

# Private Life of an Amateur

## Top Hatter May Be Copy Writer, Chemist, Mother Or Banker, but All Agree That the Play's the Thing

By JANE CORBY

The play's the thing, a group of young Brooklynites, like Shakespeare, firmly believe. They call themselves "The Tophatters, non-professionals with an air of experience," and they are readying four one-act plays for production on May 18 and 19, at the Flatbush Y. M. C. A., E. 21st St. and Church Ave. It's not their first production either. Founded a year ago the group has already come before the public with four different plays—regulation three-act plays.

Katherine Mark Hafner gives airily a description of the young crowd, their hopes and aspirations and background. She lives at 288 Rugby Road and is the daughter of Frances Hafner, who headlined a few years ago with Nellie Tanenbaum, as a two-piano housewives team, taking Chopin, Mozart and the rest of the classicists in their housekeeping, child-raising,

home making stride. Kae Hafner is the little girl with the hair ribbon in the lineup on the sideboard of the top picture on this page. She looks fresh out of school, and she is, but she has a job in advertising, and there, she says, firmly, her ambitions are planted. But she "dabbles in posters and programs as well as minor parts" for this young co-operative theater. And her heart? "Oh, that belongs to daddy!"

Lots of the girls and boys in the group are wage earners, Kae says.

"Virginia Gerstenfeld is a chemist—honest—who loves to roller skate and play the piano. In the coming production she plays the part of an innocent 16-year-old trying to get kissed."

Virginia Gerstenfeld—that's the engrossed young lady, sitting on the end of the slideboard in the pictures looking over the script with Robert Carson, standing. He's The Tophatters' director and guide.

"And 99.44 percent responsible for the success and fun that we have had with our plays and for the interest they have aroused in Brooklyn," says Kae. "Mr. Carson is a fine coach, and while he does not act in The Tophatters' productions he has had a lot of acting experience."

### Martins Are Tops

Sitting between Kae Hafner and Virginia Gerstenfeld is Margaret Martin, "an ingenue with mother trouble." She's a veteran of the stage," explains Kae, "having done professional dancing and singing since early childhood. She's got radio ambitions—and a job typing her mother's novel.

"Her mother, Mrs. Frances Martin, is an ardent Tophatter. She has three children in the group, besides

an important part herself in one of the plays—the one called 'Fourth Generation'."

The girl in the checked jacket, first on the left in the group, is June Dickerson. "Tophatters' pride and joy. She handles a Billie Burke role as well as the role of a much-married British lady—question mark after the lady. June has been in dramatics only a short time, but she shows great promise. During the workaday week she is a receptionist."

Mrs. Frances Martin is shown in the near-murder scene, where one young man is choking another, conveniently arranged on the table. Mrs. Martin is standing by, registering horror with both hands. Harry Tenny is the irate young man who has throttled the agonized Tom Fletcher, lying prone.

### In Family Tradition

"Harry Tenny is upholding his

family tradition by going into the theater," says Kae. "He's the grandson of the famous Jane Cleaver. But he's also in the banking business. Hedy Lamarr is his favorite screen personality," she adds, doing a conscientious job of description on Mr. Tenny. He's going to be a very busy man on May 18 and 19, for he plays in two shows, and in one, Kae promises, "he loses his suit in a very odd way."

Tom Fletcher, the victim on the table, "has been in amateur theatricals since his school days." Not exactly an endurance record, from

all appearances, but a nice one at that.

The young lady in the choking scene who is following the course of events with some concern is Arlene Standard. "Bobby to us," explains Kae. "She acts well, doesn't she? And she's a grand swimmer and tennis player and stuff like that. She's dynamic."

### Glamour Boy, Too

"Jim Cuniff, who helps make the scenery for the forthcoming production, is the strong, silent member of the cast," says Kae. "He says

A group of budding actresses (Top Hatters) with the director, Robert Carson, giving pointers to (from left to right): June Dickerson, Katherine Mark Hafner, Margaret Martin and Virginia Gerstenfeld.

a little and acts a lot. We think he could be with a little urging a sort of glamour boy. He comes naturally by his interest in the theater—he works for Warner Brothers."

Frank Murphy makes glasses for a living and writes music for fun.

Besides the two Martins already mentioned, The Tophatters are proud to claim Robert P. Martin Jr. He's stage manager and "The Tophatters leave all the responsibility for handling scenery and lighting up to him—it's no small task. He's trying to find time to write a play, but most of the time he sells books."

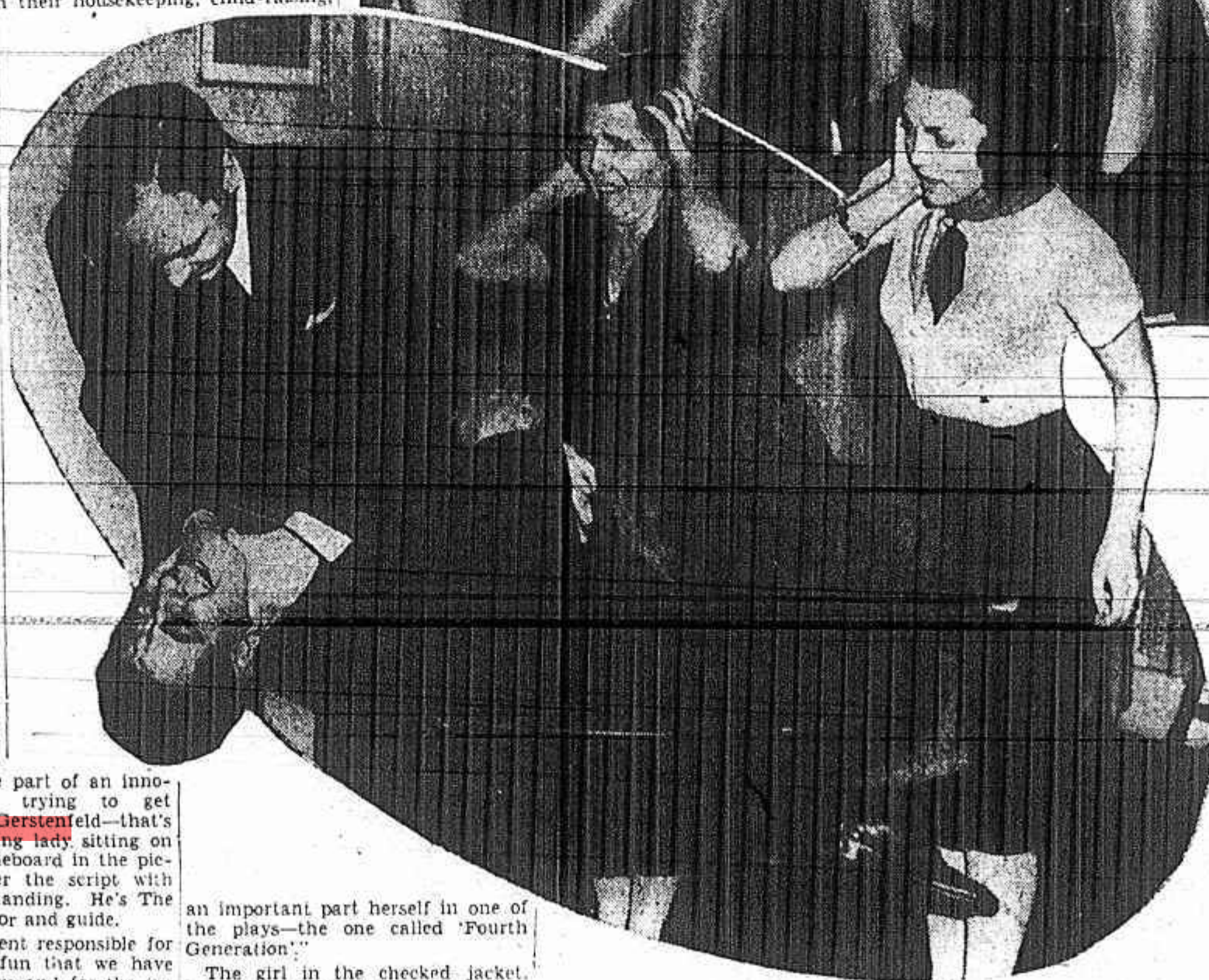
Another Martin is Elizabeth, a nonacting member of the group. She is an artist and assists Kae Hafner in making posters and programs.

### Acting Sole Requisite

"She has studied art and scenic design," Kae elaborates, "and is looking forward to wedding bells in June and a domestic career. Lucky girl."

In the propmaking group is included Jimmy Bavetta, the youngest of the lot, only 18, and still goes to Alexander Hamilton High. "But he's a good actor, so we took him in, too," says Kae.

That completes the membership of The Tophatters, whose coming four one-act plays will be both "amusing and amazing," she adds, with confidence. "Amusing because of the selections themselves, amazing because of the excellent interpretations." Well, Kae ought to know. She hasn't missed a single rehearsal.



The victim in this scene from a forthcoming Top Hatters play is Tom Fletcher, with Harry Tenny in the role of wild man. Mrs. Frances Martin, mother of three Top Hatters, is doing a nice job of acting at the center, and the girl at the right is Arlene Standard.