

**THE SHADOW
ON THE DOOR**

FRANCES K. JUDD

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“GIVE THE PASSWORD,” HE COMMANDED EACH PERSON. (See [Page 104](#))

KAY TRACEY MYSTERY STORIES

THE SHADOW ON THE DOOR

By
FRANCES K. JUDD

Author of
THE SECRET OF THE RED SCARF
THE STRANGE ECHO
THE MYSTERY OF THE SWAYING CURTAINS

ILLUSTRATED

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	<u>A PRIZE CONTEST</u>	1
II.	<u>A TRICK EXPOSED</u>	9
III.	<u>A DEMAND FOR MONEY</u>	22
IV.	<u>THE WINNER</u>	30
V.	<u>A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY</u>	38
VI.	<u>A DISGUISED ESCORT</u>	47
VII.	<u>A SECRET COMMISSION</u>	54
VIII.	<u>THE SHADOW</u>	61
IX.	<u>A WARNING MESSAGE</u>	67
X.	<u>A THANKLESS TASK</u>	75
XI.	<u>A CLUE REVEALED</u>	83
XII.	<u>A STRANGE MEETING</u>	91
XIII.	<u>THE PASSWORD</u>	100
XIV.	<u>A NARROW ESCAPE</u>	109
XV.	<u>A THREAT</u>	117
XVI.	<u>A TRYING HOUR</u>	122
XVII.	<u>AN AUTO ACCIDENT</u>	131
XVIII.	<u>A FAMILIAR SILHOUETTE</u>	139
XIX.	<u>A TELL-TALE BILL</u>	147
XX.	<u>AN EXPLOSION</u>	156
XXI.	<u>KAY TURNS SLEUTH</u>	163
XXII.	<u>AN EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENT</u>	172
XXIII.	<u>A RETURN VISIT</u>	181

XXIV. [A USELESS SEARCH](#)

188

XXV. [KAY'S REVELATION](#)

196

CHAPTER I

A PRIZE CONTEST

“I’d like to try for the prize,” said Kay Tracey thoughtfully to her chums, Wilma and Betty Worth.

The girls were seated on the porch of the Tracey home, discussing a contest which had recently been announced by their Carmont High School English teacher. She had informed the students that a highly desirable “secret” award would be made to the two persons submitting the finest original poem and the best short story.

“A short story with a mystery plot would be appropriate for you, Kay,” commented dark-haired Wilma.

“Yes,” added her fair-haired twin, Betty. “Since you’re always involved in one, it should be no trouble at all for you to write a winning tale.”

“But a real-life mystery and an imaginary one are two different things,” Kay protested. “Unfortunately, I can’t think of an intriguing plot.”

“Why not write up your exciting experiences at Watch Hill?” Betty suggested. “Couldn’t you weave them into a story?”

Kay shook her head.

“The prize winning story must be strictly original with the writer. Everyone at Carmont High has heard all the details of what happened to me in that mysterious old mansion.”

“I’m the one who should worry,” Wilma fretted. “I’d love to win the poetry prize! But like Kay, I can’t think of a suitable topic.”

“I can give you one,” the Tracey girl announced quickly. With a wave of her hand she indicated the Western horizon, the low-hung sun, and the deep shadows of twilight.

“Shadows!” Wilma cried. Then, inspired by this thought, she began to compose extemporaneously:

“When shadows fell at eventide
And the sun sank in the west,
The witches of old were wont to ride
From the moon to the mountain crest.”

“Why, that has a nice swing,” Kay praised, as Wilma paused. “Let’s hear the rest of it.”

“I can’t think of anything more. Besides, I don’t like it. It’s too light. I’m sure it would never win the prize, even if I should finish it.”

“I thought poems came by inspiration,” Kay teased.

“Not prize winning ones. ‘Perspiration’ would be a better word!”

“What’s all this excitement about prizes?” a deep masculine voice demanded. “How can I win one?”

The girls turned, and saw Bill Tracey standing in the doorway of the house. Kay noticed at once that the young lawyer had a legal document in one hand, but he made no mention of it as he joked with the twins.

“Cousin Bill, do you want me to do something for you?” Kay presently questioned.

“I thought you might go on an errand. Mrs. Van Hutton is expecting this paper for her signature. I’d take it to her myself, only I’m snowed under with work.”

“I’ll be glad to deliver the paper for you,” Kay assured her relative promptly. “I think the twins would like to come with me.”

“Yes, indeed,” Wilma agreed. “I’ve always wanted to see the interior of Mrs. Van Hutton’s beautiful home, anyway.”

“Haven’t I noticed her name in the newspaper recently?” Kay inquired alertly.

“No doubt you have,” the lawyer explained. “She is one of the biggest stockholders in the Treadwell Shoe Corporation, that’s getting front page stories just now.”

“Isn’t that the concern which has had so much trouble with its employees?”

“Yes. The workers are out on strike.”

“What is your part in the case?” asked Kay.

“I am doing legal work for the president and director of the company. Mrs. Van Hutton is reluctant to grant certain of their demands. The delay has tied up the entire factory, with the result that at the present time the company finds itself in serious financial difficulties. She has consented at last, though, to sign this paper, and that will help the whole situation.”

“I’ll hurry,” Kay promised, accepting the envelope.

The girls caught a Fairmont Boulevard bus at the corner. Then, rather proud of their responsibility, they rode toward the wealthy woman’s home. As a stop was made a little later to take on passengers, Kay suddenly grasped Betty by the hand.

“Look!” she directed, indicating an automobile parked in a side road. “Isn’t that Mrs. Van Hutton?”

“Why, it is,” Betty acknowledged. “And she’s talking with some man, who looks excited about something, the way he’s waving his arms about. Who can he be?”

Before the girls could leave the bus, they were carried toward the next stop. They decided that perhaps they had better not

intrude in Mrs. Van Hutton's conversation, anyway, so they rode on.

"We may as well take the papers to the house since we've missed her," Kay decided.

The girls arrived at the residence they sought, an imposing brick building. They were pleasantly greeted by Ellen Tremont, an attractive young woman of some twenty years, who acted as private secretary to the wealthy woman.

"Do come in," she said cordially. "I am expecting Mrs. Van Hutton any minute."

As Kay and her friends were ushered into the drawing room, the Tracey girl caught a glimpse of a small boy with blonde hair and wide, blue eyes, peering at them from behind a velvet curtain. Playfully Miss Tremont captured him, and led him forth to meet the callers.

"Are you Mrs. Van Hutton's little boy?" Kay asked with interest. "What is your name?"

"My name's Kenneth, and I'm an orphan," the seven year old lad said gravely. "I live with my grandma."

"Oh, I see," Kay laughed, annoyed at her mistake. "Do you live here?"

The boy assented indifferently. "I don't like it much 'cause I get lonesome," he said. "Grandma never lets any little boys come to see me. 'Course it's fun playing with Ellen and she tells me dandy stories, but Grandma keeps her terrible busy."

“Kenneth is very fond of his grandmother,” the secretary hastily explained, “but Mrs. Van Hutton is so occupied with all her affairs that she cannot devote much time to him.” Under her breath, Kay heard the young woman add softly, “It’s a shame, too!”

While the three girls were trying to amuse Kenneth, a car swept up the driveway, and a minute later Mrs. Van Hutton entered the house. She was alone. Observing that her chums were about to say they had seen the woman a short time before, Kay unobtrusively signaled them not to disclose the fact.

Quickly Kay introduced herself, explained her mission, and offered the paper for Mrs. Van Hutton’s signature. The woman glanced briefly at the document, then handed it back.

“I am very sorry, but I can’t put my name to this. I have recently changed my mind about doing so.”

Kay was perplexed. A suspicion that the stranger in Mrs. Van Hutton’s car might have been responsible for the decision came to her. She was more convinced of this than ever a few minutes later.

The doorbell rang. Mrs. Van Hutton started, looked slightly guilty, then ended by laughing self-consciously.

“I’ll answer it,” Miss Tremont volunteered. “I am expecting a caller, so it’s probably for me.”

She returned almost immediately, followed by a well-dressed man of perhaps thirty-five. He was the same person the girls

had seen in Mrs. Van Hutton's car!

The secretary presented him as Mr. Peter Stannovi, her fiance, who had been in this country only a short time. To the girls' amazement, Mrs. Van Hutton greeted him as if he were a total stranger.

"I am charmed to make your acquaintance," he said, bowing low, and not giving the slightest indication that he had ever seen the society woman before.

This pretense mystified Kay. She wished that she might remain to find out how long it would be kept up. This being out of the question, she made a final appeal to Mrs. Van Hutton concerning the signature, and upon being refused, she left the house with the twins.

As the door closed behind them Kay said, "It was all so strange the way they acted as if they had never seen each other before!"

"And did you notice how Mrs. Van Hutton glanced at Mr. Stannovi when you asked her that last time if she would sign the paper?" Betty demanded.

"I certainly did," Kay returned. "It's my guess he induced her to refuse. The whole thing's queer."

"Spooky," commented Wilma.

For some minutes the girls walked along in silence, each absorbed in her own thoughts. Then unexpectedly Kay made an announcement.

“I was just thinking that perhaps this trip wasn’t entirely a waste of time after all!”

“What do you mean?” Betty asked curiously.

“We’ve stumbled into the makings of a fine mystery!” Kay replied. “Lovely American girl working as secretary to a wealthy woman, who makes speeches about the conditions of the poor. Said woman also gives talks about child welfare, but neglects the little boy entrusted to her care. Moreover, she has some kind of secret dealings with a foreigner whom she pretends not to know, and yet who is engaged to her own secretary! There’s a mystery, if there ever was one!”

“And you mean to solve it,” Wilma stated, her dark eyes sparkling.

“Who can tell?” Kay replied. “But just at present my interest in this mystery is a literary one. I intend to elaborate on it and make a short story for the prize contest!”

CHAPTER II

A TRICK EXPOSED

“The shadow falls on vine-clad walls,
In mystic sheens of shade and light—”

Seated at her desk in the study hall of Carmont High School, Wilma Worth scribbled the above lines, then thoughtfully chewed the end of her pencil as she struggled to finish the stanza.

Across the aisle from her Kay was writing steadily, the words fairly flowing from her pen. It was recess, and the girls were using the time to complete their entries in the prize contest, which closed that afternoon. For days they had worked over their original compositions. Now that the dead-line was so near, they were frantic lest they fail to get their contributions in on time. The English teacher had warned the students that nothing would be accepted that was late in being submitted.

“There!” Kay cried at last, as she blotted the final page. “It’s done, and I’ve called my story ‘The Mystery of the White Door.’”

“I think you’ve chosen a title that sounds interesting,” Wilma praised. “I wish I had time to read your

manuscript, but if I stop now I'll never finish my poem. I'm calling it 'Shadows.' I feel as if it isn't going to be any good."

"Nonsense! You should have more faith in your own ability," Kay chided, as she neatly folded her own literary attempt and placed it on the teacher's desk. "I'll go away now, and leave you alone so you won't be disturbed."

When the students filed back into the study hall at the end of recess, Wilma was still struggling valiantly. Her desk was littered with papers, her hair was dishevelled, while a smudge of ink stood out on her cheek. Despite it all, her eyes gleamed with triumph. Her poem was finished!

"It's beyond me how anyone can get so excited about a contest," Ethel Eaton, a schoolmate who had never been friendly to Kay or her chums, remarked petulantly to a companion. "I don't expect to have my story ready before tomorrow."

"Then you may find it will be too late for acceptance," Wilma, who had overheard her, retorted.

"I'm not worrying," Ethel said airily.

Before the close of the afternoon session the English teacher called for all the entries which had not been turned in. Every student save Ethel Eaton handed in a paper.

"I'll have mine ready tomorrow," the disagreeable girl announced, as the woman paused by her desk.

“I am sorry, Miss Eaton, but I cannot accept your entry late,” said the instructor. “It is unfortunate that you did not comply with the rules, for the prize is such a splendid one.”

Later, in the locker room, Ethel gave vent to her anger and disappointment. “It’s unfair! Why shouldn’t I have a right to compete with the others, even if my entry is a day late? If Kay Tracey had been the tardy one, you can be sure Miss Waters would have extended the dead-line for *her*.”

“Oh, forget it,” someone advised bluntly. “You knew the rules as well as the rest of us.”

Kay and the Worth twins made their way from school leisurely toward the station, where they were to catch the train to take them to Brantwood, a town some few miles away, where their homes were. As they passed through Carmont Park, the Tracey girl drew her friends’ attention to a group of factory workers who had gathered to hear the fiery speech of a soap-box orator.

“Let’s stop and listen,” she proposed. “The people are from the factory that makes boxes for the Treadwell Shoe Corporation. I read in the morning paper that they have voted to strike.”

The three girls crowded closer, and mingled with the workers. The speech itself did not interest them, but they were fascinated by the elaborate gestures and impressive tones of the youthful orator. His hearers did not appear to be much impressed, however. Kay noticed that their attention

was focused on something in the center of the little group. Unable to see what it was, she moved nearer.

Suddenly Kay was startled to hear a child's voice; one that sounded strangely familiar. The next instant she caught a glimpse of little Kenneth Van Hutton, completely encircled by adults, and making a speech all his own.

“My grandma owns the Treadwell Shoe Corporation,” he proclaimed in shrill tones. “And she says——”

Pushing her way through the crowd, Kay reached the boy and grasped him by the hand, just as a rough looking man started to pick him up.

“Kenneth, how did you get here?”

“Oh, I rode in the back of a bakery truck most of the way and walked the rest,” he told her proudly.

“But your grandmother will be worried about you. Does she know you left home?”

“I don't 'spect she does.”

“Then I'm going to take you straight back to her.”

Kay hastily lifted up the lad and carried him through the crowd to the place where the twins were waiting.

“It's a wonder he didn't get into serious trouble,” she said in an undertone to her chums after they had moved some distance from the throng. “I reached him just as he was

telling that his grandmother owns the Treadwell Shoe Corporation. There's a strong feeling against the company, and some fanatic might have injured the lad or kidnaped him."

"Only a cruel, hard-hearted person would harm a child," Betty declared feelingly, "but I agree that this is no place for Kenneth. What are you going to do with him, Kay?"

"Take him to his grandmother, of course. She's probably searching the city for him now."

"Perhaps," Wilma commented doubtfully. "It seems to me she should pay less attention to her social affairs and a little more to her grandson!"

Kay shot her chum a warning glance, but Kenneth had not heard the remark. Now that he had found friends, he seemed perfectly happy, skipping ahead of them down the walk.

Some time later the girls rang the bell at Mrs. Van Hutton's home, and Ellen Tremont opened the door. She gave a cry of joy as she caught Kenneth in her arms.

"Oh, I've been so worried. He left the house while I was working on some letters for Mrs. Van Hutton," she explained. "Where have you been, darling?"

"Most everywhere," the boy informed her grandly.

"But why did you run away? If you only knew how frightened I was!"

“It wasn’t any fun sitting in the house all by myself, Ellen. I got so lonesome I thought I’d walk down to the corner. Then the bakery truck came by and I got inside.”

“Mrs. Van Hutton will be very grateful to you, I know,” the secretary told Kay. “Do come in, for I’m confident she will want to thank you personally.”

The girls were conducted to the study where the wealthy woman was busy writing. She smiled pleasantly as they entered.

“Ah, I see you have recovered my mischievous young grandson for me. Where did you find him, may I ask?”

“In Carmont Park among a group of strikers from the Winton Box Factory,” Kay informed her briefly.

For an instant Mrs. Van Hutton frowned. Then her face resumed its usual tranquil expression.

“Dear me, that was a long way from here. Kenneth, you must promise Grandma never to run away again.”

“Not unless I get lonesome,” the boy told her. “Why don’t you stay home and play with me sometimes?”

“I wish I could, dear.” She turned again to Kay. “Thank you for all your trouble, Miss Tracey.”

“You are very welcome, I’m sure,” the girl returned a trifle stiffly. She was disappointed at the woman’s lack of interest

in the boy's welfare. "By the way, I don't suppose you've changed your mind about signing that paper, have you?"

"No, I can't say that I have. I wish I might accommodate you, but I fear it's out of the question."

So saying, she politely bade the callers good-bye, Ellen escorting them to the door.

"I can't understand Mrs. Van Hutton's attitude," Kay remarked later as she reported the incident to Cousin Bill and her mother at dinner. "She doesn't seem much interested in either Kenneth or the Treadwell Corporation. And yet I'm told she goes around making speeches on child welfare and conditions among poor people."

"Unless she can be made to realize how things stand, she'll wreck the Shoe Corporation," Cousin Bill said quietly. "From what you've told me, Kay, I rather judge that Stannovi has been influencing her. I must take time to look up his record."

"It should be interesting. There seems to be some mystery about that man."

"Trust our Kay to find out what it is," Mrs. Tracey said, smiling.

"The main mystery I'm interested in just now concerns a White Door," her daughter replied.

"Don't build up your hopes on winning a prize for your story," her mother counseled her.

Speculation about the contest was pushed somewhat into the background, however, by an approaching gymnasium and swimming exhibition for girls to be held at the school. Kay and Betty were among those chosen to compete. Ethel Eaton complained bitterly of favoritism, since she was to take no part in the affair.

New shoes for the competitors had been ordered, but at the last moment the principal was forced to announce that because of a strike at the Treadwell Shoe Factory the wearing apparel would not be available for the pupils.

“What a shame,” cried Betty. “It’s all Mrs. Van Hutton’s fault, I believe.”

“Yes,” commented Kay, “she should have signed that paper Cousin Bill had. Now there will be all kinds of trouble.”

The chums practiced faithfully, and were very happy when their mothers accepted an invitation to be present at the evening performance. The swimming meet was run off first. Kay distinguished herself by winning several dashes, while Betty made an excellent showing in the longer races.

In the gymnastic exhibition Kay was called upon to work from the swinging trapeze. She executed a few simple stunts; then, taking a firm leg hold, she swung with her head down, hands outstretched. The crowd cheered. Suddenly the clapping ceased, and a low cry of horror issued from a hundred throats. A rope which held the trapeze had become unfastened at the ceiling!

“Look out! Look out!” somebody shouted frantically.

As one end of the apparatus sagged, Kay realized her danger. Desperately she struggled to maintain her hold on the bar, but knew she could not do it. Swinging outward, she glimpsed a soft mat which had been used only a few minutes earlier in a tumbling exhibition. She knew she was doomed to fall, but felt that if she could only hurl herself upon the padded surface she might be able to escape serious injury.

Kay was not the type of girl to take unnecessary risks. However, her very life now depended upon the rapidity and precision with which she acted. She was thankful that she was naturally athletic, and that her father, Roger Tracey, a newspaper editor who had died many years before, had taught her to face any kind of a situation with courage.

Although Kay resembled her mother in appearance only slightly, she had the same ready smile, slim figure, and regular features that Mrs. Tracey had. Her eyes were brown, and in the sunlight her beautiful wavy hair took on a delightful golden sheen.

With Wilma and Betty, the Worth twins who were as unlike in make-up as they were in appearance, Kay attended school at Carmont, commuting daily from Brantwood, which was only a few miles distant. The girl was popular with her classmates, and of late her many exciting adventures had aroused considerable comment. She was often requested to relate how she had solved “The Secret of the Red Scarf,” and “The Strange Echo.” Yet, in recent months this interesting

adventure had been overshadowed by her astonishing capture of a noted Criminal, recounted in “The Mystery of the Swaying Curtains.”

Slight wonder that a wave of horror passed over the audience as Kay made her flying leap through the air, for she was loved and admired by nearly everyone. Mrs. Tracey arose from her seat, white with terror. Betty, who was close by, darted forward, hoping to break her chum’s fall. But she was too late!

Kay knew what she was about, however. Twisting in mid-air, she hurled herself toward the mat. Then, striking it, she tucked herself into a ball and rolled. An instant later Betty was assisting her chum to her feet.

“Are you badly hurt?” she gasped.

“I’m not hurt at all. I guess it was lucky for me that this mat was here, or I might have broken my neck.”

The audience burst into wild applause for the escape had been an extremely clever one. After Kay had brushed the dust from her costume, she smilingly acknowledged the tribute of the spectators. The physical instructor praised the heroine’s quick thinking, then advised her to go to the dressing room for a shower and brisk rub-down. Betty accompanied her chum, and after obtaining soap and towels the girls went to their lockers.

“Why, my clothes are gone!” the Worth girl cried in amazement as she opened the door of her compartment.

“Everything!”

“You’re probably in the wrong locker,” Kay smiled, refusing to be disturbed.

“No, I have number twenty-four, and I tell you all my clothes are gone!”

“Didn’t you lock it up?”

Betty shook her head disconsolately. “I thought I wouldn’t bother because so few girls were using the dressing room.”

“But I’m certain no one taking part in the exhibition could have stolen your things, Betty. You must be confused about the locker. Just as soon as I get my clothes I’ll help you find yours.”

Confidently she inserted her key and opened a nearby wardrobe. It was her turn to stare blankly.

“So *your* things are gone, too!” Betty exclaimed, not without a tiny tinge of satisfaction. “Now, maybe you’re mixed up about your locker!”

“It looks as if someone has stolen our belongings, all right,” Kay admitted. “Maybe it was done as a prank.”

“Well, this isn’t my idea of a prank!” Betty was shivering. “It’s a mean trick, that’s all I can say!”

“It’s a mystery to me how anyone got into my locker, unless the person used a skeleton key.”

“How are we to get home?” Betty groaned. “We can’t go in these shorts.”

While the girls were discussing their predicament, Wilma entered the dressing room.

“Haven’t you started to get ready yet, Betty? Mother said I was to tell you to hurry.”

“I can’t go without any clothes. Someone has stolen them!”

A queer expression passed over Wilma’s face, which her sister was quick to note.

“Wilma, did you hide our things for a joke?”

“I never play practical jokes,” the other returned. “But I think I may be able to tell you what became of your clothes.”

“Then do so before we freeze to death,” Betty urged.

“I didn’t say I could produce your things. I merely said I might be able to throw some light on the situation.”

“Then throw it before we throw something at you,” Betty cut in quickly. “This may look funny to you but it’s a very serious matter with us.”

“I was getting some water at the fountain in the hall upstairs about fifteen minutes ago,” Wilma said, “when I noticed a strange, grotesque shadow moving across the glass door of the fire escape.”

“And what has that to do with our clothes?” Betty interrupted impatiently. “Since you wrote that poem, I’m afraid you have shadows on your mind.”

“If you don’t care to listen, I’ll not go on!”

“We want to hear all about it,” Kay said hastily. “What sort of shadow did you see?”

“I’m convinced now that it was someone carrying a pile of clothes. Even as I saw the silhouette, I said to myself, ‘Coming events cast their shadows before them.’”

“That shadow certainly forecast enough trouble for Betty and me,” Kay declared feelingly. “Wilma, couldn’t you tell who it was? I’d give anything to know.”

The dark-haired twin hesitated, for she disliked to accuse anyone without evidence to back up her claim. Yet she had noticed the person’s profile very clearly, and felt sure of the identification.

CHAPTER III

A DEMAND FOR MONEY

“Ethel Eaton!” Kay exclaimed indignantly, when Wilma told her suspicions. “I might have guessed as much. She’s been most hateful since her story failed to be considered in the prize contest. She was peeved because she wasn’t invited to take part in this exhibition, too.”

“She had no reason for taking her spite out on us,” Betty declared. “Just wait until I see her again!”

“You mustn’t accuse her without more evidence,” Wilma interposed hastily. “After all, it was only a shadow I saw and I might have been mistaken.”

“Wilma’s right,” Kay agreed. “It won’t do to let Ethel suspect we know—at least not yet.”

“But I want my clothes back!”

“Perhaps we’ll get them some time. Meanwhile, let’s consider how we’re to get home.”

“You and Betty go ahead and take your showers,” Wilma suggested. “I’ll see if I can borrow some clothes for you.”

As the two girls left the shower room a few minutes later, Wilma met them with a number of garments collected from various sources.

“These aren’t very good-looking, but they’re the best I could find.”

Gratefully the girls accepted the clothes. As they emerged from the dressing room they presented a ludicrous spectacle. Nothing matched, and Betty’s garments were far too small for her. Friends gathered about to inquire for details of the strange disappearance, but Kay and Betty refrained from saying anything that might incriminate Ethel, even though they deeply resented the unkind trick she had played on them.

Mrs. Tracey and Mrs. Worth were awaiting their daughters in the front lobby. Betty told them all that had happened, while Kay drew Wilma aside for a few words.

“Before we go, I want you to show me where you saw that shadow,” she demanded.

“Why, of course,” replied Wilma. “But Ethel won’t be there now.”

“No, she probably took the clothes and hid them somewhere. Let’s look, anyway.”

Without attracting anyone’s attention they made their way to the floor above and quietly opened the door leading to the fire escape. It was a clear night, with every nook and corner

of the school yard standing out clearly. As they had anticipated, Ethel Eaton was nowhere in sight.

They were turning to leave when something on a low step attracted Kay's attention. It was a pile of clothes. With a low cry of satisfaction the girl hastened to reclaim the lost property.

"Ethel must have been afraid to carry the things very far for fear she'd be caught," Kay pointed out to Wilma. "Oh, there's no doubt in my mind now about the identity of that shadow."

The next day both Betty and Kay made a point of wearing their "lost" clothes to school. Ethel flushed when she saw them. However, as the girls made no mention of the affair, the Eaton girl grew confident, even to the point of making flippant remarks.

"She thinks we haven't an idea as to who did it," Kay confided to her chums. "The time may come, though, when it will be our turn to laugh," she added.

The press of school duties had kept Kay from giving much thought to Mrs. Van Hutton or little Kenneth, but one day when Mrs. Tracey casually mentioned that the well-known woman was scheduled to speak at the Brantwood Club, the girl's interest was aroused.

"What is to be the subject of her talk, Mother?"

"I'm not sure. It has to do with the necessity for bettering the conditions of the poor. I believe I'll attend."

“May I go with you?”

Mrs. Tracey smiled. “Why this sudden interest in speeches?”

“I’m rather curious about Mrs. Van Hutton,” Kay replied mysteriously.

“Come if you wish, of course, dear,” her mother returned. “I’d like to have you go with me.”

The following afternoon Kay and Mrs. Tracey were among the few who gathered to hear the scheduled talk. Mrs. Van Hutton spoke in a pleasing manner, but to some of her listeners it seemed that she had not worked out carefully some of the plans which she proposed. At the conclusion of the lecture, Mrs. Tracey and Kay paused to say a few words to the speaker.

“Did you like my little talk?” she asked them eagerly.

“Very much indeed,” Mrs. Tracey told her politely. “But your plan for bettering conditions in factories——”

“I should love to go into more detail about that if we only had more time,” Mrs. Van Hutton interrupted. She seemed struck by a sudden inspiration. “I am giving a reception tonight for a well-known politician. I wish you and your charming daughter would attend.”

Kay nudged her mother, for she was afraid Mrs. Tracey might not accept the invitation.

“And bring the Worth twins if they would care to come,” Mrs. Van Hutton added as an afterthought.

Mrs. Tracey accepted the invitation graciously. A few minutes later she and Kay left the place.

“Well, I did it for your sake,” the former remarked as they walked slowly home. “I cannot understand your sudden interest in Mrs. Van Hutton, Kay, unless it’s because you’ve scented another mystery.”

“It was at her house that I got my idea for the prize story, Mother. And I think there is something strange going on there.”

Betty and Wilma were thrilled at the thought of attending a reception in such an attractive home. In response to Kay’s telephone call they promised to be ready at nine o’clock, when the Traceys were to call for them in Cousin Bill’s car.

The Van Hutton house was brilliantly lighted as the little party arrived, and many of the guests were already there. After greeting their hostess Kay and the twins left Mrs. Tracey and looked about for Ellen Tremont, but she was nowhere to be seen. After some conversation with several adults, Betty, bored, urged that the girls sit down on a comfortable couch in an inconspicuous place and wait for refreshments to be served.

“This party is dry as dust,” she complained. “The only subjects under discussion are politics and economics. And I get enough of the latter at school.”

At that moment Kay gripped her chum's hand.

"See who's arriving!" she whispered. "Peter Stannovi! Over there by the door. He's greeting Mrs. Van Hutton."

"And how he does linger over her hand," Betty commented with rising interest.

"It's my guess Miss Tremont hasn't a suspicion Stannovi even knows Mrs. Van Hutton, save by sight."

Kay had been watching the two very closely. "There's something going on, that's evident. But who knows what is a puzzle. I hope it isn't Mrs. Van Hutton who is being fooled. She is nice, even if she is gullible and easily impressed."

"Well, it's none of our affair," Betty said with a shrug. "Let's try some of the fruit punch in the other room."

After they had quenched their thirst, the girls mingled again with the guests. Kay hoped to meet Stannovi, but he seemed to avoid her. She happened to be standing near a tall potted palm, when she noticed the man speaking with Mrs. Van Hutton, and presently the two moved out upon a veranda and paused where Kay could hear their conversation.

"I must have the money," she heard Stannovi say in a tense voice to the woman.

"But I have given you so much already," came the response. "I really don't see how I can make another contribution."

“I tell you I must have it without delay, Mrs. Van Hutton. I’m sure if you were to think over the matter carefully you’d realize that you could not afford to turn me down.”

Was Stannovi deliberately threatening the woman? Kay was not quite certain.

“Well, all right. I’ll send you a check in the morning,” Mrs. Van Hutton said hastily. “We mustn’t be seen talking here together.”

He stepped back into the brilliantly lighted reception room. A moment later Mrs. Van Hutton entered alone.

“Where did you go?” Wilma queried when Kay rejoined her companions. “Your mother is ready to go home.”

“And so am I, for I’ve had enough of receptions for one night.”

The following day she and her friends were at school as usual, and were told that just before closing hour the English teacher would make an important announcement.

“I am now able to tell you the names of the winners in the poetry and short story contests,” Miss Waters began. “But first I shall explain about the prize.”

Every eye in the room was fastened upon the woman; everyone was listening with bated breath.

“The two best entries will be sent to *Hearthstones*, a national magazine with which you are all familiar. It has been very

difficult for us judges to select the winning compositions, for all of the work was of an unusually high quality. However, in their estimation the two best entries submitted were by——”

The students leaned forward expectantly in their seats, but could not catch another word, for at that moment someone in the school yard below started tooting a noisy automobile horn. The all-important announcement was lost.

CHAPTER IV

THE WINNER

After the noise had died away, the English teacher joined in the laughter, and then began again.

“The two prize-winning entries were submitted by Kay Tracey and Wilma Worth,” she said. “Miss Worth handed in a beautiful poem called ‘Shadows,’ while Miss Tracey has written a most unusual mystery story entitled ‘The Mystery of the White Door.’ These two pieces of work will be sent immediately to *Hearthstones* for consideration in a national literary contest, and we trust that they will bring honor to our school.”

There was a little hum of excitement, and everyone began to clap. Wilma and Kay became the focal point of all eyes, yet no one, save perhaps Ethel Eaton, begrudged them their success. In the halls friends gathered about the lucky ones to congratulate them.

“Oh, I’m so glad you both won!” Betty cried joyfully, hugging the two girls. “If you can only be chosen in the national contest how proud everyone will be!”

“I don’t expect any such remarkable luck,” Kay declared, and Wilma echoed her sentiments.

The girls were still thrilled with their success as they went to the locker room for their wraps. Entering unexpectedly, they could not help but catch a phrase which had not been intended for their ears.

“I’d like to see that prize story,” Ethel Eaton was saying to a companion. “If it’s half as good as the teacher says it is, I’ll bet Kay Tracey copied it out of some magazine!”

Furious, Kay marched up to the offensive girl, for she could not refrain from defending herself. “You know that isn’t true, Ethel!” she said. “Every word of my story is original with me. You may read it yourself.”

“I’d not go to so much trouble over such a silly thing,” Ethel retorted furiously, turning away.

Wilma and Betty did their best to placate Kay, but she was thoroughly aroused at the insult. As the three girls rode toward Brantwood she would not even discuss the matter.

“It’s only Ethel’s dreadful jealousy,” Wilma repeated. “Half the time she doesn’t realize what she’s saying.”

“Let’s not talk about it any more,” Kay smiled. “Let’s discuss the picnic we’re having tomorrow. What shall we take with us?”

“After a long hike every girl and boy will be ravenously hungry,” Betty responded. “We must bring something

substantial.”

“Chops, and plenty of them,” Wilma suggested, growing enthusiastic at the thought.

“We may as well buy everything tonight,” Kay proposed. “In that way things will be ready for an early start in the morning.”

They began to figure their exact needs. Ten persons in addition to themselves had agreed to make the hike to Jordan’s Gully, a picturesque spot nearly nine miles from Brantwood. Ronald Earle and several of his friends had promised to accompany the girls.

“We’ll need at least twenty chops,” Kay calculated. “Dear me, that seems like a lot.”

“It won’t after you’ve walked nine miles in the crisp air,” Betty told her. “If I were doing the figuring I’d make it twenty-five for good measure.”

By the time they reached Smith’s Grocery and Meat Store, the girls had their list of purchases ready. The place was unusually crowded and they were forced to wait their turn. Suddenly Kay noticed Ellen Tremont in the shop.

She moved over to the secretary, speaking to her cordially. “I am so glad to see you again, Miss Tremont. I had hoped to talk with you the night of Mrs. Van Hutton’s reception.”

“My employer wanted me to stay upstairs with Kenneth,” the young woman explained. “Poor little fellow, he gets so

lonesome and often cries himself to sleep.”

“But I thought that since your friend Mr. Stannovi was there
_____”

Miss Tremont looked startled. “Oh, no, you must be mistaken. I’m sure he wasn’t at the reception. You see, he hardly knows Mrs. Van Hutton by sight. I introduced them to each other myself only a few days ago. You recall it. You were there.”

“Perhaps I mistook another for him,” Kay said quietly.

She did not for an instant believe that she had been mistaken. Had she cared to press the point, Wilma and Betty would have supported her statement. It was clear now that Ellen Tremont did not know of Stannovi’s duplicity, much less suspect that he was accepting money from her employer.

As the secretary had finished her marketing, she waited for the girls to make their purchases, and then left the store with Kay and the twins, walking a short distance with them. Encouraged by their friendly questions, she told the girls about herself.

She had taken a position as secretary with Mrs. Van Hutton early in the year, but found it far from pleasant. Her employer, though careless about many things, was very exacting where her employees were concerned.

“She really needs two secretaries to handle all her correspondence,” Miss Tremont declared. “Besides doing all my regular work, I spend my leisure time looking after

Kenneth. Not that I'm complaining, for I love the lad, but Mrs. Van Hutton doesn't realize how much there is for me to do."

"Why don't you resign?" Betty suggested.

"Several times I've considered it, but on Kenneth's account I have always changed my mind. However, perhaps I'll be married in the Spring. Then Mrs. Van Hutton will have to find someone else to do the work."

Kay and her friends exchanged significant glances. Tactfully Kay broached the subject of Peter Stannovi.

"He comes of an old European family, he tells me," the young woman answered proudly. "His home in this country is in Bridgeton. He is a chemist there, with a fine laboratory in a large manufacturing plant—the Hammond Company, I believe he said."

"Have you known him long?" Kay inquired doubtfully.

"Well, not a great while," Ellen Tremont admitted. "My sister, Mrs. Grace Lambert, thinks he is too old for me, but I don't agree with her."

"Is Grace Lambert your sister?" Kay demanded in amazement. "You don't mean the Grace Lambert who edits *Hearthstones*?"

"Indeed I do, and I feel quite proud of having such a brilliant sister. Since the death of her husband she has become absorbed in her work and is doing very well with it. Just at

present I believe she's writing a series of articles about factory conditions. You may have heard of the national contest which *Hearthstones* is conducting?"

"We've not only heard of it, but we're in it!" Kay laughed. "Wilma is competing with a poem and I have submitted a short story."

"I hope you both win."

The conversation switched to less personal subjects, then a few minutes later Miss Tremont took leave of the girls.

"I didn't have the courage to tell her about Stannovi," Kay confessed to her chums as they continued down the street. "But it doesn't seem right to stand aside and permit her to marry that man if he's unworthy of her."

"No, it doesn't," Betty agreed soberly. "I wish we could do something about it."

"Perhaps we can later," Kay said hopefully, "but I don't want to make any rash moves. I think I'll wait and see if I can learn more about him."

"Whatever you do, don't become so engrossed in the mystery that you'll forget the hike tomorrow," Wilma warned as the twins left Kay at her doorstep. "Remember, we start at seven o'clock sharp."

The following day dawned bright. Dressed in becoming hiking clothes and stout shoes, Kay reached the appointed

meeting place ahead of her chums. But Ronald was already there.

“Hello, Kay,” he called. “Gee, you look stunning,” he added.

The girl blushed becomingly, and was about to reply, when she was greeted by some other young people. By half-past seven everyone had arrived, and the group trudged off to the tune of an inspiring martial air.

Long before Jordan’s Gully was reached, the hikers were loudly clamoring for food. Ronald and the boys built a roaring fire, while the girls prepared the chops for broiling.

“We need water,” Wilma observed, picking up an empty pail. “If someone will show me the way to the spring, I’ll get some.”

“Straight ahead of you, up the hill,” Kay directed. “The place is half hidden among the rocks and bushes.”

Wilma disappeared with the bucket. She had been gone perhaps ten minutes when Kay and her friends heard a loud scream. Dropping their work, all the boys and girls ran to see what had happened. They found Wilma sprawled out upon the path, thoroughly drenched with water, the empty pail still clutched tightly in her hand.

“There’s a wild animal in the bushes!” she warned in a tense voice as Kay rushed to help the girl to her feet. “I was so startled at seeing it that I tripped and fell.”

“What sort of animal?” Ronald questioned doubtfully. “I didn’t know there was any wild game in this part of the country.”

“It was a grayish brown animal with large ears. It rushed by me almost at my feet.”

“You don’t mean that innocent little rabbit over there by the briars?” Betty demanded, pointing.

“Of course it wasn’t a rabbit!” Wilma retorted indignantly. “That is, it couldn’t have been,” she amended less confidently.

By this time Ronald had discovered rabbit tracks in the soft earth near the place where Wilma had fallen. “I’m afraid the evidence is against you,” he said. “The ferocious animal seems to have been a rabbit.”

“And he’s sitting over there winking at you now,” Kay added with a laugh.

“I’ll get the water,” Ronald offered, picking up the empty vessel. “You’d better dry yourself, Wilma.”

The crestfallen girl permitted herself to be led back to the fire. Fresh fuel was piled on until the flames leaped high.

“Be careful so your clothes don’t catch fire,” Betty warned.

A few minutes later the light-haired twin forgot her own admonition. In chatting with Kay, who was placing the chops on a wire rack, she carelessly turned her back to the blaze.

“Look out!” Kay called. “You’re standing too close!”

Betty turned quickly and gave a scream of terror. Flames shot up the skirt of her attractive suit!

CHAPTER V

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Betty beat ineffectively at her blazing garments. Then, overcome with fright, she started to run.

“Stop!” Kay shouted, springing after her chum.

She caught the girl roughly by the shoulders and flung her to the ground. Then she rolled her over twice very slowly. Jerking off her own coat, she extinguished the remaining flames by smothering them with it. By this time Ronald had come dashing up with a pail of water and would have drenched Betty, had not Kay stopped him.

“No use ruining my good coat. The flames are out.”

“You saved my life, Kay,” Betty murmured gratefully. “I lost my head completely when I realized I was on fire.”

“Let me see your arms,” Kay directed. “Are you burned?”

Gingerly Betty examined herself.

“I seem to be all right, but this suit is completely ruined. Your coat, too, has a hole in the lining.”

“It doesn’t matter. I can mend it easily. But let’s get the food cooked before anything else happens!”

Soon the air was filled with the odor of broiling chops, whose cooking Kay superintended. By the time the meat had been browned over the fire, the buttered buns were ready, and the other dishes prepared.

“Gee, you’re some cook, Kay,” praised Ronald. “These sobs-s-u-gu——”

No further words were intelligible; his mouth was too full. The entire group laughed, then began telling stories, which presently turned to the eerie variety. Especially was Kay induced to recite some, which she did well, owing to her ability to solve mysteries. Finally Wilma announced that it was time for them to leave.

It was nearly dark when the young people reached the outskirts of Brantwood. Fearing that her mother might be worrying about her, Kay stopped at a drug store to telephone home. She entered an empty booth, and was in the act of taking down the receiver when she heard a familiar voice at another instrument.

“I’m sure Ethel Eaton is in the booth beside me,” she thought. “I don’t want to meet her, so I’ll just wait a minute until she’s made her call.”

Kay did not intend to listen to the conversation, but was forced to, as Ethel had a high, shrill voice which carried distinctly.

“Yes,” the girl was saying, “I’ll meet the six-fifteen train Tuesday. Be sure to wear a white carnation so I’ll know who you are, Mr. Scott.”

“Now what can she be up to?” Kay speculated.

Of the remainder of the conversation she heard but a few words: “You say I’ll recognize you by your mustache? All right, but don’t forget the carnation. Good-bye.”

After making certain that Ethel had left the drug store, Kay put in her call, then took her departure. Her eyes danced with mischief.

“It’s a splendid opportunity to get even with Ethel for having stolen my clothes,” she reflected. “If Ronnie will help me, I’ve a notion to try it.”

The plan continued to take form in her mind. She was so pleased with it that the next morning she called Ronald for a secret conference.

“Remember, not a word to anyone about it,” she warned after he had promised to aid her. “If the news should leak out, the joke will surely fail.”

“I’ll keep it to myself, Kay. Ethel has been acting too important to suit me lately. This may bring her down to realities.”

It was very difficult to keep the secret from Wilma and Betty, particularly when Kay wished them to share in the fun, so she decided to tell them of her plan.

“Can you go with me Tuesday night to meet the six-fifteen train?” she asked them.

“Why, I suppose so,” Betty assured her. “Whom are we to meet?”

“No one. Ethel is meeting a Mr. Scott, and I thought it would be fun to see what he looks like.”

“This sounds mysterious,” Wilma protested. “Tell us how you found it out.”

Kay was sufficiently wise to maintain her own counsel.

“Sorry, but I can’t divulge another thing until Tuesday night.”

Although Kay had been busy, she had given a good deal of thought to Miss Tremont, and had mentioned to Cousin Bill her recent talk with the young woman. He brought the matter to her attention one morning at the breakfast table, when the lawyer announced that he had made a few inquiries concerning Peter Stannovi.

“And what did you learn?” Kay demanded eagerly.

“Nearly everything I heard tallied with Miss Tremont’s story. Stannovi claims to come from an aristocratic old European family.”

“Is he actually employed by the Hammond Manufacturing Company?”

“Well, he has a laboratory there, and experiments a great deal with chemicals and explosives.”

“That’s an unusual sort of business,” Kay commented. “But it should be interesting.”

“It isn’t one that I should choose,” Cousin Bill smiled. “However, it is a legitimate occupation. Stannovi has patented several formulas, I believe, most of them pertaining to explosives.”

The information was not very helpful to Kay’s purpose. “What I need, Cousin Bill, is direct evidence to show that he himself isn’t so fine and that he is carrying on underhanded dealings without Miss Tremont knowing of them.”

At this point in the conversation Mrs. Tracey interposed a word of advice.

“Kay, it’s all very well for you to interest yourself in mysteries, but love affairs are a very different matter.”

“But, Mother, if he’s not the right man for her——”

“You can’t expect to straighten out people’s private lives, Kay. After all, the type of man that would appeal to you might not suit Miss Tremont at all.”

“If you were to ask her opinion of Ronald, she might find him immature,” Cousin Bill added teasingly.

“Who’s talking about Ronald?” Kay cried indignantly. “Oh, I know you’re both afraid I’ll try to break up the secretary’s engagement. Well, if it were the best thing to do, I’d do it,”

she added courageously. "I'd thank anybody for keeping me from marrying a—a crook, maybe!"

"Now don't glare at me so," Cousin Bill grinned. "The only point we are trying to make is that you shouldn't condemn a man until all the evidence is presented. I'm afraid you took a dislike to Stannovi from the very start."

"I think I had good reason to be suspicious of him."

"Well, yes, you did, but still there may be an explanation for his actions."

Kay realized this might be true, and was reflecting upon the idea later that day as she walked through Carmont Park. Her attention was drawn to a crowd, and motivated by curiosity, she drew near to listen. A group of workers, both men and women, had gathered about a soap-box orator, who was making a speech against all factory owners. The arguments were so inconsistent that Kay was inclined to smile, although a few of the persons about her seemed greatly impressed.

"Why, the members of our school debating team wouldn't use such bad arguments as those," she thought. "The man is distorting facts shamefully."

The crowd about the speaker rapidly grew larger. Kay was shoved and pushed as rude persons sought to gain more advantageous positions. Annoyed, she turned to leave, but discovered that it would not be easy to do so. She was completely hemmed in.

“Don’t shove. You’re hurting me!” she heard a tremulous voice cry out.

An old woman with a shawl half torn from her shoulders was being pushed roughly against a tree by several coarse looking men, who seemed determined to press their way through the mob. Kay tried to aid her.

“Please act like gentlemen,” she pleaded. “Can’t you see you’re crushing this poor woman?”

Shamed by her words, the men fell away. Kay’s arm supported the frail figure, and little by little the two worked their way out of the crowd.

“Oh, thank you, Miss. I couldn’t get my breath with everyone pushing and clawing. It was terrible!”

“May I take you home?”

“I live just across the street. I shouldn’t have come, only I wanted to hear what the man was saying about the strike. You see, my boy is being kept from his job on account of it.”

“Because of the strike, you mean?”

“Yes, he’s a member of a labor group and until the strike is settled he can’t work. We didn’t have much money saved up. Now our coal is gone and we have almost no food left. Do you suppose they’ll get the strike settled in a few days?”

“I really have no idea,” Kay said gently, touched by the pathetic story, and deciding to help this person later.

“However, if you’ll give me your address I’ll see if I can do something for you.”

The woman shook her head stubbornly. “We don’t want charity. All we want is to get our jobs back. Folks say it is Mrs. Van Hutton’s fault that things aren’t settled up right.”

The woman left her a few minutes later and the girl started toward her own home. She had gone only a few steps when she stopped short, for she had just overheard a conversation which shocked her.

“The Van Hutton kid’s over there,” the rough voice of a man was saying. “It would serve the old lady right if we did take him away.”

“Sure,” replied a companion in equally harsh tones.

“Mrs. Van Hutton’s going to help the poor, eh? Bah! Why don’t she give away some of her money, then? All she does is go around making speeches.”

“Come on,” urged the other. “We’ll get the kid now!”

Panic-stricken, Kay hurried toward the spot where, out of the corner of her eye, she had seen one of the men pointing. A little way from the crowd stood the Van Hutton lad, crying as if his heart would break.

“Kenneth!” Kay ran over to him and wrapped her coat about the shivering little body.

“I’m lost,” he wailed miserably.

“It seems to me you’re always getting lost,” she scolded mildly. “And you must never, *never* leave home again. Come with me quickly. We’ll—we’ll get some ice cream.”

At mention of food, the boy began to sob all the harder. “I’m ’most starved to death.”

The task was not an especially pleasant one, and moreover Kay was now on her way to the home of a friend. However, she instantly gave up her own plans.

After pausing at a store for a few minutes, the two boarded a bus and soon arrived at the little boy’s residence. Neither Miss Tremont nor Mrs. Van Hutton was at home. A servant politely thanked Kay for having looked after Kenneth, but seemed only a little disturbed to hear he had been lost. However, he promised to watch the little fellow until his grandmother should return.

“Someone really should speak to Mrs. Van Hutton about the matter,” Kay reflected as she made her way toward her own home. “Kenneth is almost seven years old, but he has never been sent to school and has no governess. I’d like to talk to her myself!”

A pleasant surprise awaited Kay when she reached home.

“A special delivery letter came for you while you were gone,” her mother reported. “It’s from *Hearthstones*, I believe.”

Her daughter fairly snatched the envelope from the woman’s hand. “Oh, maybe my story has been accepted!” she cried.

Excited, she tore open the envelope. Her face flushed with pleasure as she read the letter. Then she handed it to her mother.

“Mrs. Lambert, the editor, asks me if she may come to interview me at my home. Oh, Mother, do you suppose that means she’s accepting my story?”

CHAPTER VI

A DISGUISED ESCORT

Patience had never been one of Kay's virtues. It seemed to her that she could never stand it to wait three days before Mrs. Lambert should come to call. She read and re-read the letter, but the terse, business-like sentences offered no clue as to what might be in the editor's mind.

As Tuesday drew near, another matter engaged a great deal of Kay's attention and thought. She held several lengthy telephone conversations with Ronald Earle, all of which greatly puzzled her mother.

"What are you up to?" she questioned dubiously, when her daughter explained that it would be necessary for her to be absent from dinner Tuesday evening. "I have a feeling you are planning some mischief."

"The truth is, we're playing a little joke on Ethel Eaton."

"I'm not sure that I approve of that."

"It's a very innocent little joke," Kay assured her mother hastily. "A few of us are meeting the six-fifteen train to welcome a friend of Ethel, a certain Mr. Scott."

“And does Ethel know about all this?”

“Not yet. Cousin Bill doesn’t either, but he is going along,” Kay laughed. “And take us out to dinner.”

The young lawyer protested at being pressed into service upon such short notice, but in the end agreed to act as chaperon to the group. He drove Kay and the Worth twins to the station in his car.

“I’ll just sit here in the automobile and watch the fun from a safe distance,” he declared.

The girls had purposely arrived a few minutes before train time. Observing Ethel Eaton pacing nervously up and down the platform, they casually made their way toward her.

“Going away tonight?” Kay asked carelessly.

“No, I’m not,” Ethel answered shortly.

A minute later she walked to the opposite end of the platform. It was obvious that she was embarrassed, hoping that Kay and her friends would leave before the train should come in.

“I can see this is going to be lots of fun,” Betty chuckled.

A long whistle sounded from far up the track. Soon the train came thundering into the depot, stirring up an unpleasant cloud of dust. Kay and the twins crowded close, almost at Ethel’s heels.

Mr. Scott was the first passenger to appear, and even Ethel was slightly taken aback as she identified him by his mustache and white carnation. His hat was pulled low over his eyes. He wore a loud, checkered suit, a flashy tie, and carried a cane.

“Look at him swagger,” Wilma said in derision. “Wouldn’t you just know he’d be the sort of person to impress Ethel.”

“Let’s move up closer and see if she’ll introduce us,” Kay proposed with a chuckle.

After the first shock Ethel did not seem to mind the stranger’s outrageous appearance. She rushed forward and touched his arm.

“Oh, you’re Mr. Scott, aren’t you? I knew you right away by the carnation! Dear me, I’m so glad to meet you!”

The man bowed low. Kay and the twins began to giggle. Ethel, hearing the laughter, froze them with an icy glance.

“Do let’s get away from here,” she urged her companion. “We must go somewhere for dinner where we can have an opportunity to talk.”

“I suggest the Hotel Regis,” the stranger said in a loud deep voice.

Several persons near by turned to stare. Ethel flushed. Then, with another angry glance in Kay’s direction, she urged her escort toward a cab.

“Quick! We must follow!” Kay said to her chums.

“I wish you’d tell us the joke,” Betty complained, as they hurried to the automobile. “Honestly, I don’t believe I crave an introduction to that man.”

“Oh, you might like him if you knew him better,” Kay replied.

“Never!”

“We must go to the Regis now,” Kay explained to Cousin Bill. “We’ll have dinner there!”

At the Regis Kay held a whispered consultation with the head waiter. A moment later they all found themselves at a table near one at which Ethel was seated.

“Why, she’s alone,” Wilma observed in surprise.

“It does look as if her escort might have abandoned her,” Kay agreed, trying to keep from laughing.

Ethel glanced at the group. She bowed coldly, as if to ignore them. The waiter, after taking Cousin Bill’s order, went to the other table and offered a menu card, but each time the girl would shake her head. She glanced impatiently about the room, watching the door apprehensively.

“I fear she’ll have a long wait for her escort,” Kay remarked, eating her chicken.

“I imagine you could tell us what became of him,” Cousin Bill smiled.

Finally Ethel could bear the humiliation no longer. With an angry toss of her head she arose and left the dining room. Scarcely had she disappeared than Wilma, glancing toward the door, observed the mysterious Mr. Scott returning. He came directly toward the table at which the girls were sitting.

“Goodness me, he’s going to speak to us,” she whispered in distress. “What shall we do?”

Kay laughed merrily, and turned to introduce Ronald Earle.

“Well, of all things,” Betty gasped. “So you were disguised as Mr. Scott?”

“Guilty,” the boy admitted, dropping into a chair beside Cousin Bill, and taking off his mustache. “Do you mind if I sit here? Or are my clothes too loud?”

“We don’t object,” Kay assured him. “Now that you’ve lost your mustache, the cane, and that dreadful bass voice, you really aren’t so conspicuous. But tell us everything. Did Ethel suspect what you were about?”

“No, she swallowed my line—hook, bait, and sinker. It was funny. She seemed to think I had developed a real affection for her.”

“How did you get away?” Kay interposed.

“I told her I had to make a telephone call.”

“It served her right,” Betty declared. “I guess this will make us square with her for taking our gym clothes. If she ever tries any of her cute little tricks again, we can spread the story about until she’ll wish she’d never heard of Mr. Scott!”

“I suspect she’s wishing that now,” Kay laughed.

Ronald ordered dinner, and while he waited for it to be served, reported additional details of the joke that had been played on Ethel. At first Kay listened attentively, but presently her attention was drawn toward an adjoining table where two strange men were engaged in conversation, from which she caught a few disjointed phrases. As she distinctly heard Ethel Eaton’s name spoken, her curiosity was aroused, and she listened intently.

“She’s a silly little high school girl,” the younger of the two men declared with a careless laugh. “She called me up and said she wanted to help me in my work with the labor organization—just an excuse, of course. She said she would like to take dinner with me here.”

“Then she didn’t show up?” the other inquired. “Queer, considering she was so eager.”

“Yes, I may get in touch with her a little later on. That father of hers is pretty foxy, but through his daughter I should be able to learn a few things worth while.”

“Knowing you as I do, Mr. Scott, I feel entirely confident you’ll be successful,” the other said flatteringly.

Mr. Scott! The name burned into Kay's mind.

Unquestionably he was the man Ethel had planned to meet at the railroad station. She studied his face. He was reasonably good-looking, but his eyes had a hard glint, and she shrewdly judged that in his dealings with the world he was none too scrupulous.

"I believe I actually did Ethel a favor by preventing the meeting," she reflected.

The men were talking again, though in a lower, more cautious tone.

"What about Stannovi?" the older man asked.

Kay felt that she was to learn some information of vital importance to her and strained to hear what was being said.

"Why Stannovi," said Scott, "he——"

At that instant Kay was startled by a loud crash that obliterated the conversation and threw the dining room into confusion!

CHAPTER VII

A SECRET COMMISSION

In serving the two men, a waiter had carelessly dropped his tray of hot soup. The dishes lay in fragments upon the floor, while some of the steaming liquid had scalded the back of Mr. Scott's neck. Enraged, he sprang to his feet.

"You clumsy lout! You did that deliberately!"

"I am very sorry, sir. I didn't mean to do it," the waiter said tremulously.

Nervously he began to sponge Mr. Scott's coat with a napkin, but the latter pushed him away roughly. The head waiter appeared. To him the offended guest directed a bitter tirade.

"If this is the way you treat your patrons, we'll go elsewhere! And see that this man is discharged at once!"

The two diners angrily left the room, followed by the head waiter. As the transgressor bent to pick up the broken bits of china, Kay said kindly to the man:

"It wasn't really your fault. Something one of those men said startled you, didn't it? I saw the look on your face."

The waiter was surprised into making an admission. “It was that name Stannovi! I always get upset whenever I hear it.”

He would say no more, but hastened away to the kitchen before Kay could question him further.

“Such a clatter!” Betty exclaimed. She had not heard her chum’s conversation with the waiter, nor had the others.

“I think it’s time we should go home,” Wilma suggested. “We’ve had a perfect lark. The only thing that could have made it more entertaining would have been for the real Mr. Scott to have appeared.”

“Perhaps he was here and we failed to recognize him,” Kay said pointedly, but the others laughed at the idea.

Cousin Bill paid for the meal, and they all left the dining room.

“May I take you home, Kay?” Ronald asked hopefully.

She smilingly declined. “No, thank you, Cousin Bill is my appointed bodyguard for the evening. But I should appreciate it if you would escort the twins.”

“Of course, though I’d like to see more of you.”

After Ronald and the Worths had gone, Cousin Bill left Kay alone for a few minutes, explaining that he wished to make an important telephone call. She shivered a little as she stood in the doorway of the hotel, for the evening was cold. Just

then a taxi drew up to the curb, and an elegantly dressed woman stepped out, pausing to say something to a man who had remained inside.

“Why, it’s Mrs. Van Hutton,” Kay observed.

The woman was speaking hurriedly, almost excitedly. “No, I won’t sign the paper, and I won’t let anyone talk me into doing it.”

She turned, and the cab moved on. Kay caught only a fleeting glimpse of the occupant, but was more than half convinced it was none other than Peter Stannovi!

“Good evening, Mrs. Van Hutton,” she said politely as the woman drew near.

“Oh!”

“Did I startle you?”

“Indeed you did. I must say I wasn’t expecting to see you here, Miss Tracey.” Mrs. Van Hutton’s face had flushed a deep scarlet as she tried to regain her composure. “Young girls shouldn’t be out alone at night.”

“I am waiting for my cousin, Bill Tracey, who is telephoning.”

“Oh, I didn’t understand. I’m very sorry. I shouldn’t have said what I did. I am sure you are very capable of looking after yourself.”

“Thank you,” Kay smiled. To herself she added, “Mrs. Van Hutton doesn’t know what she is saying. She’s flustered, and wonders how much I overheard of her conversation with the man in the cab.”

The appearance of Bill Tracey brought the conversation to an end. During the ride home Kay lapsed into a pensive silence.

“Working out the plot for another prize story?” her cousin teased.

“Another!” Kay scoffed. “I’m not even certain of one prize yet. As a matter of fact I wasn’t thinking about plots. I was wondering about Mrs. Van Hutton and her connection with Stannovi.”

The following day was the one designated for Mrs. Lambert’s visit to the Tracey home. When Kay greeted the editor at three o’clock, she gave no outward sign of excitement. Perhaps the woman’s charming manners put her at ease. At any rate, the distinguished lady tactfully drew out the girl in regard to her own accomplishments.

“I was deeply interested in the story which you submitted for consideration in our contest,” Mrs. Lambert said kindly. “I am curious to learn if you took the plot from real life, or whether you produced it from your imagination.”

“Both. The first part I observed, and the rest of my story I figured out for myself.”

“It was a very clever mystery and I enjoyed reading it. However, I must confess that I was particularly interested in your heroine—she reminded me of someone I love dearly.”

“The character was chosen from real life, Mrs. Lambert.”

Kay had to check herself to keep from blurting out Ellen Tremont’s name. What would the editor say if she realized that the heroine of the story was none other than her own sister? It might prejudice her against the entry. Kay was very glad that she had portrayed the girl in a very favorable light.

“As I read your story I couldn’t help thinking of my younger sister,” Mrs. Lambert continued. “The names were different, of course, yet I could see Ellen in every page.”

“Ellen Tremont?” Kay asked, deciding that she might as well explain everything.

“Yes. Then you do know her!”

“Only slightly. I met her at Mrs. Van Hutton’s home. At the time I wrote about her in my story I had no idea she was your sister, Mrs. Lambert. I hope you’re not offended.”

“Not in the least. But I am deeply impressed.”

“The story really combined three characters; your sister, Peter Stannovi, and Mrs. Van Hutton. I just allowed my imagination to run wild, I guess.”

“Perhaps it wasn’t entirely your imagination,” the editor responded quickly. “You said the first part of the story was true. Did you mean that your male character—Stannovi—actually was acquainted with Mrs. Van Hutton, yet kept the knowledge from my sister?”

“Why, it seemed so to me,” Kay admitted reluctantly.

“I wish you would feel free to tell me anything you may happen to know about the affair, Miss Tracey. I will say quite frankly that I have always distrusted Peter Stannovi. I never approved of my sister’s engagement to him. In fact, I tried to influence her to give him up with the result that we have become slightly estranged. It pains me deeply.”

“I really haven’t any evidence against the man,” Kay told her, “though I do feel that he may be involved in some scheme perhaps to defraud Mrs. Van Hutton, or at least to bend her to his wishes. Perhaps I have no right to say such a thing.”

“My sister’s happiness is at stake. If only Ellen could be made to realize that her fiance is unworthy! I wish you could talk her into breaking the engagement, Miss Tracey.”

Kay shook her head. “I have no influence over her. I shouldn’t care to interfere unless I could prove that Stannovi is unscrupulous.”

“You are the only one who can help me,” Mrs. Lambert said earnestly, grasping the girl’s hand. “I have heard about your unusual ability for discovering elusive facts. Won’t you

interest yourself in this case? If we really set ourselves to it, I believe we can uncover evidence against Stannovi!”

Kay shared the conviction. In fact, she was eager to delve into the mystery, and now that the editor had requested her aid there was no reason for her not doing so.

“I’ll see what I can find out about it,” she promised.

Mrs. Lambert gripped the girl’s hand gratefully as she arose to depart. With a smile she said, “You may consider yourself officially appointed as my detective. Remember, I am counting upon you to keep Ellen from making a serious mistake in her life.”

Kay stood in the doorway until the woman had disappeared down the street. Had she been too hasty in promising assistance? She was not at all certain that she would enjoy her new commission as detective and family peacemaker.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHADOW

No sooner had Mrs. Lambert left the house than Mrs. Tracey came hurrying into the living room to inquire about the outcome of the interview.

“Was your story accepted?” she questioned hopefully.

“My story?” Kay echoed. Then she shook her head. “You know, we never once discussed the prize.”

“But she stayed so long and I heard you talking so animatedly, I was almost certain your entry had won.”

“Nothing has been decided about the winner as yet. Mrs. Lambert did mention that a committee of judges, which did not include her, was passing upon the stories and would make the final selection.”

“Then why did she make a special trip to interview you?”

Kay explained the real purpose behind Mrs. Lambert’s visit, telling of her promise to investigate Peter Stannovi.

“I knew you’d be involved in the affair before long,” her mother laughed. “But then, perhaps it’s all for the best.”

“The thing that worries me is how I’ll be able to find an excuse for calling upon Mrs. Van Hutton again.”

“That’s easily solved,” said a masculine voice directly behind her. Cousin Bill had entered the house so quietly that Kay had not heard him.

“How do you propose to go about it?” she demanded.

“We’ll take dinner there this evening.”

“Just walk in casually and announce ourselves, I suppose?” the mystified girl exclaimed.

“Oh, no, even your rough and ready old cousin has better manners than that. As it happens, we have an invitation to dine there this evening at seven.”

“We?” Kay inquired suspiciously. “Who asked us?”

“Mrs. Van Hutton. She requested me to come to her house tonight to talk over her business affairs, and then added, ‘Do bring your attractive cousin with you.’”

“I was hoping for an opportunity to visit the house again.”

In several ways the dinner proved to be a disappointment to Kay. The food was excellent, but for some reason conversation was difficult. Although the Tracey girl was seated beside Ellen Tremont, the young secretary was strangely reserved. Mrs. Van Hutton devoted herself almost exclusively to Cousin Bill, taking it for granted that the other two were enjoying themselves.

“Ellen is worried about something,” Kay thought.
“After dinner perhaps I can find out what is troubling her.”

However, no sooner had they left the dining room than the secretary murmured an excuse and hurried to her room.

“Poor girl, she’s had a headache all day,” Mrs. Van Hutton said apologetically to Kay. “I fear you will have a dull evening now, for your cousin and I must discuss business.”

“I’ll just sit here in the living room and read a magazine, or perhaps look at your marvelous paintings.”

“Do. Walk around wherever you wish. Maybe you’d like to chat with Kenneth for a minute or so. He’s always asking about you. You’ll find him in his room on the second floor.”

After Mrs. Van Hutton and the attorney had retired to the study, Kay walked leisurely about the lower floor, examining the many valuable oil paintings. The house soon grew quiet, for with the exception of an old colored butler who had his quarters near the kitchen, the servants lived out, and always left the place shortly after dinner.

Presently Kay followed Mrs. Van Hutton’s suggestion, and mounting the stairs, paused before Kenneth’s door. She rapped lightly, and upon hearing the lad’s voice knew that he was still awake.

“I’m so glad you came up to see me,” the little boy grinned in delight as the girl entered. “I could hear you all laughing and talking downstairs.”

“Why didn’t you come down, too?”

“Grandma wouldn’t let me. She says little boys ’mopolize the conversation. Whenever there’s company I have to eat alone in my room.”

Kay glanced at the tray standing on a nearby table. Kenneth had scarcely touched his food.

“Will you stay with me until I go to sleep?” the little boy pleaded.

Kay nodded as she tucked in the covers about him. “I’ll tell you a bedtime story, too,” she said.

“Something with animals in it!” he begged.

“What sort of animals? Bears?”

“No, I’m afraid of bears. Sometimes I can see ’em coming at me at night.”

“You just imagine that,” Kay laughed. “Shall I tell you about a little pony?”

“I’d like that,” Kenneth agreed, snuggling down into the pillow. “Kiss me first,” he begged. “I like to be kissed goodnight, but Grandma hardly ever does it.”

Kay began an account of “Black Beauty.” For a time the boy listened wide-eyed, but presently his lids fluttered shut and the next instant he was sound asleep. As the story-teller

tiptoed from the room and extinguished the light, she was met at the door by Ellen Tremont.

“I couldn’t talk to you downstairs,” the young woman whispered, “but there’s something I must tell you. Will you come to my room?”

“Of course,” Kay replied, delighted but mystified.

She thought that perhaps the secretary intended to discuss her fiancé, but in this she was mistaken. When the bedroom door had closed behind them, Miss Tremont lost no time in explaining what was troubling her.

“I’m worried about Mrs. Van Hutton. Perhaps I shouldn’t say it, but in some ways I feel that she’s incapable of looking after her fortune. Of late she’s been acting very strangely.”

“Have you noticed anything in particular?”

“Only that she seems to be spending a great deal of money foolishly. And I have reason to believe that she’s giving large sums away to unworthy organizations.”

“It’s a shame,” Kay declared sympathetically, “but I don’t know what I can do about it.”

“I wish you’d speak to your cousin. He might have some influence over her.”

“I’ll tell him tonight,” Kay promised.

“I’d not have troubled you with this, but Mrs. Van Hutton has always been kind to me and I hate to see her throw her money away.”

“I know exactly how you feel,” Kay assured the secretary. “If Cousin Bill can do anything about it he will, I’m sure.”

She had hoped to bring Peter Stannovi’s name into the conversation, but Ellen Tremont gave her no opportunity. Thinking that Cousin Bill might be ready to leave she accordingly said goodnight, and started down the long hall toward the stairway.

Hearing soft footsteps behind her, Kay turned, thinking that the young woman might have followed her. There was no one in the hall. She went on again, then abruptly paused as she distinctly heard a rustling sound.

“I’m going to hide and see who it is,” she decided.

She drew back into a little recess and waited. The footsteps had ceased.

“I guess it was nothing after all,” she reasoned.

Kay was about to move on again, when directly in front of her, at the far end of the hall, she saw a dark, awe-inspiring shadow—the shadow of a human being. It moved stealthily past a white door, was silhouetted there a moment, then vanished.

“Why, it looked exactly like Peter Stannovi!” the girl thought, amazed. “Could he be eavesdropping?”

She stood still a few minutes reflecting upon the meaning of the strange sight. Then suddenly she was startled out of her thoughts by a woman's shrill scream.

CHAPTER IX

A WARNING MESSAGE

Startled by the cry, Kay raced down the hall, almost tripping over a figure which lay near the stairway. It was that of Miss Tremont, who had evidently fainted.

Kay knelt beside the figure and felt her pulse. It was weak and rapid. The young woman's face, too, was very pale.

The shrill scream had brought Cousin Bill and Mrs. Van Hutton hurrying up the stairs. "What has happened?" the latter cried anxiously. "Is Miss Tremont hurt?"

"She has fainted," Kay explained briefly. "Get me some water and smelling salts."

Mrs. Van Hutton was too excited to do this, but Cousin Bill ran to a bathroom, and presently returned with a cold cloth which Kay placed over the secretary's forehead. She then raised the patient's feet slightly so that the blood would rush back toward the brain. A moment later Miss Tremont opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she gasped. "Oh, I remember. I was coming down the hall when I saw that horrible thing."

“What horrible thing?” Mrs. Van Hutton cried anxiously. “I’m alarmed.”

“I don’t know what it was. It appeared to be a shadow, but it was so grotesque—like that of a strangely deformed animal.”

This description puzzled Kay. She believed that Ellen Tremont had seen the same silhouette she had observed upon the door, yet it had not been weird. While it had been startling, the sight had not been of a kind to upset one to the extent of fainting.

“Nonsense, Ellen, you are excited,” Mrs. Van Hutton declared quickly. “How could you have seen such a thing in this house?”

“It wasn’t in the house at all. It was outside,” was the tremulous reply.

“Outside?” Kay asked, surprised. “Didn’t you see the shadow on that white door at the end of the hall?”

Ellen stared blankly at the girl.

“Then you saw it, too?”

“I noticed the shadow of a man,” Kay admitted, “but it was inside the house, not outdoors.”

“Then that couldn’t have been what I saw, for this shadow was outside, and it was grotesque. It couldn’t have been a man. It was too queer, too unhuman. But,” she added, “it was foolish of me to faint. I—I guess I’m tired.”

Miss Tremont was assisted to her room. Then, while Mrs. Van Hutton remained with her, Kay and Cousin Bill made a hasty inspection of the upper floor. They found no trace of any intruder.

“I am certain I saw the shadow of a man,” Kay maintained.

As the girl feared, the noise had awakened the Van Hutton boy. Peering into his room, she saw the lad standing by the window, shivering with terror.

“Kenneth, you must jump back into bed this minute or you’ll certainly catch cold,” she advised.

“I can’t sleep,” he half sobbed. “There’re ghosts out in the garden.”

“You’re too old to believe such nonsense, Kenneth. There are really no such things as ghosts,” Kay replied, putting her arms about the shaking little fellow.

The boy did not appear convinced. However, as Kay led him to the bed he obediently climbed back into it. Returning to the window, the girl glanced down into the yard. Had Kenneth, too, seen the mysterious shadow?

At first glance she decided that the grounds were deserted. Then as her gaze traveled toward the garden she suddenly started. A grotesque, black shadow was moving slowly in front of the white garage door.

Nowhere was there visible the figure of either a man or an animal which could have produced the silhouette.

This was not the same outline she had seen before; of that Kay was certain. Doubtlessly it was the one which had terrified Ellen Tremont a short time before.

Before she could really study the apparition it had vanished, so she returned to the hall and there found Cousin Bill. To him she briefly reported what she had seen from the window.

“We’ll have a look around the grounds,” he proposed tersely, and the two hurried outside.

Although they searched everywhere, they could find no trace of the elusive “shadow.” Kay examined the ground for footprints.

“The earth is too dry,” she complained. “If anyone had walked around here, his footprints would not show.”

“We may as well go back inside the house,” decided Cousin Bill.

Mrs. Van Hutton was greatly distressed over the incident, though inclined to believe that her secretary had exaggerated the character of what she had seen. Kay did not add to the woman’s worries by explaining that she had noted the same sight from the window of Kenneth’s room; nor did she so much as hint that the first shadow bore a marked resemblance to Peter Stannovi. However, she expressed this opinion to Cousin Bill as they drove home.

“Strange things appear to be afoot in that house,” the attorney acknowledged musingly. “So it’s your opinion that Stannovi was there tonight, prowling about?”

“I only know that I heard footsteps in the hall and that the spectre looked like him. By the way, did Mrs. Van Hutton sign the paper for you tonight?”

“No. She refused again. This time she gave as her reason that she was afraid if she should do so, she would grant even more power to the officials of the company, who would use it ‘to grind down the poor, helpless workers.’ Those were her very words.”

“And is there any basis for such a fear?”

“No. The officials have always given their employees a square deal as far as I can learn. Mrs. Van Hutton’s policy of watchful waiting threatens to wreck the company. If this goes on for another six months the factory will be forced to close down, and then there will be no work for anyone. But I can’t make the woman see it.”

“Miss Tremont asked me to give you a message, Cousin Bill. She thinks Mrs. Van Hutton is squandering her money on some wild schemes. She asked me to try to get you to do something about it.”

The attorney sighed. “More trouble. But I’m not surprised. The woman is gullible and an easy mark for smooth-tongued salesmen who appeal to her heart rather than to her reason.”

“Can you do anything?” asked Kay.

“I’m willing to help out all I can,” Cousin Bill offered, “but I’m afraid I haven’t much influence. I’ll see if I can learn

what schemes the woman has become involved in, and how she is spending her money.”

He fully intended to look into the matter the following day. However, he was called out of the city on an important conference which would keep him away for several days.

Kay was disappointed at the delay, but there were many other interests which demanded her attention. Several times she had debated whether or not it really was her duty to tell Ethel Eaton of the conversation she had overheard at the hotel restaurant. She felt that she should warn the girl against any association with the unscrupulous “Mr. Scott,” who obviously intended to use her as a dupe in trying to find out something about her father.

She did her best to bring up the subject on one occasion, but Ethel had made an impertinent rejoinder which had sealed Kay’s lips. Although the Tracey girl had never spread about the story of the joke which had been played upon the girl, it was generally known. A hint of it had even appeared in the school paper.

Ethel smarted under the humiliation. Being of a shrewd nature, she readily guessed that Kay and her friends had been responsible for her mortification. She soothed her injured feelings by adopting a superior attitude, taking particular pleasure in making cutting remarks about Kay and Ronald.

“I’m not like a certain girl in this school,” she declared upon one occasion. “Real men, not mere boys, are my interest.”

“Meaning Mr. Scott?” someone teased.

Several times Wilma and Betty reported to Kay that they had seen Ethel in the man’s company.

“I ought to warn her against him,” Kay said, looking troubled.

“She’d only resent it,” Betty advised. “If she wants to act silly, it’s not your fault.”

Nevertheless, Kay determined that if an opportunity should present itself she would tell the girl what she had learned about Scott. She made several attempts to be friendly, but Ethel’s manner had grown even more aloof.

“I’ll get square with Kay Tracey if it’s the last thing I ever do,” the spoiled girl confided to one of her friends. “She’s not going to make a laughing stock of me!”

Her first move in the little game of retaliation was to tell Harry Scott, whom she saw now at frequent intervals, an outlandish story about Kay. Deliberately she painted the Tracey girl as a busybody who tried to push her way upward in the world by running after wealthy persons, such as Mrs. Van Hutton.

“Mrs. Van Hutton?” the stranger inquired with interest. “So she’s acquainted with that lady, is she?”

Unaware that she was being made the source of information, Ethel told all that she knew and a great many things that she

did not know regarding Kay and her activities at the Van Hutton home.

“Well, I’ve started the ball rolling,” the hateful girl told herself gleefully, as she bade Mr. Scott good-bye one evening. “I hope the story spreads like wildfire.”

Innocent of the plot against her, Kay attended strictly to her own affairs. She was so occupied with school work that she did not have time even to call upon Mrs. Van Hutton or Ellen Tremont. As she jokingly remarked to her chums, the “shadow” of monthly school examinations lay upon her, and until they were over she could not find a moment to interest herself in silhouettes of a more sinister character. However, one day she turned her thoughts to the unsolved mystery.

“I believe I’ll call on Ellen this afternoon,” she remarked to her mother. “I haven’t seen her for days and I’m curious to learn if she has seen that shadow again.”

She slipped on her wraps preparatory to leaving the house when she sighted the postman. There was a letter for her postmarked “Brantwood.”

Quickly tearing open the letter she stared at the brief message. It was signed “Anonymous” and read:

“If you value your life and reputation, stay away from the home of Mrs. Van Hutton.”

CHAPTER X

A THANKLESS TASK

“This settles it,” Kay thought as she re-read the brief warning. “I’m going straight over to Mrs. Van Hutton’s home! I’ll show the writer of this note that I’m not afraid.”

Crumpling the message and dropping it into her purse, she caught the first bus going along Fairmont Boulevard.

“I wonder if Ellen Tremont could have written that note?” the girl began to speculate. “It may be she’s afraid I’ll endanger her position by telling Mrs. Van Hutton of her request to have Cousin Bill investigate how she spends her money. Or, perhaps she realizes I dislike Stannovi.”

Although Kay really had no sound reason for such a belief, the more she thought about it the more certain she was that the secretary might have written the anonymous note. Therefore when she arrived at the Van Hutton residence she was very glad to find the secretary alone.

“Miss Tremont, did you send me this note?” she demanded bluntly, offering it for the young woman’s inspection.

“I most certainly did not!” the secretary returned instantly, after glancing at the message. She grew indignant. “Why should you accuse me of such a dreadful thing? I have only the utmost contempt for a person who stoops to write anonymous letters!”

Kay realized that she had been very hasty in making her accusation. She deeply regretted what she had said, and apologized profusely for her mistake.

“I’m dreadfully sorry, Miss Tremont,” she stated frankly, slipping her arm about the young woman’s slender shoulders. “I was excited, and didn’t stop to realize what I was saying. Of course, I know you wouldn’t do such a thing.”

“But whatever made you think of me?”

“I figured that perhaps you didn’t like to have me come here—well, on account of Mr. Stannovi.”

“What has he to do with it?”

Kay realized that she was becoming more and more deeply involved. She could not explain anything about the shadow.

“It’s only that your fiance and I didn’t seem to take to each other very well. I believe he isn’t—isn’t as fine as you, Miss Tremont.”

“He’s far above me—a real gentleman,” the secretary declared. “But I must confess you’re talking in riddles. I don’t see what Peter has to do with this note.”

“I feel sure he has nothing to do with it. My accusation was inexcusable. Won’t you forgive me?”

“Why, of course,” the young woman returned generously. “I wasn’t really angry; only hurt. I don’t wonder that you were excited when you received such a letter. Who could have sent it?”

“I wish I knew. Very few persons are aware that I’ve visited this house.”

“You don’t suppose either of the Worth girls did it for a joke?”

Kay shook her head. “This isn’t their handwriting, and they would never send anyone an anonymous note.”

She remained a few minutes longer, but decided to say nothing further about her suspicions regarding Stannovi, since Ellen Tremont was so extremely loyal to the fellow. Kay doubted that the engaged girl would ever accept the truth about him, even though she were confronted with the most damaging evidence.

“By the way, Miss Tremont,” she inquired, as she was about to leave, “I suppose you haven’t seen that mysterious shadow again?”

“No,” the other responded. “Mrs. Van Hutton has almost convinced me that it was only my imagination.”

To this statement Kay made no comment. Bidding the secretary good-bye, she walked over to the regular bus stop,

and as she waited, chanced to glance downward. Almost at her feet lay a checkbook. She stooped down and picked it up.

“Someone must have dropped it when getting on a bus,” she concluded. “What a shame.”

She noticed that the little checkbook which was of a size to fit into a woman’s purse, bore the name of a large New York City bank. A hasty examination failed to reveal the owner’s name, although a number of checks had been used.

“I may as well take it with me,” she decided. “Perhaps I can trace the owner.”

As she rode home, Kay had time in which to study her find more carefully. The stubs were very interesting, for they disclosed that large sums of money had been paid out to various charitable organizations.

“The Weary Mothers Day-Nursery Fund—\$1000.00,” she read in amazement. “Hopeful Workers’ Relief Fund—\$2465.50.”

There were several other notations with similar benevolent sounding names. Kay had never heard of any of them, though she was familiar with all the worthy institutions in Brantwood and Carmont. Upon reaching home she showed the checkbook to her mother.

“Someone must have written those names on the stubs for fun,” Mrs. Tracey declared. “I have done charitable work all

of my life, and I've never heard of any of these organizations."

"Just the same, I believe I'll call a few of the local banks to find out if they have any clients who draw funds from New York," Kay announced.

Her various inquiries failed to reveal any clue as to the possible owner of the property; nor did the following day's paper carry any notice advertising for the lost article.

However, in looking for one, Kay came upon a picture which greatly interested her. It was a likeness of Harry Scott, whom Kay recognized as the man she had seen in the Hotel Regis restaurant.

"This is a photo of the person I was telling you about," she explained excitedly to her mother. "The news item says he is a labor leader!"

Mrs. Tracey studied the face with interest. "I can't say that I like his appearance, Kay. I wonder what Ethel's parents are thinking of to permit her to go about with him. He looks at least twice her age, and has an unpleasant expression."

"Ethel says she doesn't care for boys," Kay laughed. Then she looked serious. "Mother, I have every reason to believe that this man is plotting against someone, and that he is using Ethel Eaton as a means of securing information. Do you think I should tell her what I know?"

"By all means, Kay. That's your duty."

The girl sighed, for she did not relish the task. "I may as well go right now and get it over," she said, and suiting action to word, she went for her coat and hat. "Good-bye," she called a few minutes later.

As she approached the Eaton home, Kay almost altered her decision. Although Ethel saw her from the veranda, she gave no sign of recognition, and pretended to be romping with her dog, an ugly Pekingese, disliked by all the neighbors. Not until Kay had mounted the steps did the unpleasant girl deign to notice her caller.

"Oh, so it's you, is it? I suppose you have come to see my father."

"No, I am here to see you, Ethel. I have something important to tell you."

"Well, go ahead and tell it. I'm not stopping you."

Nettled at such a reception, Kay felt tempted to leave without explaining her mission. Ethel noted the expression of disgust on the Tracey girl's face, and since she really was very eager to learn what the other might wish to tell her, she motioned Kay to a seat in the porch swing.

"Now, what brings you here?" she urged less harshly.

"It's about Mr. Scott."

"Oh! Well, if you've come to make a confession——"

“I’ve not come to confess anything, Ethel. I did play that joke on you, but you played one on me first, so we’re even. As it happened, that night when I was with my chums at the Regis Hotel restaurant, I saw Mr. Scott and a friend at a table near ours. That was after you had left.”

Ethel flushed at the recollection of her unbecoming exit from the dining room. But she was interested in Kay’s story.

“What of it?” she asked impatiently.

“Mr. Scott and his friend were talking about you, Ethel.”

“They were? What did they say?”

“Nothing flattering. Scott was making fun of you, Ethel. He hinted that he intended to use you to draw information from your father.”

Ethel sprang up from the swing, her eyes flashing.

“And you expect me to believe such a vicious, trumped up story!”

“It’s the truth. I hope you don’t think I’ve come here because I enjoy doing so.”

“You’re jealous because Mr. Scott pays more attention to me than he does to you!” the girl fairly screamed. “I might have known you were like that. But he’ll never fall for you! I fixed that when I told him what you were like—how you ran after all the rich people in town, especially Mrs. Van Hutton!”

Realizing suddenly that she had told too much, Ethel broke off abruptly.

“So you were the one who told the trumped up story!” Kay said coldly. “I can’t say I am surprised.”

She thought she now understood the source of the anonymous letter. Mr. Scott must have sent it.

“I don’t care for your so-called warnings,” Ethel was continuing her tirade. “I’ll thank you to keep entirely out of my affairs!”

In her anger she inadvertently stepped upon the tail of her little Pekingese, and the enraged beast turned upon Kay.

“Bite her good!” Ethel cried, scarcely aware of what she was saying.

The command was unnecessary, for the little dog already had sunk its sharp teeth deeply into Kay’s wrist!

CHAPTER XI

A CLUE REVEALED

Kay uttered a cry of pain as she pushed the dog from her. The skin on her wrist was broken, and the wound was bleeding.

“Oh, I didn’t think he’d actually bite you,” Ethel cried, aghast.

The loud barking of the dog had brought Mrs. Eaton to the door. “Dear me, what is wrong?” she inquired. Then she noticed the Tracey girl’s wound. “Why, Kay, you’re hurt. Bingo didn’t bite you?”

“Yes, he did.” Kay refrained from adding the unpleasant details of Ethel’s remarks.

“Come into the house and I’ll bandage your wrist,” the woman urged nervously. “Oh, I can’t tell you how sorry I am that this happened. Ethel, you should have warned Kay about Bingo. He’s getting so cross and ugly of late. It isn’t safe for a stranger to pet him.”

Her daughter flushed guiltily, glancing quickly at Kay. But the latter had no intention of relating what had actually occurred.

“I think you should see a doctor immediately,” Mrs. Eaton insisted, after she had treated the wound with an antiseptic and bandaged it. “Sometimes dog bites result in serious trouble.”

“I might drop in to see Doctor Rolph,” Kay promised. “But don’t worry any more about it.”

“Yes, do that. Of course, I’ll take care of the bill.” Then she added, “We will keep Bingo in his kennel after this—at least until he gets over his cross spell.”

“I don’t want my dog shut in,” Ethel protested, stamping her foot.

Her mother eyed her sternly. “You have nothing to say about this. I feel that you are more than half responsible for the accident. You should have kept Bingo away from Kay.”

“How did I know he would bite her?”

“It isn’t the first time he’s attacked a stranger. And are you sure that you did nothing to excite the dog, Ethel?”

“Kay and I were only talking.”

Ethel avoided meeting the other girl’s eyes. She knew very well that she was entirely responsible for the affair. Now that her anger had cooled she even felt slightly grateful to Kay for not having related what had happened. Nevertheless, she could not bring herself to offer an apology.

On her way home, Kay stopped at Doctor Rolph's office to have her wrist examined and re-dressed.

"Come in again in two or three days," the physician advised her. "Should the animal develop rabies, I would want to give you vaccine treatment immediately."

"Perhaps I'd better take it now," Kay suggested with a laugh. "If I were to come down with lockjaw I'm afraid I'd be dreadfully handicapped. I love to eat and to talk!"

Everyone felt relieved when, after a number of days, Kay's wound completely healed, and Bingo, according to a report of the Eatons, showed no symptoms of disease.

Although the Traceys had made no move to have the dog killed, neighbors of the Eaton family, long annoyed by Bingo's unpleasant tricks, endeavored to get the authorities to do away with the animal. As the agitation grew, Kay was not surprised to read in the paper that the little beast had been taken to a kennel and that Mrs. Eaton and her daughter Ethel had left unexpectedly on a trip.

"I'm glad Bingo didn't go with them," she said, laughing.

Since Ethel in her fit of rage had revealed that she had told a distorted tale to Harry Scott, Kay was inclined to believe that the man might have been responsible for the anonymous note she had received. However, she was at a loss to understand what reason he could have for wanting to keep her from seeing Mrs. Van Hutton, except that in some unexplainable way he was having dealings with her through Stannovi.

Deciding that she would like to question the woman concerning a possible acquaintanceship with Scott, Kay decided to call upon her. She telephoned Wilma and Betty, inquiring if they would like to go with her that afternoon to the Van Hutton home.

“Indeed we should,” Betty assured her chum. “Do you suppose there’s a chance that we’ll get to see that mysterious shadow?”

“I’ll try to arrange it,” Kay said, laughing.

“Do! Wilma and I will be over around two o’clock.”

The three girls presented themselves at Mrs. Van Hutton’s home, only to be informed by a servant that the woman was not at home. However, Miss Tremont was there, so the maid escorted them to the study, where the secretary was busy typing.

“Don’t stop your work on our account, for we can stay only a minute,” Kay said, as the young woman rose to greet the girls. “I just wanted to let you know that I think I’ve discovered who sent me that anonymous note.”

“You have?”

“Yes, from a clue dropped by a girl named Ethel Eaton. I suspect it may have been from a man called Harry Scott. Does he ever come here to see Mrs. Van Hutton?” Kay inquired eagerly.

“I really don’t know. She has so many visitors—representatives of charitable organizations and the like. It seems to me that everyone in the world is trying to get her money. Yet I believe all this attention flatters her.”

“What are you typing?” Betty asked suddenly and not very politely, as she noticed the amount of work on Miss Tremont’s desk. “Form letters?”

“Oh, no, I’m putting into shape one of Mrs. Van Hutton’s speeches.” Unwittingly Ellen Tremont sighed. “It seems to me she gives a talk every other day. This afternoon she’s lecturing at the Woman’s Club on a labor subject. Tomorrow she’s scheduled to appear at a political meeting, and the day following she launches some sort of campaign to aid the Children’s Home.”

“And is this the original speech?” Kay questioned, indicating a manuscript which had been written in longhand.

“Yes. She stayed up half the night getting it ready for me to type. I’m supposed to have it finished for final corrections by the time she returns.”

“Then we’d better leave you to your work,” Betty said.

“No, please don’t hurry away. I’ve been typing so steadily that I need a few minutes’ relaxation.”

Kay had glanced at the original manuscript of the speech. The handwriting interested her intensely. It seemed to her that the lecture had been written in the same bold scrawl she had seen on the stub of the checkbook she had found!

She hesitated about asking if Mrs. Van Hutton ever drew funds from a New York bank, fearing that the secretary would consider her entirely too prying. If only she could secure a sample of the writing it would be easy to learn what she wanted to know by comparing the two specimens. Suddenly she noticed that several sheets of the manuscript had been tossed into the waste paper basket.

“Do you always discard the original pages after you copy them?” she inquired.

“No,” Miss Tremont replied. “I keep them. But those that have been thrown away,” she added, as she noticed Kay looking at the ones in the basket, “are duplicates.”

Satisfied that she would not be damaging anything of value, Kay awaited an opportunity to secure a sample of the handwriting. When the others were chatting, she carefully took one of the discarded sheets and slipped it into her purse.

“Did you say Mrs. Van Hutton was making a speech today?” she inquired a little later, as the girls were about to leave.

“Yes, at the Woman’s Club. The meeting is open to the public. If you’re interested you might drop around.”

“I believe I will,” Kay decided.

The girls said good-bye to Ellen Tremont and left the house.

“Why in the world do you want to stop at the Club?” Betty exploded. “I know of nothing I’d rather do less this beautiful afternoon than listen to a lecture.”

“I get enough of them in school,” Wilma added, then quoted:

“Talked! her voice so cadenced in the talking,
And she spake such good thoughts natural, as if she
always knew them.”

“What’s the matter with you lately, Kay?” asked Betty.

“Am I changed in any way?”

“Since you wrote that story for the contest you’ve been terribly serious-minded. Interested only in capital and labor problems, economics, lectures, and I don’t know what all! I believe you’re turning into a high-brow.”

“No, I’m not. I’m merely interested in Mrs. Van Hutton and that man Stannovi for Ellen Tremont’s sake.”

“Well, if you discover any clues at the lecture today please let us know!” Betty said scoffingly, as the three parted at the next corner. “You’re an ace detective but I don’t believe you’ll uncover any evidence at the Woman’s Club!”

After the twins had left her, Kay paused at the first park bench she saw to examine again the sample of Mrs. Van Hutton’s handwriting. She was almost certain it resembled that on the checkbook stubs, and as these were still in her purse, she decided to make a comparison at once.

“The writing is identical, I do believe!” she thought excitedly, studying the two specimens. “It means that Mrs. Van Hutton is the owner of this checkbook!”

Then, too, it signified that the society woman was spending vast sums of money for charities about which neither Kay nor her mother had ever heard. True, they might be organizations in distant places, but nevertheless the thing seemed queer. Kay reflected upon these facts as she continued toward the Woman's Club. She was not surprised that Ellen Tremont worried over Mrs. Van Hutton's financial affairs.

As the girl reached her destination, she could hear someone speaking. She entered the building quietly, tiptoeing down the hall to avoid disturbing the audience. She paused suddenly as her attention was attracted to two men standing in a recess just off the corridor. They were straining their ears in an effort to hear what was being said in the adjoining room.

"If they want to listen to the talk, why don't they go inside instead of acting so secretive?" Kay thought impatiently.

Then she recognized the men. Stannovi was one, Scott the other!

Instantly several ideas which had been at the back of Kay's mind came racing together. Suddenly she had a clue to one angle of the mystery. But there was such a lot to find out to prove her contention! However, she would start right in by asking Mrs. Van Hutton for an interview.

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGE MEETING

At the first opportunity after Mrs. Van Hutton had concluded her talk, Kay drew the woman aside. "I should like to speak with you alone, if I may," she explained.

"Just as soon as I am at liberty, my dear. You must wait until the auditorium has cleared. So many persons insist upon congratulating me on my speech."

Kay sat down to wait. Beside her were two women who looked slightly out of place among the type of people who had attended the lecture.

"It's all very well for her to talk about helping the poor," one said vehemently, "but down underneath it you can tell she's for the rich, the same as most of the folks with plenty of money."

"She doesn't know the meaning of suffering," the other added bitterly. "Why, she has no idea of what goes on in her own factories. Charity should begin at home."

"It's because the rich have everything," the first woman whined.

Kay's thoughts flew at once to little Kenneth, and she wondered why these complaining women could not realize that wealth did not always bring happiness; that suffering the pangs of loneliness was worse than that of hunger.

Presently Mrs. Van Hutton came over to speak with Kay. "Did you hear my talk?" she asked effusively.

"Only the last part of it."

"Oh, I am so sorry, for the beginning was especially good, I think. Everyone in the audience seemed to like it."

Kay could have told her of two persons who had not cared for the woman's opinions, but she tactfully refrained from doing so. However, it seemed an excellent opportunity to bring up the subject of Peter Stannovi and his prying friend.

"So they were listening in the hall?" Mrs. Van Hutton repeated, not the least bit disturbed. "I wish they weren't so bashful."

Kay tried to make her point clear that it was not bashfulness which had kept the men outside, but was unsuccessful. In sheer desperation she turned to the subject of the checkbook she had found.

"I did lose such a book not long ago," the woman admitted reluctantly. "I told Miss Tremont I thought she must have mislaid it among my things in the desk."

Kay opened her purse and produced the article she had picked up. "Is this it?" she asked.

"Why, it is!" Mrs. Van Hutton cried, growing embarrassed as she recognized the little book which Kay extended to her. "Where did you find it?"

"Near a bus stop on the boulevard."

"My dear, I hope you haven't shown it to anyone."

"Only to my mother."

Mrs. Van Hutton looked relieved. "Never mention it to a soul," she pleaded. "Not for the world would I have anyone know I have so much money. Everyone would harass me for donations. I might even be kidnaped or killed!"

"I'll not mention it, of course," replied Kay politely.

She hoped that Mrs. Van Hutton would offer some explanation for the large amounts she had drawn, but the woman avoided mentioning the matter. After thanking Kay for having returned the lost article to her, and not once asking how the girl had traced its owner, she hastened away.

"I must warn Cousin Bill not to speak to her about money matters for some time," Kay thought. "If he should bring up the subject now, she'll think I told him about the checkbook."

Returning home, she found awaiting her a letter from Mrs. Lambert, stating that she expected to call upon Kay the following day.

“I haven’t a great deal to report to her,” the Tracey girl thought regretfully, “but at least I’ve made a start in the right direction.”

When the editor arrived Kay gave her a detailed account of the various events which had transpired since the woman’s latest visit, and was praised for her clever deductions. “You have done very well indeed. I consider I showed good judgment in appointing you as my detective!”

“But I haven’t solved anything as yet, Mrs. Lambert. I may even be mistaken about the identity of that mysterious shadow on the door.”

“At any rate, the things you have revealed make me more determined than ever to prevent my sister from marrying Stannovi. His connection with Harry Scott looks suspicious, to say the least.”

“I can’t help but feel that the two men are plotting to obtain money from Mrs. Van Hutton,” Kay commented.

“It certainly looks that way. I shall drive over to Bridgeton as soon as I leave here and see if I can learn more about Stannovi from his employers. I intend to have an interview with the president of the company where he works, anyway, about conditions in his factory.”

“I wish I might go along,” Kay said impulsively.

“Oh, do,” Mrs. Lambert invited eagerly.

As the two reached the industrial city some time later, Kay noted that the houses seemed even more dingy and crowded than they had upon her last visit there. Dirty children played in the streets of the poorer districts, where the people in general looked gaunt and undernourished.

“I often come here to do social service work,” Mrs. Lambert explained, as she and Kay continued toward the Hammond Manufacturing Company, which was located on the outskirts of the city. “Conditions among the working people are steadily growing worse.”

“I suppose many of the factories have closed down now.”

“Yes, but if it were not for all these labor troubles business would be far better than it is. Agitators are continually keeping the workers restless and disgruntled, and several strikes have not as yet been settled, though they have been in effect for months.”

Kay thought of Peter Stannovi, who made his headquarters in the city, and wondered if he might be responsible for any of the unrest. The same idea seemed to be passing through Mrs. Lambert’s mind, for as she parked the car near the entrance to the Hammond grounds, the woman said:

“We must be very careful when asking questions about Mr. Stannovi, for no doubt he has many friends here. Perhaps by interviewing Mr. Hammond, the president of the company, I may learn something about the foreigner’s personal history.”

As they entered the main office of the building, the two were greeted by a handsome, well-dressed young man who recognized Mrs. Lambert instantly.

“Herbert Allen!” the editor exclaimed heartily. “How glad I am to see you again. Kay, I’d like to present an old friend of our family.” Then, after the formal introduction had been completed, she went on, “Herbert, you haven’t been to call on us in months.”

The young man looked slightly embarrassed. “Well, you understand how it is,” he said in an undertone. “Since Ellen and I are no longer friends, I haven’t felt like running in as often as I used to do.”

“You know you are always welcome,” Mrs. Lambert insisted. “Mother and Father have said time and time again that they wish you would come to see them. They are still hoping that Ellen will change her mind and that you two will be married.”

“I haven’t given up hope, either,” said Herbert Allen quickly.

“I can’t help but feel that Ellen is merely infatuated with Stannovi,” Mrs. Lambert went on comfortingly. “Since she met him she has changed. She seldom comes home to visit either relatives or friends.”

“I know. She isn’t like the same girl that used to go to dances with me. Sometimes, when Stannovi comes swaggering around, I feel like taking a sock at him.”

“That would do no good,” counseled Mrs. Lambert. “Do you often come in contact with him?”

“No, his laboratory is in a different building, but he’s very seldom there. Most of the time he seems to be riding around the country. I’d like to know where he gets the money to do it.”

“That’s what I should like to know,” thought Kay.

After Mrs. Lambert had gone into Mr. Hammond’s private office, the Tracey girl remained talking a while with Herbert Allen.

“Have you known Mrs. Lambert long?” she queried with interest.

“Yes, almost all my life. Our families have been friendly for years; in fact, it was always the wish of our parents that Ellen and I should marry. I always thought that we would, too, until this fellow Stannovi came along.”

Feeling that he had talked enough about personal matters, the young man offered to escort Kay about the factory while she was waiting for Mrs. Lambert to return.

“Where does Mr. Stannovi work?” Kay inquired casually, as they wandered from department to department.

“He never works, in my opinion,” the other returned significantly. “His laboratory is in the chemical and storage plant. If you like, I’ll take you there.”

“Oh, I don’t believe I care to meet him today.”

“He won’t be there, I’m sure.”

They walked over to a nearby building. The young man led the way through a series of halls to a dingy back room.

“I can’t understand why Mr. Hammond allows Stannovi to have his quarters here,” he remarked. “It must be that the man has creative ability of some kind, though I could never see it myself. His experiments are all kept secret.”

Kay glanced about with interest. The room looked like any average laboratory, save that it was less tidy and had an unpleasant odor. On the tables stood half-empty bottles containing various acids and chemicals.

“We may as well move on,” Herbert proposed. “There’s nothing here for us to see.”

As he reached over to open the door, his sleeve brushed against one of the containers on a nearby table. Before he could prevent it, the bottle had crashed to the floor, spraying Kay’s skirt with acid.

“Now I’ve done it!” the young man exclaimed in dismay. “I’ve ruined your suit.”

“It’s an old one. Anyway, if I can wash the spots out, I’ll be able to save the material.”

“I don’t see how I came to do such an awkward thing!” said Herbert Allen remorsefully.

“Don’t be troubled. It really doesn’t matter,” Kay laughed. “While you’re picking up the pieces of broken glass I’ll find some water and try to remove the stains.”

She walked to the end of the hall but as she could not locate a washroom, she turned into an adjoining corridor. Hearing voices, she paused suddenly.

“Why, that sounds like Peter Stannovi and a woman!” she thought. “But I must be mistaken, for Mr. Allen said the chemist wasn’t at the plant today.”

Cautiously she approached a turn in the hallway. One glance assured her that her senses had not played her false. Stannovi was engaged in conversation with a tall, stern-faced woman, evidently a factory forelady.

“Pass the word around secretly,” Kay heard him say furtively. “The meeting is at eight tonight. The usual place—Tony’s!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE PASSWORD

Having issued the command, Peter Stannovi moved on down the hall alone. As the forelady turned in Kay's direction, the girl ducked out of sight and frantically looked about her for a place to hide. She noticed a women's washroom, which previously had failed to attract her attention, and darted into it.

Inside an indignation meeting seemed to be in progress. A number of employees had gathered in a group and were complaining bitterly.

"I think myself it's about time we struck for higher wages," one of them was saying. "Employers are all alike. They want all the profits for themselves."

"Why, they're even too stingy to give us cloth towels," another added. She angrily wiped her hands on a paper one. Then, crumpling it into a ball, she tossed it on the floor, although a container was standing near by.

Kay's entrance did not bring the complaints to an end. The girls gave her merely a casual glance, probably thinking that she, too, worked in the plant. As she washed the

acid from her skirt, she listened to what was being said. One of the young women, more friendly than the rest, helped her remove the stains.

“You must expect to ruin your clothes when you work in this place,” she said curtly. “I guess you’ve not been here long, have you?”

“Not very,” replied Kay noncommittally.

“You’ll learn it doesn’t pay to wear such a good suit to work. If you hurt yourself on one of the machines or burn yourself with chemicals there’s a doctor to fix you up, but when you ruin your dress you have to pay for it yourself!”

“That seems fair enough,” Kay returned.

“I don’t call it fair. There ought to be a fund to take care of such things. It’s like the man said—employers these days owe more to their workers than they did twenty years ago.”

“What man?” Kay questioned quickly.

“I don’t know his name.”

“By the way, where is Tony’s?”

The girl gave her a sharp glance. “I never heard of the place,” she said, and turned away.

Before Kay could engage another girl in conversation, the door opened and Mrs. Lambert entered. Instantly all talk died away, and the employees left the room.

“I am afraid I came upon you at the wrong moment,” the editor acknowledged to Kay a few moments later as she and the girl went out into the hall. “I noticed how the conversation stopped as I made my appearance.”

Kay reported the girls’ complaints, and mentioned the proposed meeting at Tony’s.

“So Stannovi is here when he’s supposed to be out of town?” Mrs. Lambert mused. “That looks to me as if he were stirring up trouble. No doubt he’s behind all this strike talk.”

“And the secret meeting is tonight,” Kay added. “I wonder where the place can be?”

“I have never heard of it. My! I’d give a great deal to attend that meeting.”

“Why can’t we?” Kay proposed quickly.

“Oh, I’d be recognized,” the editor protested.

“Let’s go disguised!” suggested Kay.

Mrs. Lambert was not accustomed to acting upon such short notice, but the more she reflected upon the daring plan the more reasonable did it appear. “If we can find Tony’s, I’m willing to try it,” she consented.

“Oh, we’ll locate the place. There must be someone in this town who can tell us where it is.”

“Perhaps Herbert Allen may be able to help us,” Mrs. Lambert suggested.

However, the young man had never heard of Tony’s, and in the end they were forced to leave the factory grounds without learning what they wished to know. Mrs. Lambert was ready to give up trying to carry out the plan but Kay managed to convince the woman that they might yet succeed.

“Why not take dinner in Bridgeton?” she proposed. “Perhaps the proprietor of the restaurant can direct us to the place.”

They selected an unpretentious but clean eating place near the Hammond plant. While waiting for the meal to be served, Kay telephoned her mother, saying she would be delayed, and would not arrive home until late. When she went back to the table, she found dishes of soup already on the table.

The food was well cooked, though plain. They were nearly through eating when Kay, glancing toward the door, saw a woman enter. She was the forelady who had been in conversation with Stannovi.

The girl’s first impulse was to leave the restaurant at once. On second thought, she realized that the woman could not possibly recognize her, and it dawned upon her mind that fate had played into her hands, providing a means of locating the elusive Tony’s. As the factory worker seated herself at a nearby table Kay quietly drew Mrs. Lambert’s attention to the newcomer.

“We can wait here until she leaves, then follow her,” the girl suggested. “Unless I’m very much mistaken, she should lead us straight to the meeting we want to attend.”

They dawdled over their food. Then, to avoid suspicion, they ordered second helpings of ice cream. When at length the forelady left the restaurant, they hastily followed her.

“I wish I could predict how this adventure is going to turn out,” Mrs. Lambert murmured doubtfully, as they entered a dark, narrow street. “Your mother may not approve of my taking you to Tony’s.”

“Oh, Mother is used to my escapades,” Kay laughed. “And she always approves of my trying to help others.”

She and the editor followed the forelady at a safe distance, and presently saw her enter the rear door of an old building.

“That must be the place,” Kay decided. “I see some other people going in there, too.”

Mrs. Lambert started forward to join the group, but Kay held her companion back.

“We can’t go inside looking the way we do now. Our appearance would give us away.”

“That’s true. I had forgotten about your suggestion of our disguising ourselves.”

“I believe we won’t need any if we pull up our coat collars and rumple our hair a little.”

“I’ll hide my hat in the bushes,” Mrs. Lambert declared. “It’s far too dressy and conspicuous.”

A moment later they were mingling with a group of girls who were coming toward the building, and followed them up a long flight of stairs. Thereafter they moved through a narrow, dimly-lighted hall to a room at the rear of the building. A man was sitting at the door, carefully checking everyone who entered.

“Give the password,” he commanded each person.

Kay and Mrs. Lambert exchanged uneasy glances. It was too late for them to retreat, since they were hemmed in by a stream of newcomers who stood waiting behind them. All they could do was hope to slip through in some fashion.

Though Kay strained her ears to hear the password as the girl directly ahead of her whispered it to the guard, she was unable to do so. Then came her turn to enter. The man looked at her sharply as she stood silent.

“Well, what is it?” he demanded.

“I—I’m afraid I’ve forgotten.”

“Then you can’t get in here. Next!”

Mrs. Lambert met a similar fate. The guard regarded the pair suspiciously as they turned to leave. “Say, who told you to come here, anyway?” he questioned harshly. “Do you work at the Hammond Plant?”

Kay and her companion pretended not to hear him. They pushed their way through the crowd and hastily descended the stairs.

“Oh, what an experience!” said Mrs. Lambert. “I—I hope no one comes after us. I’m glad to get away.”

Kay was not so willing to admit defeat; in fact, she was more determined than ever to hear what was going on at the secret meeting.

“We might try again a little later,” she proposed. “If we only could learn the password——”

She broke off abruptly, and without a suggestion of an explanation, suddenly pulled Mrs. Lambert back into the shadow of a building near by. Two men were approaching. As they passed directly in front of Kay’s hiding-place, the girl could have touched them with her hand. One was Peter Stannovi, the other Harry Scott. They entered the building together.

“I’m going to find out if they are allowed into the room,” Kay whispered, starting to carry out her intention.

Mrs. Lambert would not permit the girl to go alone, so together they tiptoed up the stairs. The hallway was empty. Only the guard sat in his chair by the door.

“How’s the crowd tonight, Joe?” Scott asked him familiarly.

“Fine, fine,” was his response. “Lots better than last time.”

Without being challenged to give a password, the two men entered the meeting, and closed the door behind them. From the stairway Kay and Mrs. Lambert could hear a loud clapping of hands, followed by the steady drone of a speaker's voice.

The guard tilted back in his chair and began to read. He soon grew tired of this, however, and as no other persons arrived, he quietly slipped inside the meeting.

"Now is our chance," Kay whispered to Mrs. Lambert.

The two crept softly to the door, but did not take it upon themselves to try to enter.

"It doesn't seem very sporting to be eavesdropping," the editor whispered nervously. "I feel ashamed to do it, yet I *must* find out what Stannovi is doing here tonight."

Kay had no such scruples, for she felt that the recent actions of Scott and Stannovi entirely warranted her finding out what the men were doing. Placing her ear to the door, she listened closely.

"The time has come for you to fight your boss," the speaker harangued the crowd. "Foreigners have been mistreated and downtrodden! You factory workers must go and take your boss's money away from him!"

"Indeed!" Mrs. Lambert said indignantly, for she too had caught the words. "The poor people who listen to that speech won't stop to think that their employer carries all the responsibility and all the worries. Employees get their

salaries, but they're never asked to use any of it to run the business!"

"The speech seems to be going over very well," Kay reported, her eye to the keyhole.

"Bridgeton is largely made up of foreigners," Mrs. Lambert explained. "They are all naturally good, law-abiding people, but most of them haven't been in this country very long, and these fire-brand speakers put terrible notions into their heads, that get them into trouble. Tell me, Kay, can you make out who the speaker is?"

"He hasn't turned this way yet. Oh, now he has! It's Mr. Scott!"

"And is Stannovi on the platform, too?"

Kay did not have an opportunity to answer this question. Through the keyhole she saw the doorman returning to his duties.

"Run!" she warned her companion. "Run, or we'll be caught!"

CHAPTER XIV

A NARROW ESCAPE

Kay and Mrs. Lambert raced the length of the dark hallway toward the stairs. Although they were out of sight before the guard appeared, he had heard the sound of their scurrying feet. His suspicions aroused, he hastened down the corridor to investigate matters.

Kay and her companion crouched in a dark doorway, scarcely daring to breathe. Would they be seen? Apparently they were not, for the man muttered something to himself, then turned back, once more taking up his old stand at the entrance to the meeting hall.

“Let’s get away from here before we’re discovered,” Mrs. Lambert whispered nervously.

“Yes, we may as well leave,” Kay agreed instantly. “We’ve learned enough for one night.”

Cautiously the two crept to the stairs and were soon safe out on the street. Once there, Mrs. Lambert gave way to her indignation.

“Scott and Stannovi are doing their best to stir up trouble here in Bridgeton. I shall go to the police and have them arrested!”

“Upon what grounds?” Kay asked quietly. “Although we have learned a great deal, we have no evidence that would stand up in court.”

“You’re right,” the woman sighed. “I can’t have a man arrested for making a speech—not in a free country like this. Oh, dear, I feel so helpless! Is there nothing we can do?”

“It seems to me the best thing now is to wait, Mrs. Lambert. After all, we’ve been working on this case only a few days. If we aren’t too hasty, I believe in the end we’ll be able to prove our suspicions to be correct.”

“You’re right, of course. Hearing that speech and seeing those two men together excited me so that I couldn’t think straight for a minute. We’ll not tell the police anything just yet. However, I do feel I should lose no time in informing Ellen about what I have learned.”

Kay was not convinced of the wisdom of such a policy. However, she realized that she ought not to take it upon herself to advise Mrs. Lambert regarding her family affairs.

“If you like, I’ll invite your sister to my home as soon as we return to Brantwood,” the girl suggested. “You could talk over matters with her there.”

“You are very kind. I dreaded trying to see her at Mrs. Van Hutton’s, for with so many servants around we should have

no privacy.”

“Then by all means come to my house,” Kay insisted.

“Under the circumstances it would seem best not to tell Miss Tremont that you will be there. By the way, it might be well for us to invite the young man who admires your sister so deeply.”

“Herbert? Yes. If we can’t influence Ellen, perhaps he may be able to reason with her.”

Herbert Allen was eager to do all he could to help the situation, and promised to appear at the Tracey home the next day. Miss Tremont, in response to Kay’s telephone invitation, agreed to come.

Mrs. Lambert was nervous over thoughts of the coming interview, and this was increased by the attitude her sister assumed when she arrived at the Tracey home the following morning. The secretary grew suddenly austere when she saw her relative and young Allen, for she gathered that they intended to tell her something unpleasant concerning her fiance.

“Ellen,” Mrs. Lambert began kindly, “I have learned certain facts about Peter Stannovi which I feel you ought to know.”

“I don’t care to hear them, Grace. If they were actual facts I might listen to them, but I am tired of your suspicions. From the very first you have been opposed to my engagement.”

“And for a very good reason. Stannovi is an agitator. Kay and I saw him last night with Harry Scott, who made a

disgraceful speech at a place called Tony's."

"You have no right to condemn Peter because he chanced to attend the meeting! After all, he may be sincerely interested in labor problems."

"You don't understand," Mrs. Lambert murmured helplessly. "Stannovi and Scott are both troublemakers. They are trying to harm the rich and the poor alike, and are interested only in their personal schemes for gain."

"Just what are these so-called schemes?" the young woman demanded.

"I'm not sure as yet."

"Of course you're not," Ellen cried with increasing anger. "You haven't a scrap of evidence, but you expect me to break my engagement. Well, I won't do it!"

Mrs. Lambert cast Kay and Herbert a beseeching look. Young Mr. Allen began to speak.

"Ellen, you've known me long enough to realize that I came here merely to help you. I don't want you to get into any mix-up with the law, or to be caused sorrow for any reason."

Miss Tremont's expression changed for an instant after this plea, but in another moment she had resumed her defiant mood.

“I’ll listen to you when you can produce some real evidence; not before!”

Kay felt sorry for the young woman. If she really loved the foreigner, she would naturally not only be blind to his faults, but encouraged to defend him. The Tracey girl was tempted to reveal what she knew of Stannovi’s connection with the secretary’s employer, of the suspicious activities of Scott, and of the mysterious shadow on the door of Mrs. Van Hutton’s home—the shadow of an uninvited visitor that looked so much like Miss Tremont’s fiance.

Kay decided the time was not yet ripe for her to disclose these clues, and was spared the trouble, for suddenly Miss Tremont arose, indicating the interview was at an end.

“I don’t care to stay and listen to any further accusations about Peter,” she declared vehemently. “You are all prejudiced against him!”

She turned, walked quickly from the room, and left the house.

“Oh, I don’t know how to make her see the truth,” Mrs. Lambert said brokenly. “Never in all her life has Ellen ever spoken so harshly to me.”

“She was overwrought,” Kay comforted the sister. “Tomorrow I’m sure she’ll not feel so bitterly about things.”

The girl was quite right in her opinion, for the next day the postman brought Kay a brief note from Mrs. Van Hutton’s

secretary.

“I wish to offer an apology for my conduct at your home,” it read in part. “I realize I should not have spoken as hastily as I did; yet I feel that my personal affairs should concern no one but myself. I imagine that my sister has requested you to try to influence me against Mr. Stannovi, but I must ask you to make no attempt to straighten out any of our family matters.”

Kay read the note several times before putting it away in her handkerchief box.

“Now I don’t know what to do,” she thought in bewilderment. “As a detective, I certainly am not getting far with this case. I must try something new.”

At this moment her mother reminded her that she should call at the office of Doctor Rolph to have him examine her wrist again, so Kay decided to go at once. As she entered the physician’s waiting room, she noticed a man who sat in a corner near the window. At first she did not recognize him, but as she studied his face more carefully, she decided that he was the waiter who had dropped his tray so inauspiciously at the Hotel Regis restaurant.

She made an excuse for drawing him into conversation. As she did so, the man recalled her instantly.

“I suppose you know I’m not at the Regis any longer,” he mentioned bitterly.

“Why, no, I haven’t been there for some time. You weren’t discharged, were you?”

“Yes, I was. I offered to pay for the dishes I broke, but the manager said I had offended two of his customers.”

“The men who were talking about Mr. Stannovi?”

The waiter looked startled. “Yes, they complained about me. It wasn’t really my fault that I dropped the tray. One of the fellows jostled my arm. Besides, I was startled because they were talking about this fellow Stannovi.”

“Do you know him?”

“Know him? He’s nothing but a doublecrosser! He pretends to be working for his employers, but all the time he is doing things for himself!”

“Just what do you mean?” Kay questioned eagerly.

The man would say no more, and the girl got the impression he regretted having revealed so much. Embarrassed by the disclosure, he arose, and without waiting to see the physician, left the office abruptly.

“I certainly am a jinx whenever I try to find out things lately,” Kay reflected gloomily. “Doctor Rolph won’t thank me for frightening his patients away.”

She was disappointed because the waiter had refused to go on with his story. Did he have any real evidence against Stannovi, the girl wondered. While she pondered the question, an inner door opened and Doctor Rolph announced that he was ready to see her.

“Tell me the worst right away,” Kay urged after he had examined her arm.

“I very much fear——”

“Yes?”

“That I am going to lose a valuable patient.”

“You mean——?”

“I pronounce you cured.”

When Kay left the office a little later, she was surprised to find the waiter standing at the foot of the stairs.

“Miss,” he said, “I just wanted to ask you not to tell anyone about what I said a few minutes ago. I didn’t realize what I was doing.”

“Then you haven’t any real evidence against this man Stannovi?”

“Oh, no, I was just talking.”

“I’ll not reveal a thing,” Kay promised.

She stood staring after the man as he hurried down the street. Despite his words, she still believed that he knew more about Stannovi than he dared tell.

“I wonder why he is afraid to say anything?” she reflected.

As she walked toward home she was so absorbed in her thoughts, that at first she did not hear the loud honk of an automobile horn directed at her.

“Kay Tracey!” a voice called.

She glanced up, to see Mrs. Lambert, who had parked her car at the curb.

“I was hoping I would meet you today,” the editor said, opening the door for Kay to enter. “I have news for you!”

“You mean about Ellen?”

“No, this concerns yourself alone.”

CHAPTER XV

A THREAT

“The first group of contest judges has selected the ten best stories from among those submitted,” said Mrs. Lambert.

“My story—was it turned down?” asked Kay.

The editor smiled mysteriously. “Your story was one of ten chosen for reconsideration. And that means you have an excellent chance to be the big prize winner!”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” Kay exclaimed joyfully. “I hadn’t hoped for such good luck. But tell me, did the judges select Wilma’s poem, too?”

Mrs. Lambert had neglected to inquire about this. “I doubt that they have made their choice in the poetry division. At least I wasn’t informed of it when I phoned my office.”

Mrs. Lambert dropped Kay at her home, declining an invitation to come in. She explained that later in the afternoon she was to attend a tea in honor of a noted playwright, and had many pressing duties to perform before the scheduled engagement.

As Kay entered the house she was greeted by Cousin Bill, who flashed a handful of theater tickets before the girl's astonished eyes.

"Five of them," he declared. "Get into your best clothes, for we're celebrating!"

"Have you come into a fortune?" Kay demanded.

Cousin Bill laughed. "No, these tickets didn't cost me a cent. I met an old college friend of mine today—he's a playwright, and came to town to see the opening of his new show."

"Not 'The Payoff'?"

"Yes. It's a drama that sounds deep, but has some humor in it. Want to see it?"

"Why, of course."

"We haven't much time," Cousin Bill warned, looking at his watch. "The matinee begins at two-thirty and we're invited to a tea afterwards behind the scenes."

"How exciting!" said Kay. "I've always wanted to meet a real playwright. Mrs. Lambert will also be there."

Betty and Wilma accepted a last minute invitation, and the party of five reached the theater just as the curtain went up. The play was a serious one, dealing with a modern social problem. Kay was deeply interested, but the twins moved restlessly in their seats and though appreciative of having been asked to attend, found the lines dull.

“I’m glad it’s over,” Betty confessed as they arose to leave after the final curtain. “I think the tea will be far more fun.”

“You liked it, didn’t you, Kay?” Wilma questioned.

“I thought it rather well done. I hope we may meet some of the actors and actresses. Particularly that girl who took a minor part—her name was Janet Adams.”

“She was good,” Mrs. Tracey observed. “You know, somehow she reminded me of you, Kay. Same low voice, and at a distance you slightly resemble each other.”

“Well, I consider myself flattered,” Kay laughed.

The girls were thrilled to be escorted back stage, but when Cousin Bill saw the number of women who had gathered to pay homage to the young playwright, whose name was Howard Baylor, he announced that he believed he would slip away.

“Oh, come along and introduce us to your college celebrity,” Kay coaxed. “I’ll protect you from the ladies!”

She saw several familiar faces in the throng. Mrs. Lambert and Mrs. Van Hutton were animatedly discussing factory conditions, one of the topics of the show, with the author of “The Payoff”. The conversation, temporarily interrupted when Cousin Bill ushered his little party into the circle, was resumed along the same subject.

Upon being asked for an opinion, Kay ventured to expound a few ideas of her own. At once the playwright became very

interested as she spoke of the drama, and amazed when she quoted excerpts from the speech of one of the characters.

“You must have a wonderful memory, Miss Tracey,” he declared admiringly, “to repeat lines you have just heard!”

“It doesn’t serve me as well when I am taking school examinations!” Kay laughed.

Howard Baylor, really deeply impressed with her ability to recite, later remarked to Bill Tracey:

“Your attractive young cousin is very clever. Has she ever considered a stage career?”

“I think not,” Cousin Bill returned. “Just at present I believe she’s imbued with the idea of being a detective or a writer of mystery stories. She’s doing remarkably well at both, too.”

Shortly thereafter a number of actors and actresses who had taken part in the production joined the group. Kay met them all, talking for some time with Janet Adams, whom she had especially admired, and accepting an invitation to stop in at the young woman’s dressing room.

When it was time for the Traceys to leave, Kay told her mother she wished to go say good-bye to the actress, and hurried off. As she started down a corridor, she halted abruptly, for she heard angry voices in an adjoining hall.

“Janet Adams, if you know what is good for you,” a man was saying in harsh tones, “you’ll change your lines in the play

and say what I tell you to!”

“Stop threatening me! I’m going to call Mr. Baylor and have you arrested!” the young woman retorted.

Kay darted forward to assist, but her approaching footsteps gave warning. The man bounded down the hallway.

“Why, it’s Harry Scott!” Kay observed excitedly, as Janet Adams ran after him to block his sudden departure.

The labor leader reached the end of the corridor. Flinging open a door, he rushed down the fire escape on which it opened. The actress, only a little ways behind, made a desperate effort to catch Scott by the coat, but he jerked himself free. As he did so, the woman lurched forward, fell, and struck her head heavily against an iron step.

“I guess that will teach you!” Scott laughed heartlessly, as he reached the ground, and disappeared into an alley.

Kay ran over to the actress, who lay in a crumpled heap upon the iron steps.

“Are you badly hurt?”

There was no response. The young woman was unconscious.

CHAPTER XVI

A TRYING HOUR

As Kay pillowed the actress's head in her lap, she became alarmed at the pallor of the young woman's face. The girl cried out loudly for help, and was relieved when several men came running to the scene.

"Raise her carefully," Kay directed them. "I am afraid she has been severely injured."

Gently the victim was carried inside, where, at the direction of the manager, she was placed on a couch. Kay, recalling that a doctor was among the guests, sent for him. Soon after his arrival Janet Adams regained consciousness. Although no bones had been broken, she had been severely bruised and shocked by the fall.

"You must have absolute rest for at least twenty-four hours," the physician ordered her.

Howard Baylor and the manager looked greatly disturbed at this advice.

"See here, Doc," the latter expostulated, "you don't mean that Janet Adams can't perform her part tonight!"

“That’s exactly what I mean.”

“But she has to go on,” the theatre man remonstrated.

“Her rôle is a minor one, so we have no understudy for it. But the part is necessary to the production!”

“I can’t help that. I am merely concerned with the patient’s condition.”

“You don’t understand,” the manager said desperately. “We can’t close even for one night—it would mean financial ruin.”

“See here,” Howard Baylor proposed unexpectedly. “Why can’t Miss Tracey take the part?”

Kay was about to protest when a remark from the manager stung her to silence.

“A school girl?” he asked sarcastically, with an appraising look at Kay. “What does she know about acting in a legitimate drama?”

“She is familiar with the rôle and knows some of the lines,” the playwright defended.

The manager surveyed the girl with a cold, critical eye. “Had any experience?” he demanded.

“In school plays.”

“Then you’d be sure to make a sorry mess of the whole thing,” the man said discourteously.

Kay blushed furiously, and started to move away.

“I disagree,” Howard Baylor cut in, holding the girl back. “I believe Miss Tracey could do very well. Besides, it’s too late now to find a professional actress for the evening performance.”

Kay was torn between two desires: to leave immediately; or to prove to the despicable manager that she would not be a failure. The latter desire won out, and impetuously she stood up very straight and dramatically recited some of the lines of Janet Adams’s part!

The theater man was aghast. “Why—why,” he blustered. “I had no idea— Hum. Well, suppose we try Miss Tracey in a rehearsal and see how it goes.”

Hurriedly some of the actors and actresses were summoned, and agreed to go over their lines, which were cues for the words usually spoken by the injured member of their company.

In their eagerness to begin rehearsals, the men gave Kay barely time enough to explain matters to Mrs. Tracey, Cousin Bill, and her friends, who sat down, astounded, in the front row of the theater to listen.

“I intend to show this sharp-tongued manager what I really can do!” Kay whispered to her mother a little later as she awaited a call to return to the stage. “How have I done so far?”

“Splendidly.” Mrs. Tracey’s eyes shone with pride. “You’re every bit as good as Janet Adams!”

Kay was highly pleased at this praise, for it gave her renewed confidence. Her lines were not really difficult. In only one scene did she have a long speech. Nevertheless, it was an important rôle, crystallizing the theme of the play. In it, Kay voiced disapproval of a labor leader who had brought a great deal of trouble upon innocent, foreign-born victims. She could do this effectively, for her mind was on a mystery connected with a similar subject.

The scene was rehearsed several times until at last even the manager was completely satisfied. “I apologize for what I said before,” he told Kay contritely. “You took the part like a regular trouper. If you go through with it tonight half as well, I’ll be satisfied.”

“I hope I’ll do even better,” she smiled.

News that Kay was to take the part had spread like wildfire. Long before curtain time every seat in the house had been sold, the three front rows being reserved for a loyal group of friends, headed by Ronald Earle.

Everyone anticipated that Kay would develop stage fright. However, when she heard her first cue, she calmly stepped out upon the stage. Greeted by deafening applause from the three front rows, she was inwardly a little abashed at the unnecessary outburst. She acknowledged the clapping graciously, then began her lines.

She spoke with deep feeling, her clear voice carrying to the last row of the theater. A hush fell over the audience.

“Keep it up,” one of the actors advised in an undertone.
“You’re going over great.”

Kay scarcely heard him. She paid no heed to the audience, for she had thrown herself into the part she was taking, gaining power as she went on. However, each appearance of the new performer was the signal for loud clapping.

“I’ll scalp Ronnie for this!” she thought with sweet indignation. “He’s disrupting the play.”

Many of the actors had become irritated at the noisy outbursts, complaining that they ruined some of their finest speeches. A few, jealous at Kay’s success, made slighting remarks.

“Wait until you come to the long speech in the third act,” one of the actresses warned the girl maliciously. “That will be the true test of your ability.”

Kay tried not to give way to nervousness as she sat in her dressing room waiting for the curtain to go up on the final act. However, the unkind words of the jealous ingenue made her dread the forthcoming long speech. Over and over she whispered it to herself.

Someone tapped lightly on the door.

“Yes? What is it?”

When no one responded, she arose and opened the door. Not a soul was within sight, but an envelope lay upon the floor at her feet. Kay picked it up, and with a premonition of trouble unfolded the slip of paper inside.

“Do not go on in the third act unless you want to come to grief!” was the message she read.

The warning note fluttered from Kay’s trembling fingers, and she did not stoop to pick it up. It was easy for her to guess who had sent the message, for she recalled vividly Harry Scott’s threat to Janet Adams.

“I should have told Howard Baylor about that incident,” she thought. “Now it’s too late.”

Nervously she paced the floor. She had worried about the final act, but now was almost panic-stricken over it. Some of the actors were antagonistic toward her, the note threatened trouble, and everything seemed to be conspiring for her downfall.

However, the writer of the message had not taken into account Kay’s fortitude, the trait that made her see a job through, that made her able to solve mysteries and bring wrongdoers to justice.

“I must go through with it!” she decided grimly. “No matter what happens, I’ll speak those lines!”

She glanced appreciatively about the room, which was banked with flowers. At least her friends were loyal! She could not fail them.

A warning signal called her to the stage. Cautiously she glanced up and down the hall, then hurried to the wings.

Her cue was coming now. Courageously she stepped out upon the stage, but began her lines in a faltering manner. Realizing that she was failing, she determined to forget the threatening note. Regardless of what might happen, she would speak the part with all the feeling at her command!

This she did, denouncing in scathing tones the villain, who was an unscrupulous labor leader. As she finished her final speech, the audience burst into applause. This time it was not led by Ronnie and his friends; it came from appreciative listeners.

Kay hardly heard the handclapping. She was waiting tensely for something sinister to happen. Would Harry Scott dare to carry out his threat?

Minutes passed. Nothing happened. Kay breathed easy again, and the play moved swiftly on to its close. The curtain fell, then rose again as the performers took their bows.

Howard Baylor and the manager came back-stage to compliment Kay upon her fine work.

“I hope you will consider the part permanently,” the former stated. “You were superb.”

“I am afraid I cannot leave my school work,” Kay smiled. “Thank you just the same.”

“Well, if you ever need a job you know where you can get one,” the manager added heartily. “You certainly surprised me. When you started that long speech I thought you were going to break down.”

“I did, too—for an instant.”

Kay decided not to mention the threatening note, now that the danger was past. However, someone had found the crumpled message in her dressing room and soon she was besieged with questions.

“It was courageous of you to go through with it,” the star of the play told her admiringly. “I am sure that had I received the warning I couldn’t have done it.”

“I think this occasion calls for a celebration,” Howard Baylor proposed. “We’ll have an impromptu dance on the stage after the audience has left. I’ll furnish the refreshments.”

“I believe I cannot stay,” Kay apologized. “You see, my friends are waiting for me.”

“Oh, bring them here, too. The more the merrier!”

A little later, while the fun was at its height, Kay, who was dancing with Ronnie, saw the doorman motioning to her. “Excuse me just a minute, please,” she said. “I’ll be right back.”

“You’re Miss Kay Tracey?” the man questioned as the girl came over toward him.

“Yes. What is it?”

“There’s a Miss Tremont outside who wants to speak to you.”

“Miss Tremont! Oh, thank you.” Then to herself she mused, “I wonder what has brought the secretary here. It must be something important.”

She started to follow the guard, then suddenly hesitated. Perhaps she was walking into a trap. The anonymous note had warned her of personal danger. She must make no rash moves, and yet——

“I wonder whatever became of Kay?” Ronnie asked himself a few minutes later, as he gazed about the stage. “She was here only an instant ago and now she has vanished.”

He sought Wilma and Betty, but they were unable to tell him what had become of their chum. Nor did a search of the wings reveal the missing girl.

“I don’t like this,” Ronnie announced, his face growing serious. “The last I saw of Kay she was talking to a strange man. If she doesn’t return in a very little while I propose we search the theater.”

“Perhaps we’d better tell Cousin Bill now,” Betty suggested.

Ronnie’s gaze traveled over the throng of dancers.

“Why, he seems to have vanished, too!” he exclaimed.

“Come on! It’s time to get busy and discover if anything is amiss!”

CHAPTER XVII

AN AUTO ACCIDENT

Unaware that she was causing her friends alarm, Kay quietly sought Cousin Bill, who was sitting down alone at the moment. Seating herself beside him, she briefly explained to him the doorman's message.

"I thought perhaps you would go with me," she said. "Possibly Miss Tremont has come here, though there's also a likelihood that the writer of the threatening note is plotting revenge because I disobeyed his command."

The attorney was on his feet in an instant. "Of course I'll go with you. The message does look suspicious."

They made their way through the deserted corridors to the stage door. No one was there, nor could they locate the attendant who had brought word to Kay.

"This is queer," she remarked. "I guess someone played a trick on me."

"Not a very funny trick, in my opinion," Cousin Bill said gruffly.

He opened the door and looked up and down the dimly lighted side street. Not a person was in sight. They stepped outside, and noticed an unoccupied car at the curb a short distance away. Otherwise the place was deserted.

“It’s just another one of those unexplainable things,” Kay commented. “I wonder if Harry Scott is behind this little scheme, too?”

“Harry Scott?”

“I’ll explain later.”

The two reentered the theater, and were about to return to the dance, when Kay stopped and went back to the exit.

“What are you doing?” her cousin asked.

“I have a hunch,” she replied, and very gently pushed the door open a crack, and peered outside.

Silhouetted against the entrance to a building across the street was the distorted shadow of a quickly moving object. Then suddenly Kay caught a fleeting glimpse of a man who jumped into the parked car and at once drove off.

She grabbed Cousin Bill’s sleeve. “I—I have a feeling I’ve just saved myself from being kidnaped!” she said tensely. “But I couldn’t recognize the man. However, I have my suspicions.”

Kay then told of overhearing the labor agitator threatening Janet Adams, the actress.

“Somehow I feel that Harry Scott is the solution to the entire mystery,” the girl went on. “First, there is his strange association with Peter Stannovi. The two seem to be plotting against Mrs. Van Hutton, although it’s hard to say exactly what their game is. Then, too, it’s obvious that Scott is making trouble in Bridgeton.”

“He seems to cause trouble wherever he appears,” Cousin Bill added. “It’s too bad he wasn’t caught when he threatened Miss Adams.”

“Yes, if we only could obtain enough evidence against him to cause his arrest!”

“That won’t be easy. Even if you were to apprehend him, you would still have failed to solve the origin of the strange shadow which appeared on the door at Mrs. Van Hutton’s home, or the one outside against the white garage.”

“Those shadows have me puzzled,” Kay admitted ruefully. “But I’ll explain it yet!”

“If you do, I’ll give you a medal for being the world’s best female detective,” the attorney laughed.

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the appearance of Ronnie and the twins, who hailed Kay joyfully.

“Oh, here you are,” Wilma sang out. “We were afraid you had been kidnaped.”

“I didn’t mean to worry you,” Kay replied, deciding not to tell her friends of the incident until later. “I just slipped away for a few minutes. Shall we go back and dance again?”

“I think the party is beginning to break up,” Betty informed her chum. “It’s time Wilma and I were going home, anyway.”

Kay felt tired, and was secretly relieved that her friends were willing to depart. After Ronnie had left the theater with the twins, Cousin Bill brought his car to the door, and helped in Mrs. Tracey and her daughter, who sighed wearily as she sank back against the cushions.

“Enough excitement for one evening, eh?” the attorney remarked lightly, as he drove off.

“I intend to sleep until noon tomorrow,” Kay added, yawning.

This she did not do, however, for she awoke early with a desire to call on Miss Tremont, and so arranged to present herself to the secretary late in the morning.

“I received your message at the theater last evening,” she told the young woman, “and I went to the door as soon as I could, but you had gone.”

“I don’t understand. I sent no message.”

“Didn’t you call there and tell the doorman that you wanted to speak to me?”

“Absolutely not. I’ve been in the house the whole evening.”

“Then it’s just as I suspected. Someone used your name.”

Ellen Tremont had remained slightly aloof until Kay made this disconcerting disclosure. As the significance of the fact dawned upon her, she grew distressed.

“Who could have done such a thing?” she asked. “Oh, dear, it seems that of late everyone has been plotting against me.”

“Your friends are trying their best to protect you.”

The secretary looked slightly ashamed, then nodded. “I know. My sister means well, and you’ve been wonderful to me, Miss Tracey. I’m so confused about everything—I don’t know what to think.”

“Perhaps we’ll be able to straighten matters out in a few days.”

“If you mean I am to give up Peter——”

“Oh, let’s not discuss that now,” Kay said hastily. “Tell me, have you ever heard that Mr. Stannovi is interested in charitable work?”

“No, he has never mentioned anything of the kind to me.”

Kay realized that she was not learning much from her questioning, so presently she said good-bye and left the house, not expecting to return to it as soon as she did, which was the next day.

During the following afternoon she was walking slowly through Carmont Park, when suddenly she heard her name called. Turning, she saw Kenneth Van Hutton running toward her. He had been listening to a group of men who had gathered about an orator in another sector of the park.

“Kenneth, I told you not to come here again! It’s dangerous. Something might happen to you!”

“Oh, I suppose so,” he said. “But I don’t care. I came over to the park to play.”

“Well, I’ll take you home,” Kay sighed. The lad was such an engaging youngster one could not be cross with him for long.

“And may I get ice cream on the way?”

“I suppose so,” the girl laughed.

As Kay and the little boy walked up to the Van Hutton residence some time later, the society matron herself alighted from a car. She greeted Kay cordially, though pretending to be horrified at the dirt and ice cream plastered all over Kenneth’s face.

“Such a grubby little boy! Where have you been playing?”

“I found him in Carmont Park,” said Kay.

“But Kenneth, didn’t I tell you not to go there again?”

“Some kids came along and wanted me to pitch ball with ’em, Gramma,” he replied, imitating the vernacular of street urchins.

Mrs. Van Hutton threw up her hands in mock despair. “I have no idea where he acquires such talk! And he enjoys playing with every ragamuffin he meets.”

“Little boys need friends of their own age,” Kay suggested significantly. “They require a great deal of looking after, too.”

“Yes, I’ve discovered that.” Mrs. Van Hutton sighed as if under a great strain. “But I mustn’t keep you standing out here, Miss Tracey. Do come in.”

“I haven’t time today, thank you. However, I am glad to have seen you, for I want to warn you about something.”

“You wish to warn *me*?”

“Yes. I understand several shrewd swindlers are in the city trying to prey upon the sympathies of wealthy persons. If I were you I’d be very careful about giving donations to unknown charitable organizations.”

Mrs. Van Hutton flushed slightly, but gave no further sign that the warning disturbed her.

“Oh, thank you,” she said evenly. “I shall bear in mind what you say.”

Kay entertained slight hope that the woman would give the matter serious thought. “Mrs. Van Hutton doubtless considers me just an annoying meddler,” she reflected.

Had it not been for her promise to Mrs. Lambert to try to save Ellen Tremont from marrying unfortunately, Kay would have been too discouraged to try solving the mystery. As it was, she felt in duty bound to make at least one more effort to secure evidence against Harry Scott and Peter Stannovi.

“I’d like to know if they have anything to do with either the Weary Mothers’ Day Nursery fund or the Hopeful Workers’ organization,” she remarked that evening to Cousin Bill. “I feel they have, but I must prove it.”

“The best way to answer that is by investigating,” the attorney returned, laying aside his newspaper. “I am going to Bridgeton tomorrow to see about a case I am handling for the county relief organization. That might be an excellent opportunity for you to make inquiries.”

Kay accepted the invitation with alacrity, and the next afternoon found her touring Bridgeton with the young lawyer. They visited various welfare institutions, a number of labor headquarters, as well as several church groups, but no one was able to offer any information concerning the two unknown organizations. At a day nursery where Kay paused to admire the many healthy youngsters, the matron stated that in her opinion such a place as the Weary Mothers had never existed—certainly not locally.

“While this trip doesn’t add to my evidence against Stannovi, it certainly confirms my suspicions,” Kay remarked to her cousin as they drove back to Brantwood.

“Mrs. Van Hutton has doubtless been giving money to fake concerns,” the lawyer agreed, slowing down for an intersection. “I’ll see her tomorrow—”

He broke off, swerving the car so sharply that Kay was almost thrown from the seat. Quick as his reaction had been, it was impossible for him to avoid striking another automobile which, in coming from a side street, had ignored the boulevard stop sign.

There was a screech of brakes on the pavement, then a sickening crash as the two cars collided!

CHAPTER XVIII

A FAMILIAR SILHOUETTE

The Tracey car skidded toward the curb. For an instant Kay thought they would overturn, but the attorney skillfully avoided any sudden application of brakes, and brought the machine to a standstill.

“Are you all right, Kay?”

“Yes, only jolted up a bit. It’s a wonder we weren’t killed!”

They sprang out to learn how the occupants of the other car had fared. Kay stopped short as she recognized Harry Scott and his companion, Ethel Eaton, neither of whom was injured.

“Don’t tell Mother about this,” Ethel pleaded before anyone else could speak. “She thought I went to visit a girl friend. If she hears I’ve been in an accident she’ll never forgive me.”

“And if she learns you are going about with Harry Scott she’ll have something worse to say, too,” Kay thought.

“What was your idea in crashing the boulevard?” Cousin Bill questioned Scott tersely.

“I didn’t see the stop sign,” the man retorted sullenly.

“It’s printed in letters a foot high.”

“Well, I didn’t see it, I tell you. Besides, I’m not certain the fault was mine. You were traveling at an excessive rate of speed.”

“We weren’t going twenty-five miles an hour!” Kay protested indignantly. “If we had been, everyone would have been killed.”

“The fender on my car is wrecked. I intend to claim damages,” said Scott.

“Claim as much as you like, then try to collect!” the attorney challenged. “If you appear in court you’ll get the worst end of the deal.”

Scott’s face grew white with anger. He climbed back into his car.

“Come on,” he said shortly to Ethel.

She hesitated, seemingly unwilling to go. Scott tried several times to start the motor, but something was wrong with the engine.

“We’ll take you home, Ethel, if you like,” Kay offered generously.

“Oh, I wish you would! If Mother should see me with Harry I don’t know what she might do to me.”

Save for a few minor scratches, the Tracey automobile had not been damaged by the collision. Nevertheless, before driving away Cousin Bill made a careful inspection of the rear axle and wheels.

“It’s fortunate we weren’t injured,” he commented. “Trying to collect for damages is a real job.”

“Oh, I think Harry would have settled with you,” Ethel defended. “He means all right, even if he is a little stubborn. I kept asking him to drive more carefully but he wouldn’t listen to me.”

“Considering what you know about the man, I shouldn’t think you’d care to be seen with him,” Kay declared significantly.

Ethel flushed as she recalled how she had insulted Kay only a few days before. She was sorry now, yet could not bring herself to apologize for what she had done.

“I think you don’t understand Harry as well as I do,” she returned aloofly. “He’s the most generous person in the world. He really wants to help everyone.”

“That’s what *he* says,” Bill Tracey commented in an undertone, but Ethel did not hear him.

“I met him today to talk over an entertainment we’re arranging for my father’s employees,” the Eaton girl went on. “He’s so helpful at planning things.”

Kay and the attorney exchanged significant glances. It was clear to them that Ethel was being used as a dupe. The girl seemed too stupid to realize it, notwithstanding the warning she had received.

As they approached her home, Ethel prepared to alight. "Don't tell Mother about this," she begged Kay again. "I'm sorry for the things I said to you the other day, and I'll promise to do anything you wish, if you'll only not tell on me!"

"I don't make a practice of carrying tales, Ethel. But it seems to me your mother is right in forbidding you to see this man."

"I'll never talk to him again, if only you'll promise," Ethel offered rashly.

"Very well, I'll not tell."

As she drove home with Cousin Bill, Kay reflected upon the girl's surprising change of heart. She wondered if Ethel would keep her promise.

"If she doesn't, it won't be the first time she has broken her word," Kay thought regretfully.

At that very moment Ethel was ruing her words. The more she considered the matter, the more certain did she become that she had been very foolish to agree not to see Harry Scott again.

“I played right into Kay Tracey’s hands,” she told herself angrily. “She wouldn’t have told Mother about the accident, anyway. She tricked me. Oh, well, perhaps I’ll find a way to get even yet!”

Unaware that the misguided Ethel was plotting further mischief, Kay went about her affairs much as usual. Since the day of her meeting with the Regis restaurant waiter she had hoped to encounter him again, but their paths had never crossed. Determined to trace him, she telephoned his former place of employment and was delighted when the hotel manager was able to provide her with the man’s present address. Kay then wrote him a note, requesting him to call at her home the following afternoon.

“I’m afraid he’ll not come,” she told her mother.

However, she was wrong. Promptly at the appointed hour the waiter presented himself at the Tracey home.

Kay did not attempt to mislead the man concerning the purpose of the call. She frankly mentioned that she was trying to learn more about Peter Stannovi, and hoped that he might be able to assist her.

“I—I think not,” the waiter returned. “I’d like to help you, but I can’t.”

“You *do* know Stannovi! And from what you have already told me, I am certain you must have some evidence against him.”

“Miss, I’d be glad to tell you if I dared.”

“Why are you afraid?”

“This man who is trying to build up the organization has threatened me.”

“What sort of organization?” Kay asked alertly. “Don’t be afraid to tell me the truth. I’ll see that you are protected.”

The waiter after a few moments of thought decided that this girl could be trusted. Relaxing, he began his story:

“There is a plot under way to get money from wealthy persons and use the funds for building up a secret organization of the poor. This group wants to get power, and then strike back at the wealthy, if need be, by overthrowing the government.”

“Why, that would mean chaos! Have they collected much money?”

“None so far. But they’re trying to make us get it out of our employers. I don’t take any stock in the scheme myself. When these men talked to me I told them I’d have nothing to do with it. But they threatened me, and I’m afraid for my life.”

“Why don’t you report the matter to the police?”

“If I should, the men would avenge themselves on me in a day.”

“You haven’t told me the names of the leaders,” Kay reminded him. “Do you mean that Stannovi——”

Mrs. Tracey suddenly appeared in the doorway. "I am sorry to disturb you," she said pleasantly, "but another visitor wishes to see you, Kay. Mr. Stannovi."

At mention of the name the waiter sprang to his feet. He faced Kay with flashing eyes.

"You planned this!" he cried. "You deliberately called me here to meet this man! You want to have me killed!"

"You're wrong," said Kay. "I had no idea he was coming. Truly I didn't."

"I can't let him see me here," cried the man, terror in his voice.

"Then slip out the back way," Kay advised. "Mother will show you the door."

The instant the waiter had disappeared, Kay went to meet the newcomer. Stannovi greeted her with exaggerated politeness as she escorted him to the study.

"I'll not detain you long," he promised, as Kay offered him a chair. "I trust you will not feel offended at anything I may say. However, it has come to my attention that you are interesting yourself unnecessarily in my affairs."

"Meaning——?"

"You are a girl with an unusually keen mind, Miss Tracey. I am sure it will be needless for me to go into unpleasant

details. We shall get along very well if you heed my advice and in the future refrain from meddling.”

“Is that a warning?” Kay questioned.

Stannovi smiled as he arose to depart. “I shouldn’t call it by such a harsh name. Might I say that it is merely a helpful suggestion? But please bear in mind what I have told you.”

He bowed politely and left the house. Kay watched him from the window until he turned at the first corner.

“So it’s just a helpful suggestion!” she mused. “Now, what I’d like to know is, who told him I was concerned about his activities? It must have been either Miss Tremont or Mrs. Van Hutton.”

At school the next day Kay reported the entire affair to Wilma and Betty, who were always interested in her various adventures. The girls were in the gymnasium locker room changing their clothes.

“You’re heading straight for trouble,” Betty cautioned her chum. “I always was suspicious of that Stannovi. If I were you, I’d heed his warning.”

“I am not afraid of him!” announced Kay.

“Some day you’ll take one chance too many,” Wilma told her severely. “Why, even that waiter might harm you—perhaps he’s one of the gang.”

“I doubt it. He came to the house at my invitation and told a straightforward story. I think his only offense was to drop a tray filled with bowls of soup!”

“Speaking of soup, I wish I had something to eat right now,” Wilma said hungrily. “It seems years since I had luncheon.” Then she quoted:

““Oh hour of all hours the most bless’d upon earth,
The blessed hours of our dinners!””

The girls had paused so long to chat that everyone had left save themselves.

“Get a move on, slow poke,” Betty urged her sister. “You can recite poetry after we get home.”

“I’ll be too busy eating then,” Wilma retorted with a giggle. “I——”

The laughter died from her voice. Kay and Betty, surprised at the sudden change in her tones, glanced up. Wilma was staring at the glass door at the end of the hall.

“There it is again!” she whispered in awe. “The shadow!”

CHAPTER XIX

A TELL-TALE BILL

Kay whirled about quickly. As she did so, she beheld a figure plainly silhouetted against the glass door! It was a queer looking object!

“Let’s see who it is!” she cried.

The three girls ran the length of the hall. Kay flung open the door. Something heavy thudded to the floor.

“A dummy!” Wilma cried.

Kay signaled for silence, for she could hear someone giggling. With one accord she and the twins raced toward an opening near by and listened. In a group of lilac bushes that bordered the school yard there was a rustling, coupled with the sound of running feet. When the girls reached the spot no one was there.

“Too late!” Kay said in disappointment. “I’d like to know who played that trick on us.”

Slowly they walked back to the gymnasium exit.

“I can’t believe the first shadow I saw in that same spot was that of a dummy,” Wilma insisted. “It wasn’t grotesque like this one looked.”

“Nevertheless, the same person may have been responsible for both of them,” Kay returned significantly. “I have a sneaking suspicion who it was, too.”

They dragged the dummy figure into the gymnasium, where they could examine it without being watched. It was a crude imitation of a man. The body was stuffed with straw, and was clad in an old sweater and a pair of trousers.

Kay ran her hands through the pockets of the latter garment, but could find no clue as to the owner. The sweater, however, yielded a folded piece of paper.

“What is it?” Betty inquired eagerly.

“It’s an old butcher’s bill. And look, girls! It’s made out to Mr. Eaton!”

“Then the sweater must belong to him,” Betty cried. “Ethel used it to dress the dummy!”

“I guessed it even before I found this bill,” Kay declared. “Ethel was so jealous because her short story wasn’t accepted, that she has taken every opportunity she can to poke fun at my title, ‘The Shadow on the White Door.’”

“She wasn’t very clever, or she’d have gone through the pockets and removed all the clues,” Wilma commented.

Kay carefully folded the scrap of paper and placed it in her purse. Betty inquired what she intended to do with it.

“Return it. I think it will be interesting to see Ethel’s face when she learns that I found out who played the trick.”

“That’s an excellent idea,” Betty said approvingly. “What shall we do with the dummy?”

“We might take it upstairs and place it in a seat at her desk,” Kay proposed. “Then she’ll find it waiting for her when she comes to school in the morning.”

The plan delighted both Wilma and Betty, so they caught up the dummy, and started to carry it away. Suddenly Kay stopped them.

“Just a minute, girls. I want to try an experiment. Wilma, throw the figure over your shoulder. Stoop a little as you walk.”

“Say, what is this, anyway?” Wilma protested.

“Walk over toward the door, so the light strikes you just right,” Kay directed. “I want to see the shadow you’ll make.”

Even Betty was bewildered by this new scheme, but she burst into laughter as she beheld the grotesque silhouette of her sister carrying the dummy.

“Now hold it in your arms,” Kay ordered.

Wilma rebelled at this. “Let Betty entertain for a change. I’m tired of posing with this silly thing.”

“Oh, well, I guess I’ve seen enough,” said Kay. “Come on. Let’s take the ‘man’ upstairs.”

“Why did you want to see the shadow?” Wilma probed. “You must have had some reason for it.”

“Well, yes, I did. But I can’t explain anything about it just now.”

“It must have had something to do with the shadow you saw at Mrs. Van Hutton’s home,” Betty guessed shrewdly.

“I don’t mind saying that it does,” Kay admitted. “I think I’ve found the explanation for one and maybe more than one shadow.”

“Then what is it?” Wilma questioned.

“My theory would sound silly if I were to tell you now. I’m going to wait until I’ve had an opportunity to test it out.”

“You surely don’t hold Ethel responsible for the strange sight at Mrs. Van Hutton’s place?” Betty inquired.

“If I say anything further I’ll be revealing everything,” Kay laughed. “You’ll hear all about it soon.”

Wilma and Betty had to content themselves with this promise, but they grumbled about it as they carried the

dummy to the study hall. Kay went ahead to see that no one was in sight. Almost every teacher had left the building so the escapade looked to be going along without detection. The girls propped up the figure in Ethel's seat, then hastily made their exit.

“Wait until she finds it in the morning!” Kay chuckled. “I’m coming early to be sure I’ll be here when she arrives.”

On her way home she took time to stop at the Eaton house to speak to Ethel. The unpleasant girl came to the door herself.

“Do you wish to see me?” she inquired haughtily.

“Not particularly,” Kay returned gravely. “I merely came to return a bill.”

“What bill?”

“Oh, just a butcher’s bill I found in an old sweater this afternoon. I believe it belongs to your father.”

Kay handed the slip of paper to the girl. Then, secretly elated at Ethel’s confusion, she smilingly took her departure, and presently reached home, where Cousin Bill laughed heartily at the story of the dummy.

“So the incident leaves you one step ahead in the famous Eaton-Tracey feud,” he said teasingly. “Are you doing equally well with your mystery?”

“I’m making some progress, though not as much as I’d like to.”

“I was over in Bridgeton today,” the attorney stated, “and dropped in at the Hammond Plant for a few minutes. Had a little talk with the owner.”

“About Stannovi?” Kay demanded eagerly.

“His name was mentioned, though only casually. Mr. Hammond is having difficulties with his employees.”

“Labor troubles?”

“Yes. There is talk of a strike.”

“I could tell him a few things about that,” Kay said emphatically.

“I tried to give him a hint as to where the trouble might be emanating. I couldn’t come right out with any direct accusations, of course.”

“I’m almost positive Harry Scott is behind all the unrest and discontent,” Kay declared. “I haven’t seen him since the day he threatened Janet Adams.”

Mention of the actress’s name recalled to her the fact that she had never questioned the young woman regarding her unpleasant encounter with the labor agitator. She knew that the girl had resumed her part in the play, though in no condition to do so.

“I believe I’ll try to see her tomorrow,” Kay decided.

Early afternoon found her at the hotel where the actress resided. Janet Adams was eating a late luncheon in bed.

“I am conserving my strength,” she said to Kay. “In less than half an hour I must go to the theater. It’s a real struggle for me, but I am trying to keep up. I am so grateful to you for the way you saved the play, as well as my job, by substituting for me that evening.”

“I was glad to do it, Miss Adams. But you really shouldn’t be working yet.”

“I know, but according to the tradition of the stage one must carry on. I really feel much better now. Fortunately, my face wasn’t badly scarred by the fall.”

“You might have been severely injured. It was all the fault of that man who threatened you.”

“Yes,” the actress agreed bitterly, “when he first met me he was very flattering and kind. Then, after a few meetings, he tried to persuade me to change the lines in my rôle. When I refused he grew abusive.”

The young woman could throw no light on why the man had made the request, so presently Kay left her. On the spur of the moment she decided to go to the Van Hutton home to call upon Miss Tremont. To her disappointment, she was told upon arriving there that the secretary had left for the day.

“Mrs. Van Hutton is at home, I believe,” a servant told her. “Would you like to speak to her?”

“Yes,” Kay replied, stepping inside.

“She was in the library a few minutes ago preparing a speech,” the maid continued. “I’ll ask her if she will see you.”

Kay idled about the living room. Then, when the servant did not return, she wandered on into a conservatory. She was admiring an unusual tropical plant, when suddenly she heard an outside door close loudly. Through the glass windows she could see a man leave the house by a side exit. He smiled in deep satisfaction as he looked at a slip of paper in his hand.

“Stannovi!” Kay recognized him. “Oh, I’ll bet Mrs. Van Hutton has given him another check!”

The maid came to tell the girl that Mrs. Van Hutton would talk to her in the library. Kay hurried in, and too excited to lead up to the subject of the check diplomatically, burst out:

“I couldn’t help seeing Mr. Stannovi leave the house just now with a paper in his hand. I do hope you haven’t given him any money!”

Mrs. Van Hutton looked slightly annoyed. “My dear child, why are you so overwrought?”

“Oh, Mrs. Van Hutton, you don’t understand. This man is a clever swindler. He goes from one wealthy person to another, securing funds for fictitious charitable organizations.”

At this outburst the woman looked startled.

“I did give the man a rather large donation for the League of Undernourished Children,” she confessed uneasily. “It surely must be a worthy organization. Don’t you think so?”

“I don’t know a thing about it, and have never heard of such a league. But I am almost sure that the Weary Mothers’ Day Nursery fund and the Hopeful Workers’ Relief fund are both fraudulent schemes! Wasn’t it through Stannovi that you donated to them?”

Mrs. Van Hutton nodded her head and began to pace the floor nervously.

“Dear me, what shall I do? The man told me such pathetic stories about those poor children that I gave him a check today for five thousand dollars.”

“We must stop payment on it at once!” Kay advised. “Wire your bank in New York.”

“I’ll do it this very minute. Oh, Miss Tracey, I’m so grateful to you for telling me of these schemes. Do help me write out the telegram.”

Mrs. Van Hutton proved herself to be quite helpless in time of stress. Kay found paper and pencil, then composed the message herself. She had just finished phoning it to the telegraph office when the bell of the instrument rang.

“Please answer it for me,” the woman urged, twisting her fingers nervously.

Kay took down the receiver.

“This is Miss Tremont speaking,” came a voice over the wire.

“Yes? This is Kay Tracey.”

“Please tell Mrs. Van Hutton that I will not be able to attend to my duties for several days.” There was a slight pause, then the secretary added very distinctly, “I am going to be married!”

“Miss Tremont, you can’t do that—” Kay began, but her voice trailed off.

The connection had been broken! The wire was dead!

CHAPTER XX

AN EXPLOSION

Kay clicked the receiver several times, but there was no response until the operator inquired in an even voice, “Number, please?”

“I have been cut off. Can you trace the call?”

“I am very sorry,” came the mechanical reply. “Your party has disconnected.”

Kay turned from the telephone to face Mrs. Van Hutton.

“What is it?” the woman questioned anxiously. “You are as white as a ghost.”

“Miss Tremont is eloping!” Kay explained tersely. “She’s marrying Stannovi!”

“Oh, this is dreadful! We can’t let her do such a thing. If Stannovi actually is a crook, her life will be ruined.”

In agitation Mrs. Van Hutton began to walk back and forth. Kay tried to think for both of them.

“Tell me, where would Miss Tremont likely go to be married?”

“Oh, I have no idea. This is a fearful shock to me. I never dreamed she intended such a move.”

“I’ll telephone Cousin Bill,” Kay decided. “Perhaps he may be able to help us.”

It was reassuring to hear the attorney’s voice at the other end of the wire. He promised to be at the Van Hutton house within a short time, and Kay was waiting at the curb when he drove up.

“I’ve already telephoned the marriage license bureau and several ministers, telling them to be on the lookout for Stannovi, should he appear,” the girl informed her cousin hurriedly. “But I’m afraid the couple may plan to be married in some other town.”

“Stannovi would probably try to get Ellen away from Carmont as quickly as possible,” Cousin Bill reasoned.

“He has Mrs. Van Hutton’s check for five thousand dollars, too.”

“We’ll warn the local banks and then set out for Bridgeton,” the attorney announced. “Jump in! There’s no time to lose.”

Although they made a number of inquiries, Stannovi had not been seen in either Brantwood or Carmont. Apparently he had not attempted to cash Mrs. Van Hutton’s check. Continuing on to Bridgeton, Kay and her cousin combed the

entire city, calling upon ministers, visiting the court house, and making a brief stop at the Hammond Plant. The elopers could not be traced.

Undaunted, they visited other towns near by, but no one had seen either Stannovi or Miss Tremont. At length, long after dark they returned home, thoroughly disheartened by their unsuccessful chase.

“Probably they were married hours ago,” Kay conceded. “I dread reporting the bad news to Mrs. Lambert, for she will be heartbroken.”

“This ends your work on the case, too,” Bill Tracey added. “If Miss Tremont and Stannovi are married, Mrs. Lambert very likely won’t care to press charges against him.”

“I feel that I’ve failed completely. A few days ago I was certain I could solve the entire mystery—now I can see many reasons for not being able to do it.”

“It’s discouraging,” Cousin Bill agreed sympathetically. “But things may turn out better than we think. Miss Tremont may reform Stannovi.”

“He’s not the type,” Kay responded pessimistically. “More likely he’ll ruin her life, and she’s really a sweet person.”

She walked into the house, leaving Cousin Bill to put the car in the garage. Wilma and Betty were awaiting her in the Tracey living room.

“We were just ready to go home,” the latter declared. “Wilma was feeling blue tonight, so I made her come over here. You’re always good at cheering up a person.”

“Not tonight, I fear. I suppose you’ve heard the bad news?”

“You mean about Miss Tremont?” Wilma asked disconsolately. “Your mother told us. Is she really married?”

“As far as we know. We couldn’t trace her.”

“That’s too bad,” the serious twin declared gloomily.

“Everything seems to have gone wrong today.”

“Wilma’s poem was returned from *Hearthstones*,” Betty said suddenly.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” Kay declared sympathetically. “It was such a lovely thing, too.”

“Nice poems don’t win prizes,” Wilma returned, trying to speak lightly. “I knew I shouldn’t have a chance in the contest—yet I couldn’t help but hope.”

“I was almost sure you’d win,” Kay told her. “Your poem was really very beautiful.”

Wilma shook her head. “I know now that I just can’t write, and this contest has proved it.”

“Oh, you mustn’t feel that way,” Kay cried. “You *can* write. I don’t know why the judges turned down your entry, for I am sure it is worthy of publication.”

“Your story hasn’t been returned, has it?” Wilma asked.

“Not yet. I suppose it will come in the morning mail.”

“No. It was far better than my poem, and I feel sure it will win the prize. I hope so, anyway. If you succeed, then I won’t feel so bad about my failure.”

“You haven’t failed, Wilma. I wish I could make you believe it!” Kay was struck by a sudden idea. “May I have a copy of your poem?” she demanded.

“You may have the original if you like. I intend to throw it away.”

“You mustn’t do that. Bring it over to me in the morning,” said Kay.

“Do you expect to frame it?” Betty asked curiously.

“I have a better use for it,” the Tracey girl smiled secretively. “One that may prove to Wilma that her poem is really good.”

That evening after her chums had gone, Kay sat up until a late hour composing a letter on Cousin Bill’s typewriter.

“I hope my plan will succeed,” she told herself as she went wearily to bed. “I’ve failed in everything else, so perhaps this venture will turn out well.”

Kay was so tired that she overslept, and was late in coming down to breakfast. As she entered the dining room Cousin Bill glanced up from the morning paper.

“Here’s a piece of real news for you,” he announced, handing her the front page. “Just read these headlines.”

They stood out in bold, black type.

“Explosion Damages Hammond Chemical Plant! Origin of Fire Unknown!”

Eagerly Kay read the story, which stated that during the night fire had broken out in one of the laboratories of the plant. From the description she knew it to be the one occupied by Stannovi. The item went on to say that in addition to the damaged building, thousands of dollars’ worth of valuable stored chemicals had been lost. Although the fire department had not yet turned in its report, it was generally believed that the explosion had been accidental.

“But deliberately so,” Kay commented.

“Yes, I’ve been expecting something like this to happen,” remarked Cousin Bill. “If Mr. Hammond had only heeded my advice and called in the police when the labor troubles first started, the disaster might have been averted.”

“Oh, if someone doesn’t expose the guilty persons there’s no telling where this will end!” cried Kay. “Innocent people will be harmed. Why doesn’t Mr. Hammond suspect the truth?”

“He believes in handling matters his own way,” was the young attorney’s reply.

“I’m going down to Bridgeton and tell him a few things about that man Stannovi,” announced Kay with

determination. “After he learns what has been going on at Tony’s he may be ready to call in the police.”

“Don’t forget that Miss Tremont and Stannovi are probably married by this time,” Cousin Bill reminded her. “If you should get him into trouble, you’ll disgrace her, too.”

“You’re right. I had forgotten about that. Oh, why did she do it? That marriage complicates everything.”

“Don’t let it upset you so, dear,” Mrs. Tracey advised kindly. “Enjoy your breakfast.”

To please her mother Kay made a pretense of eating, but she was not hungry. Between bites of toast she re-read the story in the newspaper. The more she thought about it, the more determined she became not to allow the culprits to escape punishment.

“I’ve made up my mind,” she announced, when breakfast was over. “Even if Ellen Tremont should suffer from my doing so, I must expose Stannovi and Scott.”

“Just how do you plan to go about things?” Cousin Bill inquired. “Your evidence isn’t incontestable.”

“It’s very nearly so, and I may be able to gather more information at Bridgeton. If you’ll lend me your car, I’ll go there right now to talk with Mr. Hammond!”

CHAPTER XXI

KAY TURNS SLEUTH

Upon reaching Bridgeton, Kay drove directly to the Hammond Plant. She found difficulty in parking her car, for a large crowd of curious persons had gathered near the grounds to survey the damage that had been done. They were being held back by several policemen.

“Sorry, but you can’t go any closer,” an officer informed Kay as she tried to push her way nearer the ruins.

“But I must see Mr. Hammond.”

“His office is in the next building. Go around to the other door.”

“But I want to take a look at the annex. An acquaintance of mine had his office there.”

“Sorry, but no one can go through without a permit.”

Kay was forced to return to the main entrance, greatly disappointed. She went directly to Mr. Hammond’s office, to find the reception room crowded with persons who were waiting to see the official.

“I believe it’s hardly worth your while to wait,” a secretary told Kay. “Mr. Hammond will be in conference almost all morning with representatives of an insurance company.”

“It’s very important,” Kay protested. “I must see him about the fire.”

“I’ll give him your name.”

Kay sat down to wait. Presently the secretary returned.

“I am sorry, but Mr. Hammond cannot see you today. Do you wish to make an appointment for tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow may be too late,” Kay returned as she walked away.

In the hall she encountered Herbert Allen, who was hurrying to another office with several typewritten sheets of paper in his hand.

“Oh, hello,” he greeted her cordially. “I am glad to see you again. We had a real fire here last night.”

“So I notice,” Kay commented. Inwardly she told herself, “He hasn’t heard yet about Ellen’s elopement. I mustn’t tell him until I am absolutely sure. It would be too much of a shock to him.”

“Funny thing about that fire,” Herbert continued. “Stannovi didn’t work yesterday and he hasn’t shown up today, although the explosion was set off in his laboratory.”

“Was the loss great?”

“We aren’t certain yet just how high it will run. Thousands of pounds of chemicals have been destroyed; at least, they’ve disappeared from the warehouse adjoining Stannovi’s laboratory.”

“You mean they may have been stolen?”

“I’m in no position to say. All I know about it is, that the chemicals are gone.”

“I wish I could look over the building where the fire broke out,” Kay said impulsively.

“Perhaps I can get a permit for you. Wait here, and I’ll see what I can do.”

He hurried away, returning in five minutes with a blue slip. “This will let you through,” he said. “But if you enter the building, be very careful. The walls are weak and the fumes may still be harmful.”

“I’ll be very cautious,” Kay promised.

She received a similar warning when she presented the blue slip to a policeman on duty at the ruined annex. Reluctantly he permitted the girl to pass through the ropes.

The outside of the building had not been greatly damaged, though all windows were broken. As she peered up a smoke-stained stairway Kay saw that the interior was a wreck. A few firemen were examining the debris.

Carefully Kay mounted the stairs. The air was stifling. Yet, considering the fact that the warehouse had been filled with chemicals, it was surprising that the fumes were not more annoying. She spoke of the matter a little later to one of the firemen.

“The absence of fumes isn’t the only queer thing about this fire,” he told her bluntly.

“Then you think it may have been set?” Kay asked alertly.

The man smiled. “I’m not saying a thing until the report is made out.”

Kay wandered about wherever the going looked safe, but she was not permitted to approach the wrecked laboratory. She found it unpleasantly warm inside the building, and soon returned to the fresh air outside, where her attention was attracted to a watchman who stood gazing at the ruin. She wandered over to speak to him.

“It beats all, what could have caused the explosion,” he remarked conversationally. “I should have thought Mr. Stannovi would have discovered something was wrong when he was here last night.”

“Oh, I didn’t know he came to the plant last evening,” Kay said quickly.

“Yes, he and another fellow. It was about ten o’clock, I guess. They brought a truck and moved some of Mr. Stannovi’s equipment—laboratory apparatus, I guess it was.”

“And the fire broke out about midnight, didn’t it?”

“That’s when I discovered it, Miss. It was going strong then. Just seemed to break out everywhere at once. If the firemen hadn’t done mighty good work, the whole building would have burned to the ground.”

“Can you describe the man who came here with Stannovi?” Kay questioned.

“I didn’t get a good look at him. He was about Mr. Stannovi’s build, though, and dapper looking, except that he wore a cap instead of a hat. Come to think of it, Mr. Stannovi never went into the building. He gave this other fellow a key and told him to get the things.”

“And the truck arrived after Stannovi had left?” Kay probed.

“That’s the way I recollect. Anyhow, the man who came with Stannovi loaded some boxes into the truck and drove off with them. I guess it’s lucky for Mr. Stannovi that his friend took the equipment away, or it would have burned up along with everything else.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” Kay smiled, as she turned to leave. “It may prove to be the most unlucky thing he ever did.”

Highly elated at the valuable information she had uncovered, Kay went directly to Mr. Hammond’s office. This time she was determined to see him. Impressed with her manner, the secretary carried the girl’s message to the inner office,

returning to say that the president would like to interview her.

“I am very busy today,” Mr. Hammond announced in an annoyed tone as Kay seated herself opposite him. “I can give you only a few moments.”

“I’ll not take much of your time,” the caller promised. “I came because I know you are interested in learning who started the fire in your storerooms.”

“Can you tell me that?” Mr. Hammond demanded incredulously.

“I’ll furnish you with my evidence and allow you to draw your own conclusions,” Kay returned.

She then rendered an account of her recent investigation of Harry Scott and his association with Peter Stannovi. She told of the secret meeting at Tony’s and of the various attempts made to promote ill-will among the employees of the Hammond Plant, as well as the Treadwell Shoe Corporation, and other places. Finally, she reported her conversation with the night watchman.

“All that you say rings true,” Mr. Hammond said in a disturbed tone. “I’ve been warned about this man Stannovi before, but I always placed a great deal of trust in him. I’ll call his rooming house and have him come down here at once.”

He rang a buzzer, and when his secretary appeared, requested her to get in touch with the chemist at once.

“We’ve been trying to reach him all day,” the girl told him. “I’ll call again, though I’m sure it’s useless.”

“This looks bad,” Mr. Hammond said anxiously to Kay when the door had closed again. “I don’t like the appearance of things. Stannovi should be here. He must have heard of the fire.”

“If I were in your place I’d report him to the police,” Kay suggested. “At least, his record will bear investigation.”

“You’re right. I’ve delayed too long,” Mr. Hammond agreed after a lengthy hesitation. “I’ll call headquarters now and have them get busy on the case.”

Kay arose to leave, feeling that she had accomplished her mission. As she did so, Mr. Hammond motioned her to be seated.

“I want you to wait, Miss Tracey. I’d like to have you talk with the police. Tell them the same story you’ve given me.”

“I’ll be glad to do anything I can to help,” she assured him.

When the authorities arrived she placed all her evidence before them, and was gratified to find that they considered it highly impressive.

“In my opinion, Harry Scott is the man who is behind all the trouble,” she declared. “Stannovi is involved—how deeply, I have no way of knowing—but if he can be found I believe he’ll be able to explain a great many baffling points.”

“We’ll get them both,” the police detective announced confidently. “You’ve done an excellent piece of work, Miss Tracey. The Chief may want to thank you personally.”

“I’d prefer that my name be kept out of this entirely. You see, I dislike reporting Stannovi, for he is a close friend of a girl whom I know. If it should develop that he isn’t really a criminal——”

“Don’t give the matter another thought,” the detective interrupted. “We’ll go as easy with him as we can. You’ve only done your duty in reporting facts.”

Despite the praise which was showered upon her by Mr. Hammond and the officers, Kay was downhearted as she drove back to Brantwood. Yet there was one bright spot.

“At least, hundreds of innocent persons will be saved from suffering if Harry Scott is convicted,” she comforted herself. “When he gets behind bars I’m sure the labor troubles around Bridgeton will cease.”

Kay tried not to think about Ellen Tremont. She knew that the young woman would despise her when she should discover who was responsible for Stannovi’s arrest.

“It’s all such an unfortunate mix-up,” the girl thought dismally. “Even Mrs. Lambert may be provoked at me for the way I have handled the case.”

She had delayed writing the woman about her sister’s marriage, for it was an unpleasant task. Determined to get it

over with, she brought out pen and ink and set to work to compose the brief note. It took her nearly an hour. When she had finished she wrote a similar message to Herbert Allen.

“This will be much better than telling them face to face,” she reflected.

Kay took the letters to the post office herself, placing an air-mail stamp on the one to Mrs. Lambert. Soon after returning home, the doorbell rang. Kay went to answer it. She stared in amazement at the visitor.

“Ellen!”

“Oh, Kay, may I come in?”

“Why, of course! I didn’t mean to be rude. I was so startled at seeing you.”

“I don’t wonder, after the way I cut off when I was talking with you on the phone. I—I was afraid you’d try to prevent me from marrying Peter.”

Gently Kay took the girl’s arm and led her into the living room.

“What is wrong, Ellen? You seem dreadfully upset.”

“It’s about Peter. Oh, I can’t bear to think of it!”

“Tell me,” Kay urged.

“I am afraid he was trapped in that awful fire last night!”

Kay was aghast. “What makes you think such a thing?”

Tears blinded the girl’s eyes as she said quietly:

“Peter and I were to have been married at noon today. But he didn’t keep the appointment. Oh, I know he was killed in the explosion!”

CHAPTER XXII

AN EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENT

“Then you’re not married to Peter Stannovi?” Kay gasped, scarcely believing her own ears.

Ellen Tremont began to weep softly into her handkerchief.

“No. I stayed at the home of a friend last night because I didn’t want to return to Mrs. Van Hutton’s house. Peter and I planned to be married today. He didn’t show up. I am sure he was trapped in the fire.”

“The firemen reported that no lives were lost,” Kay assured her.

“Then why didn’t my fiance come? You’re sure everyone escaped from the building?”

“I’m almost positive. You needn’t worry about it any longer.”

Kay was trying hard to keep from showing her delight at learning that the little secretary had failed in her elopement plans. She longed to tell the young woman everything, yet felt that it would be wise to refrain from doing so just at this time.

“I can’t understand it at all,” Ellen murmured brokenly. “You don’t suppose Peter deliberately jilted me, do you?”

“I’d not try to figure anything out just yet,” Kay said kindly. “Sit here and relax for a few minutes. I must make a telephone call.”

Requesting her mother to talk to Miss Tremont during her absence, Kay hastened to the telephone. In a few minutes she had succeeded in notifying both Mrs. Lambert and Herbert Allen of the situation, asking them to disregard the letters which she had mailed a short time before. They both promised to be at the house as soon as they could possibly get there.

“Things are working out far better than I dared dream,” Kay thought excitedly, as she hurried back to her caller. “Since she’s not actually married, there’s still a chance that we can save her from ruining her life.”

Now that the secretary was assured no serious harm had befallen Peter Stannovi, she grew calm. Although the young woman avoided discussing the painful subject of the possibility that the man had deliberately failed to keep the appointment, Miss Tremont did not appear to be upset that the marriage had failed to materialize.

“I was hasty in promising to elope,” the girl acknowledged. “I realize that I should have taken your advice and investigated my fiance’s past.”

The telephone rang just then, and Kay went to answer it. Cousin Bill was calling from his office.

“I am on my way to see Mrs. Van Hutton,” he stated. “Can you join me at the house immediately?”

“Why, yes, if it’s important.”

“It is. Mrs. Van Hutton has suffered a nervous breakdown. She’s going away for a long rest and has requested me to take complete charge of all her business matters. Miss Tremont’s unfortunate marriage has greatly distressed her, and she’s almost hysterical because she allowed herself to give away money to so many fake charitable organizations.”

“I’ll be over right away,” Kay promised. “I’m bringing Miss Tremont with me.”

“Did I hear you correctly?” Cousin Bill questioned.

“Yes, Miss Tremont is here. She isn’t married after all. I’ll explain everything when I see you.”

Informed that her employer needed her, the secretary put aside her own troubles, declaring that she must go to the woman at once. Before leaving, Kay quietly directed her mother that should Herbert Allen and Mrs. Lambert arrive during their absence, they were to go at once to the Van Hutton residence.

Cousin Bill was engaged in conference with the distraught society woman when the girls reached the house. They were immediately ushered into the study, where Mrs. Van Hutton

reclined on a couch. Her appearance shocked Kay. Her face was drawn and white, and she had lost her usual air of hauteur.

“Oh, Ellen,” she burst out reproachfully, “how could you run away and marry such a deceitful man? Stannovi and his friend have tricked me, cheating me out of a small fortune!”

“Miss Tremont isn’t married,” Kay explained, as the girl stood mute.

“Then that’s one disaster that has been averted,” Mrs. Van Hutton said in relief.

“Everything will turn out much better than you think,” Cousin Bill assured her. “Perhaps we may be able to recover some of that lost money, too. If the police should catch Stannovi and Scott——”

He broke off, realizing that he was speaking of Miss Tremont’s fiance. The girl sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands, but did not weep. A few minutes later Kay gently led the young woman to her room on the second floor.

“Don’t worry about things,” she said kindly as she helped the girl undress. “We’ll get at the truth of this affair before we’re through.”

“The absolute truth,” Ellen whispered gratefully. “I can bear to hear it. I’ll never marry Peter unless his record is clear.”

Downstairs Cousin Bill and Mrs. Van Hutton were discussing the woman's financial affairs. A few minutes later Kay joined them, and was startled at a remark she heard.

"I'll sign anything you like," the matron was telling the attorney. "Use your own judgment about settling the troubles of the Treadwell Shoe Corporation. I am sick and tired of it all. I've muddled everything."

"I'll look after your interests," Cousin Bill said kindly. "You will feel much better about things after you have had a good rest. Go to some lively resort and forget all your troubles."

"I shall leave as soon as I can get my trunks packed."

"You haven't as yet explained your business with Stannovi," Kay reminded Mrs. Van Hutton as she was on the verge of leaving the study. "Did he actually swindle you out of any money?"

"Oh, I can't go into that now," the woman returned in a harassed voice. "The subject is such a painful one. Later, when I feel better——"

"Of course," Kay agreed instantly. "We'll talk about it some other time."

Mrs. Van Hutton went directly to her room, stating that she would not be at home to anyone. Alarmed at the woman's nervousness, Kay summoned a physician. She was greatly relieved when he stated that the only treatment he would prescribe would be a long rest.

After the doctor had left, Kay and Cousin Bill examined the papers in Mrs. Van Hutton's desk. They discovered her affairs to be even more muddled than they had suspected.

"It will take several weeks to straighten out matters," the attorney commented. "I'll need a good secretary to help me."

"Why not ask Miss Tremont? She's familiar with the situation, and the work might help her forget her own troubles."

"An excellent idea," Cousin Bill said approvingly. "I'll see if it can be worked out."

When the subject was broached to Mrs. Van Hutton, she was willing that Miss Tremont should continue her duties, and the young woman in turn was grateful for the opportunity to work.

"If only Scott and Stannovi could be apprehended, it would be easy to get at the bottom of everything," Cousin Bill said to Kay.

Ever since the search for the two men had been instituted, the attorney had kept in close touch with police headquarters. Therefore, it did not surprise him to receive a phone message from the Chief, reporting the latest developments.

"Here's interesting news," he repeated to Kay as he hung up the receiver. "Thanks to your tip, the police have traced that truck-load of stolen chemicals. The boxes were found in a district of Bridgeton where foreigners live—most of them at Tony's."

“Have they caught Scott and Stannovi yet?”

“They’ve had no luck so far. But they’re hot on the trail.”

Kay was so interested in the search, that after returning home she lingered near the telephone, hoping to receive another call from police headquarters. Wilma and Betty, dropping in to hear the latest details of the case, found her at this post.

“Oh, come with us to the football game,” Wilma pleaded. “You’ve mooned over this affair long enough.”

“The police will finish the case anyway,” Betty added. “You’ve done all you can. Why not attend the big event with us?”

“Why, this is the day Carmont battles Hilton City!” Kay cried. “Of course I’ll go.” She sprang to her feet. “Why, Ronnie will be playing!” she exclaimed.

“Of course he will,” Betty laughed. “Hurry!”

“Try to keep me away!” Kay said. “And I need relaxation from the mystery, for it will make me think better. I still have to prove my theory about the shadow on the door. But I’ll put the thing out of my head for a little while. Let’s go!”

The girls were a bit late in reaching the stadium. As they studied the scoreboard they were alarmed to see that Hilton City led by one touchdown. At the end of the first half the result remained the same.

“I wonder why the coach doesn’t put Ronnie into the game?” Kay fretted.

“Someone told me he hurt his arm in practice yesterday,” Wilma told her. “Perhaps he’ll not play today.”

At the end of the third quarter Hilton City had thirteen points, Carmont none. Then Kay clutched Betty’s arm excitedly, for Ronald Earle was streaking across the field to report to an official.

“Now watch that ball travel!” she cried loyally. “Come on, team! Touchdown!”

She was right. Ronnie was responsible for two touchdowns before the other side could score again. Then, with only three minutes to play, the score stood 13 to 13.

“Time is getting short,” Kay stated, looking at her watch. “And we need another touchdown to win.”

The ball was in the enemy’s territory. Only some clever playing could make Carmont win.

“Come on, Ronnie!” Kay shouted, leaving her seat and crowding closer to the field.

“Fourth down, and half a minute to go!” Betty groaned presently.

The players went into a huddle, then took their respective positions. The ball was snapped back and passed swiftly

from one to another. Even Kay and the twins could not tell what had become of it until they saw Ronnie break away and race toward the goal post.

“Touchdown! Touchdown!” Kay screamed frantically.

A Hilton City player lunged for young Earle, but the lad whirled and dashed over the line. The band struck up a victory tune. The crowd went wild.

“Carmont wins!” Betty cried in delight, nearly hugging the breath out of Kay. “Oh, that was the most glorious finish I’ve ever seen.”

A few moments later Ronnie was carried around the field on the shoulders of his appreciative schoolmates. At last he begged to be set down near the spot where Kay was waving enthusiastically.

“You were splendid!” she praised. “I think such a victory deserves a celebration. Why not round up the entire team and come to my house for hamburgers? We’ll cook them over the fireplace, and dance afterwards.”

“Sounds good to me,” Ronnie grinned. “I’ll bring as many fellows as I can get.”

The girls hurried on ahead to prepare for the party. While Betty and Wilma were telephoning their friends, Kay sought out her mother.

“Did the police telephone?” she asked.

“No, dear,” Mrs. Tracey responded. “But there’s a letter that came for you this afternoon.”

Kay dropped her work and ran to find the missive. Her eyes sparkled as she observed that the envelope was long and thin. Ripping it open, she quickly read its contents.

“Girls,” she called, “come here!”

Wilma and Betty hurried to their chum’s side to see what was wrong.

“I have a wonderful announcement to make,” Kay told them.

“Harry Scott has been captured,” Wilma guessed.

Kay shook her head.

“No, this is about—” She broke off, and laughed. “But I mustn’t ruin the effect of the news by telling it now. Wait until the others come!”

CHAPTER XXIII

A RETURN VISIT

“You’re the worst tease I ever knew,” Wilma complained. “I believe I don’t care about hearing your important announcement after all!”

“You’ll change your mind when you learn what it is,” Kay laughed. “Oh, there goes the doorbell. Our guests are arriving.”

Soon the Tracey living room was crowded with boys and girls. Since Kay really was impatient to tell her news she did not postpone the momentous proclamation any longer. Clapping her hands for silence, she faced the group.

“I have just received a letter from the *Rainbow* magazine. The editor states that he is pleased to accept Miss Wilma Worth’s poem, ‘Shadows,’ for publication in the December issue. A check will be mailed at once to the young poetess.”

As everyone began to cheer, Wilma’s face flushed a rosy red. “So that’s why you wanted a copy of my poem?” she accused Kay. “I didn’t even think of trying another magazine.”

“Your poem was splendid, and you deserve the honor of having it appear in the publication,” Kay praised. “I hope the editor sends you a big check, too.”

“I’m so grateful, I don’t know what to say,” Wilma stammered. “You’re always doing such generous things, Kay.”

“Speech! Speech!” the young people demanded.

Wilma was too overwhelmed by her good fortune to express herself very coherently. Over and over she kept repeating that she was very grateful, and very proud of the honor bestowed upon her.

Kay’s announcement had served to start the party off at an enthusiastic pitch. The house resounded with shouts and laughter as the hamburgers sizzled over the fireplace.

No one seemed to notice that Kay herself was unusually quiet. She made an effort to enter into the spirit of the fun, but try as she would, she found her thoughts reverting to Ellen Tremont and her troubles. She wondered how the young secretary would react when her sister and Herbert Allen should arrive.

“She really isn’t in love with Stannovi,” Kay reflected. “Still, his arrest would doubtless cause her much grief and humiliation.”

The party did not break up until a late hour, and Kay was secretly relieved when she had bidden goodnight to the last of her guests.

The next morning, before she had finished eating her breakfast, Mrs. Lambert and Herbert Allen arrived at the house.

“I came as quickly as I could,” the latter explained. “I didn’t receive your message until last night.”

“Tell us everything,” the woman urged Kay anxiously. “Is Ellen married? You told us to disregard your letter reporting that she had eloped with Stannovi.”

Kay quickly explained the situation, becoming somewhat embarrassed at the gratitude that was showered upon her.

“I really can’t claim any credit for having prevented the marriage,” she stated. “Until yesterday your sister has never listened to me when I have tried to tell her about her fiance.”

“How does she feel toward him now?” Herbert asked eagerly. “Is she beginning to realize the type of man he is?”

“She doesn’t know what to believe just yet. For that matter, I’m not convinced myself that Stannovi is as black as he has been painted.”

“You don’t mean you’re in favor of the marriage?” Mrs. Lambert demanded incredulously.

“No, but I feel we should give the fellow an opportunity to clear himself.”

“He must be guilty, or he wouldn’t have disappeared after the fire,” Herbert insisted.

“I hope for Ellen’s sake that Stannovi’s name isn’t disgraced,” Mrs. Lambert said anxiously. “Poor girl, she has enough to bear as it is.”

“Cousin Bill went to the police station this morning before I was up. He intends to help with the search today. I feel sure he’ll do all in his power to keep matters quiet, if Stannovi is arrested.”

“I owe you so much,” Mrs. Lambert declared gratefully.

Kay hoped that she might be instrumental in re-uniting the two sisters, and ultimately bringing about Miss Tremont’s engagement to Herbert Allen. It was her opinion that the girl might be in the mood for a reconciliation, so she suggested asking her over to the Tracey home.

“I wish you would,” Mrs. Lambert urged. “Do you think she’ll come?”

“I believe she will.”

In response to Kay’s telephone call, the secretary promised to come over immediately. As she entered the living room, she hesitated on the threshold, staring uncertainly at Herbert and at her sister. Then impulsively she flung herself into Mrs. Lambert’s arms. The two sisters clung to each other convulsively.

“Oh, can you ever forgive me?” Ellen asked tearfully. “I said such harsh things to you, when you meant to save me from my own folly.”

“There’s nothing to forgive, dear. We all make mistakes.”

Ellen turned to Herbert. “I’m just beginning to appreciate my true friends,” she told him. “I’ll never forget how you’ve stood by me in my trouble.”

“I want only your happiness, Ellen. If you really love Stannovi——”

“Oh, I don’t! I was fascinated by his fine manners, but after I had promised to elope with him I began to realize it would be a mistake. When he didn’t come I was almost glad.”

Herbert’s face lighted up. He took Ellen’s two hands in his own strong clasp, and the two moved over to a window, to whisper to each other. Kay and Mrs. Lambert exchanged triumphant glances, confident that within a few weeks at the latest Miss Tremont would announce her engagement to Herbert Allen.

“There’s only one thing that would make her turn from Herbert now,” Kay thought, “and that is if Stannovi should return and try to prove his innocence. She might then allow her feelings to sway her good judgment.”

In a few moments Ellen came back to Kay. “I wish you would tell me everything you know about my former fiance,” the young woman urged.

Kay was beginning to relate what she knew, when the telephone rang. Excusing herself, she answered it. A moment later she faced her friends, saying quietly:

“Cousin Bill just called me over long distance to say that Harry Scott has been captured. Considerable evidence against him was found, and he will be brought back for trial.”

“Was Peter arrested, too?” Ellen Tremont questioned anxiously.

“No, and his name hasn’t been mentioned officially in the case. Cousin Bill saw to all that.”

Mrs. Tracey insisted that the three callers remain until the lawyer should return, that they might learn all the details of the capture. Mrs. Lambert and her sister accepted the invitation, but Herbert Allen felt that he must return to his duties in Bridgeton.

Cousin Bill did not reach home until evening. He then gave a vivid account of the police chase which had ended almost at the state line.

“Scott is implicated in more underhanded affairs than we suspected,” he told the group. “It may take several days before all the evidence against him is gathered.”

The two visitors had accepted an invitation to remain over night, and since the day had been a trying one, they retired presently.

“Guess I’ll turn in, too,” Cousin Bill said a little later. “I’m dead tired.”

Kay read a magazine for perhaps an hour, then mounted the stairs to her own bedroom. Without turning on the light she

walked over to the window and looked out across the yard. It was an unusually beautiful night, with a full moon shrouding everything with its silvery beams.

She heard a slight sound on the gravel driveway. Gazing downward, she focused her eyes upon the white door of the garage. Slowly, as if on a moving picture screen, a dark shape moved across the panel.

“Oh!” came involuntarily from the girl’s lips.

It was the same shadow which Kay had observed in the hallway of the Van Hutton home!

CHAPTER XXIV

A USELESS SEARCH

“It’s Stannovi!” Kay decided instantly. “He has probably found out that Ellen is here, and hopes to see her.”

Darting down the hall, she rapped sharply on Cousin Bill’s door. He responded drowsily.

“What’s the matter? Is the house afire?”

“A man is prowling about near the garage,” Kay informed him tersely. “I think it’s Stannovi!”

“I’ll be with you in a second.”

Without waiting for him, Kay ran downstairs and quietly let herself out the back way. No one was in sight. Cautiously she approached the garage, and was searching about the grounds when Cousin Bill joined her.

“I saw the shadow on this door,” Kay explained in a whisper. “It looked exactly like that of Stannovi, but he’s gone now.”

“You’re sure you didn’t dream it?”

“Of course I didn’t.” Kay stooped to examine a small depression in the soft earth. “And see! Here is a footprint I’m certain you didn’t make.”

“I’ve never worn a shoe that large in my life. You’re right, Kay. Someone must have been here tonight.”

Cautiously they searched the garden and the garage, but the prowler had vanished.

“We may as well give it up,” Bill Tracey said presently. “No use telling the others about this—at least, not until morning.”

They returned to their rooms. Kay could not sleep, so sat for more than an hour by the darkened window, watching the grounds below. The shadow did not reappear, so she finally grew impatient and went to bed.

She was awakened in the morning by a soft tapping at her door. “Come in,” she called.

Mrs. Lambert entered, becoming apologetical when she saw that Kay was not yet up.

“I didn’t mean to disturb you at such an early hour. But I want you to see what I found in our room this morning. I picked it up by the open window.”

She held out a small stone and a folded bit of paper. Kay read the brief message:

“Do not believe anything the Traceys tell you about me. Meet me by the garage door and I will explain everything to

you.” The note was signed with Peter Stannovi’s name.

“Then I was right!” Kay exclaimed. “The shadow *was* that of Stannovi!”

“The shadow?”

Kay explained about the disturbance during the early hours of the night, adding, “I must have frightened him away. Tell me, has Ellen seen this note?”

“No, I picked it up from the floor myself. Evidently it was thrown through the window, but didn’t awaken us. When I read the message, I thought it best not to worry her with it. Do you think Stannovi will make another attempt to see my sister?”

“He may. We must be on the lookout for him.”

“Ellen expects to return to Mrs. Van Hutton’s today. You don’t suppose——”

“That Stannovi will try to see her there?” Kay finished. “Yes, that might be his logical move. I happen to know that he’s well acquainted with the interior of that house.”

“Isn’t there anything we can do?”

Kay leaned back against the pillows, thoughtfully studying the note.

“We’ll notify the police and have them search the town for him,” she decided. “If he isn’t captured by nightfall, I may

have a better plan.”

The search went on all day, but the authorities were unable to find a trace of the chemist. Late that afternoon Miss Tremont and her sister left for the Van Hutton home, the secretary still unaware that her former fiance was being pursued so relentlessly.

“Don’t worry,” Kay whispered to Mrs. Lambert as the visitors departed. “I confidently believe Stannovi will be captured soon.”

Kay later explained to Cousin Bill her theory that without doubt Stannovi would anticipate Miss Tremont’s return to the Van Hutton home. Having failed in his attempt to see the girl at the Traceys’, it was probable that he would attempt to get in touch with her at the house of her employer soon after nightfall.

“We’ll spread our net for him then,” Cousin Bill declared. “Herbert Allen will help watch the house. He will drive over as soon as he finishes his work for the day.”

Convinced that the plan would succeed, Kay, who wished to witness the capture, went over to the Van Hutton residence shortly after dinner. She found the household in confusion.

“It’s Kenneth,” Ellen told her, almost tearfully. “He has disappeared.”

“Why, didn’t he go with Mrs. Van Hutton?”

“No. At the last minute she decided not to take him. Kenneth was all broken up about it, and has wandered off somewhere.”

“I’ll telephone the police,” Kay offered. “Surely they’ll locate him in the neighborhood.”

Secretly she was fearful the lad had been kidnaped, and as the hours passed and there was no trace of the little boy, she was more convinced than ever that this had happened. Kay was eager to join in the search, but as it was late she did not know in what way she might help. She did her best to comfort Ellen.

“I’ve already telephoned the hospitals,” the girl said. “Kenneth hasn’t been injured, so we should find him by morning at the latest.”

Kay was glad when Miss Tremont was persuaded to retire early, for she did not want the secretary to witness Stannovi’s possible capture if it could be prevented. With Mrs. Lambert as her companion she darkened the windows and waited.

An hour passed. Then another. Finally Kay heard a slight sound in the direction of the garden wall. She peered out, to see Stannovi coming stealthily toward the house.

Almost at the same instant Cousin Bill and Herbert Allen, who were hiding in the shrubbery, sprang forth, and caught the man by his arms. He struggled desperately to free himself but they held him tight.

“Let me go!” Stannovi cried furiously. “I’ve done nothing wrong.”

“That remains to be proven,” Cousin Bill informed him tersely.

“I can explain everything.”

“You’ll explain it all to the police.”

“Don’t take me to headquarters,” the man pleaded. “I’ll tell my entire story.”

Cousin Bill debated for an instant. “You’re going to my office,” he told the man firmly. “I’ll listen to your story there, and if it doesn’t ring true, I’ll turn you over to the authorities.”

By this time Kay and Mrs. Lambert had hurried out to the garden.

“You two plotted my downfall,” Stannovi accused them sullenly. “From the first you poisoned Ellen’s mind against us. You tried to make Mrs. Van Hutton suspicious of me, too,” he said to Kay.

“And for an excellent reason,” the girl retorted. “What have you done with all the money you took from her?”

Stannovi had the grace to look ashamed. “I can explain about those checks,” he said.

“And I suppose you can explain about the explosion in the Hammond Plant, too!” Herbert Allen remarked sarcastically.

“Yes, I can!” Stannovi shouted defiantly. “My back is to the wall now—I am trapped in a net of circumstantial evidence. But I could tell you the truth if you’d believe it.”

“We’re willing to listen to your story,” Cousin Bill told him. “You shall spend the night in my office. I have a cot there, where you’ll be very comfortable, even if you are under guard. In the morning, with a detective from the police force to witness the proceedings, you will be permitted to offer your alibi. If it rings true, you go free; if not, it’s jail.”

“I have no choice,” Stannovi said angrily.

The men led him away.

“Come to my office tomorrow at nine,” Cousin Bill directed Kay over his shoulder. “We may need you.”

“I’ll be there.”

After Stannovi had left with his self-appointed guards, Kay telephoned the police to inquire if they had been able to trace Kenneth.

“We’re combing the city,” she was told, “but so far he hasn’t been found. It begins to look a little like kidnaping.”

In the emergency Kay had promised to remain over night at the Van Hutton home. However, neither she nor Mrs. Lambert felt like retiring.

“If anything should happen to that little boy Ellen would never get over it,” her sister said anxiously.

“Mrs. Van Hutton should have taken him with her.”

“I’m going to send her a message,” said Kay with determination. “A night letter. Even if she is ill, she owes a duty to her grandson.”

“Someone should give that woman a talk about her attitude toward the boy. In my opinion, it’s disgraceful the way she neglects him.”

Since they could do no good by staying up, Kay and Mrs. Lambert presently retired. They arose early, and had finished breakfast before Ellen was awake.

“I’m beginning to fear that the police may never find Kenneth,” Mrs. Lambert declared, after a telephone call to the station had informed them that nothing new had developed during the night. “Possibly he has been kidnaped.”

Suddenly Kay sprang to her feet.

“What’s the matter?”

“Why didn’t I think of that before?” she said as if to herself. “It’s just possible I’ll find him there!”

Without waiting to explain, she caught up her wraps and ran from the house.

CHAPTER XXV

KAY'S REVELATION

Catching a bus at the corner, Kay rode directly to Carmont Park. Recalling that she had found Kenneth there upon previous occasions, she was hopeful that he might have gone there, been unable to find his way home, and not been kidnaped at all. Observing a group of men gathered about a soap-box orator she mingled with the crowd, asking various persons if they had seen the little boy.

“I saw a youngster here a few minutes ago,” a man told her. “He complained of being hungry.”

“Which way did he go?”

“Toward the lake.”

Terrified lest Kenneth might have fallen into the water, Kay hurried on. She thought she saw someone through the trees, and in another instant knew that it was the Van Hutton lad. He was sailing a paper boat at the edge of the pond.

Kay had never in her life seen a more bedraggled little boy. His nice suit was now wrinkled and muddy, his hair unkempt, his face dirty.

“Kenneth!” she cried. “Where have you been?”

He turned at the sound of her voice and approached reluctantly.

“I’m never going back home,” he announced in quavering tones. “Even though I’m hungry and cold, I’m never going back. Grandma went off and left me.”

Kay took the little fellow by the hand. “Where did you sleep last night?” she asked gently.

“I slept in an old box down by the tracks. It was awful cold, too, and I was ’fraid.”

“You wouldn’t like to sleep there tonight, would you, Kenneth?”

The boy shook his head.

“You’d like something to eat, too, wouldn’t you?”

“I’m ’most starved to death.”

“Then I think you should go back to your grandmother.”

“She doesn’t want me.”

“Yes, she does, Kenneth. She has been ill and she needs you to look after her.”

“Then I’ll go back,” the boy agreed. “I didn’t know she was sick.”

Kay took the little fellow to the nearest restaurant. While he was eating an enormous breakfast, she telephoned to the police and then to the Van Hutton home.

“Oh, I’m so glad you have found him,” Ellen Tremont responded joyfully. “His grandmother just came back and is hysterical because she thinks he can’t be found.”

“Mrs. Van Hutton got my message?”

“Yes, and decided to come back to take charge of the search. She began to miss him as soon as she had departed, she says.”

“It was time, I think,” Kay thought, overjoyed that at last the elderly woman was to find true happiness.

When she arrived at the Van Hutton house, Kenneth’s grandmother met them at the door, and gathered the little boy into her arms.

“I will never leave you alone again,” she promised contritely. “I’ve been very neglectful, but from now on I’m going to devote all my time to you. And we’re going to have a good time together.”

“Kenneth has been very lonesome these past few weeks,” said Kay. “I really think he needs you far more than all the clubs and charities which have demanded so much of your attention.”

“You are entirely right, Miss Tracey. I’ve been very silly, gadding about and making worthless speeches. I’ve learned

my lesson. From now on I intend to give Kenneth a lot of attention.”

It was now nearly nine o'clock. Kay had not forgotten her appointment with Cousin Bill, so was forced to break away while Mrs. Van Hutton was still trying to thank her for all that she had done.

At the attorney's office two police detectives, together with Herbert Allen and Cousin Bill, were listening to Stannovi's account of his association with Harry Scott.

“I didn't mean to become involved in the man's dishonest schemes,” the foreigner was protesting. “He took me out to dinner several times and we grew friendly. I needed some money, and he suggested a way whereby I might make it.”

“By securing so-called charitable donations from Mrs. Van Hutton and other wealthy women?” Cousin Bill probed.

“Yes, it seemed an honest way to me. I have always had a persuasive way with women.”

“I've noticed that,” Herbert Allen cut in sarcastically.

Stannovi shot him an angry look and continued with his story:

“I thought there was nothing wrong about accepting money to be used for charity. Mrs. Van Hutton was gullible and easily influenced, and I may have been overly persuasive.

However, I never intended to defraud her. I always turned the checks over to Scott immediately.”

“His signature appears on several which he cashed,” one of the detectives confirmed.

“Let’s hear you explain the robbery and fire at the Hammond Plant,” Herbert Allen challenged.

“Scott asked me for the key to my laboratory. He wanted to borrow some of my equipment.”

“What actually happened was that he entered the building, committed robbery, and then tried to cover up his tracks by causing an explosion,” Kay stated tersely, as she broke into the conversation for the first time.

“I suspected that as soon as I learned of the fire,” continued Stannovi. “I discovered, too, that Scott had portrayed me as a labor agitator. I disappeared because I was afraid I’d be accused of the crimes Scott had committed.”

Stannovi had told a straightforward story, which confirmed the evidence Kay had gathered. She was strongly inclined to believe the man, yet she was not entirely satisfied concerning one point.

“Weren’t you prowling about the Van Hutton house the night that Cousin Bill and I came there to consult with Mrs. Van Hutton?” she questioned. “I’m sure I saw your shadow.”

“Yes, I did try to overhear the conversation going on there. Rather, Scott asked me to go to the house with him and I

foolishly agreed to do so.”

“But you both weren’t in the house?”

“I was inside listening. Scott remained outdoors. I intended to slip away through a first floor exit.”

“But instead,” Kay took up the story, “you were frightened, tiptoed upstairs, and climbed out of a second floor window.”

The erstwhile intruder looked at the girl incredulously.

“But you fell,” Kay went on with the story. “Then Scott picked you up and carried you away. The grotesque shadow made by this against the garage door frightened Ellen Tremont and she screamed.”

Stannovi nodded assent.

“How did you ever figure this out, Kay?” Cousin Bill questioned in amazement.

“Because I made tests with a dummy at school. Thanks to Ethel Eaton, I had a model presented to me. I had Wilma carry the stuffed figure on her back, and the shadow it cast was almost identical with the one I saw from the window of Kenneth’s room.”

“That was a clever bit of detective work, Miss Tracey,” one of the officers said admiringly. “We may as well bring Scott in now and see how his story jibes with Stannovi’s yarn.”

Through a special arrangement with the police, Harry Scott had been brought to the lawyer's office for questioning. At a word from Cousin Bill he was ushered into the room.

“So you squealed, did you?” he demanded, glaring at Stannovi. “I’ll get you for this later!”

At first he refused to answer any questions, but Cousin Bill succeeded in forcing the man to make several damaging admissions.

“It really doesn’t matter whether you confess or not,” he told the culprit. “You were caught with the goods, and you’re due to serve a long prison term not only for defrauding Mrs. Van Hutton, but also because of the robbery at the Hammond Plant and your anti-American activities.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Scott sneered.

“We have several witnesses to connect you with various crimes,” Cousin Bill said evenly. “Some of the stolen property was found in your possession, and we have your signature on the checks you obtained from Mrs. Van Hutton. It will be much easier for you if you’ll admit your guilt.”

The prisoner hesitated. Suddenly his manner changed abruptly.

“All right, you have me this time. If it hadn’t been for that snip of a girl there, my plans would have gone through.”

“You were responsible for all the labor troubles at Bridgeton,” Kay accused him. “You weren’t interested in helping the poor working men. You only intended to use them for your own selfish interests.”

Scott acknowledged the charge with an insolent smile.

“I believe you actually intended to harm me,” Kay went on. “Weren’t you the one who sent that message at the theater saying that Miss Tremont wished to see me?”

“You seem to know all the answers yourself,” the man sneered. “But I don’t mind admitting that I sent the note. If it hadn’t been for him—” Scott indicated Cousin Bill—“I’d have taught you a lesson for meddling in my affairs.”

“As it is, you’re the one who will learn a lesson,” the attorney retorted. “Take him away, officer.”

After Scott had left, Bill Tracey conferred with the detectives and Kay concerning what disposition should be made of Stannovi. The chemist watched them nervously.

“Don’t send me to jail,” he pleaded, as the attorney faced him again.

“We’re not sending you to prison because of Miss Tremont, Stannovi. However, there is one serious charge against you which doesn’t involve her. We find that you entered this country illegally.”

“That is true.”

“You will be deported, and you should consider yourself lucky that you have escaped Scott’s fate.”

“I’ll make no trouble about leaving the States,” Stannovi mumbled. “I’ll do anything you say, if you don’t send me to jail.”

It was almost noon when Kay returned home, to find Wilma and Betty awaiting her. Before she had finished an account of the morning’s adventure, Mrs. Lambert and Ellen Tremont arrived. Before she could continue, the editor announced, beaming:

“I have splendid news for you, Kay.”

“Ellen and Herbert are engaged,” Kay guessed.

The secretary laughed. “Not yet, but I think we may be within a few days. I owe all my happiness to you, Kay.”

“This piece of good news concerns yourself,” Mrs. Lambert smiled. “It’s about your story.”

“It hasn’t been chosen by the judges?”

“They have selected it as the very best entry! It was well written, and of timely interest. Then, too, you worked out a very clever solution to the mystery.”

“Oh, it’s almost too good to be true!” Kay gasped, dancing around. “I never expected to win the first prize!”

“I was certain from the very first that your entry would be selected,” Mrs. Lambert declared, “but I hesitated to tell you for fear I might be mistaken!”

“It’s wonderful!” Wilma praised, as the twins hugged their chum. “You deserve your good fortune, too.”

“When I wrote the story I had no idea it would very nearly have its counterpart in real life.”

“It was almost a mirror of the future,” Mrs. Lambert laughed. “You worked out the plot extremely well—though I must admit, not as skillfully as you solved the actual shadow mystery. I hope you will contribute other stories to *Hearthstones*, too.”

“I am afraid I haven’t any more ideas,” Kay confessed.

“Why not write an autobiography?” Wilma drawled. “Call it ‘The Exciting Life of Kay Tracey!’”

“And include this latest adventure,” Betty added. “What a thrilling last chapter *that* would make!”

Taken aback at this barrage of suggestions, Kay finally recovered herself sufficiently to say:

“I think it’s far more mysterious for one to be having new adventures than just to be recording old ones!”

THE END

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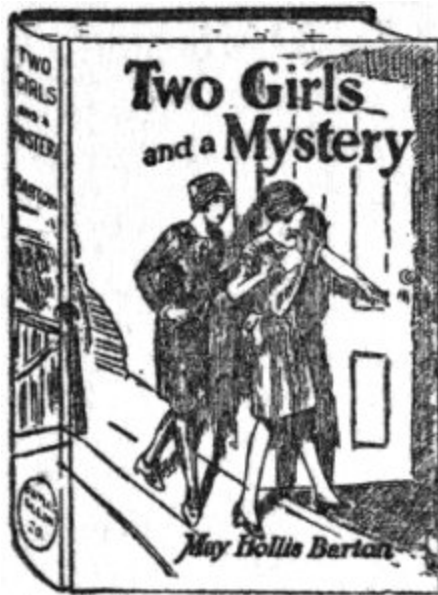
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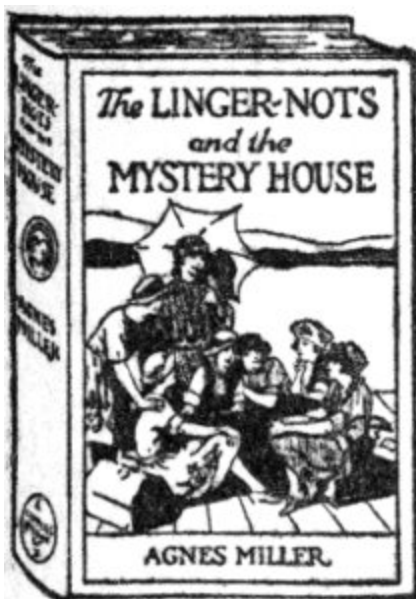
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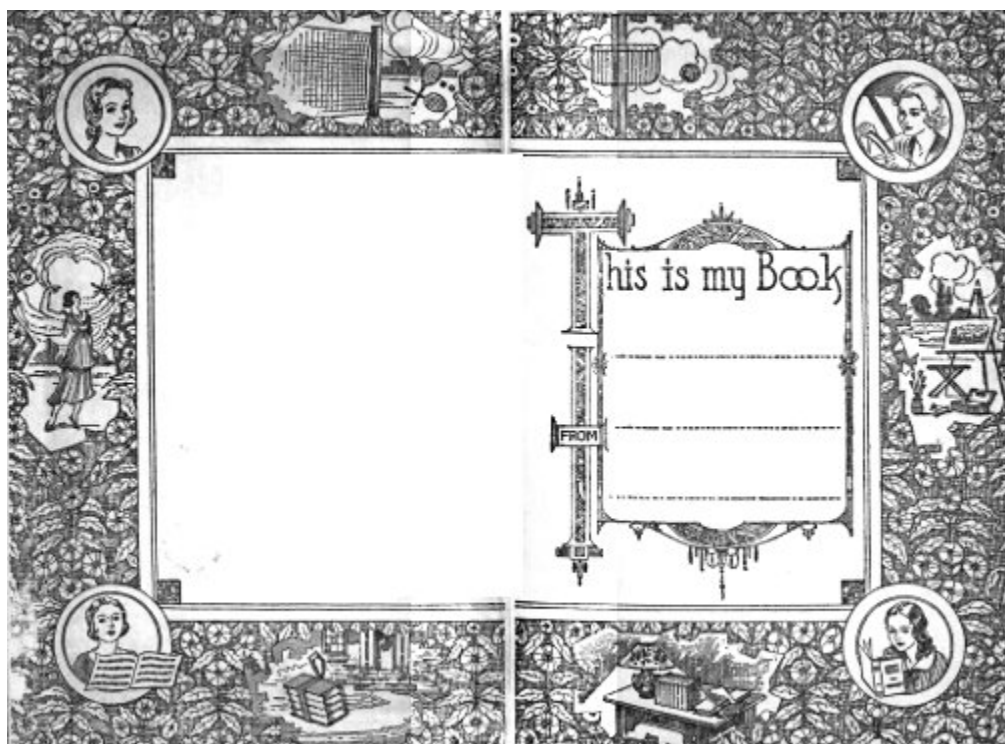
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[The end of *The Shadow on the Door* by Frances K. Judd]