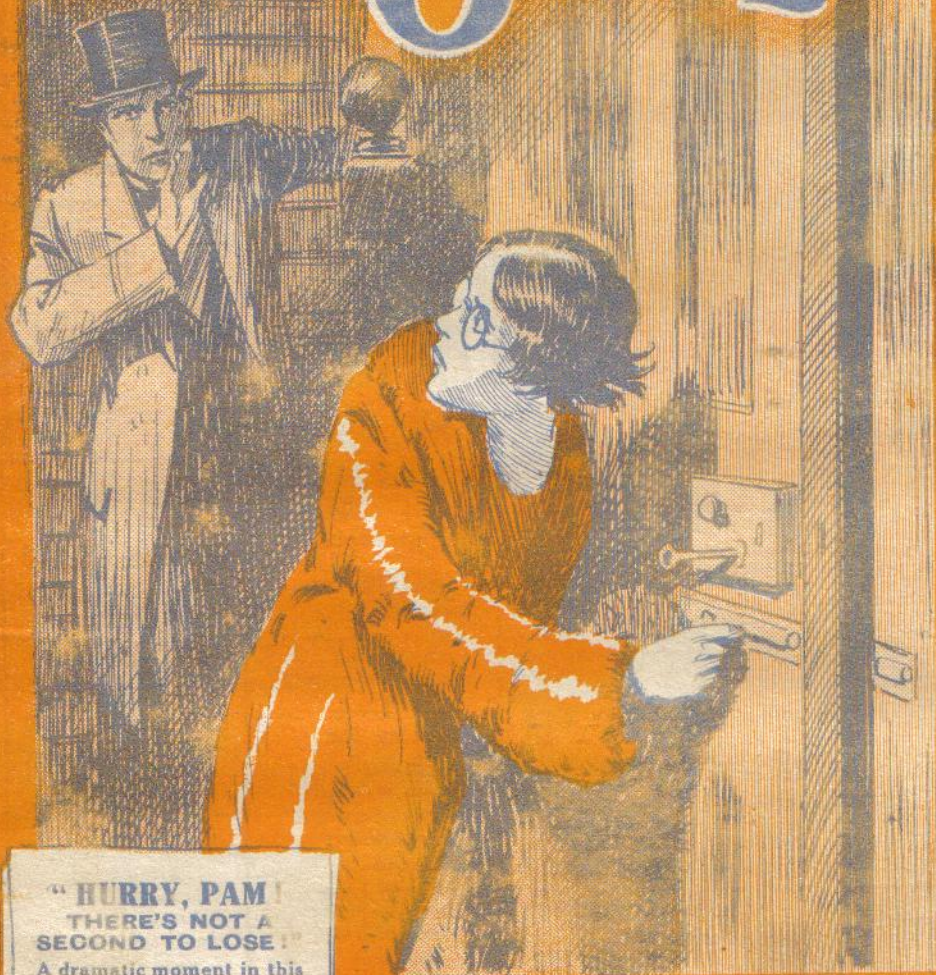


"THE QUICK-CHANGE SCHOOLGIRL"
Exciting Long Complete Morcove Holiday Story Within

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ^{2d}

No. 728, Vol. 28.
Week ending
January 19th, 1923.
EVERY TUESDAY.



**"HURRY, PAM!
THERE'S NOT A
SECOND TO LOSE!"**

A dramatic moment in this
week's complete Morcove
story.

"DODO WREN IS 'WANTED'!" Complete Laughter Tale Inside

FEATURING PAM WILLOUGHBY: Long Complete
Morcove Holiday Story

The Quick-Change Schoolgirl



BY MARJORIE STANTON

PAM WILLOUGHBY one moment—Monica Gray the next! Mingling happily with "Morcove" for a day—then assuming once again the amazing rôle which makes her unknown even to her best friends! Daringly, Pam carries through this dual part, knowing that one false step must mean the failure of her plan!

CHAPTER 1.

The Mystery of Monica Gray

"I SAY, Polly, I can't get any answer from her bed-room!"

"You can't, Betty?"

"No! We thought she must have gone up to bed, but I've knocked and knocked so that I simply must have awakened her, if she were asleep."

"But that's very strange!"

"It is, Polly. I don't like it. If she isn't in her bed-room, then where is she?"

These were whispers of anxiety passing between Betty Barton and Polly Linton—two Morcove girls who were staying at a famous London hotel for the last week or so of the winter holidays.

Their concern was not for any schoolmate of theirs belonging to the party of which they themselves were members, under the care of Mr. and Mrs. Linton.

It was a new-made acquaintance of theirs—a girl of the name of Monica Gray—about whom they were exchanging such uneasy murmurs,

alone together in their own bed-room at the Monopole Hotel.

Betty had just returned to Polly, in the bed-room, after a brief absence. Both girls were fully dressed, having come upstairs only a few minutes since.

"Um! Don't know what to say, I'm sure!" grimaced Polly Linton. "Feel I'd like to know definitely, before going to bed."

"Oh, rather," Betty gravely agreed. "I mean to say! Would it be like her to go off without saying 'good-night,' after spending the evening with us?"

"Besides, you say she isn't in her room!"

"She might be having a bath; but every room on that floor has a private bath-room."

Polly Linton nodded.

"Yes, she mentioned that hers was a fine room, with a private bath. Oh, look here, Betty, let's go along together—"

"I think we should, Polly. And if we don't get any answer this time—better inquire at her aunt's room, next door."

"That's it."

Polly's habitual impetuosity showed itself in the rapidity with which she whipped open this bedroom door and whisked into the corridor.

Betty Barton followed, and together they hurried round into a yet broader corridor, serving some of the best rooms on this fourth floor of the hotel.

The thick carpeting hushed their footfalls, and altogether there was that deep silence, up here, which people staying at hotels like to obtain at bed-time.

Not that the Monopole was, as it were, already wrapped in slumber. As Betty and Polly knew, downstairs the life and gaiety of the place was still going on.

"Here we are," Betty commented, stopping in front of a certain closed door. "So we'll try again."

Rap, rap—rap! she knuckled the door.

There was no response from within.

"Then it's a fact," Polly promptly decided; "she isn't there. What I can't make out is this. Betty; we haven't seen her since she went with us out to the pavement, half an hour ago, to see Madge and the rest go off in the cars that had come to pick them—Hallo!" was the sudden change to utter amazement. "Good—gracious, Betty!"

"Yes!"

And Betty became as goggle-eyed as her chum, suddenly recognising the person who had emerged from a guest-chamber adjoining Monica Gray's.

If it had been Monica Gray's aunt, coming out of the room which that lady occupied, there would have been no surprise for the two girls. But Mrs. Gray's room was the adjoining room on the right, and this person—a gentleman—had come out of the adjoining room on the left. And they knew him—instantly.

"Mr.—Somerfield!" they both gasped.

"Hallo, you two!" Mr. Jack Somerfield greeted them genially. "Not gone to bed yet! What would my sister say to this?"

It was his jesting allusion to that Miss Somerfield who was the girls' adored headmistress at Morcove School.

"Mr. Somerfield!" Betty repeated, changing from blank amazement to relief at seeing him. "You're in the very next room to Monica Gray! Just jancy!"

"On this side, yes," he nodded blandly. "Why?"

"Oh—well—"

"We didn't even know you were staying in this hotel!" Polly exclaimed softly.

"I only took over this room this evening," he airily explained. "I'd meant to stay at my club, but changed my mind. Are you two going in there to say good-night to Monica?"

"Why, that's just it!" Betty said, still subduing her voice out of regard for this being a bed-room corridor. "We don't believe she is in her room, although she should be!"

"Eh?"

"And it seems so strange!" Polly added. "You know the girl we mean, Mr. Somerfield?"

"Oh, yes. I danced with her this evening. When did you see her last?" he questioned briskly.

"She left the ball-room with us and the boys," Betty answered, "when those who are not staying at the hotel had to go."

"That would be—"

"Oh, just over half an hour ago, Mr. Somerfield. We all flocked out to the pavement, and she was with us, saying good-night to one and another. Then, when all our chums had gone who had had to go—we missed her."

"And you've not seen her since?" he jerked. "No," Betty responded gravely. "We thought she must have run back indoors to go straight up to her room. I thought I'd slip along to her room, just to say good-night—and this is the result. She's not in her room!"

"Her aunt sleeps next door—there," Polly supplemented, with a directional gesture.

Mr. Jack Somerfield nodded that he was aware of that. He was not looking greatly concerned; but, then, they knew him to be an iron-nerved man—ex-Air Service, and much travelled—who never let anything agitate him.

"We ought to let her aunt know?" Betty now suggested. "I expect she is in bed and fast asleep, right enough. From what we've seen of her, she would be! But she's a dear, all the same."

"Look here, you two; you've got your heads screwed on the right way, I know," Jack Somerfield said steadily. "Let her aunt know, but don't let her get alarmed. Tell her to wait, and it'll be all right. Tell her that Monica will be back presently."

"But—goodness!" gasped Polly. "How on earth can you be sure she will be back presently, Mr. Somerfield!"

"Oh—you can give her aunt my word for it, anyhow!"

And with nothing more explanatory than that, he turned away, pulling shut his bed-room door and then hurrying off in the direction of the lift.

He was still in evening dress, but whether he was only going downstairs, or was going to get into hat and overcoat, to go out of doors, Betty and Polly were left to wonder.

Astoundedly they watched his receding figure—tall, well-knit, strongly suggestive of a fine athleticism—until it passed from sight.

Then they turned to each other in round-eyed astonishment.

"Well!" Polly gasped. "What do you think of that, Betty?"

"Oh, never mind about him!" Betty was forced to exclaim helplessly. "Now to knock up Monica's aunt!"

MR. JACK SOMERFIELD was at the ground-floor cloak-room in less than a minute, getting into an overcoat. He clapped on a hat and, not to waste a moment, did the winding of a silk scarf as he hurried to the hotel's front entrance. "Taxi!"

The liveried doorman realised that here was a guest who wanted a taxi—at once! A dab at a button rang a bell at the street-rank, and by the time Jack Somerfield was at the kerb, a taxi was gliding to pick him up.

He gave the wanted destination as he whipped open the door to jump in.

"And a pound, my man, if you do it in half an hour!"

"Right, sir!"

Slam! Rurrr-r-r!

And they were off, getting into a tearing speed along the nightbound streets.

CHAPTER 2.

Question and Answer

"**N**OW, let the girl—whoever she is—be brought in!"

No such words as these were actually uttered; but they were the English equivalent of a sudden command, closing a jabber of talk that had gone on for some little time in this small, bare, ill-lit room.

It was a room, no doubt, that had its counter-

part in many another mean dwelling-house along the street. For this was one of the very poorest parts of east London, down by the river.

At the deal table, on which a candle burned, had been sitting three people of Oriental appearance. One was a man, a brown factory-made overcoat contrasting oddly with his native turban.

The two others were women, and they, to some extent were wearing British garb, preserving only that native raiment which pride of race decreed.

One of the women got up from her cheap Windsor chair and went from the murky room with a gliding step. No conversation was resumed between the other man and the woman when they were left waiting together, still seated.

It was like a midnight silence during the brief wait—a brooding hush, only disturbed by the faint and tremulous note of a ship's siren, somewhere on the misty river.

Then the woman who had gone from the room came back, ushering in—a young girl.

The candle-light shone feebly upon her after she had been shown where to stand. She was obviously a British-born girl, still of school age, and just as obviously her clothes were good.

But there was one thing rather strange about what she wore. Over an evening frock suitable for a girl of her age—although it was not a particularly attractive frock—she was wearing a kind of cloak more becoming to a full-grown woman.

The man sitting at the table looked at her with dark eyes that had a dull gleam in them. Possibly he could not speak English, for he said something to his companion at the table in a purring language, like Hindustani.

That woman, sitting round to face the girl who had been brought in, could speak English.

"Your name, girl?"

"Monica Gray."

"You go to a school—Morcove?"

"Morcove; where is that?"

"Mor-cove," the Eastern woman repeated, pronouncing the syllables with slow emphasis. "That is a big school for the Engleesh girl."

Monica Gray shook her head.

"You seem to know more about it than I do!"

Such a cheeky answer drew displeased murmurs from all three of her captors.

"Are you trying to make us believe you are not afraid?" she was asked by her previous questioner.

"I don't believe in being afraid. Besides, why should I be? What harm have I ever done any of you, that you should mean harm to me? I told this woman in the car that brought me here"—indicating the one who stood like a wardress beside her—"there must be some mistake!"

"Not so," dissented the woman at the table, shaking her small, dark head. "You try to tell me lie! It is known to us, you are one of the English girl who stay at that hotel, but soon you go back to that school."

"I! Oh, there you go again—quite mistaken!"

"How then!" frowned the questioner. "You are with many English girl, this night, in the ball-room of that hotel?"

"Yes, that's right—"

"So! And those English girl go to Morcove when it is schooldays?"

"But that isn't to say that I go!"

Monica's questioner flashed an angry look,

"They are your friends?"

"They would tell you that I am only a new acquaintance, and that they've never seen me before to-day! Your mistake seems to be that you imagine I am staying at the hotel, as one of

their party, I'm not! I am staying with my aunt, Mrs. Gray—she is a widow, who—"

"Not so fast," the questioner struck in, looking very sullen. "We will say, then, that you have become the friend of those other English girl. They spik a lot to you?"

"They've been very nice to me—they saw I had no one of my own age to be with—"

"So! Then they have talked of the Morcove School, where they go?"

"Oh, I think they did mention—"

"So! Did they spik of a girl who is at that school, who is their friend—where she is?"

"Pardon?"

"Ah, be careful! You must attend—"



"But how can you be certain that Monica will soon be back?" Polly asked, amazed. "She seems to have vanished completely." Jack Somerfield nodded. "Give her aunt my word that Monica will be back—soon!" he said meaningly.

"I am attending! But I don't understand what you mean. Some other girl—a friend of theirs—where she is?"

"This night, yea!" the woman nodded fiercely. "Of where she is to-morrow—the next day—any time! I shall tell you her name, then perhaps you will understand me better. It is an English girl, Pam-e-la Willough-by."

"Oh, Pam Willoughby—yes, I did hear her mentioned."

"She is in London?"

"It is no use asking me!"

Again the girl's calm voice, her half-amused look, caused the mysterious three to exchange glances. The questioner seemed, for the moment,

to be reduced to silence, like a cross-examiner handling a hostile witness in Court.

Then there ensued a conversation in that language which gave such a purring note to all three voices. Monica Gray inferred that the trio felt themselves to be in a difficulty about her; and she could only hope that she was not looking as relieved as she was feeling.

To be on the safe side, she kept a worried frown upon her forehead—a frown that caused a V between her bespectacled eyes.

At last the woman questioner resumed sullenly: "Is the Engleesh girl, Pam-e-la Will'by, to go back to Mor-cove?"

"What IS the use of asking me! All I heard the girls at the hotel say about Pamela Willoughby was that she had not turned up to be with them, as she had been expected to do."

"So? And they think—"

"Oh, as if I know what they think!"

"I shall ask you this," the woman at the table said darkly, implying that she was going to put her meaning in another form. "She do not come to the hotel. So, she send the message why? She say, I meet you to-morrow, or next day, or next evening?"

"I think I understand you," Monica Gray responded calmly. "But I still can't help you! Not that I think I ought to help you, if I could. I should like to know why you have as good as kidnapped me, to try and get information out of me like this! And there is aunty all this time, at the hotel—she'll be in a fearful state about me; of course, she will!" was added, a little tearfully.

Perhaps Monica Gray was being granted time to get over her sudden unstrung state, for no further questions were put for a minute or so. She was, indeed, speaking again before anyone else had resumed speech.

"Please let me go away from here! Please take me back—or, at least, set me down somewhere, so that I can find my way back!"

"And then," the woman at the table rejoined, keeping her dark and flashing eyes upon the girl, "will you spik about all this?"

"No! I promise—oh, I gladly promise, if that's the condition you want from me! I'll not tell those girls; I won't even tell aunty! I—I will lead them to think that I just wandered away from the hotel—sort of fascinated by London at night. I could be back there in an hour or so—couldn't I?"

The woman, when she shook her head, was evidently answering not that question but her own uneasy thoughts.

"You shall not get back now," she muttered slowly. "You stay here."

"What!"—with an assumed look of increasing fright.

That monosyllable ended all that the questioner had to say to Monica Gray—for the present, at any rate.

Next moment, the woman who had stood by Monica during the examination—ready to frustrate any desperate outcry or a movement resulting from a distraught state—received a sign that must have meant:

"Take her back!"

Instantly Monica was gripped by the arm, to be led away.

The wretched room opened on to a cramped upper landing, just off a steep and narrow flight of stairs. Monica could not see the stairs, but she knew they were there, having been brought up them when she was hustled into the house. Landing and stairs were lighted only by a dim lamp.

The room to which she was now returned by her silent custodian was unlighted. It was a garret-like place, with little more than a chair and table for furniture.

Once again she was left to herself, with the door locked upon her.

During her previous spell of imprisonment in the room she had been quick to grope around, to try and obtain some idea of her surroundings. So she had discovered that there was an old-fashioned grate—not worth a second thought, as a possible means of escape—and one window, across which boards had been nailed.

Common sense told her that she would not have been left to herself again, like this, if her captors were not certain that she could do no good for herself by trying to escape.

The boarded-up window could not be tackled without the making of some noise at least, and in a house otherwise so grimly silent they could rely upon hearing tell-tale sounds. For all she knew, one of the three might be on guard outside the room.

What, then, was to be the end of this night for her? What the finish to the desperate plight she was in?

At the hotel absolutely nothing would be known as to what had happened to her. That, it seemed to her, was a tragic certainty.

At one moment she had been with a party of girls on the pavement outside the hotel, saying good-night to some who were about to be whirled away in cars sent to fetch them; and in the next moment she herself had been—spirited away!

But at least she had kept her end up during that verbal examination in the other room just now. They had not obtained that information the need for which, as she realised, was the motive for the kidnapping.

On the other hand, they had not found out *who she really was!*

CHAPTER 3.

Who Comes?

IN the dark, this girl who had given her name as Monica Gray began to smile to herself.

"Yes, well!" she was thinking. "It looks as if they feel they have made a mistake in collaring me. And at that rate, is it likely that they will do anything worse than keep me here, until it is safe for them to let me go? I am no use to them—none! I've convinced them of that—at least, I hope so!"

To and fro she paced, silently, for such a movement helped her to resist the oppressive horror of being shut away like this—in the dark, in one of Dockland's myriad mean houses. Thing to do—keep calm, steady!

"It answered the purpose just now. They didn't frighten me; they didn't find me out, after all!"

And what that meant—the difference between their simply regarding her as Monica Gray, a girl with whom they should never have troubled themselves, and the what-might-have-been. Their discovery that she was actually the girl about whom they were in desperate need of information; Pam Willoughby herself!

If—if they had found out that!

"But they didn't; no, they did not," she said to herself, and drew a long breath of fervent relief. "And that is everything."

A girl of a different disposition would scarcely have been inclined to say that. For the "everything" did not include certainty of release unharmed. Monica, however, was not one to think of her own safety as being of first importance;

otherwise, she would never have become—Monica!

For an important reason had inspired the secret change of identity.

Pam Willoughby, in a certain sense, was no more! She had ceased to exist less than twelve hours ago, and it was as a totally different girl that she had turned up at the Monopole Hotel, under the care of a "widowed aunt." And all this so that the plans of a gang of plotters from India might be frustrated.

Pam's father was going to India to advise a native ruler on affairs connected with the countrymen of the gang. The plotters wanted to get hold of Pam and use her to stop Mr. Willoughby going, and also to extract certain vital information from her.

Knowing that the plan involved the kidnapping of herself, as Pam Willoughby, it had been a sufficiently appalling moment for her when she realised that she had actually been kidnapped as Monica Gray!

From that moment, of course, her chief dread had been lest they should find out that, instead of being a girl from whom only useful information could be extracted, she was the very girl about whom the information was wanted.

Hence her tremendous relief that so far, at any rate, they were completely duped.

"It really is splendid," she reflected with increasing delight. "For if my falling into their hands to-night hasn't enabled them to find me out, then what better chance will they ever have? I can go on being Monica Gray,—once I get away from here—and that means—"

As abruptly as that her rejoicing thoughts were checked.

Someone coming in!

It was not that she had heard voices, or even a footfall on the landing; but somehow—instinctively—she felt sure that someone was silently turning back the key.

Perhaps there had been a sound, so faint and vague she could not assign it to any exact cause. Helpless prisoner as she was, here in this dark room, all her senses were bound to be in an acute state.

So, in the darkness, she stood turned towards the door, her heart beating fast, her eyes acquiring that power which comes in times of extreme anxiety or peril, to be able to see in the dark.

She was thinking, it was probably that woman again who had acted as her custodian just now. There was to be some more questioning! That woman, standing sentinel-like outside the room ever since, was to lead her back once more into the presence of the other woman and the man. And then—

The door slowly opened.

Unless it was a cruel trick of her agitated mind, she was hearing her own rightful name whispered, ever so faintly.

"Pam!"

Then her peering eyes assured her that neither the one woman nor the other was entering. It was a man—not the man of the other room; no dark-skinned, turbaned man, but one whose face and hands were white in the darkness.

He came no farther than a step beyond the threshold of the room. Then one of those white hands of his beckoned. It was the left hand. In his right, as she now made out, he held a dark object, like a revolver of the most modern pattern—small and with no bright parts.

Then she knew, and her brain reeled. A rescuer! Jack Somerfield—here in the house ready to take her away.

He beckoned again, then tiptoed back to the landing.

When, with a tremendous effort at composure, she tiptoed out to him, he did not turn his eyes upon her. He was watching the closed door of that other room where the verbal examination had been conducted.

In that room a purr of talk between the two women and the man was going on.

The left hand of Jack Somerfield signed to her to creep down the stairs.

She obeyed. Keeping close to the wall—for presence of mind told her that stairboards creaked least when you trod close by the wall—she stole down that steep, dark staircase.

Then, in a wretched little front passage, she found the street door, and groped for the lock.

How her heart was beating now, as she had to turn back a key, with the risk of the bolt rasping in the hasp!

Before she had succeeded, he was with her there in the ground-floor passage.

"Hurry, now!" he breathed, "or it may be too late!"

He left her, then, to do all that remained to be done, to get the door open. She knew that he was facing the other way—looking up the stairs, revolver in hand.

Did it take her only another moment to get the street door open? To her, it seemed more like a minute of stealthy activity. But at last—at last she was outside, and even the murky air of the narrow East-End street seemed, oh, how good to breathe, after the imprisonment.

Then he was with her on the pavement.

"Not so bad," he remarked, hurrying on with her to a lamp-lit corner. "But the worst still to come, I'm afraid."

"Worse than that?"

"Yes," he said; but she was not going to believe it. He was smiling!

"The one drawback to your being Monica Gray, young lady," he said; "you have to have an aunt. What that aunt of yours is going to say—"

"I'm sure I don't know," Monica laughed. "I don't even know what I am going to say myself!" And she smiled along with him.

CHAPTER 4.

Morcove is Amazed

TWO streets away from the house, Jack Somerfield pocketed his revolver and handled his cigarette-case instead.

"I've a taxi waiting round in the next street, young lady."

"That's good. But how on earth, Mr. Somerfield, did you get to me?"

"Oh, much the same route that you came, no doubt."

"I mean, how did you get into the house!"

"Oh, that? I sort of know the house. A thing about it I like, the house next door is empty, and not an unsmashed window in it. I had to be a bit careful, climbing over some backyard fencing dividing the two backyards. It was fencing liable to crash under my weight. Otherwise, nothing to complain about. And how," he asked, "does Monica Gray feel after her little—escapade?"

"That's a good word, Mr. Somerfield. I like 'escapade.' That's what it must be, when we get to the hotel!"

"I am afraid it must be," he nodded. "But here's the taxi. If you want something to do you a bit of good, young lady, take a look at my taximan. The authentic Old Bill of the trenches."

"He would have come with you to the house, Mr. Somerfield, I'm sure."

"At a word from me, no doubt. So would all the police in London, if required. So, in fact, would Jack Linton, or Betty and Polly even. But it was up to me to do without help. We don't want this to be known—least of all to girls who may possibly be chums of yours at Morecove ere long!"

"I know," Pam nodded, and then, having reached the car with her rescuer, she conferred a bland "Good-evening!" upon Old Bill, who sat huddled up and berugged, smoking a short-stemmed pipe, the bowl hardly clearing his walrus moustache.

"E'ning, miss!" he said, rousing to life.

"The Monopole Hotel, my man?"

"Right, sir! Still in a 'urry?"

"The young lady should be in bed by now."

"I should say so myself, sir."

Jack got in after Monica, and the fitful glow from his cigarette revealed his face to her as being charged with a look of satisfaction.

"How, Mr. Somerfield, did you know for certain I had been taken to that house? And why have you been there before?"

"Now, young lady, don't you ask questions," he blandly rebuked her. "If you were Pam Willoughby, you would possibly be aware that at times I do a little secret service work for parties I never on any account name. On the whole, I find it good fun."

"It must be jolly, to—"

"Those people would have given something to be able to kidnap Pam Willoughby as neatly as they kidnaped Monica Gray this evening."

"Oh, I know! They had me in, to question me—all about a girl named Pam-e-la Will'by. But how," Monica rippled, "could I possibly tell them anything!"

"Of course you couldn't. They pounced, with the idea that one girl in the Morecove bunch at the hotel would be as good as another; but they just happened to pounce upon—"

"Monica Gray! It is rather funny," she gurgled. "And really splendid, too, when you think of it, Mr. Somerfield. I mean, for daddy—"

"Now, young lady; you mean, for Pam's daddy!"

"Sorry. But we're in this taxi, anyhow."

"That doesn't matter!"

"No; and I must be more careful, of course! Anyhow, Mr. Somerfield, it means that they'll never trouble with me again! If I should be at Morecove School next term—"

"And I think you will be," he agreed genially. "As my sister happens to be the headmistress, you must not be surprised at my knowing; she expects a new girl next week—Monica Gray!"

"It will be jolly," Pam sparkled. "Perhaps I shall have the very study that Pam Willoughby had last term! Mr. Somerfield, are you ever down that way?"

"Morecove way? It is curious," he responded, lighting a fresh cigarette from the stump of the other, "you should ask that. I may be staying at Swanlake—that's the home of the Willoughby family, you know!—during Mr. Willoughby's absence from this country. He has to go out to India."

"I'm so glad," Monica smiled. "Swanlake is not far from Morecove, is it? Oh, and you will come to the school sometimes, being Miss Somerfield's brother! I shall see you often!"

"But I do hope," he mock-gravely rejoined, "you will not indulge in—in escapades—down there, like this one to-night. A girl of your age, Monica Gray, shouldn't take it into her head to go out alone to see London By Night!"

"I suppose that's what I did do," she sighed. "Silly of me—as I shall have to tell aunty! But about Morecove; it's no use anybody expecting me to be a well-behaved girl! Monica Gray can't be like Pam Willoughby!"

"You won't be expected to be, anything but," he responded. "All I say is, don't run risks—"

So they kept it up, this playful skirting round a subject of such tremendous import as it was. To Monica, it was all good practice in the art of masquerading, and she meant it when she said, at the end of the run back to the hotel:

"I've quite enjoyed it!"

It was now late enough for even the ground floor of the great hotel—the lounges, the smoke-rooms, and the ball-room—to have lost most of the evening's vivacious crowds. He and she went straight to the lift, to go up to the fourth floor.

"What I expect," he said, during the ascent, "we shall find your esteemed aunt in her room, with Mrs. Linton and one or two of those girls for company. I hope they all forgive you, young lady, for treating them to this scare!"

"I hope they do," said Pam. "But you are going to put in a word for me?"

"I'll just let myself be seen, to say good-night."

The lift gate clashed open, and five seconds later—going down the corridor that served their respective rooms—they beheld Betty and Polly, standing about in talk.

"GOSH, Betty! Why, look—"

"Yes! There they are!"

"Both of them!"

And the two Morecovians did a rush along the carpeted corridor, to meet Monica Gray and her escort.

"Monica!" they gasped at her. "Oh, where HAVE you been?"

Very nearly Monica Gray returned a cool: "Yes, well!" It was one of those moments when Pam Willoughby would certainly have used that famous phrase of hers.

"Your aunt's terribly worried about you! Mrs. Linton is with her," Betty said. "We have only a moment since come away from your aunt's room. We were told we simply mustn't stay up any longer."

"I'll go in," Monica Gray nodded. "Sorry for any anxiety I have caused—"

"Whatever happened to you, Monica?" Polly asked. "We couldn't think where you were."

"This young lady," Mr. Somerfield interposed affably, "has been having a look at the newspaper offices."

"Oh!" said Betty and Polly.

Monica nodded and smiled. She thought it pretty neat of Mr. Somerfield to advance that simple explanation.

The merit of it was, that it involved no departure from the truth. For she had, in fact, been getting a look at newspaper offices to-night. She had seen them—from the windows of the kidnapers' car—on the race to the East End, via Fleet Street. She had also seen the fascinating buildings on the way back, in that taxi.

"Yes," she said. "The work goes on at night, you know."

"Lucky I could guess where she was," Mr. Somerfield again interposed, as blandly as before. "I think I told you, I danced one dance this evening with Monica. And we were talking—"

He let it go at that, leaving Betty and Polly to infer that Monica had expressed a longing to see Fleet Street by night.

"Was it very exciting?" Betty asked.

"Frightfully," smiled Monica. "Then Mr. Somerfield turned up, and told me to come away."

So good-night, girls, and now I must go in and see aunty. Oh, and I must let Mrs. Linton have back this wrap that she lent me, before I went off."

"Good-night, Betty—Polly," said Jack Somersfield. "You girls will have to sleep on in the morning."

"That is, if we get to sleep at all, after such a scare," was Betty's half-laughing remark to Polly, as they hastened away to their own room. "Just fancy!"

"Rather a silly thing to do," Polly said grimly. Then she grinned. "Still, Betty! I rather like a girl who can do such things."

"I'm not sure that I do," Betty grimaced. "Causing people anxiety like that. If that aunt of hers hadn't had your mother to keep her company during the waiting—"

"Oh, in that case, I suppose, every police station in London would have been rung up! And nothing to be really anxious about, after all," Polly chuckled.

Nothing? That was all she and Betty knew!

In the bed-room, with the door locked for the night, they still had to discuss Monica and her "escapead" whilst preparing for bed.

"You see, Polly, she hadn't said a word to us about going off like that! She simply took it into her head to go off!"

"Wearing mother's evening wrap, too! Really, she must be a strange girl! Whatever did they think of her at the newspaper offices! Imagine," said Polly, "in the middle of going to press with a morning newspaper a girl turning up in evening dress, and wearing a lady's wrap, to ask to see the printing machines, and all that!"

"And imagine, Polly darling, having a girl like that at Morcove? Some handful!"

"Still, as I say—I like her for it! And I only wish she could be at our school, Betty! What it all means, I expect, she has a sort of hankering for journalism."

"Then we'd put her on to editing the Morcove Mag!"

"That awful rag—don't remind me of it," sighed Polly, who had a great deal to do with the Form's own magazine during term-time. "Hark, there goes midnight."

"Which means, another day of the hols gone, Polly; Oh, dear! And yet—to be back at Morcove—"

"Next week!"

"Yes! Oh, there are worse places than Morcove, Polly."

"There are, decidedly," agreed the madeap. "But the Monopole Hotel is not one of them. This lovely comfy bed!"

And Polly, making her dive into it, was asleep



"You shall not go back now!" the woman muttered. "You stay here!" In assumed fright, Pam voiced: "What?" At heart she was wondering: Had they pierced her disguise?

before any of Mighty London's bells had again ding-dong'd.

CHAPTER 5. Called Back

MONICA GRAY'S bed, just as "comfy," kept her sleeping soundly until well past eight next morning.

Then, before getting her bath, she slipped round in dressing-gown and slippers to aunty's room, next door.

From her brief talk with that dear soul, Monica divined that there were no serious after effects of last night's scare. All the same, it became Monica's decision that aunty, this morning, must breakfast in bed.

"But, my dear, I couldn't! Me—I've never done such a thing in my life—"

"Sh! Aunty, when will you give up talking as if you were—well, not entitled to a bit of ease. You might," said Monica, "be somebody's housekeeper, the way you so often talk. I can imagine Pam Willoughby's people having somebody just like you, for their housekeeper in Halkin Street. You are such a dear, simple soul," said Monica, kissing aunty.

"Ah!" sighed aunty. "It's all very well! But if this is to go on—"

"Oh, but it won't, aunty. You'll soon be rid of me. Next week I shall be at school again!"

Meantime, Monica returned to her own room, to ring for the chambermaid.

"Will you have breakfast taken into my aunt, please, next door—"

"Yes, miss. And for yourself as well, miss?"

"I think I will!"

So, when Monica came out of her private bathroom she found that a well-laden tray had been brought in and placed upon the bed-room table.

Good idea! Because this was going to obviate an early morning encounter with Betty, and Polly, and Polly's brother Jack, to say nothing of Polly and Jack's parents.

Then there were all those others, housed in different batches in different parts of the West End for the rest of the "hols."

Monica was quite sure that Judy and Dave Cardew, and Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney—in fact, all who had been at the hotel overnight—would be here again by half-past nine at latest. It was, so to speak, the rendezvous for Morcove and Co., this fine London hotel.

But they could be relied upon not to hang about. London was too interesting, and holiday-time too precious, for that.

Suddenly the bed-room telephone gave its shrill ring, ring, ring!

Pam covered her half-finished plate of sausage and bacon with an entree-dish cover and got up to answer the 'phone.

"Hallo, hallo?"

"Is that Monica Gray?" asked a deep, masculine voice.

"Speaking!"

"This is Mr. Willoughby—"

"Oh, yes," she calmly answered her own father. "I understand that something happened to you last night that appears to concern my daughter? I wonder if you could give me a call, here at Halkin Street?"

"I will if you wish it, certainly!"

"Then can you come round this morning? I shall be here. Perhaps you had better get the gentleman who came to your help last night to bring you round in a taxi. Then you will be safe."

"Right-ho!"

"He knows the number in Halkin Street. In fact, he is a friend of mine."

"Oh, I see!"

"Right! 'Bye for the present!"

And the call ended.

Monica's smile, as she returned to her breakfast, was bent with an expression of puzzlement. She could not understand her father wanting her to turn up at home! But it must be all right.

"Oh, and what fun it will be," she said to herself, "calling at my own home—as Monica Gray. This," she decided elatedly, "looks like being another exciting day!"

Nor was that lively expectation to be falsified.

Half an hour later she was in a taxi with Mr. Jack Somerfield, driving to Halkin Street. By a curious coincidence—for what else could have caused it?—she had found him idling about when she got downstairs at the hotel.

But Betty and the rest of Morcove and Co. she had not seen. Evidently they had been off out directly they were up from breakfast.

"A shame, Mr. Somerfield, that I could not bring aunty," Monica sparkled, in the cab. "I hope she won't be kidnapped whilst I'm away!"

He grinned.

"That aunt of yours would be rather a big order for anything in the vanishing lady line."

"Not a word against aunty! She's a dear. The only thing, she would be far happier run-

ning somebody's house, as a housekeeper. I always think of her as simply cut out for the job of housekeeper at a place—like this!" as the taxi drew up opposite the front door of the Willoughby residence.

Bremlow, that faithful retainer, admitted them, and Monica sensed a respectful longing on his part to ask after her aunt. As aunty was no other than Bremlow's own wife, this was not surprising. But he played up to the situation extremely well, treating Monica as a complete stranger, and announcing her along with Mr. Somerfield as:

"The young lady to see you, sir!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Willoughby, casting aside a newspaper, in the library, to advance and greet her.

"Monica Gray?"

"That's right, Mr. Willoughby!"

The farce was carried no further than that. Bremlow's retirement, behind a closed door, rendered conditions absolutely safe for father and daughter to exchange kisses.

"But, daddy, I am surprised! I thought I was not to come near Halkin Street!"

"After to-day, Pam, you will not see either home or me for a good while. But Mr. Somerfield, here, rang me up quite early this morning, about last night, and I at once decided you must be Pam again, in Pam's own home in London, for this one day."

"Anything you like, dad, so long as it helps!"

"Various reasons, my dear," he continued, with a fond look. "What happened last night tells me that those people had better be put on a false trail. Otherwise, their attempts to find clues as to your whereabouts may cause—inconvenience, we will say—to friends of ours."

"Morcove, for instance?"

"That is so, my dear. Again, we have to do something, it seems, to end Morcove's wonderment as to why they saw nothing of you yesterday."

"I think something on those lines should be done," Jack Somerfield put in quietly. "Betty and others, when I happened upon them in the hotel, first thing this morning, were still thinking it rather strange."

"Here, then, is the plan of campaign for to-day, Pam. I am sure, after yesterday, you can carry it out all right. By the way, my dear, the fact that those people even had you in their power for a little while, last night, and did not pierce the disguise—it seems to me very, very reassuring."

"Daddy, I am so glad! That's how I have been feeling about it. And it means that you will be able to go out to India, without any fear as to what may happen to me?"

He nodded gravely.

"Yes, Pam. My passage, in fact, is booked, and I leave to-night. This is our last day together, Pam—"

"Then do let's make it a good one! But what would you like me to do, dad?"

"Just be about the place all day, as much of a Pam as Pam can be," he smiled. "And what about your asking Betty and the rest to come to tea with you?"

"Oh, throw a party?"

"That's it! Have them all to Halkin Street—giving them the invitation over the 'phone, presently. It will be a sort of a farewell party, Pam—as they won't see anything more of you in Town—"

"Nor at Morcove, when term begins? Oh, I get you, daddy! I am going right away—"

"By car, this evening, with me—up North! All that you must tell them, my dear, will be explained to you presently by me. Meanwhile—"

Mr. Willoughby walked to the window, which looked on to the street.

"Yes, my car is outside, waiting. I have a short drive to do, so perhaps I can give you a lift, Monica Gray? And you—-to Jack Somerfield—can I drop you anywhere?"

"No, thanks, sir; I'm walking," grinned he.

The talk did not end there; but ten minutes later Pam—as Monica Gray—went out to the Roysler with her father. In view of what had been said, she was not at all surprised to find a small travelling bag in the car.

Jeffreys, the chauffeur, handed over to Mr. Willoughby, saluted, and went away. Mr. Somerfield, on the pavement, had a last word with Mr. Willoughby, as the latter settled himself at the steering-wheel, and then spoke in to the girl who had the car's luxurious interior to herself.

"Morning, Miss Gray!"

"Oh, good-morning, Mr. Somerfield, and thanks ever so!"

Then the car glided away along Halkin Street. It had only gone a few yards when Monica Gray, appearing to look out of the window in a mere mildly interested manner, noticed a dark-skinned man, in a brown overcoat and wearing a brown turban, looking about as he paced the pavement, as if waiting for somebody to turn up. The same man who was at that house in the East End last night!"

She was positive, and afterwards she felt entitled to smile. Watching Halkin Street again to-day! But unless she was mightily mistaken, dad wanted it to be like that.

The car did not set her down at the Monopole. It went nowhere near that famous West-End hotel, but was soon speeding along one of the main traffic-ways of London in the direction of Richmond.

A few minutes more, and it was somewhere out Richmond way that Monica, with the car still purring along, opened the travelling bag and took out an adequate change of clothes.

Whilst the Roysler covered a length of tree-lined road running between grassland, Monica Gray changed back into Pam Willoughby. She recovered her eyesight and could dispense with glasses. And at one o'clock, the car, back at Halkin Street, was setting down—Pam Willoughby!

"Morning, Bremlow!" she said, when that faithful manservant opened the door to her and her father. "My bag's in the car."

"Very good, miss."

"Nice to be home again, daddy!" she remarked to her father, as he followed her in. "And now, it's just the right time to catch my chums at the hotel. Betty and some of them, at any rate, will have come in for lunch."

She went straight to the telephone and put through the call, and after a little delay she heard Betty's voice.

"Oh, Betty darling, is that you? Pam speaking—yes, Pam!"

She spoke all the louder into the receiver, being aware—for the 'phone was near one of the library windows—that a man in a brown overcoat and wearing a turban was standing just outside on the pavement, pausing to light a cigarette.

"I say, Betty dear! Sorry I couldn't be with you all yesterday afternoon!" Pam cried on. "You got my tallywag? And now, look here—to-day's my last chance of seeing you for a bit! Can you all come to tea this afternoon?"

Pam, out of the corners of her eyes, saw the man on the pavement delaying to rewind a scarf, before walking on.

"I'm going away to-night—I'll explain when I see you! You think you can all come this afternoon? All of you, mind! It's got to be a sort of farewell party!"

Then came a question over the 'phone that made a demand upon Pam's presence of mind. Betty, delighted with the invitation, wanted to know: Could they bring a girl with whom they'd got rather friendly, staying at the Monopole?

"Who?" cried Pam.

"A girl—quite a nice girl—Monica Gray!"

"Oh, I think, Betty, if you don't mind, I would rather we were all to ourselves—just Morcover, you know, and the boys, of course. Understand? Right, then, bye-bye until half-past three!"

And Pam, replacing the receiver, called out loud enough for any passer-by in the street to hear:

"Daddy, they'll be here!"

She turned to the window. A man in a brown overcoat and wearing a brown turban glanced towards the window, perhaps associating her with the vivacious cry which he had overheard just then.

Pam did not appear to notice him. She seemed to be only watching her father's chauffeur taking over the car to drive it round to the garage.

CHAPTER 6.

Pam Presides

"GIRLS, just look at this kid!"

It was like madeup Polly Linton to find that Naomer was "disgracing" this Morcover procession which, at half-past three in the afternoon, was wending its way along Halkin Street.

"Eating chocolate in the street! Turning up at Pam's with sticky lips!" said Polly witheringly. "You ought to have been left behind at the hotel!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Am I all right?" jested Polly's fun-loving brother Jack. "The old school tie, boys!" and he fingered his. "Tubby, old son, a button gone from that greatcoat of yours!"

"It burst," said corpulent Master Blood.

"Well, don't do any bursting here, man—not in Halkin Street. It isn't done," Jack stressed. "And remember, Tubby, when you get indoors, to take your hat off. At tea, wait until you're asked. Never mind what you see Naomer or any of these girls doing; they're only Morcover! And don't, Tubby, forget to tip the butler."

Jack slyly added:

"I'll do that, for all, and then you can all refund me when we get back to the hotel!"

"Oh, yeah!" drawled Polly. "But here we are, and—gosh, isn't it a grand house! Oh, and there is Pam, at that window—"

"Hooray!" Naomer joyously exploded.

"Bekas—hi, Pam, cheerio!"

Such an unseemly demonstration as this could not be allowed by Polly. So she swooped upon Naomer, to pull her to order; at which moment dignified Bremlow set the front door wide open to let the procession file in.

Pam was there to greet them when they were mounting the few steps.

"Yes, well, this is! No stayers-away—splendid! Come along in, all!"

"We had the greatest difficulty in persuading Naomer to come," Polly sighed. "She didn't feel equal to a tea-party—"

"Ooo, what fibs! Bekas, Pam, I have been ever so eggscited!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas, I know what your tears are—gorjus! And we had lunch sharp at one, so we are quite ready for tea, Pam!"

That there would be no tantalising delay was proved by ocular evidence, in a moment or so. As the girls went with Pam to discard their outdoor things, they could see into a dining-room where a long table was even then displaying a fascinating "spread."

"But, Pam," the clamour began during the getting rid of hats and coats, "why didn't you turn up at the hotel, yesterday afternoon?"

"Oh—dad wanted me to do something for him," was the perfectly truthful reply.

"And you say you are going away, Pam, so that we shan't see anything of you for a bit?" cried Betty. "Where?"

"Dad is to take me North, this evening. I have to stay with someone for a bit."

"That doesn't mean you won't be at Morcove for re-opening day?" gasped Polly.

"Afraid it does."

"Oh, Pam!" was the chorus. "Going to be away from Morcove? What a shame!"

"So no wonder you invited us to ze farewell spread!" Naomer piped in. "Bekas—sweendle!—you won't be sitting down to tea with us in ze jolly old Study 12, next week! But cheer up, everybody! Let's all have a jolly good tea now, and zen, when Pam DOES get back to Morcove, we will have a grand cellerbration! A gorjus spread—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anythink to laugh about," Naomer protested. "One good tea deserves another, doesn't he?"

"We shall miss you, though, Pam!" exclaimed Madge Minden, during the drifting towards the dining-room.

"Yes, bai Jove; an iwetwiewable loss, Pam deah," deplored Paula Creel, giving a last caressing touch to her fair hair. "And you are going North, you say? So you will be a gweat way off—yes, wather!"

Pam let a bland smile and a nod or two answer these and other comments. So far, in what she had said, she had kept to that form of truthfulness which diplomacy warrants. She really was, for instance, going North this evening. Her father was going to drive her at least as far as North London in the Roysler.

The boys drifted in, having handed over coats and caps and mufflers to dignified Bremlow. At sight of the tea-table—the array of tempting delicacies—Tubby, for one, drew such a big breath that a waistcoat button flew off straight away.

"It's all right," Jack said cheerfully, whilst dissuading his beefy chum from seeking the button under the table. "There'll be others; collect them all afterwards. Good-bye," he next addressed Jimmy Cherrol. "Your seat will be at the top of the table, of course."

Sure enough, it was! There were little tickets naming the visitors' places, and Jimmy found that he had "gone to the top." In fact, he would only have Betty between himself and Pam.

Polly was next to Pam at that top end, on the other side. As for Jack, finding himself placed with Tubby at the lower end, he voiced a cheerful:

"Come on, cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hope you don't mind?" Pam spoke down to the inveterate jester. "But Jimmy wants more looking after!"

"That is so," Jack responded, mock seriously. "And it's a great pity, Pam, you weren't at the hotel last night—in the ball-room. Jimmy was needing some looking after by someone like yourself. We couldn't do anything—could we, boys?"—meaning girls, as usual.

"Oh?" said Pam innocently, whilst starting to pour out. "What was Jimmy doing, then?"

"Shame!" cried Morcove gaily. "Never mind, Jimmy—ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, bekas, what about yourself, Jack?"

"Me! I only danced with her once or twice! I didn't sit about with her, and ask her to have ices, and all that! I mention NO names," Jack cried virtuously. "But when a fellow so far forgets the old school tie and all that, as to—well, I mean to say!"

With a round of laughter going up, Pam serenely insisted:

"But I must be told her name, and what she is like! Fancy, Jimmy, you! And I've always found you so very shy."

"That shows how deceitful he really is," said Jack grimly.

"But who is the girl?" asked Pam blandly.

"Oh, the one I mentioned on the 'phone!" Betty cried. "The girl Monica Gray. You see, Pam, she came in yesterday as a guest, along with her aunt, and we got talking with her, as she hadn't anyone of her own age to be with. Then, in the evening, we saw that she got some dances from one and another of us."

"I see!" nodded Pam, at her very serenest. "Nice girl?"

"Nothing much to look at," Polly said flatly.

"It isn't only that she screws up her face when she smiles, but she seemed to us a bit—well, slummocky!"

"You should have seen the frock she wore, Pam," chimed in Helen Craig merrily. "We thought of you—your taste in colour and so on."

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Positively hurtful to the eye; pawicularly the sash, bai Jove!"

"Oh, but she's a nice girl—jolly!" Betty resumed. "That's why we'd have liked you to meet her, Pam."

"Yes, well, I hope it didn't seem unkind, but —"

"As a matter of fact, Pam, I doubt if we could have brought her along, for she seems to have been away all day. We haven't seen her since last night. And what DO you think she did last night, Pam?"

"Danced with Jimmy, so I'm told? Ate ices with him—"

"Yes," voiced Jack, eating heartily, "and that is what went to her head, so that she suddenly did the battiest thing. Look at Jimmy," said Jack, looking up the tea-table at that much-twitted pal; "there he sits, not a bit ashamed! Such men are dangerous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bekas—"

"Tell Pam about Monica's visit to Fleet Street, boys," Jack begged. "Whilst I just help myself to another of these pate fois sandwiches. Much too good for Tubby. Got something a bit plain and substantial up that end, for Tubby?"

They told Pam about the "Fleet Street escapade"—as if she didn't know much more about it than any of them!—and whilst she listened to the mirghful narration her eyes glanced brightly from one face to another.

Her chums, all of them!

Whether they were serious natures, like clever Madge Minden and Tess Trelawney, and Judy Cardew and her brother Dave, or whether they

were full of fun like Polly and Jack and Naomer—how fond she was of each one!

There was Tubby—stout fellow!—bursting with good nature as well as good living. And close at hand—next to Betty, who would be Form captain next term—sat shy Jimmy Cherrol, taking all twittings about his shy devotion to her with good humour. Ah, what a fine lot they all made!

From this thought it was a leap of her mind to the idea of how empty life would have been for her, had she really been going to see nothing of them in the weeks to come.

But she would be with them—unbeknown to them! What a thrilling situation it was. She would be Monica Gray to them at Morcove, as she had been Monica Gray in the ball-room at "the hotel last night.

No more than they had found her out then, would they find her out at Morcove! Just as Jimmy had taken pity upon "slummocky" Monica Gray, in the ball-room, so, during term, he would see her now and then, to have a shy, kindly-meant word to say to her.

And now and then, of course, she would long to reveal herself in her true identity; long to take every one of her chums into her confidence. But the temptation to do so must be thrust aside—sternly!

There was the solemn undertaking given to dad that she would not let even her dearest chums into the secret.

He had exacted that condition, arguing that if one chum were let into the secret, somehow the whole school would soon be sharing that secret; and very likely he was right.

An unguarded word, an indiscreet look, and the cat would be out of the bag!

"Strange thing to do!" was her smiled comment on the Monica Gray "escape." "But I suppose London had rather turned her head."

"That's about it," Betty nodded. "And don't imagine that we like her any the less for it, because we don't, Pam."

"I'm only wishing we had her at Morcove," Polly cried. "She'd go down well with the Form."

"Yes, wather!"

"It's such a treat to find a girl who sort of gets the bit between her teeth at times," Helen joined in, "and yet plays the game. You don't always find it like that."

"You do not!" muttered Tess. "Girls like Fay Denver, for instance, and her sister Edna—always doing something that means spoiling it for others."

"Ah, Fay and Edna," Pam mused aloud. "They'll be back at Morcove with the rest, next week. After being nearly expelled last term. How are the cups? And are you looking after yourselves, down there?"

"If I might," jested Jack, "have just half a cup, then I might go on again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Several cups came along to Pam for replenishment, and she was busy pouring out afresh when she heard the bell go at the front door.

Ordinarily, she would have felt not the slightest concern. But as Halkin Street, at present, was the centre of a very big human drama, she could not help wondering: Now who was that at the street door?

Meantime, the tea-party continued to be all laughter and chatter. Every tongue was going when suddenly the door opened, permitting Brem-low to announce:

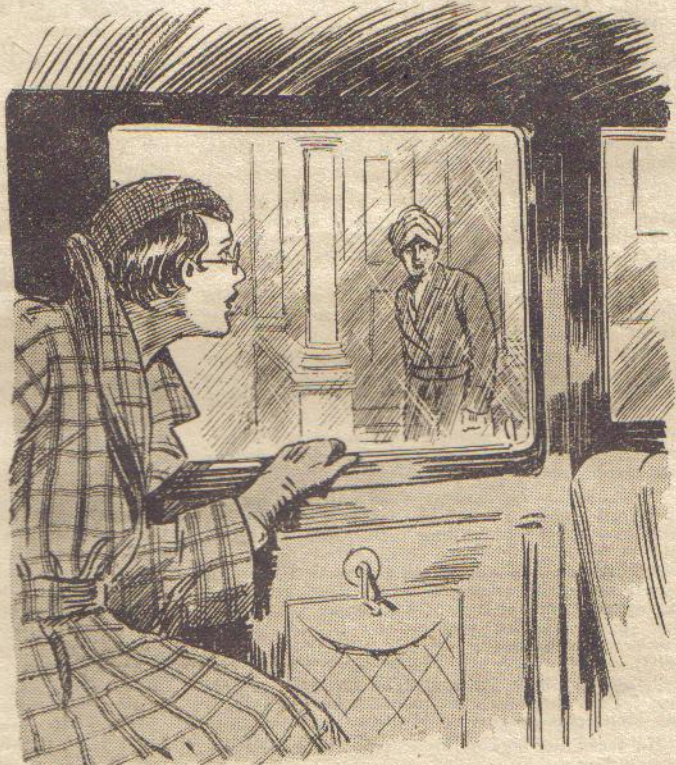
"If you please, Miss Pam—the Ameer of Abdur-Khan!"

IN all her life, never had there been such need for Pam to do her best not to appear—staggered.

"The who, Brem-low?" she serenely questioned, amidst that silence which had fallen upon the whole tea-table.

"The Ameer of Abdur-Khan, miss. He called to see your father, who, as you know, is out. He now desires a word with you, miss, as being the daughter of the house."

"Oh!" smiled Pam, giving her chums a consulting glance.



Glancing from the car window, Pam saw a dark-skinned man loitering on the pavement. And she realised, with a thrill, that he had been at that house in the East End to which she had been taken last night!

"Gosh, boys!" came from the lower end of the tea-table.

"Bekas, what ze diggings, he is ze joker who is staying at ze Monopole Hotel! And we have seen him, a beeg, fat man—fatter than Tubby even!"

"Sh!" glared Polly. "He'll hear you!"

Pam stood up to go from the room. An "Excuse me, all!" was on the tip of her tongue. Then she changed her mind. She would get a bit of fun out of this!

"Yes, well, Bremlow," said Pam serenely, "show the Ameer in!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Ameer is Curious

THE fun for Pam was starting in the very instant that dignified Bremlow withdrew to fetch in the Ameer.

She saw her tea-party in a state of mild panic. The girls wore in a flutter of excitement. Paula, for one, was giving an anxious touch to her hair. Naomer, for another, seemed to think she should bolt the last two inches of a chocolate éclair before this Eastern grandee was shown in.

Then there was Jack, agitatedly fingering the "old school tie."

"Gosh, boys! Now, Tubby, don't breathe so loudly! But I think, if you'll excuse me, I'll get under the tab—"

But now the door opened again.

"The Ameer of Abdur-Khan!"

He came in, and Pam advanced to meet him.

Nothing, it seemed to Betty and others, could have more set off the bulky ugliness of the Ameer than did Pam herself—so tall for her age, and slim, and adorably lovely.

She bowed to him as he toddled to a standstill, a human toad, smuggled in a British overcoat, but wearing a jewelled turban.

"You wished to see me, sir?"

"Why, yes," he said, staring fixedly at her after paying the most momentary attention to the other boys and girls. They were, of course, all standing. "You are the Meess Pam-e-la?"

"Mr. Willoughby's daughter."

"Good! You see, I call upon your father, to thank heem; to aboligise for the trouble it was given, yes-day."

"Oh," Pam smiled, comprehending his imperfect English quite well. "you mean, the lady who was brought into this house, having been taken ill in a car in the street?"

"Yes, so!" he nodded. "She iss my sister, not str-rong! She find your Breedish wedder not goodt for her."

"Yes, well! So long as she's quite recovered, that's all right. I'll tell my father that you did him the honour of calling. I'm sorry he isn't in!"

"Dank you! Thadt is all, if you will tell him how I regret it, tank you! So," half-turning to survey all Pam's chums. "You enjoy yourselves, my young friends, yess?"

"Very much, sir!"

"Goodt!"

"They are here for a sort of farewell gathering," Pam serenely explained. "As I am leaving home this evening."

He faced her again interestedly. She had expected him to.

"Yess?"

"Yes," she nodded. "Dad is taking me—up North."

"Ah, the North," he chuckled, shuddering more

into his heavy overcoat. "More cold vedder than London?"

"It can be a bit severe in the North, at this time of year," Pam agreed. "But still, I shall enjoy—the change!"

He was not to know that she meant the quick change which she would have to make again, sometime this evening.

"You cunning old rascal," she was thinking.

"I know the real reason for this call!"

"Very cold vedder for the travel," he purred.

"You go in dee train, yess?"

"No, sir; dad drives me in the car."

"Ah, not varm, a car. But I shall nodd keep you from dee tea, my young friends. So," and he began a withdrawing smile, "good-bye, my young friends!"

"Good-bye, sir—"

"And pleased to meet you!" Naomer thought she ought to add brightly. "Bekas—"

Here, however, a girl-next to Naomer trod warningly upon her toe.

The Ameer was toddling away to the door. He turned round to voice something in the way of an after-thought.

"You soon go back to de school—yess?" was his remark to the girls and boys in general. "All in one school?"

"No, sir! Our school is Grangemoor," Jack answered for self and friends.

"And we girls all go to Morcové," Betty rejoined. "We go back next week—at least, all of us except Pam. She won't be there at the start of term, anyhow."

"Ah, so?" His dull, dark eyes rested upon Pam again. "You continue to have the holiday!"

"Oh, I don't know, sir, that it will be any holiday where I am going," Pam laughed. "Anyway, there's no place like Morcové, after home."

"You not stay at home, and you not go to school," he observed, so that she could tell the duping of him was complete. "So I dink you must be going to stay, hotel—yess?"

"For a bit, I expect so," she nodded, bearing in mind the Monopole.

"Ah," he said, moving on to the door once more, "I sday at hotel, in London here. Very good hotel; very first-class—yess! Good-bye, my girls and boys, good-bye, Miss Pam-e-la! I hope to meet you again!"

Faithful Bremlow must have remained just outside the door, for he was there to show the Ameer out. Pam, as soon as the room had lost that Eastern notability, found all her chums in fits of silent laughter. And she thought to herself:

"If only they knew!"

Yet she herself could afford to laugh—the more so, as the artful Ameer had just about done the worst for his own scheme, by coming here on such a paltry pretext.

His motive had been, of course, to glean any information he could as to her future movements; so it was great fun to have bamboozled him. Especially about to-night!

Would there be a car to follow the Roysler, by-and-by; some spy of the Ameer's trying to keep up with the car in which her father would be driving her? She was certain there would be!

And so, too, was her father, when presently he and she were talking about the Ameer's visit.

Her chums had all left, after farewell words eloquent of the belief that it might be many a day before they saw her again. Just in time for a word with the girls and boys, her father had got indoors when they were saying good-bye to Pam.



"The Ameer of Abdur-Khan!" Bremlow announced, and the Indian entered and walked across to Pam. Here he was, she thought—the very man whom she had to outwit!

Now he and she were alone together in the library.

"Then we shall start, Pam, a little earlier than I had intended," he decided gravely. "For we may have to do a rather longer run—to the North—than would have been necessary if there had been no risk of our being followed. We shall be followed—not the slightest doubt about that. The scoundrel will have one of his gang waiting with a car, outside this house."

"To keep up with us all the way? I suppose one car could reckon to keep track of another in front quite easily, say, on the Great North Road? But, dad, the run out through all the crowded London streets?"

"It has been done before, Pam, and it can be done again. Given a skilful enough driver—"

She hugged her father's arm, standing with him at the fireplace.

"He'll have to be some driver, daddy, who keeps the Roysler in sight, with you driving! But what sport it will be—thrilling! You'll give him the slip at last, and he will drive on, thinking you are only ahead of them. How lovely if they go miles and miles along the Great North Road, thinking to overtake us—and all the time we shall have doubled back!"

Her father smiled.

"You girls—how you do like a bit of excitement. I only hope all goes as well as you seem to expect. It will be a first-class disaster for us now, Pam, if we don't give them the slip. After to-night, you must completely vanish, as far as those people are concerned. I shall not be here to help you. I shall be on my way to India—"

She nodded gladly.

"You are going, daddy?"

"Some time this evening, Pam dear, you and I must say good-bye. Somewhere, during that ride in the car, we shall stop for the final parting." He paused. "You will return as Monica Gray to the Monopole Hotel. I shall drive away—into

the blue. By this time to-morrow a thousand miles and more will lie between Monica Gray, at the Monopole, and the father of Pam Willoughby—on his way to India."

"Where he can do such a great service to those who are friendly to British rule out there; not like that vile Ameer person," Pam added scathingly, "who is up to all these tricks over here, hoping to prevent your going out to India."

"Yes, my dear, there is not the least doubt," her father agreed softly, "that has been their plan—to kidnap you, so that anxiety about you would cause me to cancel my trip. And if Mr. Somerfield had not warned us in time, that plan would have been carried out successfully. As it is—"

He looked at his watch.

"An hour from now, Pam? You can be ready then?"

"As soon as ever you like, dad!"

"We'll deliberately wait the hour longer, although we could be off now. Remember," he stressed, "we really want one of their spies to see us start. Our going off together in the car will be the final hoodwinking of them."

"Oh, quite! Our last hour together then, daddy, at home here in London," she mused aloud, not sadly. However emotional she might feel, at the prospect of the great and even perilous separation, she reckoned it was "up to her" to keep smiling.

But, during that last hour of theirs a wonderful tenderness was in all they had to say to each other. And for a few minutes Pam played upon the grand piano in the drawing-room, whilst her father sat in a fireside armchair, finger-tips together, her brilliant music the accompaniment to the thoughts that were his.

"Monica Gray doesn't play the piano," she remarked lightly, getting up from the keys. "So it means, that's the last time I shall touch a piano for goodness knows how long!"

"Come here, Pam my dear," he called to her very tenderly. "Your music—your hockey—"
 "Now, daddy, be quiet!" she enjoined gaily.
 "Goodness, is it much for me to do for you, dad, and for the Empire and all that—just to be different from what I've always been! Any rate, I'm not going to be at a different school! I'm not going to have to find different friends from the old! It is really funny, you know. Betty and Co. are to lose me; but I don't lose them! I call that a scream!"

"Oh, the comedy is there, right enough," he assented, rising now that a clock was giving the hour with a silvery ting, ting. "But there is the very reverse of comedy to be guarded against."

"Yes, well!"

Spoken like a Willoughby! This was the girl who would some day inherit everything—the vast Swanlake estate in the West Country, the Town house, fifty thousand a year, heirlooms in the way of priceless jewels, and pearls, and pictures.

His Pam, imbued with that spirit which had enabled generations of Willoughbys to fight, and, if needs be, die for any cause that was right and true.

He took her face between his hands, upturning it for a single kiss. Then he went to one of the windows looking on to the night-bound street and peered round the edge of the lowered blind.

"Our car is waiting now, Pam. And I also observe another car, standing at the kerb a hundred yards away. We will make a start."

"Right-ho! I'll go and get ready."

When at last she went out to the Roysler with her father, Bremlow followed with sufficient luggage to make it appear that somebody was going away to make a prolonged stay somewhere.

Pam, as before midday, sat in the body of the car, with only one travelling bag ready to hand. Her father took his seat at the wheel. The night was dry and clear. She had a last sight of Bremlow, in the light of a street lamp, standing to see them off. As the car started, he gave that respectful bow of his towards that window out of which she was peering.

"Dear old Bremlow," she said to herself.

Then, as the car glided away, she at once whisked about on her seat so as to be able to look out by the wide, narrow window at the back.

She saw that the other car had also moved off, to go the same way as the Roysler along the fashionable West-End street.

The desperate game of hare and hounds between these two cars had begun. How would it end?

CHAPTER 8.

"Stop!"—"Go!"

PAM, as the Roysler smoothly threaded its way through the busy West-End streets, could not settle herself upon the luxurious upholstery.

She remained in a kneeling-round attitude upon that back seat, peering out through the small back window.

But she was careful to keep her head well to one side, so as not to interfere with her father's means of knowing what the car behind was doing. There was a mirror for him, as the driver of the Roysler, to see what was close behind. That mirror obtained its reflection of anything behind the Roysler, by way of the back window. There was, of course, a side mirror for the driver, but it was not likely to serve the present purpose nearly so well.

Inevitably, for the first few minutes the driving was by fits and starts. Traffic signals held them

up; then the car would flash over some busy turning, to dart along a length of quiet street, come to another that was choc-a-bloc with traffic, and so meet with a fresh check.

Streets of private residences; streets with glaring shop-fronts; past a theatre or two, where people were already queuing up—so they zig-zagged along, on a northwards course.

"Stop!"—"Go!" and yet again: "Stop!"—"Go!" And all the while, Pam could see that other car keeping close to him.

Once it pulled up, during a check, so close to the rear of the Roysler that she could make out the figure of the person driving. A man with a dark-skinned face and wearing a turban.

Then came a welcome spell of "all clear" for several minutes on end. It was "Go!"—"Go!" wherever there was traffic signals showing their lights at crossings.

The Roysler took full advantage. It simply flashed along, and still the other car followed. Thrilling!

The neighbourhood to which they penetrated became a quieter one, much less brilliant by night, the houses and shops all of humbler appearance.

Always watching, Pam had the joy at last of losing the sidelights and the vague shape of the pursuing car. Her father had whisked round into a quiet thoroughfare, turned again in a few moments, and then fairly raced ahead.

Had he succeeded then—already? Oh, if only

No!

There were the sidelights of that following car again! It was still, so to speak, hard upon their heels. Very nearly they had given it the slip—but not quite!

Evidently, by "treading on the gas," the pursuer could rely on not being out-raced. So Pam's father would have to rely upon dodging tactics.

And now they were getting almost clear of outer London. The roads were lined with attractive, well-kept villas, with mere "patches" of shops, and perhaps a cinema or two.

Pam was not without the thought that giving another car the slip, by night, was not nearly so easy in open country. The headlamps—even the sidelamps only—could render one so distinguishable on roads or in lanes running amongst unlighted wastes of land.

Suddenly, whilst they were still amongst brick and mortar, the Roysler did another lightning bit of zigzag work. She lost the following car once more—and this time it did not reappear.

Now, then—now! Had they done the trick, this time?

"Oh, daddy, splendid! Carry on!"

He slewed round into another suburban road. Whirr! and they left-turned into another road, just as quietly. A sudden but calm braking-up for somebody wanting to cross at a corner—a polite "After you!" in spite of the desperate need for speed—and then on again!

She still peered out by that back window of the Roysler. Where—where was the pursuer now?

Coming round that bend which they themselves had just used? No! Not in sight again, yet.

The Roysler whizzed aside once more; the fifth turning within the minute!

"Go it, daddy!" Now—at last!

Only a few seconds' after this, amazement seized her. She found that the Roysler was drawing out into a suburban road just previously traversed. Her father had dodged round into it again.

Then he turned off to the right, and, with a swift run along a quarter of a mile of villalined road, he drove out warily on to a main highway, smooth as a roller-skating rink.

Huge lorries were rolling and lumbering along on either side, whilst fast cars had, as it were, the main line to themselves. The wavering glare from some of the headlamps was a wonderful sight in the darkness.

But Pam could not understand, for this seemed to be the Great North Road, and since her father seemed to have shaken off the pursuit whilst still amongst the roads of villadom—why this?

She was soon to know.

Less than ten minutes later her father slowed whilst overtaking a car in front of him in the line of fast traffic running north.

The Roysler's headlamps helped to pick out the number at the back of that car just in front, faintly illuminated as it was by the tail-lamp.

She was peering forward now, and she read the number of the car in front quite distinctly: BAJ—010.

The very number that she had seen on the front number-plate of their pursuer!

In other words, they were now *behind* that car—had caught it up on the Great North Road, whilst it was going "all out."

Pam sat back on her seat and laughed. Her father was going to turn back now. She could imagine the smile of calm satisfaction with which he had satisfied himself, as the result of this manoeuvre; that they had not only given the car the slip, but had tricked it into going on, on, on, up the Great North Road. In the belief, of course, that the Roysler was somewhere ahead!

She waited until they had started the run back towards mighty London. Then she unsnapped the bright fastenings to the one travelling bag which was with her in the car.

Once again Pam became the quick-change schoolgirl whilst being driven in her father's car. Once again she became Monica Gray, losing all the dainty loveliness of Swanlake's only daughter.

When at last the car stopped at the kerb, in a quiet London thoroughfare, it was Monica Gray who stepped out, rather ungracefully, wearing glasses and screwing up her face as she smiled.

"Thanks so much, Mr. Willoughby! I've quite enjoyed it!"

"The Underground is just round the corner," her father said, having joined her on the pavement.

"I shall go to Bond Street and walk the rest of the way," she nodded serenely. "Shouldn't wonder if most of my chums are at the hotel when I get in. They had nothing special on for to-night."

A few moments went by in silence.

"And so," he murmured, "here we say good-bye. Morcove for you, a week from now, and India for me."

"There's one thing," she smiled, glancing herself down. "I don't have to 'change,' do I?"

A strange, never-to-be-forgotten good-bye it was, between father and daughter, taking place there in the lamplit darkness of a prosaic London street. She would have been more than human not to find her eyes, behind the deceiving glasses, suddenly afloat with tears. She could never have said her last words to him, the father she loved and who loved her so adoringly, without a little sob or two.

Yet when that good-bye had been said and she was hurrying away, alone, leaving him to drive off in the car, her every step—a rather ungraceful one—evidenced sturdy self-reliance.



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.

Sheila (Glasgow).—Thank you so much for your very nice letter. I was delighted to know that you and your friends enjoy our paper so much. It was splendid of you to secure so many new readers. Very soon I shall have a big surprise to announce, so watch my Chat carefully.

"Bess (Cromer, Norfolk).—Many thanks for your letter and good wishes, dear reader. The present series of Morcove stories promises to be one of Marjorie Stanton's best, don't you think? I should be very grateful if you would introduce our paper to your friends in the hockey club. Best wishes.

"A Wellwisher of Polly" (Wimborne Dorset).—Thank you very much for such a nice letter. The answer to your question regarding Morcove School is "No." I will bear in mind your request for another competition, but, in the meantime, there are the gifts to which to look forward. Very best wishes.

"A Bookworm" (Shipway, Torquay).—I regret that I cannot do as you ask regarding a pen-friend. I am so glad you like all our present features. Did you have a jolly Christmas? You must write again and tell me all about it. All good wishes.

"Polly," "Betty," and "Paula."—Thank you very much indeed for your first letter; I hope it will be the first of many. Fay and Edna will be back at Morcove next term, so we shall hear more of them. Yes, Polly and Betty are almost the same age. Don't forget that next long letter!

Joan and "Marina."—Many thanks for such a nice letter. Yes, Betty will be to the fore again next term, you will be glad to know. Marjorie Stanton is even now writing a topping new series in which Betty figures prominently. Keep a sharp eye open for details of our forthcoming gifts.

She betook herself to the nearest Underground station as a young girl typist might do any morning in the week, with a brave air, glad of a job to be got on with.

Pam's job now! She knew exactly what it was. To be outwardly, to all the world, at all times, Monica Gray, whilst inwardly she would still be dad's only child, his daughter and yet his help-mate; a Willoughby—with a heart for any fate! And all this—at Morcove!

MONICA GRAY, when she got to the Monopole Hotel, made the mistake—as it appeared to be—of entering at a doorway reserved for the reception of visitors' luggage.

The superintendent of this department, amongst the numerous dumps of luggage, politely informed her that this was not, strictly speaking, the way in for visitors, but she said a careless:

"Oh, it's quite all right!" and marched on.

Band music grew louder as she neared the public lounges, where people were settling down who had just come away from the grand res-

restaurant. When she had got rid of her outdoor things, she strayed into the main lounge, looking about for Betty and other "acquaintances."

She saw a jolly batch of them almost as soon as her bespectacled eyes roved the luxurious sitting-about place, with all its well-dressed throng.

Mr. and Mrs. Linton were off the scene, but there were Polly and Jack, and Betty, and in addition most of the other girls and boys had gravitated to the Monopole again.

They saw her, and waved an invitation for her to come across and join them in their favourite corner. Naomer for one even streaked across the lounge, bearing a mammoth box of chocolates for her, Monica, to sample instantly.

"Bekas, hallo, Monica, look what Tubby has brought me, zis evening! All soft centres—gorjus, you try one, queek!"

"Thank you! You're a big crowd again, I see."

"Bekas, Mr. and Mrs. Linton have promised to take us all to a theatre, only he doesn't begin till nearly nine o'clock—sweendle!"

With Naomer in sprightly attendance, Monica got to where the other juniors were ready with welcoming remarks.

"Haven't seen you all day, Monica!" Betty voiced the general reproach.

"I was up late, I know!"

"And then you went off on your own to explore more of London, of course," was Polly's twitting

allusion to the famous "escapade" of last night.

"Where was it this time, Monica? Chinatown?"

"You'll be kidnapped," jested Betty. "That'll be the end of you!"

"Oh, I hope not. I say, though, I've got a bit of news for you. I wonder whether it will please you."

"Why, what—what?" they clamoured.

"I'm going to Morcove next term."

"What-a-at!" they yelled, much as if they were at their school instead of in this West-End hotel.

"You, Monica—going to Morcove?"

"Next term, that's right," she smiled, screwing up her face. "It's all settled, and I shall be there on the day the school re-opens."

"Goodness!" Polly gasped.

"Yes, bekas—"

"Most gwatifying, bai Jove, yes, wather!" beamed Paula Creel. "But haow wemawkable, too!"

"Amazing!" cried others. "Just fancy!"

"Bekas—what ze diggings, hooray! You will be one of us, Monica! Ooo, gorjus! Everybody," shrilled Naomer, "have another choc all round, to cellerbrate!"

"I am so relieved that you are not horrified

"Horrified!" Betty laughingly echoed. "Why, Monica, it is grand; it's great, this is!"

"The very thing we have been wishing COULD happen, if you want to know," chimed in Polly.

"And now you must keep with us, Monica, for the evening. You must get permish to come to the show. Perhaps your auntie will come, too? Seats can be arranged, I'm sure. The theatre is

—"

And there Polly broke off, at a moment when she seemed ready to dash away, in that headstrong manner of hers, possibly to find her parents and tell them; Monica must be included in the party.

Polly stopped dead, and others who were seated stood up politely, for suddenly they were all aware of a short, stout man in Oriental dress, with a blazing jewel in his turban, pausing as he went by in the lounge.

He was treating them to a recognising smile.

"Ah, my young friends who I see at the Sahib Willoughby's house, I dink?"

"That's right, sir," Jack Linton responded.

"Some of us are staying here, you see."

"So?"

"And this, sir," Betty said, drawing Monica Gray forward to be introduced, "is a girl who was not at Halkin Street this afternoon."

"Wasn't she?" the girl in question thought to herself.

"Miss Monica Gray," Betty did the introduction. "Monica, the Ameer of Abdur-Khan!"

She bowed with intentional lack of grace.

"Ah," the Ameer said to her. "You go to school as well, eh?"

"She's going to our school, next term, as a new girl!" Polly impetuously put in. "Morcove!"

Monica Gray laughed, screwing up her face.

"Yes, that's right," she smirked.

The Ameer gave his notion of an affable, patronising nod, and toddled away.

After looking her full in the face like that, in the bright light of the hotel lounge, he still had not known her for who she really was!

"Yes, well—"

But she only said those words to herself, whilst being left with a sense of a curtain coming down to close the second act in a big drama, and of its having to rise again ere long upon the third act—the scene, Morcove School!

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]



This is the title of the brilliant long complete story which will thrill you next Tuesday—a story that is packed with excitement and adventure.

Read how Pam continues her daring masquerade at Morcove—how she faces peril undaunted. And there is a big surprise in this powerful tale, which makes Pam's position even more dangerous.

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BY MARJORIE STANTON