the cage all by yourself?"

But Naomer, needless to say, was hugely delighted at the audacity her clever little pet had shown by thus coming out for a stroll, as it were, and thinking he would join the girls at tennis! As she got him to hop on to one of her hands, she stroked him very lovingly with the other.

Paula simpered admiringly.

"Bai Jove, remarkable cwearure! We shall find him marching into school, one morning, geals, to take his place in the Form!"

"Yes," chuckled Naomer, "and so he will learn to spik English as good as me! Jimmy, what do you say when I give you ze nice plum cake for breakfast?"

"Squawk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Naomer proudly set him down that he might exercise upon the grass. Whether Naomer purposely set him close to Paula's ankles or not, is open to question. But suddenly Paula, who had got out her pocket mirror again, felt a jab at one slender ankle that made her yelp:

"Ow! Get away—shoo! Dwop it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Paula, from where she had dodged round behind the trunk of the elm, to escape further playful peckings, peered cautiously.

"Wemove that wascal, Naomer! Either he must withdaway, or I must! I pwotest—weally, quite a hard peck! It's dweadful! He will wuin my stockings!"

"Eet is not the stockings he want to eat!" said Naomer.

"I am painfully aweah of that fact," was the answer that sent Betty and the others into a fresh fit of laughter.

Suddenly it seemed to the girls that Jimmy was practising a two-step as he flirted around, and the fun became all the greater when the strains of a distant band became audible. For it was just as if Jimmy the jackdaw was dancing to that music!

"Hark!" Polly stopped her laughter to exclaim, with an ear turned to listen eagerly. "Soldiers!"

"Boy Scouts," was Helen Craig's opinion.

"Come on, anyhow, and see them! They are coming along the road, past our gates!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ooo, yes, queek—queek!"

Naomer, however, had to curb her excitement for the moment. She did not like to dash away to see the band go by before she had returned Jimmy to his cage. The latter was some little distance away, in the school gardens, and it would never do to leave him at large.

So, whilst other girls sped off in the direction of the gateway, Naomer made haste to pick up Jimmy and run off with him to his cage. There were some rebellious squawkings when, a couple of minutes later, he was unceremoniously bundled into the cage, with his feathers very much awry.

"He look like Paula when I ruffle her!" Naomer

chuckled to herself, as she spent a few moments making the cage-door quite secure this time. "Good-by-ee, Jimmy!"

Then she tore off again to rejoin her chums at the spot where they were mustering to listen to the band.

Bam, bam, bam! the trumpets were going, and bom, bom, bom the drums, making some spirited marching-music. It might certainly have been a battalion of soldiers that was coming along in step to such martial strains. Or, again, it might well have been a troop of Boy Scouts! But it was neither!

"Hallo—"

"Bai Jove, geals—"

"Oh, a circus—a circus!"

Naomer came dashing up at the instant the whole crowd of girls discovered just what the music meant. She clapped her brown hands and did a caper of delight.

"What fun, Polly! Ooo, I love ze circus! And perhaps eet go to Barncombe to give a show!"

"If so—front seats for us, to-morrow afternoon!" predicted Polly.

"Yes, wather, geals. Hooway, here it comes!"

"Let me see—let me see!" clamoured Naomer, finding herself almost lost amongst rather taller girls. "Paula, queek!"

It was the elegant one's dismay, then, to find that she was expected to provide a mount for her Serene Highness—a thing Paula strongly objected to doing.

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Heah, get off me, Naomer! Healp—"

"No! This ces lovely—"

"Ow, get off!" wailed Paula, staggering this way and that, with Naomer clambering on to her back. "I'm not a gwand stand!"

In the end, Naomer somehow scrambled on top of the high wall. Nor was she the only Moroccan to do so. By the time the head of the circus procession was level with the gateway, the wall on either side was festooned with girlish humanity.

The din of the band was now terrific. It was not the first time that a travelling circus, finding that it had a big girls' school to pass, had advertised itself by turning on some joyous music to enliven the procession.

In the very forefront was a jolly old clown who, apparently, had been told to circulate a few handbills amongst the potential audience that these girls constituted. His painted face wearing its exaggerated grin, this comical-looking fellow thrust the leaflets into eager hands, and then threw a somersault on the road to advertise his own part in the performance.

Betty found herself gazing at a handbill which was headed:

### SARKEY'S STUPENDOUS CIRCUS!!!

"Then it's the same circus that we came upon at Brenscombe!" she exclaimed to Polly, who was standing by. "You remember, Polly—last week—"

"When we were watching the rehearsal, and got turned out!" laughed Polly. "I remember! I say, I wonder if we shall see that girl who was learning to perform in the ring?"

"Let's look out for her!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, it will be gwand if we can give her a cheer."

"We'll do that," said Polly, "if only to pay out that other circus girl who was so horribly jealous. I call it being very mean of that older girl,

when she flew into such a rage because we happened to praise the learner."

The talk lapsed; there was so much to watch in a fascinated way. Sarkey's Stupendous Circus included amongst its great attractions some caged animals. The leaflets advertised lions and tigers, and although the larger travelling cages were carefully sheeted over, just a glimpse of iron bars could be obtained as the trolleys lumbered past. But, so as to whet the interest of people along the road, other cages that held monkeys and other amusing exhibits were not so screened, and the Morcove girls felt that they were getting quite a treat for the mere trouble of standing to watch!

The very impedimenta of the circus was interesting to the girls, since it excited thoughts of what a strange, romantic life the circus folk must live. Who could see a huge wagon go rumbling by without thinking of all the skill and toil that were required to turn that wagon-load of poles and striped sheeting into some shapely looking tent?

Above all, there were the living-vans. One of these quaint little homes on wheels turned up every now and then in the lengthy, straggling procession. The chums guessed that one nicely painted van was the proprietor's. The man who stood lounging at the half-door at the rear of the van looked like the showman-in-chief. They gave him a cheer, and he gave a fat smile that seemed to say:

"Mind you fill the best seats, then!"

After this, some more of the circus "tackle" lumbered past, and then came another van—a very small but pretty one. Eagerly the girls looked out for anyone who might be standing at the door above the usual few steps. They wanted to see that girl—a girl no older than themselves—who was the persevering learner.

Instead of her, however, whom did they see?

All in a moment Betty and Polly, and Paula and Naomer—they were gazing at the other circus girl whom they had seen during the rehearsal.

There she stood, the older circus-rider, who had been so insulting to them all simply because they had praised the learner's efforts to become proficient.

She was at the back door of the passing van, looking out in a haughty way. Instantly recognising the four chums, she curbed a lip and held her proud head an inch higher.

"Oh, dear!" Polly commented tartly. "No need to let us know how proud you are. We are quite aware!"

"Yes, wather, haw, haw, haw! Bai Jove, and, perhaps, geals, she will have less weason to be so pwood in a little while. At the wate that other geal was learning to perform—"

"See! See! Here is the other girl!" Polly suddenly cried out, pointing eagerly.

She had taken her eyes off the girl in the van, to find that a fine elephant was coming on behind a wagon or two. A gilded howdah was strapped to the great beast's back, and in the howdah a girl was seated—young enough to have been a school-girl still, very beautiful, and made to look like some lovely Eastern damsel in her fancy dress.

"That can't be the girl, Polly?" doubted Betty. "This one has such a dark skin! She comes from the East—"

"Bronze powder will do that," Polly declared knowingly. "It's the same girl, I do believe. Let's give her a good look, anyhow, and see!"

"All right. I wonder if she will recognise us?"

Would she recognise them?

How little Betty and the rest suspected that the circus girl in the howdah was Zonia, and no other!

### The Coils of Fate.

**H**ER chums of Morcove School! Once again had Fate itself decreed that she should be looking into their dear faces without being recognised herself!

A mere stranger to them, she, for all they knew to the contrary. Only one of the roving circus-folk, sitting here like this as a sort of advertisement for the show! And she dared not throw off the disguise; dared not voice a glad cry to let them know who it really was passing by the school's familiar gateway.

Ah, if she only could be done with all the irksome secrecy, and call to these girls she loved by their names!

A startling outcry and what a sensation it would cause! What a dramatic ending to this strange life that had been the sequel to her flight from school.



**PAULA IS "WOWWIED."** "I pwotest!" cried Paula. "Wemove that wascal, Naomer. He will wuin my stockings!" Jimmy, the jackdaw, gave another playful peck at Paula, while the rest of the girls laughed at Paula's consternation.

more than a week ago! If only—oh, if only one could make the sign, voice the word that meant recognition!

But, no. It must not be.

And so, in full view of all the girls who mustered there, Zonia Moore rode past in silence, in such strange attire, and so strangely situated, that she might well imagine herself to be doing all this in a dream.

Incredible that the girl who had had no choice but to run away from her own school, little more than ten days ago, should now be riding past her chums' school in the garb of an Eastern girl, and seated in an elephant's howdah!

Yet Zonia had more than enough to remind her that this was really life, with all life's stern trials.

Not much of a fairy-like dream about nine-tenths



of her existence these days! In a few minutes the band would stop playing, and she would be allowed to dismount from the howdah, and return to the living-van, for the travelling circus would be going along the open country road, with nobody to look at it. And then—

Why, then the gaudily dressed Eastern girl would become a poor drudge of the circus again! The very slave of Sybil Lemur, the circus rider; tormented and bullied by the girl from morn to night!

Still, was not this life, with all its hardships and miseries, better than the one that was being avoided?

Even at this moment, when the poor, ill-fated girl was in greater anguish than ever, because she was going past Betty and the rest without daring to betray her identity, she could say to herself that this life was better than the other! A hundred times better to be "Beth Jackson" of Sarkey's Circus, than a girl at the mercy of that couple who had claimed her as their daughter!

It was about a quarter of a mile past the school gateway that the band stopped playing. Word came along the straggling procession that all who had been doing something to advertise the show could now "knock off." They were on the lonely country highway, and would encounter no more people until Barncombe was reached, some few miles further on.

The man in charge of the elephant brought that ungainly brute to a standstill, and Zonia nimbly clambered out of the howdah and let herself down to the ground. The man lent her a helping hand—he was being kind to her, as were all the circus folk, with the exception of Sybil Lemur.

She, Sybil, had never denounced Zonia, after all, as she had threatened she was going to do. But dearly was Zonia having to pay for the jealous girl's silence. If Sybil had not spoken out, it was only because the sudden whim had seized her to let the fugitive schoolgirl stay on as one who was absolutely at her mercy!

Jealousy and a love of cruelty often go hand in hand. Sybil was finding in the present state of things something that ministered to a deep-down craving for power, the freedom to treat others as dirt beneath her feet.

For a long time now she had been inordinately proud of her position in the circus. To her, the applause of the audience was as the very breath of life. And now—now she was in the still prouder position of one who could goad and torment this girl, who shared the little living-van, finding a savage delight in the possession of a slave who dare not murmur.

Zonia, after scrambling down from the howdah, ran forward to the living-van, for she wanted to get out of a costume that seemed so absurd for one to be wearing at a time like this.

She could hear the chimes of Morcove School beating out two o'clock—the hour for classes to reassemble. And maybe her pretty face was looking all the more wistful because she thought how Betty and the rest were all trooping into school by now, perhaps exchanging a last word amongst themselves about Stormwood's "runaway," little knowing how close that runaway had been to them within the last few minutes!

Sighing to herself, she raised her troubled eyes and then saw Sybil standing just inside the van doorway, wearing that spiteful expression which could make the circus queen look so inimical.

"What do you want now?" Sybil greeted the object of her bitter jealousy, curtly.

"Please, Sybil, if I might change out of these

things?" Zonia pleaded, meekly enough. "I will try not to get in your way."

"You've been showing yourself off to that crowd of gaping schoolgirls; you can just remain as you are!"

"Sybil, please—"

"Stay down there in the road, when I tell you!" the elder girl said fiercely, thrusting at Zonia as she started to mount the van-steps. "The farmers will thank you for scaring the birds—scarecrow that you are!"

The pleading look in Zonia's eyes might have moved any heart to pity; but it did not move Sybil's. She looked as if she would like to strike out at the girl who was fast becoming her rival, and leave her asprawl upon the dusty highway.

"Sybil, you know I did not want to go in the howdah, but Mrs. Sarkey said I must. I dare not disobey Mrs. Sarkey."

"But you think you can do as you like with me!"

"No, Sybil. Oh, I only want to do my best to conquer the—the dislike you have taken to me," was poor Zonia's gentle entreaty. "Why can't we be at peace with each other, Sybil? I did so hope that you and I—"

"Hold your tongue and get away! Get down, I tell you," Sybil struck in, with undiminished passion. "Is it likely I am going to be friends with you, when you are trying to steal my place in the show?"

"No—"

"Bah, that's your slyness, to pretend you don't glory in being pushed forward by the Sarkeys! Remember, though," Sybil hissed, leaning over the half-door to get the threatening words to Zonia without others overhearing, "remember, my girl, whenever I like I can give you away! I've only got to tell the first policeman we meet!"

"You won't do anything so cruel, Sybil!"

"No, I won't—not whilst it amuses me to lead you a life. Ah, just you wait until we are in the circus meadow, outside Barncombe! You'll have to work then, Beth Jackson. Scrubbing brush and pail for you!"

"Yes, well, I don't mind. Only let me come in now, and get out of this dress," implored Zonia, standing on the bottom step whilst the van swung along. "I must look so silly in it, now!"

"You want to come in and admire yourself, and you shan't—no, you shan't!" Sybil said, her handsome face distorted with jealous rage. "You already fancy yourself the queen of the circus, and I hate you! Get away, I say—get down and walk!"

This time, Sybil was so carried away by her animosity that she reached over the half-door and gave a menacing wave of her clenched hand. It was a gesture so threatening that Zonia dropped off the van-steps, realising that there was nothing else to do but walk.

It was a moment when a rather large car was coming along the road, and lucky it was for Zonia that the person at the wheel—a lady—was going very slowly alongside the straggling procession.

Zonia herself was too sick at heart and confused to have a thought for other likely traffic. If only to get beyond the reach of Sybil's venomous looks, she stepped to one side, and in another moment she might have been run down—killed!

But the lady motorist was driving cautiously, and saw the girl move out in front of the car, and on went the brakes with a sharp screech. Zonia jumped back, agasp with alarm, instantly realising that any accident would have been her own fault. Indeed, she felt she owed the lady an apology for

having got in the way and given her such a scare, and so she panted a "Sorry!"

The lady not only smiled good-naturedly, but, with a sudden, glad cry of surprise, threw open the side door of the driver's seat and sprang from the car.

"Hallo, it's you!" she exclaimed at Zonia. "The same girl that I and the Morcove girls saw rehearsing in the marquee, although you are dressed so differently now, and you have bronzed your face and arms! What's your name, my dear?"

"Beth—Beth Jackson, I'm called." Zonia was right in feeling that it was a truthful answer to say that she was called Beth Jackson.

"Then, Beth, I think you know how we admired your perseverance at the rehearsal, and I hope I shall be in a front seat if you give the show at Barncombe!"

They were meeting each other's eyes, and surely this was the most fateful moment in all Zonia's fateful life? The moment when at last she was face to face with her own mother, the mother who would have been such a loving, doting one—and neither mother nor daughter knew it!

"You know, I find it so easy to take a friendly interest in girls of your age, Beth," Mrs. Spenlow said, regarding the poor circus girl, in all her tawdry dress, with kindly eyes. "I had a little girl of my own once, and if she had been with me now she would have been just your age!"

"Did she—did your little girl die then, ma'am?"

"Ah, no. It was a strange, sad business," was the sighing answer. "I could never explain now; you want to run along and get back to your van. Are you happy, Beth? Does everybody treat you kindly?"

"I—I might have a much more trying life than this," Zonia said huskily. "It makes me very happy to—meet such a kind lady as you! You left some money for me—the other circus girl gave it to me—"

"Oh, well—"

"I must thank you ever so much, whilst I have the chance," Zonia went on earnestly. "I am keeping that pound note in case—in case I ever need it badly."

"You dear, wise little thing! Well, good-bye and good luck! I think I must kiss you, my dear!"

And Mrs. Spenlow did so, resting one hand caressingly upon Zonia's shoulder as the kiss was bestowed.

"Good-bye! It is Mrs. Spenlow you have been speaking to, in case you ever wonder. I live at a bungalow along the cliffs just at present!"

Then, with the medley of vans and wagons and cages still rumbling past, the good woman got back to her seat at the wheel and drove off, whilst Zonia ran on to overtake lost ground.

As she came up with Sybil's van again, she found that girl herself walking on in the road—as a change from the monotony of the lumbering van, Zonia supposed. But she was soon to find out the real reason why Sybil had come down out of the van.

The instant Zonia had mounted the van-steps and got inside the little home-on-wheels, her vindictive companion also returned. Sybil came up the steps and entered quietly, but Zonia could tell that it was the quietness before a storm!

Nor was it another moment before the jealous girl flared out again in a greater passion than ever.

"Getting grand ladies to make a fuss of you and kiss you!" she burst out fiercely. "I saw you! I suppose there was another pound note as a present for the girl who is trying to oust me!"

"No, Sybil! Oh, why—"

"Don't answer me! The very sound of your voice makes me feel madder than ever. I'm dangerous when I'm like this!" Sybil hissed, advancing upon Zonia with clenched hands. "I could hurt you—thrash you—I feel so mad!"

"Don't Sybil—oh, don't give way to such passions," was Zonia's appeasing cry. "You spoil yourself. I am sure you could be a better girl, if only—"

"You, to talk to me! I won't have it, I tell you, so take that! And that!" Sybil panted, striking out with her open hands.

In that confined space which was all the caravan afforded the two girls, Zonia could not dodge aside to avoid the blows that had been aimed at her. Her bare head received a vicious slap-slap, and then—because she endured the stinging slaps without a murmur—the other girl seemed to become all the more enraged.

"Proud, are you! Got a spirit that you think I can't break! But I will break it—like this!"

So saying, Sybil seized the younger girl, of whom she had become so jealous, and shook her violently, continuously, until all the breath was out of Zonia's body.

Then, worked up to such a frenzy as she was, Sybil dashed the dazed and breathless girl to one side, where Zonia stood, shaken and amazed, holding on to the side of the caravan bunk.

"Let that teach you!" panted the very fury of a girl. "And as soon as I'm tired of taking it out of you, for your cheek and artfulness in wanting to oust me—then I shall tell everyone who you are! Do you hear me, you!"

There was no answer to the infuriated outburst. Poor Zonia had swooned away.

#### The Schemers Scared.

AT twilight that evening the click of a wicket-gate at a certain lonely cottage, some few miles from Morcove School, gave warning of a visitor.

The man and woman who were sitting about in one of the front rooms looked at each other in a rather uneasy way. It was the woman who got up quickly and went to the window to see who was approaching the front porch.

"Miriam! Now, I wonder—"

"Ay, what does she want, calling suddenly like this?" the man exclaimed, starting out of his chair. "What's happened now?"

His wife hastened out to admit the so-called niece of the wealthy Spenlows. The bicycle which had brought her along to this lonely dwelling where the girl's actual parents had installed themselves, must have been ridden at a fast pace. Miriam was hot and breathless as she came into the sitting-room with her mother.

"Well, my girl?" the father asked, with the uneasiness of a guilty conscience. "We weren't expecting this!"

"So what's wrong?" the mother asked irritably. "Miriam, I hope you realise the risk it is, coming to see us like this. Take care you don't do it once too often. If the Spenlows find out—"

"That's all right, mother," the girl said tersely. "Anyhow, I had to come. I don't suppose you know that the circus has gone into Barncombe, and is going to give a few days' show there!"

The girl's parents frowned.

"We do know, as it happens, Miriam," the mother said. "It is a sickening nuisance—"

"But wait; there is something else I felt I must tell you," went on Miriam, with more excitement in her looks. "You can't be aware that Mrs—"





### FATE'S STRANGE TRICK!

These two were meeting each other's eyes, and surely this was the most fateful moment in Zonia's life. It was the moment she was at last face to face with her mother—and neither of them knew it!

Spenlow herself had word with Zonia Moore on the open road this afternoon!"

"What! Miriam, you don't—"

"It's a fact," the girl said agitatedly. "Mrs. Spenlow came back from a motor run full of a lot of talk about how she had met the circus. Seems she nearly ran down one of the circus girls—and it was Zonia! They stood and talked—just fancy!"

"Without anything coming out?" quavered Miriam's father hoarsely. "What a narrow shave for us! Amazing!"

"Pretty lucky, anyhow," was Mrs. Loveless's tart comment. "It only shows that now the girl has got amongst those circus folk, she is safe from being recognised. We needn't worry."

"I don't know about that, mother," Miriam said gloomily. "After all, Mrs. Spenlow had never set eyes upon the girl, before the running away from school. It will be a different case if Zonia's former schoolfellows go to the performance—"

"Are they going?" questioned the father eagerly. "If you can tell us for a certainty, your visit may have done some good, my girl."

"Going—of course they will be going, dad! Don't those circuses simply live by the audiences they get from the schools! And Mrs. Spenlow is saying that she and I ought to arrange to go with a party of the Morcove girls."

Once again the rascally couple looked at each other in a dropped-jaw manner. There was something terribly alarming in this news that Miriam had brought.

"Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow—they are quite gone on the Morcove girls," Miriam resumed sulkily. "Auntie is even talking of sending me to school there, as a day girl. She says I'm doing no good idling about at home."

"You don't look up to the mark," acknowledged Mrs. Lovelace, staring at the girl.

"Well, can you wonder?" was the sullen retort. "The Spenlows don't know; but I'm worried! I can't sleep at nights for thinking about the change it will mean for me if ever Zonia Moore is found to be the Spenlows' own daughter! I'll be out of it then—sickening worry that it is to know it!"

And, as she sat down, the girl breathed loudly as if she was fuming with suspense.

The father kept silent. He seemed to feel there was a lot to ponder very gravely, and he went to the mantelpiece for his pipe and pouch. As for Mrs. Loveless, she moved about the room with a slow, thoughtful step.

"If those girls go to the performance—"

"They may easily recognise Zonia, in spite of the circus dress!"

"That's not what I was going to say," the mother snapped at her daughter. "If they arrange to go to the circus, you must contrive to let us know, my girl, which performance it is to be. We must be there at the same time, to see what happens!"

"You think so?" muttered the father dubiously.

"I do," his wife answered tensely. "Better to be on the spot, seeing how things go off, than waiting here in suspense!"

"Confound those Sarkeys for bringing the circus to Barncombe!" the man exclaimed savagely. "We want to see the wretched affair get away from this part of the kingdom—a hundred miles away!"

"Yes, well," shrugged Mrs. Loveless, "they have their living to get, and must stick to arrangements. We haven't been able to make it worth their while to go right away just because the girl is under their care. We were lucky enough, if you ask me, to get them to agree to—to have the girl!"

"That's admitted," said Miriam's father, and he struck a match and drew at his pipe. "All right! Maybe it will be best for the pair of us to be at the show on the same day that the schoolgirls are there."

Thus it came about that, on the following evening, Miriam's rascally parents took their seats in the huge marquee of Sarkey's Stupendous Circus, for it was at this evening performance certain of the Morcovians were to be present.

Usually the scholars patronised the matinees, and Morcovians by the score had been present at that Wednesday afternoon's performance. It so happened, however, that the girls with whom Miriam and her parents were chiefly concerned had received the special privilege of attending the evening show.

Mrs. Spenlow herself was responsible for this special little treat for Betty and some of her chums. She had spoken to Miss Somerfield early in the day, and had obtained that lady's ready consent to the proposal that Betty & Co. should be called for in the Spenlows' car, shortly after tea.

This time, it was a party of six Fourth Form scholars for whom Mrs. Spenlow insisted upon finding room in the car. Mr. Spenlow was not going to the show, and so that helped. With Miriam and her benefactress sitting together in front, there was just room enough in the body of the car for the six chums.

"Bit of a squeeze," chuckled Polly, as she purposely jammed herself close against Paula, in a teasing way. "Still!"

"Yes, wather! My gwacious, Polly, have a little regard for my fwock! A nice week I shall look when we stwoll into the weserved seats, bai Jove!"

"You are all right; no one will notice you!"

scoffed Polly. "The way you fuss about your appearance, one would think you were going to ride round and round the circus—"

"On ze back of an evelant, yes!" chimed in Naomer gaily, whilst the car sped on. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Paula turned faint at the mere idea of such a thing.

"Wide wound and wound, bai Jove, on an elephant's back! I wondah how any geal can have the couwage to be a circus wider, what? Geals, I do twust there will be nothing too thwilling!"

"Don't worry," smiled Betty. "The performers know their turns so well; one never hears of accidents."

"No," agreed Madge Minden—for she and Tess were the extra pair who made up the party of six. "And I don't suppose for a moment we shall see that beginner taking any part. She can't be proficient yet."

Miriam overheard this remark, as she sat next to the lady who was driving. Only too well she knew who was meant by the term "beginner." Zonia!

With frowning eyes upon the road—hating to see how fast the car was rushing along the road to Barncombe—she thought to herself desperately:

"Perhaps it will be so, and Zonia won't be seen at all! Oh, how I hope she is kept out of the ring! And yet—"

And yet, was there any doubt that the showman and his wife would be all for making use of the "learner" in some way or other as soon as possible?

Every extra artiste appearing in the ring helped to make the show a better one than ever. It would be an added attraction—so Miriam realised in a sick-at-heart manner—even if Zonia was only brought on in some very minor part.

"She is so beautiful, and must look so wonderful when dressed for the ring!" ran on Miriam's thoughts. "What's the use of counting on her not making an appearance! She will be there—worse luck!"

Then it suddenly flashed upon her that perhaps her crafty parents had warned the Sarkeys—bribed them—to keep Zonia in the background. If so, everything would be all right.

Miriam would have done better not to build on any such infirm grounds for hope.

Already her equally alarmed parents had got word with the Sarkeys, but although Mrs. Sarkey was in favour of keeping Zonia out of the ring for as long as the circus remained in Barncombe, the showman himself would not hear of it.

"The gal wa'n't in our first performance this afternoon," he said to his wife, after sending the Lovelesses away in dismay at his obstinacy; "but I made up my mind she should start performing this evening, and start she shall!"

"But, Joe—"

"Don't argue, Martha!" the showman exclaimed impatiently. He was a short-tempered customer whenever a performance was on the point of being given. "Then Lovelesses offered to make it up to me, bimeby. Well, I don't want so much of their talk about what may be coming along later to make me rich for life. I want to keep my audiences—"

"True, Joe. A bird in the 'and—"

"And you know as well as I do, Martha, there's nothing better than a noo attraction. Now, this evening," went on Joe Sarkey, drawing himself up and sweeping a hand over his fat head, "I am going to make a little speech, introducing Beth,

the youngest circus-rider in the world! See how that goes down, Martha!"

He flounced about to make his exit from the van in which this talk had taken place, but paused on his way out to say a last word:

"Mind you, the girl's not wanted to try and be too clever, and get herself 'urt. If she thinks she can do a ride round, let her. The point is, I'm a-going to make that there speech. I know my business, and what a speech will do towards bringing crowds next day!"

Then he was gone, and Mrs. Sarkey soon followed him down the van-steps, to seek out Zonia and let her know the intention as regards the coming performance.

In a single night this big meadow just outside Barncombe had found tents springing up like mushrooms. Apart from the great marquee, with its tiers of bench seats, there was the enclosure for the caravans, from which the public were excluded. Very welcome were the public, however, to the rest of the meadow, with its various sideshows.

Those who patronised the grand menagerie, the canvassed shooting-gallery, or the entertainment known as "houp-ia!"—and who could resist such attractions?—were not refused a sight of the beautiful horses and ponies that were being groomed for the ring.

Mrs. Sarkey, sending a glance round the teaming meadows, as she made for Sybil's van, felt confident that it would be a big "house" this evening. In a few minutes all these people who were thronging around would be trooping in past the marquee's pay-box.

Zonia and Sybil were alone together in their van when the showman's wife entered. The deep silence marked that tension between the two girls



## HER BELATED REPENTANCE!

"From now onward I am your friend, Zonia," said the circus queen. "You saved my life after I had been so cruel to you!" "Lie quiet, Sybil," was Zonia's reply. "After this you and I will stick together, always!"



which Mrs. Sarkey knew existed. Affecting not to be aware of the strained relations, she first of all smiled admiringly at Sybil, who was proudly adorning herself for the ring, then passed word to Zonia about what was required of her.

"You understand, my dear," the woman said impressively, "we don't want no accidents, and you are not to take risks. If you don't feel equal to any trick riding, you must just do whatever you can. The main thing is for you to look as pretty as you can—like Sybil, there!"

That girl instantly turned her back. She was not minding how rude she was to Mrs. Sarkey these days. Nor, indeed, could the showman's wife feel free to take Sybil to task about her high-and-mighty behaviour. It was a very real fear in the Sarkeys' minds that Sybil might go off, and join some other circus, before they had trained another girl to be the star turn.

"I will do my best," Zonia said modestly, yet with a certain spirited gleam in her eyes. "You have been kind to me, Mrs. Sarkey."

"Oh, well," exclaimed that woman, feeling a good deal ashamed, all at once, of the way the girl had been deceived, "just mind what I say—no trying to be too clever, Beth!"

There was another heavy silence. Mrs. Sarkey was waiting about, in the hope that Sybil would show a bit of graciousness. But no; that fiery-natured girl still stood with her back to the showman's wife, putting some finishing touches to her made-up face. So, in silence, Mrs. Sarkey removed her buxom figure from the poky van.

Then Sybil turned round, and looked at Zonia with dilating eyes.

"If I have hated you all along, guess how I hate you now," the elder girl said, through her clenched teeth—"now, when you are to go on and do tricks that you've only copied from me!"

"Sybil, I could not ref—"

"Bah! I only hope you fall and hurt yourself!" Hardly had Sybil said this before she was bursting into laughter of a harsh sort.

"But, there," she chuckled malignantly, "why should I care how much applause you are going to get this evening? If you do make anything like a hit, my girl, you won't repeat the triumph—not where'll you be the moment I choose to tell the world who you really are?"

Zonia held her peace. What purpose could be served by trying to argue or appease? With a secret sigh of resignation, she began to dress herself for the performance, and, as she attired her youthful figure in all the tinselled raiment, she wondered if ever a heavier heart than hers had beat beneath such a frock. For, indeed, it made her look like a happy fairy.

Happy!

Ah, when—when would all her trials and troubles be over? When would she be happy again, with all her loved chums around her?"

#### In the Ring.

"LADIES and gentlemen!"

It was Mr. Sarkey, the ringmaster, who was vociferating this polite beginning to his little speech, after quelling all the applause that had attended the completion of a clever acrobatic turn.

All Barncombe seemed to be packing the plain wooden seats this evening, so stout Joe Sarkey was not finding it hard to be the hearty, gentlemanly ringmaster, with many a crack-crack of the long whip to help proclaim his great good spirits.

Left behind with the showman, now that the clever acrobats had gone running from the arena, was Charlie, the clown, and, of course, Charlie was not going to let Mr. Sarkey make his speech without a few quippish interruptions.

In fact, the audience was in that tantalised state of wanting to know exactly what Mr. Sarkey had to say, and yet delighting in old Charlie's merry antics and exasperating butting in.

"Er—ladies and gentlemen, with your kind permission—"

"Ah, ladies and twenty-men," cried Charlie, falling over his feet, as it were, whilst walking forward to make a grand bow to the audience, "with your kind admission—"

Crack! snapped Sarkey's whip playfully, and Charlie gave a "Whoo-er!" and somersaulted, sending young and old alike into fits of laughter.

A circus is a circus, and all the time-honoured antics and the age-old jokes always seem as fresh as ever. At this moment you could have seen Mrs. Spenlow laughing just as heartily as most of the girls who accompanied her, though not quite as deliriously, perhaps, as Naomer.

No need to say what shrieks of laughter Morcove's royal scholar was sending up now that Charlie, the clown, was having such a game with the pompous-looking ringmaster! Naomer's amusement at this moment was equal to the admiration she had felt whilst watching the many clever items that had formed the first half of the programme.

"This evening, ladies and gentlemen," bawled Joe Sarkey, whilst Charlie threw up his white conical hat and caught it on his head—"this evening I have great pleasure in announcing the first appearance of a new and talented artiste, Miss Beth Jackson!"

There was a burst of applause, whilst Charlie gestured extravagantly, as if he was saying a great deal, and then a snap of the whip sent him shinning up one of the poles, whilst Mr. Sarkey resumed:

"In addition to being a circus-rider of remarkable genius, ladies and gentlemen, Miss Beth Jackson has the distinction of being the youngest equestrienne in the world!"

Tremendous applause, given in the generous way that the British public has, to encourage the clever youngster whom Charlie was now running to meet at the curtained entrance to the ring!

And so, with the old clown leading her by the hand—and she knew that it was not all buffoonery that had prompted him to lead her in like this—Zonia, of Stormwood School, made her first bow to a circus audience, and that a Barncombe one!

How her heart was fluttering as she stood beneath the glare of the arc-lamps, with that big audience ranged all around the ring in the tiers of seats! Already she had bravely conquered one attack of stage fright, but another was seizing her.

She bowed this way and that, and then stood stock still, utterly breathless, palsied in every limb. How thankful she felt toward old Charlie for the way he was coming to the rescue with his comical antics! Only let her have another moment, a breathing space, and then she would try to deserve a little of the applause that had been accorded in advance.

But, oh, how different it all was from the quiet rehearsals, with not a soul in the seats! A gaily garbed attendant was bringing in the horse, and even that beautiful creature seemed so changed. Would it go round and round the ring at the

exact pace to which she had accustomed herself by so much hard practice? Would she get through without coming to grief?

"I must—I must!" was her desperate thought, as she let Charlie help her vault to the saddle. "They expect it of me! They are all giving me such a lot of undeserved applause!"

Even if she had been less nervous, she would never have realised that the audience itself already felt that its applause was well won. The hundreds of people were, in fact, applauding her mere appearance, so pretty and elfin-like she looked, and all so graceful.

The band struck up, and away went the beautiful piebald horse, prancing round the arena in high-stepping fashion. He and Zonia—what a pair they made! So the onlookers were exclaiming, although "Zonia" was not the name by which they knew the youthful circus-rider. She was Beth Jackson to all of them—to all except those in the audience who knew her true identity. Miriam and her parents—those three alone knew whom they were watching. Alas, that Mrs. Spenlow and the Morocco chums only knew the novice by a name that meant nothing to them!

Nor, for all theirs was one of the front rows of seats, were Betty & Co. to have a chance to pierce the disguise which the circus dress afforded.

There they sat, in company with Mrs. Spenlow and Miriam Loveless, entranced by the ease and dexterity which the "learner" had already acquired by constant practice. They held their breath in admiration of her skill and daring. They never suspected that here, before their very eyes, was the missing chum they loved so dearly, and of whom they were so anxious to have news.

And Zonia herself—mercifully for her, perhaps—never picked out those dear familiar faces from amongst the hundreds that were around her. Was it likely that she would, when all her attention was concentrated upon the performance she was giving?

That performance was nothing like the amazing one which Sybil Lemur would be giving as the next turn on the programme. Zonia could do little more, as yet, than go round at a gallop, standing erect upon the saddle. As she gained confidence, partly from the applause of the audience, and partly because the trained horse seemed to be doing his very best for her, she performed the trick of dropping upon one knee and then springing up again. This, done with some graceful waving of the arms, was as far as she dared go, and again she wondered at so much applause being accorded her. They should wait and see Sybil!

But she was still failing to realise that all this admiration was due to her dainty, adorable appearance, and to the fact that she was known to be a bit of a beginner.

"Bravo, bravo!" Betty and her chums joined in most heartily with all the rest of the audience when at last the simple "turn" ended. "Bravo!"

"Keep it up!" Polly sang out blithely, alluding to the way she and her chums were clapping madly.

"Yes, wather, haw, haw, haw! Bai Jove, geeals—"

"She'ees grand, and I love her!" was Naomer's excitable cry. "How I wish I was in a circus, instead of being a silly queen!"

Clap, clap, clap! and "Bravo, bravo!"—so it went on, with stout Joe Sarkey smiling from ear

to ear at the hit that his beginner had made, whilst Zonia herself stood all out of breath in the ring centre, confusedly bowing over and over again.

Then there were shrieks of laughter as old Charlie came rolling towards the girl, with a big cauliflower stuffed in his clown's cap, to look like a bouquet. Going on one knee, the comical fellow offered his complimentary gift to Zonia, and then at last she burst out laughing.

At the same time she thanked the clown so prettily that people in the audience went wild with delight.

"What a darling she is, really!" beamed Mrs. Spenlow.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, a weal wipper! Bwavo, bwavo!"

"To-morrow I send her a present!" declared Naomer decisively. "I send her ze beeg box of chocolates!"

"We all will!" said Betty heartily. "We'll make a collection for it!"

"And present it in person!" laughed Polly.

"Yes, wather!"

With the storm of applause still coming at her, Zonia backed away to the curtained exit from the ring. Just before she vanished, she bowed again and blew kisses to the thronged seats, then she skipped out of sight and was behind the shabby curtains.

Sybil was there, mounted upon another fine horse, for she always made her entry upon horseback. The band had struck up again, but it could hardly be heard for the hubbub of the talk and laughter and some last handclaps. The moment's delay gave Sybil an opportunity to glance down at Zonia with a look of sheer deadly hatred.

"All right, my girl!" she seemed to be saying. "You have done for yourself now! As soon as the performance is over the police shall know where to find Zonia Moore, the runaway from Stormwood!"

Then the shabby hangings were suddenly flashed apart, and Sybil sent her beautiful steed galloping out into the arena.

There is no denying that this girl's feats on horseback were such as to make most of the audience instantly forget all about the "turn" that Zonia had given.

Sybil had been at the work for years, and had gone on acquiring one daring feat after another. She had the temperament of a true artiste, and sometimes she would not give her best performance. It all depended upon the mood in which she was.

This evening, however, the girl's mood was one of fierce daring. They were harmless crackings of the whip that Joe Sarkey was giving, but a very real whip was lashing Sybil on to do her best. It was her jealousy of Zonia.

And Zonia, as she lingered behind the curtains, to peer through into the dazzlingly-lit arena, could only think what a pity it was—what folly—for Sybil to be so jealous. Already Sybil was coming in for every bit of the applause that she so richly deserved.

"She can afford to laugh at my poor efforts," Zonia was musing, as she watched the circus queen complete one hair-raising trick on horseback. "And yet she hates me now as if I was a dangerous rival!"

But, of course, Sybil's jealousy was not of what Zonia could do to-day, but of what the girl might



be able to do if she continued to improve so rapidly.

Presently the girl behind the curtains looked round, to find that Sambo the elephant had been brought forward, in readiness for his amusing performance in the ring. Sybil was prolonging her turn—showing the audience some of the most daring tricks that she did not always perform. Thus the man in charge of the elephant found he had brought along that ungainly brute a bit too soon.

All that happened in the next few moments was something neither Zonia nor anyone else in the circus tent that evening would ever forget.

How it was that the unlucky thing came about no one could ever say. Perhaps it was some unusual noise from the arena that did the mischief. Perhaps the elephant had been working up for an outbreak of the sort for some time, unknown to those who had charge of him. Be that as it might, all in a moment a shout of alarm close behind Zonia made her look behind again.

In the very instant that she did this she retained the presence of mind to jump aside, out of the elephant's way.

For Sambo was taking quick and clumsy strides towards the curtained entrance to the ring. In vain the man in charge bellowed commands that should have stayed the great beast. A moment more, and Sambo was past the curtains and lumbering into view of the whole audience, with no one to control him!

Thrilled though they were, a good many of the people in the seats would not have taken alarm, thinking it only part of the programme. There were those in the audience, however, who had attended the afternoon show, and they knew instantly that this was no rehearsed effect.

So there immediately went up a few cries of dismay. Here and there a few people stood up in alarm.

Then it became clear to all, from the dismayed attitude of Sarkey himself, that the elephant was out of control and meaning mischief.

Even so, most of the people in the seats very creditably kept their heads. But when Sambo, with a sudden ugly squealing, sent his great bulk across the arena straight at the girl on horse-back, then it was panic everywhere.

Panic amongst the audience, and panic in the ring itself! Sarkey knew not what to do, for if he used his whip it might make matters worse. Sybil's horse reared up in fright, and this was a moment when all the girl's own nerve was gone.

For the first time in her life she was flung helplessly and violently to the ground by a horse.

It was all happening in a moment or so, although it takes so long to describe.

In the seats numbers of panicky people were only thinking about getting outside as quickly as possible. Others who were keeping to their seats, to minimise the panic—and Betty & Co. were some of those—were horrified to see the elephant make short work of poor old Charlie the clown.

He, brave fellow, in spite of the advanced years that were his, had run in front of Sambo to try and turn him back. The clown was sent spinning sideways by a sweep of the elephant's trunk. And now the crazed beast ramped round, smashing a ladder and platform that had been used for one of Sybil's tricks, whilst the horse fled in panic towards the exit. Sarkey went dashing after it, whilst the old clown dazedly staggered away.

And there, left alone in the arena with the dangerous brute, lay Sybil, the circus queen, all the senses gone out of her!

#### From Foe to Friend.

MRS. SPENLOW always declared that she had to hold back one and another of the Morcovians, because they were seized with the frantic desire to rush to the rescue, whilst she herself was realising her responsibility for their safety.

On the other hand, the chums will always declare that they were merely looking on, as helpless as any, when suddenly the younger circus-girl was seen to rush forward.

For the next second or so it was an agonising question as to whether the dauntless girl would get to Sybil before the stampeding elephant trampled the very life out of that prone and senseless performer.

That it was the younger girl's desperate intention to save the other, everyone realised. But would she do it? Would she?

By now the horror of the situation was intensified by the screams of hysterical women and the yelling of small children.

The elephant was in a dangerous, wicked mood. Within a mere yard or two of Sybil, he was sporting with the already smashed steps. Some people had a frantic hope that he would continue to amuse himself like that, but it was not to be.

Even as brave Zonia dashed to where her bitter enemy was lying, Sambo let the smashed steps crash to earth, and swung aside to run down both girls. Zonia had got to be as quick as lightning to save herself, let alone the other unhappy girl. Quick as a flash, the fearless girl acted.

With a lightning pounce, she got hold of Sybil



## FREE Pattern of this NEW JUMPER FROCK

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and dragged her along the ground. A yard or two like that, and then the plucky rescuer changed her hold of the senseless girl and rushed on with her towards the exit. Sambo loomed about, his massive feet stamping the ground, just where Sybil had been lying. Lashing his trunk this way and that, and with his small eyes wild with the strange anger that was upon him, he saw the gaudily-dressed rescuer getting away with the other circus-rider, and he started after them both.

But now the elephant's attendant and half a dozen other men belonging to the circus were ready to chance everything, after the example that Zonia had set them. They ran into the arena as Zonia came staggering out, half carrying, half dragging Sybil. A few moments more, and Sambo was safely hobbled by a rope that had been thrown about his legs. Some man, who was an expert with the lasso, had made the skilful cast, and thus all danger was at an end.

Even so, the scared audience continued to pour

steps, and Mrs. Sarkey and Zonia gasped with relief. It not only meant that they need not get other help, but that Sybil was not in any way hurt—simply badly upset and bruised.

"That's a good gal—up with you, Sybil, dearie!" palpitated Mrs. Sarkey, as they helped the sufferer into the van. "We don't want a crowd round, and a lot of fuss. We'll see to you, and get a doctor."

"No, I'm all right," gasped Sybil weakly, tottering into the poky van. "Let me lie down, that's all. Beth—"

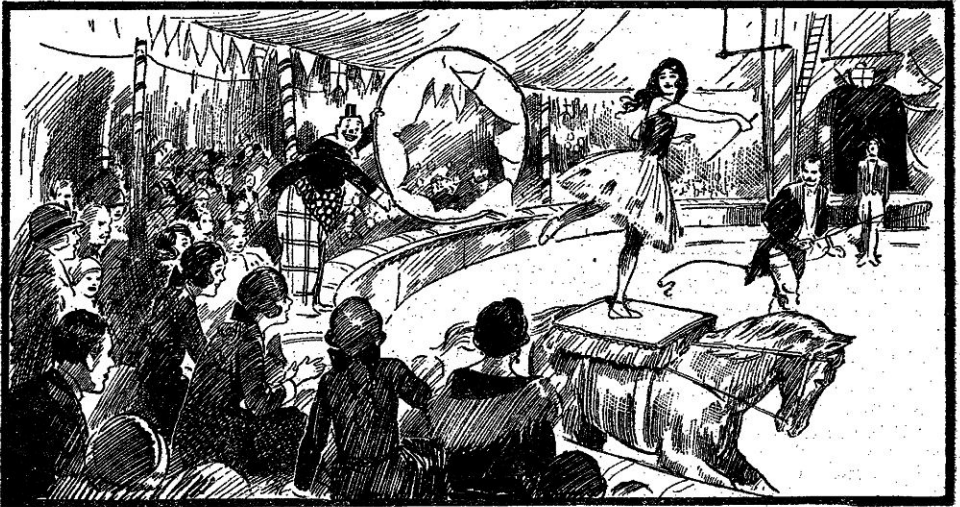
"Yes, Sybil?"

"You stay."

"I would like to. Oh, Sybil, how awful it was for you!"

And suddenly Zonia, in the overstrung state that she was, burst into tears.

"Awful for me!" the circus queen said huskily. "What about yourself? You saved me, didn't you?"



**AND THEY DID NOT KNOW!** There Mrs. Spenlow and the Morocco girls sat, entranced with the ease and dexterity which the circus girl had acquired. None of them realised that it was Zonia—Mrs. Spenlow's daughter and their missing chum—here before their very eyes!

out, by all exits, into the open air. It was getting dark, and the twilight helped to prolong the general confusion. When at last Mrs. Spenlow and her girls emerged from the great marquee, they found little groups of people everywhere, either clustered together for talk, or to give first-aid to some fainting woman.

Scores of other people were rushing round to the back of the marquee, wanting to find out whether Sybil was seriously hurt by her fall from the frightened horse. The other girl's astounding bravery was being praised by all, and, if they could get a glimpse of "Beth Jackson," they were going to cheer her madly.

But two or three police and some of the circus folk formed a cordon, imploring the crowd to pass away, whilst Zonia herself was the one to help Mrs. Sarkey to carry Sybil to the caravan.

Sybil was coming round now. Her eyes were wide open, staring strangely into Zonia's white face, by the time the van was reached. She gave a moaning murmur that she could manage the

"She did, Sybil!" interposed Mrs. Sarkey, herself on the verge of a good weep. "I never, in all my born days, knew nothing like it! But get to your bunk, Sybil, and I'll go and find something for you to steady you up."

"Yes, get me something; I feel bad," the shaken girl panted, and she went lurching to the forward end of the van, to cast herself exhaustedly upon the bunk.

Mrs. Sarkey hurried away, whilst Zonia pulled herself together. She had already discerned something in the other girl's distressed state that was not due to the accident. Now that she met Sybil's wild eyes, as that girl lay along the couch-like bed, she knew that the wildness was not anger—anything but!

"Come here!" Sybil rasped at her weakly. "Beth—no, I shall make it Zonia, when no one else is about—you saved my life!"

"Oh, Sybil, I—I only—"

"You did! I'd have been done for—killed—by now, just think of it!" the elder girl panted.

sweeping back the black locks of hair that were streaking her forehead. "I owe you my very life, Zonia, and after this— Here, get closer to me, Zonia! Closer!"

Stormwood's fugitive schoolgirl obeyed, with a pounding heart and bewildered brain. She was suddenly kneeling down, for Sybil had reached out a hand and pulled her so close that she had to kneel. And, just as suddenly, the girl who had been all jealous hatred an hour ago was kissing her rescuer passionately.

"Zonia—oh, Zonia, how could I have been so cruel, so miserably jealous, and wickedly spiteful?" was Sybil's tearful outcry. "But from this time onward, Zonia—"

"Hush! Oh, don't use that name—not so loudly, Sybil! If you only knew how I dread being discovered! There is a reason, if you had let me tell you—"

"You shall tell me, Zonia," the circus queen spoke on in a spent way. "Not now, I'm too upset. I feel I'm going to faint again. But I mean it, Zonia! From this time onward I am your friend, and if you have a secret you shall share it with me. You shall have all the help I can give you, because— Zonia, my head's going funny! Oh—"

"Hush! Lie quiet, Sybil. There—there—"

"Stay with me, then, Zonia. You and I, after this—"

"Yes, Sybil! Oh, yes, yes; we will stick together!" the younger girl whispered joyfully. "But lie quiet now, dear."

"You dear good girl—you brave girl! Kiss me, Zonia!"

And once again the circus queen's lips were pressed to the other's, before she lolled back upon the bed, in another dead faint.

Zonia went through a full minute alone with the unconscious girl, and she marked the hubbub that was going on in the twilight circus meadow. Then Mrs. Sarkey came in, panting for breath, and carrying a cup of some cordial or another that was likely to do Sybil good.

"Fainted again, has she, poor thing?" the showman's wife commented distressfully. "Ay, well, this'll fetch her round and steady her up a bit, and then perhaps the doctor will be here."

She talked on garrulously whilst she was coaxing a little of the cordial past Sybil's lips:

"Thank goodness, there's bin no one badly hurt! Oh, my dear, what a scare it were! You're the 'eroine of the hower, that's what you are!"

"Nonsense!"

"But, I tell you, you are!" insisted Mrs. Sarkey. "And there's one lady waiting about,

wanting to see you. She give me her card. Here 'tis. Take hold, Beth."

The girl took the bit of pasteboard, and then gave a violent start as she read the name:

"Mrs. Spenlow! The same lady who spoke to me on the road! She lives at Cliffedge Bungalow. Such a dear, kind lady!"

"So she looks, Beth," muttered Mrs. Sarkey, still giving attention to Sybil. "And a nice, good-hearted lot o' schoolgirls she has with her!"

"Schoolgirls! Then, Mrs. Sarkey, how can I go and see them? They are Morcove girls! Oh, they are some of my own old best chums, perhaps!"

The showman's wife almost dropped the cup as Zonia said that.

"Schoolgirls— Bless my soul, o', course, Beth! And what was I a-thinking of, to tell you to go and see them? You stay here—"

"I must—oh, yes, I must avoid them, Mrs. Sarkey! If only I could be done with this life, with all its secrecy!"

Zonia stood pressing her hands together, a wistful look in her shining eyes.

"The girls are out there in the meadow, and would give anything to have news of me, and yet I cannot go to them! I dare not! I must remember to what it would lead!"

"Ay, you'd better be careful, dearie. Besides, think what a draw you're going to be in the ring, arter making such a name for yourself!"

Mrs. Sarkey, satisfied that Sybil was coming round again, got to her feet at the bunk-side, and stood the cup upon a shelf. Then she shuffled to the door.

"I'm a-going to send 'em all away, dearie, saying you don't want to be made a fuss of by no one, you don't. Look arter Sybil, dearie. You've got a friend for life in her now."

"Yes," Zonia found herself murmuring, as she knelt again by the one whose eyes were still closed, "that is one great blessing. I have changed enmity to love, and Sybil will never, never give me away now! And yet—"

Ah, what a great love it would have to be indeed, the love that Zonia had suddenly won by her heroism to-night, if it was ever to atone for the loving friendships Zonia had renounced, for motives so greatly to her credit!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

A friend at last! But can that friend assist Zonia? If only the runaway schoolgirl knew that the scheming Lovelesses are not her parents! Will she discover the real truth? Do not miss next week's splendid complete tale, which is entitled: "The Fate of a Schoolgirl!"

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