

NOBODY'S GIRL

THIS HAS HAPPENED
SALLY FORD is a girl, the summer she is 16, and leaves the State orphanage, the only home she has known since she was 1. At the farm she finds a friend in DAVID NASH, student and an athlete. Carson is angry because David prefers the little orphan to his daughter, Pearl. When he makes insulting remarks about Sally, David hits him a terrific blow.
David and Sally ran away and join a carnival. David as cook's helper and Sally as "Princess Lalla," crystal grazer, the "midget," "Patty Sing," takes a fancy to Sally and warns her to be wary of Nita. Mrs. Bybee, wife of the carnival owner, promises Sally she will go to Stanton and see if she can find any news about Sally's mother. Sally has told her about her years in the orphanage and that the only information she has about her mother is that she lived in Stanton at one time. Late in the morning when Mrs. Bybee sends for her, she goes with anxious heart. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XX

AS SALLY ran across lots to the aisle-tracked carnival train, she buried her precious new memory of David under layers of anxiety and questions. It would still be there when her questions had been answered by Mrs. Bybee, to comfort her if the showman's wife had been unsuccessful, to add to her joy if some trace of her mother had been found.

"Maybe—maybe I'll have a mother and a sweetheart, too," she murmured, as she climbed, breathless, into the coach which had been pointed out to her as the showman's private car.
It was not really a private car, for Bybee and his wife occupied only one of the drawing rooms of the ancient Pullman car, long since retired from the official service of that company. The berths were occupied on long jumps by a number of the stars of the carnival and by some of the most affluent of the concessionaires and barkers, a few of the latter being part owners of such attractions as the "girlie show" and the "diving beauties." When the carnival showed in a town for more than a day, however, the performers usually preferred to sleep in tents, rather than in the stuffy, hot berths.
Since the carnival was in full swing at that hour of the day, Sally found the sleeping car deserted except for Mrs. Bybee, who called to her from the open door of drawing room A.
The carnival owner's wife was

seated at a card table, which was covered with stacks of coins and bills of all denominations. Her lean fingers pushed the stacks about, counted them, jotted the totals on a sheet of lined paper.
"I'm treasurer and paymaster for the outfit," she told Sally, satisfaction glinting in her keen gray eyes. "Me and Bill," and she lifted a big, blue-barreled revolver from the faded green plush of the seat and twirled it unconcernedly on her thumb.
"Is business good?" Sally asked politely, as she edged fearfully into the small room.
"Might be worse," Mrs. Bybee conceded grudgingly. "Sit down, child. I'm not going to shoot you. Well, I went calling this morning," she added briskly, as she began to rake the stacks of coins into a large canvas bag.
"Oh!" Sally breathed, clasping her hands tightly in her lap. "Did you—find out anything?"
Mrs. Bybee knotted a stout string around the gathered-up mouth of the bag, rose from her seat, lifted the green plush cushion, revealing a small safe beneath the seat. When she had stowed the bag away and twirled the combination lock, she rearranged the cush-

ion and took her seat again, all without answering Sally's anxious question.
"Reckon I'm a fool to let anyone see where I keep the coin," she ridiculed herself. "But after making a blamed fool of myself this morning over them dresses your David give you, I guess I'd better try to do something to show you I trust you. You just keep your mouth shut about this safe, and there won't be any harm done."

"Of course I won't tell," Sally assured her earnestly. "But, please, did you find out anything?" She felt that she could not bear the suspense a minute longer.

"You let me tell this my own way, child," Mrs. Bybee reproved her. "Well, you saw that missionary rig I had on this morning? It turned the trick all right. Lucky for you, this ain't the fastest growing town in the State, even if that billboard across from the station does say so. I found the address you gave me, all right. Same number, same house. Four-or-five-room dump, that may have been a pretty good imitation of a California bungalow twelve years ago. All run-down now, with a swarm of kids tumbling in and out and sticking out their tongues at me when their

ma's back was turned. She said she'd lived there two years; moved here from Wisconsin. Didn't know a soul in Stanton when she moved here, and hadn't had time to get acquainted with many of her neighbors, what with a new baby every fourteen months."

"Poor thing!" Sally murmured, finding pity in her heart for the bedraggled drudge Mrs. Bybee's words pictured so vividly. But those too numerous babies had a mother. What she wanted to know was—did she, Sally Ford, have a mother?

Then a memory, so long submerged that she did not realize that it existed in her subconscious mind, pushed up, spilled out surprisingly: "There was a big oak tree in the corner of the yard. I used to swing. Some one pushed the swing—some one—she fumbled for more, but the memory failed."

"It's still there, and there's still a swing," Mrs. Bybee admitted. "One of those dirty-faced little brats was climbing up and down the ropes like a monkey. Well, I reckon that's where you used to live, right enough. I asked this woman—name of Hickson—if any of her neighbors had lived there many years, and she pointed to the house next door and said 'Old Lady Bangs' owned

the house and had lived there for more'n twenty years. This old Mrs. Bangs—"
"Bangs!" Sally cried. "Bangs! It was Gramma Bangs who swung me! I remember now! Gramma Bangs. She made me a rag doll with shoe-button eyes and I cried every night for a long time after I went to the orphanage because mama hadn't brought my doll. Did you see Gramma Bangs? Oh, Mrs. Bybee, if I could go to see her again!"

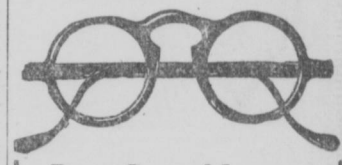
Mrs. Bybee's stern, long, hatchet-shaped face had softened marvelously, but at Sally's eager request she shook her head emphatically.

"Not with the police looking for you and Dave. Yes, I saw her. She's all crippled up with rheumatism and was tickled to death to see Nora Ford's sister. That's who I said I was, you know. But it pretty near got me into trouble. The old lady took it for granted I knew a lot of things about you that I didn't know, and wouldn't have told me just what I'd come to

find out if I hadn't used my bean in stringing her along. I had to go mighty easy asking her about you, since it was my 'sister' I was supposed to be so hot up over finding, but lucky for you she'd been reading the papers and knew that you were in trouble."
"Oh!" Sally moaned, covering her hot face with her little brown-painted hands. "Then Gramma Bangs thinks I'm a bad girl—oh! Did you tell her I'm not?"
"What do you take me for—a blamed fool?" Mrs. Bybee demanded heatedly. "I didn't let on I'd ever

seen you in my life. But it was something she let spill when she was talking about you and this story in the papers that give me low-down on the whole thing."
"Oh, what?" Sally implored, almost frantic with impatience.

(To Be Continued)



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