

Autograph Anne—Valerie Drew—Wanda^{of the} Woodlands—Patsy—The Silent Six!
(Meet Them ALL Inside.)

SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 2¢

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

July 21st, 1934.



**FUN and
EXCITEMENT
at the Seaside**

can be yours if you
read—inside—about
**Patsy-Never-
Grow-Up,
the irrepresible.**

VALERIE DREW, the famous girl detective, never investigated a more astonishing mystery than—

WHEN THE WIND CHANGED!

"I AM not a poor woman, Miss Drew. See, I will hand you these notes to the value of one hundred pounds as a retaining fee if you will come up to my home in Cumberland at once to solve this strange mystery for me."

The silvery-haired woman in tinted spectacles who sat in the drawing-room at Valerie Drew's house in Kensington thrust her gloved hand into her bag.

It reappeared, holding a thick wad of notes. Eagerly the well-dressed woman held out the money to the girl detective.

"Please—please!" she urged, with a little stifled sob.

Valerie made no attempt to take the money.

With the sunshine that was streaming in at the window putting ruddy tints of gold into her auburn hair, she was half-resting, half-sitting on the edge of the table facing her visitor, who had described herself as Mrs. Kendall, a widow.

Valerie's eyes rested for a moment on the caller's well-shod feet.

In the welts of her shoes the girl detective could see traces of reddish sand.

Flash, Valerie's intelligent Alsatian wolf-hound, sat beside her, with his tongue lolling, because the afternoon was very hot.

For some reason Flash did not approach the woman and rest his muzzle sympathetically on her knee, as he usually did when he saw a person inclined to cry.

Valerie's gaze wandered from Mrs. Kendall's shoes to her silvery hair.

"We will leave the discussion of fees for the moment, Mrs. Kendall," she said, waving the proffered money aside. "Now, you have told me a very queer and eerie story. Let us see if I have all the details correct."

She checked them off on her well-manicured fingers.

"Shortly before the death of your husband, three years ago, your son Ronald, then a little over twenty-two, quarrelled with his father.

"Ronald left home and apparently disappeared.

"Of late at your lonely house far away up in Cumberland you have found yourself for some unaccountable reason unable to sleep between the hours of midnight and one o'clock in the morning. Something—some overwhelming impulse—has induced you to leave your bed and go to the window. And from there you have seen below, walking with his head bowed sadly, the figure of your son, attired in the uniform of the French Foreign Legion?"

"Yes, yes. That is right!" said Mrs. Kendall, with another only half-suppressed sob.

She made a supplicating gesture.

"Oh, what does it mean? Did he join the Foreign Legion, and was he killed in some battle? Is it his—his ghost I have seen?"

Valerie slowly shook her head.

"It is a most mysterious story, Mrs. Kendall," she murmured. "Indeed, it is almost as great a mystery as your coming to me in a white wig and wearing tinted glasses to hide your eyes."

The woman gasped and half-started up in her chair.

But Valerie made a clutch at her hat and the silvery hair beneath.

Both came away bodily in her hand. With a second grab that the woman found it impossible to avoid, the girl detective whipped away her blue-tinted glasses.

The result was startling.

An instant before Mrs. Kendall, as she called herself, had looked like an elderly, silver-haired woman of sixty or more.

Now she was clearly no more than half that age, raven-haired, and, though white from shock, quick-witted, quite dry-eyed, and agile.

Flash gave an excited bay as the bogus client sprang to her feet and made a panic-stricken rush for the door. Valerie grabbed the hound's collar and held him,

The CASE of



"All right, Flash," Valerie said, with one of her soft laughs. "She just wanted to send me right up to Cumberland to get rid of me from home, and was willing to spend no less than a hundred pounds to do it. I think we shall find out why before very long!"

In a spotless white overall, Valerie was in the small but well-equipped laboratory belonging to her father.

She was bending over the marble slab, and Flash was squatting on his haunches and watching her with some misgiving. From experience he knew that when his young mistress came here to make experiments they often gave off the most obnoxious smells which would catch at his throat and nostrils and set him violently sneezing.

As a matter of fact, Flash was getting ready to bolt if anything of the sort should happen now.

But he need not have feared.

Valerie was using her father's powerful microscope and comparing two minute smudges of red sand on the slide.

One was taken from a large case where her ex-Police Commissioner parent had many samples of sands and soil from numerous districts which had often aided him when he was at Scotland Yard.

The other few grains of red sand Valerie had collected from the carpet in the drawing-room after they had fallen from "Mrs. Kendall's" shoe in her precipitate flight.

"Yes, they are identical," murmured Valerie, straightening up. "She came from the Redglades Forest district, and I seem to

remember having read that something queer and mysterious is going on there. Flash, the newspaper file, old boy!"

She pointed to where it hung on the wall.

Flash trotted over to the file of daily papers, seized it in his mouth, and carried it to his charming young mistress.

Stroking his head as she seated herself, Valerie began to run back through the newspapers.

She had not to go far. In a paper under the date of three days before she found:

"ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS FIRE IN REDGLADES FOREST!"

"Yet a third outbreak of fire has occurred in the beautiful Redglades Forest," the report ran. "Fortunately, a sudden storm and a heavy downpour of rain extinguished the flames so that very little damage was done. But as this is the third blaze in the forest in less than a week it would seem that all possibility of the outbreaks being accidental is ruled out, and that the fires are the work of ruthless and mysterious vandals."

Came a tap at the door. With almost as much apprehension as Flash had recently shown a maid put in her head.

"Miss Valerie, there's a young girl just called and begged to see you—and her eyes are red," the servant said.

"Did you notice if her shoes were red, too?" asked Valerie, rising and stripping off her white overall.

"I—I didn't notice, miss," stammered the maid. "What—"

QUEERHOLME COTTAGE

Valerie smiled. "Pity you didn't," she exclaimed. "It's rather important, as a matter of fact, but—"

"I'll—I'll run and have a look, miss—now, I will," the maid declared, blinking and fluttering her hands.

"Don't bother. I'll look for myself," Valerie smiled. "Where is she now?"

"In the small sitting-room, miss. I wasn't sure whether the nice-looking white-haired old lady was still in the drawing-room."

"The nice-looking, white-haired old lady left in the dickens of a hurry, Mary. I wonder you didn't hear her slam the front door after her," returned Valerie grimly, and went to find her fresh visitor.

As the girl detective entered the room a young and rather poorly clad girl turned sharply from where she had been gazing unseeingly out of the window.

It was true what the maid had said. Her eyes showed signs of recent tears, and she looked as if she was keeping a plucky grip upon herself to control agitation.

Valerie smiled at her to put her at her ease, then glanced down at her shoes.

She could have given an ejaculation of triumph. There were traces of reddish sand in the welts of the girl's shoes, just as there had been in those of the woman calling herself Kendall.

"You come from the Redglades Forest district and you probably have come to see me in some connection with the mysterious fires,"



Enthralling LONG COMPLETE Detective Adventure Featuring VALERIE DREW and FLASH.

said Valerie. "Won't you sit down and tell me all about it?"

Instead of taking the chair to which Valerie nodded, the girl appeared rooted to the carpet in utter amazement.

"I—I do come from Redglades Forest," she breathed. "And it is about the fires that I want to see you, Miss Drew. But—but how could you possibly know that?"

"Never your mind," Valerie laughed. "Meet Flash, who wants to shake hands with you. That's right. Now, do you mind telling me your name?"

"My name is Elsie Renard," answered the girl, as, still regarding Valerie in some awe, she went to the chair, sat down and tightly clasped her hands.

"We—mother, my elder brother, Chris, and I—live in a cottage—Queerholme Cottage—in the forest which belongs to Lord Hawthwaite. Oh, if you saw it, Miss Drew," she went on, her lips quivering and her eyes filling with tears, "you'd realise what a dear old romantic place it is and what a wrench it would be to lose it!"

"But why should you lose it, Elsie?"

"Because of the mysterious fires," was the young girl's answer. "You see, Lord Hawthwaite was intending to give the forest to the public.

"If he had done that, he would have made Chris chief keeper and given us Queerholme Cottage freehold as part of the arrangement. It would have meant so much to us."

Valerie nodded sympathetically.

"Even more perhaps than you can realise," continued Elsie, dashing a hand across her eyes and stilling her lips with an effort. "To me, especially. My twin sister, Barbara, died there of influenza a year ago, but to—me she is still there.

"I mean that I have all the little things she valued. I know all the walks in the forest about our cottage that she loved. When I walk in these places it seems as if she never died at all and—is with me. Oh, please don't think me stupid."

"I certainly do not think you stupid, dear," said Valerie quietly, who knew the strong bond

of affection that frequently exists between twins. "It would break your heart to have to leave Queerholme Cottage. Well?"

"Well, Lord Hawthwaite is so angry about the fires that he is thinking of changing his mind and instead of giving the forest to the public he might sell it."

"To whom?" Valerie leaned forward in the chair she had taken and her voice was a trifle sharp.

"Oh, I don't know. Very likely to somebody who would cut down the beautiful old trees and build on it, or something," said Elsie. "That would mean that our poor little cottage would be knocked down and no job for Chris, who has been out of work for ever such a long time."

She clenched her hands.

"I believe somebody is doing it purposely, setting fire to the forest, I mean. Lord Hawthwaite says that if the public can't be a little more careful when it picnics and that sort of thing in the forest it doesn't deserve it. And that's just the way somebody wants him to feel, I believe, so that he sells it."

"Is there any builder that you know of after buying the forest from Lord Hawthwaite—or any rich man who might sell it again at a profit for building purposes?"

"Well, I've heard that Mr. Tobias Belcham has made Lord Hawthwaite an offer. And—and he's not a nice or very honest man. Some houses he built just after the War are beginning to fall down already."

"Ah! How old is he?"

"Nearly sixty, I should say."

"Does he happen to have a young wife with black hair and blue eyes or a daughter who would answer that description?"

"No," Elsie shook her head. "He isn't even married," she said. "Why did you ask that question, please?"

Valerie took up the white wig and spectacles from the table.

"Because a woman came to me this afternoon, wearing this wig and the spectacles and offered me a hundred pounds to go at once to Cumberland to lay a ghost," she said. "I detected just a glimpse of her real hair under

the wig where it was just a trifle displaced—and I snatched the wig off."

"Oh, how exciting!" cried Elsie, gazing at Valerie in frank heroine worship. "But why do you think she had anything to do with the forest fires?"

"Because she had red sand in the welts of her shoes which I proved to come from the Redglades Forest district, just as you have, Elsie."

"My dear, there is something big behind this. The woman was so anxious to get rid of me before you reached here to tell me your story that she was willing to part with a hundred pounds to bring it about."

Valerie sprang to her feet.

"Come along. We are going to get into my car with Flash and make a rush for your home. I mean to know more about these mysterious fires and you shan't lose that cottage if I can help it."

She waved away Elsie's thanks, and two minutes later they were in the speedy car, with Flash looking rather annoyed because Elsie was occupying the seat beside his beloved mistress and he had been relegated to the rear.

Out of London and its congested traffic Valerie skilfully threaded the blue sports model. The moment she had a clear road she rapped a "Sit tight!" and thrust down her foot.

But it was a long drive that they had before them and dusk had given place to darkness by the time they were swinging into a road leading to the extensive forest.

It was then that Elsie uttered an anguished cry and pointed to the sky.

By



Illustrated by C. PERCIVAL

"Look!" she gasped huskily. It was a lurid, savage glare. Another fire had been started. Valerie had scarce glanced up at the red glow suffusing the heavens when she felt the wind suddenly veer round. Elsie cried out again, and turned ashen to the lips. "Did you—did you feel the wind change?" she gasped. "Yes," said Valerie. "But does it matter very much?" "Matter!" cried Elsie, and there was a stricken sob in her voice. "It means that it will take the flames rushing about Queerholme Cottage and—and destroy it!"

A FIRE TO STOP A FIRE!

THE girl-detective had already been driving at a fairly smart pace. She thrust down the accelerator pedal and the fast blue sports model fairly leaped forward and hurtled along the tree-bordered road. "Be careful!" warned Elsie. "There are rails not far ahead and a gate which you couldn't get the car through even if it were open." Valerie nodded to show that she heard. Her powerful headlights were at full glare. Abruptly she saw the rails enclosing the fringe of the forest looking to be rushing to meet her. She shut off and clapped on her brakes. The car shuddered to a standstill within a few feet of the railings. They could see the wicked glare of the fire through the trees of the forest away to the left as they hurled themselves from the car with Flash following and letting out a bay of excitement. Elsie rushed to the gate in the railings and snatched it open. "This way, Miss Drew," she panted, starting to rush through the tree-trunks and to the right. After Elsie darted the girl detective. Suddenly she found thick underbush which was as dry as tinder about her legs. It tore her thin silk stockings badly, but there was no time to bother about that. Valerie saw lights gleaming through the trees. She guessed that they came from Queerholme Cottage, that might be doomed,

and in another moment knew that she was right.

The picturesque cottage came into view. It was thatched and very old and one of the sweetest little dwellings Valerie had ever seen. Rambler roses clung to its walls and bloomed in riotous profusion over its porch. There were window-boxes in which carefully tended flowers added further touches of colour and beauty.

As they stumbled towards the little house, sobbing for breath, a motherly looking woman rushed out with several framed photographs and a knowing-looking, bald-headed parrot in a cage.

A young man stumbled out after her, staggering under the weight and bulk of an old-fashioned treadle sewing-machine.

"Mother! Chris!" Elsie panted. "You know that—"

"That the wind's changed!" the young man breathed, an angry gleam in his eyes. "Yes. I'm afraid the cottage is going to be burned down, Elsie. Quick! Help to get as much as you can out."

"No, no! You're wasting time!" cried Valerie, her gaze on a glade to the left of the cottage. "We can check that fire with luck. Elsie—hurry! Back to my car and bring the spare tin of petrol you'll find there."

"Petrol?" exclaimed Chris Renard. "I don't see—"

The girl detective pointed to the glade towards which the wind was sweeping the lurid glare that meant destruction for the little home if the roaring fire were not extinguished.

There were no trees in the clearing, only a few straggling bushes, which would serve to carry the fire on to the underbush and trees growing near to the left-hand wall of the dwelling.

"It sounds drastic, but it's an old dodge of the settlers in Canada when a forest fire starts," said Valerie. "If we can start another fire—burn down those bushes before the main fire reaches them—there's a good chance of the flames dying out and never reaching the cottage."

"By gum! I see your idea, miss, and it's worth trying!" cried Chris, picking up the parrot-cage and carrying it to a safe distance.

"Hallo, Chris! Step on it!" croaked the parrot. "Man the pumps, me hearties! Full steam ahead!"

Flash started and gazed in bewilderment at the bald-headed bird, which later Valerie was to learn had been brought home by Chris' late father, who had been a sailor.

Flash blinked. He couldn't understand it at all. He walked up to the cage, and was most indignant when he jerked his muzzle back only just in time to save his nose from being bitten. Elsie came racing back with the can of petrol.

Valerie took it. As she started to unscrew the cap she glanced anxiously towards the raging fire racing for the cottage.

It looked near—terribly near!

She set her teeth. She had got to be quick if she was to get her plan into execution before the inferno reached the glade.

"A long torch of some kind—a roll of newspaper!" she shouted.

Chris rushed back into the cottage to get something. While he was gone Valerie hurried from bush to bush in the glade, sprinkling just sufficient petrol on each to ensure their burning readily.

Chris hurried out. A long roll made of a double page of a newspaper was in his hand. Valerie poured the few drops of petrol she had left over its end, lit a match, and ignited it.

"Look out, miss! Mind your clothes don't catch!" Chris shouted, as Valerie raced for the farther bushes in the glade, with Flash going after her.

Another look at the oncoming flames. Then: Oumph-h-h! Oumph-h! Oumph!

Valerie touched the bushes in turn with her impromptu torch. Flash retreated and bayed furiously as they caught with an explosive noise.

The girl detective worked fast, and soon had the whole of the bushes in the glade blazing.

But it was to be touch and go.

If they burned themselves out before the main fire reached the clearing, then all might be well. If they did not, nothing could save the cottage from which Elsie, Chris, and their frantic mother were again carrying the more portable of their possessions.

Valerie guessed that most of the articles she saw in Elsie's arms had belonged to her lost twin, and her heart went out to her.

"Come here, Flash!" Valerie said, seizing his collar. "You mustn't take the chance of getting mixed up with that blaze, old boy."

She held him and watched the onrushing, main fire and the lesser one she had created in breathless suspense.

Would the bushes never cease to burn and crackle?

The other fire was clearly visible through the tree-trunks now as it devoured the dry underbush before it and licked up the trees, threatening even the stoutest of them. The roar and crackle of the flames was nerve-racking.

Ah! One of the bushes which Valerie had set blazing near to the cottage was threatening to connect with the underbush there! She released Flash, snatched up a well-worn overcoat that Chris had brought out, and made a desperate rush for the spot.

With lusty blows Valerie beat at the flames, creeping insidiously towards the vegetation by the cottage. To her relief, she soon extinguished them.

She looked behind her. To her joy, she saw that nearly every tongue of flame in the glade had died out, leaving only sparks on the charred ashes where the bushes had been.

In the same instant the greedy flames reached the fringe of the clearing.

Valerie, Elsie, who was clinging to her arm with an intensity that almost hurt, Mrs. Renard, and Chris could only watch with bated breath and in the throes of the most intense suspense.

Then they all gave gasps of profound relief.

The fire was dying out! Valerie's clever plan had proved successful. The flames could gain no hold on the grass, which looked as if it recently had been clipped short by sheep.

Valerie, who was again holding the collar of Flash, felt him struggling to break away, and turned in the direction in which he wanted to make.

She was not sure, but thought she heard a faint rustling in the bushes there as if some body might be lurking in the cover to watch!



"Here's one mystery solved!" snapped Valerie, and, leaning forward, she snatched at her visitor's hair. It came away in her hands—a wig!

"After them, Flash!" she cried, releasing his collar on chance.

With a deep, rumbling growl, Flash shot for the gloom, where the bushes evidently did hold some stealthy watcher!

FLASH FAILS AND FALLS!

THE girl detective saw a woman start up from behind the bushes as Flash went racing towards them.

It was that moment that a part of the burned forest gave out a vivid flicker before it died into just red sparks.

Valerie caught in her breath.

In the glow, she saw the watcher's face clearly. It was that of the woman of that afternoon who had come to her in disguise and tried to press one hundred pounds upon her to send her far away to Cumberland on a wild goose chase!

"Hold her, Flash!" Valerie cried, certain that even if the woman had not actually caused the fires she knew more than she would care to tell about them.

The woman gasped with apprehension. She did not know that Flash would merely seize her clothing and detain her if he came up with her and believed he might bite her severely.

She turned and ran into the forest with the Alsatian changing his course and going after her. In her turn, the girl detective sped after the dog.

Flash burst through the underbush after the fleeting woman, though darkness now hid her, and actually Flash was following her by the crashing of her running feet.

The woman heard him getting closer—closer. Again she struck away at a tangent. Flash heard and whipped that way also. And then—

The woman came to a gnarled tree with a low-growing branch. She leaped, caught at this with both hands and dragged herself up. As she cast an anxious glance over her shoulder she saw Flash's eyes glowing green as he came hurtling on.

Just too late, Flash dimly made her out, clinging to the tree branch and drawing up her legs.

Before he could check his rush he shot under her and dashed into some bushes. Clean through them he went, to find that there was no longer solid ground under his paws.

He started to pitch through space, to fall and fall—

The woman gasped with relief. As she dropped from the tree branch she listened. It was to realise that Valerie had temporarily lost the chase.

She stepped over the underbush into a rough track to the left of the tree.

On tiptoe the woman made noiselessly along the path. In any case the deep gloom probably would have hidden her. But it was not long before she was around a curve in the track and still stealing silently on.

"Flash! Flash! Where are you?"

It was Valerie. She came hurrying through the trees and, as she called her pet, she heard a pathetic whine that she knew came from him.

Valerie made to step through the bushes that hid the gap. The hand of Elsie closed on her arm and the younger girl uttered a cry of horror and dragged Valerie back.

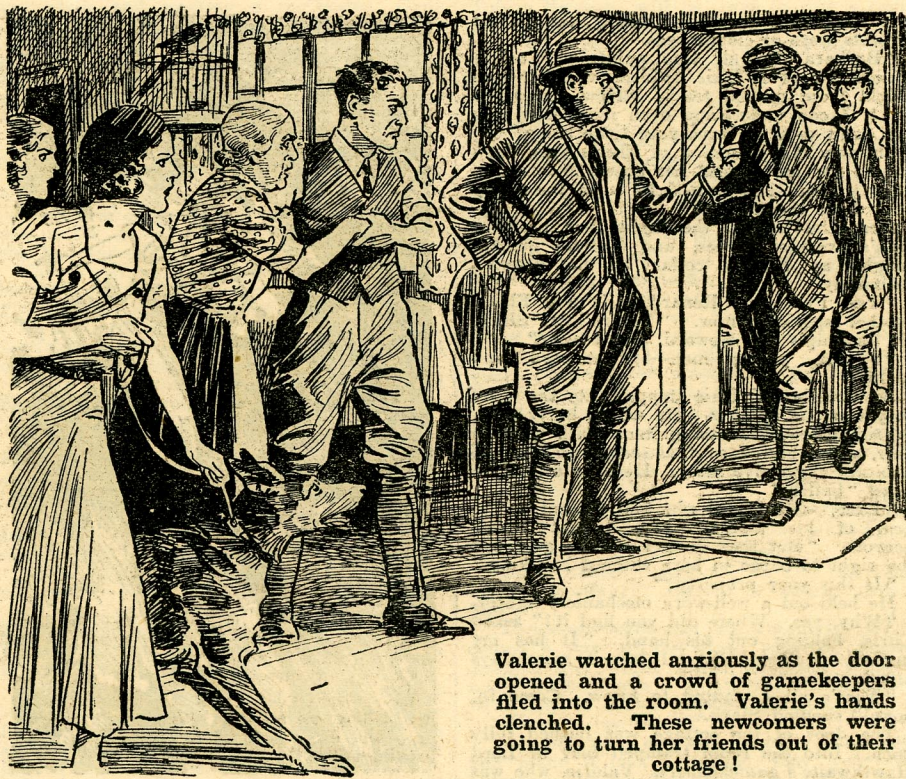
"Be careful!" she urged. "There's a deep sandpit, right in front of you just over those bushes."

A cold dread clutched at Valerie. She realised now that the whine had come from below, and that Flash was in the pit and very likely gravely injured.

"I must get down there!" she gasped. "Didn't you hear Flash whine? He—he wouldn't do that unless he were hurt. He would bay to let me know where he is—and he's lying at the bottom of the pit!"

As she spoke the whining was repeated. Valerie had gone very pale.

"Oh!" breathed Elsie, as Chris joined them. "Come with me—just for a few yards to the right. The fall is sheer where you were going to step over the bushes just now.



Valerie watched anxiously as the door opened and a crowd of gamekeepers filed into the room. Valerie's hands clenched. These newcomers were going to turn her friends out of their cottage!

But this way the side of the pit is sloping and we can scramble down."

Valerie allowed her to draw her in the direction she indicated as she took her hand. Agonising suspense for her dearly loved dog was making it almost impossible for Valerie to speak again.

She flashed her torch over the bushes when Elsie halted. She saw the edge of the pit, advanced to it and saw that the red sand of the district was evidently dug here. The side at this point was sloping as Elsie had said.

Valerie threw her legs over the edge and at a precipitate pace she stumbled and slid down the pit-side. She reached the bottom and realised that both Elsie and Chris were following her. Valerie ran towards the spot where she judged Flash to be, flashing the beam of her torch before her.

"Oh, Flash dear! What's happened? No, no! Keep still. I am coming to help you."

Flash's hindquarters were firmly wedged in some prickly brambles from the force of his fall. He tried to struggle out to approach Valerie, but stopped and whined shrilly and pitifully.

"Quiet, old boy! Quiet!" urged the girl detective, a break in her voice, as she ran to him. "Yes. I see. It's your poor leg that's caught the worst."

An old and rusted pickaxe in the straggling bushes had badly ripped the fleshy part of Flash's hind leg and it was bleeding profusely. The leg itself was firmly held in the prickly brambles.

Regardless of her own hands, Valerie tenderly freed it. Though more than once she must have hurt Flash in easing the prickles from his fur, he understood that his young mistress was doing all she could for him and gratefully licked her cheek.

"Let me carry him up the slope, Miss Drew," urged Chris. "You can steady me from behind in the steep places. He won't bite me, will he?"

"Of course not," said Valerie, her eyes very bright, as she gently put Flash in the young man's arms. "I'll be behind you. I would like you to give me some warm water and a dash of disinfectant of some kind. That pick-head that wounded his leg was rusty."

"I'll go on and get water and some bandaging ready!" cried Elsie, running on in front.

By the time they got Flash to the cottage, Elsie and her mother had made the table in

the pretty little kitchen ready to receive him. They had put some old cushions upon it and bandages and a basin of warm water which smelled of some antiseptic were to hand.

Flash reached up and licked Chris' chin to show that he appreciated his help.

He tried to be affectionate to Valerie as he was laid on the table. But she gently pressed down his head and then bent over him to bathe his leg.

At first Elsie and her mother attempted to hold Flash down, especially when he winced and yelped on Valerie starting to bathe the most serious wound.

Then they realised that there was no need to hold the fine dog. Flash knew that Valerie would only act for his welfare, and he lay perfectly still while she washed his injuries and bandaged his leg.

Once it was done, Flash stumbled up.

"Wouff!" he remarked, looking towards the door. And it meant: "Where's that jolly mysterious woman who pulls funny stunts on a fellow?"

"No, Flash; I'm afraid it isn't of any use your going alone to try to find her," said Valerie. "What a sweet old place this is!" she added, looking round the cosy kitchen, with its raftered ceiling, its old-world pump in the sink, and its old, but homely furniture.

"Just come with me for a moment, Valerie. I can show you something you will like, I think," said Elsie.

"Well, just for a moment, then, while Flash really gets back the use of that leg," the girl detective answered. "Then I shall try to find that woman. I have the wig she wore in my car, and I think Flash might get her scent and be able to follow her from that."

Elsie, her face a little sad, took Valerie's arm and guided her to a cupboard-like door, which proved to lead to a staircase.

After the two girls had ascended this, with Flash limping after them, Elsie threw open the door of a neat bed-room.

"This is where I sleep," she said, as she lit a lamp. "Before Barbara, my—my sister, died she used to share the room with me. She was clever with her brush, wasn't she?"

Valerie cried out in surprise and admiration at what the lamplight revealed.

The walls were beamed. Between the old oak were scenes of what Valerie rightly took to be more beautiful and peaceful spots in the forest, painted in oils.

It was likewise with the ceiling, though the subjects were of cloudscapes.

"Barbara did all this painting?" asked Valerie. And as Elsie nodded, with her eyes bright from unshed tears: "How clever she was! I can understand even more now why you don't want to leave your little home."

She saw the glistening of Elsie's eyes, drew her to her and kissed her cheek understandingly. Then they started to make their way back down the stairs.

Near the foot of the flight they heard a man's truculent tones, and Valerie quickly caught at Flash's collar as he growled ominously.

"Yes, I'm Chris Renard." It was Elsie's brother speaking now. "You're Mr. Slark, his lordship's new steward, aren't you?"

"I am, young man—his steward and bailiff."

As Valerie and Elsie stepped into the room they saw the speaker. He was a burly man, in riding-breeches and gaiters, with grizzled hair, and a hard face, that seemed to wear an habitual aggressive sneer. He emphasised the word "bailiff."

"I see," said Chris, who had a hand on the arm of his mother, who looked rather nervous. "But that doesn't exactly give you the right to barge in here without knocking."

"Is this your property?"

He held out a well-worn mechanical lighter. "Why, yes. Where did you find it?" asked Chris, holding out his hand. "It has my initials on it—'C. R.' I lost it some days ago."

"That's all I wanted to know. Come in, boys!" shouted Slark.

The door of the cottage was pushed fully open. Into the room tramped four of Lord Hawthwaite's gamekeepers. Valerie, who was rather puzzled, felt that they wore the expression of men who disliked the task lying ahead of them.

"W-what do you want? Why have you walked into my home like this?" faltered Chris' mother, her careworn face paling more deeply.

"I'll do the talking!" snapped Slark. "I happened to be in the forest not long back, and I saw a young fellow of about your build, Mr. Christopher Renard, using a lighter to touch off some underbrush, that seemed to have been soaked in petrol or paraffin oil. Something startled him, and he scuttled off, leaving the lighter, which he dropped, and a raging fire behind him."

Chris strode forward, with his hands bunching, and he had gone white about the mouth from suppressed anger.

"Are you going to say that I started the fire?" he cried indignantly.

"As you've claimed this lighter as your property—yes, you young scoundrel!" bellowed Slark; and Mrs. Renard caught restrainingly at her son's arm.

Two of the gamekeepers had taken hold of a sofa, and were starting to carry it out into the open.

"What—what does this mean?" cried Elsie, leaving Valerie and running forward.

"That, as Lord Hawthwaite's bailiff, I'm ejecting you. And if you don't happen to know what that means, I'll put it more simply. We're throwing you out!" jeered Slark.

A stricken cry burst from Mrs. Renard. It was echoed by Elsie, and Chris struggled with his mother to reach the swabbing bucket.

But it was Valerie who came striding forward to face him, his violet eyes blazing.

"You can't do this to these people, Mr. Slark!" the girl detective said indignantly. "They are at least entitled to a week's notice."

"They were given a provisional notice to quit when the first of the fires so angered Lord Hawthwaite, young woman. Though I am unaware what business it is of yours. That notice expired days ago. And now I'm putting them out."

ON THE SCENT!

MRS. RENARD was seated on an old truck and sobbing, with her face buried in her hands. Elsie, who was seated beside her, was doing her best to comfort her, but her own eyes were swimming and her lips quiver.



Valerie half-stumbled down the quarry's slope, her heart thumping with fear for her beloved dog. Flash lay somewhere down here—perhaps badly hurt!

Chris had gone off to try to find Lord Hawthwaite, angrily reiterating his innocence as he went.

Every stick of furniture had been removed from the little cottage and dumped down on the grass, where Elsie and her mother sat. All the possessions Mrs. Renard had treasured for years were tumbled here and there. Elsie had her dead twin's brushes, palette, and other painting materials under her trembling hands in her lap.

Turned out! Homeless! But for her mother she could have broken down and sobbed wildly in an endeavour to ease her broken heart. She thought of the pictures in the bed-room that had been Barbara's last work. Never to look upon them again! It was too heartrending—too utterly cruel!

Valerie came striding out of the shadows with Flash just as Slark slammed the front door of the empty cottage and put a seal upon it.

"That's that!" he said harshly. "Now I warn you that if you don't remove that stuff within three days I'll have it chopped up for firewood—which is about all it's worth."

"Be a little merciful, Mr. Slark," pleaded Elsie's mother. "Let us take the beds and bedding back, and at least sleep in our old home for to-night."

"Nothing doing!" the man said, with a colousness that caused Valerie's blood to boil. "If I agreed to that I'd find all your old junk back in the place, and have all the trouble of throwing you out again."

"Mr. Slark, may I pass my personal opinion of you?" asked Valerie, as she hurried up, panting.

"I'm pretty thick-skinned," he grinned.

"You will have to be to withstand what I'm going to say," the girl detective blazed. "I think you the meanest, most hard-hearted and detestable villain who ever went outside the law with the knowledge that your victims have not the money to fight you."

"Here, you be careful, young woman!" snarled Slark, his red face going scarlet in wrath. "Those words are libellous—and don't forget the gamekeepers are standing by and listening to you."

Valerie laughed, with a scorn that made him wince.

"You wouldn't dare drag me into court! It would mean too much of a show-up for your contemptible self!"

Slark visibly wilted.

"That's about enough from you!" he snarled. "Go and complain to Lord Hawthwaite if you don't like what I've done to these paupers!"

"I have already been on the telephone to him," Valerie said quietly.

The bully looked a trifle uneasy.

"What did he say?"

"That's my business," Valerie told him. "Do you mind going away. Your presence spoils the beauty of the woods."

Slark gulped.

He was about to turn away when Chris came bursting through the trees, sobbing for breath.

"Perhaps you won't win, after all, Mr. Slark!" he panted. "I phoned Lord Hawthwaite instead of going right to his house. He told me that he'd just heard from Miss Drew and that he's given her twenty-four hours to solve the mystery of the fires, provided—"

"Stop!" cried Valerie, but she was too late. "There isn't another fire to-night," Chris finished. "Get out of here, or I shan't be able to keep my hands off you!"

"Oh, you stupid, Chris!" admonished Valerie, when Slark and the gamekeepers had gone. "We don't know who is causing the fires, and one of those gamekeepers, for instance, may be hand-in-glove with whoever is doing it, and urge them to create another blaze to-night to make Lord Hawthwaite so utterly tired of it all that he sells."

"I'm sorry, Miss Drew," the young fellow returned, looking remorseful, "but that worm, Slark, had so got my goat that I hardly knew what I was saying."

"Well, it can't be helped now. Go to your mother. I don't know my way about too well in this district, and I would like Elsie to come with me."

When the young girl joined her, Valerie made for her car. From under one of the cushions she took the white wig that she had snatched from the head of the mysterious woman that afternoon.

Calling to Flash, she made for the brink of the sandpit where he had pitched over. Already she had reasoned that the woman had suddenly leaped and caught at the convenient tree-branch, so that Flash was hurled into the ugly trap.

"Flash, old boy, take a good sniff at this, then try to find her," the girl detective said, thrusting the silvery false hair against Flash's muzzle.

It caused him to sneeze several times, and Flash regarded Valerie resentfully. Then he saw that her face was too serious for her to be pulling his leg. He advanced and muzzled the wig on his own account.

Now he dropped his muzzle to the ground. Valerie had a leash ready, and was holding his collar.

As Flash started off the way the woman had gone, Valerie clicked the strap to his collar, and wound it twice about her hand.

"Put this wig back in the car and follow us, Elsie," she urged.

Though he limped slightly from his injuries, Flash made through the forest at a smart pace. Elsie rejoined Valerie and the intelligent dog with a run.

"That's Bluebell Walk," said Elsie, in a low and rather tremulous tone, pointing to a long winding avenue through the trees. "It's the most beautiful part of the forest when the bluebells are blooming. My—my sister used to love it."

Valerie pressed her arm sympathetically, but did not speak. Flash was still tugging at the leash in a manner that showed he was clinging unflinchingly to the unknown woman's scent.

On they went until suddenly, rather to Valerie's surprise, they came to a barbed wire fence.

"What's this?" she asked, dragging hard on the leash to prevent Flash trying to struggle through the formidable wire.

"The dividing line."

"You mean—"

"Why, the land on the other side of the wire used to belong to an old man named

Tarsh. He died about a year ago," said Elsie. "And what happened?" asked the girl detective. "To whom did the land pass?" "I think I heard that it went to a nephew named Henry Tarsh. But he's in Canada, and hasn't even bothered to come to England to claim it."

"Have there ever been any outbreaks of fire on the land over the boundary line?" "There was one, and it spread into Lord Hawthwaite's forest."

They found a break in the wire fence. Hurriedly, because it was beginning to rain slightly, Valerie took Flash back to where he wanted to break through. He picked up the scent again promptly, and went on until they left the wood and found themselves on a public road.

Flash immediately made for the drive gates of a fairly large house.

"Who lives here?" asked Valerie, restraining him, and, looking round, she saw that Elsie's hands were clenched, and that her eyes were blazing in indignation.

"Tobias Belcham, the builder—the man who wants to buy the forest to build on!" she breathed angrily.

C. P. R.

SUDDENLY the rain began positively to pelt down about them.

"Oh, my poor mother! What will she do?" asked Elsie, choking down a sob as she visualised what must be happening away by the cottage whence they had been ejected.

The pathetic picture that Elsie painted in her mind's eye was correct in almost every detail. Away where she sat on the trunk with her son, Mrs. Renard crouched against him with a sob as the rain made her ordeal even more wretched.

Already Chris had his arm about her. "Never mind, mother," the young man said, kissing her wet cheek. "Here, put on my jacket. It will keep you from getting seriously wet."

"No, no, Chris. I won't have it! What about you?"

Almost by force Chris put the jacket on his white-haired mother. Then he gently raised her and led her towards the trees. Mrs. Renard was sobbing and looking towards the furniture and other treasured items that had been brought from her home and dumped ruthlessly on the grass. The rain was splashing about them and some would be ruined. Chris hurried back and brought the parrot into shelter.

"It's too wicked—after we have lived there all this time!" the poor woman whispered brokenly. "I don't believe Lord Hawthwaite would have let Mr. Slark do this if he had known."

Meanwhile, Valerie was opening her bag. "Where is there a decent inn near the forest?" she asked.

"There is the Bull Hotel at Belbridge," said Elsie. "But—"

Valerie thrust several pound notes into her hand.

"Run back to your mother and Chris. Tell Chris to take my car and run Mrs. Renard and yourself to the inn and all three of you put up there for the night," she said.

"Oh, Valerie, I can't take this money. I—"

"And your mother cannot stay out in the rain, dear," the girl detective cut in. "Quite on his own initiative, Lord Hawthwaite said he would write me a cheque for fifty pounds if I solved the mystery of the fires. I'm going to do that and take his cheque as a fee, so I shall not be out of pocket. Off with you. I won't listen to any argument."

She kissed Elsie and gave her a push. Elsie darted a glance of pitiable gratitude over her shoulder as she started to run back towards the spot where she had left her mother.

Valerie waited until Elsie was out of sight, then stole into the drive of the house with Flash. She was scarcely there when she saw the front door starting to open.

Valerie jerked Flash behind a clump of shrubs and herself slipped into the rear of them.

It was a woman who, swathed in a long

macintosh and wearing a sou'wester, came quickly down the drive. Valerie could not make out her face in the darkness, but as she looked after the woman and noted her figure and manner of walking she was next to sure that she was her mysterious disguised visitor that afternoon.

The idea was confirmed when Flash strained on the leash to try to reach her.

The girl detective laid a hand on the head of Flash, which he knew meant "steady!" Valerie waited until the woman had turned out of the gates and her ears told her that she had turned left.

Then Valerie followed to the road which was bordered by grass. Keeping to this border, the girl detective started to trail her suspect.

On for some distance went the woman. The footfalls of Valerie and Flash made no sound on the damp grass.

There came a bend. The woman's blurred figure passed beyond it. And then—

Click! A gate had opened and shut, and the sounds of her footfalls had become crunching, as if she were treading a drive. Valerie quickened her pace.

She reached a solitary house just as the front door was closing and reasoned that the woman had been admitted.

"Now what do we do next, Flash?" she murmured. "Ah! That looks promising."

A light had sprung up in the ground floor room lying to the left of the front door. Though the windows were fitted with Venetian blinds, Valerie hoped to be able to see in.

Slipping into the drive with Flash, she stepped on to a lawn and made noiselessly for the windows of the room. Yes, there was a displaced slat. She told Flash to stay where he was and climbed silently on to the sill.

Slowly rising, Valerie peered in through the chink in the blind.

It was to see the mystery woman smiling at a man on the far side of the table.

And that man was Slark! "Well, have you got them, Merna?" the man asked, and his voice reached Valerie quite clearly because the window was open at the top.

The woman drew a long and bulky envelope from under her macintosh. As she tossed it down on the table, Slark seated himself, and eagerly drew out its contents, which to Valerie looked like plans of some sort.

"Splendid! Splendid!" he said. "Mr.

Tobias Belcham will be sorry to lose a competent secretary like you, Merna."

So the woman was the builder's secretary. That might be worth noting.

"I wonder if he is going to lose me?" she said with a challenging smile.

"He sure is!" cried Slark, and into his tones had crept for a moment a noticeable twang. "We started as business partners, but you are going to marry me, Merna, and become a very rich woman as I am going to become a very rich man."

"I'll think about it, Julian."

"You bet you will—and now we've one more piece of risky work to do. The meddling girl, Valerie Drew, whom you tried to get rid of when you heard Elsie Renard say she was going to Town to see her, has been telephoning to Hawthwaite. He's given her twenty-four hours to solve the mystery of the fires. If she succeeded, he would then give his forest to the public. But he's made a proviso."

"That girl hasn't the time to find out who is creating the fires in twenty-four hours," sneered the woman. "But what is the condition, anyway?"

"That there isn't another fire to-night. He vows he will sell out if there is—and, of course, there's going to be one!"

"Isn't it too dangerous to risk starting another to-night?" asked the woman called Merna.

"Dangerous—nothing!" Slark scoffed. "We'll choose a part of the wood that the gamekeepers don't visit much—Bluebell Walk—and Hawthwaite will think that the Renards have done it out of revenge, probably."

"What do you mean?"

"I've had them chucked out of their cottage and made it look as though they were responsible for the fires, with the aid of that mechanical lighter of young Chris Renard's that I chanced to find in the woods."

"Wasn't that going a little too far?"

"Aren't we out for big money?" Slark sneered. "What does the fate of a bunch of poverty-stricken cottagers matter? Besides I believe Hawthwaite was reluctant to sell the wood to your employer to build on because of the Renards and their wretched cottage. He'll be done with such scruples when I tell him



As Flash leaped and bayed in his eagerness to enter the gates, Valerie turned to her friend. "This is the place," she said. "We've run our quarry to earth!"

that I almost caught Chris Renard starting the fire to-night—and after he's had another little blaze."

He rose and opened something behind the table which Valerie thought was probably a box ottoman. Into this he dropped the plans which he had returned to the unsealed envelope.

"Come on," he urged. "We'll take the car and go out by the back and see that we have a spare tin or two of petrol to combat this rain that has started. If we hurry and get the fire going the rain won't have had the time to make the underbush very wet, anyhow."

Holding her breath, Valerie watched them quit the room.

She gave them a few seconds to get out of earshot, then raised the window as noiselessly as she could.

Her heart beating fast in case the villainous Slark came back for anything, Valerie dropped into the room.

Around the table she crept. Then she saw that it was not a box ottoman, but a trunk plastered with travelling labels into which Julian Slark had dropped the envelope.

Listening tensely, Valerie raised the lid. She took out the envelope and shook out its contents. Unfolding these, she studied the drawings which she thought had been executed by Merna and which were certainly expert.

Valerie drew a long breath. She returned the plans to the envelope and thrust it under the coat she had put on for motoring.

Cautiously shutting the lid of the trunk she looked again at the labels, and one bearing the initials C.P.R. appeared to intrigue her not a little. She suddenly realised several things.

But the new fire that was to be started in the most beautiful part of the wood! She must stop that at all costs, and at the same time expose these plotters who had turned the unfortunate Renards out of their home, and who were now aiming to lose it for them! Valerie climbed back through the window and dropped to the lawn, bringing the anxious and impatient Flash towards her, wagging his bushy tail in welcome and relief.

Catching at his collar, she dropped flat with him while a two-seater that had come purring from the rear of the house passed down the drive and out of the gates.

It sped back along the road in the direction of the forest. Valerie rose, drew down the window and left the garden with the hound.

Two minutes later, she was in a telephone-box which she had noticed on her way to Slark's abode, and dialling the house of Lord Hawthwaite.

When she was in touch with him—

"Not much time to explain, but it's Valerie Drew!" she rapped. "If you will come to Bluebell Walk I can expose two people who intend to start another fire. I can also tell you why they have been firing your forest. Will you come with some gamekeepers and join me when I signal with the light of a torch?"

"Done!" rapped Lord Hawthwaite, and Valerie sighed with relief.

THE TORCH!

THE rain had ceased. At the same time the wind was fast developing into a half-gale.

Valerie and Flash were back in Lord Hawthwaite's forest, not far from the dividing wire fence, but still a considerable distance from Bluebell Walk.

The wind howled and screeched through the swaying trees. Suddenly Valerie heard a loud, ominous crack. She heard something crashing through the foliage, turned, and uttered an involuntary gasp of dismay.

A tree had snapped under the force of the wind. It was falling straight for her! She tried to leap clear, but was too late. Valerie went down under it, with the tree pinning down her legs.

The underbush had slightly broken its fall before it had ground its way into the bushes, and started to press relentlessly upon her. Miraculously enough, she was not greatly hurt.

She struggled and strained to draw her numbed legs from under the trunk as Flash

realised she was not with him, and came rushing back, whining with anxiety.

Valerie tugged and wrenched in vain. It was hopeless. She found that she could not even shake the heavy tree.

And if she stayed here she could not give the prearranged signal to Lord Hawthwaite and his men; the plotters would start the fire, and very likely get away!

Flash tried to seize the bark of the tree in his mouth. Then he fell back, and his head went on one side as he saw his mistress struggling to get free.

"Wouf! Wouf!" The bay was low and encouraging. Flash darted forward, and, as the panting and breathless Valerie tried to force the trunk upward again, Flash pushed his head and neck under it, scrambled forward until it was resting on his powerful shoulders.

"Oh, you clever dear!" gulped Valerie, understanding what was in Flash's doggy mind.

Once more she strained upward with both legs. Flash heaved his strong shoulders at the same time, so that Valerie was able to draw her legs from under the trunk.

That left the whole weight of it on Flash. He tottered, and, to Valerie's horror, she thought that he must collapse and be crushed by it.

But Flash was cute. He ducked and sharply hurled himself back, and the tree just missed his wet, healthy nose as it came smashing down into the underbush.

Valerie sat down to rub the circulation back into her bruised legs. Then she hugged Flash and silenced the joyous bays she saw he was on the point of giving.

"Come on, old boy! We hadn't much time before. We have got less now!" she panted.

On they hurried to Bluebell Walk.

Behind her Valerie could hear a suspicious rustling in the underbush. She saw that several thick tree-trunks were between the significant noises and herself, flattened her back against one of the trees, and flashed her torch several times to give the signal.

Now she turned and stole for the rustlings, her hand on the collar of Flash.

A light—the flame from a mechanical lighter—split the darkness in front of her. It showed Slark and the woman, Merna; and Slark managed to get a petrol-soaked torch of twisted underbush blazing before the wind blew out his light.

He rose and extended the torch towards a clump of underbush.

Where were Lord Hawthwaite and his gamekeepers? Would they never come? Must she try to outwit this desperate man and woman with the aid of Flash?

Though her heart gave a little tremor Valerie decided to take the risk. There must be no other fire—this lovely part of the forest must not be reduced to charred ashes as the other fired spots had been.

"Stop!" she cried, leaping out of the darkness. "Quick, Flash! Take it away!"

Flash understood. As Slark gasped and started to straighten up, Flash sprang, seized the blazing torch from the man's hold.

Flash carried it to a distance, and dropped it into a puddle!

"You shall pay for your meddling, Miss Drew!" snarled Slark, but as he made for the girl detective Flash came racing back, with a rumbling growl.

Slark stumbled backwards, and it was clean into the powerful arms of a gamekeeper who burst from the bushes behind him. The man was accompanied by a companion, and now Lord Hawthwaite and two more gamekeepers rushed on the scene from the opposite way. Merna tried to run, but was seized.

"Slark! My new steward!" Lord Hawthwaite breathed, sniffing at the reek of petrol that rose from the underbush.

"Yes. Mr. Slark, as you know him, Lord Hawthwaite. But, in reality, Henry Tarsh, from Canada," said Valerie, whipping the long envelope from under her coat. "Letters on a label on a trunk of his—'C.P.R.' otherwise Canadian Pacific Railway—put me on the right track. Merna—I don't know her full name—is—"

"Her name's Austin, and she's Belcham's secretary."

"Well, anyway, she is clever at her work," said Valerie. "In that envelope you will find detailed plans for turning Henry Tarsh's forest into a great amusement park, where there would be swings, roundabouts, a boating-pool, refreshment kiosks, and the like. He saw he was going to lose heavy profits that he had planned, so he kept firing your forest—starting one from his own property to divert suspicion—in the hope of making you sell."

"You villain, Tarsh!" cried Lord Hawthwaite. "You and this woman can make yourselves scarce. But I warn you—you shall hear from my solicitors!"

An hour later Queerholme Cottage was much as it had been, and the beds were being dried. Not only that, the contrite Lord Hawthwaite had made it over freehold to the Renards, and assured Chris that the public would be given the forest and himself his promised job.

"Valerie, I'm so happy!" whispered Elsie, turning shaming eyes the girl detective's way. "I— Why are you laughing?"

"Could anybody help laughing?" asked Valerie.

The bald-headed parrot was the cause of her amusement. His cage had been left standing on the floor, and Flash had approached it inquisitively. He could not quite get the hang of a bird that could talk.

"Good dog! Bad dog!" croaked the parrot, and Flash's ears went alternately up, then down. "Ur-r-r, you bad dog! Good dog! Good dog!"

THE END.

"Unless You Drop This Case Your Dog Will Never Get Well!"

Threatened in that dramatic fashion by an Eastern woman from the strange "House of Minarets," Valerie Drew had every reason to cease her investigations on behalf of a friend. But—

VALERIE DID NOTHING OF THE SORT!

Instead, she redoubled her efforts, not only to bowl out the peculiar people at the "House of Minarets," but also to save the life of her beloved pet. Flash came first, of course, yet Valerie never lost sight of the fact that she was, above all, a girl detective.

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AUTOGRAPH-ANNE'S AMBITION



INGENIOUS ANNE, BUT—

EITHER you throw her out of the house—now, this minute—or I leave myself!

Autograph Anne heard those shrilly voiced words with startling clarity. Breathing heavily from her defence of little Violet Wilson, she faced her rival, her accuser. Then she looked round at Mr. and Mrs. Cribbing.

"Dorothy—my dear, good girl—" Dot's mother came forward as though bemused. "Your hair—all over your face. And your lip—it's cut! What ever does all this mean?" "That girl—Anne—she flung me on the floor!" Dorothy shouted furiously.

"Did you, Anne?" came Mr. Cribbing's more level inquiry.

Anne drew a deep breath. "Yes," she said quietly. "I did." "There you are!" cried Dorothy triumphantly. "She's—she's like a wild cat—oh, mother!"

And Dorothy buried her face on her mother's shoulder.

"It wasn't Anne's fault, daddy. It was Dorothy's." Oh, Anne, let me tell them, please—

Anne went to the crippled child who had squirmed round in her bathchair. She took Violet's hand and squeezed it comfortingly. All the time her heart was pounding; her brain seemed to be whirling.

Of course, it had been inevitable that Dorothy's enmity, her hostility and her jealousy of the crippled child would one day lead to such a scene as this. But it was unfortunate—tragically unfortunate.

In a series of lightning-like flashes, Anne saw what would happen if Dorothy kept to her ultimatum and one of them had to leave the little home.

Both she and her rival were contributing to the exchequer. If one of them left, Mrs. Cribbing would have less money with which to provide for the others. If Anne left—well, as Anne was giving a very generous allowance it would mean that certain little delicacies which invalid Violet had every week would be impossible in the future.

Besides, Anne wanted to be near the youngster, if only to protect her from Dorothy's seething enmity.

Even though Anne would still be able to collect autographs in her new album, with the object of selling them to pay for an operation that would enable Violet to walk, it wouldn't be quite the same as living with her; being able to protect and comfort her at all times.

If only her original album had not been

stolen, just when she had received an offer of fifty pounds for it—

Anne's ruminations were interrupted by Mr. Cribbing's voice, raised with anger.

"More trouble between you two girls, eh?" he exclaimed. He sighed heavily. "What exactly is the matter with you both? Why can't you live like ordinary, peaceful citizens, instead of—"

"Do you expect me to live peacefully with a girl like that?" Dot looked up to sob.

"Do you think I enjoy living with a girl like you?" snapped Anne. "I'm sorry, Mr. Cribbing," she added quickly, checking his intended outburst, "but there's no sense in beating about the bush. Dot and I can't get on together. It's no use. And yet," almost to herself, "I wonder—"

She became thoughtfully silent, her brow puckered. Little did they guess how she was fighting for some way of averting the threatened disaster. Neither she nor Dot must leave home—for Violet's sake! But she couldn't tell Dot that. Dot would probably leave at once!

"Oh, dear Anne, aren't you going to tell them what happened?"

Tearfully, Violet clung to her friend's hand. Anne came out of her reverie with a start; looked into the child's yearning blue eyes; touched her golden curls.

"No, dear," she whispered, shaking her head. Anne knew that Dot could concoct a far more convincing story, supporting her own case, than Anne's truthful version would be. "I'm going to do something else."

She looked up at Dorothy's father.

"Could Dot and I go into the sitting-room for a moment?" she asked.

A little gasp—was it of terror—came from Anne's rival. She edged farther away from Anne, keeping her mother between them.

"It's all right," Anne said, trying to hide her contempt. "I'm not going to push you over again. I just want to—talk to you!"

Dorothy's eyes opened wide. There had been a slow significance about the utterance of those last four words which sent an uncomfortable shiver down her spine. Anne wanted to talk to her—

"What—what about?"

"Oh, just—er—things," said Anne, with an airy wave of the hand, but her dark blue eyes never flickered as they bored into Dot's.

They seemed to say "You'd better!" in a way that brooked no ignoring.

"All right, mother, I'll go," sniffed Dot, as one who is about to undergo the punishment of a martyr. Truth to tell, Dot was feeling extremely shamefaced at having been compelled to give way to this injured, tearful

attitude. Usually, she was suavely cutting; loftily indifferent.

Those tactics wouldn't have paid under the circumstances, and Dot was clever enough to know it.

As soon as they were in Violet's music-room, and Dot had perched herself on the music-stool, Anne stood by the door and regarded her rival. Out of sight of her parents, Dorothy was supercilious. There was a hard sneer about her face. Her leg swung indolently. Her hands were on her hips.

"Well," she hissed, "what did you want me in here for?"

"Listen." Anne spoke quietly. "I'm not going to conceal the fact that your threat just now—to leave the house unless I was told to go—rather alarmed me."

"I'm so glad—"

"But it doesn't any longer, now I've had time to think things over."

"Oh," came Dot's disappointed and involuntary comment.

"And I'm so glad, too!" Anne had to smile as she said those words. "You see, Dorothy, I've thought of a way out. I don't like it—it's sort of making use of a threat, but then, you're used to making threats yourself, so you'll understand all right."

Alarm showed plainly on Dot's pale face.

"What do you mean?" she asked tensely.

"Either you go out there and tell your parents it's all a mistake—you forgot yourself—lost your temper with me, as you certainly did, or—"

"Yes"—anxiously.

"I'll tell them about a certain pound note that disappeared from the dresser!"

Anne folded her arms and waited, perfectly willing to stay in that attitude for a couple of hours. She was amused at Dot's sudden limpness. The girl's frantic embarrassment pleased her. Anne wasn't usually vindictive, but she was remembering what little Violet had gone through at the hands and tongue of this hypocrite of the house!

At last Dorothy gulped and opened her mouth.

By
Margery
MARRIOTT

Illustrated by E. Flinders.

"I'll—I'll do it!" she muttered hoarsely. "But I'll remember this. If I live to be a hundred—"

"You'll have too many enemies to count!" Anne blandly broke in. She opened the door. "Stage waiting, Miss Cribbing," she murmured.

The once haughty Dorothy passed by with an attempt at dignity, but her imperiousness passed when she came face to face with her parents.

"I'm—I'm sorry, mother—father!" she stammered. "It was my fault. I—I lost my temper—fell over—thought Anne had pushed me—and all that. It won't happen again—"

Then, most incontinently, she flew upstairs. Grimly, Mr. Cribbing tugged at his chin.

"I knew there was more in it than we thought," he muttered. "And if I have anything further from that girl—"

"Father! came his wife's reproving murmur. "Oh, let's switch on the wireless!" And he strode into the front room and picked up the overturned occasional table.

Swiftly Anne explained that she and Violet were setting off for Carl Steinbach's, where the youngster was to have an audition.

"Go and enjoy yourselves—and best of luck, my darling!" said the kindly woman, kissing Violet. "I'm sorry, Anne, about what just happened—"

"Forget all about it, mother," said Anne, using the term of endearment she had adopted since lodging at the house. "We're going to."

It was a glorious evening, and as Anne pushed Violet's bathchair along the street she would dearly have loved to dally. But they had a long journey before—over a mile and a quarter to travel in this way.

At the famous musician's house Anne left Violet, hugging her violin and music, at the foot of the steps while she ran up and pulled the bell.

Breathlessly she waited for the maid. She had never felt quite so nervous as she did now. Her whole being seemed to tingle. If only such a lot did not depend upon how Violet's playing impressed Carl Steinbach! Anne wanted Vi to become a great violinist—Anne hoped that she would, when her operation cured her—but Anne could not help wondering if, after all, the child's playing might not be so brilliant as she felt.

It would be tragic to disappoint Violet now. Music meant everything to the youngster—everything, that is, except her love for Anne!

"Oh, are you the young lady who was expected this afternoon?"

Anne whirled round at the sound of that familiar voice. It was the maid she had met that afternoon.

"Yes," said Anne, smiling. "We've an appointment for five o'clock."

"It now happens to be five-and-twenty to six," came the maid's cool answer.

"Five-and-twenty to—My hat!" Anne jerked up her wrist-watch. "Crumbs, so it is!" Her lips set. This was through Dot's intervention, of course. "Oh, we're awfully sorry! Would you tell Herr Steinbach—"

"Herr Steinbach, I am afraid, had an important engagement at six o'clock. He waited until five minutes ago, then left. You've missed him!"

Anne felt as though something had struck her a stinging blow between the eyes.

Little Violet's wonderful chance had been ruined—because of Dorothy!

DOROTHY INTERVENES.

"OH!" said Anne, with the air of one who is fighting against a shock. "That's awkward!"

Little Violet, from her bathchair at the foot of the stone steps, was looking up earnestly. Evidently she had not heard the maid's startling pronouncement.

Anne, thinking of the child, clenched her hands. It was going to be hard, having to break this news to her, after the way they had looked forward to this opportunity—

"But Herr Steinbach said he would probably be free to-morrow morning at ten o'clock—"

Anne jumped. She could not help it. The maid's words sent a thrill right through her—

banished her sudden despair, her gloom, and sent her hopes rocketing skywards again.

"Really?" she cried, her face breaking into a broad smile. "Oh, that's topping! Thanks ever so, miss! Please apologise to Herr Steinbach for us missing him this time and tell him we'll be here sharp at ten to-morrow morning—if we have to stay awake all night."

Smiling, the maid closed the door. Also smiling, Anne skipped down to the expectant child and quickly explained the position.

Her heart twinged, however, when she saw Violet's face fall. Even though the child immediately summoned a bright smile, her eyes lacked the sparkle of complete happiness. Somehow an air of despondency had settled over her.

Anne nodded to herself and made a quick resolve. Little Violet was afraid—afraid that she wouldn't be given this chance, after all. Very well, she should be induced to forget her uncertainty. Anne already had plans for giving the child a really thrilling treat.

"Listen, Miss Muffet!" she said, as she wheeled the youngster down the road. "How would you like to go to a lovely lake, right in the middle of the country, and see people swimming and diving and boating and playing in the water—and racing in those exciting speedboats I've told you about?"

Vi's blue eyes widened incredulously. "Oh, good fairy, I'd—I'd just love to!" she exclaimed. Then she smiled ruefully. "But there aren't any lakes like that near here. I've never seen them, and—"

"But I know where one is," Anne continued. "You do?"—eagerly.

"Yes." "And you mean—we could go there—one day soon?"

"This very evening—now—right away!" Anne chuckled as she swung the invalid-chair round a corner. "Well, Little Miss Muffet, what do you say—"

"Oh, darling Anne, you must really be a magic fairy as well as a good fairy!" Violet heaved a big sigh of contentment. "Where is that lovely place?"

"You just wait and you'll see."

Anne did not explain that she knew a famous lady speedboat racer—Muriel Seacome, whose autograph she had once obtained—was giving an exhibition at a lake some distance north, and that it was her intention to secure it again, and also give Vi a lovely outing.

They called home and told Mrs. Cribbing they might be rather late back, collected Anne's album, and then continued their journey. To Violet it was a thorough mystery trip, for she had not the slightest idea where they were going until they stopped—at a charabanc depot!

"Anne—" the child exclaimed then, as the truth began to dawn upon her.

But Anne, with a teasing smile that conveyed nothing, went up and spoke to one of the uniformed drivers. A moment later she returned to Violet's side.

"Up you come!" she exclaimed, beginning to lift the child out.

"But—" And then—Violet understood in full. "Oh!" she gasped in delight. "We're—we're going there in one of those big motors?"

"We are, Little Miss Muffet!"

Ten minutes later they were off, with a complement of other passengers. Violet's bathchair was securely strapped to the luggage-grid, and she and Anne sat in the front seat on the left.

Through delightful country they passed. It was all fresh to the youngster. Anne's heart beat happily as she noted the gradually reddening cheeks, the sparkling eyes, the golden curls that were wafted hither and thither in the cooling rush of wind.

Violet could not keep still for long; she could not keep silent, either.

"Oh, Anne," she would suddenly cry, hugging her protector's arm, "just look at those lovely baa-lams!"

Anne would look and nod, feeling gloriously peaceful inside.

"And, Good Fairy—that windmill! I've never seen a windmill before—"

Anne would smile and nod again.

"Look—look—look!" This time, jumping up and down and clapping her hands, so that Anne had to tighten her arm around the child's waist lest she fell to the floor. "There's

a rabbit—sitting in the road. Oh"—in sudden alarm—"I do hope we don't hurt it!"

And then, just at the very last minute, the brazen little fellow would scuttle into the hedgerow and disappear, bringing another peg of merry laughter from Violet.

It was almost two hours later that they reached the end of their journey, and Anne carried Violet over to the waiting bathchair.

In the distance, a silver gash that stretched as far as the eye could see in opposite directions, was Lake Well. Actually, at this part it more closely resembled a river, being extremely narrow. Some distance away, however, it widened out into an oval shape, and it was there that a great crowd of people could be seen, lining both banks, and dotting the water itself in boats and bathing-costumes.

"Ooooooh!" breathed Violet wonderingly, when Anne halted the chair before an enclosure at the entrance to which was a ticket table.

The crowded lake was now only a few yards away, and Violet was craning forward to make sure of missing nothing.

"Like it?" Anne asked, brushing a stray curl from across the child's forehead.

"It's wonderful!" Violet declared. "Oh, Anne darling, it's so lovely of you to bring me here. I've never seen anything so—so—"

"You haven't seen half yet, Little Miss Muffet," came the gentle interruption. "Just a moment and I'll see about tickets."

Anne approached a girl who, with her back towards her, appeared to be in charge of the ticket-table.

"Excuse me—" Anne began.

The girl turned. For a moment Anne stared at her, wanting to rub her eyes, to blink, to shake her head and make sure she wasn't imagining things.

But there was no mistake. The other had recognised her, too.

"You!" she said sibilantly.

"Dorothy!" gasped Anne.

She was astounded—almost incredulous—and quickly annoyed, too. It seemed that, no matter where she went after autographs, this cunning, deceitful girl was either there before her or a very close second. Now Anne set her lips as she saw Dorothy's face assume an expression of vicious satisfaction.

"Want to come in?" the girl inquired sweetly.

"Of course," Anne snapped.

"Then I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

"Disappointed?" Anne experienced surprise again. She frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Well," and Dorothy shrugged, "it's quite simple, really. You see, I happen to be in charge of the ticket-table—quite a nice job for ten shillings, you know—and, naturally, after what happened at home to-day, I couldn't dream of letting you pass—"

"Why—you—you—"

It wasn't often that Autograph Anne was lost for words, but on this occasion she simply couldn't help herself. The knowledge that her rival was prepared to be as unscrupulous as this filled her with such frantic indignation.

Literally shaking, Anne clenched her fists. Her eyes flared.

"That's final, I suppose?" she exclaimed tensely. "All right," as Dorothy nodded superciliously. "So long as I know. But let me tell you this, Miss Cribbing—you haven't beaten me yet!"

Quickly Anne walked over to Violet. The child was bending out of her bathchair, picking butter-cups.

"Anything wrong?" she asked, seeing Anne's strained features.

"No," said Anne, and smiled. But there was a hardness about the smile which Violet did not notice—and which meant that Anne intended to outwit Dorothy Cribbing at all costs!

OLD FRIENDS!

THOUGHTFULLY, Anne began to wheel Violet away from the enclosure.

"Aren't we going in, Good Fairy?" came a surprised question.

"Not yet—soon, though."

Anne spoke indifferently. Truth to tell, her mind was too occupied with other things at the moment. First of all, she was determined to obtain an interview with Muriel Seacome,

the great lady speedboat racer, whose silver vessel could be seen in midstream, surrounded by an admiring crowd of boaters.

Once she had done that, Anne felt perfectly confident of getting permission for little Violet to be brought into the enclosure—no matter what Dorothy said!

But how could she reach Muriel Seacome? If Anne had been alone she might have considered forcibly entering the enclosure, in spite of her rival, and hiring a boat that would take her out on to the lake.

But Violet's presence complicated matters. The youngster couldn't be left alone while Anne risked creating a scene that might very well end in failure—in her being thrown out of the enclosure altogether!

No. Something more subtle was required. Something just as effective, meaning that she got into the centre of the lake, but something which would not offend anyone—even Dot, though it might give her considerable annoyance.

"Got it!" Anne exclaimed, all at once. "A topping stunt!"

"What's a topping stunt, Good Fairy?"

"Something I've thought of," Anne answered. "As a matter of fact, I couldn't get us into that enclosure for—for certain reasons." Anne wasn't spoiling Violet's peace of mind by revealing Dorothy's presence here. "But I know how to overcome those reasons."

She halted by a refreshment stall, around which were tables and chairs, occupied by people in summery frocks and flannels.

"Will you be a very good Miss Muffet and stay here until I come back?" Anne asked.

"Why, of course!" Violet agreed, but she looked surprised all the same. "But you—you won't be very long, will you?"

Laughingly, Anne shook her head and approached the stallholder, a buxom lady with an extremely hot-looking face.

"Would you mind keeping an eye on that little girl?" she asked. "And," in a louder voice, "give her as much ice-cream as she wants!"

"Certainly, miss."

A fond kiss, and Autograph Anne, clutching her precious album, was passing along the bank of the lake until she reached a spot that was practically deserted, except for an old boatman who appeared to have hired out most of his possessions.

There was, though, one rowing-boat tethered to the bank. Anne's heart leapt for joy when she saw it.

"For hire?" she asked the man.

"Coupla bob a 'arf-'our!" came the reply.

"Right!" Anne exclaimed. She climbed into the boat, and, placing her album on the seat beside her, seized the oars. "When do I pay—now or when I come back?"

"When yer come back, o' course," was the surly declaration.

"If I do come back." Anne returned, with a mischievous wink, and rammed the oars deep into the water.

"Whadjer mean, you young—"

But Anne's silvery laugh drowned the rest of that furious, apprehensive outburst. She was still chuckling when she reached a point some twenty yards from the shore and slackened down, to look back.

A silvery flash, a zooming of engines, and Muriel Seacome went past in mid-lake. Anne, filled with admiration for the young woman's nerve—of which she had already had one experience—leaned on her oars to watch.

Zooooommm!

Dwindling to a tiny speck the speedboat leaped and bumped out of the water, then slowly swept around and came back. When it went past Anne there were two long, white streaks on the surface; one on its outward journey, one on the homeward.

"Wish I were her," Anne murmured, meaning she wished she had Muriel Seacome's nerve, and her speedboat.

The trim craft stopped in the middle of the lake, and several other craft gathered round.

"Now's my chance," murmured Anne, and began to row again.

Twenty minutes later, to the astonishment of all who saw what happened, a pretty girl with dark hair and blue-eyes rowed up to



Muriel Seacome's speedboat, and calmly held out a large book.

"Get away, there!" came a shout from one of the men officials; and he jumped up in his boat.

But Muriel Seacome smiled him into silence. She had not forgotten Anne—had not forgotten how the girl autograph-hunter had once rescued her from the clutches of kid-nappers, and then accompanied her on a record attempt.

"Just fancy seeing you again, my dear!" she exclaimed. "Why, step in beside me!"

"But this rowing-boat—" Anne began, her pulses racing with triumph and delight.

"They'll take it to the owner," Miss Seacome assured her. "There! That's right," as Anne, with a joyful laugh, took the tiny seat next to the famous sportswoman. "Now, why do you want my autograph again—lost the other one?"

"Yes," Anne nodded, some of her merri-ment fading. She watched while Miss Seacome signed her new album. "Oh, thanks, ever so much! But I'm afraid I'm going to be an awful nuisance. I wonder if you could help me? It's like this—"

Anne had not finished explaining about the waiting Violet, and "a certain difficulty in entering the enclosure," when her companion cut her short.

"Leave it to me, Anne!" she exclaimed. "Where's your little friend—over there? Well, hold tight!"

Zooooommm!

The speedboat shot through an opening in the ring of other boats, and whizzed towards the bank. Anne's heart leapt. She held on grimly. In a flurry of spray they curved round, and came to a gentle rest opposite the refreshment stall.

"Bring your little friend in here. We'll take her for a lovely trip," smiled Muriel Seacome.

Anne's eyes shone.

"You—you really mean that? Why, she'd love it!"

"Go and get her, Anne!"

Leaving the bathchair in charge of the stallholder, Anne carried a deliriously excited Violet to the speedboat, and kept her on her lap while the racing lady started the engines again.

Squeals of thrilling happiness came from

"You don't suppose," sneered Dorothy, "that I'm going to let you in, do you?" Anne stared at her rival, then set her lips. Dorothy wasn't going to ruin her plans for securing a vital autograph!

the youngster as—at a more than usually sedate pace—Miss Seacome coasted around, and performed all manner of remarkable evolutions.

It only dawned on Anne when she heard the applause from the crowded banks that she and Violet had actually been taking part in a portion of Miss Seacome's exhibition! She told Violet so at once.

The child opened her small, pretty mouth into a large "Oh" of astonishment.

"Really, Anne dear" she ejaculated.

Anne turned to the driver.

"That's so, isn't it, Miss Seacome?"

"Oh, yes! I've finished now for some time. I'll take you on a nice long trip up and down the lake."

Over the water they careered, bumping, jolting, leaping. Violet, for all her thrilling pleasure, clung to Anne very, very tightly, and Anne did not once take her arms from around the youngster's waist.

At last, flushed and breathless, Violet was back in her bathchair, and, with Anne at her side, they were saying good-bye to Muriel Seacome.

As the sportswoman bent and kissed Vi someone, hurrying past, turned deathly pale, and compressed her lips. The person's face was twisted with frenzied jealousy. It was Dorothy Cribbing, but none of the trio noticed her as she passed by.

"Good luck!" called Muriel Seacome, when Anne wheeled Violet away.

"Good-bye!" they called, waving.

Then they were out of sight, heading for the charabanc terminus.

There were several vehicles, already loaded with passengers, when they arrived, and Anne inquired of the inspector for the West Hill motor.

"West Hill?" The man regarded her with a frown. "But that went half an hour ago." Anne started, alarmed. Quickly she glanced at her watch. Her heart sank. The man was right. It was more than half an hour since they should have taken their seats in the West Hill charabanc.

Continuing

AUTOGRAPH ANNE'S AMBITION.

"My hat!" she ejaculated. "That's a nuisance. Is there long to wait for the next one?"

"There isn't a next one," came the portentous reply. "H'm!" as he stroked his chin. "Rather awkward for you two."

"What do you mean?" Anne exclaimed, for to her way of thinking there was still the railway station.

"I mean, there ain't no trains that I knows of until to-morrow morning!"

Anne bit her lip.

"You're—you're sure?"

"Well—"

The man spread out his hands.

"I wouldn't like to say as how I'm sure positive, missy, but so far as I can remember, there ain't no more trains after this time o' night. Of course, you kin run along there and find out for certain—"

"My hat! I will!" Anne declared.

Rejoining little Violet, she began to wheel the child down the road in the direction of the station, purposely saying nothing for fear the child would be upset. But Violet, as it happened, already had a shrewd idea as to their position, and she, in her turn, kept silent because of her Good Fairy's feelings.

"I shan't be long, darling!" said Anne, when they were inside the small station.

Leaving the wheeled-chair by the closed booking office, Anne passed through the unguarded barrier and on to the platform. Her heart sank. It was deserted!

"Looks as if that charabanc chap was right, after all," the girl autograph-hunter mused, and was turning away when she spotted a shadowy figure some distance down the platform.

Instinctively, her heartbeats quickened. Who was that?

Eventually, as Anne watched with bated breath, the shadow resolved itself into the figure of an old porter. Anne ran towards him.

"Are there any more trains for West Hill, to-night please?" she asked anxiously.

In utter dismay, she watched him shake his head.

"None before to-morrow morning?" she pursued.

"None, miss."

"Oh—thanks!"

Anne rejoined little Violet and slowly began to wheel her back to the charabanc stop.

On the way, she looked out for a sign of a taxi, but that final hope was doomed the same as the others. One or two private cars passed them, but Anne saw that they were too full to accommodate Violet and herself, even if she had stopped and requested a lift.

Grimly, she set her lips.

No other motor; no train!

Nothing in which they could journey to West Hill.

That meant they were stranded for the night, fifty miles from home. There was no possibility of reaching West Hill until, at the earliest, eleven o'clock the following morning.

And at ten o'clock they had promised to call on Carl Steinbach for Violet's audition.

Fifty miles! Impossible to reach home in time. Even if Anne could manage to do it with the aid of a bicycle there would be little crippled Violet to consider. Whatever will Anne do? Prepared as she is to go to almost any lengths for the sake of her little friend, it yet seems that even she is helpless now. You simply must not miss next Wednesday's magnificent instalment of this great serial.

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New readers and old, I should like to receive a letter from you whenever you have time to write. Remember my address: The Editor, SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR READERS,—This week I have a really exciting announcement to make. I know you love exciting announcements—especially those concerning the future of your favourite paper. You're going to be particularly thrilled by this one. The improvement I have in mind, you see, will go to make SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY even more entertaining—and better value for money—than ever.

THE BEGINNING

of it all was a number of letters which arrived from various readers saying, rather plaintively, that though they liked Valerie to appear every week, and did not, indeed, want to lose her, they would very much like, now and again, to read LONG COMPLETE stories of other characters. Short complete stories of these characters, they pointed out, are all very well, but they don't quite make up for the absence of LONG completes.

I AGREE.

I do, seriously and emphatically, agree. And so that brings me to my announcement, which is as follows:

Although Valerie Drew will continue to appear in this paper every week, we shall vary the length of those stories so that one week they are the usual length, the next week a trifle shorter, the week after the usual length again, and so on.

When a shorter Valerie story appears a LONG complete story featuring one of your other favourites will be published, and next week I will give you full details of the nature of these yarns.

The first of these new programmes will appear in our August 4th issue, when an enthralling LONG complete story of Tessa of Tarranto's will appear, together with a shorter story of Valerie Drew and Flash.

Exciting, isn't it? By this means Valerie Drew fans will still have their favourite every week, and yet have long stories of the other "stars" as well.

AND NOW—

to tell you all about next Wednesday's issue.

VALERIE DREW—girl detective—and her wonder-dog "Flash," top the bill in a magnificent story by Adelle Ascott entitled "The House of Minarets."

The House of Minarets is a weird place of domes, spires, and—of course—minarets, situated near a town where Valerie is pursuing investigations. Suddenly Valerie finds this place full of significance—of terrible, ominous importance in the mystery on which she is engaged. This is a wonderful story—the most enthralling I can ever remember Miss Ascott writing. The way in which the mystery develops, in which the

SUSPENSE

increases almost to breaking-point, is wonderful. You'll hold your breath when Flash's life is threatened! You'll tremble while his life hangs in the balance—while Valerie—desperate with anxiety—fights to solve the mystery and save

him. You'll thrill when the climax comes in the Room of Idols in the House of Minarets. A triumph of story-telling! That will be your unanimous verdict of this great tale.

"HESTA OF HAPPINESS GLADE"

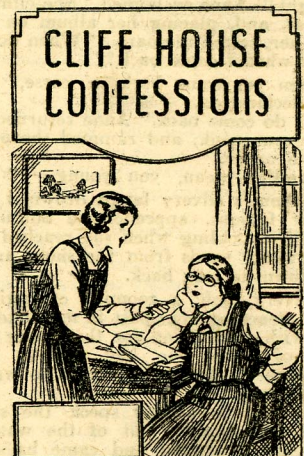
is a new character who will make her bow before you next Wednesday. She is a gipsy girl—a gipsy girl with a difference. You're going to like Hesta—like her and admire her. When you've finished reading "Hesta of Happiness Glade," by Louise Carlton, you'll vote Hesta one of the most appealing characters you've ever met. Incidentally, this story is the result of Miss Carlton's stay in a rural Essex village. She made the acquaintance there of a real gipsy girl, and was so intrigued by her that she was inspired to put her into a story. You'll see the result next Wednesday.

PATSY-NEVER-GROW-UP

will also be here—full of fun and high spirits. Miss Rhoda Fleming is to be congratulated on keeping up the standard of these delightful stories so excellently. This one will be called "Too Many Mr. Martins." It is another seaside holiday story.

Further instalments of our two great serials—"Autograph Anne's Ambition" and "The Silent Six Under Canvas"—complete a programme which I know none of you will miss. All best wishes.

Your sincere friend,
YOUR EDITOR.

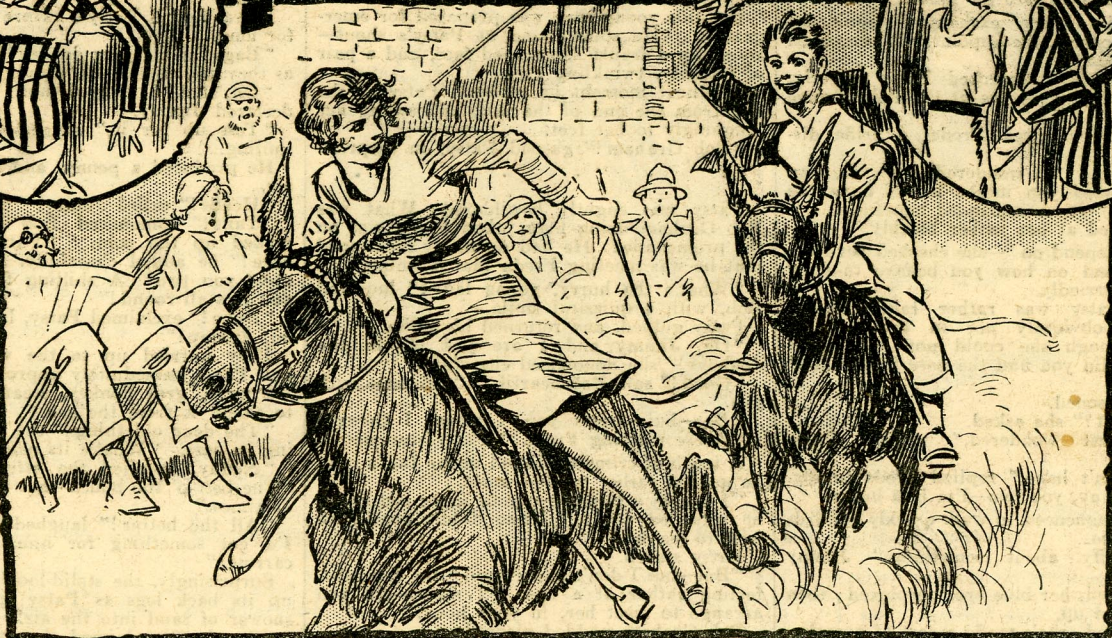


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PATSY NEVER-GROW-UP!



FUN AND EXCITEMENT

BESIDE THESEASIDE

DONKEYS!

RACE you to the beach, Jimmy!" exclaimed Patsy Raymond cheerfully. "Bet you don't!" retorted thirteen-year-old Jimmy.

Patsy's blue eyes gleamed; though sixteen—and nearly grown up—she could never resist a challenge.

"Right!" she returned, tossing her fair hair back from her forehead. "Ready—steady—go!"

And away they went—out of the gates of the sedate boarding-house and along the promenade, their headlong progress followed by amused glances from passers-by.

Of course, Patsy should have known better; at her age, more serious pursuits should have occupied her mind. But Patsy was on holiday, and Patsy didn't care!

She was out for a lark; and when Patsy was out for a lark anything might happen—and generally did.

It happened now as she took a short cut across the grass.

A young man—immaculate in white flannels, striped blazer, and felt hat—was strolling unconcernedly over the green, unaware of his impending fate; a very elegant young man, with wondrously wavy hair, who carried his hat in his hand.

Not looking where he was going, he veered suddenly into Patsy's ken when she was only a foot or so away from him.

"Mind—mind out!" gasped Patsy, endeavouring to swerve.

The next moment the young man awoke as seven stone ten pounds of youthful energy struck him in the region of the chest, bowling him over like a ninepin.

Gasping faintly, the young man sat up—to encounter Patsy's remorseful, half-laughing glance.

"I say, I'm dreadfully sorry!" exclaimed Patsy breathlessly, as she knelt up on the grass and shook the hair out of her eyes. "We did go down a wallop, didn't we?"

But the young man declined to smile; he looked definitely pained, and not a little angry. His expression of injured dignity reminded Patsy of a goat she had once met.

She bit her lip hard in an attempt to keep a straight face.

"It's disgraceful!" stuttered the young man

In which, quite apart from a very thrilling donkey-race, PATSY'S THE WINNER!

in high-pitched, bleating tones. "Young ruffian!"

Patsy's cheeks crimsoned. "Ruffian" was a bit thick! She was quite ready to admit that she had been careless; but the young man, too, had been negligent in not looking where he was going.

But Patsy had a forgiving nature; she smiled disarmingly.

"It's no use crying over spilt milk, is it?" she asked. "And it was rather a lark!"

The young man glared as he rose stiffly to his feet.

"Kids like you," he drawled, staring from Patsy to Jim disdainfully, "are pests—sheer pests!"

And, with a flick of his silver-headed cane, he turned on his heel and strolled away.

Patsy stared after him, her cheeks flaming.

"Well," she gasped, "of—of all the sauce!"

"Kids!" snorted Jimmy pugnaciously. "I'd like to dot him one on the nose!"

Patsy could sympathise with Jimmy's sentiments. The young man might consider he had cause to feel peeved, but there was absolutely no excuse for his remarks.

Her blue eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"I've seen that young man before," she announced. "He's staying at Beach View, next door but one to ours. I've seen him ogling Freda over the gate!"

Freda was Patsy's elder sister, very grown up for her eighteen years.

"Freda'd be potty if she looked at him!" remarked Jimmy disgustedly. "Now, there's a chap she might look at—you know, Bob Graham, at the next table to ours! He's keen on her, too, and no end of a good sort! He mended my cricket bat yesterday."

Patsy nodded approvingly. She knew Bob Graham, and liked him. He was a typical out-of-doors young man, and, as such, met with Patsy's full approval.

"Freda likes him," she announced, nodding wisely. "She went out with him yesterday."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Jimmy suddenly. "That reminds me! Bob gave me a note for her; I left it on the table—"

"I found it," said Patsy, smiling, "by your plate. It wasn't addressed, was it? I wrote on the envelope, 'From Bob,' and put it on Freda's dressing-table."

"Oh, good!" Jimmy grinned, a trifle guiltily. "He gave me sixpence for taking it. I've spent it all!" he added regretfully. "Haven't got a bean now—till Freda stumps up!"

Freda was temporarily in charge of the holiday exchequer in Mr. and Mrs. Raymond's absence on a brief visit to friends in town.

Hence Freda had taken on a new importance in Patsy's and Jimmy's eyes; she commanded a most unusual respect!

"Hallo!" exclaimed Patsy suddenly. "Here is Freda!"

A tall, attractive girl was hurrying towards them.

"I bet," declared Jimmy sagely, "that she's come to meet Bob! She's all dressed up. I say, Pat, you might ask her about to-night—you know, that stunning cowboy picture at the Palaisdrome!"

Patsy nodded, her blue eyes gleaming.

"Leave it to me!" she returned confidently. Then, cupping her hands to her mouth, she gave out a boisterous shout: "Coo-ee! Freda!"

Freda started, and turned. She looked a trifle distraught.

Patsy and Jimmy raced up to her possessively.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Patsy breathlessly.

"Lo!" added Jimmy, hastily concealing a grubby pocket handkerchief.

By Rhoda FLEMING

Illustrated by L. SHIELDS.

Freda eyed them with a mistrust born of long experience.

"What have you two been up to now?" she inquired.

"Nothing!" replied Jimmy promptly.

"We're just going down to the beach," said Patsy. "Er—are you coming?"

Freda shook her head.

"I—I've got an appointment," she returned hastily. "Don't be late for lunch."

Patsy and Jimmy exchanged significant glances. Of course, the appointment concerned Bobby Graham.

"I say, Freda," remarked Patsy eagerly, "there's a topping picture at the Palaisdrome this evening."

"Is there?" inquired Freda, a trifle distraitly.

"Jimmy and I wondered—that is, we thought perhaps you might let us have the money to go," Patsy continued hopefully.

Freda looked at her rather bleakly.

"That'll depend on"—she checked herself—"that'll depend on how you behave to-day," she added hurriedly.

"Oh!" Patsy was rather taken aback. Freda was obviously not in the best of humours, though she could not understand why. "Er—did you find the note from Bob?" she ventured.

Freda crimsoned.

"What of it?" she asked.

"Oh—er—just wondered," replied Patsy lamely.

"You needn't have," replied Freda briefly.

"Now run away, you two—I'm in a hurry."

And she commenced to walk quickly towards the promenade.

"She's huffy about something," Jimmy remarked.

Patsy nodded, her blue eyes perplexed; then she brightened up.

"Never mind—she's made a sort of promise. We've just got to mind our P's and Q's. Anyway, she'll probably cheer up when she meets Bobby Graham."

"Bound to," agreed Jimmy. "I say, Pat, got any money?"

"Fourpence," said Patsy.

"Donkeys?" queried Jimmy pleadingly.

"Donkeys it is," Patsy grinned. "Race you to the prom!"

Once again they started off, Jimmy leading. This time, till they reached the slope that led to the beach; then, by way of variation, Patsy

vaulted on to the iron balustrade, and slid down rapidly.

"Cheat!" shouted Jimmy, grinning.

"Whoops!" gasped Patsy, her eyes dancing. "Crumbs—look out!"

The remark was addressed to a young man, standing on the beach with his back towards the slope.

Patsy seemed fated to encounter young men that day!

But this young man was prepared for emergencies. He spun round at Patsy's shout—revealing a frank, sun-tanned face, and a pair of friendly, twinkling eyes.

The next moment he grabbed Patsy as she slid from the end of the rail, and swung her laughingly to her feet.

"Bob Graham!" gasped Patsy, in surprise.

Patsy was slightly bewildered. What was Bob Graham doing here, when Freda was on the promenade? He had definitely mentioned that he was meeting Freda that morning!

"What's the hurry, young lady?" inquired Bob, with a quizzical smile.

Patsy gulped, and returned his smile.

"Oh, Jimmy and I are just off to the donkeys!" she announced cheerfully.

"Good!" said Bob heartily. "I'll come with you."

"But—but—aren't you—I mean, I thought you were meeting Freda?" Patsy stammered.

A touch of crimson showed under Bob's tan; he gave a rather twisted smile.

"I caught a glimpse of your sister just now," he returned wryly. "She didn't appear to wish to see me."

Patsy stared.

"But—but I don't understand," she returned, feeling rather at a loss. "I mean—did you arrange to meet her, in your note?"

Bob Graham nodded gloomily.

"I suppose she got the note?" he asked.

"Of course!" supplied Jimmy quickly. "Patsy gave it to her—didn't you, Pat?"

Patsy nodded. Shrewd at judging other people's feelings, she could see that Bob Graham had taken this very much to heart.

"Perhaps she didn't see you?" she ventured comfortingly.

Bob Graham shook his head.

"She saw me all right," he returned dryly.

"Look here! Don't let's talk about it. Let's find those donkeys!"

He spoke with forced cheerfulness, taking Patsy and Jimmy each by an arm.

Patsy was conscious of a little lump in her throat—and a feeling of burning indignation at Freda's conduct.

Privately, she determined to have a talk to Freda at the first opportunity.

But, meanwhile, the sun was shining—the sea was sparkling—and the donkeys were waiting.

It was not in Patsy's nature to be depressed for long.

"Bags the big grey donkey!" she announced, as they approached the stand.

"Oh, but I bagged him this morning!" declared Jimmy.

"Toss up for it," suggested Bob Graham, smiling.

He produced a penny, and spun it into the air.

"Heads!" called Jimmy.

"Tails!" announced Bob Graham, as he picked up the coin. "Patsy wins. Look here!" he added cheerfully. "What about a race, you two? A shilling for the winner—and ices all round!"

"Done!" exclaimed Patsy, laughing. "Come on, Jimmy!"

They hurried up to the waiting donkeys, and Patsy immediately approached her choice—a large, grey donkey, wearing a straw hat to shield it from the sun.

"The dear old thing!" she remarked, stroking its ears. "What's its name?"

"Neddy," replied the attendant, grinning.

"The best o' the bunch—but a bit too spritely at times."

"All the better!" laughed Patsy. "I wish I'd got something for him. Does he like carrots?"

Surprisingly, the stolid-looking animal flung up its back legs as Patsy spoke, sending a shower of sand into the air.

"Steady!" exclaimed the attendant, hastily grabbing the reins. "Sorry, miss," he added apologetically to Patsy. "It's you mentioning carrots that did it. Neddy used to belong to a lady who spoilt him. He always gets excited like when anyone mentions 'em."

"Come on, Pat!" put in Jimmy, impatiently from the back of his mount. "I bet I'll race you to the break-water and back."

"I bet you don't!" flashed Patsy.

She sprang unaided into the saddle.

"No cheating, now," put in Bob Graham with a grin. "I'll wait here for you. Now then—are you ready? One—two—three—and off you go!"

But nothing happened; both donkeys remained stolidly motionless while Patsy and Jimmy, doubled up with laughter, tried to urge them to start.

Then, prompted by a gentle pat from the attendant's stick, the two animals ambled forward at a sedate walk.

"Goodness!" chuckled Patsy. "We'll take all day at this rate. Gee up, Neddy! A lump of sugar for you, if you win!"

But Neddy was determined to take things easy; Jimmy, who had urged his mount to a canter, passed on with a triumphant wave of his hand.

"Stick it, Patsy!" he chuckled. "I'll save an ice for you when you get back!"

Patsy, rather crestfallen, shook a playful fist.

"Oh, come on, Neddy!" she urged. "Catch him up!"

Neddy twitched his ears and continued his stately walk.

No doubt he would have continued in this manner for the whole length of the ride; but fate unexpectedly took a hand.

An urchin, playing on the beach, and catching sight of Jimmy's reddish-auburn hair, sent up a derisive shout:

"Come on, Carrots!"

At that fatal word, the grey donkey paused abruptly and flung up its hind legs.

"Help!" gasped Patsy, laughing breathlessly as she clung to the reins.

That seemed to aggravate Neddy all the more. Ceasing from his gyrations, he started off at a gallop across the beach towards the more crowded end.

"Crumbs!" gasped Patsy, her smile fading. "Neddy—Neddy—good boy—stop!"

But Neddy possessed the stubborn nature of



"This," said Freda icily, "is my friend, Mr. Mellingsford." Patsy turned cold with horror. The foppish youth whom she had just offended was her sister's young man!

his tribe. It was hard to start him—but, once started, there was no holding him!

Patsy, clinging alternately to the reins and saddle, was tossed from side to side, tears of laughter streaming down her cheeks in spite of herself.

This was a lark! If only she could keep Neddy to his course, she would overtake Jimmy in no time!

But it was not to be.

The donkey swerved suddenly and headed towards the promenade. People on the sands sprang for safety. But one be-flannelled young man, reclining elegantly in a deck-chair, refused to spring.

He merely waved his stick.

The next moment, the deck-chair was bowled over with the young man in it—and Patsy was flung head-first on to the beach!

Sand in her eyes and mouth, Patsy scrambled breathlessly to her feet—to confront the victim of the collision.

Then she started, her blue eyes widening.

"Oh!" she gasped. "It's you!"

The young man in the immaculate blazer glared daggers.

"You—you again!" he spluttered. "Of all the young pests—"

Patsy's eyes glinted.

"It was an accident," she panted. "The donkey ran away. You—you ought to have jumped when I called out."

"You've no right to be out without a nurse!" snapped the young man unpleasantly.

"And neither," returned Patsy, flushing, "have you!"

"Patsy!"

A startled, angry voice caused Patsy to spin round.

"Freda!" she gasped.

Freda, her pretty face flushed with anger and embarrassment, rose from an adjacent deck-chair.

"Patsy," she said, coldly, "this gentleman is—is Mr. Conrad Mellingsford—a great friend of mine."

ALL PATSY'S FAULT!

PATSY stood stunned.

Conrad looked taken aback at Freda's disclosure; he blinked at Patsy rather rapidly.

"Oh—er—so you're Freda's sister?" he remarked, lamely, forcing a weak sort of smile.

Patsy nodded faintly. Fancy Freda liking this chap!

"I'm Patsy," she explained, briefly. "We've met before, haven't we? You'd better tell Freda about that, too."

"About what?" put in Freda, frowning.

Patsy grinned faintly, in spite of herself.

"I bashed into him once before this morning," she announced. "Might as well get it over and done with! We seem to be getting in each other's way, this morning," she added.

Freda bit her lip in vexation. Patsy's heart sank as she saw her and Jimmy's hopes of the Palaisdrome, that evening, fading into the dim distance.

She did not care so much, for herself—but Jimmy had set his heart on seeing that cowboy film.

"I say, Freda," added Patsy, impulsively, "Jimmy's not to blame for all this, you know. It—it was all my fault."

Freda's lips tightened; she was evidently extremely annoyed.

"Something always happens when the pair of you get together," she said crossly. "I'm ashamed of you, Patsy—at your age! Apologise to Mr. Mellingsford at once."

Patsy swallowed hard, keeping a tight hold on her feelings. She had no desire to apologise to Conrad Mellingsford—and yet, she owed that much to Freda.

"I—I'm sorry," she said, staring frankly into the young man's languid features. "It won't happen again."

"So I should hope," drawled the other, fondly smoothing his crumpled flannels. "At your age, y'know, you ought to know better."

Patsy's eyes glinted, but mindful of Freda she bit back the sharp retort that rose to her lips.

"I—I'd better go and catch that donkey," she said, hurriedly. "You will remember that it wasn't Jimmy's fault—won't you, Freda?"



Patsy raced desperately after her sister, waving the card. "Freda!" she called wildly. "Stop! It's all a mistake!"

Freda shrugged, declining to reply; and as Patsy turned away she heard the young man snigger.

"If you ask me," he drawled, "the pair of them want spanking an' putting to bed."

Patsy's cheeks flamed; she felt a strong desire to turn back and pull the young man's prominent nose.

"The hateful, conceited thing!" she breathed.

"You were telling me," put in Freda, hastily changing the subject, "how you caught a burglar, single-handed—"

"Ah, quite," drawled Conrad. "It happened one night when—"

But Patsy did not wait to hear any more. Her eyes gleaming scornfully, she hurried out after the runaway Neddy.

"The fibber!" she thought. "He's stuffing Freda up with a lot of yarns—to try to cut out Bob. Freda must be potty!"

Jimmy agreed wholeheartedly with this sentiment, when she rejoined him, leading the now subdued Neddy by the reins.

"I knew he was a rotter, first time I saw him," he declared.

"We ought to do something about it!" declared Patsy broodingly. "Poor old Bob!"

Bob Graham was waiting for them at the starting point. Patsy knew, at once, that he had spotted Freda with the young man in the blazer.

His manner was subdued—his smile a little more crooked than its wont.

"Who won?" he asked with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"Jimmy," said Patsy, trying to smile.

"I didn't," declared Jimmy. "Patsy's donkey ran fastest."

"A bit too fast—eh?" demanded Bob, with a determined chuckle. "Come on, both of you—and we'll buy those ices."

But as they approached the ice-cream stall, Patsy caught sight of Freda and Conrad Mellingsford moving towards them on their way to the promenade.

A meeting seemed inevitable—a meeting painful to everyone. Patsy, determined to avoid it, if possible, plucked Bob Graham by the sleeve.

"Let's—let's go farther on," she said hurriedly. "There's another stall at the end of the beach."

But Bob Graham had seen Freda. A rather grim expression on his face, he waited. The young man in the striped blazer caught sight of him—and moved on rather nervously, leaving Freda to follow.

"Excuse me, Miss Raymond—" began Bob, stepping forward.

"I say, Freda," said Patsy, impulsively jumping into the breach. "Bob's no end of a sport! He's giving us a gorgeous time—"

"Indeed?" out in Freda icily, though her cheeks were crimson. "That reminds me, Mr. Graham—I have something to return to you, with many thanks."

She held out an envelope. Patsy started, as she recognised her own writing in the corner—"From Bob."

"My note?" breathed Bob, his face paling.

"Your note," retorted Freda biting, and hurried on to overtake Conrad Mellingsford.

Rather unsteadily, his face grim, Bob drew something out of the envelope. Then he started.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "What's this?"

"W-what?" asked Patsy, her heart missing a beat.

"This!" said Bob, staring in puzzlement as he held out a coloured picture postcard—a picture portraying a large grey donkey, and bearing beneath it the printed inscription:

"From me—to you. Puzzle—which is it?"

Patsy's mind was in a whirl. "You—you didn't—I mean—"

"I say!" shouted Jimmy, suddenly. "Where did you get that? That's the card I bought to send to my school chum, Bobby Clayton!"

Patsy felt as though the sands were giving way beneath her. She had made a dreadful mistake! She had taken the wrong envelope into Freda's room. It was all her fault!

"Oh," she gasped, clutching at Bob Graham's arm. "I'm dreadfully sorry. It's all a mistake. I— Wait here," she added breathlessly. "I'll tell Freda!"

The card in her hand, she raced after Freda and the young man. It was good-bye to the Palaisdrome, for certain—but nothing mattered so long as she cleared up her ghastly error.

"Freda!" she panted. "Freda—stop! I want to tell you something. That card—"

But Freda was in one of her tempers; she flatly refused to listen.

"I don't want to hear anything about Bob Graham," she returned sharply. "And as for you and Jimmy—you can go to bed immediately after tea—and I'll report you both to daddy when he comes back."

She turned to her be-flannelled companion. "Please go on, Mr. Mellingsford," she said. "You were telling me how you rescued a little boy from being run over. I'm thrilled!"

Patsy halted, her hands clenched at her sides, her heart sinking.

"It's no good!" she thought. "I've spoilt Bob's chances. I've got to make amends, somehow—I've just got to!"

Broodingly, Patsy sat on the beach that afternoon, staring out to sea. Jimmy, his knees hunched between his arms, watched her hopefully.

"Got an idea yet, Pat?" he asked.

"No!" said Patsy.

"Bob Graham took it jolly sportingly," added Jimmy. "Made a joke of it."

Patsy nodded.

"I know," she added. "That's what makes it all the more rotten. He's a real sport, Jimmy!" she burst out. "Freda must be mad to look at that other one."

And she turned her gaze towards a couple seated in deck-chairs on the stone breakwater.

Conrad Mellingsford's striped blazer made Patsy's blood boil.

"Look!" breathed Jimmy, suddenly. "There's Bob!"

Patsy turned quickly. Bob Graham, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, his head bent, was walking disconsolately along the almost deserted beach. He had not yet seen the couple on the breakwater.

"I wish something would happen," said Patsy tersely, "to bring Freda to her senses—"

She broke off with a sudden start as her glance rested on a ragged urchin sprawled on the sands near to them—the same youth who had called out to Jimmy that morning.

Into Patsy's blue eyes crept a sudden gleam. Patsy had an idea!

"Got it!" she breathed.

"What?" asked Jimmy eagerly.

Hastily, Patsy fumbled in her purse.

"Quick," she breathed. "Here's the shilling Bob gave me for winning the donkey race. I didn't want to take it—but I'm glad he insisted. Ask that boy if he'll lend you his cap and coat for a shilling!"

Jimmy stared at her as though wondering if Patsy had taken leave of her senses.

"What—what ever for?" he demanded huskily.

"Don't ask questions," breathed Patsy tersely. "Go and speak to him."

Jimmy departed wonderingly—to return a few moments later, triumphantly bearing the required garments—a shabby tweed cap and a long ragged coat.

"There's no time to explain," breathed Patsy, bundling the shabby garments under her arm. "Bunk after him, quick—and do as I say!"

Jimmy looked at her quickly—and obeyed. He knew from Patsy's expression that something exciting was afoot; and he was anxious not to miss it!

With a brief nod, he darted after Bobby Graham.

Patsy, with the ragged garments under her arm, sprinted to the bathing-huts. The attendant was not in sight. She entered one quickly, closing the door behind her.

A moment later, a ragged figure lurched from the hut, and made its way across the beach towards the breakwater.

Patsy's eyes were gleaming under the peak of her disreputable cap.

She saw Jimmy, accompanied by Bob Graham strolling slowly towards the water's edge, deep in conversation. Just then, Jimmy looked round anxiously and caught sight of her.

Hastily, Patsy raised a finger to her lips.

It was a daring plan that she had in mind—a plan typical of Patsy. And being a judge of human nature, she was confident of its ultimate success.

Of course, there was a risk attached to it—but that, in Patsy's estimation, lent it an added spice.

Conrad Mellingsford was fond of boasting of his imaginary achievements; his wide-awake alertness under all circumstances.

Well—he'd have a chance to justify his boast! Not that Patsy had many fears on that account. The elegant Conrad would be

left, gasping—while Bob Graham leapt into the breach.

Then Freda could judge for herself—

Her heart beating rather quickly under her ragged coat, Patsy sidled down to the breakwater, on which Freda and the elegant Conrad were seated, in deck-chairs.

Around the breakwater the waves lapped gently; a few gulls skimmed overhead. Conrad Mellingsford was engaged in a drawing recital of another breath-taking exploit—in which he was the hero.

Patsy sidled up behind them. Freda's handbag, containing several pounds—as Patsy was aware—lay enticingly on Freda's lap.

Patsy, glancing round hurriedly, was relieved to see that the beach was still deserted—with the exception of Jimmy and Bob Graham, strolling slowly towards the water's edge.

Drawing a deep breath, Patsy acted. Bending over swiftly, she snatched the handbag from Freda's lap and made for the beach.

Freda screamed and sprang to her feet.

"Oh—my money!" she gasped. "Stop him!"

Conrad Mellingsford looked up dazedly, his mouth dropping open.

There came a shout from the beach as Bob Graham, his expression grim, sprinted towards the breakwater.

Patsy's eyes gleamed happily. Now Freda would see the difference between the two young men! She intended to drop the handbag and escape before Bob Graham overtook her.

There came another shout—a sound of a distant commotion. Patsy ventured to look round—fully expecting to see Bob Graham close at her heels.

But what she saw gave her an unpleasant shock.

Pelting behind her, his striped blazer billowing in the breeze, was Conrad Mellingsford—running as though for dear life!

Of Bob Graham there was no sign.

Patsy's heart fell. What had happened? Had she been mistaken in the young men's respective characters? Impossible!

And barely had she recovered from that shock than Patsy received another.

A distant shout caused her to turn her head again. Conrad Mellingsford, the perspiration streaming from his forehead, was now close on her heels—and some distance behind him, joining in the chase, was an excited crowd of people, headed by a policeman!

Patsy gave a horrified groan; her little ruse seemed to have taken a turn that she had not expected!

"CARROTS!"

"STOP—thief!"

The distant, unnerving shout came to Patsy's ears as, her pulses throbbing, her breath coming in gasps, she pelted for the next breakwater.

What on earth was she to do?

It did not occur to her to stop and explain. For one thing, no one would believe her; for another, Bob's chances would be utterly ruined.

So Patsy ran on grimly, determined at all costs to escape.

Conrad Mellingsford was gradually losing distance; evidently he was out of training, for Patsy could hear his sobbing breath as he ran.

At any rate, thought Patsy, he had more grit than she had credited him with.

And what of Bob Graham?

Patsy felt bitterly disappointed in that young man.

Patsy reached the breakwater and scrambled over it; in doing so she fell heavily, bruising her knee.

Pluckily, she scrambled up—but she knew that this was the end! She could not run with an injured knee.

Then, as she looked round desperately, her eyes lit up.

Tethered a few yards away were the beach donkeys—the spirited Neddy among them!

Hobbling forward, she scrambled on to Neddy's back—even as Conrad Mellingsford slithered over the breakwater, on all fours, and scrambled to his feet.

Patsy leaned forward and took a firm hold on the reins.

"Carrots!" she gasped. "Carrots!"

Neddy reared; the sand flew into the air, and into Conrad Mellingsford's face.

From the other side of the breakwater came an ominous shout.

"Quick!" gasped Patsy, tugging frantically at the reins. "Gallop—Carrots!"

Again the donkey planted its forefeet firmly and flung its hind-legs into the air. A lump of wet sand met the bewildered Conrad in the chest as he staggered forward.

Conrad missed his footing and sat down heavily.

"Oh, Neddy—you wash-out!" gasped Patsy.

A hurried glance over her shoulder revealed that the game was up. The policeman was striding towards her—followed by an excited crowd.

With a groan, Patsy slid from the saddle and flung off her tattered disguise.

Then her blue eyes widened in bewilderment.

For neither the policeman nor the crowd were paying her the slightest attention!

They had surrounded the unfortunate Conrad—and the constable hauled him to his feet.

"You led me a nice chase, young man," he said grimly, "but I've got you! I'll arrest you for petty larceny—"

Patsy started forward in bewilderment.

"I say—you've made a mistake!" she gasped. "He—he didn't take it—"

"Eh?" the policeman stared, as though noticing her for the first time. "Didn't take what, miss?"

"The—the handbag," gasped Patsy, prepared to make a clean breast of everything.

The policeman shrugged, and eyed the white-faced Conrad grimly.

"Dunno about a handbag, miss—but he took plenty of other things—from the boarding-house. He's a well-known character, he is—Smart Horace, we call him. Works the boarding-houses round the coast and pilfers what he can lay his hands on—"

Patsy's mind was in a whirl as she slowly retraced her steps, holding tightly to Freda's handbag.

And her heart was heavy. Though her opinion of Conrad Mellingsford had been more than justified—she felt she had been bitterly mistaken in Bob Graham!

But Patsy was due for yet another surprise!

As she approached the breakwater where she had left Freda, she halted abruptly, her eyes widening in bewilderment.

Coming towards her across the beach were a smiling trio; Freda and Bob Graham, their clothes wringing wet, walking close together—and Jimmy, grinning broadly, bringing up the rear.

"Freda!" gasped Patsy, starting forward.

"What ever—"

"He jumped in an' saved her!" shouted Jimmy excitedly.

Bob Graham crimsoned, and Freda flushed happily.

"Bob saved my life, Patsy," she declared unsteadily.

"Rot!" returned Bob huskily.

"But he did," persisted Freda. "When that—that horrid tramp snatched my handbag, I was so startled I fell off the breakwater—and—"

—and Bob jumped in—"

"Oh, hurrah!" shouted Patsy, waving her sister's handbag in her delight. "Then it worked, after all—ahem—I mean—"

She broke off, flushing furiously.

"I say, young lady—so you managed to rescue the handbag!" exclaimed Bob, obviously pleased to change the subject.

Patsy smiled demurely.

"She—he dropped it, and I picked it up," she explained.

She felt that to have gone into details just then would have spoilt the happy ending!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

But then Patsy never did bother very much about details, did she? And they needn't bother us, either. All we need to know is that our own lovable Patsy—Never-Grow-Up will be appearing again next Wednesday in another delightful story by Rhoda Fleming. Order your copy now!

Our Thrilling School and Adventure Serial Dealing With—



STILL SMILING!

"YOU poor kid!" said Shirley Carew, the leader of the Silent Six again, as she took Monica Trent, the scholarship girl, in her arms.

"My hat!" exclaimed Shirley's friend, Pam White. "It looks as if you are never to have any good luck, Monica. Your mother breaking her leg is serious enough. And now the beanfeasts that would have brought you such good trade at the tea gardens are cancelled!"

"Don't, Shirley," Monica gulped, gently disengaging herself from the madcap's arms. "I'll break down and make a—a real stupid of myself if you do that."

"I understand, old thing," whispered Shirley, kissing her cheek. "Try to cheer up. Your mother will soon get better, and perhaps we can find some way to carry on her little business."

As she spoke, however, Shirley's heart was heavy for Monica.

With the starting of the rival establishment directly across the country road from Mrs. Trent's picturesque tea gardens—the Eureka Tea Gardens, whose cut prices seemed obvious attempts to ruin her—what chance would the unfortunate woman have now that she was hopelessly crippled, and would have to take to her bed?

Shirley's hands clenched hard for a moment. She was sure that Lydia Collet, the leader of the High Hats, the greatest snobs that Higheroft School had ever known, was behind the Eureka Gardens. With her was her unscrupulous father and another girl from the school whom they had not yet identified, but whom they knew was Lydia's sister—at school in a false name. False, that is, unless Lydia's name was not really Collet, and the unknown girl was using her own name.

"Monica, you can't throw away your scholarship," said Shirley. "No, no! You can't"—as Monica gave a dejected shake of

her head. "You know that it is your life's ambition to go on to the University. Bother it! You shan't be cheated out of that!"

"But what can I do?" Monica looked at Shirley, with tears standing in her eyes, and her mouth quivering, and gave a helpless gesture.

"I'll show you! Come with us!" urged Shirley. "We are going to Miss Spence."

"To—the Head?"

"Yes. She's a real good sort, and perhaps she'll suggest something if we tell her about it."

She took one of Monica's arms and propelled her towards the stairs. Pam fell in on the other side of the stricken scholarship girl, and a few seconds later they were outside Miss Spence's study.

Shirley knocked on the door, was bade to enter, and they went in.

Miss Spence looked up from the papers on her table. She saw in an instant that Monica was seriously upset, and her kindly face softened.

"Well, what is it?" she asked. "Monica's up against it, Miss Spence," began Shirley, "and—"

"You mean," said the Head, in mild reproof, "that Monica is in distress."

Shirley nearly said, "I'll say she is!" but altered it to "Yes, Miss Spence."

After that, she told the headmistress just what had been happening—how the Eureka Tea Gardens had started in opposition to Monica's mother, how Mrs. Trent had broken her leg, and how the beanfeasts, which had looked like sure and profitable business, had been cancelled.

"And Monica feels she ought to give up her scholarship and go home to look after her mother," Shirley concluded. "Miss Spence, it's her dearest wish to carry on with the jolly—er—the scholarship, and to win her way into

the university later on. Can anything be done about it?"

The Head leaned back in her chair, and put the tips of her fingers together. There was genuine sympathy in her eyes as she regarded the pallid Monica.

"Dear, dear! I am really very sorry, Monica," she murmured. "But why did you not come to me yourself and put the matter to me?"

"She wouldn't have done it—she's too shy," cut in Shirley. "Anyway, Miss Spence, if she had come herself, she wouldn't have driven home her points as I have."

"Not exactly modest," smiled the Head. "But quite true. We must do something, of course. It is not right for Monica to have all her ambitions in the direction of learning dashed to the ground."

She thought for a moment. Then: "Go home for a fortnight, say," she instructed Monica. "Count it as special leave, though you might take home with you any books you need to keep in touch with any subjects upon which you feel yourself to be weak."

"Look after your mother, my dear, and try to improve her trade at the same time. Perhaps by the end of two weeks you will find it possible to employ somebody to manage the tea gardens for you and look after Mrs. Trent."

"Oh, thank you—thank you!" breathed Monica.

The Head smiled, rose, and walked around the table. She gave Monica's shoulder a sympathetic pressure.

"At the termination of the fortnight, should you find that my suggestion about employing somebody in your place is not possible, come to see me again. In any event, do not worry more than you can help."

WHEN THE SILENT SIX GET ON THE TRAIL, THERE'S NO PEACE FOR THE SNOBS OF HIGHCROFT.

She waved away Monica's further protestations of gratitude, and gave a nod of dismissal. The door did not quite close when Shirley drew it to after her.

"Didn't I tell you that the Head was a real good sort, and that she'd come across if I spilled the giddy beans to her?" Shirley asked joyously.

Miss Spence suppressed a shudder at the slang, but looked gratified all the same. She liked to do her utmost to do the right thing by her girls and to be termed "a real good sort."

"It was awfully good of you, Shirley," said Monica, her voice unsteady. "And it was just as you said. I couldn't have put it just like you did, somehow. I am going at once to see my mother."

She rushed away to pack a few things in a suitcase.

After that, Monica saw Miss Fletcher, explained the permission the Head had given her, and left with the sympathy of the undermistress still in her ears.

Monica found that the Eureka Tea Gardens had several motoring parties at its tables and doing quite good trade.

She looked towards her mother's gardens, and her lips trembled at the contrast. Nobody was there. The chairs and tables stood ominously empty, and a lump rose in Monica's throat.

She hurried indoors, and found the neighbour who had sent the message to the school—she was a woman with a large family of young children who could not possibly spend much

By **GERTRUDE NELSON** Illustrated By **S. H. CHAPMAN**

time with Mrs. Trent—at her mother's bedside.

The doctor had recently left, and wretchedly poor Monica realised that his visits and attention would mean more expense. Mrs. Trent's broken leg was in splints and paining her.

Monica had hard work not to cry again when she saw how the loved face was twitching.

"Monica," Mrs. Trent said, seeing the suitcase in her daughter's hand, "you have not come to stay—not throw up your scholarship?"

Monica put her arms about the invalid. The neighbour had said something about going to get her children's tea and had quitted the room.

"I would have done that if it had been necessary, mother dear. But it isn't—not yet, anyway. The Head's been awfully good, and has given me a fortnight to look after you and try to improve business here."

She kissed her mother, straightened up, and smiled at her.

"So, you see, you haven't to worry. For two weeks I'll be here. And"—she turned towards the window, looked out at the Eureka Tea Gardens, with blazing eyes, and her hands bunched—"I'll do everything I can to beat those wicked people over there and get you your old business back."

She turned again and saw that her mother was smiling with new hope in her eyes.

Monica managed to smile back, but it was with an effort.

She realised the difficulties ahead.

She realised that her mother's accident and illness would mean many other additional expenses as well as the doctor's fees, and that money must be brought in to meet them.

She realised that the tea gardens were a failure, and yet as she thought again of those dreary and significantly empty chairs and tables down in the garden she still smiled at her mother.

THE SILENT SIX AGAIN!

"M'M! Those kippers smell good. The sooner you get them done and jerk a couple this way, my stout daughter of Holland, the better I shall like it."

The Silent Six were seated on the grass outside their tent and preparing to have tea.

Gretchen turned from the stove, over which she was frying some large and succulent kippers.

"Ach! If you want these fish sooner than I can fry them, goom and yourself see to them, and it's!" she invited.

Lydia Collet walked past with Clara Bevan. She made a point of raising her handkerchief to her nose.

"Disgusting creatures!" she said to Clara. "When girls have depraved tastes one can always sum them up."

"Jealousy, girls!" grinned Shirley. "If it's lack of giddy pocket-money that is making you turn green with envy—"

"Bah!" said Lydia.

"And bah to you!" said Shirley. "How are you getting on with those lines?"

Lydia almost fell over a guyrope in turning to glare at her furiously. Shirley's laughter followed her until she reached her own tent.

"Up put your blates for kippers!" cried Gretchen.

Plates were eagerly extended; kippers were dumped on them—all save for one, which somehow missed the plate and landed in Shirley's lap.

"You clumsy—" she gasped. "Oh, it's hot!"—as she hurriedly seized it by the tail and transferred it to her plate.

"Of course it hot vas! It shust out of der frying-pan haf come," said Gretchen stolidly.

Pam had already made the tea, and they thoroughly enjoyed the repast in the open air.

The odour of the kippers floated to Lydia's tent, where she was slaving at her lines.

It really made her feel hungry, but she pretended to be nauseated, and while she wrote mechanically she told her friends of the magnificent late dinners she was accustomed to at her home.

Those kippers were to lead to startling things.

In the night Gretchen awoke and felt so thirsty that she drank most of the contents of the water carafe. Soon afterwards Inez had her slumbers spoiled for the same reason, and finished what little water was left and dozed off again, longing for more.

Then it was Shirley's turn—and a case of third time unlucky.

She lay wondering for some moments what had awakened her, and why her mouth and throat seemed on fire.

"My hat! Those kippers!" she then remarked drowsily. "Where's the giddy water?"

She groped and at first found the face of Gretchen, whose snores ceased with a great indrawn grunt. After that Shirley found the water carafe, and sprawled back under its unexpected lightness, almost dropping it on the Dutch girl's cherubic countenance.

"The— the greedy wretches!" Shirley grumbled. "Not a drop left. I'll have to go out and get some."

She slipped out of her sleeping-bag, took up the carafe, and was just leaving the tent, when she started and stood tense.

A girl was stealing from one of the other tents.

Though the moonlight was feeble, from her figure Shirley knew that she was Lydia Collet.

In a twinkling she was back in her own tent and shaking her friends in turn.

"Into your robes!" she breathed excitedly.

"Lydia Collet's snooping out of her tent, and we've got to keep track of her, in case she's

out for the silver casket belonging to Monica Trent!"

"But Lottie Parker's got that hidden somewhere," protested Dolly Downer.

"Child, does it occur to you that Lydia might be sneaking out to make some bargain about it with the sweet-natured Lottie?" asked Shirley.

In less than a half-minute they were in the cowed black robes of the Silent Six.

In single file they stole from their sleeping-quarters and in the direction in which Shirley had watched Lydia go.

Suddenly they saw her.

She had made a detour, and they caught sight of her making for the road between the fringe of the camp and the school.

Cautiously, always seeing that the tents were between them and their stealthy quarry, Shirley & Co. stole after Lydia, looking like black shadows of the night in their hooded robes.

At last only one line of tents stood between them and their quarry.

But she had stopped, and was speaking to somebody in a low tone.

Shirley murmured a warning "'S-sh!" and peered around one of the tents.

"It's her father—the gentleman who carries his own knitting with him," she whispered.

"Own knitting?" breathed back Inez, puzzled.

"His beard, stupid! Shut up, and I'll get a bit nearer and try to hear what they're saying!"

As it happened, there was a grassy rise near the point where Lydia had met the bearded man.

Shirley went down flat. Red Indian fashion, she squirmed her way up the rise, her ears strained.

"The little schemer!" she heard the man grumbling. "So she knew in what business I was, and that I could help her father, George Parker, out of a rather nasty business difficulty! And she makes the condition that I do so if she hands us the casket?"

"That's it, father," agreed Lydia. "She'll be here any moment now to meet us."

"With the casket?"

"Yes," said Lydia; and her father gave a meaning laugh.

"Beat it, girls—I mean, to either side of them—and keep out of sight!" whispered Shirley, as she squirmed back to her friends.

The Silent Six secreted themselves among the tents. Within they could hear the heavy breathing and snoring of girls who little dreamed of the tense excitement so near to them.

There was a wait that seemed an eternity.

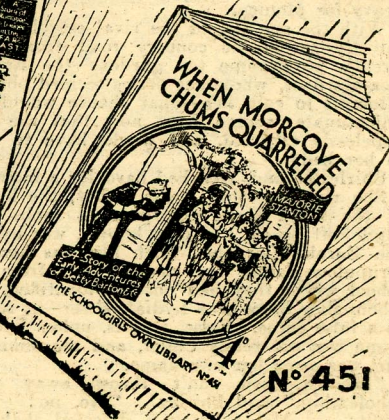
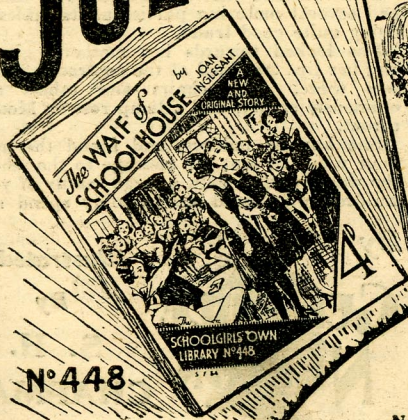
Then, rather to Shirley's dismay, she heard a step approaching on the road. Lottie must have made a detour to keep the appointment.

Eagerly Shirley peered towards the plotters.

Her heart beat fast when she saw Lydia

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and the bearded man turning to meet Lottie Parker, who had a brown-paper parcel under her arm.

How to prevent her handing over the precious casket—the silver box which might hold wealth in some form to sweep away all the pressing troubles of Monica and her mother—to the scheming Lydia or her equally unscrupulous father?

"H'st! Get ready to make a rush, girls!"

Shirley hoped that her sibilant whisper would not reach those on the road as she uttered it. She watched them, in an agony of anxiety.

No, they had paid no heed; they had not heard.

Lydia's father was smiling at Lottie.

"Ah! So you, my dear, are the daughter of my business friend, Mr. George Parker?" he said wheedlingly.

And Shirley thought of the story of Red Riding Hood and the wolf.

"Unluckily, Mr. Parker has some barges loaded with goods which my firm rejected as not up to standard. Poor Mr. Parker is paying a quite large sum every day—they call it demurrage—as we won't take the goods, and he is desperately trying to find a buyer to unload the barges upon."

"He is," said Lottie, with quite a lot of spirit for her. "You take those goods on to your wharf, refund him the money he has lost, as well as paying for the goods, and I'll give you the casket which is not yours, but which you seem to want so much."

"There's a businesslike little girl!" murmured Mr. Collet, still very pleasantly. Then, in a savage tone, through his teeth: "You'll hand over that casket now, you little idiot!"

He made a spring.

Lottie clung on to her parcel as he got both hands upon it. They staggered, and the parcel fell with a heavy thud to the road.

With a triumphant cry, Lydia made to pounce upon it, and stooped.

"Now, girls!" rapped Shirley.

In a twinkling the road was full of black, cowed figures.

Shirley struck into the back of the bending Lydia, and she went shooting across the road, and squealed in a pained tone when she made the acquaintance of some stinging nettles.

Next moment Shirley had the heavy parcel.

With it she whipped round on her heels before the staggering Mr. Collet and Lottie Parker could regain their balance.

"Run for it!" cried Shirley in a disguised voice.

The Silent Six rushed back among the tents. They were in their own, with the flap secured, within half a minute, and not a sign that any alarm was coming had reached them.

"I thought as much!" Shirley panted. "Both Lydia and Lottie are out long after they should be, fully dressed. They couldn't exactly make a song about seeing the Silent Six."

"See if you can open the casket and find out what's inside it!" urged Inez. "I'm sure Monica wouldn't mind."

"All right! Hold my torch, but shield the light with your hands, so not a glimmer of it can be seen outside!" Shirley whispered back. "Here goes!"

She tussled with the string about the parcel. It would not give, so she used her penknife upon it.

The brown paper fell away, and Shirley found in her hands—an old cigar-box!

"Well, what do you think of this?" she breathed.

She cut through the string about the box and raised the lid. It was filled with sand to give it weight, and this Shirley poured into a wash-hand basin.

There was nothing else—just sand!

"Ach! Lottie knows Lydia!" grunted Gretchen. "Und she also suspected dot it might be like fader, like son, only daughter, nod son und der oder vay round, aind't it?"

The Dutch girl's idea was somewhat involved, but quite correct.

Lottie Parker had taken no risks. She had tested the people she wanted to "trade with," and that meant that the mysterious silver casket still remained in whatever place of concealment she had put it!



PLOTTING!

MONICA TRENT stood staring, with a queer, desperate hopelessness, out of the kitchen window, and into her mother's tea gardens.

It was the Wednesday, and a "halfer," of course, for Highercroft.

Lydia Collet, Clara Bevan, and others of the High Hats had gone swaggering past and crossed the road to the Eureka Tea Gardens. That was only to be expected. But, unfortunately, many other Highercroft girls had followed their example.

It was not that they were shunning Monica or her mother's place of business deliberately. In the case of several, Monica had seen them take out their money, count it, and look doubtfully at Mrs. Trent's gardens, which they had always been accustomed to use in the past.

Then, reluctantly, they had turned away and crossed over to the Eureka establishment, where tea and other refreshments were so much cheaper, though far from being so good.

The term was wearing on and pocket money was not plentiful.

It had been the same with some trippers in a charabanc.

The driver had been about to pull up at Mrs. Trent's gardens with a load of thirty people. Then somebody had pointed out the notice over the road outside the Eureka Tea Gardens that screamed of cut prices.

In consequence not a chair by the tables outside was occupied. Worse, Monica had left practically none of the little money her mother had given her to carry on with.

She set her lips tightly to prevent them from trembling. Her hands clenched until her knuckles gleamed white in the mental agony that the sight of those empty chairs and tables brought to her.

Soon her mother would be sure to ask how things were going and what money she had left. Unless she left the unfortunate and helpless invalid to lay worrying on her sick-bed, she would have to resort to white lies to stave her mother off.

And Monica loathed any kind of deceit, even if there was a good purpose behind it.

Oh, where were Shirley's cousin and the other boys from his school? Cricket was again claiming them, perhaps.

Where was Shirley herself and her friends? If only somebody would come along and buy a cup of tea or two it would end this torturing idleness, this terrible waiting and hoping in vain.

She took what little money she had from the pocket of the pinafore she wore.

Gretchen had accidentally switched on the electric piano. Her chums halted in alarm. In another moment the whole school would be aroused. It seemed that the Silent Six must be caught!

Slowly, with tears creeping into her eyes, Monica counted it.

Two and eightpence.

How far would that go towards supporting an invalid who, growing weak from being forced to lie in bed, needed nourishing things?

She fought pluckily against a sob and made to turn from the window. Then she paused.

A small covered van with "B. Morris, Printer & Stationer" on the cover had drawn up outside. Probably the driver wanted a cup of tea and perhaps a sandwich. Monica hastily flicked the tears from her eyes.

Then she cried out.

From out of the rear of the van were tumbling girls. Shirley, Pam, Inez, the bulky Gretchen, and the Downer twins. A man with a scraggy neck and a walrus moustache swung himself down from the driver's seat.

Her eyes shining, Monica hurried out into the sunlit garden.

It was to meet Shirley & Co., who had just entered.

"Hallo, Monica! How's tricks?" asked Shirley. "Meet Cromwell, though no relation to the Iron Man who liked war and made himself a nuisance."

"Afternoon, miss," said Mr. Cromwell through his drooping moustache.

"Well, hurry up, old egg. Bring in the boxes and we'll help you," said Shirley. "Then you shall yaffle a cup of tea and anything you like to eat."

"Boxes?" asked Monica, puzzled.

"You'll see. It's a stupendous, brilliant and colossal idea of mine and when you repeat that you say it as if every word started with a capital letter! Jump to it, Cromwell, old horse."

"Yes, miss."

Monica watched in growing wonder as they all hurried back to the van and flat-shaped cardboard boxes of two sizes were produced from it. They made a number of journeys and the table in the kitchen was piled with the cartons before they were finished.

"Now, tea, Monica, and we'll tell you all about it afterwards," said Shirley. "A couple of sandwiches for me and—well, what do you other cripples want?"

They all wanted something and Shirley and Inez hurried indoors with Pam to help Monica serve the refreshments. Cromwell had voted for tea and, as Shirley was paying, had hinted

YOUR EDITOR says

THANK YOU

to the following correspondents.

Bernadette Quinn.—Very pleased to hear from you again. **Josephine Bristow (Malta).**—Dinah is very well, thanks! **Dorothy Holland (Clairwood).**—Sorry I can't grant your request. There is a strict office rule which prevents me. **Florence Oliver (Victoria).**—Write again soon! **Jean Brimble (Tasmania).**—Your wish has been granted, you see! **Leonora Wyeth.**—Glad you like the paper so much. Do write again. **Dorothy Hardy (Cardiff).**—Susie Melville will be appearing again shortly. **Eileen Hand (Christchurch).**—Miss Swainson thanks you for your greeting. **Ngairie Robinson (Wellington).**—So glad you like Zena and Flash. **Pat Seawright (Wainuku).**—Thanks for your charming letter. Don't let the homework worry you too much! **Betty Hewitson.**—Dinah sends her love to "Ginger." **Nellie Ryan (Belford).**—Glad you like Autograph Anne so much. **Dorothy Ferrier (Dundee).**—I'll bear in mind your request. **Judith Smith (Hughenden).**—Anne is a delightful character, isn't she? **Ruby Morriss (Bolton).**—I passed on your compliments to Miss Marriott who thanks you ever so much. **Josephine Brunkley (Bexhill).**—Sorry I can't oblige. I haven't any! **"Molly."**—Miss Marriott thanks you for your kind remarks about her new serial. **"Autograph Jean" (Gateshead).**—I'm afraid Anne herself couldn't give you her autograph, as she is only a fictitious character. I wonder if Miss Marriott would oblige? **Bertha Bray (Hornsey Rise).**—Thanks for your enthusiastic letter. Miss Marriott is honoured. **Marjorie Atkinson (Leeds).**—Don't bother about handwriting! It's the length of letter I look at—not the way it's written! Please write again soon. **Jean Hawkins (Kilburn).**—Miss Flinders' cover was a lovely one, wasn't it? So glad you like the new serial so much.



that he would like a pint cup or a large mug if possible.

Gretchen and Pam went to Mrs. Trent's room to see her and cheer her up. That they succeeded Monica knew. She heard her worried and troubled mother actually laughing.

When all the cups of tea and sandwiches, cakes, pastries and the like were out on the tables Shirley told Monica her plan.

It was to make up neat "tuck boxes" of two sizes mostly of home-made cakes, jam tarts and other pastries.

"Get the wheeze, old thing?" Shirley asked. "The smaller boxes can be sold at a bob, the double-size ones at one and tenpence. We've a bundle of printed labels with 'Trent's Tea Gardens' on them and the prices."

"I think it's a wonderful idea!" cried Monica enthusiastically. "If we let your cousin, Monty, know—"

"He knows already. I phoned the old egg," said Shirley. "As a matter of fact, he and the others will be over after a bit of cricket practice to-day. Monty's going to tell the boys at a grammar school near his school and ask 'em to pass on the news."

"You see, by turning the printed label inward and carrying the boxes under your arm, nobody would be likely to tumble to what was in them. The boys buy a few one and ten tuck-boxes and they have most of the jolly old material for a dorm feast!"

"Oh, yes, yes! It's grand!" cried Monica. "What about the girls at Higheroft?"

"We shall spread the news. You'll find a few of them dropping in for tuck-boxes, but you mustn't be disheartened if there aren't many."

"You see," cut in Pam, "that fire that caused them to have to buy a lot of odds and ends has left them—or most of them—mighty short this term. Still, some of them have written letters home and are beginning to get some postal orders back now."

"I think it's a fine idea, young ladies," remarked Mr. Cromwell, wiping his moustache and preparing to leave. "I'll tell all the schoolgirls and schoolboys as I happen to meet. Well, cheeri-ho!"

And he waved his hand in farewell to Shirley, who had tipped him a couple of shillings.

"Well, Monica, what about it?" asked Shirley, springing up. "Your stock looked a bit low. What about starting in to sort of manufacture pastries and that sort of thing for the tuck-boxes, so that they are ready and packed by the time the lads hop along?"

Monica nodded happily. In another moment the Silent Six and the scholarship girl they were befriending once again had their sleeves rolled up and were energetically working in the interests of the tea gardens.

At the same time Lydia Collet was hurrying into an inner room of the Eureka Tea Gardens

bungalow across the road, where her father sat.

"Dad, we've got to think hard to stop that Trent girl from winning through, after all," she panted. "I've just met a printer's man on the road, and—though he thought, of course, he was doing the Trents a good turn—he told me what's in the wind."

Quickly Lydia told her father about the proposed tuck-boxes and how it was planned to make large sales at Monty's school and perhaps the Grammar school near it.

Her father sat scowling for a moment. "We must stop her—we must!" he said. "All the time the Trents are in the district there is the danger of Monica herself finding the silver casket—and what's in it."

Suddenly he brought his fist thudding down upon the table.

"I've got it, Lydia!" he cried, with a sinister smile. "The boys from the two schools might come along and buy some of those tuck-boxes to-day. But after that—and he laughed triumphantly—"Monica Trent will not sell a single box to any of them! I've seen how to stop her for a certainty!"

"For why are we putting on these plack robes, ain't it? I am nod quite clear as to dot."

"Crumbs! Haven't I whispered why the Silent Six has got to walk to-night?"

"Ach! You may haf whispered, but it vas too low to reach mein ears, ain't it."

"Then," said Shirley, seizing one of Gretchen's ears through her cowed head-dress, "lend me your ear while I talk into it and spill the beans all over again."

"Ow!"

"S-sh! Now, it's this way. For a start I want to find out who is Lydia's secret sister. It looks as if she isn't a Fourth Former and of our camp. Therefore, Dutchy, if we steal into the school and examine shoes that are left outside, say, the Fifth's dormitory and the rooms of the senior girls, we might come upon the rubber heels with 'Super' or 'Superior' on 'em."

"Und ve should then know whom she vas, ja?"

"Yes. Almost for a certainty. Some other girl might be wearing similar rubbers, but it's unlikely."

"The second aim," went on Shirley, "is to

try to find where Lottie Parker has hidden the mysterious silver casket that belongs to Monica, and— Oh, bother! Why didn't you listen when I first started to trot all this out?"

"I sorry am. I thought you vere, as usual, nonsense talking," said Gretchen. "Mein ear iss vide open, und I wish you vould leave off pinching it und dragging it towards you."

"Well, I remember seeing that cigar-box with which Lottie fooled the Collets in her trunk—Lottie's large trunk which stands in the box-room."

"What she used to keep in it I neither know nor jolly well care. But my idea is that as she used the old cigar-box to make a dummy silver casket, she might have left the real casket in her trunk in its place."

"I understand perfectly. What are ve waiting for?"

"Oh, my aunt!" groaned Shirley. "Haven't I been talking till I'm nearly hoarse to try to drum it into your pudding head? Now come on—and watch your step."

It was nearly midnight. Away in the school, Miss Spence, the Head, who had been unable to sleep, laid aside a book and snapped out her light, feeling drowsy at last.

The Silent Six were just too late to see the light that might have warned them of possible danger as they stole in their ghostly robes from their tent.

They glided through the sleeping camp and into the quad, where the movable flagstone was situated.

A minute later they were in the subterranean and secret passage below, with the flagstone eased back into place. A minute more and they were opening the sliding panel in the study that had once been Shirley's.

"The hunt for the shoe with the sort of tell-tale rubber heel is going to be a long job," whispered Shirley. "We'll have a shot at Lottie Parker's trunk first—and if it's locked, I think we're justified in trying to open it."

The others murmured their agreement. They stole from the study and away to the box-room in a distant corridor.

It was Shirley who was the first to enter. She kicked up a rug that rather surprisingly lay on the floor and stumbled.

Gretchen, who came next, sprawled completely over the upturned rug before Shirley could hiss a warning.

"Ach!" grunted Gretchen, and her hand came down on what felt like a massive piece of furniture in the darkness, and her thumb touched something that gave out a click.

Next instant loud and resonant music filled the air.

"Who's afraid of the big bad wolf.
Big bad wolf, big bad wolf?"

A piano in the room was noisily playing the popular air—so noisily that it would surely be heard all over the school!

"Stop it!" gasped Shirley. "Has one of you gone cuckoo—or what?"

The music crashed away merrily. Shirley flashed on her torch, looked about her, and, with a cold thrill of dismay, understood.

Owing to the fire, some of the rooms had been changed round.

This room, once a spacious box-room, had been turned into the servants' recreation-room!

The piano making the nerve-wracking din was of the electric variety, and a music roll had been left in place!

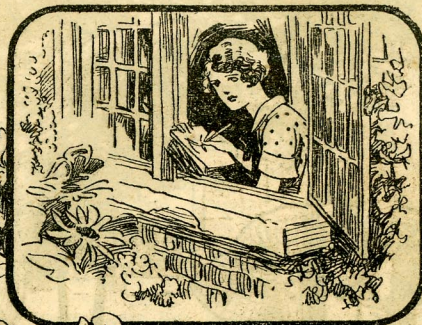
Up in her room Miss Spence started up in bed.

"Dear me! What's that?" she gasped. And in dormitories and bed-rooms countless other people were asking themselves the selfsame question!

Will the Silent Six be caught? Time and time again we have been forced to ask this question of ourselves. Time and again the answer has been "No!" Miraculously they have managed to evade capture. But this time, it seems that they have made their fatal blunder. What will be the outcome? You must read next Wednesday's dramatic instalment of this great serial.

COMPLETE This Week. Delightful Story, Featuring a Fascinating New Character—

WANDA of the Woodlands



WANDA'S WAY!

TED, don't move! Don't breathe! Just look over there—on the window-ledge. It's a real swallowtail—the first I've ever seen in my life."

Wanda Franklin spoke in a bated whisper, her grey eyes kindling; the pencil grasped in her nimble fingers flew rapidly over a page in her sketch-book.

The golden rays of the setting sun crept through the open lattice window, burnishing the coppery tints in Wanda's auburn hair.

Her cheeks, naturally pale, were tinged faintly with a flush of excitement; her gaze—the ardent gaze of a born naturalist—was fixed on the beautiful insect that had settled for a moment on the drab grey of the window-ledge.

It was a perfect specimen of a swallowtailed butterfly, the deep black of its velvety wings set off by brilliant yellow markings. Its slender antennæ quivered faintly in the breeze as it remained poised, as though inviting admiration—a perfect subject for Wanda's skilful pencil.

In the doorway Wanda's schoolboy brother Ted, a couple of years younger than herself, stood motionless in obedience to his sister's command. The troubled expression in his blue eyes was set off by a faint tolerant smile.

"What's a chap to do if he musn't breathe?" he inquired humorously. "You might give me the word when you're ready; I want to talk to you."

"S-sh!" breathed Wanda tensely. "You'll frighten it away. I simply must sketch those markings. Have you ever seen anything so marvellous?"

Ted grunted, not particularly impressed. "You ought to see Fred Brayton's new Silver Cloud motor-bike!" he returned enthusiastically. "Now, that's something worth looking at!"

Wanda threw a withering glance over her shoulder.

"How can you compare a horrid, noisy motor-bike with a butterfly?" she demanded indignantly. "And don't talk to me about Fred Brayton. A boy who can tie a poor cat up in a sack is no friend of mine."

And Wanda tossed her head, her grey eyes flashing, as she resumed her task.

Ted coughed. "Fred was only out for a lark," he returned awkwardly.

"I don't call that a lark," returned Wanda crisply. "Neither did you at the time, Ted. I'm glad you punched his nose. I was awfully proud of you!"

Wanda is "different"; a girl you'll all admire, even though she is content to be alone with Nature; to tend the injured birds of the forest; to choose her friends from among all the other denizens of the woodlands. Meet Wanda now, in this charming story.

Ted crimsoned. "Oh, cut it out, Wanda!" he muttered. "Why keep dragging that up? I punched his nose because—well, because he slanged you when you rescued the cat. Anyway, that's finished with. He's been pretty decent recently. Chaps aren't like girls," added Ted, with the profound knowledge of fourteen years. "They let bygones be bygones."

Wanda smiled faintly, her gaze fixed on the swallowtailed butterfly.

So like Ted, she thought, to punch a boy's nose one minute and shake hands the next!

But there were certain offences unforgivable in Wanda's code, and cruelty to animals was one of them. A boy who could torment a helpless dumb creature was definitely not to be trusted.

"Anyway," added Ted hurriedly, "I didn't come to jaw about Fred; there—there's something else—"

Wanda's sharp ears, attuned to listening to sounds of Nature, were quick to detect the anxious hesitancy in her brother's voice.

She looked up, her pencil poised above her sketch.

"What is it, Ted?" she asked quietly.

Ted closed the door rather clumsily; startled, the swallowtailed butterfly rose from the window-ledge and flitted away in the golden evening haze.

"Oh!" exclaimed Wanda regretfully. "And I hadn't got the markings on its underwings."

"Sorry!" mumbled Ted apologetically. "But the fact is, old girl, I'm in a pickle. If it gets to the pater's ears there'll be no end of a rumpus."

Characteristically, Wanda thrust her own disappointment aside. When Ted was in a scrape—and Ted was rarely out of scrapes—he could always count on her for advice or help.

"It all started with this boxing," he said, thrusting his hands into his pockets and frowning in a worried way. "You know, the pater was set against my taking it up in the evenings—said I ought to be studying, instead."

Wanda nodded understandingly. Daddy was a dear, but he rather lacked sympathy at times with his family's chosen pursuits. Ted's obsession with sports, together with her own passion for Nature, was classed by Mr. Franklin as a waste of time.

Both his son and daughter were destined for a business career, and Mr. Franklin felt that they should have shown more enthusiasm for their respective studies.

"Well," asked Wanda sympathetically, as she closed her sketch-book, "what's happened now?"

"The very deuce," declared Ted lugubriously. "It's Major Warren again."

Wanda pursed her lips, her grey eyes suddenly worried.

Major Warren, their influential neighbour, was a great friend of daddy's. An irascible, quick-tempered gentleman, he looked on all boys with suspicion, and the memory of a certain occasion when Ted had trespassed on the major's grounds in search of a lost cricket ball and accidentally broken a cucumber-frame was still vivid in Wanda's mind.

On that occasion daddy had sternly forbidden Ted ever to go near the major's estate, the high wall of which adjoined the Rookery Spinney, which in turn abutted on to Mr. Franklin's garden.

"You don't mean," gasped Wanda anxiously, "that you've been trespassing again?"

"No," returned Ted, flushing. "Word of honour, Wanda! But the major thinks I have. He stopped me this afternoon and accused me of climbing over his orchard wall in search of bird-nests."

"Ted," gasped Wanda, to whom disturbing a bird's-nest constituted one of the worst crimes of all, "how could he say that?"

"He declared he'd seen me," returned Ted glumly. "Last night—when I was boxing down at the hall. I gave the old chap my word that it wasn't me, but he didn't seem convinced; said if it happened again he'd come straight to the pater and kick up a shindy."

Wanda's face was rather white.

"But, Ted, someone ought to convince him that he was mistaken. The boys you were boxing with—"

By
Renee FRAZER
Illustrated by E. Flinders.



"That's the rub," put in Ted, frowning. "It'd be easy for a chap to slip away from the hall when another bout was on and pay a flying visit to the spinney. And—and there's something else, Wanda—"

He broke off, his face very red. "Someone had told the major about your hobby," he blurted out clumsily. "He—he accused me of pinching birds' eggs to add to your collection—"

"Ted!" Wanda sprang to her feet, her grey eyes blazing.

"What a horrid thing for him to say! Why, you know that I don't collect birds' eggs like that. I wouldn't ever dream of taking an egg from a nest. If I find one that's fallen on the ground and broken, I bring it home and mend it as well as I can."

Wanda's voice shook; the vexed question of collecting birds' eggs was one very near to her heart.

"I know," returned Ted hastily. "I told him that, but someone had evidently been getting at him. Anyway, I thought I'd better tell you, old girl—in case of squalls."

Wanda bit her lip, nodding, her face pale. "I'm glad you did, Ted," she breathed. "We'll have to think of some way of proving our innocence. I've a good mind to go and see the major—"

She broke off suddenly, staring out of the french windows, her slim figure tautening.

A grey, sleek form was stealing across the grass—a big grey tabby, with something fluttering in its mouth.

"Oh!" Wanda gasped. "Timmy's caught a thrush!"

In a flash, every other thought was thrust aside. Wanda, the nature-lover and dreamer, became galvanised into sudden action.

"Quick, Ted," she breathed. "Bunk out through the backdoor and guard the path; I'll cut across the lawn. And the times I've punished Timmy for chasing birds—"

In one bound, she reached the french windows and flung them wide; the next moment she was darting like the wind in pursuit of the guilty tabby.

Timmy saw her coming, and raced for the fence; but he was not quick enough for his young mistress. Darting across his path, Wanda grabbed him and lifted him from the ground.

"Naughty—naughty Timmy!" she panted. "Oh, the poor wee thing!"

This last remark concerned the young thrush,

Even as Wanda snapped the squirrel, a boy appeared above the wall, obviously in flight!

which, still very much alive, was fluttering desperately in an attempt to escape.

A swift, gentle pressure on the side of Timmy's jaws—and the thrush lay, fluttering and twittering pitifully, in Wanda's hand.

"You got him, then?" panted Ted, as he hurried up. "Gosh, you can get a move on when you want," he added admiringly.

Wanda waved aside the compliment. "Take Timmy," she commanded breathlessly, "and shut him in the woodshed. He knows that's his punishment. I must see to this poor thing. It's a young missel thrush, Ted—you can see by its markings."

"Can you?" asked Ted, staring. "One thrush looks very like another to me. Come on, Tim, my boy—you've got to take your medicine!"

And with the disgruntled tabby under his arm, he marched away towards the woodshed.

Wanda, meanwhile, gently carried the young thrush indoors and examined it. One wing was bleeding, where it had been damaged by Timmy's sharp teeth—but otherwise it seemed more terrified than hurt.

Gently and methodically, Wanda set to work—bathing the injured wing, and bandaging it with a length of gauze.

Ted came in just as she completed the operation.

"I've got to be buzzing off now," he said hurriedly. "The chaps'll be waiting for me down at the hall. Thought I'd get Fred Brayton to take me on the back of his motor-bike—that is," he added hesitantly, "unless you'd like to walk down with me?"

Wanda shook her head, though not unmindful of the brotherly compliment.

"I'm going to the spinney," she said. "I know Timmy caught this poor thrush there; it's his favourite hunting ground. I'll find an empty nest, if I can, and leave the poor wee thing comfy."

"See you later, then," said Ted. "Cheerio!" He departed, banging the door behind him.

Wanda put on her hat, slung her naturalist's camera over her shoulder, and taking the thrush gently in her hand, departed on the short walk for the spinney.

For the moment her worry concerning Ted and Major Warren—her own hurt feelings at the major's accusation—were forgotten in her anxiety for the baby thrush.

That was Wanda all over!

CAUGHT!

ROOKERY SPINNEY—so named by Wanda herself—was a veritable aviary of wild birds; besides being a favourite haunt of squirrels, rabbits, and other wild life.

The evening sunlight slanted through the interlaced branches, forming chequered patterns on the leaf-strewn paths and mossy banks.

Wanda walked softly, her footsteps making scarcely a sound on the thick carpet of leaves. And all the while her keen, eager gaze darted from side to side, seeking evidence of that wild life she loved so well.

A rabbit scuttled before her approach, its white tuft of a tail bobbing comically in the sunlight; a pair of bright eyes peered inquisitively at the newcomer from the foliage of a tall tree.

"A squirrel!" breathed Wanda, her face lighting up. "I must get a snap of him if I can!"

But her first care was for the injured thrush; and after a painstaking search, Wanda discovered the very thing she was seeking.

It was a deserted nest—set in the lower branches of a tree. Wanda had to climb to reach it—a difficult task, when only one hand was free.

Tenderly, she placed the injured thrush in the warmly lined nest. She could do no more for it just now. At any rate, it seemed comfortable, and would be temporarily out of the reach of prowling enemies.

"I'll come back again, later, Twitters," she remarked, playfully naming the young thrush—as was her wont. "Before I go to bed I'll bring you something to eat!"

She commenced to edge her way along the bough, intending to jump to the ground; but just then she caught sight of a pair of bright, interested eyes watching her from a hollow in an adjacent tree.

"Why—there's Brighteyes again!" she breathed. "A squirrel at home! I must just get one snap of him!"

Cautiously, holding her breath, she took out her little folding camera—her constant companion—and adjusted the sight.

It would make a perfect picture, she decided, if only the squirrel did not take fright.

Beyond the tree lay the high red-brick wall of Major Warren's estate. It made rather a good background, the rays of the setting sun reflecting from the mellow brickwork, and throwing the trees in the foreground into relief.

Wanda's finger trembled on the trigger-release; her gaze was fixed steadily on the watchful squirrel.

Then suddenly, dramatically, the peaceful scene was shattered; there came a gruff, angry shout from the other side of the wall, followed by a crash, and a tinkle of broken glass.

Startled, Wanda pressed the trigger—looking up at the same instant. The squirrel, of course, was away like a flash—but Wanda's gaze was turned in horrified bewilderment towards the brick wall.

For climbing over the wall was a boy—a boy wearing a school cap, and a familiar grey-tweed sports jacket and flannels.

Wanda could not see his face—but his figure, and that old sports jacket of rather unusual pattern—sent her heart into her mouth.

"Ted!" she gasped.

The boy dropped to the ground and commenced to run; Wanda, face ashen pale, her mind in a whirl of doubt and bewilderment, slid from her perch and raced in pursuit, still holding tightly to her camera.

Behind her came a loud, angry shout. "Come back, you young scoundrels!" came Major Warren's familiar bellow. "I've seen you both—come back, I say!"

For a moment Wanda hesitated, wondering whether to get back and cover Ted's tracks. Then, setting her lips firmly, she raced on.

Even now—in spite of the evidence of her eyes—she could not believe that the trespasser was her brother. True. Ted was the only boy in the immediate neighbourhood who wore the familiar cap of Penholme High School—and that sports jacket certainly looked like his.

But Ted could not have done a thing like this! After their conversation this afternoon he would not deliberately have gone behind her back and trespassed in the major's garden.

Nor was Ted a coward! He would not have run away like this; he would have stayed and faced the music.

But the boy, whoever he was, possessed an amazing fleetness of foot; Wanda could hear him crashing through the undergrowth as she raced in pursuit.

But even so, Wanda, with her superior knowledge of woodcraft, might have overtaken him had not disaster come unexpectedly.

Her racing feet caught in a trailing bramble, and she pitched to the ground.

Even as she lay there, half stunned and trying to recover her breath, heavy footsteps sounded behind her and a hand fell on her shoulder.

"Got you!" panted the major's gruff voice. Wanda sat up, staring into the other's red, angry face. She felt that she must say something to protect Ted.

"Please, you don't understand!" she gasped. "There's a mistake—"

"Mistake!" rapped the major, his face purpling. "There's no mistake, young lady! I caught you both in the act. Your brother climbing trees in my orchard, and you, outside, waiting to help him! Birds' eggs—ha! That's what it is. You see, I've heard about you, young lady. No doubt you put your scamp of a brother up to it. Well, you've got yourselves to thank for what's coming to you. A broken greenhouse is no laughing matter, young lady!"

"Oh!" Wanda's eyes widened as she scrambled to her feet. "But you're wrong," she protested. "That boy wasn't my brother! I wasn't waiting for him! Oh, you must believe me!" she added desperately.

The major puffed out his cheeks, his moustache bristling.

"We'll see whether your father believes you," he returned grimly. "You'll come with me to interview him now!"

Wanda's heart turned cold. Though she knew that her father was fond of her, there were times when he could be very stern.

But it was not of herself she thought so much as of Ted. Ted, as a boy—and as the chief suspected culprit—would suffer most.

At all costs she must try to protect him! Unflinching she raised her eyes to the major's angry face.

"Very well," she said quietly, "I—I'm ready."

Even as she spoke she heard a distant sound—a sound that caused her grey eyes to narrow suddenly.

It was the distant splutter of a starting motor-cycle.

It might mean nothing, of course, and yet Ted did not possess a motor-cycle.

Wanda put the thought aside for future reference, and nerved herself to face the coming ordeal.

"I'm ready," she repeated quietly.

PUNISHMENT!

"WELL, Wanda, what have you to say?" Mr. Franklin—grey-haired, austere—stood with his back to the mantelshelf, his keen eyes watching his daughter's face.

The silence of the room was oppressive as Wanda hesitated. She could almost feel the silence as she tried in vain to speak.

It was all so unfair—so preposterous! She had done nothing to be ashamed of; neither had Ted—of that she was certain!

And yet how could she refute the major's clear-cut, decisive story—the story of the trespass, the pursuit, and capture?

"Well?" repeated Mr. Franklin, and his tone was ominous. "I'm waiting, Wanda!"

Wanda gulped, finding her voice at last.

"Daddy, it's all a ghastly mistake!" she returned breathlessly. "That boy wasn't Ted—I'm positive!"

"Indeed?" remarked her father coldly. "Then for whom were you waiting, might I ask? And what were you doing in that tree?"

Wanda bit her lip, feeling the net of circumstantial evidence closing round her.

What could she say? How could she explain about the injured thrush? The story would sound incredible to them—they would never understand.

Let them think what they wished—she knew that she was innocent, that Ted was innocent.

"I wasn't waiting for Ted!" she burst out breathlessly. "Ted had gone to the boys' club—"

"We'll deal with Ted later!" out in her father grimly. "At present, Wanda, I am concerned with your part in this disgraceful business, and I'm far from satisfied. This hobby you have taken up—this craze of yours—seems to have had a bad effect on your conduct. You must give it up—you understand? Once and for all, you'll drop this naturalist nonsense, and concentrate on more useful studies—"

"But, daddy," gasped Wanda, white to the lips—"daddy, you can't mean— Oh, it's not fair!"

Mr. Franklin held up his hand, his expression determined.

"I am the best judge, Wanda, of what is good for you!" he said curtly. "You will, please, fetch me your cases of specimens, books, and other rubbish connected with your hobby. At once, Wanda!"

Like a girl in a dream Wanda left the room. Daddy couldn't mean— Oh, it was too unfair!

Her heart welled with rebellion, and yet the thought of disobeying daddy did not enter her mind. It was not in her nature to be openly defiant towards those whom she loved and respected.

Her eyes smarting, an aching lump in her throat, she collected her cherished belongings—the glass case of specimens, the sketch-books filled with neat drawings, her cherished notebook. She did not think of keeping anything back.

Only the camera she left out. The camera was owned jointly by her and Ted; it was not hers to give up.

Her arms filled, she made her way slowly back to daddy's study.

She had hoped that, at the last minute, he might relent. But that faint hope was doomed to be quashed.

Mr. Franklin was a believer in discipline. He had Major Warren's statement that Wanda had been engaged with her brother in a mad-brained escapade connected with her hobby. Wanda's denials had been unconvincing; the punishment must be made to fit the offence.

Gravely he took the cherished articles from her arms and placed them in his safe, locking the door and dropping the key into his pocket.

The slamming of the safe door found an echo in Wanda's heart; she felt as though something—an integral part of her—had been

locked away in that safe, perhaps never to return.

With an effort, she fought back the tears that started into her grey eyes.

Mr. Franklin had his back to her; he did not see the tears. "Had he done so he might perhaps have relented—though without guessing what lay behind them."

But Wanda's pride refused to allow her to cry. She turned away quickly, and walked towards the door.

"Go to bed, Wanda," said Mr. Franklin gruffly. "I shall deal with Ted when he comes home. Good-night!"

"Good-night—daddy!"

Wanda closed the door; she would not give way—not yet! Steadily she walked to the room where she had kept her treasures; it looked so bare now—bare and dismal in the twilight.

Turning away quickly, a lump in her throat, she hurried upstairs and threw herself face-down on her bed.

She felt as though her heart were broken.

BY MOONLIGHT!

"WANDA—I say, Wanda!" Wanda sat up with a start, hastily pressing a hand to her smarting eyes.

"Y-yes?" she faltered.

"It's me—Ted," came her brother's voice from outside the room. "I say, can I speak to you just for a minute?"

Hastily Wanda darted to the washstand and dabbed her eyes with a cold sponge. Ted must not guess that she had been crying! He'd have enough to worry him without that.

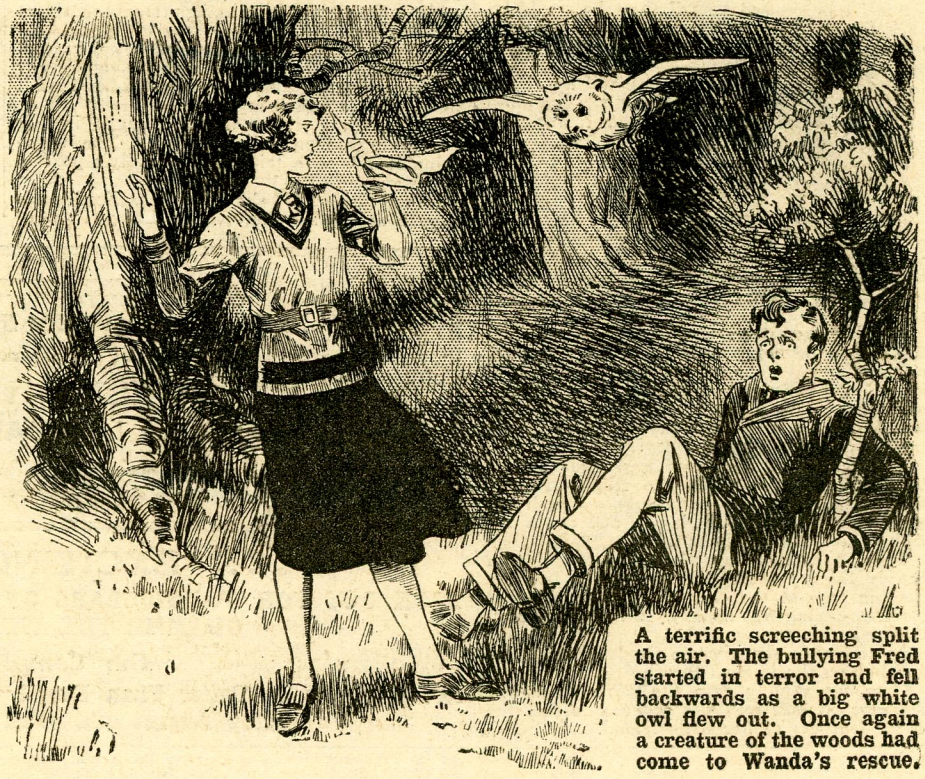
Hurrying to the door, she unlocked it. Ted stood there, a rueful expression in his boyish face.

"I've just seen the pater," he remarked. "No end of a shemozzle! Can't make head or tail of it. What's all this about you and me and the major's garden?"

Wanda explained breathlessly, keeping nothing back.

Ted's frown deepened.

"There's something queer about this," he remarked—"dashed queer! You know we change for our boxing bouts? Well, when I went back to the dressing-room my togs had vanished—clean gone! No one had seen them. Well, I hung about for a while, trying to



A terrific screeching split the air. The bullying Fred started in terror and fell backwards as a big white owl flew out. Once again a creature of the woods had come to Wanda's rescue.

borrow some things to come home in—then, along comes a chap, carrying my togs! Said he found them in a ditch by the roadside. What do you make of that?"

Wanda stared, her thoughts racing. Strangely enough, she was thinking of the distant throbbing of a motor-bike? And, combined with that recollection, was another picture—the picture of a great, laughing bully of a boy, tying a harmless cat in a sack!

That cat had been Timmy; that was how Timmy had come to be adopted by Wanda. And it was Timmy, come to think of it, who was mainly responsible for her visit to Rookery Spinney that afternoon!

It seemed almost as though there were some purpose behind it all—the workings of an inscrutable natural law.

"Ted," said Wanda suddenly, "have you seen Fred Brayton to-day?"

Ted stared.
"Why, yes! He took me down to the clubhouse on the back of his mo'-bike. Fine machine," he added, with a belated burst of enthusiasm.

Wanda smiled grimly; then her smile faded. "Is daddy going to punish you, Ted?" she asked.

Ted grimaced.
"No more boxing," he growled. "That's one thing. There's going to be thrashing, too—if dad can prove the major's story."

Wanda's lips tightened.
"There's going to be proof," she said, her eyes gleaming. "But not that sort of proof. When you study Nature you see that things always work out right—a sort of poetic justice."

"What on earth are you getting at?" demanded Ted.

But Wanda would not explain.
When her brother had gone she lay down on the bed, fully dressed, and tried to make some sort of plan of action. But the harder she thought the more hopeless it all seemed. Suspicions were not enough; she must have proof!

But where could she find it?
Tired out, at length Wanda dropped asleep.

She awoke with a start, with an anxious feeling of some urgent duty left undone.

For a moment she lay there, racking her brains; then, in a flash, it came back to her. The injured thrush!

She had promised herself that she would go back to see to it—take it some food. But the subsequent events had banished it from her mind.

Wanda slipped from the bed and stood up, her heart thumping. A glance at the luminous dial of her wrist-watch showed that it was close on midnight.

Another girl might have decided to wait till the morning rather than run the risk of getting into a fresh scrape, but Wanda could only think of one thing—the injured bird.

Creeping on to the landing, she noticed that a light was gleaming under Ted's door. Was he awake? In any case, there was no point in disturbing him. This adventure was her own!

Stealing downstairs, she pulled on a coat and hat and made her way to the kitchen. Here, working silently, she crumbled some soft bread in a little milk and wrapped it in a paper bag; then, unbolting the back door, she crept out into the garden and made her way at a run towards Rookery Spinney.

By moonlight the spinney was a trifle eerie; but Wanda had no time to think of that. Besides, her practised ear recognised each one of the curious noises which now and again disturbed the stillness of the night.

That ghost-like screech was, to Wanda, simply the cry of the white owl who lived in the big tree at the end of the spinney, that furtive rustling was made by a rabbit, retreating to its warren.

So at length she came to the tree where she had hidden the injured thrush.

Climbing nimbly into the lower branches, she reached out, and was relieved to feel the warm feathers of her little friend.

A faint twittering greeted her as she dropped the moist and crumbled-bread-crumbs into the nest.

"Your supper, Twitters," she whispered, smiling. "I'll bring your breakfast in the morning!"

Suddenly her smile faded, and she turned, every nerve taut.

Creeping stealthily among the trees was a boyish figure, his gaze bent on the ground. Slowly and methodically he was making his way towards the brick wall that bordered Major Warren's estate!

Wanda held her breath, her pulses racing. She had not put her truth in nature without cause.

Here, perhaps, was the very proof for which she had racked her mind in vain, and but for the injured thrush, she would never have been here to find it!

But what was the boy searching for?
Wanda, from her point of vantage, was able to scan the moonlit ground; and suddenly she drew her breath.

Caught in a low bush was something white, that fluttered in the faint breeze. A handkerchief!

Wanda acted with the swiftness of a night owl leaping on a scurrying stoat.

Springing from the overhanging branch, she landed on the soft ground a few feet from the startled boy. Bending quickly, she snatched the handkerchief from the bush and stared at the corners.

As she had guessed—initials! "F. B." Fred Brayton had come back for his incriminating property!

Wanda darted forward, grabbing the boy's arm as he made to turn and run.

"Fred Brayton!" she panted. "I might have guessed it was you!"

The bully turned, an ugly scowl on his heavy face, a scared look in his small eyes.

"I suppose," he sneered, "you were hiding in that tree to look after the poor little birdies?"

Wanda's eyes flashed.
"Exactly!" she replied quietly.

The boy sniggered.
"And who'd you suppose'd be fool enough to believe that?" he demanded. "If you split on me I'll tell my story. What have you to say now, Miss Clever?"

Wanda bit her lip, her heart sinking. Who would believe her incredible story, after all? That she had visited the spinney at midnight to take food to an injured bird!

Fred Brayton was grinning triumphantly at her dismay.

"Give me my handkerchief!" he grated. "I'll get my own back on you and your precious brother before I've finished! I'll teach him to punch my nose—"

So that was it! Wanda caught in her breath in sudden enlightenment. The whole thing had been a trick on the bully's part to get even with Ted!

"You—you cad!" she panted, as Fred made a grab at the handkerchief. "Let go!"

"Give me my handkerchief, I say!" growled the boy, thrusting out his jaw.

A sudden, ear-piercing shriek sounded behind him.

The bully released the handkerchief and started back, his face deathly pale. Missing his footing, he sprawled on the ground.

A white owl flapped from the branches of a tree and flew away with a derisive hoot.

Wanda laughed breathlessly.
Once again Nature had come to her rescue!

Turning quickly, she commenced to run. The bully, recovering from his fright, scrambled to his feet and started in pursuit.

But the chase was cut short dramatically. There came a sudden shout—the flash of a torchlight through the trees.

"Ted!" gasped Wanda incredulously.
The next moment Ted appeared at a run, followed by Mr. Franklin himself.

"There he goes, dad!" shouted Ted.
"Daddy!" Wanda raced up to her father, almost sobbing, and waving the torn handkerchief.

"Look, I found this in the spinney!" she panted. "It belongs to Fred Brayton. He—he came back to fetch it—"

"I know." Mr. Franklin spoke gruffly, his voice shaking with emotion. "Wanda, I'm sorry! Ted's already shown me proof of my mistake."

"Ted!" gasped Wanda, her mind in a whirl. There came a sound of scuffling among the bushes—a sharp thud, and a grunt of anguish.

"Take that!" panted Ted's voice. "And if you try any more funny tricks, there's more of the same coming to you!"

Then Ted appeared, his hair dishevelled, a rather sheepish grin on his flushed face.

"I've just knocked him down, pater," he explained airily. "He's creeping away on all fours. That comes of a bit of boxing practice!"

And he winked at Wanda.
Mr. Franklin coughed.

"I was just telling Wanda," he remarked hastily, "that you'd shown me convincing proof of your innocence."

"Oh, that!" Ted chuckled. "That's your proof, really, Wanda. I couldn't sleep to-night, so I amused myself developing that film in your camera. Look, here's the print—done by artificial light. Not bad, eh?"

Wonderingly, Wanda held out her hand for the snap. Then she started, her eyes widening.

For it was the snapshot she had taken from the tree, when she had been so dramatically disturbed. In the foreground was a bright-eyed squirrel, peering from a hole in a tree-trunk; and in the background, but clearly visible, was a boy in the act of climbing over a wall.

And that boy was Fred Brayton!
"Oh!" gasped Wanda, her eyes shining.

"Ted, didn't I tell you? It's nature again! If it hadn't been for the squirrel I'd never have taken that snap, and we'd never have had proof!"

And her father smiled!

THE END.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S

Enthralling Complete Story by Louise Carlton

introduces this author's most fascinating character:

HESTA—the GIPSY

who lives in "HAPPINESS GLADE."

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