

"PAM WILLOUGHBY'S MASQUERADE"

Exciting Complete Morcove Holiday Story Within

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d

No. 737 Vol. 28
Week ending
JANUARY 12th, 1935
EVERY TUESDAY



**Would They Pierce
Her Disguise?**

One of many dramatic
moments in this week's
powerful complete Morcove
story.

"DODO'S 'SILLY SYMPHONY'": Complete Laughter Tale Inside



Brilliant Complete Morcove Holiday Story
By MARJORIE STANTON

IT is "panto" time in gay London, and Pam Willoughby and her Morcove chums are making the most of the last weeks of the holidays. But for Pam at least it looks like being more than just a round of pleasure, for suddenly, dramatically, she is called upon to play a most amazing rôle, that alone may save her from great peril.

CHAPTER 1.

At the "Panto"

"OH, dear, it's nearly over, Pam!"
"Been a lovely show, hasn't it, Polly?"
"Super!" was the response from Polly Linton—in term-time, the madcap of Study 12 at Morcove School. "The best ever!"
"Yes, wather!" beamed elegant Paula Creel, who had not come to Drury Lane to-night without looking what she called "wrespectable." That is to say, Paula was as well frocked as she always liked to be.

Then Betty Barton's delight over the pantomime found expression.

"So screamingly funny, girls! I don't know when I laughed so much!"

"Bekas," chimed in that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, who had a depleted carton of chocolates in front of her, on the broad ledge of the box, "zat bit where zey all came on as animals, in ze wood—gorjus! Ooo, and ze fairies, too, and ze giant! Bekas, he was ee-normous!"

"With an appetite," said Polly, "something like yours, kid! Oh, but now look—isn't that a lovely effect! How I wish Madge and the rest could have been with us to-night!"

"So do I—and I!"

"Yes, wather!"

Pam Willoughby herself would have loved to see this box which her father had taken packed out with chums of hers. She was happy in having four of her very closest Morcove friends with her; but no party that fell short of nine girls in all, including Pam, was really a completely "Study 12" gathering.

But now an attendant tapped at the door of the private box that looked on to the vast stage.

He went into the roomy box, where Mr. Willoughby appeared to be enjoying the last scene in the grand pantomime quite as much as the Morcove "chummery."

"Excuse me, sir—"

"Oh, yes, what is it?"

The attendant—in plum-coloured livery, white silk stockings and powdered hair—whispered a few words.

"Right! I'll be there in a moment."

With that dismissing remark to the flunkey, Mr. Willoughby nudged one of the girls—his own only daughter—claiming her attention for an instant.

"Pam dear, someone has rung me up on the 'phone."

"Here, at the theatre, daddy?"

"Yes. I suppose he rang me up at Halkin Street first, and they told him I had gone to

Drury Lane with you and your friends. I'll be back in a minute."

"Right-ho, dad. Hope it's nothing tiresome!"

And Pam Willoughby sat round again to resume her enjoyment of the piece.

Now, on the stage, the whole magnificent production, rich in music, fun, and gorgeous settings, was ending with a last grand chorus.

In the orchestra, fiddles were jiggling and brass instruments blaring, whilst before the footlights the entire brilliant company of actors and actresses crowded the boards, singing away to an audience that was already clapping.

It was a moment so exciting to Naomer Nakara that she knocked the chocolate box and the last of its contents over the ledge, causing Polly to voice a withering:

"There! Now you've done it? On somebody's bald head no doubt!"

"Zere was only one choc left, any old how!" was Naomer's consoling reflection. "Hooray!" she cheered, jumping up to demonstrate her delight all the better. "Bekas, jolly good!" she yelled towards the stage. "Bravo, and many of zem! Gorjus!"

Down rushed the curtains, to fall together in front of the stage, whilst the band crashed on, and tumultuous applause came from all parts of the packed auditorium.

"Souvenir!" sparkled Betty, folding up her programme to take it with her. "Well, Pam, it was awfully good of your father to bring us!"

"And now it will be our turn to have you out for the evening, in return," Polly cried, above all the din of the general dispersal.

"Yes, wather, Pam deah!" agreed Paula, whilst she put on that lovely coat which was to shield her against the cold night air of the streets.

Mr. Willoughby was suddenly back, and Pam noticed that he looked quite untroubled after the telephone-talk. His eyes rested fondly upon her for a moment, and then included the other girls in an inquiring glance.

"Well, young people—ready for home and bed?"

"Not bed!" jested Polly.

"No, bekas—what ze diggings, eet is only a little after eleven! And we are on holiday, Meester Willoughby, zank you all ze same for a gorjus treat!"

"You've enjoyed yourselves?"

"Yes, Mr. Willoughby—yes, rather!" was the chorus.

"What an audience it was!" Betty remarked, looking out of the box to see the flocking away of hundreds of people who were all talk and laughter. "Makes you wonder how everybody is going to get home!"

"It means a bit of a scramble, I'm afraid," said Mr. Willoughby, getting into his coat and muffler. "Best not to hurry, girls."

Inevitably, however, a kind of eagerness to mingle with the rest of the audience carried him and his charges out to the thronged foyer.

Under the glaring lights the Morcove girls moved on slowly with the jostling crowd, hearing the shouting for taxis and the slamming of car doors going on just outside the theatre.

Again and again there was a check in the out-flowing tide of humanity, due to a shortage of taxis and a mix-up of private cars. But everybody was good humoured and content to drift on slowly.

Pam and her chums even found a supplementary delight to the evening's feast of enjoyment in noticing other happy parties and over-hearing snatches of talk about the "panto"—what a fine one it was!

At length the girls were clear of the last bit of shelter, with Mr. Willoughby—tall as he was—peering easily over the heads of other people, to find his car.

"We must keep together," Pam casually remarked.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, what a cwowd!"

An instant later Mr. Willoughby voiced a calm: "Here we are, girls! Jump in!"

At that same instant, something took place which might have caused Pam, for one, some surprise, had she been aware of it. As for her father, his concern, had he noticed, would have been considerable.

Just as Pam was taking the last few steps to the waiting car, along with her chums and her father, she was pointed at by a man who seemed to belong to that huddle of humanity which always gathers on the pavement to see an audience disperse.

She, looking as lovely as any girl even in her high station of life could look, at a schoolgirl's age, was singled out for that directing thrust of a forefinger; and she knew nothing of this!

Nor did Pam know that the man, as he pointed her out in the fashionable throng, said under his breath to two companions at his side, one of whom was a woman:

"There! See her?"

A nod, and something in a guttural voice was the response.

A few seconds later, Pam was sinking back with her chums upon the rich upholstery of her father's Roysler. Mr. Willoughby jumped in after the girls and drew the door round with a slam.

Home, now, after the theatre! Pam's chums were to be dropped at places in the West End, where they were residing, for the last week of the hols, with parents or other guardians.

Then the car would go on with Pam and her father to Halkin Street, where the Willoughby family had its Town house.

And the two men in the crowd who had shown that mysterious interest in Pam?

They walked away together, jabbering in such an excitable and foreign-sounding way, now and then a passerby could not help looking amused. What a place, Mighty London, for encountering people from every corner of the earth!

But the two men only walked as far as a certain bus stop. Then, as a bus going east drew up at the kerb, they parted.

One was an undersized figure, going away along the lamplit pavement with a rather shuffling step. The other became a huddled figure in the rumbling bus, not quite used to English money; it appeared, when presently the conductor voiced a cheery:

"Fares, please!"

CHAPTER 2.

Told at Midnight

"T IRED, Pam?"

"Not a bit, daddy!"

"A lot of late nights this last week or so."

"Oh, well—the hols!"

Silently the sumptuous Roysler was speeding through the West-End streets, having set down Betty, Polly, Paula and Naomer at their destinations.

"It was awfully sweet of you, daddy, to give up this one evening to me and my chums."

"Not at all, my dear. It has been up to me to give you a nice time in London. Your mother's

being away upon that cruise which she was ordered—I didn't want that to make any difference to you, Pam, if possible."

She received this with a smile and a pensive nod.

"Wonder where mumsie's boat has got to by now, daddy! You know, you should be with her, to get some of that winter sunshine the doctors ordered her."

"Ah, Pam, I'm likely to get enough sunshine before long," he laughed. "India, Pam!"

She perked up at the word, side-glancing him quickly.

"Really, daddy?"

"Yes, my dear. It looks as if I shall have to go out there again. But, there, you'll be back at Morocco before my boat sails, so it won't affect you—oh?"

"Oh, won't it? So I'm to be without anyone belonging to me," Pam laughed. "Mother, away on her West Indian cruise, and you on the way to India!"

The car had turned into Halkin Street and was gliding to the kerb, opposite the Willoughby front door.

"You'll have your headmistress, my dear—your adored Miss Somerfield," was Mr. Willoughby's little pleasantry, as he sat ready to unlatch the car's door. "By the way, I expect to find her brother waiting to see me, inside."

"What! Miss Somerfield's brother? Oh, I shall want to see him for a moment, daddy!"

"Well, you may! Here we are!"

Jumping out, now that the car had pulled up, Mr. Willoughby helped his daughter to alight.

"But fancy," she was remarking, as she stepped down to the pavement. "Jack Somerfield here at this time of night!"

"As a matter of fact, Pam, it was he who rang me up at the theatre. So this is a sort of appointment."

"Oh, I see! Good-night, Jeffreys," she said to her father's chauffeur—one long in the service of the family.

Then she went up the white stone steps with her father, to a front door that was already being opened by a manservant.

He, another faithful retainer, first closed the door after father and daughter had entered; then he impassively announced:

"Mr. Somerfield, sir, is in the library."

"Ah, yes, thank you, Brem-low!"

In a corner of the beautiful square hall a grandfather clock—one of the rare antiques of this famous Town house—gave the time as ten to twelve.

"All the same," Pam smiled. "I'm not going to bed just yet!"—and preceded her father into the library with that serenity which her schoolmates knew so well.

"Hallo, Mr. Somerfield!"

"Hallo, Pam! Had a nice evening?"

"Jolly, thanks!"

"And now," chimed in her father lightly, as she shook hands with this tall, fine man who was Miss Somerfield's brother, "Pam is in a hurry to get to bed!"

"It's the first I've heard of it, daddy!"

And Pam stood getting a good look at her father's friend, finding him just as nice as ever; the same engaging smile, the face retaining that bronze which years of world-travel had conferred, the eyes as steady as they had been, back in the days of the Great War, when they ranged the German trenches from a British scouting plane.

"You might just as well have come along to the theatre, Mr. Somerfield, to get your talk with daddy—about India, is that it? Then you'd have seen Betty and some of the others, and they'd have been so glad!"

"No mention of Jack Linton and the other boys—why's that?" Jack Somerfield twinkled. "You're seeing something of them, I hope, whilst you're up in London?"

"Oh, they're all up in Town for the last of the hols. But they were under promise to go somewhere else to-night. I'm seeing them to-morrow, most likely."

"Tell them all—best of luck from me, won't you, Pam?"

"I will!"

"And now, Pam, my dear—"

"Yes, well, I suppose I must!" her father was answered. "Good-night, then, daddy darling; and mind, you're to be still here when I come down in the morning! I know what Mr. Somerfield



As Pam left the theatre, muttered words passed between three people who were watching her: "See! There she is!" But Pam knew nothing of this!

is—turning up, to get you to catch the first air liner to Karachi or somewhere! Good-night, Mr. Somerfield”—retiring with that adorable smile of hers. “And do remember that last term we saw absolutely nothing of you at Morcove!”

“On the other hand, I had sensational accounts of you and your chums, more than once, from my sister!” he retorted gaily. “Good-night, Pam!”

“Night!”

She was gone, and the two men stood mute and still, looking towards the door that had closed after her exit.

Then, as they turned to each other, an admiring murmur from Jack Somerfield ended the impressive silence.

“Wonderful girl, sir, your Pam.”

“She goes to a wonderful school,” Mr. Willoughby returned the compliment. “Her mother and I—we often give thanks in our hearts for Morcove School, and its headmistress.”

“Nice of you to say that, sir. At any rate, with Pam growing up to be the girl she is, you and Mrs. Willoughby must feel—”

“She is our all in all, Jack; and you know what that means. Cigarette? And you must let me pour you out something—”

“No, thanks, sir; I’d rather not. But I will smoke,” said the younger man, accepting a fine Virginian from the silver box standing upon a side table. “Well! As I hinted over the ’phone, it’s about Pam that I wanted to get a word with you—at once.”

“Yes, and you gave me a bit of a turn, Jack, by the vagueness of the hint!”

“Sorry—”

“I think it’s for me to be sorry,” laughed Mr. Willoughby, “if my nerves are going to get as jumpy as that. With the Government wanting me to go out to the North-West Frontier any day now—nerves are not a thing one should be aware of!”

“Your nerve is still as good as ever, sir, I’m sure. You won’t need to cry off the mission to India on that account—not you! But here is the question that had suddenly popped up to-night—as the result of what I’ve discovered in the last hour or two. If you go to India—then what about Pam?”

“With her dear mother, too, away on that voyage,” Mr. Willoughby deplored. “Yes, Jack, if what you hinted at is—”

“I wish I could doubt my own accuracy, sir, but I can’t,” Jack Somerfield exclaimed very gravely. “After what I have overheard to-night, it is as certain as my standing here that Pam is—in danger.”

Mr. Willoughby motioned his visitor to a deep armchair, and then took one for himself. As soon as they were seated, both men hitched the chairs a little closer together.

“Did it all come, Jack, as a surprise to you? No hint—”

“A complete surprise, sir. I won’t say I was not expecting to hear your name mentioned, at that secret conference down there in the East End. My job this evening was to get to know, without their knowing—”

“Quite. And I take it that from first to last those people never did suspect that you were—er—present?”

“If you can call it being present, hanging on to a bit of gutter with only your toe-tips on the sill of an upper window—then I was present!”

“The Abdur-Khan lot—eh?”

“That’s it. And so, as I was going to say, I quite expected to hear your name crop up, sir. But when it got to their talking about Pam—that, it seemed to me, was something quite new.”

“The East,” muttered Pam’s father, “is showing a liking for newness, although it is still—the East. New methods, Jack—”

“To achieve the old, old purpose? I get you, sir. Well, in a nutshell, this is their plan. They mean to stop your going out to India—as you intend doing at the special request of your old friend, Prince Ahmed.”

“The poor old prince,” murmured Mr. Willoughby, flicking the ash from his cigarette. “They might let him end his days in peace. But go on, Jack, with what you heard them plotting.”

“Any idea of putting you on the spot has been dropped, sir. They are afraid it would look too much like their doing—for, of course, it’s known in the right quarters that they are over here in London. And so, something is to happen—and will happen, unless we’re mighty careful—to Pam.”

“When you say ‘something,’ Jack, you mean—”

“Kidnapping, sir.”

“What!” But with the next breath Mr. Willoughby was voicing an understanding: “I see! Has that suggestion come, perhaps, from the ring-leader himself?”

“From Shere Azim—yes, sir. If ever a man were a fiend in human disguise—”

“I know, Jack. It must be—let me see—ten years since I got that Azim chap taped, and gave him my measure at the same time.”

“But this all seems to me, sir, a particularly deadly business,” Jack Somerfield resumed in a deep whisper. “As soon as I could be sure I’d heard enough—taking into account that I was really doing Intelligence work for parties that shall be nameless—I dropped to ground from that window-sill, and streaked for the nearest call-box. When Bremlow answered the ’phone and told me you were at the theatre with Pam, I felt like taking a taxi to Drury Lane. Mr. Willoughby, if anything should happen to her—”

“But it won’t, Jack. Now that you’ve given me this timely warning—and it makes me eternally grateful to you, my boy—”

“You’ll have her guarded? But, sir, is that going to be good enough? I’m wondering! Somehow, it’s a cold-blooded business that turns me sick. They meant to kidnap Pam—spirit her away—so that you’d be so worried, so crazed with anxiety about her, you’d have to abandon all idea of going out to India. And at the same time they’re going to try to get information—either from you or from Pam herself.”

“Yes, I see the idea. I was to be chained to the Home Country by that anxiety. Well, as a plan to prevent my helping my old friend, Prince Ahmed, and helping the Indian Government at the same time—it won’t come off, Jack; not likely!”

Mr. Willoughby and his visitor had risen together, casting away unfinished cigarettes whilst they met each other’s eyes.

A lengthy pause was filled in with the chiming of the clock out in the hall. Midnight!

“I shall go to India,” Mr. Willoughby said at last, flatly. “As for Pam—”

“You’ll have her guarded, you say? Excuse my asking it, sir, but where Pam is concerned I feel—well, sort of as a big brother might—”

“That’s quite all right, my boy.”

“Then—will it be your idea to let her go back to Morcove School, next week?”

“No, I’m afraid that will be out of the question, now, Jack. We have to do more than see that she is well guarded, night and day alike. She must not be where those rascals probably expect her to be—at the school.”

"You'll find somebody—a relation, or a proved friend—to have her for a bit, in the depths of the country, maybe?"

"That's about it, my boy. Well?"

"Well, sir," came Jack Somerfield's steady response, "I can't help thinking—will that be good enough even? Will that outwit such a crafty lot as Azim's crowd? Wouldn't they track her down—?"

"What would you suggest, then?"

"I suggest that wherever you may place Pam, as Pam, she will be found—traced! With relations—in town or in the country—it will be all the same; they'll get her. And so I suggest that the best place for Pam, whilst you are away"—Jack Somerfield paused and smiled grimly—"will be Morcove School; but not, sir—as Pam."

"How on earth do you mean—not as Pam?" Mr. Willoughby ejaculated.

"Shall we sit down again," said Jack Somerfield. "And then I can tell you!"

CHAPTER 3.

Pam Willoughby's Peril

PAM, in bed and dreaming about the "panto," awoke with a start.

She heard instantly the faint voices of two men saying good-night to each other at the street-door-below. Her father and Jack Somerfield.

The voices died away; the door closed; then Jack Somerfield's retiring step grew fainter on the pavement.

All was silence after that, until one London clock and another ding-dong'd the four quarters, and gave a booming stroke upon the hour bell.

One in the morning!

What a lot, then, dad and Mr. Somerfield must have had to talk about. India, of course! Would dad ever be done with India? But, there, it was something to be proud of that he was so often called upon to give advice, to act as a go-between.

There was that time, Pam could remember, when he had to go out with some new Viceroy; she had never been told why! These things remained a mystery. And so, now, it looked as if dad were to go out again upon another mysterious mission.

Pam gave a shake to the downiest of pillows and settled her head again. She dropped off to sleep once more with the facility which comes of a sound mind in a sound body. But, of course, the soundest mind can go in for the most absurd dreams. This time, Pam dreamed that the new term had started at Morcove, and she and her chums were getting up a "panto"—just like the one at Drury Lane!

It was wonderful, in the dream, to see how the Morcove gym had been transformed into a theatre as big as Drury Lane, with Madge Minden conducting a full orchestra instead of being simply at the solitary piano.

A final attempt to reason how such things could be must have come at Pam's waking-up moment, for she was wide awake all of a sudden—and it was daylight again; nearer nine o'clock than eight, too, which was disgraceful!

No girl, at any rate, could have been quicker than Pam at getting bathed and dressed. A few minutes, and she was hastening downstairs, conferring a cheery smile and a bright, "Morning, Mrs. Bremlow!" upon that zealous housekeeper.

"Morning, daddy!"

"Ah, Pam my dear—"

"Anything in the paper about—?"

"Nothing in the paper, my dear," said Pam's

adoring father, dropping it to the breakfast-room carpet.

"I didn't suppose there would be, really—about your going to India!" Pam remarked serenely, and after kissing him and patting him on the head quite patronisingly, she took her place at table.

"You are going to India, daddy?"

"More to the point, young lady—what are you going to do with yourself, to-day? Or rather, what had you proposed doing?"

"I had arranged"—a little emphasis on this word—"to be with Betty and all of them, this afternoon. We are all to meet for tea at the Monopole Hotel—where we dropped Betty and Polly last night, you know."

Pam started upon a grape-fruit.

"But, of course, daddy, if you want me to come with you to Croydon, to see you off to Karachi—"

"Not to-day. thank you, my dear!"

"Good! I want to have you, daddy, until I go back to Morcove."

"Yes, well!"

This was a favourite remark in the Willoughby family. Mr. Willoughby used it often, so did Mrs. Willoughby, so did Pam. It was due to the Willoughby characteristic of retaining a serene mind even in times of danger or crisis.

Mr. Willoughby, who had finished his breakfast when Pam came in, watched her making a good one.

When she was at the marmalade stage, he began to charge a briar pipe. As soon as he had filled it, Pam jumped up—finished—ready to light the pipe for him, and at the same time help herself to one of his choice Virginians. It was the usual holiday indulgence, which he conceded with the usual smiling frown.

"Come into the library, Pam. Something to say to you."

This sounded so like real news at last that Pam, as she followed him to the oak-lined room, where another jolly fire was putting heart into the January morning, inferred aloud:

"Then you really are going abroad, daddy?"

"That all depends, Pam," he said, whilst she heeled shut the door—"upon you! Whether, Pam, you can be trusted—"

"To behave at school? But," she submitted, "I am not to be captain of the Form this term; it goes back to Betty. So can't I do a bit more as I like?"

"As a member of the school, Pam, you can do just as you like, so far as I am concerned. But not as—Pam!"

Her brows went up.

"Dad!"

"Yes; well, now to be perfectly serious, Pam. I want to make everything quite clear to you, so I will come to the Morcove aspect of it all presently. Here's the situation: Unless I can go out to India, a very old friend of mine—a native prince, and one of the best friends to the Empire, as a whole, that India has ever given us—that fine man, Pam, will be overwhelmed with trouble that may easily kill him. He is old, and his enemies are ambitious for themselves alone—not working for India's good at all. Ruthless, crafty—"

"Yes, daddy? Then, of course, you must go."

"I want to do what I can out there," he said, standing with his back to the fireplace. "But those very enemies have schemed to keep me chained at home. They mean to hit at me, Pam, so that I won't be able to go out to India, and they mean to hit at me—through you."

"Through me!"

"Yes, my dear. Just suppose that something serious happened to you to-day—to-morrow—or the day after. Naturally, I would at once cancel any arrangements I had made about India. You, Pam—you, my only daughter, would have to come first—"

"Oh, but daddy, not before India! Not before—duty, so to speak. I mean, as you feel it a duty you owe to the Empire, and all that sort of thing—"

"I could not go on, Pam, and they know it. And so—I'm about to put it very plainly now, my dear—"

She nodded.

"Yes, well!"

"You are in danger, Pam," he continued with slow impressiveness. "If they can, they will kidnap you. Ugly word—but I know that the Ameer of Abdur-Khan will stop at nothing."

"Yes, well? Go on!"

"Either in these, the last days of the holidays, or when you are at Morcove—for it would not be too late even then," he stressed. "They know that I would turn back. At the first opportunity they get—"

"They mean to get me? But," Pam smiled, "how perfectly thrilling, daddy! So what I have to do, of course, outwit them! Get into a disguise; go about London, even to-day—in disguise! A snag, though, daddy! Morcove! How on earth," she questioned, with genuine gravity, "am I to manage there?"

"That, Pam, was all arranged last night—before Mr. Somerfield went away. He had an absolute watertight plan. I was awake for hours afterwards, turning it over in my mind, and I could see no flaw in it anywhere. Had I discovered one—I would not have been still thinking this morning of going to India."

"You are going, daddy; that's decided. So the only question is—what do I do about Morcove? Am I to miss a term—go to Auntie Becky, at her place in Suffolk; hide myself there—vanish—"

"No, Pam; that was my own first idea, put completely in the shade by Jack Somerfield's. His plan is this: Those fellows will look out for you at Morcove, when the new term has started. Well, then, you must not be there—as Pam Willoughby. But, as Pam Willoughby's absence from Morcove will inevitably lead them to think that you must be somewhere else, the hunt for you will still go on."

"I see! You mean, then, they'll try Auntie Becky's place in Suffolk—and draw blank! Lovely! They'll be trying all likely places—"

"Except Morcove, which will have already provided a blank," Pam's father caught her up gently. "And yet you will be there at Morcove all the while."

"Oh!"

"As another girl, Pam; as a new girl, owning any name you like to suggest."

"I think—let me see—yes; I think I'd like to be a Monica Something-or-other," Pam promptly considered. "Monica Gray—how do you like Monica Gray, daddy? You know, I can see Monica Gray already!"

"What is she like, then, Pam?"

"She's not a bit like Pam!" said Pam, stepping about the room. "She wears glasses, and has dark hair—"

"And doesn't hold herself up, perhaps?"

"I'm afraid she doesn't, dad! And she is not keen on games. I'm sorry—at least, in a way, I must be sorry—but Pam's chums won't think much of Monica Gray!"

"I hope they won't, by any chance, think that she may be—Pam Willoughby!"

At that grave remark from her father, Pam stood to face him.

"No, dad! Never for a moment! You can rely on me there! Betty and the rest will never be given a chance to suspect."

"Yes, well, I have to rely upon you, Pam," her father responded, almost solemnly. "Unless you think you can carry the thing through, then I must abandon all idea of India. One slip, down there at Morcove—good heavens, it might lead to terrible things."

"You can trust me, dad," Pam said calmly.

"If you like, I'll make an experiment to-day—have a sort of rehearsal as it were. Yes, I know—splendid! I won't let the girls see me as Pam, to-day. But I will let them see me—at the Monopole Hotel, when they are all having tea in the lounge, and me an absentee, as they will imagine. But I shall be there!"

"Very well," her father nodded. "For, in any case, Pam, we have to make a start—to-day. I was going to warn you, most regretfully; you cannot go out as Pam Willoughby. Even at this moment—"

He broke off, walking to the high window, which looked on to the fashionable street.

At first, as Pam noticed, he failed to notice anything disquieting. Then she saw him fix his attention upon the opposite side of the way.

"Already?" Pam inferred, crossing over to get her own look from the window.

"A man with rugs to sell—a man from the East, going from door to door," Mr. Willoughby commented dryly. "They don't look to me like genuine Indian rugs."

"I wonder," Pam smiled, "if he is in any genuine need of selling them?"

"I imagine—not," said her father simply. "Yes, well—that shows!"

And he returned to the fireside, to stand for a half-minute in deep thought. Then:

"No, it is no use, Pam," came his changed opinion, causing her to turn to him with a startled:

"Dad!"

"It can't be done, Pam! As your father, I simply can't entertain the plan, after all. I ought not even to have considered it."

"But, dad—"

"Pam, my dear, you are a true Willoughby to be ready to do this thing, so as to free me—that is to say, you are ready to risk your safety for the sake of India and the Empire. It comes to that—"

"Well, listen, let me, daddy—"

"No! I find I can't let you, after all. Nothing will ever convince me that you can so effectually change your identity as to render the plan quite safe. In any disguise, Pam, you would be recognised by me—"

"You think so?"

"I am positive. There it is, Pam—a tempting idea that must be finally abandoned."

"No, dad, India—"

"Run away!" he bade her, with a loving smile.

"I will NOT be tempted any further, Pam!"

"Oh, all right," she pouted—and marched out of the room, to lose her playful expression as soon as she was alone with her thoughts.

Of course, it was his love for her that was standing in the way. All in a moment, like that, he had revolted against the plan. "Nothing will ever convince me," he had said. But now, supposing—

Supposing she had a shot, at once, at proving that he was mistaken there! Supposing she did succeed in convincing him, after all! Take in her own father successfully, by means of a dis-

guise—a complete change of identity—and could he then deny her claim to be able to take in everybody else?

She cheered up. Thing to do—put the plan to the test, at once! And the best of it was, a way of doing so had already flashed into her mind.

Less than an hour later, Mr. Willoughby received a tap at the door of the library.

"Come in," he responded, interrupted in his frowning thoughts over the impracticability of the "changed identity" plan.

Buxom Mrs. Bremlow, the housekeeper, began with a flustered apology for intruding.

"But, sir, if you would be so good—a niece of mine, up from the country—"

"Wants to see me? Oh, let her come in then," cried Pam's father, getting up from a fireside chair. "If it's anything I can do, Mrs. Bremlow, for a relation of yours—after the many years you have been with us—"

"Thank you, sir, I'm sure. There's nothing I and my husband wish more to do so, sir, than to go on serving you faithfully, and I am sure the same can be said of—my niece, sir!" as a girl of school age advanced into the room, wearing outdoor things.

Mr. Willoughby, without expecting every girl to be another Pam, liked to see any girl looking attractive. It was a great pity about this particular girl, he felt, that she did not hold herself up, and also that her taste in clothes was not good.

As she seemed a plain girl, with glasses that did not help her looks—as glasses can often help some people's looks—what he felt to be a certain "slummockiness" was all the more regrettable.

But still, as a relative of good Mrs. Bremlow's, she deserved to be heard. What, he blandly inquired, could be do for her?

Mrs. Bremlow's niece, at any rate, was free from all affectation. As he listened, Mr. Willoughby began to give her credit for being perfectly natural. A little incoherent and ungrammatical, Mrs. Bremlow's niece managed to convey that she wanted to get something to do, now that she had left school, and so she had thought of the Willoughby family.

Mr. Willoughby demurred. This, he said, was not a good time for fixing up anything like that. His wife was abroad, and he himself—his plans were most unsettled. "If you care to leave it to Mrs. Bremlow to bring up your name later—"

But Mrs. Bremlow's niece, having obtained the interview, was not minded to have it cut short. With all the self-assurance of the modern girl, she kept at Mr. Willoughby, ignoring her aunt's warning coughs that they ought both to be withdrawing.

And Mr. Willoughby tried not to feel irritated, recognising that here, after all, was a girl who had her living to get now that she was done with school. Only natural. Yes, that was the great thing in favour of the girl—so natural.

"Yes, well," he said at last, "I must see what I can do—either up here in town, or down at Swanlake. I will just take your name," he added, stepping to the writing-table to have pencil and paper handy.

"Monica, sir—"

"Eh, what!"

"Monica Gray, sir."

"Pam!" her father gasped. "Good heavens!"

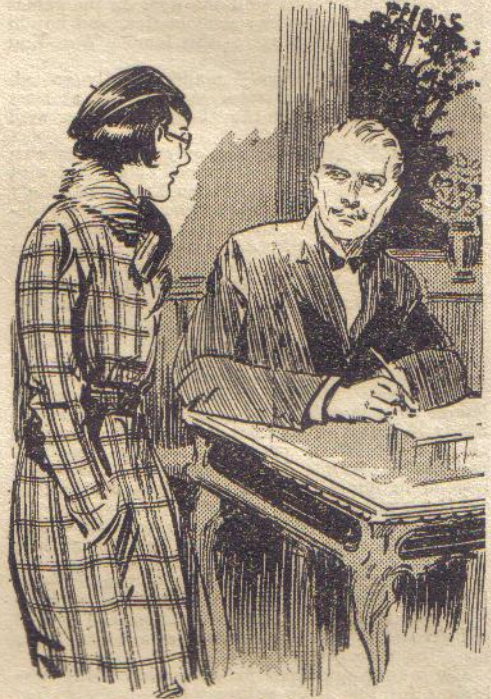
"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, dad darling—ha, ha, ha!"

Pam laughed, whilst she took off the spectacles and also cast her hat aside. "So now, daddy, say I am not—to be trusted to do it!"

"Mrs. Bremlow—" He was turning to her in mingled amazement and amusement.

"Bogging your pardon, sir, but Miss Pam would have it that if only she could take you in properly, it would be such a load off your mind! I don't know why! So I allowed myself to be persuaded—"

"And, Mrs. Bremlow, in all the years you have been with the family, you have never done a better thing for us than this—never!" Mr. Wil-



"Yes, well, I'll take your name," said Mr. Willoughby—little knowing that the girl who stood before him was his own daughter—
Pam!

loughby admitted. "Pam—you little rogue! Because I was—utterly deceived—during an interview as lengthy as that!"

"I know you were, dad!" she rippled.

"Height, looks, bearing, speech—everything, quite different! You were totally changed—"

"Wrong, dad; my hair should have been a different colour—darker—"

"Then dye it! For this has decided me!" he declared joyfully. "If you could take me in like that, you can take in anybody. You shall be Monica Gray! And Mrs. Bremlow, here—"

He turned to her, all flabbergasted as she was. "Mrs. Bremlow shall be—Monica's widowed aunt!"

CHAPTER 4.

"Monica" Meets "Morcove"

AT the Monopole Hotel, now that the wintry afternoon was ending, the spacious lounge was filling up for tea-time talk, music, dancing.

A tuning-up scraping of violins could be heard,

just faintly, amidst all the pleasant murmur of guests and droppers-in as they found tables for themselves.

"Lucky we came in early and bagged this corner," Polly Linton said to Betty Barton. "Not so easy to find a good place presently—we shall be such a crowd when they all get here."

"They've got here—some of them, anyhow!" Betty gaily remarked, giving a directional nod; and then Polly gave a calling-attention wave of an upflung hand, just as if she were on the games field at Morcove, hailing schoolmates, and not in such grand surroundings as this famous West-End hotel provided.

"Come on, come on!" madcap Polly voiced, with her usual impatience, causing two at least of the arrivals to reach the "bagged" corner with a rush.

Naomer Nakara—she not only made her own dash for the corner, but dragged Paula Creel with her. But Madge Minden, Helen Craig, and Judy Cardew—they crossed the lounge with more decorum, thus entitling the madcap to complain:

"You're so slow! And where's Tess, even now?"

"Oh, Tess—she'll be along in a jiffy," Helen lightly answered. "She went into a shop to buy paints."

"Buy what?"

"Paints, Polly."

"Oh, I thought you said pants!"

Thereupon, Morcove treated the Monopole lounge to a sample of its laughter—the authentic Study 12 brand. It did not appear to be regarded as a scandalous outburst. On the contrary, fashionable people looked Morcove's way and seemed to imply by their own amused looks:

"Don't mind us; we like it!"

"All the same, just you behave yourself, kid!"

Polly made a point of warning Naomer grimly. "Sitting down before anybody else!"

"What 're diggings, eef I like to bag zis seat, I suppose I can? And eef we are going to have tea, isn't it time zey got a jerk on and served us? Hooray," Naomer cheered, as a waiter came up. "Stuff to give zem!"

The waiter appeared to guess that Polly was hostess for this little gather-round—probably because he knew that she was staying in the hotel with her parents. He bowed to Polly, putting her out in some mental arithmetic.

"Er—how many are we, girls? Including the boys, of course, for they'll be along. Oh, for fourteen, please, waiter!"

"It should be thirteen, you know," Betty softly corrected, after the waiter had flashed away. "Nine of us girls, when Tess and Pam get here; and the four boys—thirteen!"

"Wrong!" said Polly. "Tubby is as good as two ordinary boys any day—at table, I mean. Don't imagine I regard him as good as two in any other respect. Awful boy!"

"Hi, bekas, you be careful what you say about Tubby!" came Naomer's shrill protest. "Tubby doesn't borrow money off his sister, like Jack does off you, Polly, any old how!"

"Tubby hasn't a sister—"

"He's got me, though!"

"But you've never got any money, so it amounts to the same thing," Polly closed the debate. "I wonder, will two of you girls be sure to sit on either side of this kid? Just so that Tubby can't sit next to her; thank you! Hallo—for me?"

Polly's sudden surprise was due to her being offered a telegram, on a salver, by a pageboy.

"Unless," Polly said, starting to open the buff-coloured envelope, "this is to tell me that mother

has been run over—or dad run in—I can't imagine what it can be about! Oh—rotten!" she grimaced, scanning the unfolded flimsy. "Pam won't be turning up."

"Pam won't?" was the disappointed chorus.

"Oh, shame! But why not, Polly?"

"She doesn't say. 'Sorry; don't expect me'—that's all it says," gloomed Polly, letting the telegram float down to the carpet. "But it's more than a sickener; it's a bit strange—"

"Yes!"

"We've seen nothing of her all day," Judy Cardew commented softly. "Hope she is all right—not taken a chill or something?"

"We could ring up Halkin Street," Betty muttered. "But, somehow, it doesn't sound like illness. More as if she had been bound to go somewhere else, at short notice. Probably had to go out for the day."

"That's it, you may depend," Madge said. "We know, of course, whenever the Willoughbys are in Town, they are wanted right and left."

"I wish I could be," sighed Polly, regardless of the fact that three waiters had arrived to set down various trays. "Instead of being Dragged Down, as, of course, I am, by a brother like Jack. Here he comes, and look at the way he wears his overcoat!"

The fact that he was being discussed in no flattering terms by his sister must have been quite patent to fun-loving Jack, as he came across the lounge with Dave Cardew, Jimmy Cherrol, and the portly Tubby.

The measure of Polly's sisterly disapproval was, as usual, the measure of Jack joviality.

He flourished down a small package for Polly to take.

"A present, Polly-wolly, for a good child."

"Oh, is that why you borrowed from me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Start pouring out, will you, Betty dear," requested the madcap, unstringing the parcel. "A poor light in this corner— Oh, I see, you are there, Tubby!"

It was the angelic sweetness with which Polly said this to beefy Master Blot that set the girls gurgling again. Tubby himself, accustomed to be twitted about his avoirdupois, minded not in the least. Nevertheless, Madge let him sit down next to Naomer after all, feeling that he deserved a compensating kindness.

"Sweendle!" shrilled the dusky one, all eyes for the parcel Polly was undoing. "Bekas, I don't get given presents!"

It now transpired, however, that what Tubby had carried in a bulging pocket was a fair-sized box of very special chocolates—for Naomer, into whose lap they were dumped quite casually. As Naomer promptly yelled her surprise and delight, attention became divided between her present and Polly's.

Even Polly was only half-attending to what she was doing, which neglect resulted in a clockwork toy suddenly jumping out of the cardboard box in her hands, like a Jack-in-the-box.

Fully wound up, the very effective imitation of a crocodile, in tin, executed some noisy gymnastics on the tea-table, fell over the edge all amongst the girls' feet, and then set off, with a great whirring, across the lounge.

What a sensation it made! To the immediate laughter of the girls and the guffawing of some of the boys was added a squeal from Paula—"Howwows!"—whilst Naomer, mounting her chair to view the erratic course of the crocodile, shrilled:

"Hi, whoa; come back! Stop him, queek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sh!" Polly gestured. "We shall be asked to leave! Yes, after it, Betty—thanks!"

For Betty, in the handiest position for doing so, had already given chase. She pounced, thinking to snatch up the runaway, missed it—and was softly cheered by Jack and others.

On scuttled the tin toy, with plenty of motive power still in its mainspring.

It maintained such a lively speed, before Betty could capture it the thing had collided with a small foot, owned by a young girl sitting companionless in one of the lounge chairs.

She was laughing as Betty rushed up and seized the capsized crocodile, from which came a dying-away whirr!

"So sorry!" Betty merrily apologised. "He didn't hurt you?"

"Oh, no," jest answered jest. "What a scream!"

"Shocking—in a place like this!" Betty tittered.

"But that's what makes it so very funny," the other girl rippled. "Oh, and nobody minds really, of course!"

Betty, feeling she ought to retire now, hesitated. She liked the vivacity of this girl—one whom she had not seen before in the hotel.

"Are you staying?"

"For a few days, perhaps," was the smiled response. "Is it nice here? We only arrived an hour ago—aunt and I."

"Oh, you'll like it!" Betty declared confidently. "It's fine! I say, you're not going to have tea alone, are you?"

"Aunt said she didn't think she would come down for tea. She isn't a one for hotels, you know; but there, we had to put up somewhere!"

"You couldn't have done better, I'm sure. There is so much going on. I say, I'm sure my chums would like you to come and join us. Will you?"

"That's awfully nice of you," said the new arrival, getting up. "I'd love to! I'm afraid I loathe being by myself."

Betty noticed then that the girl was not particularly graceful; didn't hold herself up! Perhaps bad sight accounted for a certain "slummockiness," as it sometimes does, for the girl wore glasses. But she was a girl with a jolly nature, anyhow.

"Come on, then! And what name shall I say?" asked Betty.

"Monica Gray," was the answer.

CHAPTER 5.

A Man From the East

TEN minutes later:

"And now, Monica, here is another one you must get to know," exclaimed Betty Barton, in the midst of tea-table chatter. "Tess Trelawney—she goes to Morcove School, too, you know!"

"Oh, does she?" responded the girl who had become Monica Gray.

Her bespectacled eyes were upon Tess as the latter came across the thronged lounge. "Monica Gray" was wondering if she would survive Tess' first scrutiny, as she had survived the friendly introduction to all the rest of the chums.

If she did, then indeed she might reckon to survive any other test. Tess, the born artist of the Study 12 "chummery," had such a keen, noticing eye!

"How late you are, Tess!" Polly mock-grimly censured the last arrival. "This is Monica Gray, Tess dear; staying at the hotel with an aunt of

hers. As Monica looked a bit lonely, we've got her to join us."

"That's the idea," Tess nodded approvingly, looking Monica Gray straight in the face. "More the merrier. But where's Pam, girls?"

"Oh, Pam—she tallywagged; couldn't turn up, we don't know why," Betty answered. "We aren't worrying. You know what she is, Tess."

"Who is Pam, then?" asked Monica Gray, as Tess sat down next to her. "Till another Morcove girl?"

"That's so," Tess said, with her usual terseness. "But what Betty meant just then; Pam Willoughby belongs to a pukha family. Their country house, not far from Morcove, is one of the show places of the West Country. They've a house in Town, too—"

"Oh, have they? They must be awfully swagger!"

"They are what you'd call high Society, but it doesn't spoil them a bit. Pam's got a lovely face," said the Study 12 artist. "If I could paint well enough, I'd send her to the Academy."

"Someday, perhaps!" said Monica Gray comfortingly. "It must be nice to be pretty. Nobody will ever want to paint my portrait, that's certain! Oh, well, I'm not in high Society, so the world won't miss much, anyway! I expect you do paint splendidly?"

"I don't, and there's nothing I hate more," said Tess, with characteristic frankness, "than being told by people—who don't understand—that I do. Been here long?"

"Me? I only got in this afternoon, with aunt!"

"Oh, I see!"

Tess being the last girl to be "introduced" to Monica Gray, it was natural for this bit of conversation to continue.

"I simply adore hotel life," said Monica. "But, of course, when you first get in, you feel a bit strange—lonely. And I loathe being by myself! Like in the country—nothing to do!"

"Your home in the country?"

"Not now. In fact, at present, we are just living in our boxes. Things are a bit unsettled."

"I'm sorry—"

"Oh, it's quite all right right, really. I don't have a bad time, altogether."

"What do you do?"

"Oh, I don't know that I do anything—if you mean painting, and clever things like that."

"Piano?"

"Not now," said Monica Gray. "I've given it up!"

"You see that girl sitting next to Jack Linton—"

"Madge Minden, I think her name is?"

"Yes. She's wonderful at the piano. The only girl who can come near her, at school, is Pam Willoughby. She's brilliant, too; but Madge is THE one!"

"She looks it," Monica smiled and nodded. "I expect you're fond of games—hockey, tennis?"

"I used to be; not so much now," shrugged Monica. "You know how it is; you lose your keenness after a bit. I'm afraid I like change—variety—life."

"Anyhow, Monica," Helen Graig gaily interposed during some handing round of replenished cups, "you dance?"

"Oh, I adore dancing! The worst of it is, I'm no good at it!"

"That," chuckled Jack, "remains to be seen—to-night! You'll be staying in after dinner? There's a dance every evening at nine."

"And refreshments at ten!" shrilled Naomer.

"All free-ices and everything! Zey come round with them!"

Monica, as she laughed with others, rather screwed up her face. Some of the girls had noticed that, when seized with merriment, she was inclined to do that.

As for Tess, although she considered the new acquaintance a quite bright and lively one, there were things about her that upset artistic susceptibilities.

"She has good clothes," Tess was thinking, "and doesn't know how to wear them—"

"Shall you all be here for the dance, this evening?" Monica asked eagerly. "I should think it will be topping!"

"All except Jimmy Cherrol, over there," jested Polly, causing shy Jimmy to grin uncomfortably. He knew what was coming. It came, sure enough!

"No," said Jack, "Sir James won't be here, as Pam's not expected!"

Monica burst out laughing.

"Oh, is it like that? Ha, ha, ha! But what a shame to tease him. But I do think he might turn up to take pity on me! He can talk to me about Pam Willoughby; I shan't mind."

"Jimmy never talks about Pam," said Jack solemnly. "He just thinks about her."

"Jack!" said Polly, who had started it all. "Behave! There!" As Naomer suddenly choked over her tea. "Oh, it is—disgraceful! We shall be turned out!"

"And to think," tittered Monica, "if that clock-work toy hadn't made a run at me, I'd have missed all this! But I must pop upstairs now and find out what aunty is doing. I expect she is in the throes of unpacking. Thanks so much for the tea! See you later, perhaps!"

"Yes! Yes, wather!" came the Morcove chorus. "Bekas—zis evening, in ze ball-room!"

After smiling back at them, she went between the tea-tables with a rather heavy, plodding step.

"Pity she walks like that," Helen deplored.

"I like her, you know."

"Oh, she's jolly enough," said someone else.

"I wonder what school she went to. She didn't say," said Madge, "although I asked her. I gathered that she has sort of finished with it."

"Yet she can't be old enough to have left school!"

"Oh, no!"

"Things are a bit unsettled—she said so to me," Tess remarked. "She's a girl, I should think, of whom you would soon get tired."

"Oh, you—you expect every girl to be something special!" exploded Polly. "She can't help her looks, any more than some of us can! What would you have her be, Tess—another Pam?"

"There couldn't be another Pam," said Jack.

"Could there, Jimmy?"

"Oh, chuck—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talking of Pam, I think I'll ring up Halkin Street," Betty said, rising to go away to the telephone boxes. "It would be nice to know."

"Yes, Betty, try and find out the reason!"

To get to the telephone, Betty had to go by the reception office, just inside the grand entrance to the palatial hotel. She saw the visitors' book lying open upon the mahogany counter, and instantly it occurred to her to take a look at the latest signatures—those of guests who had arrived during the day.

Another moment and her eyes were scanning a line which gave these particulars, in a rather clumsy feminine hand:

"Mrs. Gray (and niece), Churnly, Essex, Brit."

"So that," Betty said to herself, "is where

Monica Gray comes from—Essex. A part I don't know."

Then, when she would have gone on round to the telephone boxes, a mild sensation kept her spellbound.

She was suddenly aware of a most important-looking personage, coming in—a new arrival, to whom the greatest deference was being shown by hall porters and others.

A big, dark-skinned man he was, made bigger than ever by the very loose and fleecy greatcoat which he obviously needed, to resist the raw cold of January in London.

His brown face was fat and ugly, under a turban that had a blazing jewel set in its front folds.

Although he was smiling, he looked as if he could be very bad-tempered on the slightest provocation.

Betty could not help standing to gaze at him. After all, she was by no means the only one to feel that here, indeed, was some notable patron of the hotel.

He signed the Register, as a new arrival, wielding the pen very awkwardly with a fat, brown fist. After he had been attended to the lift, and the general stir of his going by had subsided, Betty drifted back to take another look at the visitors' book.

And this time she read:

"THE AMEER OF ABDUR-KHAN,"

CHAPTER 6.

"Pamonica"!

MONICA GRAY'S rather slummocky gait took her half-way down a broad, richly carpeted corridor on the fourth floor of the huge hotel. There, she knocked upon a door numbered 490, and went in.

"I say, aunty!"

"Oh, Miss Pa—"

"Sh! 'Monica, Monica'!" hissed the girl, whilst she hastily closed the door behind her.

"Yes, of course, miss—I mean, Monica dear," the homely-looking "aunty" flusteredly agreed.

"Oh, dear, dear, I must be more careful, even when we are alone! But—Monica—how have you been getting on, then, downstairs?"

"Just fine, aunty! I happened to sit down in the lounge close to where a lot of schoolgirls and schoolboys were going to have tea, and it ended in my getting to know them. Such a jolly lot," rippled Monica Gray. "The girls go to a school named—let me see!—Morcove, I think they said!"

"Buxom "Mrs. Gray" stood agaze at her "niece" in a dumbfounded manner.

"And, aunty, they are going to look out for me in the ball-room, after dinner to-night; so now I must look out something nice to put on. That cerise, aunty, with the violet sash, would be best, I think?"

Mrs. Gray, by her expression, was evidently thinking that the cerise, with the violet sash, would look awful. Perhaps Mrs. Gray was even feeling horrified at her niece's taste. At any rate, Monica, one way and another, was certainly a cause of palpitating uneasiness.

"You'll be with me in the ball-room, of course, aunty."

"Me—in a ball-room? Good gr— But there," Mrs. Gray corrected herself again hastily.

"I suppose I must! Oh, but it don't seem right—doesn't, I should say, ahem! That you, my dear—YOU!—should be masquerading like this!"

Agitatedly, aunty turned her rings round—a habit of hers when perplexed.



"This is Monica Gray, Tess," said Polly. And Pam, in her disguise, thought: "How strange to be introduced to my own chums! I wonder if they'll recognise me!"

"And you mean to say—er—Monica, that not one of those girls or boys saw through your disguise?"

"Not one! Not even Tess!" was the triumphant reply. "I did have the wind up about Tess Trelawney; but it was all right!"

"Ah," quavered Mrs. Gray, "it was only all right because I wasn't there! I shall be the one to make a hash of everything. Oh dear, oh dear, how could your respected fath— H'm! But you must realise, Miss P—Monica dear! I am NOT cut out for anything like this, and it's no use saying I am!"

"You poor darling aunty!" laughed Monica, stepping close to confer a quick kiss that quite scandalised the good dame. "You'll be splendid, I'm sure, after a rehearsal or two."

"Never ball-rooms, my dear! Oh, and then there's the restaurant, for dinner, this evening. Oh, please, can't I go to bed with a headache—tired after travelling—"

"No!" said Monica, with a smile. "Hotels are full of all sorts of people, always, and we shall both be as safe as houses, if we just be our natural selves."

"Natural selves, indeed!" sighed Mrs. Gray. "As if it's natural for you—YOU!—to wear violet with cerise, any more than it's natural for me to be— Oh, but I can't be, so there; not above my station, Pamonica!"

"Bother," said Monica, after laughing so much that her glasses fell off. "How long before I'm used to these tiresome things? Yes, well— Dash, I must get out of saying that! Aunty darling, I'm going to my room, next door, to do some unpacking."

"Very well, Pamonica—that is to say, Monica!"

The girl who, as Monica Gray, could not be said to be half a day old yet, was giving the smile

that screwed up her face whilst she passed round into her own room—491.

She latched the door after entering, so that no one could come in unbidden. Then she sauntered to one of the two windows. They both looked on to Hyde Park, grey and misty in the waning light of the winter's afternoon. For more reasons than one, Monica Gray was glad to have this outlook from her bedroom windows. Houses opposite would have meant, for instance, that these windows might have been watched at times.

She was also glad to find out, now, that there was no parapet or stone ledge such as anybody could creep along, to get at the windows from the outside. Not that Monica was thinking about cat-burglars; but still—

Turning away, she set about her unpacking, and as she was alone she could indulge in a smile or two over frocks and other things that had to go into the wardrobe. The cerise, complete with violet sash, came to light, and it was by no means the only frock that seemed to hurt her eyes.

Suddenly a tap-tap at the door put her presence of mind to the test. She put on her spectacles, and by a little rounding of the shoulders managed to appear not so tall.

"Yes, who is it?"

"Betty Barton! This is your room, isn't it, Monica? I say, may I come in for a moment?"

"Course! Half a sec!"

And Monica, taking an anxious look at herself in the full-length mirror, crossed to the door and unlatched it.

"Hallo!" she smiled, opening to admit Betty. "Want to speak to me?"

"Something a bit exciting!"

Monica Gray managed to look quite calm, in spite of a feeling that this concerned her—vitality!

"You know my chums and I were talking about

a girl named Pam Willoughby?" Betty continued, advancing into the bed-room. "I rang up the Willoughby Town house just now, to find out why she hadn't come here for tea, as arranged."

"Oh, did you?"

"And what do you think, Monica? The person who answered the 'phone said he couldn't attend to me then. Somebody in the house had just been taken ill."

Monica Gray hoped that she was not turning pale. It had struck a chill to her heart to be told that somebody at Halkin Street was ill. Would it be daddy?

"Nobody, I hope, Betty, connected with the family?"

"Oh—no! The extraordinary thing is, it was somebody taken ill in a car, just outside the house. They had to bring her into the house for attention. An Indian lady, the butler or whoever it was on the 'phone said to me."

"An Indian lady," echoed Monica Gray. She very nearly said: "Yes, well!" This was one of those moments when a Willoughby might be expected to use that phrase.

"So I, of course, just rang off; couldn't pester them at a time like that," Betty rattled on. "Now I'm wondering if the Indian lady is staying at this hotel!"

"But—why should she be?"

"Only because there is a very grand Indian gentleman staying here—just come in. He signed the register a few minutes ago."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes. He looks an awful grandee; turban, you know, with a big diamond, or something, as if he were a prince or some other big pot in his own country. As a matter of fact, I took a look at the visitors' book, to see his name."

"Oh, did you?"

"Yes, and it was—half a second and I shall get it right! Oh, I remember; the Ameer of Abdur-Khan!"

THE Ameer of Abdur-Khan!

The very man who had necessitated Pam Willoughby's becoming, in secret, Monica Gray, with a widowed aunt from Essex.

That man, deadly enemy of the aged Prince Ahmed, and therefore dad's enemy! And he was here in this hotel!

Monica Gray, now that Betty Barton had scampered away after imparting, in all innocence, such disturbing news, sat down to think.

"Anything to be done—at once? Tell 'aunt'?" Pack up and make for another hotel—at once?

No! It was the answer to all three questions, reached instantly by Monica Gray. The Ameer's presence in the hotel meant a severer test than ever for the ruse that had been adopted to outwit him and his hirelings. But unless the ruse could stand even that test—better never to have adopted it.

At any rate, this had to be borne in mind now. The Ameer was probably primed with the information that Pam Willoughby had school chums at present in London, some of whom were residing at the Monopole.

Those girls had now become acquainted with a certain Monica Gray—just arrived to-day. If Monica Gray suddenly bolted from the hotel with her aunt—what, then?

No, carry on! That was the decision calmly reached by Monica Gray after a minute of cogitation. The Ameer might just as well be here as anywhere else in London. Unless one could go on, on those lines, the ruse was doomed to failure.

For, what was the theory on which that ruse had been founded? What else, but the sound

argument that Pam Willoughby would be safest where she was least likely to be supposed to be—in other words, under the very noses of those who were either her former associates, or who, as enemies, were seeking her!

"I'll go down," Monica Gray suddenly decided, brightly. "See if I can't show myself to this Ameer merchant, although I don't suppose he will be showing himself much. He has a private suite, I dare say."

Purposely, on quitting her bed-room, she turned the wrong way for finding the nearest lift or public stairway. She wandered round into other grand corridors, affecting such a lost look that a passing chambermaid inquired:

"Wanting to get downstairs, miss?"

"Er—yes, please. The lift—"

"Oh, not that way, miss; they're private suites along there!"

"Oh, private suites! Sorry! Grand folk, I suppose?"

"Well, miss, there's an Ameer of Somewhere-or-other just come in. He and his sister, I understand; but I've not seen her. If she's anything like him—"

"Fine looking, you mean?"

"Fine looking! Huh! You should see him," shrugged the chambermaid. "But, law, though; look who's coming now! I mustn't stand here. You want to turn back, miss, to get to the lift."

Monica Gray turned back, whilst the chambermaid quickly effaced herself. Coming down this corridor was a tall, stately woman in Eastern dress. She had with her a female attendant, who evinced that anxious concern which a lady's maid might display in regard to a mistress who has just had an upset.

Passing them both in the corridor, Monica Gray noticed that the Indian lady rather faltered in her gliding step. So it looked as if this really was the lady who, "taken ill" in a car a while back, had been carried into the Willoughby Town house to receive medical aid.

Neither she nor the attendant took the slightest notice of Monica Gray. There was a gliding past by both with that total indifference to Westerners which people from the East habitually preserve.

And so Monica Gray, when at last she was going down in the lift, could at least indulge in a mental:

"Yes, well!"

CHAPTER 7.

Dancing Time

"THERE she is—with her aunt, I take it!"

"Oh, yes—"

"Then go across to her, Betty! One of us must!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!"

"Bekas, what ze diggings, she must we wanting to dance. I know I do! Hi, Tubby, what about eet?"

There was never any nonsense about Naomer, in regard to waiting to be asked. Particularly in regard to Master Robert Bloot, Naomer had a happy way of voicing commands which just suited one of his cheerfully obliging disposition.

Tubby, it must be understood, was no uncouth fat boy of a big public school—Grangemoor. He was the youthful counterpart of a genial club man, with all the bonhomie of a good dincr-out.

"You go, Polly dear—"

"No; you, Betty! You're captain!"

"Am I?" Betty retorted gaily. "I don't know that I am!"

All the same, she made her way round the

outskirts of the huge ball-room floor to where Monica Gray had just sat down with her buxom aunt.

A great pity, but Monica was NOT wearing colours that suited her, nor was she wearing her frock as if she knew how to put it on properly.

As for the aunt—Betty could not help thinking of Tess Trelawney's artistic opinion in such matters. But, oh, what a nice, homely aunty this lady was—and that, of course, meant everything!

"Well, Monica, you're going to dance!"

"Oh—I don't know! I'd love to, but—er— aunty darling, this is one of the girls I was speaking to you about!"

"Pleased to meet you, miss, I'm sure!" panted aunty, looking very hot and bothered. "So you want Mi—my niece to be with you all, do you? Well, I'm sure, miss, that's a blessing, for I can't say I feel at home here. Everything so grand and—and—"

"Aunty feels that we never should have come to this hotel!" cried Monica Gray, with the smile that screwed up her face. "It was my fault. We were coming to London, and, oh, I did want to make it a really posh place for once! Isn't it topping, Betty, to see such lovely frocks! And wasn't it delicious dinner, in the restaurant! Aunty darling—"

"I shan't be staying, no, Monica! now I can leave you in good hands, I think I'd rather go up to my room and—and write letters!"

"Right—ho, then, and I'll look in to say good-night, last thing! Now, Betty," laughed Monica Gray, "if you're all determined to see how badly I dance! As for aunty, she'll be far happier upstairs than parked somewhere around here."

"She's a dear!"

"Oh, one of the best, rather! I say, I like the way Judy Cardew dances with her brother!" Monica commented, giving her bespectacled eyes to various Morocco couples that had now taken the floor. "And Madge Minden—the one who plays the piano so nicely, isn't she?—that's her, dancing with the one who paints, isn't it?"

"That's right! And now, you dance with me, won't you, Monica?"

"Oh, you can find somebody better than me. But, all right, since you're so kind! Just a mo. My sash—"

Monica, it seemed, was one of those girls who are always worrying about something or other while they are dancing. Betty, who liked Monica as much as ever, was bound to feel glad when she could turn her over to someone else.

Polly's brother Jack had that dash of cheek which makes a fellow such a helpful partner for a bad dancer; but even he could do no good with Monica, although sheer good nature would not allow him to desert her after only one dance.

"Gosh, she was just about right, Polly," he said, afterwards advancing with his sister. "The girl really can't dance for toffee."

"No, it's a pity, but she's not at her best at an occasion of this sort. I suppose," Polly murmured, "she really hasn't had much of this! Oh, Jack—goodness, do you see?" came delightedly, next instant. "Jack Somerfield is here!"

"He is? So he is!" the other Jack gasped rejoicingly, as he glanced about whilst dancing. "That's good, Polly-wolly."

"But just fancy! I suppose he is in Town on some business or other, and had the evening on his hands. I wonder if his wife is here? That isn't his wife he is dancing with."

Meantime, Monica, to her secret amusement, found herself left to sit beside Jimmy Cherrrol. It was no rudeness on the part of anyone else that had accounted for this; merely the change and chance of the ball-room.

Jimmy had said: "Lot of people here," a minute ago, and she had said: "Yes, aren't there!" Since then he had sheepishly sat on in silence.

Now, however, he struggled to be sociable and fight down his natural shyness, rose, and asked her if she would mind having that one with him.

"You'll find me, I warn you, very different from Pam Willoughby," she jested, standing up very gladly to take the floor, with him. "Just a mo, please. My frock—"

If Jimmy was to be pitied, there was somebody to pity him—Monica herself! He was so awfully nice about dancing with a girl who simply HAD to be different from Pam. She could have kept



"In!" a voice hissed fiercely; and Pam knew in a flash that she had been—caught!

him to herself—easily, when he was so afraid of hurting another's feelings!—but that would not have been fair.

So, presently, she contrived to withdraw to the other side of the ball-room, to sit about as a "wallflower," feeling that both he and the rest of the chums must have had about enough of her.

And then, suddenly, a handsome gentleman stood before her, bowing as he remarked:

"May I have the pleasure? Being as much amongst strangers as you appear to be, perhaps?"

Jack Somerfield!

And, for the life of her, Monica did not know whether he knew her true identity or not.

"Delighted!" she said, jumping up. "Just a mo, though; my sash—"

Having fiddled with the sash again, she was ready to take the floor with him.

The band had started a slow foxtrot. She longed to dance it properly with him, one of the best partners in the room, as he was quite the handsomest; but she did everything instead to justify her rueful remark, half-way through the dance:

"I'm awful!"

"No, you are not," he smiled. "You are just splendid—Pam—"

It came as the gentlest of whispers, audible only to her as his partner, and thrilling her.

Then misgiving seized her.

"But you saw through my disguise?" she whispered.

"No. I could only infer it was you. I've had Betty and others talking to me about you, as a girl they've got acquainted with, so I guessed."

"They've no suspicion?"

"Not the faintest. You're a rogue, Pam—must be, to have been able to get away with it so well. They were asking Jimmy how he liked dancing with you instead of with Pam!"

"Poor Jimmy," she smiled, not forgetting to screw up her face. "But what was that about Halkin Street—that illness?"

"A put-up job."

Monica Gray got him to stand still for a moment, whilst she fiddled with her frock again.

"So sorry," she apologised, and they resumed the foxtrot. His whispers were renewed, only just audible even to her amidst the noises of the ball-room.

"They wanted to spy out the house. Cleverly done, too. She and her attendant were half an hour upstairs. The master of the house was out, you see, and the servants knew no better."

"I suppose if the daughter had been at home—"

"Quite likely."

"Oh," Monica sighed aloud, a moment later. "I never shall be able to do a slow foxtrot. Yet I do love it here—the hotel, everything! And such posh people. I saw such a grand sort of Eastern lady upstairs!"

"Did you?"

"I fancy there is an Ameer of Somewhere-or-other staying here—in a private suite. On my floor, too!"

"Oh, the Ameer of Abdur-Khan," Jack Somerfield responded aloud, quite carelessly. "I heard that he was in London."

"A chambermaid seemed to be sort of scared stiff of him—so ugly!"

Jack Somerfield received this with a laugh.

"But you," he said, looking his youthful partner full in her bespectacled eyes—"you don't feel scared?"

"I? No; why should I?"

"There's no need," he agreed in a whisper. And then, aloud: "So you like the Monopole?"

"Oh, it's just perfect!"

"I think I'll give it a trial myself," he remarked carelessly. "I'm staying at my club at present, as my wife isn't in Town with me this time. They seem awfully full here. Perhaps I ought to see about a room straightaway. All the best people on your floor?"

"That's right," she laughed. "My room, four—nine—one; aunty's is four-ninety."

The band stopped; but people stood about on the floor, clapping for an encore. Jack Somerfield walked the girl who had danced so gawkily to a vacant seat, blandly thanked her, bowed, and went away.

Monica Gray appeared to realise that nobody would care to dance twice with her. She was looking properly forlorn when Jimmy Cherrol came by. She looked down, so as to give him the opportunity to pass, pretending he had not noticed her.

"Er—hallo—"

"Oh, hallo! Is that you again?" She was screwing up her face as she smiled up at him.

"Er—yes," he said lamely. "I suppose you wouldn't care to have this one with me?"

"I'm sure you can't want to dance again with me."

Jimmy crimsoned.

"Well, I—er—don't like to see you—er—"

"Oh, it's quite all right! I told you I couldn't! I'm going up in a minute."

"To bed? Oh, don't go up just yet. I say—er—may I sit down?"

"Of course!"

"Well, it's awfully nice of you. I can't dance myself—"

"Oh, I think you do, beautifully!"

He shook his head.

"No. It's why I never like to ask anybody who dances really well. I mean—I say, that was a bit of a brick, wasn't it? After asking you to dance—"

"Oh, it's quite all right! Nice of you to take pity on me!"

Then Jack Linton skated up, to take Monica off Jimmy's hands. Jack, humming the tune the band was playing, was in striking contrast with shy Jimmy. If anybody, to-night, was enjoying himself, Jack Linton was.

"Lah-dee, lahra, lah-dee, tum, tum!" he continued, having got Monica going again.

"Oh, but just a mo, please, my shoe—"

"Good law," Jack groaned inwardly, "the girl can't even keep her shoes on! Staying to the end?" he sparkled aloud.

"Me? Not much! Aunty would have a fit."

"Some of us—not staying here in the hotel, you know—have to go in a bit. But I'm on until midnight, any old how—lah, dee, ta-rah, dee, um! Come back after they've gone. You're staying here? You ought to—"

"Oh, but I can't dance— Oh!" Monica said, in a different way, for Jack, being in that mood, was suddenly determined to show her how to dance.

Monica's fear was not so much on account of his going all out, as it were, but of her suddenly betraying herself as one who could dance, if she liked! He was so clever, such an excellent partner, it was the very hardest thing for her to appear as bad as ever.

"Anyway," he said gaily, when that dance ended and there was a general sauntering off the floor; "you're not going up until the others go? I say, how about an ice? There they are!"

Received back into the Morocco fold, she was ultimately served with one of those ices which

Naomer, spooning away for all she was worth, shrilly pronounced to be "gorjus."

Then an all too brief interval was followed by a quick-step.

"Come on, last time round!" Jack cried.

"Oh, shame, the cars coming so early to fetch us," moaned Helen Craig, who was one of those who would have to depart after this dance.

She was getting up to take the floor with Jack. "Don't go up before we go, will you, Monica? Arrange about to-morrow!"

"Oh, that's awfully nice of you. Right-ho!" Five minutes later, she was amongst the lively batch of chums, at the front entrance. It seemed as if the lively chatter between those who were going away and those who were sleeping in the hotel, could not cease.

The night was reported to be dry, and so there ensued a general drifting out to the pavement, for a very last word at car doors.

"Come on, Monica!" she was entreated gaily. "See them off outside!"

"But you must put something on, my dear," interposed Mrs. Linton, who had suddenly put in an appearance for the leave-taking. "Here, have this wrap of mine, Monica."

It fell lightly about her shoulders as the kindly words were voiced, and so she was ready to slip out with Betty, Polly, and the rest.

At that instant, a car drew up at the kerb, behind those motors which were there to pick up various twos and threes belonging to the Morcove "chummy."

A woman stepped down to the pavement, but someone who had been riding with her in the car was remaining seated, as if to be taken somewhere else. The woman who had alighted, after slamming the door of the car, was going on to mount the steps of the hotel; but suddenly she turned back, making a sign to the man at the wheel not to drive away for the moment.

Whipping open the door which she had just previously slammed, she spoke in to her recent fellow-passenger. It was something rapidly said, in a foreign-sounding tongue, and the response also was not in English.

Then the woman on the pavement again set off towards the hotel steps. They were a few yards farther on, the Morcove cars having prevented a pulling-up of cars directly in front of the steps. That car which had set her down remained at the kerb, ticking over.

"GOOD-NIGHT, Monica!" "Oh, good-night—Madge, isn't it? I didn't see you!"

"We are a crowd, no mistake——"

"Sweendle, I call eet, having to leave so early! Bekas, what ze diggings, only ten o'clock! But good-night, Monica; sweet repose, all ze bed and half of ze clothes!"

"That's the idea, ha, ha, ha! 'Night Naomer!" "Monica——"

"Hi, Tubby, have you got my chocs! Come on, zen; but which is our car, bekas——"

"Good-night, Monica!" cried another of the departing Morcovians. "Enjoyed it?"

"Oh, fine! Just like after the theatre, isn't it?"

This, from Monica, was in allusion to all the flurry on the pavement, and the laughable keeping together and finding the right car out of so many. Slam, slam, doors were going, whilst engines raced to life.

"Monica, do look at my brother, acting about like that!" Polly chuckled, close to her "new acquaintance."

"I know! He is a lad, your brother," Monica was tittering, when she received a low-voiced, urgent;

"Miss!"

She half-turned, to realise that the man at the wheel of a car was wanting to ask her something—the direction for somewhere else, she supposed. "Pardon?"

"Excuse me, miss," the man rasped, leaning aside in his seat whilst she stepped nearer; "but could you tell me the best way to——"

If the rest was ever said, Monica Gray did not hear it.

A strong hand suddenly gripped her. It belonged to someone who had thrown open the car's door on that side and reached out to make the grab at her.

She found she could not cry out. The surprise was too sudden and horrifying for her to be able to get over it in the single instant when a cry could have saved her.

The powerful arm dragged her to the open doorway of the car and then even lifted her, so that involuntarily her feet touched the running board.



IN REPLY TO YOURS

Your Editor is always delighted to hear from you. His address is: The Editor, THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

"Dodo's Admirer" (Maidstone).—Dodo is immensely popular with all my readers; I get shoals of letters in praise of her amusing escapades. So you, too, dear reader, have been getting new readers for our paper? That's just splendid of you! All good wishes.

"Morcove Reader" (Colchester).—A "first" letter is always particularly welcome, dear reader. I was delighted to know that you have been a reader for so long, and that you like all the present stories. Madge Minden may appear in a Morcove series in the near future. Yes, do please write again. Best wishes.

Bernice (Port Talbot).—Very many thanks for such a nice letter, Bernice. I'm so glad you enjoy all our present stories so much. Dodo is certainly a "scream," isn't she? I'll see what can be done about a competition in the near future. Very best wishes.

Margaret Havering (Bristol).—Yours was a very welcome letter, Peggy. At the present time I am planning a wonderful new programme of stories. Many of your favourite authors will be represented. And don't forget about the Gifts, will you?

"Regular Reader" (Winchester).—Certain of the early adventures of Betty Barton & Co. are re-printed from time to time in THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY, details of which appear in this paper every week. So glad you like all our present stories.

Joan Jeffries (Oxford).—Yes, very shortly THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN is going to present each of its readers with wonderful Gifts, details of which will appear in my Chat in the near future. Also, a splendid new programme of stories is on the way. Very best wishes.

"In!" a voice hissed furiously. Any effort at resistance that she started to make was futile.

Another moment—although it seemed much longer to her—she was inside the car, held down to the same seat which her captor, a woman, occupied.

Then, with the door not yet pulled round, Monica Gray realised that the car was already speeding away.

The woman pulled the door round—slam! "You not spik!" she threatened in a hissing whisper. "Or to-night you float in the river!"

CHAPTER 8.

Going East

MONICA, getting her wits about her instantly, could see another reason for not speaking, altogether apart from that deadly threat.

"Yes, well!" she was saying to herself, whilst she sat painting and decidedly a-tremble beside her captor in the car. "Is this because they know who I really am? Or is it only because they've seen me with Betty and the rest, this evening?"

If the latter—then what a difference it meant! "So the thing is, to keep calm," she counselled herself. "Now don't give yourself away, Pam, then perhaps they don't know, after all, that you ARE Pam—"

The car was speeding through the West-End

streets. How it was cutting along, yet observing all the rules of the traffic.

"I suppose," Pam said to herself, "a smash would be the best thing. But there won't be one. That man can drive."

Out of one street, into another, automatic signals fatefully in favour of a slick crossing; the Arm of the Law, by a strange irony of fate, even waving on this car.

"And that, when you come to think of it," Pam reflected, "is rather funny. London policemen—such nice bobbies!—giving the All-Clear to my kidnappers—"

She looked aside at her companion.

No, this was not the Ameer's sister, nor that native attendant one had seen in the hotel corridor. But she was from the East, sitting perfectly still now, yet with a suggestion of feline readiness to act. It was, Pam realised, the attitude of a cat towards a caught mouse that is yet alive.

On and on! Vaguely Pam was aware of their racing along the Strand, after crossing Trafalgar Square. They came to Fleet Street, and she saw only a few people on the pavements, whilst newspaper offices were athrob with the activities of the night.

Would there, she wondered, be newspaper placards in the morning? "SCHOOLGIRL KIDNAPPED IN LONDON."

The car crossed Ludgate Circus and went up the hill, to whirl past St. Paul's. Going East! And this, Pam reflected, so that her own father might be prevented from—going East.

At last she decided to question her custodian, if only for the sake of showing courage.

"What are you going to do with me?"

The woman did not answer, but kept a side-long, wary watch upon Pam in that cat-and-mouse way.

"You cannot have meant to do this to me," Pam said steadily. "You must have made a mistake."

There was again no response.

The City was soon left behind, and then every glance that Pam sent into the nightbound streets gave her fleeting glimpses of dark business buildings and poor dwellings—as ever-increasing sordidness, culminating in a district of appalling squalor; every house-front wearing an evil look.

Suddenly she heard a steamer's siren, from so close at hand that she knew the car had reached Dockland.

Her next glance out of the window showed her a Chinaman, shuffling past on the ill-lit pavement. Then she saw a couple of lascars.

She tried her custodian again.

"If I am to come to no harm, will you let my aunt know at the hotel? Her name is Mrs. Gray."

The woman remained as mute as ever.

"Have I," Pam then began to think to herself anxiously, "anything on me that will tell them who I really am? No! So that's all right. There is not the slightest thing."

The car turned out of a street of mammoth warehouses into a much narrower street of miserable dwelling houses.

From one lamplit front-room, whose window had some rags of curtains pinned together across it, she thought there came a lot of yelling, as of people quarrelling.

Then, a little farther on, the car stopped at the kerb.

Her journey's end—and what, she was asking herself, was to happen now?

KIDNAPPED!

So Pam has been caught—tricked by the very schemers she had hoped to outwit. But do her captors know that she is really the girl they are after? Have they recognised, in Monica Gray, the girl they seek?

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