

"The Red Revellers"

Complete Morcove Holiday Tale

"The Caravan Wanderers"

Begins Inside

# The SCHOOLGIRLS' 2<sup>D</sup> OWN

No. 741, Vol. 29.  
Week Ending  
April 20th, 1935.  
EVERY TUESDAY



## BETIY'S DRAMATIC APPEAL

A tense situation in this week's fine complete Morcove holiday story.

FIVE MAGNIFICENT STORIES BY FAVOURITE AUTHORS



THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. No. 741. Vol. 29.

Week ending April 20th, 1935.

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IN this number appear the opening chapters of a very delightful and unusual story—"THE CARAVAN WANDERERS," by Louise Carlton. Those of you who remember "Norma of the Blue Dominoes" will be sure to enjoy this latest story by one of your favourite writers, and new readers will have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with Louise Carlton at her very best.

Next week, too, there is another big treat for you all—nothing less than the first of a new series of complete stories by Iris Holt. This favourite author has created a delightful new character, about whom I told you last week, named Amber Dare. You will meet Amber next Tuesday in the first of the series, which is entitled:

#### "AMBER THE ADVENTUROUS."

While I am on the subject of coming stories, I must not fail to mention next week's brilliant long complete Morcove story. If you have already read this week's tale you will be longing to know how the famous chums fare in their splendid attempt to help the luckless "Red Revellers."

All the fun of holiday-time, combined with the excitement and novelty of such a daring venture, make this one of Marjorie Stanton's most entertaining holiday stories. All your favourites of Morcove—and of Grangemoor, too—are to the fore, and the title is:

#### "FROM MIRTH TO MYSTERY,"

By Marjorie Stanton.

"The Suspect She Must Unmask" continues to be one of the most popular features ever published in THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, and next week's chapters will delight you.

There will be another splendid story by Margery Marriott in our next issue, featuring Kathleen Carr in a dramatic adventure. So make sure of securing your five-story SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN by ordering it now from your newsagent.

I feel I must mention how delighted I am by the large number of letters that have reached me in the past few weeks. Readers of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN have always been particularly good correspondents, but just lately there has been a great increase in my post-bag—a fact which I am very pleased to note.

I am especially delighted to notice the number of new readers who have written. I always like to

hear from my new reader-friends and to have their opinions and comments on our stories, and it has given me tremendous pleasure to find so many "first" letters in my daily post.

To most of my correspondents I try to reply personally through the post; other letters are answered in rotation in the pages of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN and this week I am going to devote the remainder of my Chat space to

#### BRIEF REPLIES

"Kit Carroll's Admirer" (Clacton-on-Sea).—Thank you so much for your appreciative letter; I was delighted to know that you were so pleased with our recent gifts. Congratulations on securing so many new readers. That was splendid of you. Best wishes.

Margaret Fenwick.—No address, Margaret, so I hope you will see this reply. I'm so glad you like all the present features in THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. Write and tell me more about India, will you? All good wishes.

Jessie Roslind (Swanland, E. Yorks).—I was delighted to hear all about your pets: they must be a very happy family. Jock is a very clever fellow, isn't he? I expect he would have loved a ride in the bus. Best wishes.

Jean Oldroyd (Pickering, Yorks).—A very welcome "first" letter, Jean. I'm so glad you are pleased with all the stories, and hope you will long remain a reader of our paper. Look out for news of new stories very soon. All good wishes.

Mignonne Kracke (Putney).—Thank you for your letter, and for all the nice things you say about our paper. "THE SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY" is our Wednesday sister-paper. I'm so glad you liked the gifts in both papers. Very best wishes.

Marjorie and Mabel Lomas (Rainow, nr. Macclesfield).—Thank you, readers both, for your welcome letters. Of course, I was very pleased to know that you liked the gifts. Very soon I shall announce a number of new stories—so watch my Chat very carefully.

"Margaret" (Bulwell, Nottingham).—What a nice long letter, dear reader. And thank you for all the nice things you say about our paper. Weren't you delighted with Bunny's escapades? Another letter soon, please.

"Pam's Admirer" (S. Chingford, E.4.).—Lots of my readers wish that our paper came out every day, but I'm afraid that's quite impossible. It is quite likely that we shall have another series featuring Dodo Wren. Best wishes.

"Pam's Admirer" (Oldham).—Another admirer of the "little lady of Swanlake." I expect there will be a series soon in which your favourite plays a big part. In the meantime, how do you like Bunny Trevor? I'm afraid I cannot promise anything, but I will bear your request in mind. All good wishes.

Mary Byrne (Mallow).—So you, too, like Pam best of all the Study 12 girls? I'm not surprised, for she's really a very fine character. Look out for further news of more new stories, coming soon.

"Joyce" (Australia).—Thank you for such an appreciative letter. I was very glad to have your comments on the stories. Freda Forrest's age was fifteen. Write again and let me know what you think of the five-feature programme, won't you?

"Animal Lover" (Audenshaw).—I do hope you have enjoyed the recent Morcove series, in which Bunny Trevor featured. I'm sure she will prove to be one of the most popular characters ever introduced into the series. So glad you liked the gifts.

Best wishes.

YOUR EDITOR.



MORCOVE'S MOST NOVEL HOLIDAY  
A Delightful Complete Story of All Your Study 12 Favourites



*The* **RED REVELLERS**

BY MARJORIE STANTON

CHAPTER I.

Plans for the "Hols."

"IT'S just as you like, girls. But if you feel that we'd get a better time that way—"

"Yes, Pam! Yes, definitely!"  
"Gweat fun, bai Jove, yes, wather!"

"Gorjus! Bekas, eet will be like living in camp, and yet, when we want to go on ze bust, we can go to ze Grand Hotel!"

"Ha, ha ha!"

They were plans for the coming Easter holidays which were being so eagerly discussed by the chums of Study 12 at Morcove School. Changed plans, all of a sudden! For one of the girls—tall Pam Willoughby—had just made a thrilling suggestion.

"After all, girls, you can stay at Swanlake any old time," she continued. "But this house I have been talking about won't always be available. There it is, at Brighthampton, which is quite a big seaside town; an odd bit of dad's property, standing empty. You've only to say the word, and I know my people will let us have the empty house—"

"Then, Pam, call it settled!" burst in madcap Polly Linton. "Get a line off to your people to-day—"

"Yes, queek!" shrilled the "chummery's" dusky imp, Naomer Nakara. "Bekas, nuzzing could be better!"

"Fine!" voiced others.

"The house is on the seafront, you say, Pam?"

"It's at the western end of the Parade." Form-

captain Betty Barton was answered. "Mind you, it is standing quite empty. We'd have to take along whatever we wanted for the hols—"

"And that's where heaps of fun would come in!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, gweat idea!" beamed elegant Paula Creel. "I do like woughing it!"

"Do you?" doubted Polly. "With a bed on the floor?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Theah is nothing. I pwesume, to pwent it's being a feathah bed?" comfort-loving Paula submitted. "At any wate, geals, I am pwepared to wisk any—er—minor discomfowts, yes wather—"

"Bravo, Paula!"

"Yes, give her ze cheer, hooray, ze good old duffer! So now, everybody," yelled excitable Naomer, standing on a chair as if to address a public meeting. "hands up zose in favour, queek! Hooray, carried unanimosity!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about Madge?" inquired Bunny Trevor. "She's not here—"

"No, and she hasn't heard a word yet about all this," Pam rejoined. "I hope she'll like the idea as much as the rest of us do. But there'll be no grand piano for her at Beach House, Brighthampton—sorry."

"Hire one—easy," sparkled Bunny. "Anyhow, we must let her know straight away."

"I'll pop down to the music-room now—there's just time before school," Pam exclaimed. "Madge is bound to be there. I expect she'll be



as keen as any of us really. Won't mind where we're going, so long as we're going to be together."

"No, and don't forget," Naomer shouted after Pam, who was already hurrying away, "tell her we can always have a sing-song together, so she will have plenty of chance to play ze joanner!"

"With an obligato from Jack's accordion!" cried the madcap.

From this it will be correctly inferred that Polly's fun-loving and versatile brother Jack would be of the party. Indeed, it was already arranged that five boys would be with Betty & Co. Just as Polly wanted to have Jack with her, so Judy Cardew wanted to have her brother Dave, and Bunny Trevor her brother Tom.

Then there were Jimmy Cherrol and "Tubby" Bloot, neither of them related in any way to the Morcove girls; but no holiday party would have been complete without them.

"Just one point, girls," Betty resumed, the moment Pam had slipped away. "It means that we'll have to find somebody to take charge of us. I wonder, Judy, if your mother—"

"I'm sure she'll love to!"

"Good!"

"She's free, I know," Judy spoke on delightedly. "And there is nothing she enjoys more than being with us all."

"So, altogether, I think we're jolly lucky!" cried Helen Craig. "It looks like being a crashing success!"

"Especially if Polly does the cooking," said Bunny slyly.

"I promise you some dinners!" the madcap said proudly. "You see me when I've got the kitchen all to myself!"

Again they laughed, and again their tongues rattled on, whilst Pam, having hurried down to the first-floor, now let her long stride take her to the music-room.

No mistaking the brilliant piano-music which Pam could hear! She herself was a good pianiste, being fond of music; but she would have been the first to admit that dark-haired Madge Minden was in a class by herself—a prodigy!

Pam entered quietly, intending to wait unseen until her chum should finish; but Madge, by an instinct that was very strong in her, could tell that she had lost the privacy of the great room. Her hands dropped away from the ivory keys, and she slewed round on the piano-stool.

"Oh, Madge dear—didn't want to interrupt you—"

"Quite all right, Pam. I suppose it's almost time to get books together for class?"

"Why I came down to find you, Madge; about the hols—what would you say, dear, to our not all going to Swanlake after all?"

"Why, is it all off, Pam? Can't your people—"

"Oh, they can still have us, right enough. But—"

"But, a moment, Pam," broke in Madge gently. "In any case—I was going to let you and the others know, only I—I wanted a few minutes to—to—"

"To think how best to put it?" Pam quickly guessed, for now she could tell that this chum of hers appeared to be rather worried.

"Why, yes, Pam, something like that," faltered the girl who was sitting half turned away from the piano. "The fact is, whether it's Swanlake or anywhere else for the hols, I—I wouldn't be able to come with you all."

"Not! Oh, Madge dear—Madge! Why—what then?"

She shook her head, shrugged, and got up. In her walking away to a window and standing there for a few moments, mute and with her back to Pam, there was clear indication that questions would only be embarrassing.

Then she came back.

"I'd rather not explain, Pam. You know how I'd like to come anywhere with you and the others. Anything you girls wanted to do, for choice, I'd do."

"We shall miss you terribly, Madge. Can't you really manage it after all?"

"Afraid not, Pam. It's because I know there'll be such an outcry, I've been hesitating to tell Betty and the rest. But there it is; something has cropped up—"

"At home, Madge? Your father—is he all right?"

"Oh, perfectly!"

Pam's first thought had been of Madge's father, as he and Madge were all in all to each other. She had lost her mother years ago.

"Then—you can't explain, dear?"

"I'd rather not. In fact, I'm not free to explain, Pam."

"Oh, in that case!" was the response which gave the assurance; Pam would not be one to pester. There was a delicacy about Pam which next moment prompted her to suggest:

"Madge dear, let me go back to the study now and sort of prepare the girls for this—shall I? You don't like the idea of having to break such disappointing news."

"You're awfully good, Pam! If you would—"

"Not at all, Madge! It is quite final though, is it? Not the slightest chance—"

"Not the slightest!"

"Yes, well," Pam murmured consolingly, "if you should be able, after all, you could come along at the last moment. As a matter of fact, Madge, I was going to explain; instead of going to Swanlake, we now think of going to—"

The rest was never spoken. Suddenly another girl was in the doorway, flourishing a buff-coloured envelope as she called across to Madge:

"Tallywag!"

"For me? Oh, thanks, Etta!"

During the moment or two that was required for Madge to cross over and anxiously snatch at the telegram, Pam stood mute and still, with a "What now?" expression.

Then, feeling bound to respect her chum's reticence, she decided to go away without another word. So Madge was left alone, setting a finger to rip open the envelope.

Out came the flimsy sheet, which unfolded gave her this pencilled message:

"HAVE HEARD FROM YOUR AUNT ADA—FULLY APPROVE YOUR DOING ALL YOU CAN. LOVE—DAD."

THE hand which put away the telegram, a few seconds later, drew from the same pocket to which the flimsy had been confined a letter that Madge had read ten times over, since it came to her at Morcove School.

Beyond the four walls of the music-room were sounds of the school's usual hurry-scurry, before morning classes. No one came to the music-room, and so Madge was still all by herself as she gave her troubled eyes once again to at least a part of the letter. It was from that Aunt Ada to whom the telegram had made reference, and one page ran:



*I am letting your father know, because I'm sure that he will want you to come to the rescue.*

*Dearest Madge, it does seem a shame that you, only a schoolgirl still, should be drawn into all this. But I remember how you live for your music, and there is that to be said for what I have in view—it will be a chance for you to use your talent—*

Madge, with a sudden faint smile, gave up her re-reading of the letter. Pocketing it once more, she hurried from the room to go downstairs. With the bell for classes just commencing its clangour, she sought the passage which led to the private room of Miss Somerfield, Morcove's adored headmistress.

All other girls had gone into class when, presently, Madge came away from that room. Her interview with the headmistress had ended in her being granted permission to pack and leave for a certain destination at once. Also, Madge was free to use the telephone, in its sound-proof box at the back of the hall.

The call Madge put through, after shutting herself up in the telephone-box, was for a trunk-line number. Some delay in being connected, however did not cause her to fume impatiently. Nor did she look at all moody; on the contrary, her comely face expressed a spirited resolve to face things bravely and cheerfully.

At last she heard a familiar voice answering, and she announced herself through the receiver.

"Madge speaking, aunty! I say, I've had a telegram from dad, and it's quite all right. He says I may. What's that? Do I want to? Of course I do aunty—ra-ther!"

Then she became a listener to remarks which supplemented what Aunt Ada's letter had told her

"You see, Madge dear, it is the pianist who has gone off like that, letting us down so badly. And your piano-playing is so wonderful."

"I don't know about that, auntie; but I'll do my best. I quite see, you can't afford to engage anybody—"

"Well, dear, we simply daren't, when even as it is our expenses are alarming. Anyhow, if you could just join us for the time being—"

"Oh, I'm coming along by the first possible train, aunty," Madge was glad to be able to say. "Miss Somerfield has told me I can leave this morning—two days in front of Breaking-up Day. I am catching the eleven o'clock from Barncombe, and so I should be with you by tea-time. D'you hear me, aunty? Right-ho, then! Until then—'bye!"

Brighter than ever Madge looked, as she came

out of the telephone-box. Considering she was by nature a staid girl, it was significant of a great enthusiasm that she now raced upstairs almost as if she had been a madcap Polly or one of the other more skittish girls.

Upstairs, Madge ran to Study 12—just to scribble a good-bye note to Betty and all those others whom she would not be seeing again this side of the holidays.

Then she went off to do her hasty packing.

But a little after ten, she was being run to the station in a car. At eleven, she was in the train when it steamed out of Barncombe Junction.

Quick work! Never yet, perhaps, had a Mor-



"Something terrible has happened," Aunt Ada quavered. "We can't hope to give our show to-night." "But why?" Madge cried. "What has happened?" And in her heart she feared the worst!

cove girl made a quicker departure from the school.

And certainly no Morcove girl had ever gone from the school, at equally short notice, to play such a part as had been decreed, by Fate itself, for Study 12's own Madge!

## CHAPTER 2.

"S.O.S.!"

"DOES Miss Fontayne live here, please?" "She's staying here, miss—yes. Want to see her, do you?" "I'm her niece. She's expecting me—"

"Oh, you'd better go up, then. The door facing you, on the first landing."

"Right-ho; thanks!"



This was a very shabby lodging-house, in an inland town in the West of England, to which Madge Minden had come at the end of her cross-country journey from Morcove School.

Only some worn oilcloth covered the steep stairs by which she now mounted to a dingy first landing. Arrived there, she was setting down one or two bits of light luggage so as to be able to give an announcing tap at a door, when the latter came open in front of her.

"Aunt Ada——"

"Madge darling! Oh, so there you are, my dear—how good of you! Come in, Madge, and you won't mind the muddle, the appearance of the place——"

"Aunt, of course not! Only temporary lodgings, I know."

"Handy, for the time being, dear—there's that to be said for this place, anyhow. We've just the two rooms—the girls and I—and we have to make up beds in this room every night. Sit down, Madge dear. Tired, are you, after the journey?"

"Oh, no, aunty!"

"I'll get you a cup of tea——"

"But I had one where I had to change trains, an hour ago. The rest of my things are at the station in this town——"

"I see, dear! By-and-by, then, they can be fetched along. I must first find out if Mrs. Saunders downstairs can find a room for you——"

"But, aunty, you don't want to go taking a room for me! If I'm to—to belong to the party, I may as well belong to it straight away!"

"Dear, that is sweet of you—to be so considerate. Ah, you have a fine spirit, Madge darling!"

They were sitting facing each other now, in this back-room which was so shabby and sunless. For a little while the aunt could only gaze at her schoolgirl niece as if there was something very refreshing, revivifying, in the sight of one so nicely dressed and so outwardly calm.

Miss Fontayne herself looked jaded, and her appearance was a little untidy—due, Madge was quite sure, to a very worrying time.

"If you could tell me exactly how things stand, aunty darling?"

"My dear, I will! But I only had time to just dash off those few lines. And, oh——" with a lift and fall of the hands—"it is such a business—such a serious upset! The way we have all been let down, Madge; the way he has served us!"

"He?"

"The young man who was our pianist, dear. I'll show you presently the note we had from him, after he had bolted—for there's no other word for the way he went off, with some of our money, too! He had the purse, you understand, and he took that with him."

"But what a——"

"You're thinking, of course, what a scoundrel he must be! And yet, dear, somehow I did trust him—we all did! Mr. Harrison was a gentleman, we all believed, and that's why it came as an all the greater blow to us. Besides, some of the others had known him, even if I hadn't, for a long time before this concert party was formed."

"Who are the others, Aunt Ada?"

"I'll tell you, dear; I'll go into everything now," was the animated response. "There are the three girls—young ladies, I should say, for, of course they're quite grown up. We were three young men besides, but with Mr. Harrison gone off like that, it leaves only two. Singers, both—a baritone and a tenor. By the way, each of them is the brother of one of the young ladies——"

"So there is no fear of their decamping!" Madge felt it right to remark, with a little laugh. Poor Aunt! She looked as if she could do with something to make her smile.

"Splendid fellows, both of them, Madge! I know that at this very moment they are denying themselves everything whilst trying to fix up something for the next week or two—the seaside, Madge, if they can get a hall. But——"

"It's a good time coming on now, aunty, at the seaside, for concert parties!"

"Oh, of course, Madge; and that's what we are hoping for—that's why we are so desperate to keep together, as a party."

"The 'Red Revellers'!"

"And how do you like the name we chose, Madge dear?"

"I think it's fine, aunty! Sounds bright and jolly, and that's what you want to suggest, isn't it? Brightness and jollity!"

"Ah, and we have talent amongst us, too, Madge!" her aunt exclaimed wistfully. "Mr. Harrison—I won't say anything about him, now that he's behaved like that, except that he was a wonderful pianist. But the others have fine voices, real gift for entertainment——"

"And then there's yourself, aunty," Madge smiled affectionately. "The stage itself!"

"Quite, my dear; I give you full leave to smile——"

"Oh, aunty, I didn't mean it unkindly——"

"Dear, of course you didn't—you couldn't be unkind. But I am candidly admitting, Madge; I was too ambitious. At one time I did feel sure that I was going to have all London at my feet some day. Ah, as stupid as how many others, I was, Madge darling! And now I am glad enough to be touring with a concert party; thankful they could let me join them—sink or swim together."

"You'll not go under, aunty. Just because that pianist has made off——"

"But he was the comedian as well, Madge!" her aunt said distressfully. "And you know these shows are always a flop unless the programme includes heaps of fun."

"Comedian, too, was he!" Madge grimaced. "Well, that's one thing I can't do—be funny! I'll play the piano; but I can't play the fool. Sorry, aunty."

"We had to give our last show in this town, last night, without him. Harry Norman—that's the baritone, Effie Norman's brother—tried to do some comic stuff, and it wasn't so bad. But with Effie as a makeshift pianist—you can imagine!"

Madge nodded sympathetically, and for a little while there was silence.

"And before that we were so hopeful," Aunt Ada pathetically resumed. "We had one engagement at a great country house, and the old gentleman who hired us seemed unable to do too much for us, after we had given our show. He was so delighted."

After another musing silence, Aunt Ada rose, rallying her drooping spirits with a little sigh.

"Ah, well, Madge dear; you've come along now, and I feel that that is going to save the situation!"

"I'll do my best, aunty. Where do you open next—at the seaside?"

"We hope to—at Brighthampton."

"Oh, that's a fine place. I've heard of Brighthampton."

But Madge had never heard her chums, this morning, debating their sudden idea of spending the holidays at Brighthampton.



Aunt Ada suddenly crossed over and kissed her schoolgirl niece.

"For you to have given up your plans for the holidays, to do this for me, Madge darling!"

"But that's nonsense. You would never have been trying to get a living this way, only you refused to take any money from dad. And that was because you feared he might have to send me to a cheaper school. Auntie, you have put up a good fight——"

"I can only say, dear, I have tried my hardest, but the stage didn't want me and so I had to make-do. Hark! I think that is one of the young ladies, just come in," as a voice could be heard, answering Mrs. Saunders in the hall below. "Yes, that's Maisie Duncan."

To Madge, it seemed that Maisie Duncan was either a very skittish young lady, or else she was in great excitement about something, for she made a noisy rush upstairs.

Then the room-door flew open, and it was for Aunt Ada to become as much startled as was Madge, by the stricken look in Maisie's pale face.

After a moment's panting to get her breath back, she spoke in great agitation.

"Miss Fontayne! This is too bad—oh, it's awful!"

"Why, Maisie—what then?"

"Eddie's gone now!"

Madge understood that Eddie was Maisie Duncan's brother.

"Gone?" echoed Aunt Ada aghast. "How do you mean, dear—gone?"

"I was round at the hall, packing up the last of the things, and someone brought me a message. Oh, I don't understand!" Maisie cried out, sweeping a hand across her forehead after casting aside her hat. "Eddie appears to have rung up and asked the person who answered to take the message to me. He didn't ask for me to be fetched to the 'phone."

"Amazing! Where did he ring up from?"

"I don't know. I can't find out! And the message was that he won't be going on with us to Brighthampton. He won't be coming back at all!" Maisie's breaking voice added, "He's chucked it in, although it has meant—chucking me, his sister!"

The shabby room knew a prolonged, dramatic stillness. Madge had turned to her aunt; but that lady was staring at Maisie Duncan, who suddenly dropped down into a chair and burst into tears.

"Gone!" Aunt Ada repeated at last, in an appalled tone. "Gone like that! Just as Mr. Harrison went—leaving us in the lurch! Maisie dear—do you know any reason? Can you think——"

"No, no, that's just what I can't do. If he'd been a stranger to us all, when we got going as a party, then I could understand. A cad, that's all, soon fed up! But he's my brother—one of the best in all the world. And yet he has gone off like that!"

Drying her eyes, the poor girl stood up

"So that's two of them now—gone," she said dully and huskily. "After that, is it any use our—our struggling on—trying to give any sort of a show——"

"Yes," Madge urged cheerily; and the young lady stared at her, as if only now mindful of her presence.

"My niece," Aunt Ada explained, striving to speak calmly. "She has come along to be our pianiste. You have only to hear her, Maisie! What to make of your brother's going off like that I just don't know. But even now—don't let us

despair. Keep together still, struggle along somehow—get to Brighthampton——"

"I would," Madge chimed in. "For I am sure it's worth it. The seaside—Brighthampton! We'll win through—yet!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### To the Sea

"A CHOC, Bunny?"

"Not now, Tom; spoil my lunch!"

"If you get any."

"Oh, there'll be something!"

And Bunny Trevor gave a smile, the reason for which her brother, quite evidently, could easily understand.

He grinned back at her, from his corner seat in this first-class compartment of a fast train to Brighthampton, where they were to join their chums for the highly novel holiday.

"Bully-beef, Bunny—on a trestle-table, eh?"

"You don't know," she gaily dissented. "Fouly, promised us some wonderful cooking. She and the others have often looked after themselves, on camping holidays. And at Brighthampton we're going to be much better off than we would be in camp."

"You don't know!" Tom retorted, in his sister's own words.

"Oh, but I do! After all, we shall have a whole house to ourselves——"

"But what's the house like; what's the state it's in? There's one thing about a camp-fire, Bunny, no trouble with flues and chimneys."

"It's a fine house, Tom!"

"Has been," he allowed. "But we'll see when we get there—when!"

"Yes, they might tread on the gas, or do something," Bunny agreed, shifting sideways to gaze out of window. "What do you think of the scenery, Tom?"

"Give me the sea, Bunny——"

"Well—look, there it is!"

"What! Oh, hip-hip, that's the stuff," as he now twisted about to catch a first glimpse of the "briny," under a cloudless sky of turquoise-blue. "Half-past six, every morning, Bunny; across to the beach in a dressing-gown——"

"Me, too!"

"Oh, yeah!"

He came in for a hurled magazine, for doubting her hardihood.

"We girls will all bathe before brekker—of course we will!"

"Then who's going to cook the brekker?"

"You boys won't have to, anyhow! Just light the kitchen-fire for us, before we girls get down, and get a pot of tea ready for us, as a sip before bathing, and——"

"You're not half expecting something, Bunny, when it stands to reason that the kitchen range will be on strike every morning——"

"Tom, if you jolly me any more about the house——"

"This Desirable Marine Residence—To Let—and has been, for the last two years! But there's one thing, Bunny, if we don't like it we can always shift along to the Grand Hotel."

"Oh, wanting to show off your school tie, Tom!"

"Why not?"—fingering it. "Grangemoor!"

"Pooh! Nothing to Morcove! But get the things down: we must be running into the station now." Bunny inferred from some jolting over the points.

"Righty-ho! Where's the lid of this chocolate box?"

As it proved to be half under the seat, in a c



siderably battered and dusty condition, Tom promptly rammèd the box of best assorted, in its unlifted state, into a side pocket.

Then he threw the magazine back to his sister, who whirled it up to one of the hat-racks.

Crash! Bunny next let down the window on what would be the platform side, and put forth her head whilst the train was drawing into a seaside station by no means swamped, to-day, with Easter traffic.

"Want to see if any of them have come to meet us!"

Tom, hardly hearing what his head-out-of-the-window sister said, whilst he stood up to reach down some of the luggage, shouted.

"What?" Then, as one heavy piece came off the rack, he shouted a warning: "Look out, Bunny!"

"Oh, bother you, Tom," as he flopped backwards into her lap. "Yes!" she fluttered a hand at a porter, whilst thrusting off her lolling brother with the other hand. "Taxi!"

"Brighthampton!" bawled the porter, whipping open the carriage door. "Brighthampton!"

"So I gather," said Tom, instantly proffering two large handbags. "And one more in the forward van, please."

"Where to, sir?"

"Er—not the Grand Hotel; I know that," Tom said, and turned appealingly to his sister, who very alertly cried.

"Beach House—on the front—west end of the parade—right at the far end—stands between two vacant plots of building land—"

"I know it, miss!" with another salute.

"He knows it," Tom said solemnly. "Did you see his face when you gave the name, Bunny? Got everything?"

Bunny, very definitely, left him to take a last look round before alighting. She jumped out with all the athleticism of the modern British schoolgirl. Modern? Bunny was nothing if not up-to-the-minute.

Hers was a self-possession, coupled with a good deal of daintiness, which rendered her schoolboy brother—in his baggy grey flannels—a mere non-entity as he scuttled after her down the platform.

"Here they are—some of them," Bunny said, without looking round. "Judy Cardew and her brother Dave."

Even as Bunny was voicing this comment, she was engaging a waiting taxi beyond the barrier by a commanding signal. So Tom had nothing to do but come to her side as she stopped in front of Judy and Dave, greeting them.

"Grand day, too!"

"Perfect weather we are having!" Judy answered above all the din of the railway station. "Comfy journey, you two? How are you, Tom?"

"Awful slow," Bunny complained about the train. And I don't see why! The rush hasn't started yet. What's it like, Judy?"

"The house?" And Judy, who was not given to laughter, had to laugh now. "Great fun, anyhow. You've engaged this taxi, or else we might have walked, and you and Tom could have got some thing at a café."

"Oh, but we want to get indoors, Judy!"

"Yes, but—er—lunch may be a bit late. Something to do with the kitchen range."

"I see!" smiled Bunny, remembering Tom's presentiment. "Well, let's get alo : anyhow, and if we catch sight of any of the others, we might stop and pick them up. Easy make room!"

On this understanding, the present party of four set off, the taxi hooting its way down to the

front, where it proceeded in a westerly direction.

A sharp look-out was kept, and suddenly Tom gave a jovial shout of recognition.

"Look who's there!"

"Oh, Naomer and Tubby!" laughed the others. "Ha, ha, ha!"

But they did not stop, after all, realising that the dusky Morcovian and her devoted Tubby were just then going into a café for, possibly, a lemonade and a look at the tempting sweet counter.

On sped the taxi, with Bunny manifesting a mounting eagerness to get to Beach House.

"Going to be such fun!"

Nor did she abandon this belief when the taxi pulled up in front of a house that seemed to be on fire.

Bunny was sure that it could not be a fire—and she was right.

The clouds of pungent smoke billowing up from an open kitchen window looking on to an area below pavement level—it merely had something to do with the cooking arrangements. So Bunny inferred—and she was right again.

Another moment, and Betty Barton came running up the area steps to combine a breathless welcome to Bunny and Tom with a laughed explanation as to the smoke.

"Polly's frying-pan has caught fire, that's all," Betty blithely panted. "But it's out by now—"

"Not quite," Bunny demurred, as she and the others became aware of a very excited and heated Polly rushing out by the area doorway, with a frying-pan still ablaze and smoking.

"Gosh!" Polly shouted. "Pouf, pouf!" she blew hard at the sizzling contents of the pan.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Bunny gurgled, and then, diving down the area steps, she took a turn at blowing—hard.

A couple of pounds of rump steak ceased to flare, and Polly could then set down the frying-pan on the bottom stone step.

"Although I mustn't shake hands—mustn't touch you, Bunny; just look at me!" puffed the madcap of Study 12 at Morcove. "Have I any eyebrows left?" after displaying grimy hands. "Oh, but the kitchen range, Bunny!"

"Doesn't it draw?"

"It does now. I turned my back for a few moments, and I suppose a brick fell down at the back, or something. Anyhow— Gosh, look at it now!"

Bunny, as the madcap dashed back into the basement kitchen, followed hastily, and through the thinning haze of smoke she saw a stove grown red-hot, and heard the coals roaring.

Like the stoker of an Atlantic liner for violent action, Polly slammed back a damper—bang! Then the flames came out in front of the bars. For a full minute it was a case of all hands to the kitchen range. Then Tom, who had been there to help, went away to get in the luggage.

He instantly returned, bringing in the forgotten frying-pan. He went away again, and returned almost as promptly—this time with a mad clatter of feet down the area steps.

"Why, what's the matter?" Bunny asked sweetly.

"The luggage," he gasped—"gone!"

## CHAPTER 4

### Bunny's Brainwave

"**W**HA-A-AT!"

"Our luggage, Bunny—not there!"

"Well, where is it then?"

"Up here, the luggage," the calm voice of level-



headed Dave came down some kitchen stairs; and Bunny laughed. She could tell; her brother, by his horrified look, had had visions of the pair of them having to replace stolen outfits at the cost of all their pocket-money.

"I'll go up with you, Bunny," Judy chummily offered. "And show you the house and where you'll be sleeping. And Dave will see after Tom."

"And Betty and I," fumed Polly, banging about with a poker, "can have the kitchen to ourselves; which is all we ask. Betty, another scuttle of coals!"

So out went one of Morcove's Form captains, to refill the scuttle at a cellar under the pavement. The fact that Betty was really Polly's captain at school counted for nothing this morning. Polly was the appointed cook for the day, and Betty only cook's mate; so Polly could give the orders.

This and much else was, of course, in accordance with the unwritten laws of Camping, by which laws Morcove and Co. were going to abide during their stay at Beach House. For they really were only "camping" in the house.

Camp beds, or even mattresses on the bed-room floors! A trestle-table or two for meals—what more did they need, when they expected to be out of doors all day?

So now it was an unfurnished and shabby-walled house over which Bunny was shown by Judy, as the only available conductress.

No carpets on the stairs up which they went, to bed-room floors where not an item of ordinary furniture was to be seen. No pictures on the walls, no carpets anywhere—not so much as a yard of lino!

The place had been scrubbed down; a few hundredweight of kitchen coals had been shot into the old-time cellar, via an old-time trap in the pavement, and that was just about all the juniors had had done for them—by their own special request.

The famous slogan of Form-captain Betty had been adopted: "We'll manage!" And no doubt Morcove would be able to manage splendidly after the first day or two. Even manage that dilapidated kitchen range which had come as such a surprise packet at the very start!

"I don't know if there's any room you prefer, Bunny

"Oh, I can kip anywhere, Judy! And is there any difference?"

"Not a bit, really! They are all front rooms we are using, so they look on to the sea."

"Balconies, too—jolly!"

Bunny crossed a floor which was bare boards, except for a couple of rolled-up beds and some dumped luggage and took her stand at one of two windows opening on to the old-fashioned

balcony. The windows were open, letting in the maximum of spring sunshine and sea breeze.

Across the way, strollers were pausing to watch the inrushing tide and the gulls planing above the yeasty surf. Somewhere along the front a band was playing. Away to the right was the pier, with a placarded concert hall.

"Hallo, Bunny"

She flashed round.

"Pam! I say, this is jam, Pam! Oh, nothing could have been nicer! Such fun!"

"I'm gladder than ever about this stunt," smiled tall Pam Willoughby. "After this, I shall get my people to run the place as a Hikers' Rest. I'm afraid Madge would have missed the piano. Even I feel lost without one. Jack Linton has brought a banjo with him—"

"Banjo? Thought it was an accordion he had?"

"He swapped the accordion at school for a banjo."

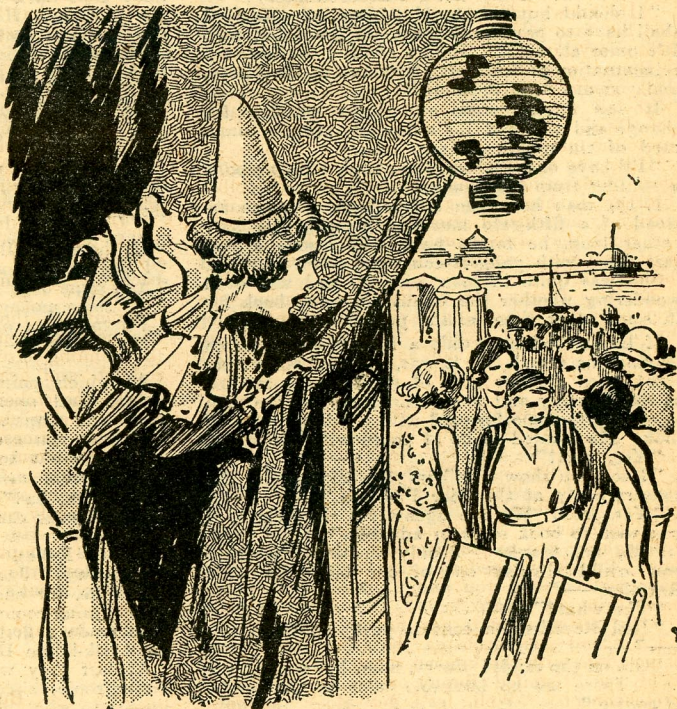
"Oh! And can he play it?"

"About as well as he could play the accordion."

Bunny chuckled. Then, for a few moments, she stood reflective.

"I must go out—I must!" she suddenly announced. "I'm not wanting to dodge any share of the chores; will help with the washing-up after dinner. But I must just pop round into the town."

The bare staircase echoed her descending steps as she whirled down to the front door. Usually, at the seaside, one keeps to the Parade as much



Taking a peep round the curtains, Madge was able to glumpse the scanty audience. And she almost cried out as she saw there her own chums of Morcove School! Would they recognise her when she appeared?



as possible, when going "round into the town." Bunny, however, dodged into the first side-street. She had a sudden thrilling motive for not wanting to run into any of her chums.

This strange desire was rewarded, as was her hope of finding, very speedily, one of those music shops which keeps a piano or two on show behind windows displaying bills for local entertainments.

Bunny found just such a double-fronted shop off the High Street, and as she passed in at the glass door her eye casually noticed a pink placard, announcing the coming visit of a concert party to the Pier Pavilion.

A man bearing a striking resemblance to Schubert abandoned some piano-playing to come forward and attend to the schoolgirl customer.

"Can you tell me, please—do you hire out pianos?" Bunny coolly asked.

The spectacles that helped the man to look so like Schubert were whipped off, given a polish, and then replaced, so that Bunny might be surveyed with pardonable amazement.

"E-h'm—we do, certainly, hire—"

"Then will you please send round one—a good one—it had better be a baby grand—at once, please," Bunny requested, "to Beach House, on the front. And I'd like to pay now, if you will tell me how much, for a week, say?"

"Yes, miss; but—h'm—you come from— That is to say, miss, you are inquiring on behalf of—er—"

"Oh, no! I'm doing this on my own. There's a party of us staying at Beach House, and we've no piano for the hols."

"I see. Er—it will not get knocked about?"

"I should hope not! If it does, of course, I shall have to pay the damage—at least, dad will. It's quite all right," Bunny assured the hesitant reincarnation of Schubert. "So how much, please, and you can send it round?"

It was during some subsequent waiting for change and a receipt for a deposit that she saw a card of tin whistles—classy ones.

"I'll have one of those," she said, offering back a shilling from her change.

If the man had been a true-born salesman instead of a fifth-rate musician growing his hair rather long, he might have sold Bunny a fine jazz drum with gadgets complete.

She was quite in love with it, and was even wondering whether she would not come back for it, some other time, as she passed out.

If Bunny had been only a few seconds later in leaving the shop! As it was, she had gone from sight when another girl, of similar age, arrived at the doorway and went inside, causing the man in charge to come forward with a rather irritated look. He wanted to be at peace with his piano.

"Yes, miss?"

"I see you show a bill in your window for the concert party at the Pier Pavilion."

"Yes, miss. We are agents for the tickets, if you wish to book seats in advance."

"Oh, no, thanks! I only wondered whether you could display one of our bills—the Red Revellers—"

"The what?"

"Red Revellers—a concert party on the sands—"

"Oh, on the sands! Sorry, miss, but we never—no! There are no bookable seats on the sands, of course."

"But surely, out of goodwill—just to help us along?"

"Sorry, miss, but it would never do. The Pavilion people wouldn't like it. Anything else?"

Certainly not! was Madge's mental decision as she turned to leave the shop. If he couldn't do a little thing like that for her, then she would not think of spending a penny there—even if she had pence to spare.

Back by the way she had come went Madge Minden of Moreove School, grasping a sheaf of folded bills that she had been trying this last hour or so to dispose of.

Everywhere, the town seemed to be displaying placards advertising the concert party at the pierhead. Hoardings—you had to buy space on hoardings. Shop windows—you had to offer a few free tickets in return for a display. As for entertainers only "busking" on the sands; simply "scrounging" along—

Poor Red Revellers! Poor Aunt Ada and all of them—how they had had to scrounge their way even to this seaside town!

But although it was right to feel sorry for them, it would do them no good to give way to dejection. Madge raised a courageous smile.

"We're here, anyhow," she said to herself, "and to-night—to-night we give our show!"

## CHAPTER 5.

### Artistes and Audience

**S**TROLLING back to Beach House, Bunny Frevor made up her mind to say nothing about the hired piano. That was to be a little surprise for her chums.

She had pocketed the tin whistle, and would have kept dark about that also, only, when she got to Beach House, there was Jack Linton in the entrance hall, twanging away at his banjo, to the great delight of an admiring throng.

The versatile brother of madcap Polly could not break off to say "How do!" to Bunny. At sight of her he immediately improvised a facetious imitation of a "crooner," to the accompaniment of his banjo.

"Is it you? Do I see you?" crooned Jack. "Looking so bright, so funny, oh, you Bunny!"—thrum, thrum! And he continued:

"My heart is all for you,"—thrum, thrum!

"I dream of you!"—thrum, thrum!

"And some day,"—thrum, thrum!—"when I have some money,

I'll take you out to tea, my honey,

My Bunny!"—thrum, thrum!

At which point Bunny whipped out the tin whistle and sent ear-piercing notes wandering about the empty, barracky house.

"There you are, Tom," said Bunny, breaking off to present her brother with the tin whistle amidst great merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the laughter was still pealing, when Naomer came dashing upon the scene with a yell:

"Hi! Bekas, dinner, everybody!"

"Hooray!" Jack cheered. "Attaboy!"

And he, for one, started to march for the one-time dining-room, still strumming hard, whilst Tom made a first attempt at blowing "Come to the Cook-house Door, Boys!" on the whistle.

At last they were all assembled in the large dining-room, sitting down on deal forms to do justice to what might be set before them on the bare deal table.

Sunshine streamed in at the balcony windows, so the dinginess of the faded wallpaper could be ignored.



Mrs. Cardew was presiding. She—a great favourite with all the juniors—had readily undertaken to “matron” them for this unique holiday. In which capacity she was prepared to let them do much as they liked, knowing them all so well.

Loud cheers greeted the serving up of Polly's fried steak; and Mrs. Cardew only laughed. She had quite expected some such facetious demonstration—and so had Polly, who rose and bowed, afterwards aiming a bread-roll at Jack because he had changed to booing.

“Steak?” scowled Jack subsequently. “Great missteak! Joke, boys! Here, where's the waiter!”

Polly was instantly up from her chair and round the table, to hear any complaints.

“Would you—would you mind?” Jack submitted gemally. “The next time it's steak—tell coked not to let it fall in the fire? Thank you, thank you! I don't like to complain; it is never a custom of mine. But—Wow! Pax, Polly-wolly—pax!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“If you were really hungry!” Polly said, with dudgeon, and marched away with his ration, adding it to Tubby's plate.

Probably Jack was not hungry, after sundry calls at Parade cakeshops during the morning, for thereafter he became the waiter, wearing a serviette apronwise and performing his duties with what Bunny called “great aplomb.”

As for Polly, she took no notice; but towards the end of the meal she suddenly went to one of the bare walls and pinned up a secretly prepared notice, which said:

#### NO TIPPING!

Then Jack's cleverly acted gloom caused even greater merriment than all his cheerful bustling had created.

“Shan't be here any more after to-day, miladi,” he informed Pam, handing her a coffee at the end of the meal.

“Oh, won't you?”—serenely.

“I can get a better job than this,” Jack scowled, handing round more coffees, “at the Grand! I never have liked this place. I don't like the black beetles in the basement kitchen—no, sir!”

“Wha-a-at!” screeched Paula Creel, paying horrified attention to remarks which were being addressed to Tubby Bloat in particular.

“That steak you had, sir—a couple of portions too! I may as well tell you—”

“Don't tell him!” several voices implored.

“No Tipping!” the jester scowled on, setting coffee in front of Polly and Betty. “And here am I, a man with a sister to support!”

At this moment, there sounded the jangle-jangle of an old-fashioned doorbell.

“Not at home, John!” Polly informed the “waiter” sweetly. “If that is Lady Parrakeet—”

“It won't be, mum,” Jack declared darkly. “It'll be the rate collector. No, it isn't though!” he shouted, in his natural voice, after strolling to the window to see out on to the front steps. “My hat!”

“Why, what, Jack—what?”

“Here's somebody,” he gasped, “with a grand piano!”

Bombshell, this, for the company in general.

“Bekas, what ze diggings—”

“A joanner—a baby grand, boys! On a hand-truck, outside!”

“For us?” yelled half the dinner-table, jumping up. “A piano? Never!”

“Yes, that's quite all right,” said Bunny, calmly sipping her coffee. “I ordered one.”

The sensation then! The staring at her!

“Bunny!” was the incredulous chorus. “You've bought a— a piano?”

“Good gwacious—”

“Bekas, what ze diggings—”

“No, I've only hired it. For when we want a sing-song—say, some wet evening. Anyhow,” Bunny argued, “the piano's here, and that's all there is to it.”

“There's a jolly lot to it,” Jack chuckled, “and it'll want some getting in. Hooray, though, come on, boys, and lend a hand. This is great!”

“Gorjus!” Naomer yelled. “Bekas, a pianer, and a banjo, and a tin-whistle. What ze diggings, we shall be as good as ze concert party on ze pier!”

“Better!” Polly claimed.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

A moment more, and all were up from the table. Some merely ran out on to the balcony, to get a first sight of the piano, at the kerb. Others swarmed away to the front-door, to which the baby-grand would have to be carried up some broad front steps.

Two men had come with the piano, and doubtless they were experts at the job. All the same, the boys rushed to offer assistance, and very speedily the fine instrument was installed in an otherwise empty sitting-room—in full working order, as Pam proved, by sitting down to run off one of “the latest.”

Then the banjoist got going, the tin-whistler came in on the second verse, and soon Morcove was doing its washing-up, below stairs, in sing-song style.

“Beautiful tone, really,” Pam commented presently. “And now, what a pity Madge isn't with us!”

Their Madge, at that very moment starting some piano-practice less than half a mile from Beach House—and they never even knew that she was in the town!

**T**HE piano which Madge Minden played was set to one side of a tiny stage, the curtains of which were drawn close. Had they been apart, she could have looked out on to that patch of shingle, above high-water mark, where by-and-bye deck chairs must be set out in rows, in hopes of an audience for this evening.

Much worry and uncertainty had attended The Red Revellers' hiring of this booth-like theatre on the sands, with the use of an out-of-tune piano, electric current, folding chairs, and other appurtenances.

But their managing to scrape together, amongst themselves, a demanded “deposit,” had put them in possession

Five pounds was the amount they had had to find. Talk about taking a chance: this was a gamble! Madge herself had parted with so much of her pocket-money, she dared not think of calling in a piano-tuner.

She could not now afford one, and certainly none of her co-adventurers could. Yet what an awful piano it was, ruined by wet days; tinkly in the high notes, and twangy in the low.

Presently Aunt Ada would be down, with the others, and then they must not only rehearse as best they could, behind the closed curtains, but must see to a hundred and one things.

Sticking to her resolve to look on the bright side, Madge told herself that the rickety affair would look all right in time for the opening performance

They could switch on the coloured lamps quite



early; and, of course, the setting out of the deck-chairs by-and-bye would, in itself, make a big difference. Only, she had seen some of those chairs, and lots of them were going at the canvas, if not gone.

Never mind! That would be a job she could tackle presently, with a hammer and tacks. It was no use expecting Harry Norman to have time for that. He, the only male member of the company who was left, had stage carpentry to do, and not a little fiddling about with the electric wiring.

"Sunk or swim!"—and which was it to be? Swim, of course! The town was full up with visitors. People who had come down for Easter were still staying on, and others had since arrived, to make a thronged sea front, morning, noon and night.

Out of such thousands of pleasure-seekers, surely there would be plenty ready to take a sixpenny seat—or at any rate stand to look on and drop a copper in the bag when it was taken round!

The surge of the tide came to Madge's ears as she played on at the piano, and now and then she heard voices of happy holiday folk, drifting by.

Suddenly, she felt that she could play no more. She got up from the piano and stepped round into the makeshift dressing-room, where already dress baskets had been opened and stage costumes put out. She sat down at a dressing-table, and almost at once someone entered in a state of great agitation.

"Auntie!"

For it was Aunt Ada, and the troubled, forlorn look which had been hers so often in the last day, or two—it had returned. Her eyes—her eyes were full of despair.

"Madge dear! Oh, what shall we do, what can be done now!" was the sorrowful murmur. "We can't hope to ring up this evening. Impossible!"

"But, auntie darling—why ever not?"

"You know, dear, we were down to only one fellow in the company—Effie Norman's brother Harry. And now he too has gone."

"What!" Madge gasped. "Gone off, do you mean, like the others? How? Why? Where?"

"We just don't know! He told Effie he was going to the railway-station, to see if they would display a bill for us. The next thing was a visit from our landlady—after Harry had been away an hour, and he was only going to be a few minutes, he said. The landlady had taken a message for Effie over the 'phone, that we must carry on without him."

"But—" Madge blurted, and then checked. It was no use crying: "Impossible!" when the thing had happened. The third and last male member of the party had gone—the same way as the first two! Supposed to be such splendid fellows, all three of them, and yet—quitters!

Aunt Ada suddenly gave way to fury.

"We will carry on, though—won't we Madge? Of course we will! Men! Better without them, if that's the sort they are! Now, Madge dear—"

"Yes, auntie, I'm sure I'm ready to do all I can—"

"You and I, Madge, we must! Effie and Maisie are terribly upset by all this. Oh, those poor things—to have been served like this, by their brothers! But they have pluck, if those brothers of theirs hadn't. By this evening—"

"We'll ring up whether there's anybody in front or not. One thing, we've several hours yet."

But they were hours that simply flashed by. Except for a brief rest and a cup of tea at five

o'clock, it was a non-stop rush for all concerned—Madge and her aunt, and the three young ladies; an "all-women" party now, and a brave little party at that!

Madge realised that only excitement was keeping her going now—and that was bad. For a time during the afternoon she had given her mind to the three "desertions," whilst turning her hand to this and that. But, with the performance coming on, she had to give up wondering and puzzling.

There was to be a lively overture, switching to an opening chorus as the curtains were flashed apart.

Before sitting down to the piano, she felt impelled to take a peep round the edge of one front curtain, to see if any sort of an audience had found its way to the deck chairs. And then—the shock of it.

Only a sprinkling of people had taken seats; but in one of the front rows sat a whole string of girls and boys. And Madge, with a great leap of her heart, had recognised them instantly as all the chums with whom she should have been holidaying!

## CHAPTER 6.

### Something Must Be Done

"WHAT ze diggings! Bekas, when are zey going to make a start!"

"I say, boys, what made us turn in at this show?"

"Shall we beat it then? We haven't paid yet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, but it looks like being a dud affair," laughed Betty.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, and I have a pwesentiment that my deck-cheah is going to give way at the canvas, geals!"

More laughter from a batch of juniors who, of course were in skittish holiday mood.

"Red Revellers!" quoth Jack. "Gosh, I shall see red soon, if they don't—Hooray!" as some electric footlights suddenly shone upon the faded curtains. "Aw, how marvellous!"

"Bekas, granjure! What ze diggings, pass ze choes, plis, or I shall go out!"

"Hi, Polly, can I change chairs? This one of mine—"

"No, you can't, Jack! Sit still and behave!"

"Well, Tubby's paying for this, we're not," groaned Jack. "Isn't that right, Tubby?"

As well as he could, with a large lump of toffee distending a cheek, Tubby Bloot implied that that was quite right. Tubby's was an after-dinner mood of wanting nothing better than not to have to get up from his deck-chair—if only it would go on supporting his bulky person.

"Not exactly a packed house," gurgled Bunny, after a glance behind. "Oh, this is going to be an awful flop. Waste of time, coming here!"

"But listen!" tittered Helen Craig, as some tinkly music started. "Overture on the—piano, is it?"

"Nunno," said Jack. "That's a harpsichord, that is!"

"Spinet," was Polly's opinion. "You can tell by the jangle-jangle."

"You're all wrong," said Tom, flatly. "It's a cross between a piano-organ and a banjo. Hallo, a note gone somewhere!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The dumb note being noticed again, next moment, there was another ripple of merriment. Jack and Tom sat forward, eagerly awaiting the repetition of it. When another blank came, they cheered.





In her own exciting way Naomer did her best to draw attention to the show. "Ze finest show on earth! Just beginning—so hurry up! Come and see ze Red Reffellers!" But her cries went unheeded, and her eagerly-offered handbills were cast aside.

"You boys," Polly reproved them, sitting between them. "We shall be turned out."

"I hope so," sighed Jack. "Hallo, the note's come right again! No, it hasn't! Blub, there it was again!"

Suddenly the faded curtains flew apart—and the scanty audience beheld three pierrettes in a very unready state for the opening chorus.

Their nerve seemed to have failed them, for next moment they ran into the wings, leaving a pierrette pianiste still jangling out the tune to which the chorus should have been sung.

"Hooray! Give 'em a cheer, boys!" Jack shouted, clapping hard. "Gosh, I can't stand this," came his graver exclamation. "Painful!"

And his companions similarly, were all done with jocularitry now. Cruel, they felt, to be derisive now that the curtain, so to speak, had gone up.

Like the good-natured lot they were, their hearts went out instantly to the young pianiste, left in that forsaken state, in full view of the audience. Young? Why, she was no older than many a schoolgirl—so Morcove decided, whilst clapping encouragingly.

"Bravo!" the chums applauded, hoping to fetch back those who had fled the stage. Clap, clap, clap! "Core!"

"It's a shame," murmured Pam, pityingly eyeing the young pianiste as she pluckily started the chorus all over again. "They'd do better to let down the curtain."

"Perhaps it won't come down—got stuck," said Polly, not humorously, but feelingly. "It's pretty obvious, they— Oh, there! That's awful!"

For, suddenly, the pianiste had stopped playing and was in tears—quite broken down, weeping half-hysterically over the dreadful fiasco that it was.

"Poor thing!"

"Yes, too distressing, bai Jove. Geals, geals—"

"Oh, heck!" Jack gritted, and then glared round upon some people behind who were still tittering.

"Shut up, can't you?" he glared at them.

"Eh, what?" he gasped, as Polly now clawed him by the arm in a calling-attention way. "I was only telling them—"

"Never mind about them," Polly panted excitedly. "Jack, do you see? Betty's just recognised her! The pianiste—"

"What about her? Great Scott," as he stared at the weeping pierrette, "it's— But it can't be!"

"But it is!" Polly insisted wildly. "It's Madge—it's our Madge!"

"Whew!"

At this instant, Betty bounded up from her deck chair, to work her way quickly out of the row of seats. The others saw her make a dash to the front of the "stage" and agilely mount to the shaky platform.

They saw her stride first to Madge and say a word or so to her. Then Betty turned to take her stand in front of the footlights. She held up a hand for silence.

"Order, please—order!" And her chums, who had become mute and still several moments since, were aware of people behind pausing in the act of going away.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Betty spoke calmly and clearly. "I'm sure our friends, the entertainers, can rely upon a little indulgence. Kindly resume your seats, and I can promise you your money's worth—a jolly good show after all!"

"Bravo, bravo!" Morcove and Co. dinned in their front seats, and clapped afresh. "Bravo-o-o! 'Core!"



This time the encouraging applause was taken up by everybody else. It went on as Betty was seen to lead Madge back to the piano and to stay beside her even when the overture was being repeated.

Then the curtains closed together in front of the stage, their jerky movements making it evident that they had gone on strike, just now. Behind the curtains the out-of-tune piano rendered the overture, as before, whilst Betty suddenly came back to resume her seat in the audience.

There was applause for her from some of the people; but she took no notice. What she did notice was that others were leaving after all.

"It's an awful state of things," she hastily imparted to her chums. "A run of vile luck. There's an aunt of Madge's behind, and she explained a bit. Three members of the company have deserted. Those young ladies—no wonder they lost their heads, just now."

"But—"  
"Look here—leaving all talk till afterwards," Betty rushed on. "Can't some of us lend a hand? Jack—you're good at gagging, clowning—"

"Go on, Jack," Polly promptly commanded. "If only for Madge's sake!"

"Come on, Tom: come on, Tubby," said Jack, just as promptly getting up. "Jimmy, you run home for my banjo—sharp now!"

"Yes, bekas— But, what ze diggings!" broke

off Naomer, noticing a wad of handbills in Betty's hand. "Bekas—show me, Betty. queek!"

"They're to advertise the show. There's been no time to give them out on the front, the printers didn't deliver them in time. But to-morrow—"

But Naomer saw no reason why it should not be done—this evening! Her little brown hands made a snatch at the handbills, and next moment she was off and away with them.

Just once she glanced behind, after getting clear of the seats. She saw that the curtains had flown apart again, and that the three pierriettes were on the stage, completely self-possessed—singing tunefully, gaily!

Then Naomer, jabbering excitably to herself, ran for some stone steps that would take her up to the thronged Parade.

Breathlessly she got to the asphalted promenade, and breathlessly she appealed to passers-by whilst offering the handbills.

"Bekas, hi! Egsucose me, plis, but—just beginning, so hurry up, queek! Ze finest show on ze earth—ze Red Reffellers—Concert Party—front seats, sixpence! Don't miss eet, bekas—hi! Read this! A really gorjus treat—now starting!"

So the imp of Study 12, in all her artlessness and good nature dinned at the evening promenaders, causing all to stare and many to laugh.

But, as she noticed, for every handbill that was retained, to be read, another was contemptuously allowed to flutter to the ground. "Pooh, who wants to go to that!"

For good or ill, the handbills were soon disposed of, and then Naomer could go scampering back, hoping to find the show being carried on somehow.

"Bekas, Morcove and ze boys will have made a difference!"

As indeed they had. Naomer came in sight of the stage again to see, with huge delight, some of her own best chums doing some comedy stuff that was going with a bang.

Polly and Bunny—they were there, taking part with Jack, Tom, and Tubby in a lot of improvised fooling, all screamingly funny.

The boys must have found and donned, with lightning speed, costumes belonging to the "quitters," for they were in stage dress. One of the effects which kept a rapidly growing audience in yells of laughter was Tubby's particularly comical appearance in pierrot garb.

As for Madge, she was still at the piano, ready to take the cue for "band" at any moment. Many a time had she served at "orchestra" for her chums, during some school concert, and the old team spirit—it was present now; it was simply saving the situation.

Larger and larger grew the watching crowd. By twos and threes folk slipped in, to occupy deck chairs, which were soon all taken.

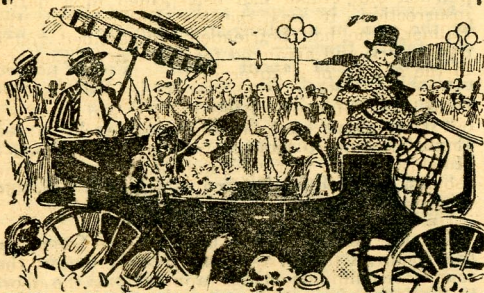
"Full House"—and still young and old alike came up, attracted by the appreciative yells of laughter and were glad to be able to find "standing room only."

"Big Business!" That was what it meant for The Red Revellers at this, their first performance at Brighthampton.

And to-morrow—what?  
Morcove could have said. For Morcove had already made up his mind.

To-morrow Morcove—and the boys—would help this ill-fated concert-party to give such an entertainment as would take the town by storm!

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Hulele Finds "Meesses Mon'mery"--but Only After a Thrilling Adventure. A Complete Story

# HULELE~ Alone in England



By Renee Frazer

## CHAPTER I. An Unfriendly Welcome

**C**LANG! Clang—clang!  
Hulele, the little native girl from the South Seas, started violently, her heart thumping, as the echoing clamour reached her ears.

When, rather nervously, she had tugged at the rusty chain hanging in the porch, she had not really known what would happen.

She had half imagined that the door would be flung wide—and a smiling, gracious lady would be there to receive her—the lady she had seen so often in her dreams.

But the heavy oak door remained shut; the muffled clamour of the bell died away into silence.

Timidly, Hulele glanced up at the massive iron knocker, with its carved lion's head, wondering if she dared lift it to make her presence known.

Perhaps "Meesses Mon'mery" had not heard her ring—or perhaps she had forgotten the young islander who had come halfway across the world to see her? Perhaps—perhaps she had grown tired of waiting?

Hulele's lips trembled at the thought, and a little anxious furrow appeared on her dusky forehead. A quaint, rather wistful little figure, she stood there in the gloomy vastness of the porch—a little frightened now that she had actually reached her goal.

She had been so long in finding it—and never once during that lonely journey, across an unknown country, had her courage faltered; but now, on the very steps of "Haw't'orn 'All," her heart misgave her.

It required all her indomitable courage to reach up and grasp the carved knocker, and to allow it to fall with a frightening, hollow-sounding thud that sent her heart leaping to her mouth.

Again she waited, half fearfully, half eagerly, trying to picture what Meesses Mon'mery would look like; the white lady who was the sister of the big, kind Englishman who had been the friend of Hulele's uncle, one-time chief of the Island of Matu.

When old Timau had been killed in a native insurrection, it was the big Englishman, Jim Palmer, who had befriended the terrified young native girl, and arranged for her visit to England in the charge of a governess.

That had been many, many moons ago—so many that Hulele had lost count. But throughout that lonely, frightening journey—after the English governess had so strangely disappeared—Hulele's simple native mind had clung to the thought of Meesses Mon'mery, and the welcome that would await her at Haw't'orn 'All.

Hark!  
Hulele's heart beat more quickly, and her dusky face lit up as, to her straining ears, there came the sound of shuffling footsteps approaching the door.

Hulele clasped her hands, the few coloured bangles she wore on her slim arms rattling together in her excitement.

"Meesses Mon'mery!" she whispered eagerly. "Hulele come—to stay!"

Then the front door was opened, and the eager smile faded from the native girl's face. Rather disappointedly she gazed at the unkempt, sallow-faced man, wearing a green baize apron and carpet slippers, who peered at her suspiciously by the flickering light of a candle.

"Wot d'you want?" he demanded in surly tones. Hulele plucked up her courage, forcing a friendly smile.

"I Hulele," she announced quaintly. "I come stay with Meesses Mon'mery."

The man's eyes narrowed as he ran thoughtful fingers over his unshaven chin.



"If you're meanin' Mrs. Montgomery," he returned, "she's gorn away. I'm the caretaker, see. If you've got any message, you'd better leave it."

Hulele's heart sank. She understood English sufficiently well to know what the man meant.

Meeses Mon'mery had gone away!

A bewildered expression crossed the native girl's face as pluckily she fought back the tears that threatened to well into her dark eyes.

She had come so far, so loyally on her quest—only to find this bitter disappointment awaiting her.

But, characteristically, her native optimism rose superior to the blow.

Her eyes brightened a little as she glanced at the sallow-faced caretaker.

"Hulele wait here—! Meeses Mon'mery come back, yes!" she announced simply.

The man's expression hardened as he barred the way.

"Ho, no, you don't!" he retorted. "You try any of them tricks 'ere an' it'll be the worse for you—see? I don't trust you darkies further'n I c'n see you. If you ain't got a message to leave—clear off!"

And he made as though to slam the door in Hulele's face.

But he reckoned without the dormant, fiery spirit that underlay the native's girl's outward timidity.

Anger smouldered suddenly in her dark eyes as she saw the man's action. This was Meeses Mon'mery's house—and she was not going to be sent away!

She leapt forward unexpectedly, her slim, dusky fingers tightening on the startled caretaker's arm—the impetus of her cat-like spring carrying the bewildered man back into the hall.

What might have happened next is uncertain, but just then a door was flung open, and a tall, sharp-faced woman appeared on the threshold.

"Fred!" she exclaimed coldly. "What is all this?"

The disgruntled caretaker jerked his thumb towards the native girl, muttering something that Hulele could not understand. The woman stepped forward—and Hulele shrank instinctively against the wall.

She mistrusted the woman's smile—the hard, calculating look in her eyes. Her native intuition warned her of the other's cruel and unscrupulous nature.

"What is your name, girl?" inquired the woman sharply.

The young native drew herself up proudly.

"I Hulele," she announced, with only the slightest tremor in her voice. "I come long way 'cross sea to find Meeses Mon'mery who live here."

"I told her that the old girl ain't here—" began the caretaker truculently.

His wife silenced him with a gesture.

"You're a fool, Fred," she said curtly, with a meaning glance. "I've been expecting this girl for some weeks."

She opened a door and beckoned Hulele to follow her. The native girl, looking round timidly, found herself in a lofty, beautifully-furnished room, lined with books.

The woman placed a lamp on the table, and crossed to the door.

"Wait here!" she ordered curtly, and the door closed behind her, a key turning in the lock.

Hulele gazed round her wonderingly, rather awed by the family portraits that stared at her so sternly from the walls.

She felt vaguely unhappy and ill-at-ease.

This was the house where Meeses Mon'mery lived—but Meeses Mon'mery was not here.

Cautiously she tiptoed round the room, her curiosity gradually getting the better of her timidity as she examined the furniture and the pictures, and fingered the heavy velvet tapestries.

And then her attention was attracted to a framed photograph standing on a small table—the portrait of a gracious, silver-haired lady, with a smile that went straight to the little native girl's heart.

Timidly she picked up the frame and gazed at the portrait, her eyes shining.

She wondered wistfully if Meeses Mon'mery was anything like that lady—and, instinctively, she spoke the name aloud.

As she did so, there was a movement behind her—a sound of footsteps muffled by the thick carpet. The next instant the framed portrait was snatched from her hand, and flung to the ground, where the glass shattered in a hundred fragments.

With a cry Hulele spun round—to confront the hard-faced woman. The woman's cheeks were flushed, and there was an unpleasant glitter in her eyes.

"How dare you meddle with things that don't concern you!" rapped the other sharply, and her hand fastened in a cruel grip on Hulele's wrist.

The native girl struggled spiritedly, tears welling in her eyes.

"Why—why you do that?" she demanded breathlessly. "Hulele not do any harm! Hulele just look at picture of nice lady she think like Meeses Mon'mery!"

The woman's eyes narrowed, and an unpleasant smile curved her lips.

"In future, my girl, you'll do as I tell you," she returned curtly. "*I am Mrs. Montgomery!*"

## CHAPTER 2

### Question and Answer

**H**ULELE stared at the speaker, a bewildered expression on her dusky features.

Her dreams of a gracious, smiling lady had been shattered with the breaking of the photo-frame. This hard-faced, scowling woman—her Meeses Mon'mery!

Tears sprang into Hulele's eyes, and her hands clenched at her sides.

"You not!" she exclaimed, brokenly. "Hulele not believe it!"

The woman's lips tightened; she reached out suddenly, grasping the native girl by the shoulder and shaking her.

"You impudent little savage!" she rapped. "I'll teach you to adopt that tone with me!"

But Hulele's high-spirited nature would not put up with treatment like that. She wrenched herself free and, darting across the room, snatched up the broken photo-frame with its smiling portrait.

"You not teach Hulele!" she returned defiantly, pressing the photograph to her.

"Hulele not like you. You bad woman—Hulele run away, find Meeses Mon'mery—"

"Stop!" exclaimed the woman sharply as the native girl made for the door.

But Hulele was already in the passage, and running for dear life.

In front of her were the stairs and, without stopping to think, Hulele raced up them.

On the landing she paused for an instant, listening with a thumping heart to the pounding of her pursuers' footsteps.



The process of the young native girl's thoughts was simple—she wanted to hide the picture of the smiling lady before the bad woman took it away from her!

But where could she hide it?

In the gloom at the end of the landing she saw another flight of stairs leading to the attics.

Hulele ran noiselessly towards them—to come to a sudden halt, her eyes dilating.

From the darkness above a faint voice was calling! Hulele could not make out the words, but she conjured up uneasy fancies of demons and hob-goblins waiting in the darkness to pounce on her.

She shrank back, her face paling, and the next moment her pursuers had overtaken her.

The woman snatched Hulele by the arm, her face convulsed with fury.

"You little spy!" she grated. "What have you seen—or heard? Answer me!"

Startled, uncomprehending, Hulele stared back, holding tightly to the precious photograph.

"Hulele—Hulele not know what you mean," she faltered.

"The kid's heard nothing, Sadie," put in the man with a warning glance. "Give her some supper—and ask her those questions."

The woman nodded, with a meaning smile.

"I'm sorry, my dear," she said, patting Hulele's shoulder. "if I appeared harsh with you

—but you mustn't disobey me. You understand that I am Mrs. Montgomery, your guardian. Come downstairs and have something to eat; you must be hungry."

Hulele stared, bewildered by this abrupt change of manner, but her simple mind had no suspicions of guile. She was pleased that the strange people were no longer cross with her—and she was hungry—very, very hungry!

"Hulele eat, now—yes?" she asked quaintly. "Hulele good girl."

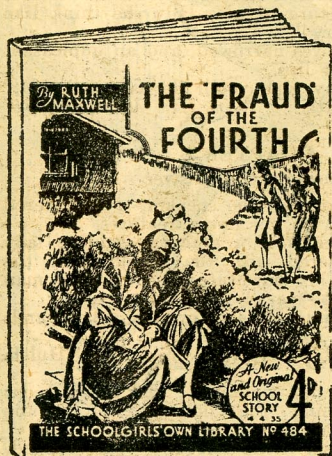
Still holding protectively to the broken photo-frame, she followed the woman downstairs and into a large kitchen, where a welcome smell of cooking greeted her nostrils.

The woman went away, to return with a large plate heaped up with some steaming, savoury food; she placed it on the table just out of Hulele's reach.

"Now, my dear," she said, with a meaning glance at her husband, "before you start—I want you to tell me about the message you brought from Jim Palmer."

Hulele stared, uncomprehendingly. "Jeem—you mean Meester Palmer, who so kind to my uncle, big chief of island?" she asked. "That's right—Mr. Palmer," returned the woman eagerly. "What message did he send?"

(Continued on the next page.)



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Hulele shook her head, perplexed by the question.

"Hulele not know 'bout message. Meester Palmer he not say anything 'bout that. He tell Hulele she come to England to stay with Meeses Mon'mery—and Hulele come."

A frown crossed the woman's face and her eyes narrowed.

"Don't tell me fibs!" she rapped. "There was a message. Think!"

A stubborn expression crossed Hulele's face, as she shook her head. She did not like the woman's bullying tone—and she had no idea what the other was talking about.

"Hulele not know 'bout message," she repeated. "Hulele come to find Meeses Mon'mery."

The woman shook her spitefully by the arm.

"Very well, my girl," she rapped, "two can play at that game! You'll not touch a bite of food till you give me that message."

The little native girl sprang to her feet. She understood the woman's threat, and her dark eyes blazed.

"Hulele not eat, then!" she declared. "Hulele not tell you, if she knew. You bad, horrid woman—and you not Hulele's Meeses Mon'mery!"

And, picking up the steaming plate of food, Hulele flung it to the ground.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### When the Bell Told

THAT night, tired out and hungry, Hulele sobbed herself to sleep on a great four-poster bed—her plucky spirit almost broken at last.

And, grasped in her dusky hand, was the shattered photo-frame, bearing the likeness of the smiling, gracious lady she had come so far to see—in vain.

The pale moonlight crept in through the tall window—revealing the motionless, dusky little figure stretched out on the white coverlet.

It revealed, too, a shadowy, stealthy form that crept slowly across the room towards the bed, as though preparing to spring on the sleeper.

Hulele stirred uneasily; her native instincts, rarely fully asleep, warned her of approaching danger!

Suddenly she sat bolt upright—wide awake with every nerve alert, in time to see a bony hand reaching out from the shadows towards her wrist.

Hulele did not scream as a white girl might have done. Instead, she leapt with cat-like agility from the bed, clawing furiously at the shadowy figure that hovered near.

But she was no match for the other's strength. The intruder flung her violently to the floor—and the door slammed, the key turning sharply in the lock.

Bruised and shaken—fearful only for the safety of her cherished photograph—Hulele darted to the bed to find, to her relief, that the broken frame was still there.

But her wrist was aching where the bony fingers of her assailant had closed on it and, glancing down, Hulele discovered that a carved ivory bangle—a gift from Meester Jeem Palmer—had vanished!

But Hulele was too unnerved to be greatly distressed over the loss. She felt that she could not stay in this mysterious house a moment longer.

Taking the photograph of the smiling lady out of its frame, she slipped it under her frock. Then, darting to the window, she flung it open.

A moment later, she was creeping, with cat-like agility, along a narrow ledge outside.

Beneath her was a sheer drop, without crevice or creeper to aid her climb.

For a moment the native girl hesitated; then, reaching up, she grasped the gutter overhead and drew herself up on to the sloping roof.

Then her eyes widened, and her heart beat more quickly. A few feet away from her, a dim yellow light shone from an attic window!

Hulele's native curiosity was not proof against this. For the moment she forgot her anxiety to



Frightened by the clanging of the bell, Hulele knew not what to do. And then the caretaker and his wife rushed up. "Come down!" they cried. Hulele knew that she was trapped; what could she do?

escape as she crept towards the window and peered inside.

Then a little cry escaped her lips—a cry of bewilderment and delight.

For, lying on a narrow bed, her silver hair strewn over the pillow, was a pale, wan-looking lady—the gracious lady of the photograph!

Hulele felt herself trembling as she crouched there, hardly daring to breathe.

The lady was not smiling now; she was asleep, though her grey head moved restlessly on the pillow, and through the open window there came to Hulele's straining ears a faint, stifled moan.

The sound seemed to stab through Hulele's heart. She felt as though she had known the gracious, white-haired lady for a long, long time.

She was the Meeses Mon'mery of the little native girl's dreams!



Nearer, Hulele crept, drawn by some strange power. The window was open at the bottom, and before Hulele knew what she was doing, she was inside the little attic room.

Her heart thumping, she tiptoed towards the bed. A board creaked under her foot—and the lady in the bed opened her eyes, staring at Hulele a little dazedly.

"Who—who is it?" she whispered unsteadily. "Why won't they send for the doctor?"

Hulele crept to the foot of the bed, a friendly, half timid smile lighting up her dusky face.

"I Hulele," she announced simply. "You—you Meeses Mon'mery, maybe—yes?"

The lady regarded her in puzzled fashion, and passed a hand rather wearily over her forehead. She was weak and ill, and her thoughts were wandering.

"Why don't they send for a doctor?" she faltered. "They know that I'm ill. And the message—the message—"

She covered her face with her hands, moaning faintly.

Hulele's impulsive heart was touched; she longed to do something to comfort the white lady, but her simple mind was baffled.

Then a strange thought came to her, bred of native superstition. The white lady was bewitched!

a trapdoor above, leading to the old belfry, dangled a thick, knotted rope.

To venture down the stairs would mean instant capture by the scoundrelly caretaker and his hard-faced wife.

Hulele chose the only other way. Without a moment's hesitation she sprang for the knotted rope, and commenced to climb up it as nimbly as a monkey.

Hulele did not know that the rope was attached to the great, disused bell in the old tower!

Her heart turned cold as, from above her head she heard a rusty creaking, followed by a deep boom.

*Boom—clang!*

Through the old house, over the silent countryside, echoed the deep, warning note of the old alarm-bell!

Startled cottagers raced to their windows; occupants of nearby mansions stared at one another in bewilderment.

"It's the bell at Hawthorn Hall!"

"And Mrs. Montgomery's away!"

"What does it mean?"

Oblivious of the sensation she was causing, scared only by the startling, unexpected sound, Hulele clung to the rope staring, with terror-filled eyes, up into the darkness of the belfry.

She imagined that the demons that had bewitched her Meeses Mon'mery were hiding up there, in the gloom!

And now there came the sound of footsteps on the attic stairs, and the caretaker and his wife, white-faced and furious, came hurrying to investigate.

Hulele, staring down, knew not what to do. The woman was carrying a lantern, and she held it above her head, staring up at the swaying rope.

An angry shout escaped her lips.

"It's the native girl! Get her down, Fred, or she'll have the whole countryside round our ears!"

The man shook his fist threateningly.

"Come down, you!" he grated, attempting to grab Hulele's feet.

Hulele kicked out desperately—and the jerking rope swung the bell.

*Boom—clang!*

Once again the deep-throated warning echoed from the old tower, and Hulele's nerveless fingers momentarily relaxed their hold.

She fell, her arms and legs flailing as she crashed into the scoundrelly couple.

And even as she fell she noticed, in a flash, that the woman was holding a familiar carved bangle! Her bangle—that little token which had been stolen from her so recently.

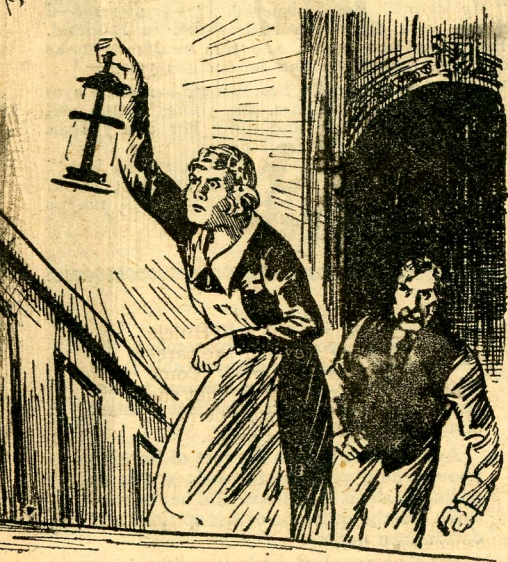
Like lightning the native girl acted. Taking advantage of the melee caused by her fall, she shot out a hand and wrenched the bangle from the woman's grasp.

The woman uttered an angry cry; her foot shot out as she tried to trip up the young native. But Hulele eluded her, only to rush blindly into the arms of the man Fred.

There was a terrific crash as they fell to the ground together in a tangled heap. Hulele, still clutching the bangle, felt a stunning blow on the head—and then everything was blotted out!

WHEN Hulele came to her senses, she found herself reclining in a big chair in the lofty, book-lined room. The family portraits still stared at her from the walls, but, this time, they seemed to smile instead of frown.

And there were several people in the room,



Hulele's heart beat more quickly, and she gazed nervously round the attic-room.

The idea was in keeping with the whole gloomy atmosphere of the house.

Hulele knew of only one way of combating witchcraft, and that was to send for a witch-doctor! But she did not know if such people existed in England—or where she could find them.

At least, she could try!

Creeping to the door she opened it, and peered out into a narrow, dark passage.

A dim light crept up the attic stairs, and from



ladies and gentlemen, talking in low, excited voices.

Near the door stood a policeman in uniform, and Hulele's heart gave a sudden jump as she caught sight of him.

For, to her, the helmeted man with silver buttons was a witch-doctor, and Hulele remembered, in a flash, that she must find a witch-doctor to cure her Meeses Mon'mery!

She struggled to stand up, but a kindly hand was laid on her shoulder, and a grey-haired gentleman bent over her.

"Steady, young lady," he said kindly. "You'll be all right, now. Just lie still."

Hulele stared up at him anxiously.

"Hulele speak to witch-doctor," she breathed, unsteadily. "Hulele tell him 'bout Meeses Mon'mery and bad people. Hulele great hur-ee—yes!"

The gentleman smiled in a kindly fashion as he patted her shoulder.

"I'm a doctor, my dear," he said, "and there's no need to worry about Mrs. Montgomery, now. With careful treatment she'll pull through—though no thanks to that pair of scoundrels who tried to hush up her illness!"

His face hardened as he spoke, and he glanced significantly towards the constable standing in the doorway.

"One thing," he added grimly, "the Jacksons will get their deserts—thanks to this young lady."

"What was their motive, doctor?" inquired another gentleman, one of Mrs. Montgomery's neighbours, who had led the search-party in answer to the warning bell.

"Fairly plain," remarked the doctor. "It seems that Mrs. Montgomery was expecting a message from her brother in the South Seas. It had to do with some valuable family papers hidden in the old house—and this young lady"—he smiled at Hulele—"was the unsuspecting bearer of the message."

He slipped a hand into his pocket, and produced a carved bangle.

A little cry of delight escaped Hulele's lips as she stretched out her hand.

"He mine!" she declared. "Mcester Jeem, ho give it to me."

The doctor nodded, his eyes twinkling.

"But you didn't know this, young lady," he remarked.

And before Hulele's astonished gaze he held up the bangle—which appeared to have come in halves—revealing a tube-like hollow inside.

"Jim Palmer's message was in here," he declared. "The Jackson's tried to get hold of this bangle, but they counted without this youngster's pluck. She managed to get it back. The message is now in Mrs. Montgomery's hands."

Someone entered the room; there was a murmured conversation and the doctor turned to Hulele.

"Your Mrs.—Mon'mery is waiting to see you," he remarked gravely. "Do you feel well enough to walk?"

Hulele caught in her breath sharply as she stumbled to her feet, catching at the doctor's arm for support!

"Meeses Mon'mery—wait see Hulele!" she breathed, unsteadily. "Quick—quick, you take me to her!"

In a large, comfortably-furnished bed-room, the silver-haired lady lay, propped up against the pillows.

She turned a wan, smiling face towards the door as Hulele entered, and held out her arms.

"My dear!" she whispered. "Forgive me—I did not even know you had landed in England. I have been so anxious, and was unable to make inquiries—come near, and let me see you—"

With a little lump in her throat, her dark eyes shining with unshed tears, the young native girl darted to the bedside and flung her dusky arms impulsively round the frail figure.

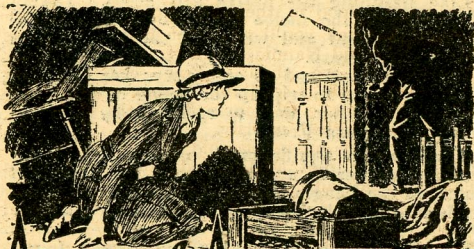
"Hulele find her Meeses Mon'mery—at last!" she gulped. "Hulele not mind anything, now. Hulele so happy she want to laugh, but maybe she cry, too—Meeses Mon'mery!"

THE END.

## Next Tuesday

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STARTS TO-DAY: This Brilliant Story, Starring  
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### Claudette's Challenge

"NANNIE, what's for breakfast, dear?"

Claudette Oliver spoke from where she was standing in the doorway of a gaily-painted caravan, looking out across the fields.

The morning sunshine, peeping over the tree-tops, touched her auburn hair, so that it glistened like red gold. Her dark eyes held laughter in their depths, though there was little of joy in Claudette's heart. But then, that was typical of Claudette; always she was vivacious, ready to smile, purposeful and spirited.

A half-smothered sob from the interior of the van brought her round in a flash. She saw Nannie, the white-haired old lady who had been her nurse as long as she could remember, at the open door of their tiny cupboard, tears in her eyes.

"Oh, my dear—only a loaf and then we have nothing," Nannie returned brokenly. "Whatever is going to become of us all?"

Claudette's sensitive fingers suddenly clenched.

What was going to become of them? An empty larder; the last shilling in her purse—the future to face!

At that moment Claudette felt frozen with dread. What did the future hold for them? She was willing to work—but what could she do?

Brought up by a darling, indulgent daddy, she hadn't been trained for a business life—willing though she would have been.

Then, as tears glistened on Nan's cheeks, Claudette's merry, light-hearted laugh rang out.

"What's going to become of us, Nan?" she repeated cheerily. "Why, we're going to have a high old tea to-day. I've got a feeling!"

She didn't add that it was an empty feeling she had at the moment!

"Ah, my dear—always a laugh—always a light-hearted joke," Nan said, shaking her head doubt-

# The Caravan Wanderers

By Louise Carlton

fully. "You don't realise how serious our position is."

How wrong Nannie was!

Claudette's happy smile hid an aching, dread-filled heart. Hers wasn't the nature to be miserable under any circumstances.

"Nan, there's no need to worry. We'll hear from Uncle Jonathan any moment now," she said hopefully.

Left orphans by the death of their daddy, Claudette and her young sister, Jessie, found themselves left with their nurse, Nannie, a caravan, a sagacious St. Bernard dog called Bruce, a parrot rejoicing in the name of Joey, and Chum, a knowing pony.

A very small sum of money had completed their outfit—and now the money was gone and there was scarcely food in the larder for another meal.

"I don't think you'll get much help from Uncle Jonathan," said Nannie dolefully.

"Oh, yes, we shall. You see," returned Claudette. "He'll send for us soon. Wasn't he daddy's brother? Of course he'll help us."

And she laughed merrily.

"We'll finish up in that old shed with the congregated iron roof at the end of the field, you see," the old lady declared.

Again Claudette laughed, as she kissed her old nurse.

"And what's going to happen to the van, that we'd have to go to the shed with the—ahem—thingummy roof?" she asked.

"You'll have to sell it."

"Not a bit of it," Claudette replied. "Hallo, what's the matter, Jess?"



A red-haired girl of fourteen had come running to the van. She was freckled and had a slightly tip-tilted nose. Nannie always declared that an imp of mischief had made a permanent home in her heart.

"There's a young woman on a motor-bike at the gate. Says she must see you at once," Jess cried excitedly. "She's got urgent news for you. Come on—let's see what it is!"

Leaving the van and followed by Bruce, Claudette ran down the meadow to the gate.

"Hallo!" she cried to the somewhat pale-faced young woman who sat astride a motor-cycle. "Do you want me?"

"Are you Claudette Oliver?" the other asked. Then, as Claudette nodded, she went on: "I'm Sadie Clarke, a distant cousin of yours—"

"My goodness!" ejaculated Claudette, in amazement.

"Listen!" the other rushed on. "Your Uncle Jonathan sent me to tell you to come to his house to-day, at four o'clock. He's distributing a fortune!"

Claudette almost fainted at the astounding announcement.

"He's doing what?" she jerked.

"I said he's distributing a fortune," was the reply. "He wants you there."

"Tell him his wish will be gratified with the greatest of pleasure," returned Claudette. "Do I take the family with me?"

"The family?"

"Yes. Nan, Jess, Bruce, Joey, and Chum!" nodded Claudette brightly. "Being in the order of interpretation—our old nurse, my sister, the dog, the parrot, and the pony!"

"What a strange lot you are, aren't you?" said Sadie, with a smile that Claudette wasn't quite sure whether she liked. "Please yourself—Uncle Jonathan expects a crowd! You know where to go?"

"Oh, yes," said Claudette. "We'll be there, Sadie. So long!"

Sadie rode off, to the tune of a deafening roar from the exhaust of her motor-cycle, whilst Claudette seized Jess and waltzed her round and round.

Then she rushed her to the van, where they burst in on Nannie Brown like an avalanche.

Breathlessly they poured out the news.

"I told you so, Nannie—I knew we should hear from him," Claudette cried.

But if they expected Nan to share their joy they were disappointed.

"Uncle Jonathan?" she sniffed. "The only thing he ever gave away was advice—and not always that."

"Good old Nan!" laughed Claudette. "Cheer up!"

"Don't you go expecting any fortune from him," Nan added warningly.

But Sadie had distinctly said that Uncle Jonathan was distributing a fortune.

Claudette remembered her uncle but faintly. He was an old man, very grumpy at times; but she recalled several episodes when he had been kindly and gentle.

The house was some twenty miles away, and feverishly they set about "breaking" camp.

With Chum in the shafts and Bruce trotting under the van, whilst Joey whistled shrilly from his cage on the rear platform, they took to the road.

Claudette had a shilling left—and this she cheerfully spent at mid-day on some bread, cheese and butter.

They were going to a fortune!—so Claudette thought.

In the library of the large, gloomy house, standing in its own grounds, Claudette continued to ask herself that all-important question.

Four o'clock was chiming.

Five others were there, distant relatives of Claudette's, but they took little notice of her and her sister.

The door opened, to admit a lawyer and Uncle Jonathan, a white-haired man of stern mien.

Was he to prove to be a fairy godfather?

"I want these proceedings to be brief," he began, shaking hands all round in turn. "I have amassed a considerable fortune, and wish to distribute it in my lifetime—actually, now. My lawyer will arrange everything."

"Ah, he is going to be the fairy godfather!" Claudette thought. "The open road for us—life, laughter, and happiness!"

There was an electric atmosphere in the room as he continued:

"You, Herbert Townsend, will receive five thousand pounds—"

A haze floated before Claudette's vision and she sought Jess' hand weakly.

She was going to wake up in a moment, she was sure, to hear Nan warning her that to dream of fortunes was most unlucky.

"You, Sarah, will have a like amount. You have worked hard and deserve your reward. You, Minnie, are receiving three thousand, and you, Arthur, two."

Claudette heard them stammering their thanks. It was a strange scene.

Then she realised that Uncle Jonathan was standing before her, looking at her grimly, his hands clasped behind his back.

"As for you, Claudette and Jessie, you are daughters of my younger brother, William."

"Yes, Uncle Jonathan!"

"And you've lived in a caravan!"

"Yes, Uncle Jonathan!"

"Idling your time away!"

"Yes, Uncle Jon—no, Uncle Jonathan!"

Claudette suddenly became aware that his tone had altered. He was speaking harshly, and his smile had gone.

"Idling, I said, and idling I mean. Your father was always an idler—sponged on me for years—"

In a flash Claudette was on her feet, her eyes aflame with indignation.

"Daddy was never a sponger! It's false!"

"He idled—he sponged!" Uncle Jonathan repeated distinctly. "And you have followed his example—idling in the caravan and living from hand to mouth. I know! And because I know I'm not letting you have a penny!"

Claudette reeled as if she had been struck.

Not a penny for them! The others had been given small fortunes—but she and Jess, nothing.

It was a situation calculated to make the stoutest heart quail.

Then Claudette's resolute spirit came to her rescue.

Her head went up proudly and she met his fierce eyes with a calm, fearless gaze.

"We didn't come here to ask you for your money, Uncle Jonathan," she said respectfully, but very distinctly, whilst the others listened in amazement. "You sent for us, you know."

"I wanted to see you personally and to tell you that in view of the fact that your father was an idler—a waster—"

"Stop!" Claudette struck in passionately, her eyes flaming. "You are not to say that about my



father! You can leave him out of this. And after what you've said I wouldn't touch a penny of your money—not a penny."

Uncle Jonathan's stern expression did not relax. "You wouldn't, eh? Then may I ask how you propose to live—what you think you are going to do? You have no means—nothing to live on."

"We can earn our own living!" was Claudette's spirited retort. "I'm not afraid of work—and neither is Jess."

"Fine words!" was Uncle Jonathan's scathing comment. "And how do you think you are going to earn your living?"

Carried away by her passionate desire to prove her worth, Claudette rushed on:

"By—by making raffia work—mats, baskets, and things like that! I can do leather-work, too. We'll go from place to place in our caravan—"

"Ridiculous idea!" snorted Uncle Jonathan. "Still, have it your own way. But I wager you won't get very far without having to seek outside aid."

"We won't take help from anyone," Claudette insisted. "We'll rely on ourselves—on our own efforts."

Uncle Jonathan looked a little less grim.

"Well, you've got spirit, I must say," he grudgingly admitted. "I tell you what I'll do. I'll make a bargain with you. Go out into the world—earn your living as you say, without making use of any outside aid—and if you have made good in three months' time, then I will reconsider my decision in regard to leaving you any money."

Claudette's eyes were shining with confidence.

"We'll keep ourselves—never fear, uncle," she replied.

"Remember the conditions," Uncle Jonathan went on grimly. "You must be absolutely self-supporting and self-reliant—earning your money and keeping yourselves by your own efforts. Prove to me that you can do this, and I promise you that I will keep my part of the bargain."

"Very well, uncle."

"And now, Claudette, to help you to make a start, I'm going to give you five pounds," her uncle resumed. He took out a note-case. "Here it is"—counting out the notes. "Turn it to good account, and come to me in three months and show me what you have made of it."

Claudette's first impulse was to refuse the money. She had

said that she would not touch a penny of his. But then across her mind flashed a mental picture of her caravan home; she thought of old Nan, of Jess; and she realised that if her bold plan was to meet with any success she must have the wherewithal to start.

She would accept Uncle Jonathan's offer—but she made a mental vow that she would pay back the money in full at the earliest opportunity. She would not accept the money as a gift—not after what Uncle Jonathan had said about daddy!

"Thank you, uncle," she said at last. "I promise you that I won't fail! And I promise you, too, that I will prove that what you said about my father is not true."

And, taking Jess' hand, she went quietly from the room.

Her challenge had been accepted. It was up to her, she knew, to prove that her words had been no mere empty boast.

### A Bad Beginning

"O H, Claudette, my dear, I don't want to say anything detonatory to you, but it can only end in disaster. It's more than you can do!"

Claudette gave Nan a kiss.

"That was a bit 'detonatory,' wasn't it?" she laughed, winking at Jess. "It's no use, Nan—



Heedless of her own peril, Claudette snatched up the rug and lamp and darted to the caravan doorway. Her home was threatened—and she was the only one who could save it!



I've not bitten off more than I can chew at all. We're going through with it, and you're going to play your part, Nan. And you, Bruce—and Chum, and even Joey, too."

"Not half!"

Claudette jumped.

She had never heard Joey speak like that before. He could say certain words, even sentences—but not retort sensibly.

Then she saw Jess' impish face reflected in a mirror in the caravan.

"My hat, Jess!" she gasped. "That was you!"

Jess nodded.

"Getting on, aren't I? I'm going to be a famous ventriloquist one of these days."

Jess was keen on ventriloquism, and practised upon every possible occasion, with varying degrees of success.

"We're going to make raffia mats, baskets and things, leather articles, too, and sell as we go," Claudette declared merrily. "We'll make first for Merston, and buy our raffia and leather," she added. "And heigh-ho for adventure, happiness, and jolly old fortune."

"It's going to be easy!" laughed Jess.

Claudette's expression changed the instant she turned away to the door.

She knew it wasn't going to be easy.

She was not blind to the difficulties of the task she had apparently so light-heartedly undertaken.

Claudette knew that ahead of them lay a long, desperate struggle, the ultimate outcome of which hung very much in the balance.

Not for the world, however, would she allow the others to know that she entertained such thoughts.

They went on along the road in the deepening shadows, and came ultimately to an ideal camping place in a meadow.

"We'll have to get our stock-in-trade to-morrow morning first thing. Hallo—I seem to know the sound of that engine."

Claudette ran out of the van to the gateway of the meadow, and there she saw Sadie Clarke, astride her motor-cycle, balancing herself with her feet on the road.

She greeted Claudette with a rather supercilious smile.

"I've been detailed by Uncle Jonathan to keep an eye on you," she explained. "You see, he doesn't want to be too hard on you, and although you've got to be entirely self-supporting, he wants to know how you go on."

She gave a half-satirical laugh.

"But you won't want me fussing about with you always. So I shall keep away, just looking in on you now and again to see how you're going on. Personally, I think you're quite mad! Good-night!"

And before Claudette could say anything she had set her machine in motion and was speeding away.

"She's not sincere," Claudette thought, listening to the fading noise of the motor-cycle's exhaust in the distance. "I don't quite like her manner. Hallo, she's stopped. I wonder what for?"

Claudette was right—Sadie had stopped.

She had espied a gipsy encampment by the side of the road.

Its members were busy preparing the evening meal, and they eyed her curiously.

Sadie possessed a sense of humour that bordered on the spiteful.

She loved to be the bearer of upsetting news.

"Hallo," she called. "Competition in these parts, eh?"

A tall, unkempt man approached her. These

were not true Romany gipsies, but a roving band of half-castes who possessed no other code than self-preservation.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh, there's another caravan up the road, and they'll all be selling raffia and pegs and things against you. There'll be competition to-morrow in the market, I can see."

She laughed and opened the throttle, skimming away. The gipsy's eyes weren't nice to see as he turned back to the others.

"Things are not so good that we can allow competition," he muttered to them. "We will see who these people are who follow in our footsteps."

Stealthily several of the men left the encampment and moved off in the direction of Claudette's little home on wheels.

Claudette, cheerfully whistling, was preparing the evening meal, when she became aware that Bruce was uneasy about something. He suddenly gave a low growl and lifted his massive head.

"Wouff!"

Again he gave his deep-throated warning, then looked round at Claudette.

"There's someone out there I don't like," he was saying, in his doggy way, to Claudette. "But carry on—if they come any nearer I'll give you warning!"

He laid his head on his paws again as Claudette cried:

"Good old Bruce. I expect it was someone passing on the road."

They prepared for bed, for they were all tired. Jess was the first between the sheets, occupying the top bunk.

Claudette crawled in a few minutes afterwards, and no sooner had she done so than Nan commenced to tuck her up in bed.

A smile came into Claudette's eyes.

Why did Nannie always treat her like a child? She was grown-up now, yet the old lady would behave as if she were still a girl at school.

"Nan," she said lazily. "How old am I?"

Nannie started and wrinkled her brows.

"How old are you, my dear?" she echoed uncertainly. "Why, bless my soul, don't you know? Let me see—thirteen, is it? Or perhaps fourteen."

Claudette's silvery laugh rang out.

"You old darling," she cried lovingly. "I'm sixteen, Nan, and jolly well old enough to tuck myself up, thank you!"

She saw the old lady move over to her bed, shaking her head.

"Sixteen! It's impossible! She's only a child still—so young and—"

"And beautiful," put in Claudette. "Night-night, Nan. And dream of that fortune we're going to make. Night, Joey; night, Bruce! And the same to you, Jess."

Snore!

That was Jessie's response—and soon Claudette's eyes closed and she fell into a slumber which brought troubled dreams.

They were working at raffia that would break; the leather they were using fell to pieces. In the background her uncle seemed to be standing, sneering, saying that he knew they were helpless.

She woke up with the deep baying of Bruce in her ears.

He was standing at the window, barking cavagely.

Claudette leapt from her bunk.

She saw a pair of eyes peering in through the window—made out the outline of a head.

Her heart seemed to miss a beat. It was unreal, frightening.



"Take warning," a low voice hissed. "Do not follow us about and compete with us in the markets. If you do you will regret it."

Claudette's reply was to slip a few clothes on and run to the door with her electric torch. She could have released Bruce, but she didn't want him to hurt whoever it was outside.

The cool night air fanned her hot face; her keen eyes sought in vain for a sign of the intruder.

Acting upon impulse, Claudette suddenly ran down the steps and along the field to where she had left Chum, the pony, tethered to a long rope, so that he could have a considerable grazing stretch.

The rope lay severed on the grass. Chum was gone!

### Faced With Failure

INSTANTLY Claudette was filled with the greatest alarm.

The cut rope told a significant tale. Chum must have been stolen!

Claudette's brain worked rapidly as she flew to the van, wakened the others, and let Bruce off his leash.

Who had stolen the pony—and why?

Without him their venture was hopeless. They would fail in the task that lay before them. The fortune would slip from their grasp.

"There, I told you so" wailed Nannie despondently. "I knew something would happen."

But Claudette had no time in which to listen to her.

"Quickly, Jess," she interrupted. "Get your clothes on and run to the telephone kiosk at the cross-roads and tell the police. I'll take Bruce and try to get on Chum's track—but we may need help."

Claudette wasn't the sort to waste time. Leaving Jess to carry out her instructions, she took Bruce and again left the van.

"Now, I wonder which way he has taken," she mused, trying to calm her fears. Action was what was needed now. "Let's see if we can follow his tracks, old chap."

She ran to the severed rope once again, and there, by the light of her torch, she was able to make out faintly marks in the grass, which she followed to the other end of the field.

Here she found an open gate, beyond which was a ploughed field.

On the soft earth she could see Chum's tracks easily—but there was no sign of any impressions of a man's footprints.

"Bruce, whoever took Chum rode on his back—unless Chum's just strayed: and I don't think that, for the rope was cut clean through. What's the matter, old chap?"

For the great dog had commenced to bark—his deep baying echoing through the night.

The next moment there came an answering sound from not far away.

"Chum!" cried Claudette excitedly, and with a wonderful relief. "It's Chum!"

It was!

Through the darkness the intelligent pony came trotting towards them, and the next moment Claudette was stroking his soft, velvety nose.

Little did she guess what was happening back at the caravan.

No sooner had Jess gone from the van, to run to the telephone, than Nannie, left alone, received the shock of her life.

The door opened once again, and into the yellow lamplight came a woman dressed as a gipsy, to

be followed by a man with a skin like mahogany, whose eyes glittered beneath great, shaggy brows.

"What do you want?" Nan demanded tremblingly.

"Be silent and no harm shall come to you," the gipsy woman returned in a low voice.

But Nan had more courage than to submit meekly to this intrusion.

"Claudette! Claudette!" she cried. "Help!"

At once the woman's rough hand closed over her lips and she was forced back on to her little bed.

Her agonised eyes saw the man ransacking the caravan—pulling open drawers and searching here, there, and everywhere.

Suddenly he found Claudette's handbag, and a low cry of triumph broke from him.

Nan saw him empty its contents into his hand and then transfer them to his pocket.

It was at that moment that Bruce commenced to bark at the top of the field, and the woman started fearfully.

"Let's go now," she whispered. "They have found the pony!"

The man stooped down to replace the bag and his head came into contact with Joey's cage.

In a flash the wily parrot, cross at being wakened from his night's sleep, thrust his beak through the bars and seized the intruder's cap.

The gipsy apparently didn't notice what had happened—or if he did he was in too great a hurry to get away to trouble about an old cap.

He and the woman left the van in haste.

Nannie struggled up from her bed, slipped on a dressing-gown, and tottered to the door. In her anxious haste she knocked against the tiny folding table, on which was the lamp Claudette had hurriedly lit.

Upset as she was by all that had happened, the old nurse scarcely realised that she had upset the lamp. It clattered to the floor, even as Nan sank down in the doorway in a half-conscious state.

A sheet of flame leapt up from the fallen lamp, and in an instant the rug was ablaze. Smoke filled the tiny caravan, causing Joey to utter protesting squawks.

Up in the field, rejoicing over the quick recovery of Chum Claudette saw the strange glare in the caravan window, as the lamp was knocked over.

Came darkness for a few moments, then an ominous red glow.

A cry left her lips.

"Bruce, something's wrong. Here, Chum—gee up, boy!"

She flung herself on to his bare back and raced the game little pony towards the caravan.

"Oh, Nannie!" she gasped, as she jumped from Chum's back. "Darling, what's happened?"

The old nurse could only murmur something unintelligible in reply.

How she did it Claudette scarcely knew, but she managed to get Nannie to the ground, where she left her on to a pile of sacks.

Claudette realised that she could devote no more time to Nannie. First of all she must fight the fire which was threatening their caravan.

With a sob in her throat, Claudette saw the flames leaping up around the legs of the little table. The rug was in flames.

She had no water to speak of, and there was only one thing to do.

She seized the rug and the lamp, and, burning her fingers badly in the process, ran to the door with them.



At any moment the lamp might explode! But Claudette didn't think of that.

The van must be saved!

Throwing the lamp and rug as far away as she could, she picked up two of the sacks and returned to the attack. Taking Joey's cage, she placed that outside, and then commenced pluckily to beat out the flames.

It was not an easy task. But Claudette gritted her teeth and tackled the job, whilst Bruce layed loudly outside, recalling Jess.

"At last—thank goodness!" Claudette panted.

The flames were out—their home on wheels was saved!

The pony was safe, too—so all was well after all, Claudette went to the door, her hands and face blackened, but a laugh on her lips.

No great damage had been done, after all—and her customary light-heartedness rose to the surface.

"That's that," she commented. "Now for poor old Nannie! I wonder what happened?"

The old lady was recovering, and her lips were trembling as she tried to speak.

"Don't worry, dear," Claudette pressed, rendering first-aid with the ease of an expert.

"D-don't worry," gasped Nannie. "Oh, Claudette, you don't know what's happened."

"Never mind now, dear—I've put the fire out, so all's well."

"Your money—your money!" wailed Nannie.

A momentary expression of alarm crossed Claudette's face; then she laughed.

"Oh, that's safe—the fire wasn't anywhere near that drawer where our money is, dear," she added lightly.

"It's gone!" gasped Nannie.

"Gone?"

"Stolen by gipsies," Nannie rushed on. "I saw them take it. Oh, dear, whatever shall we do?"

Claudette sprang into the van and drew open the drawer.

The colour faded from her cheeks.

The bag was empty—their little "bank" had been stolen.

"So that was the plan," she thought, her brain reeling. "They came here first of all, and looked through the window, knowing Bruce would waken us. They guessed we'd investigate outside, and to make sure we'd be gone a good time they cut Chum loose and drove him up into the ploughed field. They chanced Nannie, knowing she's old and feeble."

Claudette knew a moment of terrible anxiety. This latest disaster—the loss of what little money they possessed—was a cruel blow for it meant that they would be unable to purchase the necessary materials for their daring venture.

It seemed to Claudette at that moment that the situation was hopeless. Penniless and helpless, what could she do in the face of such a crisis?

Suddenly she saw the gipsy's tattered cap lying in the corner. Picking it up, a new light came into her eyes.

The position was not so hopeless, after all. There was a last, desperate chance!

She might, after all, be able to recover the stolen money.

Bruce was as well-trained in tracking as most bloodhounds. With this cap to serve as a guide to the man's scent, surely, with the trail so fresh, Bruce should be able to follow?

With a wild hope in her heart, her eyes shining with determination, Claudette took the cap down the steps to where Bruce stood barking.

"Bruce, old chap, sniff!" she urged, holding the cap to his nose, then throwing it down on the grass. "Seek, Bruce—seek!"

Looking up at her, he gave a whine. Then he commenced to nose around on the grass near the foot of the steps.

What would happen?

Their future depended upon Bruce now, and small wonder Claudette watched him with such anxiety.

He raised his head again—and this time he gave voice to a deep-toned bay.

In a flash Claudette slipped a lead on his collar, and then he was off, his muzzle to the ground, questing along the edge of the field.

**W**ILL Claudette's desperate effort meet with success? Will she, with the help of Bruce, be able to recover the stolen money? Next Tuesday's chapter of this powerful new story are crowded with dramatic developments, so do not fail to read how Claudette and Co. fare in their brave venture. Order now your copy of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.

## EASTER

**I**N a few days Easter will be here, and we shall really feel that we have left the long winter months behind. It is curious that, no matter when Easter falls—and the date varies by several weeks from year to year—one always thinks of it as a kind of dividing line between the cold of winter and the warm sunshine and gentle breezes of summer.

Easter is, of course, a religious feast in origin, and it is remarkable how much dispute and dissension there has been over fixing the time of its observance.

Quite early on a controversy arose between Christians of Gentile and those of Jewish descent as to the day of observance, and it was to obtain a settlement of this (among other matters) that Constantine summoned the Council of Nicaea in the year 325.

Nowadays Easter day is the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox, but this, of course, varies in different longitudes.

Many attempts have been and are still being made to fix Easter so that it falls on the same date each year. The movable Easter causes great inconvenience in business, scholastic, legal, and other circles, and practically all Christian nations would like to see it made fixed.

The matter was considered by a special committee of the League of Nations, and as a result of this what is known as the *Easter Act* was passed in England in 1928. This fixed Easter Day as the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April. The Act, it should be noted, was passed conditionally on acceptance by all other Christian countries, and as this general agreement has not yet been reached Easter remains a movable feast.

It can, in fact, vary by no less than thirty-five days between March 22 and April 25. The date is fixed in accordance with tables prepared by Clavius for Pope Gregory XIII. when he reformed the calendar in 1582.

Easter is always warmly welcomed by young people as the first holiday of the year.

Whether it falls early or late, it seems to bring joy and hope with it, making us think longingly of all those pleasures of the great outdoors, whether in the country or at the seaside, that we hope will be ours during the months to come.

After the long winter we are feeling very much like the little squirrel and other hibernating creatures, newly awakened and longing to disport ourselves in the fresh air and sunshine. Let us hope that, this year, we shall not be disappointed.



Kathleen Carr Receives a Message From Mysterious "Lady Mary," Bidding Her Seek Another Ivory Elephant

# Kathleen's Quests in Secret

By  
**MARGERY  
MARRIOTT**



## CHAPTER 1.

"What is the Meaning of This?"

"ANOTHER hundred yards or so and I'll be there," murmured Kathleen Carr.

Her blue eyes shone as she spoke, and almost instinctively she increased her pace along the winding bank of the narrow stream.

Within a few seconds she would come in sight of her destination, the ruins of a small stone bridge. There, secreted in a crevice of one of the crumbling supports, she would find a little ivory elephant!

A strange quest for a girl whose guardians treated her so strictly; who never allowed her outside their farm unless she were in their company, but who, at the same time, kept her fully endowed with pocket-money and lovely clothes.

But then, Kathleen had reflected only a short time ago, her whole life was strange these days.

How could it be anything else when someone whose face she had never seen—someone who hid her identity behind a black veil and the enigmatical name, "Lady Mary"—was sending her on these extraordinary quests for little ivory elephants.

Moreover, someone who had convinced Kathleen that in obeying her unknown friend's instructions she was helping to bring about her own eventual freedom.

It was fortunate her guardian had been away from the farm when Lady Mary's 'phone message came. All her plans would be threatened once they discovered her secret.

Kathleen had no tangible clues to support her suspicions, but she felt sure that in some way her tasks for Lady Mary were related to her guardians' strict attitude towards her.

They, too, had a secret!

Yes, she was sure of it. Their furtiveness, their desperate anxiety to prevent her breaking free from their guard, told her that.

She reached the ruined bridge at last, and paused by the nearer pillar, which was now in a state of final decay, cracked, dirty and moss-cung.

A little frown mantled her brow.

"Lady Mary said it was the eastern pillar, this side of the stream," she mused. "Now where IS the east?"

A few moments' study of the sun's position, in comparison with what it had been earlier that day, soon put Kathleen on the right track, and a moment later she was examining the pillar.

There were several crevices in the eastern pillar, some of them large enough to contain an object twice as big as the little elephant. It looked as though she would have to examine them all.

Eagerly Kathleen began the task. It was a thrilling, absorbing occupation. As the seconds passed, her heart beats gathered swiftness and her fingers commenced to tremble.

Supposing someone else had taken the elephant? Her outstretched fingers probed crack after crack. Suddenly they stopped. A thrill shot through Kathleen's bent figure; she straightened up.

"Got it!" she breathed.

A moment later the precious little object was nestling in her hand.

Lady Mary, who had known her guardians would be away that day, had intimated on the telephone that she would send Kathleen further instructions regarding how to give the elephant into her custody.

She must hurry back to the farm





now It would never do to miss Lady Mary's fresh message, or allow it to be intercepted by Old Martha, the housekeeper.

Thrusting the elephant into her coat pocket, Kathleen hurried away from the bridge.

When she arrived at the farm, Old Martha was apparently busy in the kitchen. Kathleen, stopping in the yard only long enough to give her terrier, Frisky, a fond hug, let herself in by the front door and crept upstairs.

In her bed-room, she paused.

Now where would be the safest place to hide the elephant until she was able to give it to Lady Mary?

On other occasions she had used one of her dressing-table drawers, but to-day that would be inadvisable. Uncle Richard had taken the key to a locksmith to have duplicates made, so that Kathleen should not, as he put it, "hide any stupid paper novels she might prefer to good literature."

"Cunning old thing!" was Kathleen's reflection. "He meant, so that he could pry into my affairs whenever he liked."

She went over to the wardrobe—a brand-new affair which her guardians had bought a few weeks back. Would the elephant be safe there?

Before she could decide, there came a very significant sound from downstairs.

So significant was it to Kathleen that she ran to the door of her room, softly opened it a trifle and listened, her heart palpitating furiously.

"Yes, Martha," came her aunt's high-pitched voice, rather faintly. "We decided to return much sooner than we intended. Instead of visiting Mrs. Thorne, she will be having tea with us."

Kathleen straightened up quickly.

"Oh, my goodness!" she ejaculated in horror. "That's done it. However am I to get this to Lady Mary now? Aunt and uncle will never let me leave the farm—"

"Kathleen!"

She started again as her aunt's voice rang imperatively through the house.

"Kathleen, where are you?"

Drawing a deep breath, she answered:

"In my room, aunt." Then she skipped back from the door and looked around her. She must hide the little elephant at once. If she did not, then her aunt or uncle might see it.

There was only one place that suggested itself as a temporary refuge—a large vase. Kathleen dashed across, and was dropping the elephant into the vase when she heard her guardians reach the top of the stairs.

Frantically, she swung round to the mantelpiece and put the vase back in position.

"Ah, there you are!" exclaimed her aunt.

She was standing in the doorway, her tall, prim figure seeming to reach within an inch of the top. Behind her, rubbing his hands, was Uncle Richard.

Had they seen what she was doing?

Kathleen searched their faces for some sign of suspicion.

Relief surged through her as she saw that both were smiling. Evidently she had been too quick for them. Thank goodness for that! She was going to find it difficult enough to prevent them learning about Lady Mary's next message, and stopping her from meeting that elusive lady.

"We decided to spend the evening at home, after all," Aunt Annabel explained. "Mrs. Thorne is coming to tea. It will be quite a nice little treat for you."

"Quite a nice little treat," supplemented Uncle

Richard, with his usual lazy method of repeating what his wife said.

The adults exchanged looks. Aunt Annabel nodded.

"Kathleen, my dear," said Uncle Richard, "would you run downstairs and get the daily paper for me?"

Kathleen's heart leapt.

That was an astonishing request. What did it mean? Did her guardians wish to discuss something of a private nature?

Seeing her hesitate, Aunt Annabel offered an explanation.

"Your uncle saw an advertisement about some bulbs," she smiled. "Run along, there's a dear, and save his legs. You'll find it on the book-case in the front-room—"

Remembering the precious trophy she was leaving on the mantelpiece, Kathleen wasted no time on the errand. She was downstairs and back again within sixty seconds, and burst into the bed-room with the paper in her hand.

Then she slithered to a standstill. Her cheeks drained of all colour. Her eyes widened with horror and the paper slowly slipped out of her fingers and dropped to the floor.

It seemed in that moment, as she faced her guardians and saw their angry, challenging expressions, that her little world of dreams had been utterly shattered.

In Aunt Annabel's hand was the ivory elephant!

From Kathleen's pallid lips burst an exclamation of dismay.

Her aunt nodded grimly and advanced across the room towards her.

"You may well be surprised, Kathleen!" she snapped. "Come now! Your uncle and I demand an explanation. What is the meaning of this—why were you hiding it so furtively when we came into the room?"

## CHAPTER 2.

### In the "Enemy's" Hands

**K**ATHLEEN clenched her hands. If only she didn't look so terribly guilty—

Somehow, she must allay her guardians' suspicions. No matter what punishment they meted out to her, she must not betray her secret. Lady Mary's happiness, as well as her own, depended upon her silence, upon her ingenuity.

Drawing a deep breath, she forced a smile.

"Why—why, it's an ornament," she said. Did that appear so very feeble to her guardians?

Aunt Annabel gave an angry sniff. Her dark eyes glittered.

"I know it's an ornament!" she snapped.

"Don't be facetious, Kathleen. What we want to know is, what does it mean to you that you should wish to hide it? And look at your shoes—they're soaking wet—"

Kathleen's horror surged back as she glanced down at her feet. Oh, what a fool she had been to forget that!

"You've been out!" Aunt Annabel went on relentlessly.

Kathleen's eyes suddenly blazed. Her rebellious nature was proving too strong.

"Yes, I have been out!" she cried, facing them defiantly.

"Why, may I ask?"

"Yes—why?" And Uncle Richard rubbed his hands.

"To—to get that elephant!" Kathleen retorted.

"You went out to get this?" Aunt Annabel looked incredulous. "You mean, you bought it?"



"How else do you think I got it?" Kathleen exclaimed.

"Don't be rude!" Aunt Annabel gripped Kathleen's arm. "Another word like that——"

"Let go!" Kathleen flamed, shaking herself free. Panting for breath, she looked her aunt straight between the eyes. "You can do what you like to me, aunt, but I'm not going to be bullied. Touch me again and I'll—I'll——"

"You'll what?" Aunt Annabel sneered.

"Send you flying!" was Kathleen's complete threat. "I'll tell you why I hid that ornament." She was speaking from the heart now, with no necessity to invent an excuse for her conduct. "I hid it because of the way you treat me. Because I'm always being watched; because I can't do anything, or have anything, or even say anything without you and uncle being suspicious——"

"Kathleen!" came her aunt's scandalised screech, while Uncle Richard went purple.

"What's the use of pretending, both of you? You know I'm right. You hate me, really. You want to spy on me. And that's the reason I hid that elephant—because I don't trust you!"

She stepped away, rather surprised at her own audacity. The effect upon her guardians was one that also surprised her. It had sobered them. They looked stunned, bewildered. Plainly Kathleen's method of turning defence into attack had left them powerless.

Powerless, that was, so far as discovering anything else about the little elephant; not in every way, as Aunt Annabel swiftly revealed.

"Take off your gold watch!" she ordered. "Then give it to me."

Kathleen, knowing what was coming, did so.

"It's yours, anyway—you gave it to me in the first place," she said defiantly.

"You will not see this until you have apologised to us both."

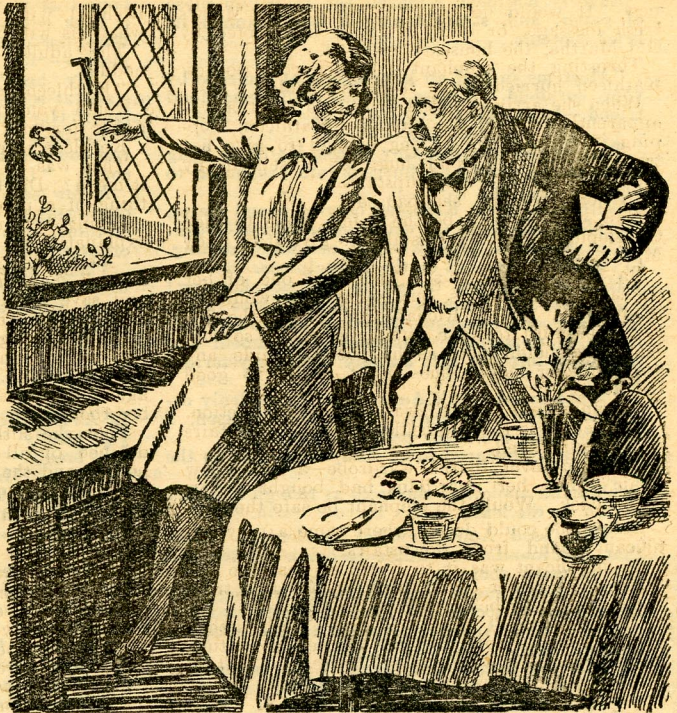
"Then I'd better say good-bye to it for good," Kathleen intimated.

"Moreover," Aunt Annabel went on, her cheeks livid, "you will wait upon us all at tea to-day. That should provide suitable humiliation for you. I shall, of course, explain to Mrs. Thorne—come along, Richard——"

Kathleen started towards the door as they went out, only just checking a frenzied cry of: "Stop!"

Her uncle had possession of the ivory elephant!

"Oh, my goodness, whatever shall I do?" she muttered, staring at the closed door. A ring at the bell downstairs passed unnoticed. "I've got to get that back so that Lady Mary can have it. And I mustn't let her message fall into their hands——"



with a merry laugh Kathleen flung the ivory elephant out of the window. "There," she told her irate uncle, "you'll have to go and look for it!" It was a daring ruse she had in mind—and she knew that if it failed she would lose the ivory elephant.

She flew out of the room and slipped quietly downstairs. Voices told her that her guardians and their guest were in the front-room.

By way of the back entrance, she reached the farmyard and peered through the front-room windows. Then she tensed. Her uncle, laughing to Mrs. Thorne, was placing the precious little elephant on the mantelpiece!

Would she be able to get it during tea without her guardians' knowledge?

She'd have a good shot at it. But first of all to see if Lady Mary was in the vicinity. Once before she had visited the farm when her guardians had been away. If she was lurking nearby now, then she must be told of the catastrophe which had occurred, and warned to keep out of sight.

Kathleen slipped off and scanned the whole panorama of farmland. There was no one in sight.

Perhaps Lady Mary was hiding.

Re-crossing the farmyard, a fluttering from the pigeon-cote attracted Kathleen's attention. One of the birds had evidently just returned from a flight.

Kathleen was about to enter the back door when she stopped, turned, with a cry of excitement, and ran over to the cote. In a few seconds she had secured a bird with something tied around its leg! A message!

THE message she had been expecting from Lady Mary; this must be it.



Eagerly Kathleen removed the folded-up piece of paper, and, straightening it out, scanned its brief contents.

"Meet me in half an hour's time at the stile by your cornfield. Please do not fail your fond friend.—LADY MARY."

Tearing the note into tiny pieces, Kathleen flung them to the wind and hurried into the house to prepare the tea.

Without a word, Kathleen handed round plates, then followed them up with the bread-and-butter.

Her gaze went once, when no one was watching, to the ivory elephant on the mantelpiece.

How she yearned to get it into her keeping!

Already ten minutes had passed since Lady Mary's second message. She had but twenty left in which to recover the precious ornament and to give it into the safe custody of her mysterious friend!

"What awful tea!" Aunt Annabel suddenly exclaimed with a grimace. "Really, Kathleen, I thought you could do better than this."

Kathleen appeared to be studying a spot on the ceiling.

"Martha made it," she said, as though it didn't matter in the least.

"Oh," said Aunt Annabel, reddening. After that, she found it advisable to drink the tea and say no more about it.

That didn't mean that Kathleen, fretting with impatience to secure the little elephant, was forgotten. Aunt Annabel returned to the attack a moment later.

"Did you butter this bread?" she snapped.

"I did," said Kathleen, setting her lips.

"Then kindly go and butter it again. You've overlooked most of it. Take it away—at once!"

Kathleen nearly flared up, then. Just in time she realised that this would mean a respite from the vigilance of her guardians. Perhaps she could devise some method of securing the ivory elephant while out of the room.

The longer she was away the better, so—

"Would you like some more bread-and-butter, Mrs. Thorne—or you, uncle?"

"No!" snapped her uncle.

"Yes, please," said the fat lady.

"Good!" Kathleen thought, and hurried out.

Leaving the bread plate on the kitchen table—Old Martha was resting upstairs—she sped out of the house and over the farmlands until she came in sight of the stile.

A slight figure, clad in black, stepped from behind the hedge. Kathleen rushed up, and in a few breathless sentences explained the alarming situation. To which Lady Mary intimated that she could only wait another twenty minutes.

Waving good-bye, Kathleen set her lips and hurried back to the farmyard.

Never had she felt so frantic with despair.

The ivory elephant reposed on the mantelpiece, and yet she could not hope to secure it without her guardians seeing. And that wouldn't help her much, even if she raced them to Lady Mary. They'd know she was taking part in some secret quest. They'd make sure that she never even left the farm-house again! If necessary, they'd lock her in her room!

"No," she muttered, creeping past the front-room windows: "I've got to be more ingenious. They mustn't even suspect about Lady Mary. Better still, if I could get the elephant without them even knowing it had gone."

And then she smiled grimly. What an absurd

hope that was! Just as though she **COULD** take it back without its absence not being discovered. Why, her uncle had only to glance at the mantelpiece—

"My hat!" Kathleen ejaculated, halting to stare at something she had seen going down the lane. Her eyes began to shine with sudden hope. "Goodness!" she burst out again, and began to run towards the startling spectacle as fast as she could. "I believe I've solved the problem!"

A few seconds later Kathleen was breathlessly chattering to an Indian lady in picturesque native costume, who bore a tray of Indian curios and ornaments!

Then, hurrying back to the farmyard, she went up to a bush directly outside the open front-room windows and thrust something into its midst!

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Kathleen's Cleverness

**K**ATHLEEN was smiling to herself as she hastily buttered several more slices of bread.

Even a "Hurry up, girl!" from the front room did not rob her of her strange cheerfulness.

To all intents and purposes her meeting with the Indian hawker had effected no transformation in her position. Indeed, it had made matters worse by making her late with this task. But Kathleen was thrilling with new hope, even though her smile did not reflect the terrible anxiety that throbbled within her.

The next few seconds would decide whether she had succeeded or failed in her efforts to outwit her guardians.

She had completely worked out her plans.

They would mean something that was distasteful to her, but that didn't matter so long as she secured the little elephant and handed it to Lady Mary.

"So you're finished at last?" snapped Aunt Annabel, when she reappeared in the front room. "Mrs. Thorne is ashamed of you."

Kathleen waited until both the ladies had taken a slice of bread-and-butter, then she walked over to the mantelpiece.

"Where are you going?" demanded Uncle Richard.

"I just want to have a look at this," Kathleen said quietly, picking up the precious ivory elephant.

Goodness, how her heart was thumping! And her hands—if only they would stop trembling! Surely everyone could see how agitated, how desperate, she was?

"Put it back!"

"But, uncle, you may have chipped it, or something," Kathleen protested, slowly moving towards the open window.

Her uncle was on his feet now, his face inflamed with anger.

"Put it back this instant, Kathleen!" he ordered. Seizing her arm, he tried to pull her towards him. "Will you do as I say?"

Kathleen struggled, but could not break free.

"I—I won't!" she panted defiantly. "I don't see why I should. This is mine! I—I got it. It's nothing to do with you. I won't put it back."

"You will!" her uncle grated. "Excuse me, please, my dear Mrs. Thorne," he went on. "This must be most distressing for you—"

"Let go of my arm!" Kathleen cried, trying to unfasten his encircling fingers.

"Annabel!" He turned his head towards his



wife. "Hold her other arm and take that thing away—"

Kathleen's eyes suddenly blazed. She continued to struggle as though frantic with alarm; as though she knew defeat was imminent.

Jumping up, her aunt strode across the room towards her. Then a silvery laugh rang inconspicuously through the room, and quickly Kathleen lightly tossed the elephant out of the window, so that it fell into a bush.

"There," she said brightly. "Now you've got to go and look for it. I said I wouldn't give it to you."

For several seconds her guardians obviously did not know what to do. Then they grimly decided upon the course of action Kathleen had expected.

"We shall not look for it!" Aunt Annabel snapped. "You will do that, my girl—this minute. And your uncle and I will watch you from the window—"

When Kathleen reached the bush, her heart was beating more quickly than ever.

True to their intention, her aunt and uncle were grimly leaning over the sill—rather a tight squeeze, but justified so far as they were concerned by their suspicions that the little elephant DID contain a secret significance.

On hands and knees, Kathleen searched the bush.

She saw the little ornament almost at once. Her guardians did not, or they would have raised a cry. Carefully masking her actions with her body, she thrust the object into her pocket.

"Have you got it?" came an impatient query from her uncle.

"Yes," Kathleen called over her shoulder.

And, moving aside so that the action was clear, she removed another little ivory elephant from the depths of the bush!

"There you are," she said, handing it through the window to her uncle.

He glanced at it, then glared at her.

"Now get up to your room. I'll see you later."

Kathleen certainly appeared to go to her room. She was heard ascending the stairs. But she was NOT heard creeping down them and out of the house.

Nor was she detected as she raced, bent very low, across the farmyard.

In her hand she clutched the real ivory elephant!

Her eyes were sparkling as she raced along. Neither of her guardians suspected that they had been cunningly tricked.

Kathleen chuckled with delight and triumphant exultation as she reflected upon their utter defeat and her complete victory.

When she met Lady Mary by the stile and thrust the elephant into her friend's eager hands, she was laughing gaily.

"What ever is it, my dear?" inquired the veiled lady, in her soft, silvery voice. "You seem amused."

"Terribly amused!" Kathleen responded.

"Listen!"

She drew Lady Mary out of sight behind the hedge.

"You remember I told you that uncle had got the elephant? Well, he thinks he's still got it."

Lady Mary's eyes gleamed through her veil.

"Gracious, Kathleen, how ever is that?"

"You see, he's got another elephant exactly like it!" Kathleen went on, her eyes shining. "As I was returning from meeting you, wondering how on earth I was to get the real elephant back, I saw an Indian hawk—"

"Oh," came a half-understanding whisper from Lady Mary.

"I'd seen her before," Kathleen went on. ment. "And you—"

"She sells all sorts of curios—including ivory elephants!"

"My clever Kathleen!" came an admiring comment. "I don't know about being clever—I was certainly cunning," Kathleen confessed. "I bought an elephant just like the real one, and hid it in a bush outside the window of the room where my guardians were. Then I pretended to lose my temper and threw the real elephant out of the window into the bush—"

There was no need to explain to Lady Mary how Kathleen had changed one elephant for another.

"Thank you, my dear!" she whispered, clasping Kathleen's hand. "You won't regret what you've done to-day. Now I must hurry off. Remember to be always on your guard for my next message—"

She started to move off. Kathleen put out an arm.

"Please, won't you tell me who you are?" she begged.

"One day," was the reply.

"Or—just let me see your face!" Kathleen went on eagerly.

"One day," was the same cryptic answer, as Lady Mary hurried across the field.

● MEET

"Amber  
the  
Adventurous"

NEXT WEEK

Kathleen watched her out of sight, and then hastened back to the farmhouse.

HER guardians never knew how they had been deceived.

Although still furious at her conduct that afternoon, they set her the imposition of copying out two chapters of a very "refined" book, their one consolation was to be found in the word SUSPICION.

They suspected something about the little elephant. That was obvious from their manner. But so long as they knew nothing, or guessed little of the truth, Kathleen was ready to match her wits against theirs again and again.

"After all," she murmured, as she began her task. "I've got the knowledge that what I'm doing is bringing me nearer to happiness and freedom and bringing Lady Mary nearer happiness, too."

And now—when would she hear from her unknown friend again?

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

THERE will be another splendid story in this series in our next number, in which you will read how Kathleen Carr secures another ivory elephant—after dramatic adventures. Don't miss this enjoyable mystery story, complete in next Tuesday's SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN which you must order now





By  
MURIEL  
HOLDEN

## Will Peggy Triumph in Her Duel With the Scheming Claire?

### Claire's Chance?

PEGGY LORNE wasted no time in making her way from the library to the kitchen.

Her brain was teeming with the thoughts aroused by her recent discovery. Those partly-paid bills she had come across in the desk Claire Blackburn used in her capacity as secretary to wealthy Mrs. Anstey—surely they could point to only one thing that Claire had been keeping the money given her to settle the household accounts and paying off only a portion of the sums due to tradespeople.

Claire's own diary gave added point to those startling suspicions.

There in the little blue morocco-bound book Peggy had come across, Claire had noted down her secret activities, her visits to theatres and dances, her trips to London, her shopping expeditions!

Obviously she had been spending money like water.

Little wonder that Peggy's temples throbbled. Here, almost by accident, she had discovered something that might well lead to the final exposure of the arch-schemer.

Nor must she delay a moment longer than was necessary. In her own mind she was certain that Claire knew that Stella—Peggy's sister—was now employed as assistant to Mr. Spelthorne, secretary of the Oldborough Hospital, even if she did not yet know that Peggy and Stella were actually sisters.

It was only a question of time ere Claire revealed the fact that Peggy was working here at Chester Lodge in the hope of clearing Stella. Once that happened, unless Peggy had meantime been able to assemble her proof of Claire's duplicity, then she herself would share Stella's fate. She would be dismissed—in disgrace!

Getting a grip on her emotions, Peggy entered the kitchen.

Mrs. Rowton, the cook, was hard at work peeling a huge basin of potatoes in readiness for the guests who were coming to dinner that evening.

"I put the bills away for you, Mrs. Rowton," Peggy told her with a smile. "And now I've come to give you a hand."

She knew that Mrs. Rowton was short-handed, though she had an even more insistent reason for volunteering in this way: she wanted to talk to the cook—in private.

"Well, miss, it's very kind of you," declared Mrs. Rowton gratefully. "I must say I was wondering whenever dinner would be ready. If you're quite sure you don't mind—"

Peggy waved aside her objections, and the cook, very pleased at this unexpected help, set to work to prepare other things that would be required.

Vigorously Peggy tackled the task she had undertaken.

"It must cost a lot, all this entertaining Mr. and Mrs. Anstey do," she began.

"Yes, my dear, it does that," cook agreed sagely. "But money's no object to them—not that there's any false show about this house. They're too much of real gentfolk for that."

Peggy shot her a shrewd look. "I suppose it's part of Miss Claire's work to settle the accounts, isn't it?" she asked conversationally. "I mean, you don't have to bother about that, do you?"

Mrs. Rowton shook her head. "Bless you, no, my dear. I never had no head for figures. That reminds me, Miss Claire must have forgotten all about those bills you took up to the library for me. They've all been sent in once before. I hope she'll pay them this time. I know how the mistress hates bills to be outstanding."

Peggy drank in every word. This was exactly what she wanted to know.

"I'm sure she does," she said. "Shall I remind Claire about the bills for you?"

Mrs. Rowton frowned. "No, I don't think you'd better," she answered thoughtfully. "I did mention it once before when the same thing happened and Miss Claire nearly



bit me head off. She can be very funny at times, can Miss Claire. It don't do to get on the wrong side of her." She shrugged. "After all, it's her business, not mine."

Peggy did not comment on the cook's observation regarding Claire. So this had happened before, had it? It was not the first time bills had come in from tradespeople who were no doubt wondering why the account had not been settled. "I don't suppose the tradespeople mind having to wait a few weeks," Peggy remarked as though it were an afterthought. "It's certain enough they'll get their money, isn't it?"

"Safe as houses!" declared Mrs. Rowton. "Not that they ever had to wait in the old days, when poor Miss Randall was here. Now she was a nice girl if you like. I never did understand her giving way to temptation like that."

Peggy wondered if her sudden agitation at mention of her sister's name were apparent to the cook.

"You—you mean the girl who was found trying to steal, and who ran away?" she murmured.

"Aye, that's the one. Thief or no thief, I liked her. If you ask me, there was more behind all that than met the eye. Maybe she was in some sort of bother and had to have money quick. I'll never believe she took the things just for the pleasure of stealing."

Peggy's lips closed in a grim line.

Mrs. Rowton was nearer the truth than she knew. Stella never had attempted to steal from her employer. It was Claire Blackburn who was the guilty one—Claire who was obviously using money even at this very moment which did not belong to her.

Her plan of action was clear to Peggy now.

For a time Claire could go gaily on stalling off the tradespeople by just paying a little off their accounts. Then, when things got too uncomfortable and there was a danger of the matter coming to the ears of Mrs. Anstey, Claire did as she had done in the cases of Stella and the maid, Annie.

She staged a theft of some sort, cunningly planted the blame elsewhere, and used the real proceeds for her own benefit.

"But I'll show her up yet," Peggy told herself grimly. "And it won't be long, either. When I get the information I want from the tradespeople, I think I can put Miss Claire Blackburn in such a position that she won't be able to wriggle out of it, however hard she tries."

For nearly an hour Peggy helped Mrs. Rowton, and then departed to her own room to change for dinner. She would have started her task of visiting the local tradespeople there and then, but it was early-closing day and there would be few shops open among the big stores with whom Mrs. Anstey dealt.

It was while Peggy was busy with her toilette that Sheila Anstey came into her room.

"Pegs, there's going to be fun to-night," she cried. "Guess who's coming to dinner, among others?"

Peggy shook her head.

"Some of the Hospital Committee?" she hazarded.

"Yes, one or two, but I wasn't thinking of them. No, mother's asked Signor Starelli and Mr. Spelthorne, and I'm going to persuade her to let 'em sit next to one another. Can't you just imagine it? The signor all excitable and bubbling over because our dance was so successful, and poor Mr. Spelthorne, more nervous than ever, and wondering half the time whether he's on his head or his heels!"

But Peggy was scarcely listening to her friend's merry chatter.

"Fun?" Sheila called it—but would it be fun for her, Peggy? Supposing Mr. Spelthorne started talking to Peggy about his new secretary, as he well might. Perhaps it would be the very opening Claire was looking for to confirm what she had already learnt.

And, all at once, Peggy felt that it would be fatal for her to join the dinner party. She must feign a headache or loss of appetite. Peggy brought her thoughts to an abrupt halt.

No, on second thoughts she wouldn't do that. That would be a coward's way out. She'd see it through and, if the necessity arose, bluff Claire for all she was worth.

### Veiled Threats

THE dinner party was in full swing. Mr. and Mrs. Anstey were entertaining quite a large party. There were four members of the Oldborough Hospital Committee, Mr. Spelthorne, the secretary, Signor Starelli, dance instructor to Peggy and Sheila, and Claire Blackburn.

Peggy sat thoughtful and rather silent, exchanging a word here and there with Sheila, who was next to her, or with Mr. Spelthorne on the other side of the table.

Every now and then Peggy had darted a look at Claire, and she had not failed to notice Claire's general demeanour. Very full of herself was Claire, very confident and self-possessed, and realisation of the fact brought little comfort to Peggy.

What was going on inside that cunning brain? she wondered.

For a girl who was living a life of imposture and deceit, as Claire was, she seemed to be able to push into the background with remarkable ease any thought of exposure or anxiety.

Then suddenly, above the general hum of conversation, Peggy heard Claire's voice.

"I thought your speech was wonderful, auntie!" Claire said to Mrs. Anstey, and there was a general murmur of approval from the other guests. "I'm sure Mr. Spelthorne couldn't possibly have asked anyone who could have done it better."

She spoke with such frank admiration and apparent sincerity that no one there guessed the cunning behind those words.

Mrs. Anstey flushed and smiled her thanks.

"Really, it's Mr. Spelthorne whom you should praise rather than me," she declared. "If it hadn't been for the facts and figures of the hospital's work he supplied me with, my little effort wouldn't have been at all interesting."

The hospital secretary coughed fusteredly. Poor Mr. Spelthorne, he was a bundle of nerves, and embarrassed by the slightest thing.

"Er—not at all. Really, you know, it is my assistant, Miss Terry, who should be thanked," he stammered hurriedly. "She got out all the details. All I did was to—er—to leave them behind—"

He smiled, and everyone laughed in sympathy.

"Oh, have you got a new assistant, Mr. Spelthorne?" asked Claire, with a great show of interest. "How glad you must be."

The secretary nodded.

"Indeed, yes. And I'm very grateful to Miss Lorne for introducing me to her," he said. "She's a real treasure!"

Mrs. Anstey and Sheila glanced at him, then at Peggy in some puzzlement.

"Oh, it was Peggy who found her for you, was it?" Mrs. Anstey remarked in smiling surprise. "Fancy that now!"



Peggy felt her pulses leap.

She knew quite well that Claire had deliberately introduced the topic of Mrs. Anstey's speech to lead up to this other matter. She was watching Peggy now, as a cat watches a mouse, noting her manner, her reactions to the conversation.

Cunning Claire!

"You must ask Miss Terry to tea, my dear," Mrs. Anstey suggested.

Peggy murmured a reply. She scarcely knew what she said. Then her eyes encountered those of Claire, and she felt herself going scarlet.

There was a cruel light in Claire's dark eyes as much as to say: "Bring her to tea! That's the last thing you'd dare do, Peggy Lorne!"

"I'd like to meet Miss Terry, Peggy," she said, and Peggy detected the mockery in her tone. "Be sure to let me know when you invite her, won't you? What's she like?"

A cat playing with a mouse—that was it.

That last question, put just to give Claire the pleasure of watching Peggy's embarrassment, her efforts to avoid betraying the profound emotion she felt.

Peggy realised what was behind the other's simulated interest, and never had she hated Claire as she hated her at that moment.

As it happened, she was saved the necessity of replying, for at that moment the door of the dining-room opened to admit Emily, Mrs. Anstey's maid.

"This came late this afternoon, ma'am," Emily said, a little anxiously. "It must have fallen down behind the hall table. I've only just found it. I hope it isn't anything very important, ma'am."

Mrs. Anstey took the note.

"All right, Emily, don't distress yourself," she said in her kindly way. "Accidents will happen Goodness me!"

She had opened the letter and glanced at it while speaking to the maid.

"Whatever is it, my dear?" her husband inquired. "Nothing serious, I hope."

Mrs. Anstey looked up smilingly.

"Serious! No, Ralph, dear. Anything but. I was so surprised, that was all. Listen to this: 'This is just to let you know that I paid a flying visit to Oldborough to see Sheila and her companion dance. I had to leave immediately after their turn, and that is why I purposely did not make my presence known. It was a wonderful display, my dear Mrs. Anstey. Congratulate them both for me. In a few days now I hope to have definite news for them regarding my season of ballet. I wanted to see how they performed in public—now I know. My best wishes and regards to you all—Sincerely, Paul Sergieoff.'"

"Mumsie!" The delighted ejaculation burst from Sheila Anstey's lips. "Was he really there? Goodness! And he never breathed a word to anyone."

A murmur of interest arose.

"I expect he only decided on the spur of the moment," Mr. Anstey observed. "Anyway, you two young women appear to have covered yourselves with glory. I expect, in a few weeks' time, your names will be glaring out in electric signs all over London."

"Daddy, don't be so silly!" Sheila rippled; but, all the same, she was delighted. "Well, what do you think of that, Pegs?" she demanded, turning to her friend. "And we hadn't the faintest idea he was there."

Peggy nodded. She scarcely knew what to say. She was conscious of that cynical smile playing about the corners of Claire Blackburn's mouth.

She could guess what Claire was thinking, and for a moment a sense of helplessness stole over her.

Then, angry with herself, she shook it off. This was no time for giving way to dread of what might happen. It was what she herself would cause to happen if she were smart and quick enough that mattered!

"Perhaps it was as well we didn't know," she answered Sheila. "I'm glad he—he liked our performance."

It was as the guests were making their way to the lounge where coffee was to be served after dinner, that Peggy suddenly became aware that Claire was at her elbow.

The pair of them had become detached momentarily from the others.

"My dear Peggy," she said in a low voice that was almost a hiss, "I haven't had a chance until now of really congratulating you on your great success at the concert. You were—wonderful!"

Peggy met her gaze calmly.

"Thank you," she returned coldly.

"And isn't it marvellous to think you may soon be going to London to achieve further success?" Claire pursued. "I was just thinking to myself as dear aunt read Mr. Sergieoff's charming letter, wouldn't it be awful if anything happened to prevent you going?"

And with a laugh that was meant to be silvery but from which Claire could not keep a note of malice, she turned off to mount the stairs.

For a long moment Peggy stood still, gazing after her, hands clenched at her sides.

Those last words constituted a threat. She knew it as certainly as she knew anything.

She knew something else, too. It was war to the knife between them now. The gloves were off. Claire would strike the moment she was ready to strike—unless Peggy struck first.

The question was: Could Peggy get sufficient evidence in time to enable her to strike first?

One thing Peggy knew she must do without a moment's delay—she must get in touch with Stella and warn her.

For the present it might be all right for Stella to remain where she was, but if the blow that Peggy feared fell, then it would become necessary for Stella to disappear once more—to become again a hunted fugitive, not knowing where to turn or what to do for the best.

Peggy looked up the stairs again. Claire was out of sight. She had probably gone to the library or to her own room.

Now was Peggy's chance to slip out of the house and see Stella.

A few moments later, after telling Sheila that she would not be long, Peggy was quietly leaving the house and hurrying to where a bus would take her to the centre of the town.

### The Blow Falls

"YOU mean she knows who I—I am? You're sure of it, Peggy?"

Stella's voice held a note of terror, and Peggy longed to be able to reassure her—and yet how hard it was. The sisters were together in Stella's room at the nurses' hostel.

"There's not much doubt about it, Stella," Peggy admitted, striving to speak as lightly as possible. "Still she hasn't said anything yet, and before she can I'm hoping to be in a position to make it impossible for her to harm you."

Stella clasped her hands.

"But how—how?" she breathed uncertainly. "I



mean, what have you discovered about Claire, Pegs?"

Peggy smiled grimly.

"A lot!" she answered. "At this very moment Claire's using for her own ends money given her to pay bills."

"She went on to relate how she had come across the receipts for partly-paid bills, and how she had found Claire's own diary on the library floor at Chester Lodge.

"To-morrow I'm going to visit certain trades-people," she added, a gleam of grim determination in her eyes. "And after that—well, I shall lay the facts before Mrs. Anstey." She took her sister's hand. "And just to make everything doubly certain, I want to arrange for you to be available, if necessary. For a short while you might even have to vanish once more—"

"You mean, if Claire gives me away before you can complete your inquiries?"

"Yes. Now listen carefully dear. If you get a message from me—no matter in what form—you must leave here at once and return to the Temperance Hotel. You understand?"

Stella gazed at her doubtfully. It was clear to Peggy that her sister scarcely knew what to do for the best. The news Peggy had just imparted to her had undoubtedly come as a great shock.

"But Peggy"—her voice shook—"don't you think I—Id better leave here right away. The police—" She broke off with a choking sob.

Poor Stella! Peggy's heart ached for her. All the dread of the past weeks had returned to Stella with redoubled force. Once again she was experiencing that dreadful "hunted animal" feeling that had partly vanished when she had obtained the post as assistant to Mr. Spelthorne.

Peggy's arms went round her.

"No, dear," she said firmly. "You're not to get the wind up, Stella. Don't you see—everything may depend on what happens during the next day, even during the next few hours. You've got to have faith in me. You've just got to!"

Stella nodded; her eyes were misty with tears.

"I have. Oh, I have, Pegs," she quavered. "I only want to do what is best for both of us."

"Then go on exactly as you are doing until you hear from me," Peggy urged.

After further talk with her sister, Peggy took her departure, feeling that she had done all that was humanly possible in the circumstances.

She was tired after the exciting day, but she scarcely slept a wink that night, so busy was her mind.

The morning broke fine and sunny, and Peggy was up almost before the servants, longing to get out and start her all-important investigations. This unexpected "holiday" from the Dancing Academy would provide just the opportunity she needed.

Sheila breakfasted in bed, and it was as Peggy was about to leave the house that she encountered Mrs. Anstey coming down the stairs.

"Ah, good-morning, my dear," the kindly lady greeted her. "You're about early this morning. What amazing energy some of you young people have, to be sure. You're going shopping, eh?"

Peggy nodded, hoping that she did not look as embarrassed as she felt by the innocent question. She was going shopping; but not to buy things! "Yes, Mrs. Anstey," she answered.

Her employer looked away thoughtfully for a moment.

"I wonder, would you be back in time to take a basket of things to old Mrs. Merton for me, before lunch? You remember you visited her a day or so ago. Cook is baking this morning, and I would like Mrs. Merton to have some of the things while they are fresh."

Peggy replied that she would be only too pleased to do as Mrs. Anstey wished.

"Very well, my dear. I will tell cook to have the basket ready by mid-day at latest and waiting for you in the hall here. Good-bye for the present."



"I was just thinking," Claire pursued suavely, "wouldn't it be terrible if anything happened to prevent your going to London." And by the tone of the other's voice Peggy knew that Claire's words were nothing but a thinly-veiled threat!



She entered the breakfast-room then, and Peggy, her heart thudding slightly at thought of what lay before her, went on her way.

And scarcely had she passed through the front door out of sight than from the landing at the head of the stairs a figure peeped cautiously into the well of the hall.

Claire Blackburn it was! Hidden among the shadows, Claire had been listening to the talk between Mrs. Anstey and Peggy, and now her mind was working furiously, for something Mrs. Anstey had said had inspired a crafty idea the very thought of which seemed to give Claire a queer joy.

As for Peggy, she made her way with all speed to the centre of the busy town. The shops she wished to visit were nearly all within a radius of half a mile or so, and she had no need to waste more than a few minutes at any one of them.

Peggy knew exactly what she was after. She merely mentioned that she came from Chester Lodge, the Anstey's place, and that she wished to know the amount of the account outstanding for goods supplied.

Most of the tradespeople had seen her out with Sheila or some other member of the Anstey household, and supplied the details asked for without the slightest demur.

And as visit succeeded visit, so did Peggy's sense of shock and amazement grow. At almost every establishment there was a sum running into two or three pounds owing. In many cases Peggy was handed the amount on a billhead. In others, she just jotted it down on a slip of paper.

Finally, she had been to all the shops, and, making her way to a small café, she sat down and ordered a cup of coffee. Then, getting out the bills and slips of paper from her handbag, she began a careful calculation of the full amount owing to the various tradespeople.

"My goodness!"

The gasped murmur left her lips. The total was a staggering one. Over thirty pounds!

Her course of action was plain now. She would get hold of Sheila and lead the talk to the subject of household accounts; then she would skilfully lead up to her shattering disclosures of what had been happening.

After that—she smiled grimly—well, after that, it would be for Claire to explain matters—if she could!

She sat thinking for a while, then left the café and started for home.

A bus took her to the end of the road, and she was soon indoors.

Emily, Mrs. Anstey's own maid, was passing through the hall, and Peggy asked if she knew where Sheila was.

"She's gone out," Emily informed her, "but she'll be back for lunch."

Peggy thanked her. She glanced at the grandfather clock at the far end of the hall. Nearly mid-day. Not long before lunch now!

Then her gaze alighted on a shallow wicker basket, covered with a spotless cloth, standing on the hall table. Peggy suddenly remembered. She had promised to take the basket to old Mrs. Merton before lunch.

Crossing to the table, she picked up the basket.

Then, so suddenly that Peggy was momentarily bewildered, a startling thing happened.

Even as she was about to pass the handle of the basket over her other arm, someone knocked into her and the basket flew from her grasp, to tip over on its side on the hall floor.

Peggy gasped in mingled annoyance and surprise.

Then she became aware of Claire at her side—a Claire whose eyes seemed to blaze with an unnatural light.

"I'm terribly sorry," Claire said, and her voice was almost a hiss.

She went to pick up the basket, but it seemed to slip from her grasp, so that more of the contents rolled out.

A startled cry left Claire's lips—a cry that brought both Emily and Mrs. Anstey running into the hall from the morning-room.

"Look! What does it mean?" Claire was saying in a tone of mingled horror and disbelief.

But Peggy did not answer. She, too, was staring in a kind of stunned daze at what had fallen from the basket.

There were cakes and pastries, small jars of potted meats and other foodstuffs. But there were other things as well which by no stretch of imagination should have been there, ready to be taken to an ailing old woman.

There were silver forks and spoons, silver service rings, brooches, and—a string of obviously valuable pearls.

"Peggy!"

Mrs. Anstey had hastened forward; her eyes were on Peggy, in amazement.

Peggy struggled with the stunned feeling that still assailed her. Slowly her bewilderment was giving way to horror and resentment.

"Don't—don't look at me like that!" she cried wildly. "I didn't know the things were in there. I tell you I didn't! It's a trick—the whole thing." She swung round on Claire, eyes blazing with passionate indignation. "You did this, Claire Blackburn. You're a thief—not me—"

Claire threw up her head and smiled icily.

"You'd best be quiet and not make things worse for yourself—Peggy Randall!" she flung at Peggy.

Mrs. Anstey gasped.

"What did you call her, Claire?" she inquired in amazement.

"Randall!" repeated Claire. "And that's her real name. Let her deny it if she can. She's Stella Randall's sister! She's been in touch with her sister ever since she came here. She got Stella a job with Mr. Spelthorne as his secretary. Let her deny that! And now she's stolen these things—or attempted to steal them—because she was afraid I'd found her out in her guilty secret, and she and Stella wanted money to go away quickly before the police could be informed!"

Peggy stood tense and still, striving to summon her scattered thoughts, and conscious of only one thing—that if she were to counter Claire's savage attack effectively, she had got to be smarter than ever before in all her life.

**IT** seems that Claire has struck her most deadly blow at Peggy. What will be the outcome of this tense situation? Will Peggy be able to counter Claire's move, or must she own herself defeated at last? Further chapters of this absorbing story will appear in next Tuesday's **SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN**, which you must order at once.





Frightened by the clanging of the bell, Hulele knew not what to do. And then the caretaker and his wife rushed up. "Come down!" they cried. Hulele knew that she was trapped; what could she do?

escape as she crept towards the window and peered inside.

Then a little cry escaped her lips—a cry of bewilderment and delight.

For, lying on a narrow bed, her silver hair

friendly, hair timidly lighting up her dusky face.

"I Hulele," she announced simply. "You—you Meeses Mon'mery, maybe—yes?"

The lady regarded her in puzzled fashion, and passed a hand rather wearily over her forehead. She was weak and ill, and her thoughts were wandering.

"Why don't they send for a doctor?" she faltered. "They know that I'm ill. And the message—the message—"

She covered her face with her hands, moaning faintly.

Hulele's impulsive heart was touched; she longed to do something to comfort the white lady, but her simple mind was baffled.

Then a strange thought came to her, bred of native superstition. The white lady was bewitched!

