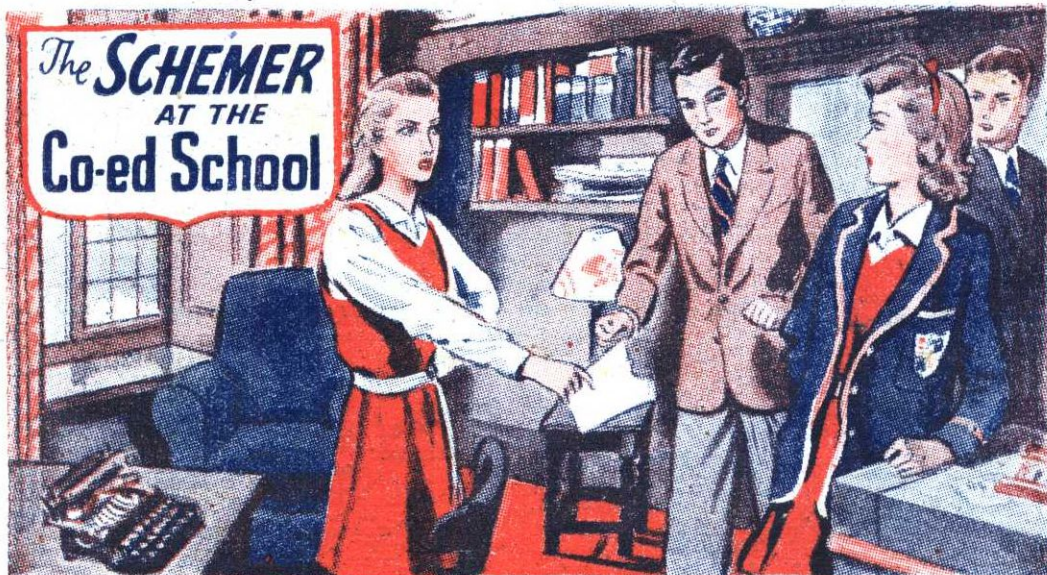


GIRLS' CRYSTAL ³

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
March
11th, 1944.



The SCHEMER AT THE Co-ed School

You Can Start To-day This Grand School Story—By ELISE PROBYN.

MIDNIGHT DISCOVERY

MIDNIGHT—and Valerie King was creeping down the dark dormitory staircase of Rossmere Co-ed School.

No sound could she hear save the wild thumping of her heart. She crept into her study, put on a glimmer of light, and with hands that trembled she donned the clothes she had carried downstairs for this night's venture.

This wild, reckless venture that might have grave consequences for herself if she were detected—but which might, if it succeeded, expose the most startling sensation that had ever swept Rossmere!

All the Fourth, all the whole school, thought the world of the new boy—Jack Warrington.

Val alone—Val and her chum Joan Selby, lying sick now in the school sanatorium—had seen through the deceit of Jack Warrington, and it was the finding of a watch, a gold presentation watch, which had now fired Val with the wildest suspicion of that smooth-tongued new boy!

Was he Jack Warrington at all? Or was he impersonating the real Warrington? Was he an impostor?

Val's thoughts raced feverishly while she dressed under the shaded study-lamp.

Always she had known that Warrington was a schemer, mixed up in some plot with Clem Barney, the shady caretaker of the old Manor House on the river. A plot which was directed against her chum Joan! But she had gone to the old manor time and again. She had found her way at last into the mysterious Blue Room. And she had entered that room just a few minutes too late. Clem Barney had left the manor in a heavily-closed car. Warrington's secret was gone from the Blue Room.

What Val had discovered was a gold wrist-

watch—a presentation watch lying broken on the floor, which told Val that only the real owner could have dropped it—not the Jack Warrington she knew at all!

Who and where was the real Jack Warrington? Had he been kept a prisoner all these weeks in the locked Blue Room? Was this why the new boy was in league with the Manor caretaker? Was this his secret? Was he an impostor, an impersonator who had stolen that other's name and identity, and was passing himself off here in Rossmere as Jack Warrington?

If it were true, it was the real Warrington's stolen luggage and possessions which he had brought with him to the school. Somewhere amongst that luggage there would surely be another clue which—like the watch—would betray him!

That was what Val meant to find out—now!

Tense in every nerve, she turned off the light and stole silently along the dark corridor to the boys' quarters. To Warrington's study!

It was a desperate risk she was taking. Breaking into a boy's study—rifling his belongings at dead of night! Nothing could explain or excuse it if she were caught in the attempt. It would have disastrous consequences for her—it would mean her expulsion from Rossmere!

Val shivered. She was at Warrington's door now. She was letting herself softly into his study.

Impossible not to feel a sense of guilt. And fear! Immediately overhead, she remembered, were the mistresses' quarters. All had been in bed for hours and were soundly sleeping now, of course. But it was a frightening thought that only the width of the ceiling separated her from the entire staff of mistresses!

Val closed the door soundlessly and put on the light over Warrington's desk.

Here in the corner stood Warrington's luggage. Two trunks and a suitcase. They bore the name J. H. Warrington—they bore the genuine labels of his former school, St. David's. But were they his own, or were they the stolen property of that stranger in the Blue Room?

On her knees now, Val was opening the suitcase with feverish hands.

It was filled with sports kit. Blazers, swimming suits, rowing sweaters—all bearing the badge of St. David's. Borrowed plumes they might be, but they proved nothing. Val groped deeper into the case. Everything in it was so plausible and natural. Everything except—A grim little thrill went through her. Except these things at the bottom. Running corks; special sprinting-shoes! Again they told the same tale as the watch. What could Warrington want with them? He wasn't a sprinter—in his own words he had never taken up running.

Val replaced everything precisely and closed up the case as before. The shoes and the corks were not strong enough proof against Warrington—but they made her own certainty doubly certain. Now to explore further!

In a fever of excitement she drew the trunks noiselessly under the light. Opened the lid of the first one. Suits crammed it. Clothes of every kind. But nothing else. No books, no letters, not so much as a postcard, not a written word. Queer, thought Val. She wondered if any other boy in the school would have so carefully removed every letter and paper, every little personal possession, from the pockets of all his stored-up suits.

But Warrington had obviously done this. The trunk had nothing to tell. Val closed it again and turned anxiously to the next and last trunk.

She raised its heavy wooden lid and propped it up. Her heart beat faster. The trunk was filled mainly with shoes and boots and skates and odds and ends—but there were books, too, stuffed right down at the bottom.

Val plunged her hand into the trunk and swiftly drew out the skates, the boots and other obstructions, placing them down on the floor. In the haste of excitement, her elbow joggled against the trunk.

There was an ominous thud! The lid had fallen!

It shut with a bang which sounded in Val's strained ears like a clap of thunder!

She sat back on her heels, going hot and cold in every pore. For awful seconds she couldn't breathe, could only listen in dread panic for some sound from above—the stirring of some mistress who might perhaps have heard that lid fall!

But the seconds passed. No sound or movement came from above. A slow perspiration of relief broke over Val, and she breathed again.

With hands that were still shaking she propped up the lid once more. Silently, feverishly, she drew a few more things out of the trunk. Now for the books! Here they were.

They were school books—text books from St. David's. Warrington's name was written in the inside covers, but was it Warrington's writing? Val knew it was not! But what else was here? What was this other book?

A diary!
Val whisked it out from the trunk in trembling excitement. Warrington's diary! And it had been buried under the other books with furtive care! Why? Was it the diary of the real Warrington, or the telltale history of the impostor Warrington?

Then a gasp burst from Val and she was staring at its open pages in tormented bewilderment. They were not written in clear handwriting. They were covered with lines of closely-written curves and strokes and symbols. Shorthand! Every page of the diary was written in close shorthand!

Val's excitement rose to fever pitch. She knew no shorthand. But she did know that Warrington, if he had taken such supreme care to hide the contents of this diary, must have grave secrets in it to conceal. It was a clue at

last—perhaps a vitally important clue! She would get someone to transcribe the shorthand for her.

She thrust the diary into her pocket. She was reaching to put the skates and things back into the trunk, when suddenly—suddenly the life drained out of her limbs.

Sounds came from the staircase. Agitated voices speaking:

"You heard it, too, Miss Renshaw?"
"Yes, it woke me up! It was the bang of a window or a door, as if someone had broken in!"

Val's throat went parched. It was two of the mistresses she could hear talking! They were coming down from their rooms! They had been awakened by the slamming of that lid! Then before Val could grasp her senses together she heard a smothered cry from Miss Renshaw:

"Look! Look, Miss Jackson! There's a light in one of the studies—in one of the boys' studies!"

Val's glazed eyes went to the fanlight over the study door, and petrified, she knew that it had betrayed her! The mistresses had seen that telltale gleam. They were rushing here now to Warrington's study!

WARRINGTON'S LOSS



PANIC galvanised Val into action. In one frantic movement she grabbed Warrington's blazer from the chair and switched off the light.

She heard a startled cry from the mistresses—heard them stumble in the sudden darkness of the corridor. She flung the blazer over her head and crouched by the door with her heart panting in her throat.

One flash of a torch, one gleam of a match, would betray her—but to her frantic relief the mistresses had brought neither matches nor torch in their haste. She heard their confused cries:

"It's a burglar! He's put out the light. Now! Where—"

"This room! This is where he is!"
Val felt a cold draught as the door burst open beside her. She couldn't see those figures in the blackness. They couldn't see her. She took one spring for the open door. Her shoulder bumped against someone—she heard Miss Renshaw cry out in stifled fright. Then she was rushing away blindly along the dark corridor.

Behind her she heard the two mistresses staggering to find the switch—both of them calling now for help, rousing an alarm that would awaken others.

Val raced blindly to the end of the corridor. She turned the bend just as the light flooded on. Safe so far from recognition. The blazer covered her head. But the mistresses were following her. She could hear their steps pursuing.

Where was she? At the back of the boys' quarters. Somewhere near the back staircase, if only she could find it in the darkness.

Val flung off the blazer, threw it on to the floor, and went branching away down another labyrinth of passages. Her feet stumbled perilously against sandbags and fire-buckets. The clatter was enough to arouse anyone else who had not yet heard the alarm. But those buckets were a sure guide. They led thankfully to the staircase.

Three at a time Val dashed up those stairs. She gained the upper corridor. She made a beeline across the iron gallery to the next wing, and with her heart panting for breath she came within reach of her dormitory.

Had the other girls awakened?
Val paused and listened in an agony of suspense. But no sound came from behind the dormitory door.

She crept quaking with hope to the door. Noiselessly she opened it. Darkness met her.

Darkness, and the peaceful breathing of her dormitory-mates asleep in their beds.

Val thrilled with relief. All her panic, all her risks had been worth while. She had carried out her task safely. She had searched Warrington's study—and she had not come back empty-handed!

Softly as a mouse, she crept to her bed, lifted the mat, lifted the loose floorboard beneath it. Then she took from her pocket that cryptic diary, and softly she hid it under the floor beside the buried wrist-watch. Its shorthand notes, when transcribed, might prove even more sensational than the inscription inside the watch. Warrington was certainly no prize-winning sprinter. Would the diary prove that he was, in plain fact, an impostor, and not Jack Warrington at all?

Val undressed and slipped into bed in silent transports of excitement. She felt no vindictiveness for the many wrongs Warrington had done her; no feelings for him at all save rank distrust. But he was scheming against her dearest chum, Joan Selby! It was Joan, lying convalescent now in the school sanatorium, who would be cheated and her happiness ruined some day, unless this clever trickster was unmasked.

Val's thoughts trailed off at last and she slept.

She was awakened by the rising-bell. Still drowsy, she was kept awake by the chatter of her dormitory mates. They were talking about the sports fixture on Saturday with Abbeydale Co-ed before Val had tumbled out of bed.

"We've simply got to beat Abbeydale this time!"

"Only way to make up for our lying at the swimming!"

"That was because Val was skipper then, and got herself gated on the very day of the swim! Are you listening, Val King?" someone said pointedly.

"Sure!" murmured Val. She was putting on her shoes now, her feet resting on the mat which covered that loose floorboard and its hidden secrets. "I was just wondering," she murmured. "Wondering if you'll ever find any cause to complain of your new skipper—your faultless Jack Warrington?"

Cecily Blayne bounced round angrily from the washstand.

"You've done nothing but find fault with Jack ever since he came here, Val King!" she flared. "You're jealous of him, that's why. He's cut you out as sports skipper, and you can't forgive him for it!"

"Anyway," someone else chipped in before Val could reply, "Jack's done a lot for the Form's sports. He's even got the Head interested at last! Dr. Curtis has promised he'll come and watch our tussle with Abbeydale next week!"

"Good!" murmured Val, and still talking of the sports fixture they all went down to the Hall for prayers.

Enthusiasm rose higher when it was announced that the Head had a special address to make after prayers.

The Form nudged each other excitedly. Dr. Curtis took his place on the rostrum, joined by one or two of the senior mistresses, and they made a sign to Jack Warrington to step up beside them.

"Attention, everybody!" the Head said, and his voice now was unusually grave. "I have something very serious to tell you. Something of great personal importance to Warrington, sports captain of the Fourth Form. And something which is of deep concern to the whole school!"

Val breathed faster. A tense hush now pervaded the Hall.

"In the early hours of this morning," the Head went on gravely, "a burglar broke into the school premises!"

There was a smothered gasp from everybody. "Sounds were heard by Miss Renshaw, and by Miss Jackson," went on the Head, "which appeared to come from the Fourth Form quarters—the boy's section. Very bravely, both mistresses went downstairs at once to

investigate. They saw a light in one of the studies—in Warrington's study. But before they could burst in, the light was put out, the marauder sprang past them and succeeded in escaping through the back of the premises!"

Val breathed freely again. It had been taken for granted that the culprit was an outside intruder.

"The intruder unfortunately escaped," the Head repeated. "But it was found that Warrington's study had already been burgled, his trunks opened and ransacked, and some very valuable property stolen! What exactly—he turned to Warrington—" what exactly was the extent of your loss, Warrington?"

"Apart from six pounds in money, sir," Warrington answered steadily, "the thief has stolen a gold fountain pen, and a set of platinum cuff-links which were worth a great deal!"

Val heard the shocked gasps that went up from everybody, but she could only gape at Warrington in dumb amazement. Why had he told that lie? Why pretend that he had lost valuable property?

"It isn't the money that matters, sir," he went on with a wan smile. "But I wouldn't have lost the other things for anything in the world. The gold pen was a present. And the cuff-links, apart from their sentimental value to me, were very valuable indeed, they were real platinum."

Val watched him stupefied as the lies rolled from his lips. If he'd wanted to create a sensation, he had certainly succeeded. The whole school, from Second to Sixth Form, sat aghast. The Head looked grey with worry.

"You have the greatest sympathy of us all, Warrington," he said. "I can only promise that I will do everything in my power to trace the thief and the property he has stolen from you, and I hope that perhaps you will be able to help me."

"I hope so, sir. Thank you!" Warrington answered.

The Head turned and uttered a final word to the school.

"This is a very big shock. Nothing like it has ever happened before in Rossmere!" he said agitatedly. "We must realise that there is a thief at large in the neighbourhood, and we must take the utmost precautions. In future, everything of any value must be kept locked up. That is a strict order. All valuables, any jewellery you girls may have, must either be kept under lock and key in your studies, or else deposited in the school safe. Meanwhile, if ever the thief is traced you may be sure he will be sternly punished!"

IDEAS AND SUSPICIONS



WARRINGTON has been robbed! The news had taken the school by sensation.

The Fourth could talk of nothing else, even while they rushed to lock up their own property or deposit it in the Head's safe.

Val felt curiously interested. No lie from Warrington would have surprised her—but it was the reason for this gigantic lie which puzzled her. She heard others flocking presently to his study, and calmly she joined them.

"Shocking old Jack!" sympathised someone.

"Shocking bad luck!"

"The crook must have known you had those valuables here!"

"Has the Head reported it to the police?"

Val pressed her way into the study. She noticed, without surprise, that Warrington himself was the calmest one present, although he was wearing an air of gallant martyrdom.

"Can't bring the police into it—of course not! It would get the school a bad name!" he was saying to his sympathisers. "I suppose it's my own fault, partly, for not keeping my trunks locked up."

"Still, a burglar could easily force them open!" Cecily Blayne said.

"If he was a skilled burglar—yes," admitted Warrington. "But I don't think this fellow was very skilful, or he wouldn't have missed those marvellous stamp-albums of your brother's."

Val's face was expressionless, but she was asking herself why Warrington was taking this line. He evidently didn't want too much fuss; he was not going to risk having the police prying into things. Yet in spite of his calm he must be feeling anxious about the loss of that shorthand diary, she reflected. Did he guess that she had taken it?

Warrington's face was as expressionless as her own. He was pottering about the study, helping Denis Blayne check up his various properties.

"It ought to be easy to trace him, if it was one of the local fellows—" Cecily was beginning.

And then a slow whistle came from Warrington.

"I say, what's this?" He had been groping in the corner where the trunks stood, and now he appeared to pick something up. "Gee, here's a discovery! Somebody's button! A Rossmere button!"

Val stared, while everyone else pushed forward excitedly. Warrington was holding in his hand a brass button—a college button bearing the Rossmere badge and worn by everyone on their school blazers.

"One of our own buttons! But—but, Jack—there was a breathless chorus—"isn't it yours? Or Denis Blayne's?"

"Ah, it might be mine!" Warrington muttered. "The rascal, whoever he was, grabbed my blazer and chucked it down the passage. It's here now!" He was reaching his blazer down from a hook. "Let's see—"

Then he broke off abruptly.

"No! None of my buttons missing." "Nor mine!" Denis Blayne burst out. "Look! Here's my blazer! No buttons missing here."

A gasp went up. The implication was obvious to everybody. Val watched Warrington curiously while he put it into words.

"Well, I hate to say it," he said in a staggered voice, "but it rather looks as if—as if the intruder was one of our own people. A Rossmere chap."

The shock brought a hush upon everybody. "Jack! You—you're sure that button hasn't been lying about for ages?"

"Certain of it! Denis and I swept this study out ourselves last night, same as every night, before we turned in to bed."

"Then it was dropped here after you turned in."

"And it means"—the words trembled on every lip—"it means there's a thief in the school!"

Val watched Warrington searchingly from the side of her eye. He had lied again in pretending to find that button. There had been no button on the floor last night when she moved those trunks.

Cecily Blayne was the first to speak now. Her excited eyes were popping all over the study, and they rested on Warrington's small typewriter. The sheet of paper that lay beside it was crumpled and torn, as if someone had

made an angry snatch at it. She held out the two pieces.

"Well, that's funny!" she burst out. "It must have been somebody who's got a spite against you, Jack. And just look at these pieces of paper from your typewriter! Torn in two! Deliberately torn where you've typed your name!"

Val's gaze and every gaze went to the two pieces of paper. And sure enough the paper had been torn at the words: "Jack Warrington, sports captain."

"Well!" Cecily said, tight-lipped. "Well, I'm not hinting anything against anybody, but I do know one person in Rossmere who's got a spite against Jack and hates him being sports captain."

And her eyes darted narrowly at Val. Val gazed back at her witheringly, and even Cecily coloured up shamefacedly and looked as if she wished she hadn't spoken.

"When I want to tear up Jack Warrington's bits of typing, Cecily," Val told her distinctly, "I'll call you so that you can come and watch me doing it."

Warrington was the first to smooth up that little unpleasantness.

"Cecily didn't mean any dig at you, Val—it was just a thoughtless remark," he said hastily.

But now Denis Blayne remembered something.

"Anyway, Val," he blurted out, "now I come to think of it, you did wander into this study when it was empty yesterday evening, and you can't say you didn't. I found you in here when I came up from the sports ground."

"Quite true. I was waiting to speak to Jack, as I told you," nodded Val. "What of it?"

"No-nothing," blundered Denis. But his remarks had only made him look foolish, and added to everybody else's discomfort. It shocked them all to think that somewhere in the school—perhaps in the Form—there was a thief, and that the wildest suspicions were bound to run riot.

An impressive step sounded in the corridor. Val recognised the Head's voice speaking to Miss Renshaw.

"I say, you people," Warrington said in a worried tone. "Here's the Head coming. We've got to drop these silly hints—it's embarrassing for everybody. We've got to do something. I'm wondering"—he paused awkwardly—"I hate to suggest it, but I'm wondering if it wouldn't be the fairest way for everyone to submit to a search."

Val inwardly gasped. She couldn't believe that even Warrington's audacity would reach to this length.

But now Cecily Blayne was speaking up earnestly for everybody.

"We're all in favour, Jack. It's only fair. It's the only way to catch the thief—it's the only way to recover your gold pen and your beautiful cuff-links. We'll ask the Head himself to conduct the search."

The door opened before she had finished speaking, and Val realised that Warrington fully meant to go through with this audacious and mocking search. He was committed to it now. In walked the Head.

What new game is Warrington playing? You'll find plenty of surprises in next Friday's engrossing chapters of this serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.



HER SECRET ROLE in FRANCE

By
JOAN MAITLAND

The story of an English girl's brave efforts to aid her friends in Nazi-occupied France, and of their daring to help her to get home safely to her own country.

Don't miss this extra-long complete story in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

The Merry-makers in Arizona



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

PRINCE JINNIWA UNDER SUSPICION

"FAY, you look sweet!" Sally Warner's dancing blue eyes gazed admiringly at her pretty, fair-haired friend. "Don, you look magnificent!"

"Sally, you look too breath-taking for words," chuckled Don Weston. "But where's old Johnny? It's not like him to be out of the picture when the bouquets are being handed around."

"Last time I saw him," smiled Fay Manners. "he was having a spot of trouble with his turban."

"It looked rather like an inverted bird's-nest," laughed Sally. "But let's find the old chump and see if we can help him. We don't want to be late."

"Rather not," affirmed Fay and Don vigorously.

Certainly they did not want to miss a moment of the wonderful fancy-dress ball which was being given by Maureen Hiller, a wealthy young woman who was greatly interested in the Merry-makers' Club. But even more exciting than that was the thought of meeting Prince Jinniwa, head of the province of Majal in India, in whose honour the ball was being given. And Johnny, with some vague idea of paying a compliment to the Eastern visitor, had decided to wear Indian costume himself.

They found Johnny in the study. From the neck downward he looked every inch a prince, for the club possessed a very fine collection of Indian clothes, and Johnny had quite naturally taken the best, but his darkened face was harassed-looking, his hair stuck up spikily over his head, and his turban, looking rather like a piece of chewed string, lay forlornly on the carpet.

"I say," he burst out as the chums entered. "there's something dashed funny here—"

"You're telling us," grinned Sally. "We can see you."

"I don't mean me," replied Johnny witheringly. "It's about the prince. I was looking in this book to find out how to put that turban on my head, and I found a chapter all about

Majal. And it says"—he lowered his voice furtively—"that because of something to do with his beliefs the prince always wears a white turban like the one in our collection." He paused triumphantly, then glared as Don answered with an indifferent:

"So what?"

"I caught a glimpse of the prince at his hotel this afternoon, and he was wearing a blue turban, that's what," replied Johnny coldly. "It seems fishy to me, especially as Maureen is handing over to him those valuable papers of hers, all about her holding in Majal. I think—"

"Save it," said Sally firmly. "We're late. Now sit down, and I'll fix your turban."

She seized the headgear in question, and placed it firmly on Johnny's head, thrust into the front of it an enormous "diamond," then grabbed Johnny's arm and hustled him out of the room.

The four of them clambered into the waiting car, and in a few moments were whizzing towards Dixon. They reached the house almost opposite their own club-room in record time, to find a radiantly pretty, very excited Maureen waiting to receive them.

"You all look grand," she enthused, surveying them admiringly. "Johnny, you might be the prince himself. He's arrived," she whispered in a thrilled voice. "Oh, he's just too grand for words! I'm handing him the papers at ten o'clock to-night in the conservatory—he didn't want anyone to know about it, you see. I think it's marvellous of him to help me like this—I've had quite a bit of trouble with my Indian property lately, and that's where most of my money comes from. But with someone on the spot—and the head of the province at that—everything will be all right again."

She interrupted her flow of words to Sally & Co. to greet another guest, while Sally stood by smiling a little puzzledly. The prince certainly seemed to be making a great mystery of the mission he was carrying out for Maureen, but doubtless he had his own good reasons for doing so. Then she forgot about the papers as Maureen took her arm.

"Come along," she smiled. "I'll introduce you to him—and you, Fay. The boys can wait till later."

And laughing gaily she swung the two girls forward towards the huge, brilliantly lit ball-room where, seated in a huge gilt chair placed before an exotic array of plants and flowers, sat a dignified, rather awe-inspiring figure. In his blue turban a magnificent diamond glittered and scintillated as it caught the light from the massive chandeliers; and he wore a white coat intricately embroidered with gold and silver thread.

"Silly old Johnny," thought Sally to herself, as she rather shyly approached the handsome figure, "even to imagine for one moment that there could be any suggestion of fineness about such a princely looking man."

She dropped a curtsy, then raised her eyes as the prince acknowledged the introduction with a few charming words of welcome in perfect English. Then, forgetting her momentary awe, she stared, frowning a little.

"But—but I thought—" she began.
"You thought what?" asked Prince Jinniwa, then smiled as Sally flushed a little. "Ah, you do not wish to tell me what you thought? Then perhaps you would do me the honour of dancing with me later?"

Sally murmured a confused acceptance, then as some more people came forward, grabbed Fay's hand and backed away.

"It's extraordinary—" she began.
"He's wonderful," murmured Fay dreamily. "Magnificent!"

"That isn't what I meant," replied Sally briefly. "Now where's Don and Johnny?"
"Right here, lady," answered Don cheerfully. "Anything wrong?"

"Plenty!" Sally's tone was worried. She looked quickly round, drew her three chums into a sheltered alcove in the big hall. "Johnny, I believe you're right. There is something funny about the prince. No, wait a moment," she added, as Fay opened her mouth to voice an indignant protest. "You remember that book Johnny was looking at—where he read that the Prince of Majal always wore a white turban? Well, I glanced at it, too. There were pictures of several of the royal family, and on all their foreheads were crescent-shaped caste marks." She paused, then went on impressively: "The man in there has a star-shaped caste mark. Therefore he can't possibly belong to the ruling house of Majal."

There was a stunned silence as she finished, while Don, Fay, and Johnny glanced at each other in dismay.

"But, Sally," blurted Don at length, "that means that if he really is an impostor and Maureen hands him those papers—she's going to lose a tremendous amount of money."

"Exactly," replied Sally crisply. "But Maureen will never hear anything against the prince unless we can get some proof—" She thought for a moment, then her eyes blazed. "I know," she cried. "Don, you and Johnny go along to the library. Maureen's got heaps of books about India—naturally, as she has so many interests in the country. Try to find one that tells you all about Majal—we'll have proof then. Meanwhile, Fay and I will see Maureen, try to drop a few hints about what we've discovered. Even if she doesn't believe us she might delay handing him the papers until we can make sure."

"Great idea," Sally!" enthused Johnny. "Come on, Don!"

And in a very un-prince-like way he sped off down the hall. While Sally and Fay, spotting Maureen momentarily alone by the entrance doors, hurried towards her. She smiled as she saw her chums.

"Hallo!" she beamed. "Still feeling thrilled about having met the prince? And Sally, you lucky thing, he even asked you to dance with him. I've heard he's a wonderful dancer. He's wonderful altogether," she babbled on enthusiastically. "When I think of the way he's helping me—"

"Maureen!" Sally's voice broke firmly into this flow of hero-worship. "You—you are sure,

aren't you, that this man really is Prince Jinniwa?"

For a moment Maureen stared at Sally, her eyes widening wonderingly.

"Why, Sally, you silly old thing," she chuckled, "of course he's Prince Jinniwa! Who else could he possibly be?"

"I don't know" replied Sally, her face serious. "But I feel there's something just a bit strange about the prince. After all, those papers of yours are terribly valuable, aren't they, and—"

"Sally!" Maureen's usually soft voice was suddenly hard, brittle. "If this is your idea of a joke, then—"

"But it isn't a joke," replied Sally pleadingly. "Then it's worse than I thought!" snapped Maureen. "I will not listen to such things about the prince. It's horrible! He goes out of his way to help me, a complete stranger, and then I have to listen to you doubting him. I will not listen to what you say. I—"

She broke off, starting violently as a sudden commotion broke out from a room along the hall. With a glance at the two girls she darted off, Sally and Fay on her heels. She reached the door of the library, swung it open, then stood stock-still on the threshold, her face paling.

And then Sally gave a little groan. For in the room stood Don, Johnny, and Prince Jinniwa, their faces angry, plainly disturbed in the middle of a tussle over a book which was clutched at the moment both by Johnny and the prince. As Johnny saw Maureen's angry face he relaxed his hold of the book, and the prince promptly tucked it under his arm. Then advancing towards Maureen, he gave a stiff little bow.

"I have been insulted," he said thickly, darting a dagger-like glare at the two boys. "Grossly insulted by these two boys. I thought I came to this house as an honoured guest. Apparently I was mistaken. I think it would be better if I took my leave at once."

"No, please!" Maureen sprang forward, her face white with distress. "You can't do that—you mustn't, Prince Jinniwa. Oh, please don't go!" She gazed at him distractedly, failing to notice as Sally did the crafty gleam that momentarily crept into the prince's dark eyes.

"Let him go, Maureen," broke in Johnny, hotly. "He's lying to you. We didn't insult him at all. He found us looking in that book, and he was scared—"

"Johnny!" Maureen's tone was vibrant with anger. "Stop it—stop it, I tell you. You don't know what you're saying. Please," she added, turning to the Indian, "pay no attention to what they're saying."

The prince shrugged.
"I can hardly overlook what they have said," he replied frigidly. "I cannot be expected to remain in this house whilst those boys are fellow-guests. If you want me to remain, then they must go."

His face flaming, Don stepped forward to protest. But Maureen, rather white but very firm, forestalled him.

"I think," she said icily, "that is the best thing that can happen. Don, Johnny, I'm sorry, but you have brought this on yourselves by your foolish behaviour. Please go at once. I don't wish to see you again."

THE IMPOSTOR IMPERSONATED



A DEAD silence followed Maureen's words. Incredulously Don and Johnny gazed at their hostess. Fay gave a little exclamation. But Sally, who realised just what Maureen was thinking, who knew how desperately anxious she was not to upset the prince in any way because of her fear that he would refuse the help he had offered, sighed sympathetically. They had all blundered, it seemed. They had precipitated things too much. Also this man, whoever he was, had proved to be cleverer than they

realised. He knew the boys were suspicious of him. Therefore the boys must go before they managed to instill any doubts into Maureen's mind.

It was Johnny who broke the silence. His darkened face was bitter with disappointment as he glared at the prince, from him to Maureen.

"Maureen," he began hotly, "it jolly well isn't fair. Why—"

He broke off, scowling a little as he glimpsed Sally in the doorway frantically shaking her head, pointing towards the exit.

"What the dickens—" he began irritably. But Don, who had also seen this pantomime, and had realised that Sally, for reasons of her own, was trying to tell them to go without further argument, grabbed his arm.

"Come on, old man," he said firmly, and without another glance at Maureen and the prince, led his protesting chum out into the garden. As they disappeared the prince's face cleared. A charming smile lit his face.

"My dear ladies," he murmured, glancing apologetically at Maureen, and from her to Sally and Fay, "how can I express my sorrow for this unfortunate scene? Those foolish boys—" He shook his head, sighed, then offered his arm to Maureen. "But come, let us return to the ball-room." And with a bow to Sally and Fay he quitted the room, Maureen with him.

"Good!" said Sally, as the two disappeared from sight. "And even more good that he doesn't connect us with Don and Johnny. That helps a lot. Come on, Fay, let's find them."

She hurried into the garden as she spoke, Fay on her heels. The two boys were waiting outside, obviously expecting Sally and Fay.

"Sally, you were right about that caste mark," Don said in a thrilled voice. "It should be crescent-shaped. We were just coming out of the door with the book to show it to Maureen when that rotter came along. I suppose we were talking a bit too loudly, and he twigged what was happening."

"And he ripped the page out of the book, so there's no hope of showing him up now," put in Johnny morosely. "Oh, blow! What are we going to do now? A perfectly ripping evening spoiled all because we wanted to help Maureen. Dashed if she deserves help, anyway," he added grumpily.

"Now, Johnny, you know you don't want to see Maureen swindled out of her money," said Sally reprovingly. "Anyway, we haven't lost the chance of helping her yet—"

"Oh, no?" Johnny's tone was sarcastic. "When it's nearly ten o'clock, and she's handing the papers over then. You know she won't listen to what any of us says about the prince now—"

"She won't have to," replied Sally quietly. "I've got a better idea than that. Listen!"

She looked round quickly, then seeing no one in sight, whispered quickly to her chums. There was a murmur of approval, a smirk of gratification from Johnny. Then with a last whispered instruction Sally flitted back into the house.

Her eyes lit up as she saw the prince just emerging from the ball-room. With heart hammering loudly, but with a sweet smile on her face, she advanced towards him, gazed archly up into his eyes.

"I am so sorry," she murmured gushingly. "I almost forgot this was our dance." And taking the prince's arm she swung him firmly round and turned him back towards the ball-room. So taken by surprise was Prince Jinniwa that he was among the dancers again before he fully realised it.

"You dance so marvellously," Sally said softly. "It's like floating in a dream. I shall remember this moment all my life."

The prince preened himself, gazed with fresh interest into Sally's pretty, upturned face.

"It is very gracious of you to say such things," he replied. "Perhaps I may have the honour of another dance later. Just now I—" He glanced anxiously towards the

clock, but before he could glimpse it Sally swung round rather sharply.

"Oh, how very clumsy of me!" she cried in pretended distress. "And look—I have made you lose the flower you were wearing." She managed to make her lips quiver a little as she glanced up at the prince, then gave a tremulously appealing smile. "But let me take you into the garden and pick you another—please do, then I shall know that you are not angry with me."

Even Prince Jinniwa, much as he wanted to keep his appointment, was not proof against this pleading. With a murmur about sparing just a moment, he allowed Sally to lead him into the garden.

"And while I am finding a flower, please tell me about Majal," pleaded Sally softly. "It must be a wonderful place."

She prattled on, cleverly steering the prince farther and farther away from the house, and nearer and nearer to a large summer-house which stood in the centre of the huge garden.

"Ah!" she cried, spotting a bush of fragrant white roses by the side of the building. "Just what I was looking for. Please—"

Interrupting her words the loud chimes of a clock suddenly boomed out. Prince Jinniwa gave an exclamation.

"Ten o'clock!" he cried. "I must go at once—"

"But not without your buttonhole," answered Sally, concealing her anxiety under a note of gaiety. "It will only take a moment—quick!"

And clutching his sleeve, she urged him the last few steps towards the summer-house. With some of his charm rapidly deserting him, the prince stood impatiently waiting. Then as the last strokes of the hour of ten died away he turned on his heel.

"I must go!" he cried sharply. "I cannot wait any longer!"

"You don't have to!" came a new voice, and from behind the summer-house hurtled two boyish figures. With firm hands they grasped the arms of the surprised Indian, and before he could raise even a shout had begun to rush him backwards into the summer-house. A little cry from Sally made them pause.

"Don the ribbon—that order he's wearing over his shoulder—"

She didn't finish the sentence, but Don knew what she meant.

"Gosh, yes, we must have that," he muttered. "otherwise we'll never fool Maureen! Johnny, hang on to the rotter while I get it!"

"No—no, you shall not!" gritted the man, struggling violently to get away from Johnny and to ward Don off at the same time. "Leave me alone!"

He lunged forward, taking Johnny by surprise. Next moment he would have been free, but leaping forward Don grabbed hold of his coat, held on with all his strength. There was a ripping noise as some of the buttons gave way, a short, sharp tussle as Johnny once more leapt into the fray. Next moment Don had triumphantly grabbed the ribbon, and with a last smothered shout the Indian was thrust into the summer-house, the door securely locked.

"Phew!" puffed Don, running a hand over his ruffled hair. "Thought he was going to get away. Here you are, Johnny, drape this thing around you. Say," he added, stooping down, "what's this?"

He gazed rather puzzledly at the small notebook he had picked up from the ground. But Sally was in too great a frenzy of impatience to bother about what Don had found.

"Probably something one of you dropped while you were struggling," she muttered feverishly. "There you are, Johnny. Now come on, quickly!"

"But where are you going?" asked Don in surprise.

"I'm going to hide in the conservatory," replied Sally briefly, "just to make sure that everything goes off all right. Johnny—quick!"

And with Johnny at her heels she fled through the moonlit garden. But nearing the

conservatory she slowed down, crept cautiously forward, and peered furtively into the dimly lit apartment. Then her heart gave a leap of triumph. Maureen had not yet arrived.

With one last warning look at Johnny she crept in, concealed herself behind one of the spreading ornamental trees. Then, heart beating wildly, she watched as Johnny made a more dignified entrance, saw him step into the shadows on the other side of the door. In an agony of suspense she waited, wondering frantically whether Maureen would be deceived by the trick that was being played upon her, wondering whether she would hand the vital papers over to Johnny, thinking he was Prince Jinniwa.

It was a daring ruse of Sally's, but as she stood alternating between triumph and despair there was a quick, light step from the doorway leading into the house. Maureen it was, and as she saw Johnny standing in the shadows she took a step forward.

"Prince Jinniwa," she began rather hesitantly, "it is you, isn't it?" Sally held her breath with suspense, glanced agonisedly towards Johnny. This was the most critical moment of the whole plan. Johnny might deceive Maureen by his appearance, but could he possibly disguise his voice?

"Hush, please!" Johnny spoke in a sharp whisper. "I do not wish anyone to know what is happening. Yes, it is I. You have the papers?"

He held out his hand as he asked the question, and with a little laugh Maureen hurried towards him.

"Yes, here they are," she replied, and thrust into Johnny's waiting hand the precious papers.

Such a feeling of relief swept over Sally then that she literally trembled. It had worked—their plan had succeeded, and now they could keep the papers safely somewhere until they could find out what had happened to the real Prince Jinniwa. Everything was all right—perfect!

But next moment Sally descended from her dizzy pinnacle of triumph with a sickening crash. For Maureen, having stood by while Johnny began to tuck away the papers inside his coat, smilingly laid her hand on his sleeve.

"And now, prince," she said gaily, "I should like to dance with you—very, very much. I know you won't refuse me. Please come!"

And gently but insistently she began to draw the disguised Johnny towards the brilliantly lit ball-room. Johnny, his eyes staring glassily in his darkened face, gave a little gasp of dismay, stood as one petrified.

For as Johnny knew only too well, he might be able to deceive Maureen in the shadowy conservatory, but once he entered the gaily illuminated ball-room he would be recognised immediately; the hoax which seemed to have succeeded so splendidly would be completely exposed!

THE PLOTTER OUTWITTED



AS surely as if he had told her, Sally knew just how Johnny was feeling in that dismaying moment.

Face blank with dismay he gazed huntedly round, as if seeking inspiration from his hidden girl chum. While Sally, almost groaning aloud at this unforeseen stroke of bad luck, frantically racked her brains for some way of escape for Johnny from the certain disaster that threatened him.

But Maureen, her mission completed, was in no mood to wait. The band was playing, she wanted to dance. Most particularly she wanted to dance with this handsome prince. With a hint of impatience in her smile she walked towards the door leading to the ball-room, turned with the merest suspicion of a frown to see if Johnny was following.

Sally thought desperately how she could

save Johnny from exposure. But before she could put any of her ideas into practice there came the sound of angry shouting outside in the garden—and at the sound of that shouting voice such a wave of alarm shot through Sally that all her previous fears seemed to be things of no account. For without doubt it was the voice of the man who called himself Prince Jinniwa, the Indian who had been imprisoned in the summer-house.

With a little cry Maureen swung round, stared with widened eyes towards the garden door of the conservatory as in staggered a dramatic if rather dishevelled figure. As Maureen leapt to his side he gave a shout of rage, pointed a quivering forefinger at the cringing Johnny.

"That boy—" he choked. "That—that young ruffian! He assaulted me. He helped to imprison me in the summer-house, he and that friend of his, after that girl persuaded me to walk in the garden with her. They fought me, they robbed me of my order—look, he is wearing it now."

He stepped violently forward. With a little yelp Johnny backed away, instinctively concealing the papers which he still held behind his back.

It was Sally's chance. Icy cool now that the real testing time had come, she reached forward, snatched the papers from Johnny's nerveless grasp. Then like a shadow she fitted along behind the trees and shrubs, hesitated for a brief space by the ball-room doors, then with a desperate leap plunged through them, ran heading into the gaily whirling crowd of dancers.

But even as she was congratulating herself that she had got away without being seen, she heard a shout behind her in the prince's voice.

"The papers—this boy hasn't got them!"

"And then Maureen's cry: "It was Sally—I saw her. She must have been hiding in here all the time. Catch her somebody—quickly!"

Like a flash of lightning Sally darted up the wide staircase ahead of her, emerged on to a spacious landing. For a moment she hesitated, then plunged ahead again as the sound of excited voices, of thudding footsteps drew ominously near. A large gilt basket containing a flowering plant stood against the wall on one side of the landing. Without pausing in her flight Sally's hand flashed out, she gave a little smile as the precious papers fell with a little rustle into the bottom of the basket. Then on she pelted. If she went warily she ought to be able to elude her pursuers for the time being, anyway, and collect and re-hide the papers then.

But eluding her pursuers was no easy task, as Sally very soon found, and the prince was the most relentless of them all. After a few minutes Sally dived into a cupboard that stood in a dark corner, and stood there panting for breath until the sounds of her pursuers died away. For nearly half an hour she stayed there till at last she thought it safe to come out. She crept along the corridor, and round the corner—straight into the arms of the prince, who, with the crowd, was returning for a thorough search of all the rooms.

"Where are those papers?" grated the prince, his dark eyes boring threateningly into Sally's.

"Tell me, at once!" "I will not!" Sally's voice was coldly contemptuous. "You're an impostor, I know you are, even if Maureen won't believe it—"

"Sally!" Maureen almost choked with rage. "I can only think you have taken leave of your senses, you and your precious friends. But I will not allow you to insult Prince Jinniwa in this fashion. Also, I insist that you return my papers immediately. Where are they?"

"But, Maureen, you don't understand," pleaded Sally. "If I tell you where they are you'll give them to this schemer—"

"I shall give them to Prince Jinniwa," replied Maureen icily.

"Then I won't tell you," replied Sally stub-

(Continued on page 437.)



RIVALS for the WITCH'S HOARD

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

VICKY WORKS THINGS OUT

VICKY KINGSWOOD and a cheery band of girl and boy chums were spending a wonderful winter holiday at Colonel Roberts' lovely home.

They were thrilled when they found a clue which led them to believe they were on the track of a treasure known as the Witch's Hoard. But someone else was also after it—someone who dressed up as the witch. One of the boys, Kennedy Vane, whom the chums all liked, in spite of his odd ways, said his uncle was the well-known detective, Humphrey Spence, and that during his absence abroad he himself was out to catch the witch, who was actually a notorious crook known as Ghostfingers.

The chums had some really frightening experiences from the witch, but the Colonel said it was Kennedy who was playing a silly joke, and when the witch's costume was found in his room he sent him away from the manor.

Kennedy did not go far—only to the old witch's cottage, where he found clues which definitely suggested that Ghostfingers was a woman. The chums suspected Amanda Shorter, the colonel's secretary, and Kennedy gave Vicky a copy of Ghostfingers' finger-print, telling her to try to get one of Amanda's and compare them, to see if Amanda really was the witch and Ghostfingers. Vicky was on her way back to the manor when she received a shock. In the snowbound darkness in front of her the witch herself appeared.

A QUICK breath left Vicky Kingswood's lips as she recognised the figure whom she knew now for Ghostfingers, the clever crook, advancing towards her. Just for an instant she was scared as she looked around into the darkness of the lonely, snowbound hillside and realised that whatever was going to happen she had to face alone.

Then she braced herself, "Aha!" the old croone sneered, still advancing. "Well met, meddler! What now, Vicky Kingswood?"

Vicky faced her. The knowledge that no help was at hand filled her with a desperate sort of courage.

"Well, what?" she challenged.

"For a long while I have wanted to talk with ye, meddling Vicky," the witch challenged. "For a long time ye have annoyed me, but I have dealt lightly, seeing that it was but curiosity. But now, Vicky Kingswood"—and her voice suddenly took on a quavering rasp—"I am at the end of my patience!"

"Which means?" Vicky asked.

"Which means, Vicky Kingswood, that if ye persist in your interference the witch shall strike—ay, and when the blow falls, then surely ye shall regret the day when ye crossed my path! Cease meddling, I say. Give up this quest on which ye have embarked with the pestering Kennedy Vane, and leave Mother Kilburn to herself."

"And what if I refuse?" Vicky answered.

"Then"—the voice became a snarl—"ye shall regret it. Ye know not, Vicky Kingswood, against whom ye pit those wits of yours."

Vicky drew a deep breath. She had forgotten her fear suddenly. Those words, coming like a challenge to her ears, made her think suddenly of the clue in her bag which, in the course of the next few hours, might unmask the woman who now threatened her.

"Perhaps I do know," she said coolly. "Perhaps, Mother Kilburn, it won't be long before I'm able to expose you."

The witch gave a harsh, high-pitched cackle.

"Brave words, child, even though they be against myself. But forget them, for the finger-print the Vane boy gave you shall never help you. Aha, ye look surprised!" she cackled, as Vicky started. "But I know about that, as I know about all things that concern me. And I tell ye, Vicky Kingswood—"

What happened then happened so swiftly that Vicky was taken quite unawares. In a twinkling the witch's stick, concealed beneath her clothes, flashed out. With a thud it knocked against Vicky's handbag, whisking it from her grasp. And in a moment the witch had dived upon it, scooped it up, and, with a shrill, triumphant cackle, booted down the hillside towards the road.

"You—you— Give me that!" Vicky yelled after her.

But the witch was gone—swallowed up in the gloom. With a shout, Vicky darted after her, her only thought now of the precious finger-print in that bag. Recklessly she plunged forward, but at the same moment a

hole, unseen in the darkness, brought her to her knees and sent her sprawling in the snow. "Oh!" Vicky gasped dazedly.

She lay for a few moments, every bone in her body shaken. Then, with a groan, she levered her leg out of the hole, plunged again in pursuit, only to bring herself up with a sharp yelp as an agonising pain shot through her knee. She could have wept as she shouted into the darkness:

"Come back!"

No sound answered her, not even the faint crunch of a step.

Vicky groaned. It served her right, she told herself, for being so confident, not to have been on her guard against some act of treachery. Now the finger-print was gone. Now—Oh golly! What was she to say to Ken when she saw him again?

But painful fire was burning in her kneecap, and Vicky knew, unless it had immediate attention, she would develop a bad sprain. Hastily she peeled down her stocking, took up a handful of snow from the ground, and massaged the injured joint. Three times she repeated the action until at last the fire subsided, and a cautious jerking of her knee told her she could move it without further risk, though it still felt stiff and sore. And then near by she heard the crunch of a footstep.

"Who's there?" she called sharply.

She turned as she pulled up her stocking, half-expecting that the voice of the witch would answer her. But she jumped as the reply came:

"Gad, is that you, Vicky?"

"The colonel!" Vicky gasped.

"Yes, it's me all right!" Colonel Roberts growled. "But I wish it wasn't. What's going on here? Didn't I hear someone shouting?"

"That—that was me," Vicky said.

"You? But what—Hey, what are you doing here?" he questioned suspiciously.

"I—I came out," Vicky answered truthfully. "I—I was rather keen to do ski-ing—by night. As you know, we're all practising hard for the carnival. Then—then one of my skis broke, and—"

"Humph!" the colonel grunted.

"And—and so I had to walk back, leaving the skis down there until to-morrow." And Vicky nodded vaguely in the direction of the road. "Then, walking back, I met the witch—"

The colonel jumped.

"The witch!"

"She—she threatened me," Vicky said. "Then she stole my handbag and ran away. That—that is why I started shouting."

"Where is she now?" the colonel demanded, looking round furiously.

"She got away," Vicky smiled ruefully. "I chased her, but I fell into a hole. Oh dear!" she added, and, feeling a twinge in her knee, rubbed it again. "But—but you, colonel, what are you doing here?"

"Not enjoying myself," the colonel said dryly. "The dashed motor-sled developed some sort of engine trouble, and, after blowing up like Vesuvius half a dozen times, died out along the road. I've sent Miss Shorter along to the garage at Lanesend, with instructions to tow the wretched thing and give it a look-over. But this witch." He stared at her. "Sure it wasn't Kennedy Vane?" he added.

"Oh, colonel, no! It was a woman all right. But—er—haven't you been to see Kennedy about that badge?" she asked innocently.

"Yes, I've seen him all right," the colonel shrugged—"ten minutes ago. And, as usual, the young bouncer proved his case. But, Vicky, what about these threats? Why did the witch threaten you?"

Vicky thought swiftly. Why shouldn't she tell the colonel part of what she and her chums were up to? If he knew more of the facts he might be less ready to blame Ken and more willing to help them.

"She threatened me because she knows we are on the track of the Witch's Hoard," she said.

"Hoard—hoard? Gad, girl, what are you talking about? But come on! Can you walk? Yes? Good! Better get along to the manor," he added briskly. "Miss Shorter will go with the sled and will join us later. Now, Vicky, what is this rubbish about the hoard? What hoard?"

And as they walked Vicky told him, now and again wincing as her knee caused her a fresh twinge. But it was not hurting violently. To-morrow, she thought, it would be quite normal again. Frequently the colonel interrupted her during her recital, but it was obvious, as she progressed, that he was becoming more and more impressed.

"Gad, but this is news!" he said, when at last she had finished. "Though, of course, I've heard something about the hoard—who hasn't hereabouts? And you say, Vicky—you tell me truthfully—that this second clue of yours is to be found in Henderson's house?"

"So we believe," Vicky replied. "It's hidden somewhere in the armoury of the west turret."

"Does Henderson know?"

"No," Vicky replied.

"Then he shall," the colonel vowed. "If hoards are hidden in a man's house—why, dash it, the man's got the right to know! I'm seeing Henderson to-morrow afternoon in connection with the carnival. I'll tell him then. And, meantime"—his voice dropped to a growl—"just let me catch that witch—"

In the darkness Vicky smiled a little. She felt she had done a good stroke of work in letting the colonel so far into her confidence. Definitely, he was interested in the hoard now. If, as he promised, he told Malcolm Henderson about it, Henderson also would be interested, thereby making the next stage of the investigation easier. But they had reached the manor now, and, with the colonel alternating between threats and exclamations, they passed into the hall.

"Has Miss Shorter come back?" the colonel asked his butler.

"No, sir."

He growled again and nodded to Vicky, and then walked away to his own quarters. But Vicky, hanging up her coat, was thoughtful suddenly. Was it again a coincidence that Amanda Shorter had been absent at the time of the witch's appearance?

She didn't think so. With quick excitement gripping her, she was already working things out from Amanda's point of view. It would be easy enough, of course, for the secretary to have arranged the breakdown of the motor-sled; easy enough for her to absent herself from the colonel on the pretext that she was going to the garage to get the breakdown gang. But what had really happened?

Vicky felt she knew. Amanda, full of suspicion, had used that ruse to go back to the cottage. No wonder now that Ken thought he had heard a sound outside the door—that, of course, must have been made by Amanda herself. And Amanda, listening, had found out that Ken had given her the finger-print. Then, afraid that the print might be put to use, she had disguised herself as the witch again. Oh, yes, it all fitted in very nicely, and that meant, quite definitely, that Amanda had the print.

"Providing, of course, all my reasoning is on the right lines," Vicky told herself. "And certainly there's been nothing to contradict it so far. Amanda has fitted into every single suspicion we've ever had."

But what was she to do in order to carry out Ken's instructions now that Ghostfingers' finger-print was lost to her?

There was only one thing, and Vicky determined to put the resolution into practice as soon as possible.

Kennedy, of course, was almost bound to have another print, or, at least, a copy of the one he had given her. Right! She would somehow obtain Amanda's real finger-print and take it to Kennedy for comparison.

MORE THAN A PICNIC



CHEERED by that thought, Vicky sped up to her room to change for dinner—a meal now very nearly due. On her way, intent on trying out her idea, she tried the door of Amanda's room; but, as she had expected, found it locked.

"Never mind. Another time," she told herself.

In her own room she washed and changed, then gaily she trotted downstairs again. There, at once, she was pounced upon by her chums and whirled into the billiards-room, where she had to recount the whole of her adventure. There were long faces when she described the losing of the finger-print.

"Gosh, though! Pretty lucky for you, Vicky, that you got away without getting hurt," Dick said. "But what's the idea now?" he added.

"That depends on circumstances—and events," Vicky said mysteriously. "I'll tell you when the time's ripe. Whoops, the gong!" she added, as the expected summons rang out in the hall. "Wonder if Amanda's back yet?"

Amanda wasn't. She did not, in fact, turn up until the meal was well over. Then, tired and cross, she retired immediately into the colonel's study, and the only evidence of her presence they had for the rest of the evening was the monotonous clatter of her typewriter.

Not that Vicky worried now. She had her plan of campaign mapped out. And that evening, instead of joining her chums in the games-room at table tennis, she spent in the library, quietly reading up an article in the encyclopedia on finger-prints.

She went to bed that night feeling that she knew almost as much about the subject as Kennedy himself. In the morning she was up bright and early, had breakfast with her chums, and then, after being mysteriously busy in the kitchen for half an hour, as Amanda came into the hall, made the suggestion she had purposely kept back until the secretary appeared.

"Carnival practice this morning," she said brightly, "and I've an idea." She noticed, with inward joy, that Amanda was listening. "The idea," Vicky resumed, "is a snowshoe race. We've got two snowshoe events in the carnival and we're competing in both of them. So supposing we go by snowshoe out to Marshcrag Castle?"

"Oh dear! Not—not to explore again?" Dawn faltered.

"No, just for practice," Vicky said, and felt inwardly elated at the increasing interest Amanda was showing in the conversation. "But, of course, we're going to handicap the boys by making them take turns in carrying the picnic-case. It's fixed up with hot chocolate and sandwiches; it'll be fun to have a hot drink and a snack when we reach journey's end. Miss Shorter, I suppose you're not coming?" she added, with just that right touch of apprehension which she guessed would make the secretary decide at once.

"You're not meeting that boy, Kennedy by any chance?" Amanda asked suspiciously.

"Oh, Miss Shorter!" Vicky frowned. "I think I had better come," Amanda decided grimly, to Vicky's delight and the other chums' dismay. "We'll go now," she added, taking charge of the party.

Soon, in the crisp, hard snow which lay unbroken on the ground outside, they started off. Vicky, with her carefully prepared picnic-case handed over to the boys, superintended the donning of the awkward shoes; then, with Amanda at the end of the row, lined them up and gave the "Off." And at once the merry race was in progress.

It was not a fast race. Snowshoes do not make for speed. There were plenty of falls and tumbles in the swift slither and slide down the mountainside, with a breathless last-minute spurt by all as soon as the sombre,

snow-clad ruins of Marshcrag came into view. Betty this time was the winner.

"Lovely race!" Vicky laughed. "Golly, do we need a brace? Hope you haven't shaken that chococate all over the case, Dick! Who says a cup?"

"Who doesn't!" Dick grinned. "Miss Shorter, will you have some?"

"Thank you," Miss Shorter said.

They stood in the tumbled ruins of the courtyard, while Vicky, waving aside offers of assistance, carefully attended the distribution of the snack. The cups and saucers were of the coloured plastic type; the drinking chocolate was steaming hot, and the sandwiches, everybody voted, were just Al. Vicky poured out Amanda's first. Politely she handed her the cup and saucer, which Amanda condescendingly took.

"Right!" Vicky said. "Now here's to the race back! Bet we beat you again, boys!"

"What, with the picnic-case empty?" Dick grinned. "Not on your life, sweet maid!"

And they didn't, for it was Dick himself who won this time—Dick, who so far forgot himself in the excitement of the race that he carried the case the whole distance. But when they had arrived in the hall, and Amanda had taken her departure, Vicky took the case from him.

"Thanks," she said. "I'll take charge of this now. Meet me in the library after lunch. I've an idea I shall have something interesting to tell you."

Bursting with curiosity, they all flocked in the library as soon as lunch was over.

There Vicky carefully closed the door.

"Now, listen, chummies!" she said briskly. "I baffled you this morning when I sort of persuaded Amanda to join the party, didn't I? But, chummies, I've got Amanda's finger-print—a beauty!"

She chuckled as she withdrew a paper bag from under her coat, and then, putting on a glove, slid out of the bag a yellow saucer made of plastic.

"My stars!" Dick gasped. "Then—then the picnic—"

"Was just a wheeze," Vicky beamed on him. "That's why I was anxious to get Amanda along. You see, I'd already treated the saucer. Now look!" She turned the saucer over, exhibiting to their admiring gaze a smoky smudge, in the middle of which was a perfect finger-print. "So now," she said, and paused, and then quickly whisked the saucer back into its bag—"now I've got an idea."

Her eyes, as she said that, for a moment flickered towards the picture near the door—that picture of the long-dead Nigel Roberts which had caused the chums such consternation on the day they had first embarked on their quest.

And once again, unnoticed by her chums, the eyes of that picture were bright and gleaming with life.

Somebody—Ghostfingers—was behind that picture. Somebody once again was spying on their meeting—was listening to their conversation.

But only Vicky had seen as yet, and Vicky, with a sudden clear-cut plan in her mind, had her own reasons for not immediately drawing her chums' attention to the fact.

"Well, and what is your big idea?" Betty asked impatiently.

"Listen," said Vicky. "We can't get working on it until to-night. This afternoon we'll let Ken have the finger-print. But I've also got something else to tell you. You remember the clue?"

"Well, yes," Dick said. "But what about it?" "It's solved!" Vicky said triumphantly "We know where the Witch's Hoard is!"

In blank amazement, they all stared at her. Again Vicky flicked an eye towards the picture.

"But why didn't you tell us?" expostulated Ivy.

"I didn't have a chance," Vicky smiled. "Why do you think I've called you here? Any-

way, there's no time to go into details now, but the hoard is in the armoury at Windridge, hidden behind a panel near the door which is decorated with small daggers in the shape of a star. And to-night, my chummiest, we're going after it."

She paused. From the portrait came a distinct movement as the flap dropped over those too-bright eyes and the picture once again became normal.

Vicky crossed to the door. Silently she turned the handle; silently opened it. She looked out, nodded, and then came back.

"O.K., everyone!" she said cheerily. "Now you can forget everything I've told you."

"Eh?"

"I say, Vicky, you're not just leading us up the garden, are you?" Dick asked, in pretended alarm. "What is the idea now?"

"It's this," Vicky said rapidly. "We were being watched—and overheard. It was the portrait again. I saw the eyes move," she explained. "Now listen. Here's the real plan—and keep your eyes glued to that picture, for goodness' sake! Ghostfingers now thinks we know where the treasure is, and that we're going after it this evening. So what would you do if you were in Ghostfingers' place?" Vicky demanded.

"Beetle off and get there first!" Dick grinned, understanding.

"Exactly," Vicky nodded. "So we've now got to get there before her. We've got to set a trap which is going to catch her. We'll think that up later. But the first thing is to get moving."

"Golly, the girl has certainly got a brain!" Betty chuckled. "But what I'd like to know is—Whoa, Vicky! That's my arm you're grabbing!"

"Then be sensible and follow it," Vicky cried, catching up the bag containing the saucer. "We've got work to do. This way, everybody—to the ski-shed."

A WELL-LAID PLAN



The ski-run to Windridge was brisk and urgent, marred only by a few minor tumbles, and with Vicky, carrying a small attache-case, in front all the way.

They reached the picturesque house at last. There, ski-ing up the drive, Vicky saw that one of the ground floor windows was open, and through it faintly came the colonel's booming voice. With a start she remembered that the colonel had an appointment with Mr. Henderson.

As she advanced she caught her own name; she heard the word "hoard." She smiled a little, congratulating herself that in all innocence the colonel was paving the way she had come to prepare. The colonel, as he had promised, was telling Malcolm Henderson the story she had told him yesterday.

"But, of course, Vicky's wrong," she heard the colonel say as she drew nearer. "The witch isn't that notorious crook, Ghostfingers. Vicky's getting her leg pulled, but she won't admit it. It's that young scamp Vane who's the witch!"

"You think so, colonel?" Vicky asked sweetly, and she poked her head through the window and kicked off her skis. Both men jumped around. "You know, colonel, you're all wrong."

"Dash it, Vicky, what are you doing here?" the colonel spluttered. "I thought—"

"Never mind, colonel," broke in Malcolm Henderson soothingly. "Vicky, I'm very glad to see you. The colonel has been telling me the most extraordinary story about the Witch's Hoard. Come in, do—yes, and your friends," he added.

Vicky smiled. She waited for the rest of the party, and then, when they had all kicked off their skis, they entered by the hall.

"Now, Vicky," Mr. Henderson said, when they were all assembled in the drawing-room. "What do you know about this?"

Vicky told him—the same story as she had told the colonel. Malcolm Henderson looked quite excited.

"It's incredible—but I suppose there is some truth in it. And you really believe this—this—er—Ghostfingers and the witch are the same person?"

"We know it," Vicky said. "Flapdoodle! It's young Vane!" the colonel growled.

"It's not Kennedy-Vane," Vicky said levelly. "He's as innocent as you are. And, what's more," she added, "we can prove it to you—this afternoon, I hope. And not only will we prove that Kennedy is not the witch, colonel, we'll prove to you who the witch really is! That is," she added quietly, "if Mr. Henderson will allow us to use his armoury."

"Gad, now what's this?" the colonel cried. "Henderson, I warn you—"

But Mr. Henderson was impressed. "Vicky, expand a little," he said.

"I will." Vicky looked at her chums. "Mr. Henderson, I haven't got time to explain fully now. But we've got an idea that the witch is on her way here now, her intention being to rob your armoury. It's to prevent that robbery, and at the same time to bowl out the witch, that we're here now."

"But, Vicky, really I must insist on some explanation," Mr. Henderson persisted. "Why, Ghostfingers is the cleverest crook known to be at large. How possibly can you know she's coming here?"

Vicky made a gesture of despair. But it had to come out—and in the next minute she had described the trap she had set for the watcher in the library at Mountcrest Manor. The colonel's eyes popped.

"Gad, you mean to tell me that the crook was in my house! You mean to tell me—Henderson, better leave this in my hands. Summon the servants! Post the guards! Surround the house—"

"Oh, please," Vicky cried apprehensively, "that'll ruin everything, Mr. Henderson!" she appealed.

Mr. Henderson was obviously more impressed by Vicky than by his guest. He nodded.

"Colonel, perhaps as Vicky has worked all this out, it would be as well to hear her plans," he said. "They might be a little less—er—spectacular than yours," he added. "Well, Vicky, what do you propose?"

"Just this," Vicky said. "Let me go into the armoury—alone. I shall hide there. I think I saw near the mantelpiece a bell-push last time I was in there. Does that connect?"

"Yes, it's in order, I believe. It rings in the housekeeper's room upstairs."

"Then please let me go—on my own—to the armoury," Vicky drew a deep breath. "There, as I said, I'll hide. When I hear the witch approaching, I'll press the bell. That will be a signal for you all to come, and you should be there a moment after the witch has entered. May I do that?"

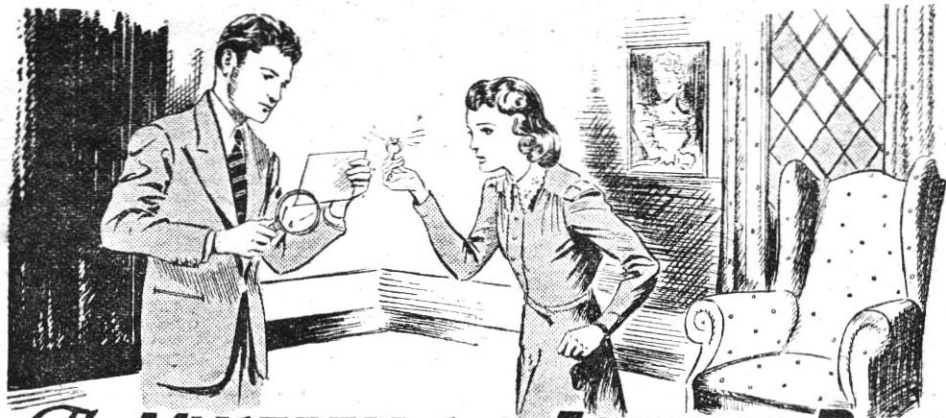
Mr. Henderson paused as Vicky gazed at him earnestly. He looked at the colonel who nodded briefly. Then to Vicky's and the chums' delight he also nodded.

"Come along then, colonel, and you other young people," he said. "Vicky, leave your bag here. We'll go and await your signal in the housekeeper's room."

And two minutes later, while the colonel, Mr. Henderson, and the chums crowded up the stairs, Vicky, with a thrill, made for the armoury. There she let herself in, carefully locked the door behind her, and took out the key.

"Now to catch the witch red-handed!" she breathed.

Will the chums succeed in trapping Ghostfingers this time? Be sure not to miss a word of next Friday's splendid chapters of this serial in the GIRLS' CRYSTAL.



The MYSTERY of the EGYPTIAN RING

WHY IRENE WAS SCARED

"If you're quite sure you're not going to arrest me, I'll let you see my ring."

Irene Merlin spoke lightly, half jokingly, but the little break in her voice betrayed to Noel Raymond's ears that she was secretly afraid.

The young detective's interest had been aroused by the Egyptian ring—almost as much as by its wearer. Auburn-haired, violet-eyed, Irene Merlin was certainly the most beautiful girl at the Carruthers' party.

And the ring of heavy gold on the third finger of her right hand—its crest shaped like a cat's head with two gleaming emeralds for the eyes—seemed strangely incongruous on such a lovely wearer.

"Do you like it?" asked the girl, as she held out her hand.

Noel smiled quizzically.

"Like" is hardly the word I'd apply to Bast, the cat-headed goddess of ancient Egypt," he replied gravely.

The girl shuddered, and drew her hand away quickly.

"I know," she breathed. "But, you see"—her eyes became suddenly tender, her lips tremulous—"daddy gave it to me before he died. I feel I must wear it—for his sake."

"I see," murmured the young detective.

"I nearly didn't wear it," confessed the girl. "You see, I was warned not to."

"Warned?" ejaculated Noel. "By whom?"

The girl groped in her handbag, and, producing a crumpled scrap of paper, she thrust it into Noel's hand.

"This—this came this morning," she whispered.

Noel scanned the message written in crimson ink on the paper:

"Wear the Ring of Bast to-night at your peril."

Simply that, and nothing more; no signature or mark to show from whom the note had come.

"I think I had better keep that for the time being, Miss Merlin," Noel said gravely. "Whoever wrote that note was not joking."

His eyes became grave.

"Miss Merlin, excuse my asking—but are you any relative of Professor Merlin, the well-known Egyptologist, who died two years ago?"

The girl nodded, her eyes filling with tears.

"He—he was my father," she whispered.

"He—he gave me this ring just before he went on his last journey to Egypt. Oh, Mr. Raymond," she burst out, clutching at his sleeve, "it was some evil thing in those dreadful

A Thrilling Detective Story, Featuring Noel Raymond.

By PETER LANGLEY

tombs that killed him—I know it! And it's trying to harm me—"

The young detective caught her hand reassuringly in his.

"Miss Merlin," he said gravely, "I want you to trust me. Tell me! Had your father any enemies?"

The girl shook her head quickly.

"Oh, no!" she said. "I'm positive he hadn't. He—he was far too kind."

"Have you any relations?" asked Noel.

"Only—only distant ones. I live with a guardian—an old friend of daddy's—Mr. Lucas. He's ever such a dear, but dreadfully fussy. I haven't dared to tell him about—about that message."

"Why not?" asked Noel quickly.

Irene smiled.

"You don't know my guardian, or you wouldn't ask. He'd call the police in and have a special guard to watch me night and day. I'd hate that."

"For all that, Miss Merlin," Noel replied gravely, "I think you ought to take precautions. I wish you'd tell me more about yourself, your friends, and so on."

The girl smiled, a slight colour creeping into her pale cheeks.

"Of course, if you really want me to; there's not an awful lot to tell—"

She broke off, her hand closing on Noel's sleeve. "Here's my guardian," she whispered.

Noel glanced up, to see a stout, jovial-looking man coming towards them, a cigar between his lips.

"Well, well," the newcomer remarked heartily, "how's our little ward enjoying herself—eh? Not tired yet?"

Noel had risen to his feet, and Irene rose with him.

"Not a bit," she declared. "I'm having a lovely time."

"I've just asked Miss Merlin for the pleasure of the next dance," said Noel.

"Splendid!" chuckled Mr. Lucas. "Young people should have a good time while they've the chance. Wish I was young again!"

Noel smiled, and led his partner on to the dance floor. As they danced Irene told the young detective all about herself. She told

him how, after her father's death, Mr. Lucas had given her a home in his house, although her father had left a small income to provide for her.

As for friends, Irene had many. Enemies, she had none, and among her wide circle of acquaintances there was only one person whom she disliked.

That, she admitted a trifle shamefacedly, was her father's Egyptian servant, Abdul Shan, who had taken up the post of butler in Mr. Lucas' house.

Noel's blue eyes glittered. "An Egyptian—eh?" he murmured. "Why do you distrust him?"

The girl shook her head. "I don't know," she admitted. "It's just that he seems to follow me about and watch me." And she laughed a trifle apologetically. "Now," said Noel, "tell me, Miss Merlin, have you met anyone recently who knew your father?"

The girl stared at him, her eyes widening. "It's strange you should ask that," she said. "I haven't, but I'm supposed to meet a gentleman here this evening—a Professor Gratton, who was with daddy when—when he died. He wrote to me, asking me to meet him here, but he hasn't arrived yet."

The young detective thought quickly. He might have been inclined to put the warning message down to a foolish and cruel practical joke—had it not been for the Egyptian ring.

The lilting tune of the waltz was drawing to a close; and then, with dramatic unexpectedness, every light in the ball-room was suddenly extinguished.

Noel heard the girl's frightened gasp as she clung to his arm.

"It's all right," he said reassuringly. "Probably just a failure of the current. I've got a torch somewhere."

For an instant he released the girl to grope in his pocket, and just then something brushed past his face—something soft and furry. Next moment a piercing scream rang through the hall; then came a dull thud.

"Lights!" Noel shouted. "See to the lights, someone!"

He snatched out his torch as he spoke, flashing the light on the form which lay on the floor. It was Irene Merlin, her face deathly pale.

"The ring!" she whispered, as Noel raised her. "The Ring of Bast!"

Noel's gaze darted swiftly to the girl's hand. He drew in his breath with a sharp, incredulous hiss.

For the Egyptian ring had been wrenched from the girl's finger, and now lay on the floor, its emerald eyes glinting wickedly.

And on the girl's white wrist was an ugly red mark—the imprint of a cat's paw.

Noel looked up, encountering the other's agitated, questioning stare.

"Miss Merlin has had a slight shock, sir," he said calmly. "She has fainted. There is no cause for worry."

"No cause for worry!" ejaculated Mr. Lucas. "There is every cause. Someone has frightened my ward. I demand an explanation."

He stared from Noel to the agitated young host.

"Fearfully sorry and all that, Mr. Lucas!" Freddy Carruthers said apologetically. "Jolly old fuses blown out or something. Accept my apologies!"

Noel was not listening. He was bending over the girl again.

"The cat! The cat!" she whispered.

"Eh? What's she talking about?" demanded Mr. Lucas, frowning.

Noel did not reply, and at that moment Mrs. Carruthers, the hostess, bustled forward to take charge of the fainting girl.

Irene's guardian made to follow, but Noel plucked him by the sleeve.

"I'd like a word with you, if I may, Mr. Lucas," he said.

"Well, well, what is it?" demanded the other testily.

The young detective drew him aside. "I'd just like to ask you a question," he said. "I'm working in your ward's interest, Mr. Lucas." He produced his card, watching the other's expression. "Your Egyptian servant, Abdul Shan—is he quite trustworthy?"

Mr. Lucas whistled, a peculiar expression crossing his face.

"Well," he said, "I don't know. You see, I know very little about the fellow, except that he was employed by poor old Merlin, Irene's father. The chap's always struck me as being a bit peculiar, but I kept him on for old time's sake, you know."

The young detective's eyes narrowed. "Oh, thanks!" he said.

"Mr. Lucas moved away, and Noel frowned thoughtfully.

"The fellow responsible for this is as cunning as he's unscrupulous," he muttered. "It's not going to be easy to bring him to book. The question is—did he actually mingle with the guests, or did he get in from the outside?"

As most of the guests were known personally to Noel, he decided to explore the latter possibility first. A brief search of the now-deserted and darkened ball-room brought him to an open window, which he was certain had previously been closed.

Perplexed, and convinced that the open window had some significance, he leaned out, flashing his torch on the ivy that grew thickly below the sill. Suddenly he stiffened, and, reaching out his arm to its full extent, he pulled up something that had been caught up in the ivy.

It was a jagged piece of fur that might have been cut or torn from a fur coat or the lining of a glove.

His eyes glinting, Noel rubbed it lightly against his cheek.

"So that's it!" he muttered. "The scoundrel used this to give colour to his scare. When he'd done with it he threw it out of the window. But what's his game? What—"

Thud!

He ducked instinctively as something whizzed past his head, embedding itself in the oak wainscoting.

It was a knife—a knife with a curiously carved bronze hilt.

Noel spun round, glaring across the deserted ball-room. In two bounds he reached the doorway opposite and peered into the corridor.

There was no one in sight, but there were several windows by which an intruder might have entered or escaped.

His face pale and grim, the young detective returned into the ball-room, and, carefully covering the hilt of the knife with his handkerchief, jerked it out of the wall and put it in his pocket. He was convinced that

ANOTHER THREAT FROM THE UNKNOWN



THE young detective dropped to one knee, supporting the fainting girl in his arms.

Irene had been attacked in some extraordinary manner in the middle of the crowded ball-room. The attacker's motive seemed to have been the purloining of the Egyptian ring, and in the general confusion he had dropped it.

But if theft was the purpose of the attack, why the message warning the girl not to wear the ring?

Noel's mind was grappling with the elusive mystery as the lights suddenly flashed up.

Two figures pushed their way through the crush. One was Freddy Carruthers, the host; the other was Irene's guardian.

Mr. Lucas darted forward his face pallid. "Irene!" he ejaculated huskily. "Great Scott, what has happened?"

the knife had been flung as a warning—a threat to dissuade him from investigating.

Irene's secret enemy meant business, and so did Noel.

As coolly as though nothing unusual had happened, Noel went in search of Irene, finding her at length in the drawing-room surrounded by a cluster of anxious and curious guests.

She greeted Noel with a wan, apologetic smile.

"I'm so sorry to have scared you," she said. "It was awfully silly of me. It was the lights going out so suddenly, and I thought I felt something furry touch my face. It reminded me—"

She broke off with a faint shudder. Noel held out the Egyptian ring which he had rescued from trampling feet in the ball-room.

"By the way, you dropped this, Miss Merlin," he said, smiling.

The girl's face lit up, then she shrank a little.

"I don't like it," she whispered, "but it's all—I've got left to remind me of daddy. It would break my heart to lose it."

Just then Mr. Lucas came into the room.

"The taxi's waiting, Irene," he said. "We'd better be getting along."

On a sudden impulse Noel stepped forward. "I wonder if you would mind giving me a lift, sir?" he asked.

"Pleasure, my boy!" returned Mr. Lucas heartily. "Pleasure!"

The brief journey was made practically in silence. Then:

"Here we are," remarked Mr. Lucas, as the taxi drew up outside a detached house on the outskirts of London. "Care to step in for a parting drink, Raymond?"

Noel accepted promptly. Not that he required a drink, but he was particularly anxious to meet Abdul Shan.

The Egyptian servant himself opened the door—a tall, magnificent figure of a man, with dark, inscrutable features. He wore native costume.

He bowed, stepping aside to allow them to pass. Noel saw his eyes, dark and watchful, following Irene Merlin as she walked down the hall.

Mr. Lucas evidently shared his late friend's taste for antiques. The house was a veritable museum of Egyptian and Assyrian curios. Mr. Lucas led the way into a magnificently furnished library, and, waving Noel to a chair, rang for drinks.

Abdul Shan came into the room, bearing a card on a salver. Irene took it in some trepidation, then she smiled.

"It's from daddy's friend—Professor Gratton," she explained. "He says he was sorry not to have been able to attend the dance to-night, and he will give himself the pleasure of calling on me to-morrow evening at nine o'clock. He particularly wishes to see my—my ring."

Noel raised his eyebrows with sudden interest, and Mr. Lucas grunted.

"It strikes me, young lady," remarked the latter, "that too many people are interested in your ring. You're foolish to insist on wearing such a valuable ornament."

"Is it very valuable, Lucas?" inquired Noel casually.

"Speaking as an expert," replied Mr. Lucas, leaning over to tap the ring, "I'd say it's worth a cool thousand, possibly more. No; don't go yet, my boy," he went on jovially, as Noel rose. "I've got some good cigars in the next room."

He stepped from the room, leaving Irene and Noel alone.

"You mean to wear that ring, in spite of everything, Miss Merlin?" inquired Noel.

"In spite of everything," replied Irene.

Just then the telephone bell rang. Irene reached out and lifted the receiver. Her face turned ghastly pale, and she staggered. In a

bound Noel was at her side. The rasping crackling of the voice at the other end of the wire was plainly audible as he took the receiver.

"Do you hear?" grated the distant voice. "To-morrow night, at eight o'clock, Bast will strike. At eight o'clock I shall steal that ring!"

The voice ended, and there came a click as the unknown man at the other end of the wire hung up the receiver.

ON THE STROKE OF EIGHT



"I WANT you to leave everything to me, Mr. Lucas," said Noel tersely, "and I promise you no harm will come to your ward."

It was the following evening, and, having told Mr. Lucas of the telephone threat, Noel had taken charge.

"It's an amazing business," muttered Mr. Lucas, glancing hastily at his watch. "In twenty minutes' time this—this mysterious scoundrel threatens to strike at my ward. Yet the house is locked up, my servants have been given orders to watch all windows and doors, and you say you have taken special precautions. The man must be bluffing."

"I doubt that very much," said Noel gravely. "But watch this."

He crossed the room and touched a small switch concealed behind a curtain. The young detective had spent several hours in the house that afternoon preparing for the audacious intruder.

"Open the door, Mr. Lucas," he instructed dryly, "but don't cross the threshold."

Surprised, the other obeyed. There was a blinding flash of light, and he stepped back hastily, covering his face with his hands.

"Electric wiring," explained Noel grimly. "If anyone attempts to enter the room by door or window while the switch is on they'll receive a shock sufficient to stun them. Now"—he turned off the switch—"I think we had better prepare Miss Merlin. She will wait in here with us till the danger's over."

Mr. Lucas nodded agitatedly.

"I'll fetch her," he said. "She is in her room."

He departed hurriedly, and Noel, taking something from his pocket, made his way swiftly to the kitchen quarters.

On the stairs he encountered the Egyptian servant, prowling in his usual noiseless, cat-like manner.

The Egyptian bowed stiffly, stepping aside for Noel to pass.

"One minute, Shan," said the young detective.

The Egyptian glanced at him inquiringly.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Noel produced something from behind his back partly wrapped in a handkerchief.

It was the bronze dagger.

"Ever seen this before, Shan?" he demanded.

The Egyptian nodded, gravely and composedly.

"It is mine, effendi," he returned, holding out his hand. "I had mislaid it. I thank you for finding it."

His fingers had closed on the blade when, struck by a sudden thought, Noel drew it back. While the man stared at him in puzzlement, the young detective took out a magnifying-glass and swiftly compared Abdul's finger-prints on the blade with the prints he had already discovered on the bronze hilt.

They were quite different.

"That seems to let you out, Abdul," Noel remarked.

"I beg the effendi's pardon."

"No matter," Noel smiled grimly. "I'm taking precautions, for all that. Please come with me, Abdul. You are wanted in your master's study."

Followed by the inscrutable Egyptian, he led the way back to Mr. Lucas' study.

Irene, rather pale, was waiting there with her guardian. Noel noticed that she was still wearing the Ring of Bast, and his eyes gleamed.

"Mr. Raymond," she said, a trifle unsteadily, "do you—do you think someone means to carry out that threat?"

Noel bent over the girl. "Remember what I told you," he whispered, "and leave the rest to me." Aloud he added: "Miss Merlin, please sit in that chair. Mr. Lucas and you, Abdul, guard the window. I'll look after the door."

Noel crossed to the wall and moved a switch. Then, torch in hand, he took up his stand by the door.

The young detective was determined to take no chances.

Suddenly Mr. Lucas pointed to the clock. "It only wants a few minutes to eight," he declared hoarsely. "We haven't long to wait now."

Abdul tensed himself, and, for all her pluck, Irene's face went pale. The suspense was agonising. Everyone kept their eyes fixed on the clock. Slowly the minute hand moved, and then suddenly the light in the chandelier overhead commenced to flicker.

"What—what the dickens is the matter with those lights?" demanded Mr. Lucas, glaring. "Stand by the window!" rapped Noel.

Even as he spoke the lights gave a final flicker and were extinguished.

There came a stifled cry from the girl. Noel could hear Mr. Lucas breathing heavily.

"Everyone keep quite still," rapped Noel. "Flash your torch, Lucas!"

He pressed the button of his own torch, but nothing happened. He heard the futile click of Mr. Lucas' torch.

"There's someone else in the room!" shouted Mr. Lucas hoarsely.

Noel, conscious of a movement close to him, reached out and seized Abdul Shan as the Egyptian brushed past him.

"No, you don't!" rapped the young detective grimly.

"Efendi, let me go!" exclaimed the Egyptian. "My young mistress—"

His words were interrupted by a horrified scream and a thud.

Noel sprang to the door and flung it open. There was a blinding flash and a brilliant glare as a set of emergency lights sprang up at the touch of a hidden button.

Irene Merlin lay across her chair, her face deathly white. Sprawled on the carpet, groaning was Mr. Lucas. The Egyptian was crouched in a corner, glaring round him and muttering threats.

Except for himself, Irene, the groaning Mr. Lucas, and the terrified Egyptian, the room was empty.

The thing was fantastic. Incredulously, Noel was staring at the girl's white hand. The ring on the third finger had vanished.

Having assured himself that the girl was uninjured, Noel groped in his waistcoat pocket for the real Ring of Bast. The ring that the girl had worn had been substituted by Noel at the last moment for a cheap imitation.

The mysterious attacker had escaped—without gaining his purpose.

HALF AN HOUR later, after spending some time on the telephone, Noel called at an old-fashioned house in Kensington, and was ushered into the presence of the well-known Egyptologist, Professor Gratton.

By now he was convinced that the professor's visit to England was connected in some vital way with the attacks on Irene Merlin.

The professor, grey-haired and scholarly, rose to his feet, motioning his visitor courteously to a chair.

"I understand by your phone message that

you have something of importance to communicate to me, Mr. Raymond, with regard to my old friend's daughter, Irene Merlin?"

Noel nodded, coming swiftly to the point.

"Professor Gratton," he said bluntly, "am I right in thinking that you wish to see Miss Merlin about the Ring of Bast?"

The professor started slightly, adjusting his spectacles.

"Why, yes! But how—"

"Professor," Noel cut in, "I am a friend of Miss Merlin's. The girl is in danger, her happiness menaced, and the cause is the Ring of Bast."

"Gracious!" ejaculated the professor, paling.

"I—"

"Tell me the truth, please, professor!" exclaimed Noel. "Of what value is this ring?"

"Of incalculable value, young man," replied the professor. "In itself it is of no intrinsic worth, but there are certain hieroglyphics inscribed inside the ring, the significance of which were only discovered by my old friend a few days before his death. I have only just been able to reach England, but I did not tell Miss Merlin why I wished to see her."

"Is it possible that anyone else could have been aware of the significance of those markings, professor?" Noel inquired.

"I should not have thought so," replied the professor.

"And the meaning of the hieroglyphics?" demanded Noel.

The professor hesitated; then he leaned forward.

"They are the clue, young man, to a fabulous treasure buried in Egypt. Though the treasure would be forfeit to the Egyptian Government, a proportion of its value—amounting possibly to a small fortune—would accrue to the finder, the late Professor Merlin, or his heirs. But might I ask the reason for these questions, Mr. Raymond?"

"You might," replied Noel; and, slipping his hand into his pocket, he produced the Egyptian ring. "Do you recognise this, professor?"

Professor Gratton started violently as he held out his hand.

"The Ring of Bast!" he exclaimed.

Then abruptly his expression changed as he picked up a large magnifying-glass from his desk.

"What does this mean, young man?" he rapped suddenly. "This is not the Ring of Bast. It's only a fake."

"A fake!" ejaculated Noel. "Are you sure?"

The professor nodded.

"Of course," Noel exclaimed. "I see it all now. Irene has been in possession of the fake ring all the time. Professor Gratton—he turned to the bewildered savant—"I need your help. This is what we must do."

"MY ring's been found, after all!"

"Eh?" Mr. Lucas looked up at his smiling ward. "What's that? The Ring of Bast—found?"

Irene nodded, her eyes sparkling.

"Mr. Raymond has just phoned to say that he has the real ring, and will hand it to me if I go to his flat. I am to take it to Professor Gratton, who particularly wants to see it."

Mr. Lucas bit the end off his cigar before replying.

"H'm!" he commented. "It's a queer business, but I suppose the young man knows what he's about. You'd better go along."

Irene thanked him breathlessly and hurried from the room.

It was the postscript of the letter that particularly intrigued her:

"Wear a long raincoat and a scarf—important. Keep this to yourself.—N. R."

Unquestioningly, Irene obeyed instructions. Attired thus, she stepped into her guardian's car and was driven swiftly to Noel's flat.

Barely had she entered it than another car drew up on the other side of the road.

THE MERRYMAKERS IN ARIZONA

(Continued from page 428.)

A muffled figure sprang out. Seeing that Irene's chauffeur, who was none other than Abdul Shan, had descended and had his back to the car, the unknown stealthily opened the door and crept into the limousine, there to crouch out of sight.

A few minutes passed; then the door of Noel's flat opened. The young detective's voice was heard.

"All right, Miss Merlin. Drive as fast as you can to the professor's house. I'll meet you there. Take care of the ring."

"I'll remember," came Irene's breathless tones. "Good-bye!"

A figure in raincoat and muffler hurried quickly across the rainswept pavement and jumped lightly into the car.

The car commenced to move. And then from a dim corner opposite sprang the muffled intruder.

"You little fool!" he hissed. "You dare to defy Bast—and you will pay the penalty!"

A pair of sinuous hands groped for the other's throat.

But the attacker was due for a surprise. The raincoated figure sprang to its feet, flinging off its scarf—to reveal, not Irene's pretty features, but Noel Raymond's grim face!

Aided by the darkness, and thanks to that long raincoat and scarf, the young detective had been able to impersonate the girl.

Before he could recover from the shock, the attacker's wrists were caught.

"We meet again, Mr. Lucas!" drawled Noel Raymond. "All right, Shan!"

The car purred to a stop.

Struggling furiously, Mr. Lucas attempted to wrench himself free.

But Noel was more than his match. He dragged the struggling man out of the car, and the impassive Abdul Shan came to his aid.

Then the door of the flat was flung open and Irene dashed out, her face white, followed by Professor Gratton.

Irene gave a horrified cry as she recognised her guardian.

"I'm sorry to say, Miss Merlin," said Noel grimly, "that your guardian is a heartless rascal. For months he has been planning to rob you of a fortune, the clue to which was contained in the Ring of Bast.

"The real ring he substituted without your knowledge. For months you have been wearing a worthless imitation.

"But why—why?" gasped Irene.

"I think Professor Gratton will be able to explain," said Noel. "We have traced the real ring. It is in the hands of experts who have been paid by Mr. Lucas to solve the hieroglyphics. He thought that he was perfectly safe—till he heard that Professor Gratton was coming to England to see you.

"Then he knew that the fraud would be discovered, and he tried to prevent you from wearing the fake ring. The mysterious messages came from him. When these failed, he tried to steal the duplicate by means calculated to terrify you.

"Abdul Shan has suspected his new employer all along, and has done his best to guard you. I think, Miss Merlin, that that is all."

MR. LUCAS, scoundrel though he was, escaped the full penalty he deserved. At Irene's earnest request, Noel did not call in the police.

The fortune accruing from the discovery of the Egyptian treasure passed eventually to its rightful owner—Professor Merlin's daughter—and Abdul Shan stayed on in England as the girl's trusted bodyguard.

THE END.

Starting next Friday, the Noel Raymond stories will be replaced by a grand series of double-length complete stories, each featuring a different set of characters. No. 1 is entitled "Her Secret Role in France." Look out for it in next week's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

bornly. "I simply won't! I just can't stand by and see you duped by this impostor."

"Very well!" Maureen's voice was ominously quiet suddenly. "If you reuse I shall send for the sheriff. I mean it!"

Sally gave a despairing shrug.

"All right, you win," she said bitterly. "I'll get the papers."

"That is very kind of you," said a new voice, a gentle, courteous voice, at sound of which the tensely excited crowd swung round, to thrill aresh as they saw the dignified figure standing at the head of the stairs. The figure of another Indian, black-bearded, wearing a white turban upon his head, and on his forehead a crescent-shaped caste mark.

"Oh, gosh," she said rather shakily, "I don't know how you got here, but you must be the real prince."

The Indian gave a stately bow.

"Prince Jinniwa," he said gravely. "And apparently I have arrived just at the right moment. I am sorry I am late, but I was kidnapped this afternoon—"

There was a rustling murmur among the tensely watching crowd. The bogus prince, still standing beside Maureen, shrank back.

"Kidnapped!" blurted Johnny.

"Yes! I was imprisoned in a house in Ferry Street in Redville. Fortunately I managed to escape, and now—" He directed his gaze ominously towards the bogus prince, and under that threatening gaze the man's nerve deserted him. He broke out into an impassioned torrent of expiation.

"It was not my fault. I had nothing whatever to do with the kidnapping. I was persuaded into this by others. I have never seen your highness before. They promised me money if I pretended to be you, and so secured the papers—"

His voice ran on and on, but Sally and Johnny did not even hear him. They were gazing sympathetically but a trifle awkwardly into the tear-filled eyes of Maureen.

"What ever can I say?" she cooed.

"Oh, forget it," muttered Johnny awkwardly. "Yes, it was good fun while it lasted," replied Sally.

She turned as she spoke, beamed radiantly at the regal figure. Then the beam vanished, to give way to a look of utter incredulity. For with a strangely familiar grin the new arrival reached up a hand, whipped off his crinkly beard.

"D-Don!" stuttered Sally. "It—it's Don!"

"In the flesh," replied that boy easily. "Now before you all start hurling questions at me, let me do a bit of explaining. You remember me finding that notebook after we imprisoned that rotter in the summer-house?"

Sally gave a dazed nod.

"Well, I had a look through it after you'd gone. It had details in it about the kidnapping of the prince—nothing definite, mind you, nothing that would convince anybody unless they were already suspicious, as we were. It also had this photograph in it." He whipped out a small photograph as he spoke, held it up. "I had a hunch that this was the real prince, so I just buzzed into the club-room and did a spot of disguising. It was only a hunch, mind you—"

"It was a jolly good hunch," said Sally admiringly. "Maureen, hadn't you better get the sheriff?"

"I most assuredly will," replied Maureen grimly. "But meantime, just to show me that you can forgive me, won't you four please go back into the ball-room and enjoy yourselves."

And Sally & Co., only too happy to fall in with that request, did so.

(End of this week's story.)

You'll be reading another delightful story featuring the cheery Merry-makers in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Don't miss it.



LOYAL to the ELUSIVE OUTLAW



TRAPPED IN THE CAVE OF GOLD!

"JIM!" Kit Stanforth gasped faintly. "Oh, Jim, what can we do?"

Jim Logan, her friend of the Mounted Police, breathed hard. He did not reply, but he stared hard at the tunnel, now blocked from roof to floor, which was their only avenue of escape. And Jennings and Cranshaw, his assistants, staring also in that direction, shook their heads.

"Guess it's just impossible to do anything," Jennings said. "That fall must be several feet thick." He turned to glare at the man whose treacherous pistol shot had caused the catastrophe. "Hatway, you skunk—"

Maurice Hatway, all his desperate bluff vanished, shrank back.

"I—I never meant to do that," he muttered. "Gosh, we—we must do something," he added, his voice rising. "There—there must be some other way out. If we stop here we'll suffocate!"

"Well, your shouting won't help us," Jim Logan said angrily. "What a man! What a brother to be proud of," he added, staring at the white-faced Zena. "Anyway, scout round," he added gruffly. "Kit, you take charge of the scouting party. We men will see what we can do to force a way through that tunnel again."

"Come, Missy Kit," Moonflower whispered gently.

Kit nodded, but she had no hope, none at all. She knew there was no other outlet to the cave. Had there been, the air would have filtered in somewhere by now, and the atmosphere would have been less humid, less choking. Nevertheless she moved away, without glancing at the trembling Hatway and the wild-eyed Zena, neither of whom showed any desire to move one way or the other.

It was with mixed feelings that Kit made a tour of the cave while Jim and his comrades, with their bare hands, tore frantically at the mound of earth and rocks which blocked the tunnel. This was her cave! This was the gold mine her father had left her. Mockingly the gold shone out at her in the torch rays.

Beside her, Moonflower, her faithful little Red Indian friend, gave a sudden choking gurgle, and then a harsh cough.

"Thirst," Moonflower said, but Kit knew that this was not true. "Plenty gold. Give much for drink of water," she added.

"I'd rather have a breath of fresh air," returned Kit. "Oh, golly!"

For the atmosphere was thickening, breathing becoming more and more difficult as the oxygen in the cave was being used up. With perspiration pouring off their foreheads, Jim and his comrades were still labouring. Hatway, to calm his nerves, sat down and lit a cigarette. Kit made a complete circuit of the cave, but one glance at its walls told her that the rock, thick and impenetrable, hemmed them in on every side.

"No outlet here," she said. "Any luck, Jim?"

He squared his chin.

"No luck, but still hoping," he answered. "Stand aside, Kit."

Again he bent forward, tearing, grabbing, clutching at the earth before him. Kit gulped. Then she, too, spurred by desperation, took a hand, and Moonflower, drawing her tomahawk, savagely attacked the ground as well. Thicker and thicker became the air, and presently Kit felt her brain reeling. Then, with a groan, Jim straightened up.

"We're done, I guess," he said. "We—" And then he saw Hatway smoking. With a thunderous frown on his face, he crossed the cave and snatched the cigarette from his lips. "Heck, have you no sense at all?" he shouted. "Here—" And grimly he grabbed Maurice Hatway by the collar, wrenching him to his feet. "Come and work!"

"You leave my brother alone," Zena squeaked.

Jim snorted. Savagely he thrust Hatway forward to the sealed entrance of the tunnel. Smoking, however, had had the same effect on Hatway that another half an hour without air would have had. Suddenly, with a faint moan, his knees doubled under him, with arms out-flung he pitched forward on to the ground.

"Jim!" Kit gasped. "O.K. Only fainted," Jim said. "Heck, hold up, Jennings," he added, as Jennings came reeling away from the hole he had dug, and caught the Mountie as he, too, would have fallen.

Kit shut her eyes. She felt her own senses reeling. Iron bands seemed to have fastened themselves around her throat, tight and tense was the sensation on her chest. It was hopeless. With every second the air was growing less, in a very few more minutes would be used up altogether.

"Jim, let—let's shout," she croaked.

"No good, Kit, who's to hear?"

"Let's!" Kit said.

"O.K." Jim grunted, and opened his mouth and shouted—a coughing, reedy shout that was just the ghost of his usually powerful voice. Kit and Moonflower shouted, too. Even to themselves their voices sounded cracked.

Heavy and dull the echoes answered. Without expectation they waited. And then—

"Jim," Kit quivered, clutching the Mountie's hand. "What's that?"

Jim turned. He listened, incredulously at first, then with faint hope dawning in his eyes. From somewhere, faint and far off, sounded a dull "pick—pick."

"Jim, listen!" Kit croaked. "Someone's trying to get to us—"

She reeled as she spoke, grasping at the air to ward off the dreadful faintness which assailed her. As she did so there was a dull thud from Zena's direction. Kit, glancing, was hardly surprised to discover that Zena had fallen forwards in a dead faint.

But Jim was listening now. On his features was a flicker of hope. Steadily, more insistent, that pick-picking sound went on.

"Gosh—it is someone!" he croaked. "But who?"

Kit shook her head. She could hardly think. Her uncle, Andrew Mackenzie, the factor, perhaps? With that thought she stumbled forward, in the vain hope that she might be able to help him. Then her legs failed beneath her, and she sank to the floor. The drumming in her ears had become a noise like thunder now.

"Jim——" she gasped weakly. She saw Moonflower slide to her knees. She saw Jim fingering at the collar of his open shirt. Mist floated before her eyes. Louder and louder grew the thunder in her ears, drowning the pick sounds now. She felt her senses slipping.

Then something in her brain went snap. She relaxed. She remembered nothing more, until heavily her eyes opened again, and she heard a strange, plaintive whine in her ear, and something warm and moist passed itself over her cheeks.

Then a voice calling her own name fell upon her ears, accompanied by a rattle of stones and earth. And then—it took her a full minute to realise it—this wonderful fact—she felt a draught of cool, reviving air on her face.

And there, in front of her, red tongue lolling, was a great, grimy-looking dog. Tracer!

She was dreaming, of course, unless—and then, as a voice called her name anew, she twisted and struggled into a sitting position. And suddenly a wonderful joy filled her eyes.

For through a hole in the tunnel block a panting, grimy figure was thrusting its way.

"Redscarf!" she gasped. For Redscarf, her outlaw friend, whom she had felt sure she would never see again, it was!

OUTLAW NO LONGER!



SHE hardly realised what she did then, for her dizzy brain had only just begun to function again. Impelled only by the gratitude she felt, and the enormous joy of seeing him again, she rushed forward, caught his arm, and then, in an access of weak relief, buried her face in his sleeve.

"Redscarf," she choked. "Oh, Redscarf!" Huskily, yet with a note of his old banter in his voice, he spoke.

"Gosh, Kit, it's just great to see you! I guess you've had a pretty tough time. Good thing I wasn't a minute or two later," he added, staring round at the recumbent figures of Jim and his men, and Hatway and Zena, who lay on the floor. "Hallo, Moonflower!"

The little Indian girl had been dragged out of the daze into which she had slipped by the frantic, licking tongue of Tracer, and was rising to her feet. Now she, too, rushed forward.

"Redscarf," she breathed. "Redscarf, I know you come—yes, I know you save Missy Kit, even though you had to save the Mounties and Master Hatway as well——"

Tracer barked in delight as he scampered, licking, from one to the other. Then Jim sat up. A moment later Cranshaw and Jennings rose. As if the outlaw had been a ghost they regarded him.

"You!" Jim breathed. "Redscarf, what are you doing here?"

The outlaw shrugged. "Sort of dropped in," he said. "As a matter of fact I tunneled into here—with Tracer's help. Tracer knew Kit was here, and I reckon he did more than I did—he's got longer nails, and more of them! Well, glad to have seen you all," he added. "But I guess, Jim, that this is no place for you and me, and I'd better get out before you come right back to your senses. Kit, I'll see you some other time," he added.

"Redscarf, no! Redscarf, why are you going?"

He grinned a little.

"Don't forget I'm an outlaw, wanted by the Mounties, Kit. Good-bye——" He turned towards the hole. But in a minute Kit had caught him, was pulling him back. Then Jim had sprung forward.

"Ease up," he said. "Let's do some talking. The Mounties want you, all right, but not in the way you think. We want to thank you, to apologise to you. I guess we're all aching to tell you that you're a free man——"

The outlaw stared. "You mean that?"

"I do mean it," Jim said, and thrust out his hand. "Stick it there, Redscarf—and, gee, I'm proud to shake hands with you."

The expression on the outlaw's face caused Kit to laugh.

"But it's true!" she said. "Oh, Redscarf, why did you escape? Your innocence was proved before you dashed off. We went to the Indian camp to tell you so. But why didn't you wait somewhere? Why didn't you get in touch with us?"

Redscarf gazed round. Hatway was just rising to his feet, and, as he saw Redscarf, he fell back with a gasp.

"I had plenty of reason for not hanging about," Redscarf said. "Yes, I escaped, all right. I was getting out of the camp when I saw Zena and Hatway drive in. I stood and watched. I saw them go into the chief's tent, and I guessed then what they'd come for."

"And—and so?" breathed Kit.

"Well, I didn't wait. I knew that Zena and Hatway would make straight for the gold mine. So I rustled up a dog team, and I came along. As soon as I saw the mine I rushed back to the sheriff's office, ten miles away from here, and I staked a claim—in your name," he added, and from his pocket drew a paper. "Then, as far as I was concerned, everything was fine. I knew the mine was safe."

"By gosh!" breathed Jim in admiration. While Kit, unfolding the claim with trembling hands, saw, indeed, that it was in her name; that after all she need never have worried.

"Oh, Redscarf, how ever can I thank you?" she choked.

"I'm thanked enough by digging you all out of this," Redscarf grinned. "Well, then—where was I? Oh, yes! Having filed the claim I came back here. I saw your dog teams outside. I thought I'd just slip that claim in your sled and beat it, Kit, when I heard the tunnel collapse. And then——" He looked ruefully at his lacerated hands. "Well, then, I got out the snow shovels, and Tracer and I did the rest of the work," he added quietly.

"And—and saved all our lives," Jim said huskily. "Redscarf, I'm ashamed I've been against you—yes, even when I thought you were an outlaw. But that's all over now, and I hope, if you'll have it, that we're all going to be pals together now——"

"Aye, I hope so, too," came an unexpected roar, and they all turned as a new figure appeared in the hole the outlaw had made—the figure of Andrew Mackenzie, the factor. "And what's more," he added, "if you want your old job back, Redscarf, it's yours, for the asking."

"But I know Redscarf won't want any job, uncle," said Kit softly, as she took Redscarf's hand. "Redscarf, you, Jim, Moonflower, and all of us are going to form a little gold-mining combine of our own. We're going to work this mine that daddy left me, and Redscarf has claimed for me, and we're going to live happily ever after."

"All except this skunk," Jim grinned, as he yanked Hatway to his feet. "And he's going a thousand miles from here on the next train to-morrow morning. And as you're so fond of seeing people off, Zena, you can go with him," he added to the white-faced girl. "Quick march, everyone, we're going back to the Post to celebrate this."

BIG CHIEF KIT



THEY went, first to Fort Maynall, where Zena and her rascally brother were safely shut away until Jim could give them his further attention. Then they all went back to the Musquash Trading Post, Redscar Farraday riding proudly on the running-board of Kit's sled.

News of their coming had already preceded them. Trappers and Indians lined up to welcome them, and as the sled slid through the gate of the compound such a roar went up as made the post-house shake. And then without a word the miners descended upon them. Without time to protest they were all hustled off into the great canteen.

And there Redscar and Kit were surrounded. Men shook her hand, women kissed her, until at last Kit was crimson and breathless. Men surrounded the outlaw, hands were pumped and backs thudded until even Redscar began to look limp. Moonflower, standing aside, smiled happily, and Andrew Mackenzie chuckled deep in his throat.

"But this is great!" he rumbled. "But, say, boys, save a bit of Farraday; he's too valuable for you to tear to pieces in your joy. Heck, but it's grand to have him back, in spite of what we've been thinking about him since he went. Fill up, boys, and let's drink to the boy who's come back."

Redscar laughed.

"No, ladies first. Let's drink to the girl who brought him back—the girl who stood by him and proved his innocence. Boys, I give the real toast. To Kit Stanforth!"

There was a roar. Glasses clinked, and were emptied. Then again they were refilled while the factor once more renewed his own toast. They were in the middle of that when there was another stir.

The door was thrown open. A little silence fell, as into the canteen swept a majestic figure, a sweeping feathered headdress barely concealing the bandage he wore about his head. It was Goodheart, the Cherokee chief.

And behind Goodheart came a dozen of his elders followed by a small company of his braves.

"Waw, 'tis fitting that you honour the maid and the outlaw," he said. "Their deeds are worthy of all those fine emotions that stir the blood. And we of the Cherokees also ask to pay our homage, for we, also, owe the outlaw and the paleface Kit a great debt."

"Gee, what's coming? Jim Logan muttered.

For Goodheart, reaching the end of the long room, had majestically sunk down into a sitting posture. His elders, moving forward, sat in a circle round him, while the braves, breaking into a low chant, took up positions in the rear. Now, while all looked on in wonderment, he put his hand beneath the embroidered blanket he wore, and drew forth the jewel-hafted dagger.

"For many sleeps this dagger, sacred omen of the Cherokees, lay hidden," he said. "Its disappearance brought misfortune to our tribe which ended in the treachery of my shaman, Sepa, and the attack upon me, its chief, by the paleface Hatway. Sepa lies in the place where Redscar lay, and to-morrow, on the night of the full moon, Sepa shall stand his trial at the hands of his elders."

A growl from the elders seemed to suggest that the verdict was already known.

"But for the recovery of the dagger we give our thanks. We also show our gratitude." He signed to his braves, who at once began to sway backwards and forwards. He signed to one of the elders, who also rose, a feathered headdress in his hands. "Paleface Kit, step forward," he said.

Impressed, wondering, Kit stepped forward. "To you and Redscar, white girl, comes the greatest Cherokee honour it is possible for me to bestow," the chief said, and, taking the lovely headdress from his councillor's hands, he placed it upon Kit's head, while the councillor himself draped over her a crimson blanket all exquisitely worked with Indian embroidery. "H're, Paleface Kit, among your own people, do I declare you an honorary chief of the Cherokee people, with all those gifts and privileges which accompany such an honour. Salute!"

He raised both his hands. From the braves went up a howl. Ecstatically they danced, and then, as Kit stepped aside, Redscar was signalled to approach, and he, too, went through the same ceremony. And then side by side they stood, Goodheart beside them.

A roar and clapping crashed out from among the audience. Then Jim started to sing "For they are jolly good fellows."

Everybody roared the famous old chorus. The roar was interrupted by the bark of a dog. Then, frisking and prancing, Tracer, escaped somehow, came bounding in, rushed at Kit, and almost knocked the new chief of the Cherokees over as frantically he licked her face. With a shout, Moonflower, thrilled witness of all this, rushed forward and caught him by the collar, dragging him back. Then arose a cry of "Speech! Speech!"

Redscar, pushed forward, said a few words, each one unheard, because each was drowned in applause. Then Kit was pushed forward.

"Well, thank you very much, everybody," she said. "I don't know what I've done to deserve all this, but, thank you! I would just like to point out, though, that Moonflower had a big hand in bringing everything about—"

"Moonflower happy," that girl chipped in. "Moonflower only ask one thing—to be Missy Kit's and Redscar's friend for life."

"I guess that's more than granted, Moonflower," the ex-outlaw said with some emotion. "Yes, rather," Kit said. "Moonflower's been just wonderful. But I'd also like you all to remember what Jim Logan has done."

"Oh, shucks," Jim said uncomfortably, when another figure came into the room. It was the figure of an Inspector of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

"Is Sergeant Logan here?" he inquired.

At once Jim sprang to attention and saluted. "Guess you've made a mistake, sir. Reckon I'm still Constable Logan," he said.

The inspector smiled.

"I guess not, Jim. Your promotion came through half an hour ago; I'm here to deliver it," he said, producing the orders.

And while dazedly Jim perused those orders, Andrew Mackenzie rose to his feet.

"Well, fo'ks, I guess this is some occasion!" he said, and grinned at Redscar as they stood hand-in-hand. "What with big chiefs and sergeants, I reckon we're in swell company. When are you and Redscar going to get busy in that gold mine, Kit?"

"Just as soon as we can," Kit laughed. "And all you boys, and everyone who can, are asked now to help. Gee, and what wages you're going to get! So now," she added, "one more toast—a bumper one this time. To our guests, the Cherokees! To Moonflower! To Sergeant Jim Logan of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and to Redscar Farraday, who's no longer an outlaw—"

"But some day, by the looks of it, to be one of my in-laws," grunted Andrew Mackenzie, making one of his rare jokes—one that caused even Kit to laugh as the warm colour rushed to her cheeks.

THE END.

"HER SECRET ROLE IN FRANCE."—Look out for this splendid double-length complete story in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL.