

No. 538.
Vol. 21.
EVERY
FRIDAY.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL^{3D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
Feb. 9th,
1946.



The CAFE of STRANGE HAPPENINGS

THE GIRL DANCER'S APPEAL FOR HELP—Would The English Boy Help Her To Fight The Menace Which Every Day Was Becoming More Frightening?—By RENEE FRAZER

NITA SENDS A MESSAGE

"LOOK—that's Juanita, the dancer!"

Nita Dare smiled, tossing back her fair hair as she waved to the crowd. The two-wheeled cabriolet swung through the narrow, picturesque street of the Mexican town, the horse's flowing mane festooned with gay ribbons.

Nita drove herself, because she loved the thrill—and because it pleased her manager, the enterprising Señor Lopez, who owned the Cafe of Dreams. It was good for custom, he argued, that his star dancer should appear in the town and become known to her public.

But it was not easy to evade the watchful care of her temporary hostess, the Señora Garcia, and the senora's handsome nephew, Don Carlos. They were affable and generous, but treated her as a child. To drive in an open cabriolet in public—that was unheard of! The closed family carriage, with its drawn blinds, was waiting even now at the door of the Garcia mansion, and no doubt there would be a reproachful scene when she returned.

Nita laughed softly. She was not ungrateful for the Garcias' kindness, but they must realise that she had her way to make—her living to earn—a chance to make a name for herself and reinstate her father's broken fortune.

Nita's eyes sparkled as she deftly handled the reins and listened to the rattle of the wheels on the cobbled street.

Even now it was like a dream—this exciting new career into which Fate and her own determination had thrown her. Dancing had always been in her blood—a talent inherited from the Mexican mother who had died when Nita was barely two years old. But it was from her English father she had the daring and purpose that were mainly responsible for her big chance.

When he had been forced to depart unexpectedly for England, to save what remained of his business. Mr. Dare's one concern had been for the young daughter he had to leave in the care of his nearest neighbours.

"Don't worry, dad," Nita had declared laughingly. "I'll find a job and look after myself till you come home!"

She had been as good as her word, in spite of the Garcias' bland opposition. Starting in a small way at the local cafe, she had enchanted the astute Señor Lopez and his customers by her dancing and was gradually making a name for herself—and, more important, sufficient money to pay off some of her father's smaller creditors.

And at last her big chance had come. A great impresario had heard of her dancing and was visiting the cafe within the next few days.

"I must please him," breathed Nita. "I must show him what I can do!"

Only for a moment her eager young face clouded as she thought of the mysterious setbacks that had dogged her for the last week or two—the unexpected hitches in her plans; the disappearance of one of her most cherished costumes; the cloaked figure that had lurked outside the cafe on more than one occasion, like a shadow of ill-omen.

With a quick laugh Nita dismissed the thoughts.

"Fancy!" she declared. "Coincidence. Thank goodness the Garcias don't suspect, or they'd become more watchful than ever!"

She cracked her whip gaily as the cabriolet swung into the main square of the town, with its colourful throng and old white houses standing out against the crimson sunset.

The Cafe of Dreams was on the far side of the square, and she could see her stage name contrived in flowers above the coloured awning:

"J-U-A-N-I-T-A."

Nita drew a quick breath, her face flushed with excitement, and just then there came a warning shout from the crowd.

Something whistled through the air, catching the spirited horse on its flank. With a shrill whinny of terror it reared, its hoofs falling, almost overturning the light vehicle.

White-faced, Nita clung to the reins as the crowd surged round, yelling excitedly but making no effort to help. A moment later the startled horse would have broken into a wild gallop, but at that instant a boyish figure sprang from the crush and leaped for the horse's head, seizing the bridle and bringing the scared animal to a standstill.

A gasp of relief and admiration went up from the onlookers as they crowded nearer; but the boy turned on them with a quick, authoritative gesture.

"Stand back!" he exclaimed. "You're frightening the horse. Clear a way, there!"

Nita thrilled at his cool, English voice and his unflustered manner as he turned to her with a smile.

"Your horse does not like the crowds, *senorita*," he remarked pleasantly.

Nita shook her head, smiling to hide the tremor of her lips.

"He—he's never acted like this before, *senor*," she breathed. "If it hadn't been for you—"

The boy waved aside her thanks with a gesture.

"Then, something must have startled him." He ran an expert hand over the animal's silky mane and across its gleaming flanks. His eyes narrowed slightly. Keen eyes they were, shrewd and watchful, in spite of the humour that lurked in their depths. "You have enemies perhaps, *senorita*?" he inquired unexpectedly.

Nita started, an uneasy catch in her throat; but the next moment she laughed, shaking her head quickly.

"Enemies? Goodness—no, *senor*!"

"So?" The boy grinned as he placed a foot on the step of the cabriolet and bent towards her. "I have often seen you dance, you know. Are you English?" he inquired.

"My father's English and I was born in England," replied Nita, smiling, "so I suppose I am. But, *senor*," she went on impulsively, "if there is anything I can do to show my thanks—"

"There is," declared the boy unexpectedly. For an instant his hand rested on hers. "*Senorita*," he added earnestly, "if you should ever be afraid—or in need of a friend—remember me!"

Without giving her time to reply, to ask what he meant, the boy touched his hat with a cheery smile, patted the now quietened horse, and disappeared into the crowd.

Her mind in a whirl, Nita drove to the entrance of the cafe, to be greeted by the agitated and portly proprietor.

"Juanita, you must take care!" exclaimed *Senor Lopez* as he assisted her to dismount. "We cannot afford an accident just now. Caramba, it would be the ruin of your chances!"

"Don't worry, *senor*, I'm all right," declared Nita gaily. "Am I in time for my dance?"

"In time, yes! But it is a wonder you are alive to take your bow." There have been too many mishaps recently.

"Coincidence, *senor*," rejoined Nita, patting his arm. "It won't happen again."

"So you have said before," grumbled the proprietor as he hurried beside her. "I admire your spirit, but I do not pay you to take risks. Which reminds me, your guardians are here."

"Oh!" breathed Nita, biting her lip.

"The *senora* is very distressed. They told her about your narrow escape." She insists on seeing you before your dance."

"Very well," said Nita. "But they're not my real guardians, you know; they're very kind friends. I'm able to take care of myself."

"So it would seem," muttered the proprietor dryly. "Then I may announce your dance to the patrons. What is it to be this evening, *Juanita*?"

"The Dance of the Flowers," replied Nita, smiling. "I'll be ready in half an hour, *senor*!"

She hurried to her dressing-room, trying vainly to shake off the faint shadow of uneasiness that clouded her usual high spirits.

Senora Garcia, her hostess, rose quickly to greet her; behind his aunt hovered the debonaire *Don Carlos*. Nita expected reproaches, but the *senora* was kindness itself.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "what a dreadful experience! I always knew that cabriolet was not safe for you. I'm sure you won't feel fit to dance this evening, dear; you're trembling and quite pale. *Carlos* will drive us home at once, won't you, *Carlos*?"

"Entirely at your service, *Nita*," declared the young man, with a gallant bow.

"But I don't want to go home," protested Nita. "I'm quite all right, really. You're both awfully kind, but I can't disappoint the patrons. *Senor Lopez* has already announced my dance."

The *senora's* handsome face clouded slightly, but the next moment she was smiling.

"Very well, my dear. You always get your own way. I'm afraid your father will think we have spoilt you! Come, *Carlos*, we'll have our usual table, and drive *Nita* home after her performance. Good luck, my dear!"

They left the room, and Nita felt a momentary twinge of self-reproach as she started to dress. They were both so kind to her, in spite of her headstrong determination to do as she pleased. But her career must come first; her promise to her father and her own future depended on her success.

As she slipped on her dainty, flowered costume Nita found herself thinking of her recent narrow escape—and the curious words of the boy who had come to her aid:

"If ever you are afraid or in need of a friend—"

Afraid? Why should she be afraid? Nita laughed a little unsteadily. It was just a gallant gesture on his part. He was a charming boy, but she could hardly imagine herself calling on him for help!

Nita shook her head quickly as she placed a red rose in her dark hair and arranged the basket of artificial flowers that played a part in her dance.

The lilting strains of the gipsy orchestra reached her ears as she opened the door, and Nita took a few practice steps in the corridor, humming gaily under her breath.

But the song faded on her lips and Nita drew back, with a stifled cry, as something fell with a dull crash across her path.

The marble statue which always stood in the alcove near the door had toppled from its pedestal, and lay, unbroken, at her feet.

Nita stood motionless, her heart thudding, her face deathly pale. No one else had heard the dull crash; it had been drowned by the strains of the orchestra, the talk and laughter in the cafe.

It had been an accident, of course—another coincidence! Her basket must have caught against it. So Nita told herself—but in her heart she knew that it was just another of those mysterious happenings that had threatened her for so long that she had tried to ignore. But now, for the first time, Nita felt—afraid!

Impatiently she shook herself as she backed away from the fallen statue. No, not afraid, but worried, perplexed, longing to confide in someone whom she could trust.

Nita caught in her breath quickly, remembering a pair of keen grey eyes and a boyish smile. With swift determination she darted back to the dressing-room and took a writing tablet and a pen from her bureau.

Her hand trembling slightly, she wrote:

"Help! If you are really my friend, meet me in the old grotto behind the cafe at nine o'clock."

"NITA."

Swiftly folding the little message, she thrust it among the petals of a cluster of artificial roses in her basket and ran quickly to the cafe.

The orchestra was playing the opening bars of her dance as she reached the curtained dais, breathless and a little pale from excitement. Senor Lopez shot her an anxious glance as he hurried forward.

"You are all right, Juanita? You look pale—"

"It is nothing," breathed Nita. "I am ready!"

The proprietor nodded approval as he drew back the curtains.

"Senors—senoritas—I, have pleasure to present the incomparable Juanita in the Dance of the Flowers!"

A burst of applause greeted her appearance, but as Nita smilingly acknowledged the clapping her glance darted anxiously over the crowded cafe. Then she gave a quick sigh of relief. Yes, the English boy was there with one or two friends, at the table in the corner. He was talking animatedly and barely looked in her direction, but he must have seen her.

The orchestra struck up, and Nita commenced her dance—first on the stage, and then down the steps, dancing between the cafe tables, tossing a flower every now and then to a smiling patron.

At last she reached the table where the English boy was laughing with his friends. She danced close to him, touching his shoulder as she passed. As he turned she held out the cluster of flowers, a desperate appeal in her eyes.

The boy took it with a careless gesture, smiling unconcernedly as he passed some flippant remark. There was no recognition in his glance, and a moment later he had turned away.

For a moment Nita's heart misgave her. Could he have forgotten their previous meeting?

Flushed and breathless, she returned to the dais, amid a storm of clapping. Senor Lopez wrung her hand delightedly.

"You are the great success!" he exclaimed. "And this is but the beginning!"

A moment later the Senora Garcia came from her table, to embrace her warmly.

"You were wonderful, my dear!" she declared. "But so pale. Is anything worrying you?"

"Nothing!" declared Nita, forcing a quick smile.

"That act with the flowers—it was perfect!" remarked Don Carlos as he bent gallantly over her hand. "But you must take care, Nita, to whom you hand those flowers."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Nita, her heart missing a beat.

The young man shrugged.

"It is nothing; you could not be expected to know. But the fair-haired English boy at the table by the palms—they say he is a dangerous character who is suspected by the police."

Nita felt her heart turn cold.

It wasn't true! That the boy whose help she had asked was a trickster, a fraud—she would never believe it!

it would be quite dark. Somehow she must play for time to keep her secret trust!

"But, senora, they are still clapping. I must dance for them again!" she declared, with an appealing look at Senor Lopez.

The stout proprietor came to her assistance.

"But certainly, Juanita—you must dance again! They call for an encore. If the senora would care to wait I shall be honoured to entertain her."

The senora bit her lip and turned to speak aside to her nephew. Don Carlos nodded blandly.

"I shall order the carriage for an hour's time," he declared.

Her heart beating with excitement, Nita returned to give her second dance. She noticed that the English boy was no longer at his table.

Would he keep his promise? Had he really meant what he said?

Nita's longing to confide in a friend was growing with every minute. She could no longer ignore the mysterious happenings that seemed deliberately aimed to ruin her chance. She dared not tell the Garcias; they did not approve of her dancing and they would merely redouble their efforts to dissuade her from her purpose.

With the applause of the delighted patrons ringing in her ears, Nita hurried back to her dressing-room. She noticed that the fallen statue had been replaced by the attendants and she felt more convinced than ever that it had not been an accident.

Someone was trying to terrify her—to make her lose her nerve.

"They shan't do it!" breathed Nita, her eyes flashing as she threw a wrap over her costume.

A few minutes later she was tripping over the moon-bathed courtyard towards the grotto to keep her secret appointment.

In spite of herself her heart was thumping uneasily as she approached the quaint structure, silent and ghostly in the twilight.

Had she been wise to come—to trust a boy who, after all, was a complete stranger? Even if the rumours about him were untrue, how could she be certain of his proffered friendship?

Nita tried to calm herself as she waited, listening intently at every sound, every faint rustle among the trees.

A soft footstep crunched on the path outside the grotto, and Nita's heart leaped—only to stand still as a tall, shadowy figure emerged from the trees and approached her noiselessly.

"Who—who are you?" she gasped.

A soft laugh brought the blood racing back to her veins as the other stepped swiftly to her side, throwing back the dark cloak that concealed his white tropical suit.

"You don't know me?" inquired the boy, eyeing her quizzically in the dusk.

Nita laughed unsteadily.

"Yes—I do—now."

"But you were not expecting me?" he countered.

"I hoped you would come," replied Nita softly, "but, after all, I am a stranger to you."

The boy shook his head emphatically.

"I have watched you from my table more times than I can count. But we waste time!"

His manner became keen, decisive, as he bent towards her. "What's the trouble, Nita? Why are you afraid?"

"I—I'm not—I didn't say I was afraid!" countered Nita.

"Your note didn't say so, but there was a look in your eyes." The boy regarded her steadily, his hands in his pockets. "Tell me what it is that's worrying you," he ordered gently.

His tone was a command, but he looked down at her with a pleasant, easy smile.

Nita found herself explaining, breathlessly, without restraint—as though to an old and trusted friend.

She told him about her ambition, and the mysterious setbacks; about the Garcias' gloomy old mansion and the figure she had seen lurking

THE HOUSE OF FEAR

"COME, my dear," murmured Senora Garcia, "you must be tired after your dance. Supper will be awaiting us, with English coffee and your favourite honey cakes. Carlos, will you have the carriage brought round immediately?"

Nita glanced quickly at her watch. It was barely eight yet, though the brief Mexican twilight was fading. In an hour



ing in the grounds. About her growing fears which she had tried to dismiss, and her feeling that she was entangled in a net of menace from which it was impossible to escape.

The boy listened attentively, his face unsmiling in the gloom.

"It was arranged that you should stay with the Garcias till your father returned?" he inquired.

"Yes, You see"—Nita's voice broke slightly—"we had to sell our house and most of the home, but we had a few treasured things left. The Garcias offered to let me stay with them and to store our pictures and things in an empty room. They didn't want to take any payment, but dad insisted. They've been more than kind."

"I'm interested in pictures," said the boy, smiling suddenly. "You must let me see yours some time. But tell me about your dancing," he added, changing the subject in his abrupt way. "Why don't the Garcias approve of it?"

"I didn't say so," countered Nita. "Your manner gave you away. The Garcias are trying to stop you from visiting the cafe."

"It's for my own safety," declared Nita loyally.

"Fiddlesticks!" said the boy. He grinned. "Sorry, but either I like people or I don't. I don't like the Garcias."

"But you haven't even met them!" objected Nita.

"I still don't like them," said the boy. "And I don't like this mystery." He frowned thoughtfully, his eyes puckered as watched her.

Nita thought of Carlos and his insinuation about this boy. She wished she had laughed in his face. This English lad was as frank and open as the day—and he was her friend!

The thought warmed her heart, and she felt the vague, uneasy fears of the past few weeks slipping from her shoulders.

She knew that she could rely on his help, though she knew nothing about him—not even his name!

The boy chuckled as she mentioned the fact. "Careless of me—I should have told you, of course. Roy Marsden—at your service! I'm here on holiday, with a spot of business thrown in. And speaking of business"—his tone became suddenly crisp—"it's time we got cracking!"

"We?"
"Sure thing—you and I, on this mystery. We're goin' to solve it between us, Nita!" He gripped her hand. "How much do you trust me?" he asked.

She stared, her breath rather taken away by the question.

"Because," went on the boy, "I'm going to ask a favour. The Garcias' jolly old mansion—I think I know it. There's a side entrance approached by a covered portico, and a gate that opens into the lane. Right?"

"Yes," breathed Nita, her mind in a whirl, "but—"

"Don't ask me how I know—I'm that kind of a chap. I suppose you couldn't leave the gate unlatched without anyone knowing?"

Nita caught in her breath.

"I—I suppose I could—"

"Splendid! Because that's the favour I'm going to ask. Not a murmur to anyone, mind—not a whisper. I just—"

He broke off as a footstep rang sharply on the stones of the courtyard. He gripped her arm.

"You mustn't be seen talking to me," he breathed. "Wouldn't do at all. Don't let the Garcias suspect anything—carry on as usual. And—I say—keep an eye on your pictures!"

With a quick wave of his hand he vanished into the shadows as the footsteps came nearer. Mastering her racing thoughts, Nita ventured out into the open. There came a startled ejaculation.

"My dear Juanita, where have you been?"

demanding Don Carlos aggrievedly. "There was no answer when we knocked at your dressing-room. My aunt has been worried out of her life. You can't be too careful with so many dangerous characters about. Come, the carriage is waiting!"

"You shouldn't worry," Nita said lightly. "I came out for a little fresh air."

And without answering any of his questions directly she went with him to the carriage, where Senora Garcia was waiting.

But in her own pleasant room at the Garcia Mansion, surrounded by her cherished keepsakes, she felt happier, and thought excitedly of her meeting with her new friend, Roy Marsden.

She felt certain that her father would like him. Dear dad—she wondered how he was getting on. It was a long time since he had written, and his last letter had been so puzzling.

She remembered one paragraph especially. She had written to ask him what he meant.

"I was delighted to hear of your success, my dear, and if you have carried out my instructions you will know by now that our future is assured. I am relying on you . . ."

Nita could not remember any special instructions he had left except to take care of herself—and their few cherished possessions. And he had given her the silver pendant with her mother's miniature, which she always wore, and the big framed picture of her mother painted in her favourite dancing dress.

Nita suddenly remembered that Roy had been interested in her pictures. She wondered why. None of them were valuable, except for sentimental reasons. They were stored with a few other possessions in the empty room adjoining her bed-room.

On a sudden impulse Nita lit a candle and unlocked the communicating door. She rarely entered the big gloomy room except to dust the furniture, but now, as she looked round in the candlelight, she had an uneasy feeling that everything was not as she had left it.

Yet she was the only one who held a key to the inner door, and the outer door had been kept locked. Nita smiled quickly, dismissing her fancies, as she glanced up at the framed portrait of her mother, in the beautiful lace mantilla of a Mexican lady.

Her mother had been a dancer, too! Nita thrilled at the thought. She would do her best to follow in her footsteps, to make her father proud of her. She would not allow the terror of this old house to—

The eager smile faded slowly on Nita's lips; her eyes dilated and the blood drained from her face.

In the glass of the picture she could see a reflection of the room, and as she watched the outer door opened slowly, to admit a tall figure shrouded in black.

A scream was torn from Nita's lips in spite of herself as the candlestick slipped from her nerveless fingers, plunging the room into darkness.

A PROMISE OF NEWS



FOR one panic-stricken moment Nita stood motionless, pressed against the wall, her heart gripped by terror. But slowly she regained her natural courage. Her eyes peering fearfully into the darkness, she groped on the floor and found the candlestick and matches.

With a trembling hand she struck a match and lit the candle. As the flame flickered up she stared at the door, and a little gasp of relief and bewilderment escaped her lips.

(Please turn to page 357.)

The Merry-makers at College



ONE MORE CHANCE

"SAY it nicely, Abdul," coaxed Sally Warner. "Kind Mr. Grittall—"

"Kind Mr. Grittall. My respects, sir!" chattered Sally's pet parrot obediently—amid a delighted chorus from Sally's chums of J House.

They were in the garden behind Sally's chalet, in Roxburgh Co-ed College, a huge audience of both J and K Houses listening mirthfully to her training of Abdul the parrot.

"Gee, what a pupil—he'll do anything for you, Sally!" marvelled Don Weston and Johnny Briggs.

"I'm sure he loves you, Sally!" cried Fay Manners, who had clubbed up with the boys to buy Sally the parrot for her birthday present.

"He's an angel," Sally said happily, and knew that all the coll had taken Abdul to their hearts—with one unfortunate exception!

The austere Mr. Grittall, head professor of J House, had been singled out for ribald remarks from the talkative Abdul! It may have been the sweep of the master's gown, or perhaps the wagging tassel of his mortar-board, which provoked the parrot.

But something had to be done about it! The consequences would be serious if Mr. Grittall had further cause to complain. Hence Sally's care, now, in teaching Abdul a polite line of talk especially to appease Mr. Grittall.

"No offence, Mr. Grittall—best respects, sir—" she coached Abdul. Then she paused.

Was something hurting or vexing the little fellow? Why did he wince suddenly? It was the second time she'd noticed it. He was used to flying loose in his old home aboardship. That wasn't always possible here in coll. So Don and Johnny had fixed a long cord to his claw, attaching it by ring to a line in the garden, so that he could still take a bit of a flight even while tethered.

Was the cord chafing him? Sally wondered anxiously. Her gaze went to the far end of it, where Wilkins, the pageboy, was kneeling in the grass, buttons gleaming, while he weeded the garden.

"No offence, Mr. Grittall—" Abdul half began. Then Sally saw the cord jerk at his claw. She saw her pet swoop straight as an arrow for the pageboy.

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

"Ow!" yelled Wilkins, and leapt up out of the grass, nursing his wrist. "Ow, he's bitten me!"

"And what did you do to him, Wilkie?" flashed Sally.

"Nothing, miss—" "You teased him!" Sally accused. "You deliberately tugged at his cord!"

"I never!" gasped Wilkins. "I—" "I saw you!" Sally said with cold scorn.

"It was the trowel. I couldn't 'elp it, Miss Sally—" he began, red to the ears.

"And Abdul couldn't help biting you!" grimly interrupted Sally. "Better buzz off, Wilkie, before he bites you again!"

Wilkins hurried off quickly, looking ashamed of himself. Sally stroked Abdul soothingly, then joined her chums to go to afternoon lecture.

It was Mr. Grittall's class. His subject was science, and he was just warming up nicely on the refraction caused by water when there was a rustle at the window. Sally looked up, and to her dismay she saw Abdul jiggling gleefully on the sill.

"Happy days, Sally. Best respects, Mr. Grittall!" he squawked.

A howl of laughter went up from the class, but it ceased abruptly under Mr. Grittall's dangerous glare.

"Silence!" he commanded, his brow like thunder. "Miss Warner, understand once and for all, you will keep that bird caged in future, or the responsibility will be taken out of your hands!"

"I'm sorry, sir!" Sally apologised.

It was the worst possible luck that Abdul had got loose just then, and she could only blame herself. She must have slackened his cord a little too much after that brush with Wilkins.

"He's gone now, sir!" spoke up Don. "Lucky he couldn't get in!" breathed Sally with a thankful glance at the closed window.

The lecture went on, but some of the class were still grinning over Abdul's little interlude, and Mr. Grittall's temper wasn't improved when he was interrupted suddenly by a voice calling to him outside the door.

"Mr. Grittal!"
"Dear me!" He broke off exasperatedly and opened the door. "Who—"

It was uncanny. Mr. Grittal stared left and right along the passage and up the stairs, but there was no one there!

"Too bad!" he fumed, stamping in again and slamming the door. "Calling me from my lecture, then not even waiting! I thought it was the Dean's voice, surely?"

"Sounded a bit too throaty for the Dean, sir," declared Piggot.

Sally thought the same. She gazed uneasily at Don, not daring to voice her apprehension.

The lecture proceeded for several more minutes, then again that call rang out:

"Mr. Grittal, how many more times? Mr. Grittal!"

With compressed lips Mr. Grittal slowly put down his duster, slowly walked from the blackboard to the door and slowly and ponderously opened it.

"Really, sir—" he began with dignity, then gasped.

Again he was gazing into empty space. No one was there, nothing could he see but the swaying of his own shadow on the bare wall.

"I—I distinctly heard"—he stumbled back to the class—"you all distinctly heard my name called?"

Sally exchanged an agonised look with Don.

"Rum bird, whoever he was!" grinned Piggot under his breath.

Frantic looks from Sally & Co. kept him quiet. The rest of the class were breathlessly stifling their mirth. The only one who didn't suspect that elusive voice was Mr. Grittal.

In quivering indignation he resumed his lecture.

Sally was beginning to breathe freely again, believing the danger had flown, when it burst out once more—distantly, but with dreadful clarity.

"You hear me, boy? Fetch Grittal! Rout him out! Rout him out!" yapped a shrill order.

"Who s-said that?" spluttered the voice of Wilkins in answer, and Sally heard a broom clatter against a pail, as if the pageboy's work had been interrupted by a severe attack of nerves.

"Hurry yourself, boy! I want old Gritty, old Gritty!" came a sharp squawk.

Mr. Grittal dropped his chalk and listened with his ears almost flapping.

There was a startled rush on the stairs. A furious rush from Mr. Grittal. He reached the door just in time to collide full tilt with Wilkins.

"Ow!" A pail of water went flying across the passage. A broom caught between Mr. Grittal's feet and nearly tripped him up.

"Wh-what the—"

Sally burst out into the passage just in time to see Wilkins waving his arms like a windmill. She caught one fleeting glimpse of Abdul, his bright green feathers streaking out through the staircase window. Then he was gone, and Mr. Grittal was gazing after him with his face livid.

"That bird!" he choked. "It was that p-parrot!"

"That parrot o' Miss Sally's—it was him talking!" Wilkins yelled, his eyes popping and protruding like his polished buttons. "And here's me been taking orders from 'im, and Mr. Grittal insulted—"

"I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Grittal!" Sally apologised in breathless distress. "I don't know how the parrot came to get loose—"

"It was our fault, sir—" Johnny and Don tried to say.

But the noise had brought the Dean hurrying to the scene, his feet paddling in the split water, his face outraged as he gleaned the cause of the disturbance.

"We cannot possibly tolerate such a thing in the college, sir—the bird must go!" Mr. Grittal was saying angrily. "It has been

taught deliberately to articulate insults against myself—"

"No, sir! I can't understand it—" Sally put in tremblingly.

"Sally's been teaching him just the opposite, sir!" blurted out Johnny.

"It would break her heart, sir, if she had to lose him!" Don said in a husky voice, and his hand closed quickly over Sally's.

She couldn't speak. Her gaze went to the window, where her gay little pet had vanished. She had grown terribly fond of him in the short time she had had him. If they took him away from her—

The window dissolved in a blur before her eyes. She didn't notice the sudden hush in class, didn't notice that the Dean whispered something to Mr. Grittal.

Then out of the blur she heard Mr. Grittal speaking to her.

"One more chance!" Those three words she caught, and her heart suddenly overflowed with warmth and relief.

"But it is the last chance, Miss Warner!" And he spoke with inflexible finality. "You will keep the bird caged in future in your own quarters, and you will be responsible for seeing that nothing of this kind ever happens again. If it does—if I have any further trouble whatever," he stressed, "you will have to get rid of that parrot, and I shall order you to remove it immediately from the college!"

ABDUL IN DISGRACE



LOOKING the picture of innocence, Abdul was waiting on the terrace-rail of Sally's chalet as she rushed to him after the lecture.

"Whoopee, Sally!" He came flying eagerly to her shoulder, and in his delight at seeing her he chattered the very lines she

him: "Kind Mr. Grittal—best respects, Mr. Grittal!"

"The little darling!" gulped Sally, burying her cheek convulsively against his soft feathers.

"The little rascal, you mean. Why didn't you say that before?" Don chuckled.

Nat Piggot and his cronies of K House came strolling along, and they set up a rousing cheer for Abdul. His popularity, already high, had been enhanced by this afternoon's performance. Any dig at Mr. Grittal, who wasn't popular, was enough to establish Sally's parrot as a favourite with all.

"Pipe down, you coons—don't let Gritty hear you!" Sally said breathlessly, and her gaze was more anxious as she appealed to Don and Johnny. "We've got to find fresh quarters for Abdul, boys. Can't even take another risk—not after what Gritty said. Where shall we keep him?"

They adjourned to the cafeteria, Abdul as well, and the whole of J House joined in the discussion over doughnuts and lemonade. Mrs. Barwell, beaming plumply over the counter and feeding Abdul with sultanas, was only too eager to offer him a cosy home here in the college cafeteria.

"Jolly sweet of you, Mrs. Barwell, only it won't do," sighed Sally. "For one thing, I don't trust Snoopy—" And she swept a gentle glance towards the friendly old Persian cat sleeping under the stove. "Also, it's too near the coffee-room next door, where Gritty sometimes pops in and might hear things he doesn't like."

"What about the Merry-makers' clubhouse?" suggested Don.

"We could rig up swell quarters for him there, and he'd be right out of Gritty's way," echoed Johnny.

"Gee, yes! And we'll make him a member—a full-blown resident member!" Sally said, her eyes suddenly sparkling. "That's it, Abdul! Initiation to-morrow, in the lunch break! We'll do it in style! You're joining the Merry-makers!"

"Merry, merry, merry-makers," rattled off Abdul, giggling hilariously on her shoulder. "Whoopee, Sally!"

The initiation of Abdul took place next lunch-break. His big cage was hung in state in the clubhouse window. Sally decorated it with the Merry-makers' colours. Johnny and Don furnished it with a new swing, a tread-wheel, a ladder, and a swimming-pool, and Abdul tried these new toys out with great glee whilst Sally, surrounded by the club committee, solemnly read out the form of enrolment.

"Now, Abdul," she concluded, "repeat after me: 'I faithfully promise—'"

"Here we go, boys, here we go!" roistered Abdul, swinging uproariously on his little trapeze.

"—That I will obey all the rules of the club—"

"Chase me, Charlie—chase me, Charlie!" squawked Abdul, and performed a rollicking jig on the treadwheel.

"—And will ever be a true Merry-maker!"

"A life on the ocean wave," sang Abdul, and went splashing gaily in his little swimming-pool.

"How's that for perfect?" applauded Sally, amid cheers from all. "Never knew anyone get it so pat before. A model member! And now—Hailo!" She broke off, astounded. "Who's this?"

The door had opened, and a foxy-faced man, with a parcel under his arm, was gazing in. Sally & Co. simply gaped. A stranger—an outsider at that—intruding in the sacred portals of the Merry-makers' Club!

"That's not a bad parrot you got there," he said. "Didn't ought to be cramped in a cage, though!"

"Sorry, and all that, but you're not allowed in here, you know," Sally told him promptly. "How did you get in, and what do you want?"

"I got a parcel to deliver," he said coolly, "for Mr. Grittal."

"You ought to have left it with the page-boy at the gates," Don said.

"There wasn't no boy at the gates, so I jest walked in," said the foxy-faced man unabashed.

At that moment Mr. Grittal himself came hurrying from the direction of the gates.

Is that my parcel? he demanded peremptorily. "Why wasn't it brought to me? Where's the page? I've been waiting for this!"

He snatched the parcel from the man's grubby hands, and tore open the edge of the wrapping. Sally & Co. looked at each other. They knew Mr. Grittal's vanity, and they knew he intended them to see what was inside. It was the cap and gown of a high college degree to which he was entitled. A beautiful purple gown, and a mortarboard with a beautiful purple tassel.

"I do not often wear my purple," he said importantly, "but on occasions like this evening, at the Dean's conference, I feel I ought to wear it—"

"What a guy!" sang out a squawky voice. "Oh, my—what a guy!"

Sally gazed unhappily towards the clubhouse. Mr. Grittal went as purple as the gown he proudly held.

"If that parrot cannot be taught to behave, Miss Warner—" he began dangerously.

"He's only chattering to himself, sir, in his cage," Sally gasped.

But it was the foxy-faced man who spoke, unexpectedly.

"Trouble with that parrot, miss, is that he don't belong to this kind of place," he said. "I know parrots like I know my own hand." The man fished a grubby card out of his pocket. "There's my address—Mr. Coney, 7, Harbour Lane. Any time you like, I'll take that parrot, and I'll give him a good home. And I won't charge you a cent for his keep!"

Sally pushed his hand sharply away as he proffered the card to her. But Mr. Grittal took it from him with grim satisfaction.

"Thank you, Mr.—er—Coney," he said. "We will bear your offer in mind."

He pocketed the card, ominously, as he strode away with his parcel. Sally was about to tell Mr. Coney what she thought of him and his offer, when she heard a shout from Don, who had gone back into the clubhouse.

"Sally, quick—come and look at Abdul!"

Rushing to the cage, Sally found Abdul fluttering helplessly at the gate, his beak wedged tightly between its bars.

"Poor little chap; he's got jammed!" she gasped, and with gentle fingers she swiftly released him.

"Anyhow, it stopped him talking!" murmured Johnny.

Sally gave a perplexed start. Abdul certainly couldn't talk while his beak was wedged. Yet surely he must have been in that plight for some time? He was exhausted and quite limp as he lay huddled now in her hands. How, then, had he been talking so loudly till only a moment ago?

It was a puzzle that lingered in Sally's mind all that afternoon, at art classes. Mr. Grittal perceived her inattention. His eyes glinted when Wilkins, the pageboy, tapped at the door, to remind him that he would be required shortly for the Dean's conference.

"Have you brushed my purple cap and gown, as I ordered?" asked Mr. Grittal.

"Yes, sir; and laid 'em out in your study, sir," said Wilkins.

"Fetch them here," ordered Mr. Grittal, his eyes turning to Sally. "Miss Warner has had such a restful afternoon, I'm sure she'll enjoy packing away all the art materials," he added sarcastically.

The rest of the class trooped out behind Wilkins, but Johnny and Don and Fay remained to help Sally, under Mr. Grittal's critical eye.

"A little less noise, please—" cried Mr. Grittal, and then broke off as another kind of noise rent the air.

It was a shrill mocking squawk, and it came from the direction of his own study.

"Gritty's the guy, Gritty's the guy—Gritteeeee!"

"Ow, the parrot;" echoed a wild howl from Wilkins. "Look! Look what he's done!"

Sally's heart lurched. She went flying out through the door after the enraged Mr. Grittal. His study was in a separate block twenty yards across the campus. Wilkins was leaning frantically out of the window, brandishing a feather duster furiously in his hand.

"It's the parrot, sir, been at your robes!" he yelled. "Got in through this window, he did—now he's gone!"

Mr. Grittal took one bound into his study, then pulled up with a stricken cry. Sally and her chums stared petrified. Lying on the floor, in a litter of feathers, was the new purple gown, its silk ripped in a dozen places with sharp, clawlike furrows. Beside it lay the new mortarboard, its purple tassel pecked clean off, and the crown punctured with the stab of a beak.

"I wasn't away two minutes, sir," panted Wilkins, "and there he was, that parrot, inside this study tearing and clawing the things like mad—"

"It wasn't—it couldn't have been the parrot!" Sally burst in wildly.

Mr. Grittal pointed quivering to the rent gown and mortarboard, and the feathers littered everywhere.

"Isn't this evidence enough, Miss Warner? Is this how you obey my order, to keep that parrot caged and controlled?" he choked out.

"But he is caged, sir—he's shut up inside the club," Sally's chums cried breathlessly.

"Does it look like it?" exploded Mr. Grittal.

"Those feathers aren't his, sir—they're from Wilkins' duster," Sally pointed out desperately. But it was a reckless argument; hopeless to put up any defence for Abdul before the infuriated Mr. Grittal.

"I warned you that parrot should go if there

was any more cause for complaint, Miss Warner—and this settles it!" he said in a white heat, and he snatched Mr. Coney's card from his pocket. "Take it straight to this fellow's address—and take it there now! Instantly!"

SALLY DOES NOT OBEY



"MY parrot didn't do this, Mr. Grittal—he couldn't have got out of his cage!" Sally panted.

"You heard what I said, Miss Warner?" And Mr. Grittal's face went even whiter.

The boys drew Sally hastily to the door, but it was rebellion they saw in her eyes. She didn't speak again. She ran out across the campus, a blur of tears blinding her, and she burst open the door of the clubhouse.

"Abdul—are you here, pet?"

"Sally" a sleepy little voice piped. "Whoopee, Sally!"

Wild relief came choking upon her—only to be shattered by a husky word from Don.

"He got out right enough, Sally. His cage is open!"

"Open?" Sally peered unbelievably through the blur. It was true! The little gate of the cage was open!

"If only we'd foreseen this and kept the window closed——" Johnny was saying shakily.

But Sally didn't hear him. Her heart was bursting. She wouldn't believe. How could Abdul have opened the gate, when he had tried before and so pathetically failed? She gazed through her tears at his drowsy little figure. He was perking up now, yet chattering to her softly, as though he still were not quite awake.

"He didn't get out. He's been asleep—asleep all the time!" she said in a perplexed voice.

"But we heard him, Sally," came from Don.

"We heard him in Grittal's study!"

"I don't care what we heard. Abdul was here, he didn't get out!" cried Sally. "He's mine, and I'm not going to give him up for Grittal or anyone else!"

Don, Johnny, and Fay looked at each other and then at Sally. What could they do? They knew it was hopeless to defy Mr. Grittal.

"What's to be done?" whispered Johnny.

"I'm keeping Abdul!" said Sally, and with trembling hands she took him from his cage and cuddled him under her coat. "Whatever the consequences!"

She bore him away to her chalet, and Fay and the boys followed stealthily with the cage. There, in Sally's cubicle, they fixed up a new home for Abdul. The secret was whispered round J House. All lips were sealed. The window was sealed. Not a sound, not a soul would ever betray the presence of Sally's forbidden pet.

But it was an impossible state of affairs!

Sally was smuggling a box of seed back from the town, two days later, when Johnny gave her arm a warning tug. Mr. Grittal was standing in the open doorway of his study, handing Wilkins the tattered mortarboard and gown to be made into a parcel.

"I don't know if they are really worth mending," he growled.

"Not if that parrot gets at 'em again, sir!" came Wilkins' answer—and Sally & Co. stood suddenly aghast under cover of the trees.

"What?" cried Mr. Grittal. "What are you saying, Wilkins? I ordered Miss Warner to get rid of the parrot two days ago! Are you telling me that she still has it here?"

"I don't know, sir," Wilkins said earnestly. "All I know is that she hasn't taken it to Mr. Coney's!"

Johnny and Don turned towards Sally. They knew what was coming.

"Are you sure, Wilkins?" thundered Mr. Grittal. "We will look into this! At once!"

Sally grabbed excitedly at the boys' arms. Next moment she was rushing them away

through the trees to her chalet—and there was a queer, almost eager gleam in her eyes.

"LEAVE that parcel, Wilkins. Follow me!" commanded Mr. Grittal.

With stern majesty he marched out across the campus, pausing first at the door of the crowded cafeteria.

"Miss Warner!" he rasped. "Is Miss Warner there?"

No! No one had seen Sally Warner. Even Nat Piggot of K House sportily assumed a blank expression, as if he had never even heard the name before.

Wilkins' uniformed figure seemed to assume an arrogant strut, as he followed Mr. Grittal on his next search—to the Merry-makers' Clubhouse.

"Attention, everybody!" And Mr. Grittal thrust open the door with lightning swiftness. "I want Miss Warner!"

The dramatic effect was not what Mr. Grittal had hoped. His voice came back in an empty echo. The clubhouse was deserted.

"H'm! No one here. Strange!" he muttered. "Suspicious! If Miss Warner is deliberately keeping out of my way——"

An excited shout came from Wilkins at the door.

"There she goes, sir! Look! She's got the parrot!"

Mr. Grittal whirled round in the doorway, just in time to see a girl's figure darting into the shrubbery behind the Dean's garden. It was Sally Warner! And she was carrying a big square object covered with a cloth. Its brass ring betrayed it unmistakably as the parrot's cage!

"Miss Warner!" cried Mr. Grittal in a voice of thunder.

Sally had vanished into the thicket before the words were out of his mouth. But she was too late! Mr. Grittal had seen her! Wilkins had seen her! Both made a rush for the shrubbery.

"Come out of concealment, Miss Warner! This instant!" cried Mr. Grittal.

There was a pause. Then a reluctant movement in the bushes. Sally emerged from hiding—empty-handed!

"Do not attempt to deceive me, Miss Warner!" he fired at her. "Where is the parrot?"

"Parrot, sir? You ordered me to send it away!" Sally answered.

"No use talkin' like that, miss—we saw you carrying it!" Wilkins said excitedly.

Sally looked shocked. She shook her head in indignant denial, ignoring the page, and addressing Mr. Grittal.

"You told me yourself where I was to send the parrot, sir——"

"And you deliberately disobeyed me!" he accused her.

"It's not at Coney's, and I can prove it!" shrilled Wilkins. "You might just as well tell the truth, miss. You've got it here. You've just hidden it in them bushes!"

His excited voice brought the Dean hurrying from his garden. Wilkins stopped. He made a dive into the shrubbery in search of the parrot. Mr. Grittal was just in the act of accusing Sally to the Dean, when, with deadly betrayal, a shrill voice squawked out from somewhere in the bushes:

"Best respects, Gritty—go and eat coke!"

There was a horrified gasp from the Dean. Mr. Grittal started forward in a quiver of rage, and yet triumph too. Wilkins wrenched the leaves aside and was pointing sensationally to the hidden parrot's cage, covered only by a loose cloth.

"Here he is, sir!" he cried.

"Where?" Sally asked.

With a dramatic flourish Wilkins whisked the cloth off the cage.

Then his mouth dropped open, he staggered

(Please turn to the back page.)



The CASE OF THE Frightened Girl

THE ATTACHE-CASE

By PETER LANGLEY

JUNE GAYNOR, niece and partner of Noel Raymond, the famous young detective, went to Glen Hall to investigate the mystery of a spectral figure known as the Green Rajah, who was supposed to haunt Temple Isle. June discovered that Colonel Raikes, who had once owned Glen Hall and Temple Isle, had hidden a crystal goblet which was the key to the lost secret of the Purple Mountains. She also found out that the Green Rajah was after the goblet.

June believed that the Green Rajah was the trickster who, disguised as Roger Standish, a friend of her host, had called at Noel Raymond's London flat and pretended to invoke her help. With the impostor had been a frightened girl, and June thought that if she could only discover where this girl lived she would be able to track down the Green Rajah.

Also staying at Glen Hall was a likeable but mysterious boy named Jack Linton, who did not seem to want June to get on the track of the frightened girl, but despite his efforts June discovered that her name was Eva Baring, and that she was living in near-by Black Glen.

Jack asked June to meet him in the museum on Temple Isle where he would explain his strange behaviour. He did not arrive, and June, exploring, found his attache-case hidden behind a secret panel. She opened it, and then gave a gasp of horror. She knew now why Jack had failed to keep his appointment.

JUNE'S eyes filled with horror as she examined the contents of the attache-case which Jack Linton had hidden in the secret cavity in the idol.

Lying on top was a black wig, a false moustache, and a pair of tinted spectacles. Undoubtedly this was the disguise which had been worn by the bogus Roger Standish.

But underneath was something far more incriminating—a green turban and a green Indian costume!

June felt her heart contract, and slowly the blood drained from her face, as she realised what this discovery meant.

Not only had Jack been the frightened girl's

companion, but he was also the Green Rajah! All his protestations of innocence had been so many lies. In face of the contents of this attache-case, there seemed no room for doubt, and the fact that the case had been hidden here only served to make the evidence more convincing.

But what about the letter which she had found? June started as she remembered that. For that letter, written by Jack to Eva Baring, had seemed to prove definitely that the boy was not the Green Rajah. In fact, it had suggested that he was out to capture that scoundrel.

Slowly the look of hope in June's eyes faded. That letter must have been a fake. Jack must have deliberately dropped it for her to pick up. It had all been part of the plot to deceive her.

"It's—it's obvious why Jack hasn't kept his appointment here," she told herself. "He never had any intention of coming to the island. He never had any intention of asking Eva if he could confide in me. That was just a trick to make me trust him."

And she gave a little groan of self-reproach as she remembered how she had handed him the piece of parchment which was the one vital clue she had to the hiding-place of the all-important crystal goblet.

That clue had gone for good. Possibly Jack and Eva, chuckling at the success of their trickery, were even now trying to solve its message.

Biting her lip in chagrin, June stood there, feeling more wretched than she had ever done before in her life. For she had liked Jack; had admired him. Oh, what a fool she had been to allow herself to fall under his easy charm!

"Uncle Noel was right," she told herself. "when he told me that detectives can't afford to be sentimental. Well, I've learnt my lesson. In future—"

She broke off and her heart gave a wild leap. Footsteps sounded on the gravel path outside. Someone was approaching the temple-like museum.

Could it be Jack? Was it possible she had misjudged him after all?

Tucking the attache-case under one arm, she ran eagerly forward, but the excited flush that had rushed back to her cheeks quickly faded, and in dismay she came to an abrupt halt. For the door had swung open and two figures had entered the temple—and neither of them was the boy whose friendship she had been so happy to accept.

The newcomers were Mr. Henley, the solicitor who was administering Colonel Raikes' estate, and Roger Standish, his friend and Colonel Raikes' erstwhile partner.

Mr. Henley gave a cry of satisfaction as he saw the girl detective standing there.

"Ah just the person we've been looking for!" he exclaimed. "I had an idea we should find you here, my dear. I have been telling Standish about the clue you found last night and he would like to see it."

The black-moustached, spectacled man at his side gave a nod.

"Yes; I have a feeling that those hieroglyphics written on the parchment may actually be Sanskrit," he declared. "If so, then I can easily translate the message my old partner left behind. If you will kindly hand over the paper—"

Leaving the sentence unfinished, he smilingly held out his hand.

June regarded the two men in dismay. How was she possibly going to explain? And what would they say when they learnt the truth?

Red with humiliation, with difficulty she found her voice.

"I'm—I'm afraid I can't," she stammered. "I'm awfully sorry, but I haven't got the parchment."

"Not got it?" barked Mr. Standish, while their host regarded June in alarm.

"Great goodness, my dear, don't say you have lost it!" he gasped.

Slowly June shook her head.

"N-no, I lent it—to Jack Linton. He also thought that writing was Sanskrit, and he said he could get it translated for me."

Mr. Henley's worried frown disappeared, but Roger Standish looked, if anything, more agitated than ever.

"You've lent it to that young jackanapes!" he exclaimed. "Well, of all the stupid things to do! You had no right to let that paper out of your possession!"

Mr. Henley raised his hand in protest. His friend's vehemence seemed to surprise him.

"But surely no harm's done, Standish? Jack Linton's a perfectly trustworthy young fellow."

"I am beginning to doubt it!" Roger Standish gave a grim nod. "Since last night I have been doing a lot of thinking. It occurs to me that it was queer that Linton was the first to reach your burgled study. If what this girl says is correct"—he frowned across at June—"about the burglary being an inside job. I mean, then the whole business is very suspicious."

"You mean that—that Jack Linton may be the Green Rajah?" gasped Mr. Henley, staring in horror.

Roger Standish gave another grim nod.

"I shouldn't be surprised. I'm certain that Ronald Baring is! And he and Jack Linton are about the same age. Therefore it's possible that they are all three one and the same person. Cleverly disguised—" He broke off, suddenly noticing the attache-case tucked under June's arm. "What's that? Where did you get it?" he barked.

"I found it hidden in a secret cavity," stammered June, realising that her humiliation could be staved off no longer. "It—it seems to belong to Jack Linton, and it contains several d-disguises."

"Disguises? Here, let me look!" Taking the case from her, Roger Standish snapped open the lid, then, as his goggling eyes glimpsed the contents, he gave an angry roar. "This settles it!" he declared. "I was right! That young

scoundrel is the Green Rajah! And you"—with a withering glare at June—"were actually fool enough to hand him the only important clue we've found!"

June went first red, then white. She knew that his scorn was justified; nevertheless, she found herself resenting his harsh manner. Her liking for the peppery Anglo-Indian was rapidly fading.

Mr. Henley shook his head sadly, as he also examined the contents of the attache-case.

"I'm afraid you're right, Standish," he admitted, a look of distress on his scholarly face. "But I don't know that we have any right to blame June for what has happened. She had no reason to doubt Jack Linton, remember."

The girl detective flashed him a look of gratitude, then she flushed again as Roger Standish gave a derisive snort.

"No reason to doubt him? Bah! She calls herself a detective, doesn't she?" he cried. "Here, I suggest we get back to the Hall. There may still be a chance of catching that young scoundrel before he realises his identity has been discovered."

Eagerly Mr. Henley nodded.

"Yes, yes, let us get back by all means," he agreed.

Silently June followed them, out of the temple and down to the beach. Silently she sat in the boat while the glowering Mr. Standish rowed them across the lake.

This, she felt, was the end of her detective career. Yet it was more distress than anger which filled her heart, and, as they made their way through the grounds, she was asking herself desperately if, after all, there could not be some other explanation for their disturbing discovery about Jack.

After all, he had protested that he could clear up all the mystery which surrounded him if only Eva would give him permission to speak. Suppose that he had only been delayed? Suppose he really had intended to join her on Temple Isle, there to confide in her and explain all the suspicious things which had worried her for so long?

"Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if he did bring back the parchment!" she told herself. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if—"

And then she broke off, for, as they came in sight of the house, there came an excited hail and Mildred Henley came running to meet them, followed by Ted Brandish, Billie Murdoch, and the Smith twins.

Wonderingly Mildred surveyed her father.

"I say, dad, did you know Jack's left?" she cried.

"Left, my dear?" gasped Mr. Henley, while June gave a horrified start.

"Yes, sir—packed up and gone." It was Ted Brandish who cut in. "When I went up to his room just now I found it empty, and when I asked one of the maids she said that he had rung up to say he wasn't coming back."

"Yes—and a taxi called and collected his luggage not half an hour ago," put in Billie Murdoch.

Mr. Standish gave a savage glare.

"There, that proves it!" he exclaimed. "That young scoundrel's the Green Rajah, right enough—and now that he's got the clue to the missing crystal goblet he's gone!"

JACK DISAPPEARS



RELUCTANTLY June was forced to admit that Mr. Standish must be right. This latest development seemed to settle the matter completely. The last shreds of hope died in her heart and a burning anger replaced her former distress.

She forgot how grateful she had been to Jack—forgetting the brave way in which twice he had saved her life. She only knew that he had cruelly deceived her.

But his trickery should not succeed. She had vowed to run the Green Rajah to earth, and somehow she would keep that promise. Indeed, now that she knew the horrifying truth, she was more determined than ever to succeed. Jack Linton should regret his treacherous behaviour.

As June stood there, a fierce indignation burning her cheeks, Mr. Standish gave another harsh laugh.

"Yes—he's gone," he said again. "By now he will be miles away. We'll never see him—or that parchment—again!"

"Wait a minute!" It was June who cut in, her lips pressed grimly together. "There's a chance we may get on his track yet. I must make inquiries."

And off she darted, leaving the angry Mr. Standish and the distressed Mr. Henley to tell the young people all that had happened. First of all June interviewed Samuel, the portly butler, but he shook his head in response to her question.

"Sorry, miss, but I can't tell you where the taxi that called for Mr. Linton's luggage came from," he said. "I'd never set eyes on the driver before. It wasn't a local car, I'm certain of that."

Nor was the maid who had taken Jack's telephone message any more helpful. Apparently Jack had not phoned himself, and the girl could not help June to identify the caller, beyond saying that the voice had been a male, husky one. June got on to the Exchange, only to learn that the call had been put through from a public phone box.

Disappointed, the girl detective next went up to the missing boy's bedroom, but she failed to find any clue there. Except for the usual furnishings, it was bare and empty.

Biting her lip, she went down to report to Mr. Henley. She found the solicitor in the library talking to Mr. Standish. They listened in silence to the failure of her efforts, and when she had finished Roger Standish gave a gloomy shake of the head.

"It's as I thought," he growled. "The young scoundrel's disappeared without trace. But he's got to be found. And his sister, too! I won't rest until both Barings are where they can't do any more harm!"

"Eva! Yes, of course!" June gave an excited start. She had been so concerned about Jack that she had forgotten all about the frightened girl who, it now seemed, must be his sister. This was a really promising line to follow, for she had an idea where Eva lived. As June remembered what she had learnt in the Parrot Tea-rooms the previous day, she faced the two men excitedly. "We may be able to trace Jack through Eva!" she exclaimed. "And I've got a clue as to where she might be found—somewhere up in the Black Glen! If you will leave it to me—"

"Leave it to you?" Roger Standish cut in with a harsh laugh. "If you ask me, young lady, you've done quite enough damage already. This case needs a real detective to investigate it—not a bit of a girl. Henley!" he turned to the solicitor—"if you take my advice you will get in touch with Noel Raymond at once. Tell him how stupid his niece has been, and ask him to take charge himself. Those scoundrels have got to be tracked down and arrested before any further harm is done."

June flushed at his frank, harsh words. Never had she felt so humiliated, and her anger against Jack Linton burnt more fiercely than ever. It would be his fault if her detective career was to end in dismal failure. Anxiously she watched Mr. Henley, and the tears gathered in her eyes as she saw him give a reluctant nod.

"You put it rather strongly, Standish," he said. "but I am afraid you are right. This is no case for a young girl."

"But, Mr. Henley—"
He raised a kindly, but firm hand.
"I am sorry, my dear, but I am afraid it is my duty to ask your uncle to return here."

There is no need for you to reproach yourself. You have done your best. Nevertheless, it is clear more drastic measures are needed."

With an effort June choked back her tears. "You mean that—that I'm dismissed from the case?" she gulped.

Mr. Henley shook his head and gave her sholder a comforting pat.

"No, no, my dear. You mustn't put it like that," he said. "It is simply that we would prefer to avail ourselves of Mr. Raymond's greater experience. It may be some days until he is free to come here. Until then—he smiled—"of course, you will continue to be my guest."

June's heart gave a leap. There was still a chance for her! If only she got busy and followed up this clue regarding Eva Baring she might still be able to retrieve her reputation as a detective; might still be saved the humiliation of having to admit failure.

Leaving the room, she donned her hat and coat and left the house. Briskly she set out along the narrow trail which wound around the foot of the mountains, making for the river which a day or two before Jack Linton had been so desperately anxious she should not cross.

Somewhere in the desolate valley beyond that river she believed the frightened girl lived.

And there, too, she might also find the missing boy!

Her eyes gleamed fiercely as she thought of him. He should quickly learn that she was not to be defeated so easily. And when next they met she would be proof against his pleasant manner.

When she came to the frozen stream she found the wooden, transportable bridge in position. Eagerly she crossed it, and then looked about her. Before her stretched a wide, stoney valley, hemmed in on either side by high, snow-capped mountains. Here and there, perched precariously on terraces, were a few isolated cottages. This must be Black Glen of which the proprietress of the Parrot Tea-rooms had spoken.

Climbing a steep path, June made her way to the nearest house. A plump woman answered her knock, but she shook her head in response to June's inquiries.

"Baring?" she repeated, and shook her head again. "No, miss, I don't know anyone of that name up here."

Thinking Eva might have assumed a false name, June described her, and the woman frowned.

"Now I come to think of it, I fancy I have seen a girl like that up in these parts," she admitted slowly, "but I'm certain she doesn't live in the valley. I was born and bred here, and I know everyone. There's the Mulletts over there"—she pointed across the valley—"and the Tarsons just to the right. Then there's old Mr. Smithers."

One by one she named the occupants of the grey-walled cottages and as she came to an end June's heart sank. Was it possible that she had come on a wild goose chase?

"Aren't there any other houses?" she asked. The woman shook her head.

"No—except, of course, the Lone Cottage."

"The Lone Cottage?"

"Yes, miss. That's a tumbledown old shack right at the far end of the valley, but it hasn't been occupied for years an' years. We give it a miss, I can tell you. The tales they tell in the valley about it you wouldn't believe. They say that the ghost of Old Mother Shingley—she was burnt as a witch a hundred years ago—still brews her spells and potions there. At night, so I've heard, you can see the smoke curlin' up from the chimney."

The woman drew in an awe-stricken breath, but June's eyes were dancing. What better hiding-place than a haunted cottage could Eva find? And the fact that the superstitious villagers had seen smoke coming from the chimney strongly suggested that the supposedly derelict cottage was occupied.

Having got the directions to the Lone Cottage, June thanked the motherly woman and set off, her heart beating excitedly. She gained the end of the long valley, then, as instructed, turned into a narrow gully hewn through the solid rock.

Like a walled alley it wound its way between the mountains, leading to a smaller, inner valley in which the Lone Cottage stood. Up it June hurried, but suddenly there came the patter of footsteps and someone came racing in the opposite direction.

There was no room to step aside, and the girlish figure which unexpectedly rounded the corner nearly knocked June down. She recoiled, then gasped, as she found herself confronted by a frightened, white-faced figure with dark, haunting eyes.

"Eva!" she exclaimed, "Eva Baring!"

THE FRIGHTENED GIRL'S TRICK



STEADILY June regarded the frightened girl, and her heart began to pound excitedly. At long last her patient detective work was beginning to bear fruit.

"Well, what luck!" she cried. "You were just the girl I was looking for!"

"You came up here to see me?" Eva first looked alarmed, then she gave a gulp of relief, as if she had been frightened lest June's visit had had some other reason. "I—I suppose you want to talk about that trick Jack and I played on you in London?" she added in a whisper.

June's eyes flashed.

"So you admit that your companion was Jack, do you?" she snapped.

"Of—of course. Didn't Jack tell you all about it? I—I thought he was going to confide in you?"

"Confide in me?" June gave an angry laugh. "He told me a whole heap of fibs!"

That frightened look returned to Eva's dark eyes, and she gazed at the girl detective in alarm.

"You mean that—that you don't believe our story?" she whispered. "But it's true—honestly it is. I know it was horrid to trick you like that, but we had to do it—simply had to! There was no other way out!"

There was a note of anguish in her voice, and she laid a quivering hand on June's arm, surveying her in desperate pleading.

Despite herself, June's heart was touched. There was something very appealing about this shrinking, white-faced girl—something which aroused all her sympathy. Then fiercely she battled with her emotions.

"Don't be weak, June Gaynor," she told herself angrily. "After all that's happened you ought to know better. Jack's charm led you up the garden. Don't let yourself be taken in again."

So resolutely she hardened her heart, brushing aside those pleading, agitated fingers.

"I don't know exactly what you're hoping I shall do," she said, "but I must make it clear that I'm no longer ready to be impressed by you—or your brother!"

"You mean that—that you are working for Roger Standish? That—that you are our enemy?" asked Eva in a distressed whisper.

June's lips compressed into a resolute line.

"I mean that I am a detective, and that I am going to do my duty," she said grimly. "Now please take me to your brother."

"My—my brother?" There was stark horror in the frightened girl's dark eyes now, and again she clutched at June's arm. "You—you have come to see him?" she breathed.

"Of course," June regarded her in surprise. "Now please don't waste time," she urged. "I don't want to upset you, but this business has got to be cleared up. I know where you are

both living. Either you'll be sensible and take me there or I'll find him myself."

"No, no, I'll take you," whispered Eva, and turning she led the way up the gully.

Slowly June followed. Suddenly she found all her anger against Jack evaporating. She could only remember that haunting look of anguish in Eva's eyes. Again she found her heart full of pity, and she shook her head gloomily. Never had she disliked any job so much as this. And then, once again, she severely took herself to task.

Detectives couldn't afford to be sentimental, she reminded herself. Besides, Jack Linton at least didn't deserve any sympathy. He was a heartless young scoundrel. According to Mr. Standish, he had robbed the man who had befriended him, and now that Colonel Raikes was dead he was plotting to steal his secret. And then there was his treacherous behaviour to herself to be thought of.

"I must pull myself together," June told herself, as she went striding up the rocky gully. "No doubt Eva thought I should feel sorry for her distress. Both she and her brother seem to be able to put on an act to order."

At that moment they rounded a bend, and there, at the far end of a smaller valley, perched on a rocky ledge, was a grey, tumble-down cottage, with a tiny, unkempt garden and a couple of ramshackle outbuildings to one side.

"That's—that's the cottage," announced Eva, and reluctantly she led the way forward.

June, following quickly in the footsteps of the frightened girl, gazed around at the desolate countryside, still thinking of the boy who had so deceived her.

Again, though, she tried to banish the thought, she found herself wishing that there was some suitable explanation of Jack's strange behaviour, some explanation that would clear all those doubts from her mind.

She pulled herself up. But even then she knew that, deep down in her heart, she wanted to know that he was innocent.

Reaching the cottage, the frightened girl led the way to the front door.

"I suppose it's no use asking you to change your mind?" she asked.

June shook her head.

"I'm afraid not," she answered.

The frightened girl gave a gulp, then, opening the door, stepped into a small gloomy hall.

"My—my brother's upstairs—in bed," she whispered. "You see, he met with an accident."

"In an accident?"

June regarded her in surprise. Eva nodded.

"Yes—he stumbled on his way here and fell down a steep slope. His leg's pretty bad."

Again June's resolute expression faded. Despite herself, the news dismayed her. Then angrily she again smothered her rising emotion.

"I must see him," she insisted.

"Very well. This way, please!"

Eva led the way up the uncarpeted stairs, a slim, wan figure. At the top was a small landing, and crossing it, she opened a door.

"You'll find him in there," she said, and stood aside to allow June to enter.

June stepped forward and then gasped, for, without warning, the other girl had given her a push. Right into the room June reeled, and then, as she recovered her balance, she heard the door slam behind her.

Furious with herself for the way in which she had allowed herself to be tricked, June cast one swift look around the room, to find, not only that it had no occupant but herself, but that it was also unfurnished.

"You little trickster!" she gasped, and, plunging forward, grabbed the door-handle.

But the door refused to budge. Eva had locked it and, with a gasp, the girl detective realised she was a prisoner.

Can Eva and Jack really be the plotters—or is there some explanation for their strange actions? Be certain not to miss next Friday's enthralling chapters of this serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.



The SKATING GIRL'S Mystery Mascot

A LAST ATTEMPT

SHEILA MAYNE lived with her family at Chinook Lodge in the little Canadian town of Juniper Bend.

She and the rest of the "Bluebirds," the skating club to which Sheila belonged, were anxious to do well in the forthcoming ice carnival and impress Lee Farrell, a film producer, who would be present. They were also anxious to do better than their rival club, led by Corinne Lefevre.

Sheila and Red Eagle, a mysterious young Redskin, were trying to discover the hidden gold of Chinook.

Sheila's father was kidnapped by Karl Olsen, their enemy, and Corinne's uncle, and held prisoner in a lonely shack, where he was ordered to translate some signs on three totems which Sheila believed to be clues to the whereabouts of the treasure.

In a last desperate attempt to obtain the totems Red Eagle told her he was going to enter the shack and try to outwit Mr. Mayne's captors. Breathlessly Sheila watched him as he tiptoed towards the door.

AS Red Eagle vanished inside the shack Sheila heard shouts of anger and surprise. Then the door slammed and there were sounds as if of a scuffle.

Sheila hated lying there inert when her loyal Redskin friend might be in the gravest danger, but she forced herself to carry out his instructions.

Suddenly she stiffened under the rugs in the sleigh. The door had opened and Karl Olsen stepped out of the shack. He took a sharp look round, eyed the sleigh, then walked round to the back of the hut. Apparently satisfied that no one was about, he re-entered the shack.

"It's O.K.!" he called to his confederates.

"Red Eagle didn't bring anyone with him. There's no need to worry."

As the door slammed Sheila sat up and clambered off the sleigh. Daringly she crossed to the hut and peered in through the window. What she saw brought a gasp to her lips.

Red Eagle, looking as if he had been roughly handled, was now seated at the table, Karl Olsen standing opposite him, a gun in his hand. Her father, still bound to his chair, had been pushed back towards the stove. Olsen's confederate was standing by the table, on which lay three objects. They were the mystery totems. Sheila could see them clearly. Two were old, genuine Red Indian charms, the other was a copy of the mystery mascot she wore around her neck.

Menaced as he was by Olsen's gun, Red Eagle seemed helpless, and there was a look of dejection on his bronzed face as he sat there at the table.

"Now, Red Eagle," Olsen snapped, "you've got all three mascots there. The Wolf I inherited from Joubert, the Bear charm Corinne bought from M. Cuvier's, and the third is a copy of the Owl totem Sheila Mayne found. You can read the signs on them, so you'd better start translating them, or it'll be the worse for you and Mayne there."

Red Eagle looked up at him as if he were terrified. But Sheila felt sure that he was shamming. Slowly he arranged the totems in a line so that their edges touched.

"Give me time and I will read the sign-writing," he pleaded. "It is old and difficult."

As he looked he stiffened, for, seeing past Olsen's shoulder, he caught sight of Sheila's fascinated face pressed against the glass of the window. For a moment Red Eagle frowned, then he nodded his head imperceptibly.

"If you do as Red Eagle says, all will be well," he said enigmatically.

Sheila, hearing him, knew instinctively that the nod and the words were to her at once a reproof, and a signal. She turned and hurried for the sleigh. Red Eagle was pretending to be scared of his captors in order to carry out some secret plan.

"Here you are," declared the young Redskin suddenly as his captors watched, fascinated. "The pictures say that the sun-stone is hidden in the earth a paddle's length from the door of the wigwam by the green waters of the hill of blizzards. The Bear will guard it, the Owl will find it, but beware of the Wolf and the sons of the Wolf!"

He leaned back, looking at his enemies. "That is just a lot of Redskin nonsense!" snarled Karl Olsen. "Explain it! It's the gold we want—the gold Rupert Mayne hid and guarded for Red Eagle's son and his own kin."

Red Eagle smiled at the mention of his ancestor.

"My ancestor never claimed his share. He was attacked and killed by Joubert, from whom you are descended—Joubert, the Wolf.

So was Elrick Green, who financed their first and second trip into the wilds."

He laughed and grabbed the edge of the table.

"Are you fools that you do not understand?" he cried. "Must Red Eagle show you further? 'The hill of blizzards' is the Chinook—Chinook, the snow wind. 'The little house by green waters' is the shack beside Emerald Lake. Now—"

He broke off as from outside there came a cry, the cracking of a whip, and the shrill neighing of a horse. Instinctively Karl Olsen and his partner turned their heads, looked towards the door.

Instinctively Red Eagle acted. Exerting all his strength, he gave the table a tremendous push. Over it went, spilling off the totems, crashing right against the two men who had their backs turned.

Olsen went sprawling on the floor, the gun flying from his hand. The other man, staggering against the far wall, managed to keep his balance.

But before he could move or draw a weapon Red Eagle had vaulted the fallen table and was after him, whipping up a jagged from the pile in the corner by the stove.

It was a thick, short piece of wood. One blow from it laid the man out, and then the agile young Redskin whirled, to see Karl Olsen on his knees, crawling to where his gun lay in a corner.

"Ugh!" he grunted, and sprang right across the room to reach it first. "Back—back, son of the Wolf! Red Eagle will not hesitate to avenge his ancestor if you make a false move!"

Olsen, pale and trembling, backed away. Red Eagle laughed, kicked open the door of the stove and, one eye still on Olsen, pushed in a long piece of spruce to kindle. Then very slowly he backed towards the chair where John Mayne sat.

Drawing his hunting-knife, he started hacking Sheila's father free from his bonds, watching Olsen and his crony all the while. John Mayne rose at last, a free man.

"I don't understand all this," he panted. "These men trapped me. I . . ."

"Sheila, your daughter, is outside waiting for a sign to return," said Red Eagle. "First take these men, secure them with the ropes I have cut. They cannot attack you. Red Eagle is master now!"

John Mayne chuckled. "Red Eagle!" he breathed, and did the young Redskin's bidding. "Then you must be the grandson of the chief of Chinook—who was Granduncle Rupert's friend."

"You have spoken truth," smiled Red Eagle. "Now I will fetch your daughter, the friend who has never failed me."

He pulled out the burning stick from the stove and, opening the door of the shack, waved his torch several times. Sheila, who had driven off and been waiting anxiously, cried out in joy as she saw the signal.

Turning the sleigh, she drove it galloping back, reined up outside the door, then jumped to the snow.

"Red Eagle—daddy!" she cried. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes," said her father. "Thanks to your friend here. Isn't he the fellow who put out the fire at our house—who helped us before?"

Sheila had taken everything in now, had seen the helpless, bound forms of Olsen and his confederate. Her father was free, unharmed! She turned eyes that shone with tears of gratitude towards Red Eagle.

"Oh, Red Eagle!" she gasped. "How can I thank you? You took a terrible risk. Daddy, Red Eagle has always been my friend. He taught me all the skating that helped me win prizes. He's been just wonderful!"

John Mayne gripped Red Eagle's hand.

"Thank you, Red Eagle, for what you've done! I wish you could enlighten me on just one thing, however. Where is the young

scoundrel who brought me here into this trap? I mean Norman Wayne, Sheila's mysterious cousin, to whom Granduncle Rupert left a share in the Chinook estate?"

"I am Norman Wayne," said Red Eagle gently. "It is time you knew the truth."

THE LOST GOLD OF CHINOOK



SHEILA gave a gasp, then laughed outright. She thought Red Eagle had taken leave of his senses. As for her father, he just stared and stared.

"But you are a Red Indian!" he frowned. "You can't be Norman Wayne."

Red Eagle smiled at them both. "It is true," he declared. "You will learn from my agents. That was how Red Eagle knew this was a trap. I am an Indian, but as a child Rupert Mayne adopted me, gave me his own name, put it in his will. But he was weak and ill, wrote badly, so they took his M for a W. I was an orphan, but the grandson of Red Eagle, his best friend, to whom he was a blood brother. He did it so that I could share the gold of Chinook. Blood-brothers in our people have all rights. Red Eagle was brought up on the reservation, but when he grew older he was educated, for money had been left him, also the totem Sheila now wears."

"I think I see it now!" cried Sheila. "Oh, Red Eagle, why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"It would not have been wise," he answered. "For already I had got on the trail of Karl Olsen Joubert who, with his niece, sought the gold. But now we have the secret."

He smiled at her and John Mayne. "We will leave our prisoners here," he declared. "At the nearest post we will phone the Mounted Police. And at Chinook, a paddle's length from the door of the Bluebirds' club, we shall find the gold—and the proofs I need to clear the name of my forbears."

John Mayne was somewhat dazed, but he allowed Red Eagle to take complete control of the situation. They locked up the prisoners in the shack then drove away in the sleigh down the valley.

It was not long before they reached a snow-bound phone post. But it worked. John Mayne spoke to the police. Officers would come and collect Olsen and his partner, whoever he was. Red Eagle had already stated it would be simple for him to prove Olsen had stolen the portrait from the Greens' house, and other matters.

They were finished—done for. But Corinne, though she had been a bitter enemy to Sheila, had been careful to keep her hands clean of any business the law might hold against her.

She had been very cunning, thought Sheila bitterly. Well, she would be all the keener to beat her now at the carnival.

It was late when they reached Chinook and pulled up outside the door of the Bluebirds' clubhouse. But with John Mayne's aid Red Eagle soon cleared away the snow at a distance from the door which he said was a paddle's length.

Then, with spades, they started digging. The ground was frozen. It was hard, bitter work. But after an hour's labour Red Eagle's spade struck something.

"This must be it!" he cried excitedly. "Hurry! Dig fast!"

They worked like Trojans, and at last an iron-bound box was unearthed. It was so heavy they could scarcely lift it. Sheila, her eyes glistening, had opened the clubhouse, and Red Eagle and her father carried it inside.

It was locked, but by means of a crowbar they at last prised off the lid.

"Now we shall see if the totem lied," said

the young Redskin, raising a pile of furs that lined the top. "Ah, here we are!"

Beneath the furs lay several linen bags, mildewed with age, almost rotted away. But as they started lifting them, out of them poured a cascade of yellowish stones.

"Nuggets," cried John Mayne—"nuggets of pure gold! There's a fortune here! Sheila, Red Eagle, we're rich!"

But there was something else beside gold in the box—a tin cylinder stuffed with papers. Red Eagle's eyes glistened as he examined them.

"These are what I want!" he cried. "Red Eagle need no longer bear shame. The shadows are lifted from his wigwam! This tells the truth—how Joubert betrayed Rupert Mayne, and my grandfather—he who was blood-brother to him."

They all bent and read the document. John Mayne whistled and smiled in satisfaction.

"This clears up everything and gives us our title to the gold!" he exclaimed. "I congratulate you, Red Eagle! The mystery of the totems is solved."

Sheila grasped the young Red Indian's hands.

"Red Eagle, I'm so happy—so happy I could cry! You do not know what it means to my father and all of us! But above all, I am glad you have fulfilled your vow. You do not need to hide any more. With Karl Olsen a prisoner, you will be cleared of every accusation against you."

Red Eagle smiled.

"Red Eagle is happy. Only one thing he wishes now—to see Sheila picked as Queen of the Ice Carnival."

Sheila's eyes shone.

"If I succeed, it will be because of you, Red Eagle," she said gratefully. "It's too late to go to Mavis Poynter's now. We will stay here the night, and you shall be our guest at Chinook."

Between them they closed the box, locked the door, and went on to Chinook Lodge. Jerry, opening the door, gave a bloodcurdling war-whoop at sight of Red Eagle.

"Gee! I wondered where you all were!" he cried. "Sis, what has happened?"

They told him quietly, and he was thrilled with it, bemoaning that he had missed all the excitement when the telephone bell rang. Instantly John Mayne started.

"Sheila," he said in alarm, "I hope that isn't about Toddles—that he has had a relapse!"

Sheila went pale at the very thought. She rushed to the phone and picked it up. The voice that answered her was familiar—it was Larry Green's.

"Sheila, I've got bad news for you," came the words. "You'll hate me for it, but I couldn't help it. I slipped to-day, went down on that old ankle of mine. I won't be able to enter any of the competitions. I won't be able to partner you in the ice-ballet. You've got to find a substitute. I'm calling all the Bluebirds to my home to-morrow, after the skating contests are over, to discuss it."

Sheila felt a cold hand clutch her heart.

Without him the ice-ballet would be a shadow of what it had been. In the doubles skating contests she would have no partner. Her house of dreams seemed to be crashing round her ears.

THE BOY WHO BOSSED THE CASTAWAYS

Don't miss the grand opening chapters of this great new story by Hazel Armitage, which will appear in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. You will enjoy this serial even more than you did Hazel Armitage's previous success—**THE WILD BOY OF THE WOODS**.

LEE FARRELL SPRINGS A SURPRISE



"THAT'S bad news!" declared John Mayne, when Sheila had told him of Larry's accident. "But don't despair, my dear. The carnival's not over yet. Perhaps to-morrow you'll find a solution."

"Yes," said Red Eagle. "You have still your lucky mascot. Believe in it—trust the wise Owl."

Sheila unfastened the Owl totem, looked at it, then smiled.

"You're right, Red Eagle!" she cried. "And I think I know a way out of our troubles. We'll go into town early to-morrow morning. I've had an idea."

She spoke rapidly, and Red Eagle smiled and nodded.

"The wise owl has whispered in your ear," he laughed. "Wait and see. This is good medicine. And if Red Eagle can help, he will do all he can."

Next morning they sleighed into Juniper. First they went to the police with a report on the prisoners who had now been collected. Then Sheila and Red Eagle set off for the Greens' house.

En route they fell in with Mabel Rowan and some of the other Bluebirds. Mabel and the others stared when they saw Red Eagle in Sheila's company. But Sheila only waved a hand, and Red Eagle drove on.

Larry Green was reclining on a sofa, his leg bandaged and in splints. He greeted Sheila with a rueful smile, then started as he recognised Red Eagle.

"Sheila, you've brought this rascal here!" he gasped.

Sheila laughed.

"Red Eagle can speak for himself now. He is no rascal, as he will prove."

So Red Eagle told his story. Larry Green listened in amazement, especially when the name of his own grandfather was mentioned.

"You see, a share of what we found in the iron box is your family's by right. It was not Red Eagle's ancestor who was the villain, but Joubert," explained Sheila. "And that's why I'm asking you one favour, Larry."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Make Red Eagle a member of the Bluebirds," said Sheila. "He taught me everything. He is the only one who can take your place as my partner in the skating contests, and in the ballet. Don't you see? There's nothing to prevent him now!"

"By Jove, Sheila, you're a wonder!" gasped Larry. "I'll fix it! Here come the others."

The Bluebirds, all worried and anxious, listened and looked at Red Eagle as Larry explained matters. Then they raised a cheer and ran to shake Red Eagle by the hand.

"Now you'll be initiated," laughed Sheila. "Red Eagle, you must take the Bluebird oath!"

Red Eagle quickly obliged, then Larry called for drinks to toast the new member. Plans were quickly made. Red Eagle was coached in what he would have to do.

"I'm crooked, but I'm being carried down to watch the contests," said Larry. "But isn't the news too bad—about Lee Farrell, I mean! He's not showing himself till everything's over. He's here, but he'll do his picking unseen, unsuspected. He has intimated that he believes it is the only fair way."

They all gasped. Sheila frowned, then smiled.

"D'you know, I think that's quite clever of him," she declared. "We'll just have to do our best without having anyone to play up to. It'll be more natural, and that's what is wanted in films. Bluebirds, are we down-hearted?"

"No!" came in an enthusiastic chorus. "Not likely!"

FOR three days the ice carnival went on at top speed.

In spite of the fact that the famous Lee Farrell had not shown himself, the excitement was high. Nobody knew what he looked like or where he might be placed.

It added an intriguing note to the whole series of contests, which were to culminate in the ice ballet by the Bluebirds.

A rather worried-looking Corinne Lefevre met Sheila in the open figure-skating event. Though Sheila knew that Corinne must be aware that Karl Olsen was in prison awaiting trial, her old rival put up a good show.

She won a first and a third in the various classes before Sheila had finished, to lead her by a place. It was the same the second day. Sheila and Corinne ran neck and neck, and it was said quite openly that if Lee Farrell was looking for a young leading lady, it would be one of them that he was sure to pick.

On the third day came the dancing contests, and for the first time Red Eagle and Sheila took the ice in front of the judges. In their spare time they had both practised together, and a partial rehearsal of the ballet had also been held to enable the young Redskin to practice Larry Green's part.

Corinne, with her boy partner from the Emerald Belles, was first on the ice. Her performance was cheered to the echo, and Sheila saw the judges smiling. Then it was the turn of Sheila and Red Eagle. As the band struck up, they skimmed across the ice, first waiting, then spinning into graceful figures of their own. With Red Eagle as a partner, Sheila forgot everything but the joy of skating. As if in a dream, she and the young Redskin went on to a glorious finish to be rewarded by a terrific burst of applause. It was the same each time they appeared on the ice. Never had such a perfectly matched couple been seen on the ice rink before.

John Mayne, watching with pride, smiled at Jerry and Gracie who sat with him. He could not help feeling that fortune was favouring the family.

When at last the judges made known their decision, it was to announce that Sheila and Red Eagle had taken first place in every class. Corinne and her partner had come a bad third, having been beaten by a couple from down the lake.

Then the announcer stepped up to the microphone to intimate that Lee Farrell had stated that he would announce whom he had chosen as his leading lady after the Bluebirds' ice ballet, which was to be preceded by a dance show on ice by the Emerald Belles, led by Corinne Lefevre.

Corinne's show was modern and snappy, and gaily costumed. In the short time at their disposal, thanks to Corinne's money, the rebel Bluebirds had done well. But it was a one-girl show, for every movement and scene had been planned to glorify Corinne herself.

Then the Bluebirds took the stage.

The curtain went up on a packed ice rink, and as the Bluebirds gave their opening chorus they all realised that somewhere in the packed audience Lee Farrell, the famous Hollywood producer, was watching. The futures of more than one person might be decided before the final curtain fell.

But the Bluebirds, though nervous, excelled themselves.

Red Eagle, in traditional costume, fitted into Larry's part with a grace and verve that won him favour everywhere. Scene after scene followed, each to be greeted by tremendous cheers.

It was when she was taking the bow for the waltz scene that Sheila suddenly caught Red Eagle's arm.

"Look!" she cried, while the cheering still went on. "You remember—the spy—the man with the beard—the Mr. Cooper who was once our lodger! He's sitting there, in the third row!"

Red Eagle looked and saw the man. He was sitting back, watching keenly. As the lights went down again he took off his glasses and raised his head.

In the wings Sheila looked at her partner. "We'd better notify the police," she suggested. "I'm certain he was one of Olsen's confederates!"

Red Eagle nodded and slipped away to do so. The man would not be allowed to leave without being questioned. The ballet continued, and the Bluebirds became more and more delighted, for it was obvious from the applause that they had scored a big success. When the final curtain fell the cheers nearly lifted the roof, and the announcer who stepped up to the microphone had difficulty in making himself heard.

"The company will line up on the stage," he intimated. "I am now about to present Mr. Lee Farrell, the Hollywood producer."

A fascinated, breathless hush came over the vast ice rink. The eyes of the audience and of the Bluebirds became riveted on the wings, where the announcer stood.

Then a figure in evening dress stepped into the limelight, and Sheila gave a gasp of astonishment.

For there in front of her, bowing and smiling and waving, was Mr. Cooper, the late boarder at Chinook. And as the crowd cheered he tugged his false beard from his face and threw his dark spectacles away.

"Well, here I am, folks, at last!" declared Lee Farrell. "You may have thought it rude of me hiding from you so long, but I always do this when I am talent hunting. I like to see people from all angles. That is why I came up here more than a fortnight ago and had a look round on the Q.T."

He paused and laughingly waved his hand to the still petrified Sheila.

"This show by the Bluebirds, magnificent in itself, is the final triumph of an exceptional carnival," he declared. "Indeed, so impressed am I by your town, by its magnificent scenery and by its value as a picturesque ground, that I am going to start production here at once on the outdoor scenes for my next big ice film."

Loud cheers came from the audience.

"In this film I am going to employ much of the local talent I have seen during the past few days, but in addition I am going to claim something from you—someone I shall take back to Hollywood with me—a new leading lady—Miss Sheila Mayne!"

Lee Farrell took Sheila by the hand and led her to the front of the stage, while the crowd went crazy with delight, all except Corinne Lefevre, who turned away her head, then rose from her seat and rushed from the hall.

Blushing, scarcely able to believe her ears, Sheila looked up at Lee Farrell.

"And with her, in this first film, I am going to employ not only Miss Mayne's partner, Red Eagle, but also a selection of girls and boys from the Bluebirds' Club—the happiest, jolliest bunch of young people it has been my pleasure to meet."

It was Red Eagle's turn to bow now, and the Bluebirds to blush.

"Red Eagle, you did it!" breathed Sheila. "We've got you to thank for all this good fortune! Oh, everything's going to be lovely from now on!"

And, flushed and happy, she regarded him with eyes which were misty with gratitude.

THE END.

THE BOY WHO BOSSSED THE CASTAWAYS— that is the title of the enthralling new serial by Hazel Armitage, which will begin in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL—9-2-46



The CAFE OF STRANGE HAPPENINGS

(Continued
from
page 344.)

The door was closed. No ghostly figure stood there, and nothing lurked in the dim corners of the room.

Could her imagination have played some fantastic trick? Nita shook herself and walked quickly to the door, trying the handle. It was securely locked.

At that instant she heard an anxious knocking on the door of her bed-room, the senora's voice calling her name. Nita quickly extinguished the candle and hurried through the communicating door, closing it quickly behind her.

"Nita—Nita, are you all right?" called the senora anxiously.

Nita unlocked her bed-room door, to find Senora Garcia with a tray containing coffee and cakes.

"What is it, child?" asked the senora. "You are deathly pale, and I heard you cry out."

An instinctive caution, bred of her new distrust, put Nita on her guard. She forced a quick smile.

"It's nothing," she replied lightly. "I dropped the candle and it startled me. I'm sorry I worried you."

The senora eyed her closely as she put the tray on the table.

"You are a bundle of nerves, child. This dancing is too much for you. You should take a long rest. Carlos and I are going to our country hacienda for a holiday, and we shall take you with us."

Nita caught in her breath anxiously.

"Senora, not yet!" she exclaimed. "One day this week I have to dance before the famous impresario, Baron Alvarez. It is my big chance—"

The senora's eyes narrowed as she patted Nita's shoulder.

"We shall see, my dear—if you are well enough. We must take care of you, for your father's sake. Now go to bed, my dear, and don't worry any more."

With a smile, she left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

Nita sat staring at the tray of refreshments. She was more shaken by her experience than she had realised, and very wide awake. If only she could have confided in Roy—

With a sudden start she remembered her promise to him. He had asked her to leave the gate of the portico unlatched. There was still time to slip down to the gate before retiring for the night. Her room was in an isolated wing of the mansion and it was not likely that the Garcias would see her.

Her heart beating quickly, Nita threw a wrap over her shoulders and noiselessly opened the side door that led to the covered portico. The white marble pillars with their trailing roses stood out clearly in the moonlight. A quick run would bring her to the gate in the wall. Nita glanced hurriedly over her shoulder and stepped out into the moonlight.

"Shush!" breathed a cautioning voice, and a hand closed quickly over her lips, stifling her cry of alarm. "Forgive me, I was afraid you'd raise the alarm," breathed the boy, his laughing eyes meeting her indignant stare.

"Oh!" gasped Nita, recovering her breath.

"You—how did you get in?"

The boy raised his eyebrows.

"By the gate—which you left unlatched, as I requested."

"But I didn't!" gasped Nita. "I hadn't time—"

Roy whistled softly as he drew her into the shadow of the doorway.

"Curious," he murmured. "Distinctly curious. The gate was fastened when I tried it ten minutes ago—and I heard someone cautiously draw the latch."

Nita stared at him, her heart beating quickly. "How long have you been here in the portico?"

"Five minutes, I should say. Why?"

"Have you heard anything—seen anything?" whispered Nita.

Roy shrugged.

"I thought I heard a scream, but it might have been a night-bird."

"That was me," said Nita.

Roy's hand gripped her arm, a look of swift anxiety on his face.

"Why, what happened?" he breathed tersely.

"The Garcias—"

"It wasn't the Garcias," said Nita unsteadily. "I don't know what it was—imagination perhaps—"

"Tell me!"

His face was in the shadow, and Nita could not see his expression as she breathlessly described her terrifying experience. His hand tightened on her arm.

"The sooner you get out of this house the better," he said shortly. "Are you sure the door to that room was locked? May I see it?"

Nita hesitated.

"But suppose you're discovered?"

"I'll take a chance on that," rejoined the boy impatiently. "I'm here to help you, Nita, and it'll take more than bogies or the Garcias to scare me."

With vague misgivings, Nita admitted him to the passage, cautioning him to tread softly. He halted outside a door, but Nita shook her head.

"No, that leads to the cellars," she whispered. "It's the next door on the right."

"Here?" breathed Roy, taking something from his pocket.

Nita nodded, and a tiny beam of white light played on the rusted lock.

"Queer kind of ghost," murmured the boy. "It knows how to oil locks for its own purpose! Have you a key?"

"No; it's been lost for years," breathed Nita.

"So they tell you!" muttered the boy. "Just a minute—hold the torch." Something glinted in his hand as he bent over the lock. "Useful little device," he added dryly. "Locks just can't resist it. Ah!"

There was a faint click, and the boy pushed open the door.

"So this is the door where the ghost came in—and this is where you keep your father's pictures?" he murmured, flashing his torch round the room. "I'm interested in that picture you mentioned Nita—the picture of your mother in the costume she wore as a dancer. I've an idea it may provide the answer we're seeking! Where is it?"

"In that corner—on your right," whispered Nita eagerly. "I was looking at it just now—"

Her voice trailed away in a little gasp as the

torchlight flickered on the massive gilt frame in the corner—a frame without a picture!

"There's trickery here!" muttered Roy as he sprang forward, flashing his torch on the frame and revealing the jagged edges of the canvas where it had been ruthlessly cut. "You say the picture wasn't valuable. Nita?"

"I—I'm certain it wasn't!" Nita's voice choked and angry tears smarted in her eyes. "Only to daddy and me. Who could have done such a hateful thing—and why?"

"That," rejoined the boy, smiling grimly, "is where the plot thickens! Someone's interested in your mother's picture, Nita, and someone's trying to prevent your dancing at the cafe. It's not just a coincidence! The two things are connected somehow, and I'm going to find out just where that connection lies—"

"Wait!" Nita caught at his arm, her face paling. "Listen!"

Roy turned quickly as a distant door banged and they heard excited voices.

"They'll find you here!" gasped Nita. "Quickly!" she whispered, and, catching at his arm, pushed him towards the door leading to the cellars.

"But, I say, what about you—"

Nita did not wait to argue; she was desperate. Despite his protests she bundled Roy into the cellar entrance and closed the door, turning the key quickly.

As she turned, white-faced and trembling, she encountered the senora and Don Carlos, who was carrying a lantern.

"Nita, my child, I thought you were in bed!" exclaimed the senora, her voice sharp with anger.

"I—I couldn't sleep," rejoined Nita, a shade defiantly. "I thought I heard sounds."

Don Carlos exchanged a meaning glance with his aunt.

"I thought as much!" he said. "There's someone lurking round this house. I sent Pedro into the garden to search. Ah, here he is!"

The bent figure of the elderly manservant appeared in the portico.

"The postern gate is unlatched, senora," he declared, "but there's no sign of the scoundrel. He must have escaped."

"Unless he's hiding somewhere!" muttered Carlos.

"The cellar," suggested the senora, and Nita's blood ran cold. "Have you looked there?"

Carlos crossed to the cellar door and tried it, shaking the handle. He frowned suspiciously.

"It's locked—and the key's missing. Have you got it, Pedro?"

"No, senor; I thought it was in the lock."

"Then break in the door!" snapped Carlos.

Nita drew a sharp breath, her hands clenching. She was ready to scream a warning to Roy—careless of the consequences to herself. But just then the senora intervened.

"It is not worth it, Carlos," she said smoothly. "It would merely arouse the servants to no purpose. But in future we shall have to take greater care—especially of our young guest."

There was a cold glitter in her eyes as she smiled at Nita, laying a hand on her shoulder.

"Go to your room, my dear," she said, "and to-morrow we must make new plans for you. San Credo is too dangerous for a young girl just now, and the life of a dancer too upsetting. Sleep well, child."

Nita smiled as she made a pretence of obeying, but her heart was cold with apprehension. She waited till she heard their footsteps depart, till the house was quiet; then, creeping from her room, she hurried to the cellar door, unlocking it with a hand that trembled.

"Roy!" she called softly. "Roy!"

There was no reply. Her premonition growing, Nita opened the door wider, and then her heart gave a little bound.

A scrap of paper was caught on the inside of

the latch, with a message written in a bold, dashing hand:

"Sorry I couldn't wait; found another way out. And there's work to be done! Meet me to-morrow night at the grotto at the same time. I've news for you!"

"Roy."

The blood raced more quickly in Nita's veins as she threw off her stupid dread.

Roy would help her! She must keep her appointment with him at all costs!

THE DANCE OF THE MANTILLA



AS though to erase the memory of the previous night the senora was more kindly to Nita than ever the next day—but Nita knew now that the seeming kindness was a mask, a velvet glove concealing relentless claws. Roy had been right—the Garcias were her enemies. For some reason she could not fathom they were plotting against her, trying to prevent her dancing at the cafe. Lacking the powers of guardianship, they were entangling her slowly in a net of fear—a net from which only Roy could help her escape!

And as the day drew on towards evening Nita's conviction grew, and with it her determination to outwit them at all costs.

After tea she went to her room to dress, as usual, for her nightly visit to the cafe.

But this evening the senora did not hover around, as was her custom.

Her very absence, though welcome, was vaguely disquieting; there was something in the air, something Nita did not understand.

Finally ready, she crossed to the window to see if the family coach was waiting, as usual, on the drive. She heard the crunch of its wheels on the drive—then, to her amazement, she saw it pass the house and rumble swiftly towards the gates amid a cloud of dust.

They had gone without her!

For an instant Nita's heart missed a beat, then she gave a quick, defiant laugh.

So much the better! There was always the cabriolet, and she had plenty of time to reach the cafe. Snatching up her wrap, Nita darted across the pillared hall and reached the door—to find her way barred by old Pedro, the manservant.

"The senora has gone out, Pedro?" she inquired lightly, her heart beating rather quickly.

"Yes, senorita—with Don Carlos. They do not expect to be back till late."

"Very well," Nita smiled, "then I shall have to drive myself. Please see that the cabriolet is harnessed, Pedro."

She made to pass him, but the old manservant stood directly in the doorway.

"I regret, senora, but my instructions are that you shall not leave the house!" he said grimly.

For an instant Nita's heart misgave her, but her dark eyes flashed indignantly as she confronted him, stamping her foot.

"How dare you! Let me pass—at once!"

"It is impossible, senorita," replied the old man stubbornly as he prepared to close the door. "The cabriolet has been dismantled by the senora's instructions, and you are to remain in the house—for your own safety—Ah, no, you don't!"

He attempted to grab her as she dived under his arm, but the next minute Nita was racing for dear life down the drive. The old lodge-keeper had a spirited horse which he sometimes let out for hire, and Nita, brought up in Mexico, knew how to ride.

An amazed Senor Lopez and an excited throng of spectators witnessed her arrival at the Cafe of Dreams.

"Juanita, what is this?" gasped the agitated proprietor. "What folly will you be up to next, with your big chance so near—"

"It's all right, señor," said Nita breathlessly as he helped her dismount. "Please don't worry. Has—has the Senora Garcia or Don Carlos arrived?"

"I am not expecting them—I did not expect you," rejoined the other. "The senora sent a message that you were indisposed! But I am pleased you have come—very pleased. Tonight, Juanita—he spoke impressively—"to-night at ten the Baron Alvarez will be here to see you dance!"

Nita's heart leaped and her eyes shone with excitement. Her daring bid for freedom had not been in vain. To-night was the chance she had so long awaited—the chance of a lifetime!

Then she thought of her appointment with Roy. There would be time to hear his good news before the baron arrived. She would dance then with a lighter heart—able to forget everything in the thrill of the moment.

Already the shadow of mystery and fear that had haunted her was beginning to dissolve in a glow of excitement. Eagerly she hurried to her dressing-room—to find that a note had been pushed under the door.

She stared at the envelope with momentary misgiving and cautiously picked it up. The envelope was unaddressed, but inside were two terse lines in Roy's familiar scrawl:

"P.S. to my previous message. Wear mantilla costume to-night—and don't keep me waiting!"

Nita laughed in relief. The message was so like Roy—laconic, mysterious. But why did he wish her to wear that particular costume? She loved it because it was like her mother's picture, but it called for a more stately, old-world dance.

But she would wear it, to please him—and because she knew that whatever dance she chose she would make a success of it to-night!

As she finished changing she heard her name being called, and the impatient clapping of the cafe patrons.

Her heart beating quickly, Nita hurried to the restaurant and peeped from behind the curtains towards the table in the corner.

Her face fell a little as she saw that the table was unoccupied. She had thought that Roy would be there to see her dance. With a quick smile, she swallowed her disappointment and made her first appearance of the evening amid a murmur of applause.

The old Spanish dance, with its haunting air, took the cafe patrons by surprise. More silently than usual they watched, but a wild burst of clapping and cheers greeted its conclusion.

Flushed and smiling, Nita was greeted by Senor Lopez as she left the floor.

"It is superb—magnificent!" he declared. "If you dance like that before the baron to-night your success is assured. You are not nervous?"

"Not a bit!" Nita assured him gaily. "I will take a little walk in the grounds to recover my breath."

"But, Juanita—is it safe?" asked the other anxiously. "There have been accidents before, and—"

Nita laughed. "Those are all finished with, señor. I—I have a friend who has brought me good luck. Some time I will introduce you!"

With a gay wave of her hand, she hurried to fetch her wrap. It was early as yet for her appointment with Roy, but she had a feeling that Roy would be there in good time.

Had he solved the mystery that surrounded her? His note suggested that he had. It was all that she needed now to enable her to dance before the famous impresario as she had never danced before!

But she was conscious that she was trembling slightly as she hurried towards the grotto. This evening meant so much to her and she tried to convince herself that nothing

now could come between her and her wonderful chance.

A pale moon was breaking between the clouds as she came in sight of the grotto, and there, standing in the shadows, was the tall figure waiting as she had expected, his dark cloak drawn round his shoulders—just as he had met and startled her on the previous evening.

"Roy," she exclaimed eagerly, darting to meet him. "I got your message. What have you found out—"

The figure turned slowly, and Nita's blood suddenly ran cold as a horrified doubt gripped her heart. This—this wasn't Roy!

The next instant something dark and muffled fell over her head, stifling her screams as she was lifted bodily from the ground.

She was in the hands of her enemy.

NITA came to her senses, conscious of a rumble of wheels, the familiar jolting of a coach over an uneven road.

In the dim light of the carriage she stared dazedly at the figure on the opposite seat. The Senora Garcia was smiling at her in her kindly manner, but with that cold glitter in her eyes that Nita had come to know—and dread.

"How are you, my dear?" she asked gently.

As memory flooded back Nita started to her feet, her hands clenched.

"Why—why am I here?" she gasped accusingly. "Where are we going? I have to dance at the cafe at ten o'clock—"

"Calm yourself, child," put in the senora. "You had a terrible shock when that young scoundrel attempted to scare you, and I don't wonder that you are confused. But you are quite safe now—"

"I don't believe you!" burst out Nita desperately. "Roy's my friend. This—this is a trick. Where are you taking me?"

"To our house in the country, child," replied the senora smoothly. "We explained to Senor Lopez and he will make your apologies to the gentleman who was to have seen you dance."

"It's not true!" whispered Nita, though her heart was sinking. She managed to see her watch in the dim light. It was nearly ten o'clock! "How—how far are we from San Credo?" she breathed.

The senora raised her eyebrows.

"I couldn't say, but we have been travelling for some time. What is that you are wearing, child?" She bent forward, touching the silver pendant that showed through Nita's lace frock. "It is a wonder that young trickster did not steal it. You had better let me take care of it for you—"

Her fingers closed on the slender silver chain that supported the locket as she attempted to wrench it from Nita's neck.

With a cry, Nita started to her feet, struggling as the woman's hand fastened like a vice on her wrist.

And just then there came the muffled, unmistakable sound of galloping hoofs, the sharp crack of a pistol.

"Halt!" called a ringing voice.

The swaying coach gave a violent lurch and came to a standstill, the steam from the horses rising in a cloud. Nita heard Don Carlos' high-pitched voice protesting as he was forced to dismount from the box.

Just then the door was flung open and a boyish face looked in.

"All right, Nita! Splendid!" Roy grinned at her reassuringly as she stared at him, speechless with relief and amazement.

"Senora," he added dryly, "I must beg of you to dismount."

"How—how dare you!" gasped the senora, her face white with fury.

"And that dainty bag—if you please!" The boy reached in swiftly, snatching the silver chain bag that lay on the seat. "Gentlemen"—he turned to two uniformed figures who stood in the background—"your prisoners! I charge

the senora and her nephew, Don Carlos, with an attempt at kidnap and robbery!"

"This—is this fantastic!" exclaimed the senora, white to the lips. "What proof have you?"

"It is here," said the boy, taking a crumpled letter from his pocket. "From your father, Nita—as you'll see. Just one of the many letters you never received. The others may be in the senora's handbag. Yes, here they are!"

Her hand trembling, Nita took her father's letter—dated several weeks previously—and hastily scanned it. One paragraph stood out, underlined in pencil:

"I meant to have told you before I left, Nita, but there was no time. There is something hidden behind your favourite portrait of your mother. Take it to my old friend, Baron Alvarez, and ask him to value it. Hand him the enclosed message and he will take care of everything."

"What—what does it mean?" gasped Nita.

"It means," snapped Roy, "that the Garcias have been deliberately trying to prevent your meeting with the Baron Alvarez till they could discover your father's treasure. They had no power to forbid your dancing, so they tried to terrorise you—to break your nerve while they searched."

"Desperate, they stole your mother's picture, thinking that the fortune might lie in that. Then they realised, too late, that the treasure was in your own hands—in the little locket you always wore. See?"

He took the locket gently and pressed a hidden catch. As the back flew open something rolled into his palm—two objects that flashed a deep crimson in the faint light.

"Rubies!" breathed Nita, catching her breath as she gazed at the two magnificent jewels.

"It looks like it," admitted Roy. "The Baron Alvarez is a connoisseur of precious stones besides being a judge of dancing."

"But why—why did you ask me to wear the mantilla dress?" breathed Nita.

Roy's eyes twinkled.

"The Baron knew your mother, Nita, and you are very like her. That was why the Garcias feared your meeting. Though you might not have known the truth, they were afraid he would recognise you and insist on taking you into his care, especially as you are such a brilliant dancer. I suggested that you wore the lace mantilla to make certain that he recognised you."

"But now he won't see me dance," said Nita wistfully.

"He's seen you dance!" chuckled Roy. "I brought him to the cafe this evening and we watched secretly while you performed the mantilla dance. He did not want to make you nervous. We planned to surprise you afterwards, but you reached the grotto too soon and the scoundrel Don Carlos was waiting for you."

Nita shivered, but her eyes were shining as she caught at his arm.

"Roy, how can I thank you—"

The boy laughed.

"By coming with me back to the cafe and dancing for the Baron again. He is waiting for you, Nita. To-night is your big night! Come!"

As the scowling tricksters were bundled into the coach Roy assisted Nita gaily into the waiting carriage and sprang into the driving-seat.

With a crack of the whip, the carriage rattled towards the distant lights of San Credo—the lights that meant for Nita fame and fortune and a wonderful friendship.

THE END.

DENISE KEPT THEM GUESSING—that is the title of next Friday's grand long complete story.

THE MERRYMAKERS AT COLLEGE

(Continued from page 348.)

back with his eyes popping out of his head. The cage was empty!

"Wh-wh-where," gasped Mr. Grittal, "where is the parrot?"

Wilkins' face went greener than any parrot's as Sally advanced towards him.

"There," she said, "there's the parrot who's been annoying you, Mr. Grittal, only he hasn't got any feathers, and his name happens to be Wilkins!"

Wilkins looked as if he wanted not only feathers but wings, at this moment. His guilty eyes popped right and left for some way of escape. But now Johnny had miraculously appeared on one side of him—Don on the other.

"D-d-you mean to say," stuttered Mr. Grittal, "that it was this b-boy who was imitating the p-parrot?"

"That's right, sir—perhaps this'll tell you why." And Sally made a shrewd grab at a paper-covered book which bulged in Wilkins' pocket, and which he was desperately trying to hide.

"TWELVE EASY LESSONS"—Sally read out the title—"IN VENTRILOQUISM."

IT was a tearful confession that was wrung from Wilkins. His uncle, it seemed, knew a gentleman who was willing to pay a very good price for a parrot—and his uncle's name was Mr. Coney.

As an amateur ventriloquist, Wilkins had conceived the cunning idea of imitating Sally's parrot, insulting Mr. Grittal, and earning such a bad name for Abdul that Sally would be ordered to get rid of him—to Mr. Coney.

The little ruse of letting Mr. Coney deliver that parcel, while Wilkins hid behind the clubhouse squawking insults at Mr. Grittal, was just a forerunner to the big incident. Wilkins himself had damaged the contents of the parcel, mutilated the mortarboard, and planted the blame on Abdul.

It was the last thing Mr. Grittal was ever likely to forgive. He felt, and he looked, extremely foolish in front of the Dean. He was still thoroughly crestfallen even when Wilkins—who had been cunning once too often—was sacked there and then on the spot.

"I am—er—indebted to you, Miss Warner, for exposing that boy's rascality," he said in a very subdued voice for Mr. Grittal. "What made you suspect him? Was it because these outrages still continued, after you had got rid of the parrot on my orders?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Grittal!" Sally said brightly. "It's quite true that I didn't take the parrot to Coney's. But how could Wilkins have known anything about Coney, unless there was some put-up job between them? That's why I suspected him—when I heard him talking to you!"

Mr. Grittal looked sheepish.

"I—I quite agree that the parrot has been misjudged, and is quite blameless—"

"Thank you, sir! And you have no objection at all to my having him here now?"

"No, oh no, of course not, but—"

Mr. Grittal gasped for words. "But where is he?"

Sally took a warm little bundle from under Don's coat, and, with a squawk, Abdul hopped gleefully on to her shoulder.

"Whoopee, Sally!" he said. "Kind Mr. Grittal—best respects, Mr. Grittal!"

(End of this week's story.)

Look out for another of Daphne Grayson's delightful complete stories in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.