

GIRLS' CRYSTAL³

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
Sept. 7th.
1946.



The PHANTOM TENNIS PLAYER

In This Thrilling Detective Story Noel Raymond Investigates The Mystery Of The
Haunted Tennis-Court—By PETER LANGLEY

NOEL'S STRANGE DISCOVERY

"HALLO, what's that?"

Noel Raymond, the young detective, halted abruptly on the lonely road. His keen eyes were narrowed in puzzlement as he listened. It was a familiar sound—yet strangely out of place at past eleven at night: a sultry night with a pale moon gleaming between heavy banks of cloud.

Ping—ping! It was the clear, unmistakable twang of racket and ball—and a soft shuffle of feet as the unseen players engaged in a rally.

"Tennis—at this time of night!" muttered Noel incredulously. "But there's scarcely enough light to see one's hand—and where are they playing, anyway?"

He stared round in considerable perplexity. On his left was an ancient stone wall, through a narrow gap in which he could glimpse a wilderness of weeds and bushes. To his right a barren field sloped to the edge of the disused Mildene quarry.

A less likely place—or hour—for a spirited game of tennis could hardly be imagined; yet there could be no mistaking those sounds. An enthusiastic player himself, the young detective's curiosity was keenly aroused.

He had arrived at Mildene that evening, on a special investigation connected with a series of daring burglaries that had baffled the local police. After a late consultation with the inspector in charge of the case, Noel had taken a short cut back to the rather lonely guest-house where he was staying.

But for the moment the investigation was banished from his thoughts by this curious mystery.

The elusive sounds appeared to come from beyond the wall, and on a sudden impulse the

young detective climbed through the opening, and pushed his way among a tangle of bushes, emerging abruptly into a clearing.

An amazed ejaculation escaped his lips as he halted. A tall hedge partly blocked his view, but through a gap in the foliage he could see a slender, white-clad figure—almost spectral in the moonlight—as she swung her racket with the skill and grace of a practised player.

Her partner was invisible, from where Noel stood, and the young detective had an eerie impression that the girl was playing on her own. Yet the ping of her racket was answered by the more distant twang of another—as the eerily gleaming white ball sped back and forth in a ghostly rally.

No other sound broke the stillness, except for the barely audible pad of feet. Neither player spoke, as the ghostly game grew swifter and more intense.

Fascinated, the young detective watched—gripped both by the thrill of the game and the mystery of its players.

Then, suddenly the spell was broken by a girl's terrified scream. At the same instant the moonlight was hidden by the drifting clouds.

Noel sprang forward, whipping out his torch as he crashed his way through the hedge. Pale, incredulous, he stared round him.

The bright beam of his torch swept a deserted court, hemmed in by tangled bushes. Weeds grew through the cracked asphalt, and twined round the posts of the almost rotted net. A rustic summer-house that had once provided shelter for the spectators stood, roofless and partially collapsed, on the far side of the court.

Of the spectral players there was no sign! Dazedly, Noel passed a hand over his eyes, wondering for a moment if what he had seen had been some crazy trick of the moonlight.

But the girl's scream had been real enough! There was something sinister here—demanding action.

"Hallo!" shouted Noel loudly.

A stifled cry answered him: it seemed to come from a narrow path on his left. The young detective sprinted down the path, and narrowly escaped falling over a girl's huddled figure.

In the glare of his torch he encountered a pair of grey, startled eyes set in a vivaciously attractive face. The girl sat on a bank nursing her ankle. Her neat tweed costume was stained with mould, and across the path lay the splintered bough of a tree.

Her face was twisted with pain, as she smiled pluckily up at him.

"Sorry," she gasped. "I—I didn't mean to scream, but it happened so suddenly. I suppose it's my fault for spying on the phantom player. Something always happens to anyone who disturbs her—"

"The phantom player?" ejaculated Noel sharply. "So you saw her, too?"

The girl laughed unsteadily.

"I tried to climb on to that bough, to look over the hedge—but it gave way suddenly. I might have expected it! No one has ever escaped trouble—"

"Look here," interrupted Noel, as he dropped to his knee beside her. "Let's get this straight. What is this place, for a start—and who are you? Are you badly hurt?"

The girl shook her head with a rueful smile. She was looking curiously into the young detective's face.

"I see you're a stranger. I thought at first you might be a member of the club. The Mildene Tennis Club," she added for Noel's benefit. "I'm the secretary—Allison Dare. And where did you spring from?"

"I'm afraid I'm trespassing," admitted Noel, eyeing her quizzically. He liked the girl's spirit and obvious pluck—and he was considerably intrigued by her story. "I'm staying in the village—on holiday," he added guardedly. "But what's all this about the phantom player, and trouble following if she is watched?"

The girl looked round hastily as the young detective assisted her to her feet. She winced slightly as her foot touched the ground.

"Well—you've seen her," she breathed. "or you'd probably imagine that I was crazy. It's the first time a stranger's ever seen her. I think—though several members of the club have been badly scared. That's why I came to investigate! You see"—she smiled at him unsteadily—"in a way, I feel responsible, as secretary. In the past fortnight we've lost more members than I can count—and if this goes on we'll have to close the club—"

Her fingers tightened suddenly on his arm as there came a distant sound of excited voices and hurrying footsteps.

"Those are some of the members," she breathed. "We agreed to keep watch—to lay the ghost. Please don't say too much. Most of them are jittery, as it is!"

With a quick smile, she released his arm. "My ankle feels a little better," she breathed. "I don't want to worry them."

Noel glanced at her in swift approval as he bent to move the splintered bough from the path. His eyes narrowed suddenly as he examined the end—rotten and covered in fungus. He looked up at the tree the girl had attempted to climb, trying to reconstruct the accident.

The deserted tennis court would be plainly visible from the branches—and anyone on the court might have seen the watcher. But how—

His thoughts were interrupted, as a group of breathless young people appeared round a bend of the path.

"Allison!" exclaimed a tall, good-looking young man in white flannels, his rugged face showing his relief. "Thank goodness, you're all right. We thought we heard you scream—"

"I did call out, Ray," admitted the girl, smiling, as the young man broke off at the sight of a stranger. "This gentleman kindly came to my assistance."

"What happened?" demanded Ray Norton tersely, glancing at Noel. "Did you see her—the phantom player, I mean?"

The young detective shrugged.

"I saw someone—or something," he rejoined cryptically, glancing at the other's white flannels and rubber-soled shoes. "Perhaps you could throw some light on the mystery?"

"I wish I could!" burst out Ray. "This thing's been going on for long enough. One scare after another. The girls put it down to the legend, but it's pretty clear there's more to it than that—"

"What legend?" asked Noel quickly, glancing round the group.

"Tell him, Allison," said Ray.

Noel encountered the girl's cool, grey eyes. "It happened years ago," she breathed. "The founder of our club—old Mr. Heathcote—had a daughter who was a brilliant player. She was in training for the all-England championship when she met with an accident, from which she never recovered."

"The club was closed for months, and when it was reopened the court on which she used to play was allowed to fall into disuse. In any case, the ground was subsiding, and some new courts were made nearer to the club-house."

"Years later, rumours got round that Eva Heathcote's ghost had been seen—and the court became more shunned than ever. We'd almost forgotten the legend, till just recently—"

"Heathcote?" put in Noel, with a thoughtful frown. "That name's familiar. Surely there's a big house near here—"

"Yes—Heathcote Manor," explained Ray quickly. "It belongs to a wealthy City magnate now—but under the terms of the old founder's will, the 'finals' of the Joshua Heathcote Championship are still played there—and the lucky winner is entertained at the house."

Noel nodded, a thoughtful gleam in his eyes. Was it simply a coincidence that Heathcote Manor had been one of the houses recently visited by the daring burglars? He remembered that a young man employed there as a chauffeur had been suspected of the thefts, but had managed to evade the police.

Instinctively he glanced in the direction of the ill-omened court.

"Just one question," he murmured. "The ghostly tennis player's partner—has he, or she, ever been seen?"

"Never!" said Ray, with a shrug, as he glanced at the others. "That's what makes it so uncanny. But, of course, it's a trick of some kind—"

"I wonder!" breathed Allison.

There was a moment's uneasy silence, broken by a stifled cry from one of the girls.

"Oh, look—over there!"

The moon had come out from behind the clouds, and through the tangled bushes something white could be seen flitting in the direction of the courts.

"It's—the ghost!" whispered Allison, her vivacious face looking pale in the moonlight.

Noel's eyes gleamed as he stared round the group.

"There are six of us," he muttered. "We could surround the court—and prevent its escape. Miss Dare, you'd better stay here—because of your ankle."

"No!" declared Allison eagerly. "I want to come—please! After all"—she smiled pluckily—"it's my place, as secretary!"

"Good for you!" declared Ray. "Are we all ready?"

Instinctively they looked to Noel as leader. There was something about the young detective's calm, assured manner that instilled confidence.

Tersely he gave his instruction, and the little party divided, taking separate paths to the court. Allison accompanied the young detective, walking with a scarcely perceptible limp as she held lightly to his arm.

"You know—I'm a bit afraid," she whispered. "You?" inquired Noel, glancing incredulously into her determined, vivacious face.

"Not for myself," breathed the young secretary. "But—about what might happen. Something always happens when the ghost appears—and this is the second time this evening—"

"Hist!" muttered Noel, gripping her arm warningly.

They had come in sight of the court—and there, in the dappled moonlight, they could see a white, elusive figure groping in an anguished way among the long grass that bordered the asphalt.

"Wait here!" muttered Noel, and he leaped across the court, as there came a shout from the far side, and Ray Norton appeared at a run, followed by several others.

The ghostly figure straightened, her hands raised to her face. Noel saw the flutter of her white dress as she made a sudden dart for the shadows, close to the ruined summer-house.

There was no way of escape, for the high wall bordered the court at this point, and Ray and the others were closing in.

Noel reached the summer-house, whipping out his torch.

"Come out, young lady!" he said sternly. "The game's up!"

The beam from his torch stabbed the shadows, as the searchers crowded round. But it revealed no ghostly figure—nothing except the roofless walls of the old summer-house, the tangled weeds and high stone wall beyond.

The phantom player had vanished into thin air!

THE TENNIS BALL TEST



WHITE-FACED, incredulous, the searchers gazed at one another in the dim light. Noel, a baffled expression in his eyes, bent to examine the ground.

His logical mind refused to accept the disappearance. Either they had all been the victims of an illusion, or—

"Where's Allison?" demanded Ray suddenly. "And Pam?"

"I'm here!" declared the club secretary breathlessly, as she limped up, her attractive face rather pale. "I wish I'd never suggested the ghost hunt! If anything's happened to Pam—"

Pam was the young member who had first given the alarm—a nervous, highly strung girl, whose absence caused general anxiety. It was Noel who discovered her, after a hurried search, lying in the long grass near the summer-house, her face white as a sheet.

"It's all right!" he said tersely. "The poor girl's fainted. See to her, one of you—I've got to look into this!"

Puzzled, uneasy, he retraced his steps to the spot where he had first glimpsed the spectral figure—apparently searching among the grass and weeds. But—for what?

A soft whistle escaped the young detective's lips as he discovered the object he sought.

A new tennis ball!

He stared at it strangely, turning it between his fingers, and just then the moon was hidden by a cloud.

But the ball continued to glow, with a faint, eerie light of its own!

"Great Scott!" breathed Noel. "So that's how—"

Swiftly he dropped the amazing clue into the pocket of his tweed sports jacket, his thoughts racing. Ghosts did not play tennis with balls treated with phosphorous paint!

The mystery had taken on a new, more sinister aspect—but for the moment he decided to keep his discovery to himself.

The fainting girl had recovered when he rejoined the group, and in reply to excited questions she told a breathless, disjointed story. Something had grabbed at her in the dark, as she raced after the others. She had been flung to the ground, and remembered nothing else.

"It's all my fault!" exclaimed Allison, her grey eyes distressed. "If I hadn't brought you out here—"

"You can hardly reproach yourself, Miss Dare," put in Noel gravely. "You did your best to lay the trickster. I'm as much to blame as you are—for letting it go!"

His eyes were grim as he spoke. A strange, incredible theory was taking shape in his mind.

"If only we could do something—" burst out Allison.

"Perhaps we can," remarked Noel, taking out one of his professional cards. "I wonder, Miss Dare, if you and the club members would care to leave the case in my hands?"

"Why?"—the girl stared at the name on the card, a curious sparkle flashing into her grey eyes—"Noel Raymond, the detective!" she gasped.

"I say—what a stroke of luck!" exclaimed Ray. "If only you could help us, Mr. Raymond—"

"Of course he can!" declared Allison. "We've all heard of Noel Raymond!" She looked up at the young detective with an eager, challenging smile. "I shouldn't be surprised if he's solved the mystery already!"

A strange gleam crept into Noel's eyes, but he shook his head with a faint smile.

"Hardly, Miss Dare. I'm a detective, you know—not a magician. I've got to follow up clues, and all that. And to start with," he went on briskly, "I suggest we make a move from here. The ghost is hardly likely to return—and Pam still looks a bit shaken. Anywhere we could talk, over a cup of coffee?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Allison quickly. "Why didn't I think of it? We could go to the club-house—I've got the key. I'll make coffee, while you ask us questions. It's going to be exciting!"

Noel was amused by the young secretary's lively temperament. Her cheery manner had its effects on the others, and they all brightened at her suggestion.

Together they trooped across the well-kept club grounds—so different from the desolate court—and approached the smart, white club-house.

Then Ray gave a startled ejaculation.

"Allison—the door's open!"

"But—I locked it!" breathed the young secretary, her face paling. Her hand tightened on Noel's arm. "It happened like this—last time," she breathed. "Do you remember, Ray? The other night when the phantom player was seen, we found the club-house open—and some of our trophies damaged—"

Ray was already sprinting towards the open door, and Noel was close at his heels as he reached it. The young man switched on the light, and a startled ejaculation escaped his lips.

For the usually neat club-room was in a state of wild disorder. Chairs had been overturned, pictures snatched from the wall, and a glass case containing several silver trophies lay shattered on the floor.

As the startled, angry members crowded into the room, Noel stared round, his mind working quickly. Here was another mystery, almost as perplexing as the first. How was this wanton damage connected with the appearance of the phantom player?

Her eyes flashing indignantly, Allison hurried to retrieve the club trophies, and Noel bent to assist her. The young detective pursed his lips as he picked up a scrap of reddish clay from the polished floor.

He slipped it into his wallet, and rose to his feet, glancing instinctively at the shoes of the youthful members.

"Anyone got a grudge against you people?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," said Ray, staring. "Not unless"—he shrugged—"there is that new member—"

"Miriam?" breathed Allison. "Ray, we can't suspect her! Just because her brother's under a cloud—"

"She was cold-shouldered here, at first," said Ray bluntly, "and I guess she hasn't forgotten it!"

"Who is she?" inquired Noel.

"Miriam Franklin," explained Allison, a trifle reluctantly. "She joined the club about a fortnight ago—and some of the members were a bit aloof. Her brother was said to be in disgrace—though it was only a rumour."

Noel whistled softly as the name struck a chord in his memory, but he quickly changed the subject.

"Has anything been stolen?" he asked, looking round.

"Don't think so," replied Ray, "but it's a rotten trick on someone's part—and it's mighty queer it should have happened twice at the identical time that the phantom player was seen—"

Amid the excited buzz of voices, Noel heard a faint sound. His eyes turned sharply towards the window, to see a white face pressed against the glass.

In a bound he reached the door and sprang out on to the path—as a slim, dark-haired figure attempted to brush past him.

"Just a minute, young lady!" said Noel sternly, his hand closing on the girl's arm.

He drew her, unresisting, into the lighted club-room.

"Why—Miriam!" exclaimed Allison, amid a sudden ominous hush. "What are you doing here?"

Everyone was staring at the newcomer, and in spite of himself Noel felt a twinge of pity.

She looked so completely friendless as she stood there—a rather drab coat concealing her slender figure, a music-satchel in her hand.

Her dark eyes shone defiantly against her pale face, as she encountered the accusing stares. Only Allison smiled at her.

"You're the last person we expected!" she added. "I thought, for a minute, that you were the ghost!"

The girl stiffened slightly, her face flushing.

"I was on my way back from evening school at Clinsdale," she explained. "I—I teach music. I saw lights in the club-house—and wondered what had happened."

Noel was looking at the girl's plain black shoes. The heels bore a trace of red clay!

"Happened?" cut in Ray shortly. "You can see what's happened. The phantom player's been at her tricks again!"

The girl stared round the club-room, her expression bewildered. Though Noel was watching her closely, he could see no trace of guilt in her manner.

"But why—why should a ghost do this?" she breathed. "It doesn't make sense!"

"It might be spite," suggested Ray curtly.

Allison intervened with a quick smile.

"Whatever the reason, it's no use worrying! I'm just going to make coffee, and Miriam can join us. We'll leave everything to Mr. Raymond!" She flashed Noel a roguish glance. "Miriam—this is Noel Raymond, the famous detective, who's promised to lay the ghost for us!"

As Noel took the girl's hand he saw the startled gleam that flashed into her dark eyes—to vanish as quickly as it had come.

"I'm sorry if I scared you just now, Miss Franklin," he said gravely. "But we're all a bit on edge at the moment. I wonder if you could help us in our inquiry?"

"I?" breathed Miriam, staring. "How?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Noel carelessly, as Allison hurried to fetch the coffee. "You might have seen or heard something while at the club—or on the courts. Unless this phantom player's a real ghost—which none of us really believe—she must have left clues."

"That sounds thrilling!" exclaimed Allison, as she returned with the tray. "What kind of clues, Mr. Raymond? Footprints?"

"Scarcely likely, on a hard court—with rubber-soled shoes," replied Noel. "I mean something more tangible. Even a ghost can be careless, and—well, I have found something!"

A chorus of excited questions greeted him. Noel smiled grimly, watching the eager faces. He was standing with his back to the switch, and suddenly the lights were extinguished.

Someone screamed, and there was a general clamour.

"All right!" called Noel. "This is just a little experiment. If it turns out correctly, I think I shall lay the ghost!"

Something bounced softly on the rug, and rolled across the polished floor—something that glowed eerily in the dark.

Noel heard a stifled gasp close to him.

"What—what on earth—" exclaimed Ray.

There was a stealthy movement in the darkness, and Noel pounced suddenly, as the faint shadow of a slender hand closed over the ball.

But the hand was withdrawn hastily ere he could grasp it. The next moment the lights flared up, as Ray found the switch.

The onlookers were standing in a huddled group, Allison holding Miriam's arm.

"Why—it's a tennis ball!" exclaimed Allison, laughing.

"A tennis ball—used by the phantom player," said Noel, as he picked it up. "Unfortunately, my experiment didn't work—but it's proved one thing."

"What's that?" asked Ray quickly.

"That the ghost is human—and very desperate," replied Noel, slipping the ball into his pocket. "I'll make some inquiries in the village to-morrow, as I've an idea that the ghostly trickster has got a bigger game afoot! And now, if you'll excuse me, I must really be going. Can I see you home, Miss Franklin?" he added, as he saw that girl move towards the door.

"No—it's quite all right—" breathed Miriam.

"I insist!" said Noel gallantly. "These country lanes are dark—and I wouldn't answer for the phantom. Au revoir, Miss Dare!" he added, holding out his hand to the young secretary, and encountering the challenging gleam in her grey eyes. "I've an idea we'll lay the ghost—between us!"

Allison laughed, and she took his hand.

"I'm certain we shall, Mr. Raymond—with your help!" she declared coolly. "I'm going to lay a trap for the enemy to-night."

"Mind you don't take any more risks!" warned Noel, shaking his head at her. "Good-night—everyone!"

Miriam walked rather stiffly by Noel's side, clutching her music-satchel. His attempts to make conversation failed, and the girl only answered to explain in which direction her cottage lay.

At length they paused outside the gate.

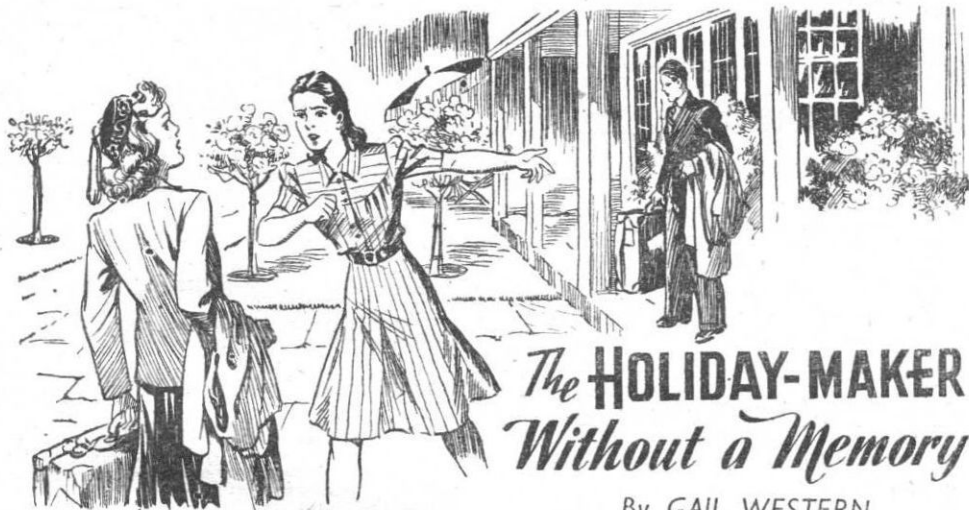
"Well—good-night, Miss Franklin!" said Noel, holding out his hand.

The girl's fingers touched his for an instant, and Noel's hand closed firmly on her wrist.

"You've been playing with fire, young lady!" he said quietly, turning her palm uppermost.

Her slender hand glowed with a faint, eerie light, as, with a broken cry, she jerked herself free and fled up the path, slamming the cottage door in Noel's face.

(Please turn to page 437.)



The HOLIDAY-MAKER Without a Memory

By GAIL WESTERN

BASIL TO THE RESCUE

DOROTHY MASTERS, who had lost her memory, was one of the guests at Southward Ho Holiday Camp. There she met Basil Kerr, whose uncle owned the camp.

Basil and Stephen Wilkins, the manager, were worried about some recent thefts of war trophies from the Manor House in the grounds of the camp.

When later Dorothy secretly visited the Manor House she found something which made it seem that she was the unknown thief, and later Esme Young, a spiteful girl who was jealous because Dorothy had been selected for the camp swimming team in preference to herself, accused her of being the culprit.

But Dorothy discovered that the real thief was a masked man signing himself "J. S." who wanted a mysterious map Dorothy had in her possession. She also discovered that at a near-by holiday camp was a photograph which might bring back her memory. This was exciting news, for on the morrow she was going there as a member of Southward Ho swimming team. And then some of Esme Young's possessions were deliberately damaged. Esme accused Dorothy, and furiously went to see the manager. Later the manager asked Dorothy to enter his office.

WHAT did the manager want with her?

That was the question which Dorothy asked herself, as she followed Stephen Wilkins into his office. His stern, abrupt manner made her feel uneasy, and her heart missed a beat as she remembered Esme Young's mocking insinuation.

Had Esme accused her of being responsible for the damage in her chalet? Was that what Mr. Wilkins wished to discuss with her?

Crossing to his desk the manager picked up a large envelope.

"I will not detain you more than a moment or two," he said. "If you will kindly sign for this money—"

"M-money?"

Dorothy stared in bewilderment.

"Yes, it represents the balance we owe you. When the original booking was made sufficient money was sent to cover a stay of two months, but as you have only been here a little time we owe—"

With an effort Dorothy got a grip on her whirling senses.

"Are you trying to tell me that you don't want me to remain here any longer?" she gasped, and incredulously she stared, hardly able to believe her own fears.

Mr. Wilkins gave an embarrassed cough.

"My own wishes hardly enter into the matter, Miss—er—Masters. But it is, I fear, necessary that you go!"

Dorothy's first reaction was one of horrified dismay. The thought of leaving the holiday camp now was unbearable. Why, her only hope of solving the strange mystery into which she had been engulfed was to stay on at Southward Ho. If she were forced to leave she might never regain her lost memory—might never discover the truth.

Then, as she saw the hypocritical expression of sympathy on Mr. Wilkins' face, her flush deepened and a wave of anger seized her.

"This is all Esme Young's doing!" she asserted. "She's been here complaining—and you believe her! But it wasn't I who spoilt her things. Archie Speller proved that definitely. The finger-print he found—"

But the man at the desk refused to let her finish. He made a scornful gesture which clearly indicated the value he placed on the boy detective's investigations.

"I am afraid I am not interested in your young friend's discoveries," he said curtly. "Nor is your innocence or guilt of this latest unhappy incident a vital factor in the matter. The point is—since you compel me to be frank—that your continued presence here endangers the well-being of the whole camp. From the very first day you arrived there has been nothing but trouble, and I am convinced that while you remain here that trouble will continue. Therefore—" he held out the envelope of money—"I must insist that you pack up and go."

For a moment Dorothy stood there, stunned by the shock of this staggering development, then she struggled desperately with the stinging tears that rose to her eyes.

"But it's so unfair!" she gasped. "I've done nothing to be ashamed of. It's not my fault I lost my memory—"

"Please, Miss Masters, I must ask you to restrain yourself," he said coldly. "You will

gain nothing by argument. Please sign that receipt."

He thrust a fountain-pen into her quivering fingers, and helplessly she scrawled her signature at the foot of the sheet of paper. Then, blinking back her tears, she faced him.

"When do you wish me to go?" she asked. "To-morrow morning, please. Immediately after breakfast."

"To-morrow," she gasped. Dorothy gave another startled gasp. To-morrow was the day of the all-important swimming contest with White Bay Holiday Camp. Basil had set his heart on winning it; was relying on her to pave the way to victory. And that was not all. Displayed somewhere in the White Bay camp was the photograph which was a vital clue in the mystery of her lost memory.

"To-morrow!" she gasped again, and there was sheer horror now in her eyes. "Oh, surely there's no need for me to leave as quickly as that. Can't I stay over the weekend?"

He shook his head, blind to the quivering note of appeal in her voice.

"It is not possible," he said brusquely, and, crossing to the door, held it open. "Good-evening, Miss Masters! I will not detain you any longer. No doubt you will wish to get on with your packing."

The envelope of money clutched in one hand, Dorothy stumbled down the steps. It was futile to argue. Only too obviously the manager's mind was made up. Yet even now she could hardly believe it.

To leave Southward Ho—where she had hoped to be so happy! To part from Basil, whose friendship she had come so much to value! To give up all hope of solving the mystery which affected her whole future!

Dazedly she walked off down the path, wondering helplessly what she should do—where she could go. As far as she knew she had no home, no friends.

"I suppose I'll have to look for lodgings somewhere," she told herself. "This money will see me through a week or two. After that—"

She broke off as she heard a cheery shout, and, looking up, she saw that quite unconsciously she had been walking down the path which led to the swimming pool. Gathered there was the rest of the team, and running to meet her was Basil himself.

"Hey, buck up!" he urged. "We're waiting to begin!"

With an effort Dorothy forced herself to speak.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, "but I'm afraid I shan't be practising to-night."

"Not practising!" he gasped. "But I'm relying on you to inspire the others. They'll slack if you aren't here to ginger them up. And we can't afford to take any chances, you know. White Bay's got some first-class swimmers."

As she saw the earnest look on his face her heart failed her. She felt herself incapable of breaking the news now. After all, there was no hurry. The least she could do for him was to see that the practice was a success, so with an effort she forced a smile to her lips.

"All right, let's get cracking!" she said, and went running down the path.

Molly, Tommy, Sadie, Barbara Carstairs, and all the rest greeted her with a cheer, and soon they were all in the water. Never had Dorothy felt less like swimming, but pluckily she smothered the ache in her heart—forced herself to forget her troubles.

Basil, from the edge of the pool, put them through their paces now criticising, now shouting a word of approval. Gradually, however, the grin on his face became permanent, and suddenly he gave a satisfied nod. "O.K.! Enough's as good as a feast," he declared. "Thanks, everybody, and congrats!

You've put up a jolly good show. If you do as well to-morrow you'll bring back the trophy."

Molly gazed up at him eagerly as she clambered out of the water.

"You really think we stand a chance?" she asked.

The boy host nodded vigorously. "A chance?" he grinned. "Golly, with Dorothy in the team we can't lose!"

And he flashed her an admiring glance. She turned away, unable to meet his eyes. What would he say when he heard the news? For a moment she was tempted to blurt it out right away, but everyone seemed so jolly, so full of high spirits that her courage failed her. Miserably she donned her raincoat, then stood waiting while Basil reminded them about the extra-special concert which had been arranged to-night.

"Don't worry; we'll be there bright and early," declared Sadie Tucker. "Come on, troops, let's get dressed! Race you to my chalet."

And her striped bathing wrap billowing out from her plump figure like a tent, she went running up the path. Whooping and laughing, the rest of the holiday-makers gave chase.

Smilingly Basil watched them go. Their high spirits delighted him. They showed that they were all enjoying themselves. Still beaming, he also prepared to depart, but Dorothy, her lip quivering, stretched out a detaining hand.

"Just a minute, please, Basil," she whispered.

He turned cheerfully, then his grin faded as he saw the look on her face. Instantly his brown eyes filled with concern.

"I say, what's up?" he asked. "There's no need to worry about the mystery now. Archie and I will soon clear it up. Come on, smile. Dull care's on the black list at Southward Ho, you know." Encouragingly he grinned at her. "Think about to-morrow's contest. That ought to cheer you up. Why, you'll be the star of the team!"

But she shook her head. The time had come to disillusion him. She hated to do it, but there was no other way.

"I—I shan't be in the team," she told him.

"Not—not in the team? I say, what's this—a leg-pull?"

Incredulously he stared, and again she shook her head, unable to prevent tears starting to her eyes.

"No, it's true. I—I shan't be eligible to represent Southward Ho. I'm—I'm leaving."

"Leaving?"

He repeated the word in a startled whisper, and dazedly he regarded her.

"Yes, I—I've got to leave directly after breakfast. Mr. Wilkins says so."

"Old Wilky! What's that old kill-joy up to now?" he demanded fiercely.

Dorothy related all that had happened, and as he listened the boy host's usually cheery face grew red with indignation.

"Turn you out of the camp?" he cried. "Great pip, but I'm not standing for that! Why, you've nowhere to go—no home, or anything. Besides, there's the contest against White Bay. We can't possibly win unless you're in the team!" In consternation he regarded her, then he put a soothing hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry, old thing," he urged. "You leave this to me. I'll fix it."

"But how?" she faltered.

"By making old Wilky see sense. He may be manager, but it's my uncle who owns the camp, and that gives me the right to butt in. Now you pop off and get dressed, then go along to the show and enjoy yourself. Wilky's gone to the village on business, but as soon as he returns I'll have it out with him."

Dorothy's heart leapt excitedly, and with glowing eyes she looked at Basil. What a grand chum he was!

"Do you really think you can persuade him to change his mind?"

He gave her shoulder a squeeze.

"You bet I do. Chfn up, old thing. Everything's going to be O.K. I promise you that. Well, I must push off now, but I'll turn up at the concert as soon as possible—and when I do come I'll have good news for you. So until then—keep smiling!"

It was impossible not to be impressed by his confidence, and it was almost happily that Dorothy watched him stride away. Perhaps, after all, she would be allowed to stay on. Perhaps, after all, she would be given the chance of realising her big ambition—to expose the man in the mask, and to solve the strange mystery which surrounded her.

WORSE AND WORSE



"GEE, what a wizard show!"

"Rather! It's a real wow!"

"Good old Basil!"

"Trust him to organise something good!"

As the velvet curtains came swishing down, and the lights in the camp theatre clicked on, there came a chorus of appreciative comments from the boys and girls in the two front rows.

Dorothy was amongst them, and even she had thoroughly enjoyed herself. Impossible in that light-hearted, jolly atmosphere to remember her fears. The concert had gone with a swing right from the start, and now at the interval everyone was in the best of spirits.

"What price a choc-ice?" cried Molly Blair, as she spotted a white-coated girl carrying a loaded tray.

"Good idea!" approved Barbara Carstairs, elegant as usual in a brand-new evening frock. "I'll stand treat."

Soon Molly, Archie, and all the rest were nibbling at the ice-cold bars, and chatting happily about to-morrow's visit to White Bay Holiday Camp, but Dorothy, her smile fading, was looking a little anxiously around the crowded theatre.

To her dismay there was no sign of Basil. But surely, she thought, he must have had his interview with Mr. Wilkins by now. Had anything gone wrong? Had—her heart missed a beat at the thought—had Basil failed to persuade the manager?

At that moment there came a sneering laugh from the exit just beyond the gangway, and, turning her head, Dorothy saw Esme Young grinning across at her from the open doorway.

"Hallo! You still here?" said the jealous girl, as if in surprise. "Should have thought you'd have been busy packing your bags."

Her malicious voice rang out clearly, and the other young holiday-makers looked up from their choc-ices to stare in amazement.

"What are you getting at now?" demanded Walter Simms.

Esme giggled.

"Mean to say you haven't heard the news? Why, our dear lost memory girl has got the order of the boot. She's been ordered to leave first thing in the morning."

"Wh-aaa-t!" There came a concerted gasp from all around, and agitatedly Molly Blair caught at Dorothy's hand. "It isn't true, is it?" she gasped. Dorothy bit her lip. She hardly knew what to say.

"I—I don't know for sure," she stammered. "Basil's in with Mr. Wilkins discussing it now. I—I may have to leave."

Unconscious of the fact that the lights had dimmed, and that the orchestra had started to play again, Molly and the rest stared in horror at Dorothy.

"But the swimming match!" exclaimed Tommy Simpson. "Why, if you're not in the team—"

"S'sh! Quiet, please!"

From the back rows came a reproving murmur, and as the curtains swished aside and the orchestra broke into a gay, haunting Hungarian air, the stricken holiday-makers were forced to lapse into silence.

On to the stage leapt a troupe of glaucous dancers, tambourines jingling and banging. But the holiday-makers had no eyes for the high-spirited dancing. Certainly Dorothy hadn't.

Worried by Basil's continued absence, Dorothy felt she had to know what had happened. She could not bear to sit on here, so with a muttered apology she groped her way to the gangway and slipped through the nearest side exit.

For a few moments she stood there in the doorway, looking across the camp grounds. Never had they seemed so lovely. The varicoloured lamps in the trees turned the gardens to fairyland. High in the sky rode a big yellow moon, gliding the near-by cliffs and turning the mirror-like sea into a golden lake.

Dorothy's eyes filled with tears as suddenly she realised that this might be her last night at the camp, and with a gulp she went stumbling down the path, heading for the office by the entrance gates. As she reached it she heard a gruff voice raised in anger. It belonged to Mr. Wilkins, and every word it uttered struck her like a hammer blow.

"I refuse to listen to another word. What I have decided stands. Whether you like it or not, that girl is going to leave the camp!"

"But—"

Desperately Basil's voice broke in, but the manager was evidently in no mood to listen.

"Not another word!" he shouted again. "Nothing will make me change my mind. I tell you that girl goes!"

Dorothy didn't wait to hear any more. Stricken, quivering, she stole away to her chalet. This was the end of all her hopes. Basil had done his best, but he had failed.

Not bothering to switch on the light, she undressed in the darkness and got into bed, and there she lay, tossing and turning and wondering what the future had in store for her now. Eventually, however, worn out by her fears and despair, she fell asleep. When she awoke the next morning the sun was streaming through the chintz-curtained window and for a moment or two she lay there drowsily, then abruptly she remembered last night's happenings.

Gloomily she got up and racked her few belongings, then took the torn map from its hiding-place under the floor. For a few minutes she surveyed it longingly, striving in vain to discover its secret, then with a sigh locked it away in her suitcase.

She would never learn the truth now, she told herself, as she paused for one last wistful look around the little chalet. Once she left the camp all hope of solving the mystery would be gone.

Suitcase in hand, she stepped outside and headed for the dining-hall, but before she reached it she heard herself hailed, and, turning, found herself confronted by Esme Young. There was a bitter, scornful look on the sallow girl's face.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied with yourself, Dorothy Masters!" she burst out.

Dorothy stared.

"I don't understand—" she began; but the other girl cut her short with a furious snort.

"Oh, stop pretending, for goodness' sake!" she ordered. "You must have heard the news. The whole camp's buzzing with it. Not content with making yourself objectionable here, you've been the means of losing us the one person whom we could rely upon for a bit of fun!"

Dorothy's heart gave a startled leap.

"Are you talking about Basil?" she gasped. Stormily Esme tossed her head.

"Of course I'm talking about him!" she

snapped. "Thanks to you, he's leaving the camp!"

Dorothy could hardly believe her ears. "I don't believe you!" she burst out. "Why should Basil leave? Why, it's fantastic! He's the life and soul of the camp. Without him the whole place would go to pot. You're making it up. This is just another of your horrid tales."

"Making it up, am I?" snorted Esme. "Right! Then just look across there, then perhaps you'll believe me."

She pointed towards the dining-hall. Slowly Dorothy turned, then she gasped.

Standing by the doorway was the boy host, but he was not dressed in his usual carefree flannels and open-necked shirt. He wore a lounge suit. In one hand he carried a folded raincoat, and in the other a large, bulging suitcase.

A FRIEND TO THE LAST



FOR a moment Dorothy stood there as if petrified; then, with a stricken cry, she went racing forward.

"Basil!" she gulped. "It isn't true, is it—about you leaving, I mean?"

His face unusually grim and strained, he nodded.

"Yes, I'll be going on the station bus with you immediately after breakfast," he said quietly.

"But why—why?" Horror-stricken, she stared at him, then her lips quivered, and the tears misted her eyes. "Is it because—because of me?" she whispered. "Is it because of what happened last night?" He hesitated, then he gave an awkward little nod.

"Well, yes, in a way," he admitted. "But you have nothing to reproach yourself with, Dorothy. You're not to blame."

"But I am! I am! Oh, I wish I'd never come here! What Mr. Wilkins said is right. I've done nothing but cause trouble."

"There, there!" Clumsily he patted her shoulder, his brown eyes dark with concern. "You mustn't talk like that, you know. After all, old Wilky can soon find another boy host."

"But he can't! Oh, you know he can't! All the boys and girls adore you. They rely on you for all their fun. Without you the camp will go to pieces!"

He gave a grim, rueful smile. "The camp will go to pieces whether I stay or not—unless Wilkins can be made to toe the line," he declared. "Last night I tried to make him see sense, but failed; so"—he shrugged—"well, I'm clearing out."

"But why? What happened?" persisted Dorothy.

Bit by bit it came out. It seemed that, in an effort to force the manager's hand, Basil had threatened to resign unless Dorothy was allowed to remain. Unfortunately, Mr. Wilkins had called his bluff. He had angrily retorted that Basil must please himself what he did, and Basil, too worked up to care, had stamped out of the office, declaring that he would leave with Dorothy next morning.

"And so here I am," said the boy host. "Unless I go cap in hand and eat humble pie—and I'm darned if I'm going to do that—my job here's finished. But don't worry," he added, as he saw how distressed Dorothy was. "I'm pretty sure old Wilky himself will do a bit of humble-pie eating when he learns I'm in earnest. After all uncle won't be exactly pleased when he learns the news, and, as you said, Wilky won't find it too easy to fill my place. Anyway, blow him! Let's get a bit of brekker before the rush starts."

And, putting his case down beside her own, he gave her one of his old cheery smiles and took her by the arm. She allowed herself to be led into the gaily decorated dining-hall.

Except for Esme Young and Barbara Cartwright, it was empty. Colonel Smithers and the other older guests always breakfasted late, but it was unusual to find the young campers absent.

With a puzzled frown, Basil looked around. "Hallo! Where is everyone?" he asked.

Barbara shook her carefully tended locks. "Search me," she said.

"I know where they are," put in Esme, with a resentful glare. "In the recreation hut—having a meeting or something. But I don't know exactly, for when I tried to get in, that beast Walter Simms slammed the door in my face."

At that moment a white-coated steward brought their cereals, so nothing more was said. Dorothy pecked at the wheat flakes, but she felt too miserable to eat. Suddenly she pushed back her chair and stumbled to her feet.

"I—I think I'll go and see if there's any sign of the bus."

In a moment Basil had risen from the table; was beside her, his brown eyes smiling understandingly.

He nodded. "Good idea. It wouldn't do to miss it. Well, cheerio, folks!" He nodded to Barbara and Esme. "Be good."

Then, with a jaunty air, as if he had not a care in the world, he led the way out of the hall, but Dorothy guessed that inwardly he was finding the strain as hard to bear as she did, and, as they stepped outside, she again caught him by the arm.

"Basil, you mustn't give up your job!" she gasped. "Think how everyone's relying on you! Think of the swimming contest this afternoon! You can't—"

She broke off, for he had given her a nudge, and, looking up, she saw Stephen Wilkins approaching. The fussy manager looked even fussier than ever, and there was an anxious look on his pompous face. He ignored Dorothy as he came up, but glowered from Basil to the boy host's luggage.

"So you actually meant it?" he exclaimed. Calmly Basil nodded.

"I'm off as soon as the bus arrives." "But I can't let you go!" burst out the manager. "It will cause a scandal. Besides, there's your uncle to think of. For goodness' sake forget what was said last night! Stop this foolery and get back to your duties. You can't desert me in the middle of the season like this!"

The boy host's jaw jutted stubbornly. "You know my terms," he said curtly. "Ask Dorothy to stay on, and I'll come back like a shot."

"No!" Angrily Mr. Wilkins dug his hands into his pockets. "I refuse to change my mind! That girl is a trouble-maker. If she stays goodness knows what will happen!"

Basil shrugged.

"Very well; if that's your last word—I'll push off," he said, and picked up the two bags. "Come along, Dorothy! Good-bye, Mr. Wilkins!"

But the manager was not listening. He was staring across the camp grounds, and suddenly his eyes bulged.

"Great Scott!" he stuttered.

Basil turned in the same direction, and suddenly he gave a gasp.

"Archie & Co!" he cried. "So that's what they were up to in the recreation hut!"

Dorothy, wondering what had come over the two, swung round; then she also gasped, hardly able to believe her own eyes.

Marching down the main drive was the most astonishing procession she had ever seen—a sight which made her blink and gape, then blink again!

There is a big surprise awaiting Dorothy and Basil—and you, too. You'll read all about it in next Friday's grand instalment.

The Merry-makers at College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

JOHNNY'S NEW CAR

"READY for the tour de luxe, Johnny?" breezed Sally Warner.

"Mustn't keep your passengers waiting!" laughed Pat Waters.

"What's that on the bonnet?" grinned Don Weston.

"Came off a door-knocker, didn't it, Johnny?"

Johnny Briggs breathed heavily. He was busy outside the garage of Roxburgh Co-ed College, putting a finishing touch to his recently-acquired new car. Johnny was justifiably proud of that smart blue sports car—a grand speedster, and hardly even dented, despite its five previous owners. He was also extremely proud, it seemed, of the crude wooden mascot he was now screwing to the bonnet.

"Door-knocker!" he snorted. "That's a bat. A very famous bat, let me tell you! It's the Vampire!"

Screwing up her eyes humorously, Sally perceived now that the object did resemble a bat on the wing.

"Vampire, eh?" Don said interestedly. "Looks like he's been through the mangle, doesn't he?"

Johnny put down his screwdriver and glared at him.

"Have you ever heard of Ron Spicer? Greatest motor ace who ever lived! His mascot was as famous as he was. A vampire bat, carved by a wizard of the Hula tribe in West Africa. That bat you see there"—and Johnny pointed eloquently to the chipped object on the bonnet—"is the find of my life. Picked up for two dollars. It's Ron Spicer's original mascot! It's the Vampire!"

A dismal cry came from Pat Waters. Sally knew what that meant! Pat was a lovable girl and a favourite with them all—they had chosen her specially to take Fay Manners' place in the car to-day, Fay being away on a visit—but Pat had one weakness. She was incurably superstitious.

"Oh, Johnny!" she wailed. "You mustn't carry that vampire mascot! It's frightfully unlucky!"

"What d'you mean?" blinked Johnny.

"There's a legend about it—"

"Legend!" exploded Johnny scornfully.

"That vampire belonged to a temple, and they say the witch-doctors put a hoodoo on it!" Pat rushed on breathlessly. "Wherever it goes, trouble goes with it! It's a mascot of ill omen. It'll bring bad luck on your car,

Johnny! It'll make everything go wrong, and keep on upsetting the works, and giving you breakdowns—"

"Hey! Dry up, Pat! You surely don't believe that piffle!" cut in Johnny, laughing exasperatedly. "Some of you people don't deserve this honour to-day. The privilege of joining me in my first spin in the new bus! Hop aboard, all of you! Where's the first call?"

"Cleaners for me—Tenth Avenue," sang Sally, springing into the front seat beside him.

"Bootmenders, me—the one on East Street, Johnny!" said Don, holding the rear door open for Pat.

But Pat hung back, her gaze fixed doubtfully on the mascot.

"Hop in—there's no oil on the cushions now!" said Johnny, misunderstanding. "The car's had a spring-cleaning inside and out from old Hickey. From the dean's chauffeur, mark you!"

"I wish he'd thrown that vampire away," Pat said nervously. "I don't like it!"

But nevertheless she climbed in, and Don, with a laugh, jumped in beside her. Johnny gave a proud toot on the klaxon. And with an echoing roar from the exhaust they drove out in state through the college gates.

"She's super!" sighed Sally deliciously.

"Goes like a bird!" enthused Don.

"You wait till I've got the feel of her!" grinned Johnny. "I'll have her running smoother than butter—I'll make her the envy of the whole school at Saturday's do!"

Mention of Saturday set all his chums thrilling. They had been invited to a motor-picnic at Bluestone Falls, on the estate of the amateur racing motorist, Clyde K. Pepper. Mr. Pepper was a friend of Johnny's uncle, owning a magnificent house, with his own private race-track in the grounds. He had invited a whole bevy of speed aces to the party, so Johnny could be pardoned now for waxing a little boastful.

"I'll have her tuned to concert pitch by Saturday. A car like this can do big things in the right hands. I shall enter her for all the high-speed races, and you'll see some of those smart guys open their eyes, Sally! They'll be surprised! I'm not bragging, but I've learnt quite a lot of tricks—"

Whrrrr-r-r—WHANG!

There was a grinding whirl—a frantic clanking of metal. The car skidded wildly. The chums were pitched from side to side.

"Ow! What the—"

"Hold tight! Something's come loose!" cried Johnny.

Desperately he clung to wheel and brakes. Sally caught a dizzy glimpse of a steel rail trailing loose under the front wheels. Then with a shivering jerk Johnny brought the car to a halt.

"It's the fender, it's the bumper!" he gasped, leaping to the road and staring incredulously. "One end of it's dropped loose! But how—"

He paused, dumbfounded. Don tumbled out to glare at the dangling bumper-rail.

"You mutt, Johnny, it wasn't screwed on properly!" he exploded.

"It was!" cried Johnny. "I went over every nut and bolt myself, and then Hickey checked up on me afterwards! He'll bear me out that there wasn't a loose screw anywhere! It's—it's uncanny!"

"O-oh!" came a startled cry from Pat. "Oh! I warned you! It's the vampire!"

"Vampire my foot—where's that screw-driver?" snorted Don.

"I'll do it," spluttered Johnny, pushing him out of the way. "All I know is that I fixed it properly before we started—"

"And I told you things would happen!" fluttered Pat. "It's the vampire! We shall have all kinds of bad luck. We—"

Sally took her gently by the arm and pushed her back to the car.

"If Johnny wants bats on the bonnet, Pat, we can't let you have bats in the belfry!" she chided her.

The car glided into Roxburgh without further incident. Don left his boots at the menders'. Sally reclaimed her frock from the cleaners—a white frock specially cleaned for Saturday's motor-picnic. She parcelled it carefully in its paper and strapped it to the luggage grid.

"We'll take a run round the byways now—out of the traffic!" smirked Johnny. "Save me the trouble of passing all the other cars, eh?" And he swung out of the town, on to the quiet country lane that bordered Sheepcote Ranch.

It was a pleasant lane, running between tall trees which dipped over the road to form a cool archway. The chums sat back in enjoyment as the car skimmed along the lane's muddy surface, till—

Ting, ting, ting, ting—

A mechanical tinkling in the rear made Sally glance behind. Then she gave an anguished cry.

"Hi! Hi, Johnny! Stop! M-my frock!"

The luggage grid had tipped from its moorings and was scraping the road, dragging her parcel with it through the mud!

In a moment Sally was out of the car, but there was her frock, stripped of its paper wrapping, its fresh snowy whiteness caked in all the mud of Sheepcote Lane!

"Ruined! Look! Oh, Johnny!" she groaned.

"That car—"

"Blaming my car!" cried Johnny—then gaped as he saw the cause of the mishap. "G-golly! That luggage grid's gone haywire! How—"

"That grid's got a broken strap—that's why!" Don told him. "You ought to have known that it wouldn't hold, Johnny!"

"I tell you it was all right when we started off!" Johnny fumed. "Everything was perfect! Hickey and I both went over every part and there wasn't a fault anywhere!"

"Looks like it!" groaned Sally.

"But—oh, I give up! Let's get on!" and furiously Johnny plomped himself down in the driving-seat. "And don't look at me like that, Pat Waters. Your silly hoodoo what's-it has got nothing to do with it!"

For Pat was eyeing him, an "I-told-you-so" look on her face.

The drive continued with Sally wondering, exasperatedly, what she was going to wear on Saturday. Several times the car swerved rather alarmingly. Once or twice a passing ranchman yelled at Johnny, who seemed to be a bit shaky on his steering. Then—

"Look out, Johnny!" came a sudden cry from Don.

But Johnny had seen that cyclist all right. It was Hickey, the dean's chauffeur. Johnny slowed down and was about to wave to him. Perhaps Hickey's idea was to wave back. But he wobbled. And then the car wobbled. And then—

Biff! Like fate the wing hit the bike—gently, but surely, and over went Hickey into the ditch!

"Gee, Hickey, I'm sorry!" And Johnny was leaping from the car to help him up. "Sorry!" he gasped. "Are you hurt, old man?"

All the chums panted with relief as they saw Hickey hop out of the ditch, a bit dirty, but grinning reassuringly.

"I'm all right, Mr. Briggs!" he said, and added stoutly: "My fault, anyway!"

"M-my steering went a bit loose!" Johnny explained.

"Couldn't have done! It was my bike skidded!" declared Hickey, brushing himself down. "Your steering's rockproof!"

"But it did wobble a bit, didn't it, Johnny?" put in Sally, who had felt the car swerve, and realised that the mishap might have been serious. "You noticed it before?"

"Not on that car, Miss Sally!" maintained Hickey. "She's a beautiful bit of work in every joint, and her steering's as sound as a bell!"

"Then that settles it!" Pat burst in wildly. "It's uncanny—it's the hoodoo working. Hickey might have been killed. We might all have been killed. You've got to throw that vampire away, Johnny! Burn it before it brings any more bad luck!"

Hickey gaped from Pat to Johnny.

"What's she mean, Mr. Briggs?"

"Nothing! Touch of the sun, I guess!" snorted Johnny, glaring at Pat.

"Nothing of the sort!" Pat cried, her superstition fired now to fever-pitch. "We've had three warnings, each worse than the other. We don't know what might happen next. You're mad to tempt fate, Johnny. You won't get me in the car again while you're carrying that vampire! I'm going to walk!"

"Walk, then—I'm fed up with this bunk!" fumed Johnny.

"Pat, you're not serious?" cried Sally.

But Pat was deadly serious. She had left them and was hurrying off across the fields, without even a backward glance.

"Would you believe it!" gasped Hickey, gazing after her, flabbergasted.

The chums drove on to an outlying farmhouse for iced coffee and corncakes. It was a lucky break. The boys bought a basket of apples to take away. The farmer's wife took charge of Sally's white frock, and promised she'd have it spotless as snow for Saturday. Back they bowed to coll. in high spirits.

Wa. it a cryptic signal from Frost, the gate-keeper, which confused Johnny? Or was it the sudden appearance of Professor Grittal, hovering darkly by the lodge, which threw Johnny's steering out of balance?

He saw Mr. Grittal step sharply into his path. And he saw at the same moment a wheelbarrow left at the verge by the gardener.

Crash! Johnny hit the wheelbarrow full amidships, and a shower of weeds and clippings descended in a cascade upon Mr. Grittal.

"Briggs!" he thundered. "Briggs, I've been waiting for you!"

Then it was his own fault, wasn't it? the chums thought in silent dour.

"No one's safe with a lunatic like you on the road!" stormed Mr. Grittal. "I know all about it. Someone phoned the college to say that a man was knocked off his bike, and nearly killed, by one of our boys driving a car dangerously in Sheepcote Lane! I might have known it was you, Briggs! I shall speak to the dean, and I shall ask him to forbid you ever to drive again!"

THE BIG TEST



"I—I— Me, sir?" Johnny climbed indignantly from the car and stared at Mr. Grittall. "Someone phoned about me? Driving d-dangerously? Me, sir?" "Someone's making trouble over nothing, sir!" Sally defended him indignantly.

"Just a little spot of bad luck!" echoed Don, with heat.

"Bad driving, you mean! Sheer reckless driving!" cried Mr. Grittall, and swept his hand angrily towards the upturned wheelbarrow. "Even that object is not safe in your path, Briggs! Far less an unfortunate cyclist!"

"It wasn't worth calling an accident, sir!" spluttered Johnny. "It was only Hickey—"

"Indeed?" Mr. Grittall's irony was crushing. "Is the dean's chauffeur not entitled to the same consideration as other people?"

"What Johnny means, sir, is that it was nothing at all—Hickey himself only laughed!" Sally hastened to explain. "The wing grazed his back wheel and pushed him into the ditch, and he was up again before you could blink. He said himself that he skidded and it wasn't Johnny's fault. He—"

"There was a witness—and the witness was extremely alarmed. People do not ring up the college and complain without grave cause!" interrupted Mr. Grittall. "Briggs has proved himself a disgracefully incompetent driver, and I shall report this to the dean directly he returns!"

Johnny was fuming as he drove on to the garage. If there was one thing he prided himself on more than another, it was his driving. And he had been called incompetent! Unsafe! Unfit even to handle a car! His feelings exploded when he tried to express them to his chums. The threat of being reported for incompetence was only insult added to injury.

"If I don't know how to drive, I'd like to know who does!" he raged.

Sally and Don were still trying to mollify him when Hickey cycled back into the garage-yard. He listened blankly to what had happened.

"Why, it was your slick driving that saved even the paint being scratched off my bike, Mr. Briggs—only doesn't it show how people will exaggerate and make mountains out of molehills!" he gasped. "I wonder who could have rung up?"

"Just some busybody!" Sally scorned. "Someone with a grudge against our chaps, maybe."

"Why didn't he tackle me? I didn't even see anyone!" fumed Johnny.

He was still fuming when the chums adjourned to the cafeteria. Nat Piggot, of the rival K House, and his chums were lounging by the counter; and Piggot didn't miss this chance of leg-pulling when he heard what was bothering Johnny.

"I've seen you drive, Briggs, and I say it was the cyclist's fault if he got bowled over!" he declared solemnly.

"Of course it was!" said Johnny.

"Other drivers carry a hawk or an eagle as their sign," said Piggot, winking at his cronies, "but Briggs carries a bat. He couldn't put it fairer than that, could he? Blind as a bat!"

The hoot of laughter that went up from Piggot & Co. was interrupted by Pat Waters. She had just returned by bus with a crowd of other co-eds.

"It's nothing to laugh at, Nat Piggot!" she said, coming breathlessly into the cafeteria. "That bat was bewitched by hoodoo men, and Johnny'll have nothing but bad luck till he gets rid of it!"

"Stop her, somebody! We've had to listen to this nonsense all the way back on the bus!" scoffed Elsie Pymm.

"It isn't bunk—is it, Sally?" pleaded Pat excitedly. "You were in the car—you saw the way it brought one calamity after another?"

"Well, it's brought another one now!" Sally said with a rueful grin. "Tell her, Johnny!"

Pat listened with curious nervousness while Johnny told her of that mischievous phone call and Mr. Grittall's threat to report him.

"There! I told you so! One trouble following another, and so it'll go on in an endless chain!" she burst out with a kind of lugubrious triumph. "There'll be no peace while you keep that vampire, Johnny! Can't you see how uncannily it works? First it causes the accident, then it makes someone telephone to the coll., then it starts Mr. Grittall off on the war-path! I was only telling the others just now—"

"Wait a moment!" Elsie Pymm interrupted in a queer voice.

She had been ordering herself some syrup waffles from Mrs. Barwell, but now she came slowly across to Pat.

"Never mind the superstitious twaddle you were telling us!" she said narrowly. "What were you doing at the bus-stop when we came along, Pat Waters? I saw you coming out of the phone kiosk!"

"I—" Pat started. "I was phoning for a taxi!"

"Rot!" cried Elsie. "You were phoning the coll.! It was you who let on to Grittall!"

"I didn't!" Pat protested, her cheeks crimsoning. "I didn't know the time; I thought I'd missed the bus, and I was ringing for a taxi—"

"You were ringing the coll.!" Elsie burst in with scorn. "You've got your silly head stuffed with superstition about Johnny Briggs' mascot, and you knew everyone would laugh at you, the same as he did, so you tried to prove the thing was unlucky by sneaking about him on the sly and getting him into trouble with Grittall."

"I didn't!" Pat cried wildly.

"Are you sure, Pat?" Johnny asked in dubious dismay.

"Pat wouldn't do a thing like that—of course she wouldn't!" Sally warmly retorted.

But Elsie Pymm & Co. continued to jeer and accuse her—and the effect was to make Pat more fanatical than ever.

"I had nothing to do with it—I tell you it was the hoodoo working!" she expostulated, almost in tears. "Everywhere that vampire goes it'll bring trouble. It's in the legend—I've got a book all about it. There'll be worse things happening. I've warned you. You'll see! They say the thing mocks before it strikes, and it's been heard to set up a horrible eerie wailing—"

Zzzzzwwweeeeee!

An uncanny wall screeched through the college almost before the words were out of her mouth! Everyone gaped, electrified. It came from the direction of the garage!

With a gasp Johnny bounded for the door, everyone rushing on his heels. That strident wailing was ceaseless and ear-splitting. The dean, Mr. Grittall, and half the college fraternity came hurrying to the scene as Johnny burst into the garage yard.

"Briggs, is that your car again? Mr. Grittall has been telling me—" But the dean couldn't make his voice heard for the din.

Sally and Don wrenched open the garage door and Johnny charged inside.

There stood his car jammed against the back wall. It had rolled against a shelf, bringing a box of plants down, and that box had fallen on top of the klaxon horn, depressing the button and keeping it depressed.

"J-just a little mishap, sir!" gasped Johnny, grabbing up the box and thereby silencing the screech. "That's all right—"

"All right?" thundered Mr. Grittall. They were his own plants in the box, and they were shaken out of recognition. "I'll have you know, Briggs, that an idiot like you is no more capable of controlling a car than—"

"Listen to me, Briggs!" And the dean sternly interrupted, beckoning his chauffeur to his

side. "I have heard what happened this afternoon—I have spoken both to Mr. Grittall and to Hickey—and I have decided that you must be given a proper driving test, to ascertain whether you are capable of managing a car!" Johnny stiffened.

"Hickey will give you a driving test tomorrow, and he will report to me whether or not you are capable!" the dean said adamantly. "A car is too dangerous a thing to be in the hands of a duffer, Briggs. I shall rely upon my chauffeur's judgment. That is all!" And the dean swept out.

Roxburgh College heard more about Johnny's driving that evening than they'd ever heard before—and they heard it from Johnny's own indignant lips. As for the morrow's test, Hickey didn't have to arrange it. Johnny arranged it himself. His pride had received a propitious challenge. It was more than a mere "test" he would put up before the college—it was going to be a solo exhibition.

He spent the lunch break, next day, converting the campus into a kind of obstacle course. With the aid of garden rollers and suchlike objects, he mapped out a course that bristled with hairpin bends, twists and turns, and all the thrills of a race-track.

"You don't need any test from me, Mr. Briggs!" said Hickey with admiration. "Well, I mean to say, you could teach me to drive, more likely!"

Pat Waters followed these preparations with superstitious fear. She begged and pleaded with Johnny to get rid of the luckless vampire and she wrung her hands when he scorned even to answer. She trailed after him pathetically when he broke off at last for lunch.

"I shall be afraid for you if you don't take some precaution, Johnny!" she said desperately. "My book says that if you carry something white belonging to a tall dark man—"

"If I do you can call me crackers!" grinned Johnny. "You don't know the strain it costs me to be patient with you, Pat! Now scam!"

Prompt at three, the whole college turned out in force to witness Johnny's driving prowess.

Sally and Don took up proud positions on the crowded path. The dean came out into his garden with Mr. Grittall and watched from over the hedge. Hickey fetched the car from the garage, placing it at the starting-point of the miniature course—and with something almost like a bow, Johnny got into the driving-seat.

He revved up the engine—the wooden bat vibrated on the bonnet—in went the clutch, and he was off.

Straight as an arrow Johnny drove, and it was no mean feat, for he was driving between a double row of tin cans, and clearing each one by the breadth of a hair. Sally and Don gave him a rousing cheer. It was echoed by all J House. Johnny put on speed to show them that they'd seen nothing yet.

This was only the first hazard. At the end of the line of cans came a narrow archway, fashioned with deckchairs, then an acute hairpin bend flanked by the garden-roller.

Johnny whizzed round that bend. But that wasn't all. He went on whizzing. Sally's eyes widened. He was whizzing round and round in circles like a teetotum! Johnny was clinging like a feverish limpet to the wheel and seemed to be trying to straighten out.

Straighten out he did—suddenly! So suddenly, that even Johnny didn't seem prepared for it. The car shot forward across the campus, the bat dancing on its bonnet. Then, as he struggled frantically with the wheel, it suddenly turned on its tracks. Next thing it did was to plunge into reverse. Stern first, it went shooting backwards across the campus, straight for the dean's garden!

"Look out, sir!" Don cried warningly. The dean and Mr. Grittall just had time to jump back, when—

Biff! And Johnny's car butted backwards

into the hedge, and finished up with a snort against the sundial.

Johnny was tumbling dazedly from the car as his chums went rushing to him.

"Th-the steering went wrong, sir!" he spluttered as the irate dean stormed up, his face flushed with anger.

"Never again, Briggs—never will I permit you to drive!" he glared.

"But, sir," Sally heard herself interposing wildly, Don echoing her. "Sir, Johnny's a grand driver really, and he'll be needing the car on Saturday because we're all invited to a motor-picnic at Bluestone Falls, and—"

But the stern voice of the dean crushed that hope as utterly and finally as the car had crushed his hedge.

"Never, I say! Never! Briggs has proved himself an utterly irresponsible lunatic, and that car shall be locked in the garage until he has found a buyer for it. I will never under any circumstances permit him to drive again!"

THE TALISMAN



"BUT I tell you, sir—" Johnny pleaded wildly.

"That will do!" thundered Mr. Grittall.

Leaving Hickey to put the car away, Sally and Don hurried him feverishly off to the Merry-makers' Club. They were joined there by the flabbergasted mass

of J. House members.

"What happened, Johnny?" asked Harry Kendrick.

"I don't know—the steering gave out on me!" panted Johnny. "One moment she was going fine, next moment she acted like she was bewitched—"

"I told you, Johnny!" came an anguished cry from Pat Waters. "I knew everything would go wrong if you carried that vampire!"

Every eye swung upon her, then Elsie Pymm burst out accusingly:

"You knew what? You fixed it, that's what you mean, Pat Waters! You did it to try to bolster up your silly superstition!"

Pat fell back, her face paling.

"I—I didn't! I d-don't know what you mean—"

"You're caught out this time!" others shouted. "You've been saying all along that disaster would happen, and you took care to see that it did happen, Pat Waters!"

"Did you touch the car, Pat?" Johnny asked her quietly. "Have you been anywhere near it?"

"I—I did go near it, but I didn't touch it!" Pat denied breathlessly. "I was only g-going to take that horrid vampire off it, b-but I hadn't the nerve—"

"So you fiddled with the car instead!" accused Elsie Pymm.

"Of course she did!" cried Lena Tooting. "Look at the way she's trembling!" She deliberately let Johnny Briggs down!

"Shame!" And the outcry from everybody reduced Pat now to tears.

Johnny looked mutely at Sally. He was fond of Pat, and the only thing he could think was that she had acted foolishly, because she was in genuine terror of the vampire, for his sake as well as her own, and had felt that this was the only way to force him to get rid of it.

Sally didn't know what to think. She shrank from distrusting Pat's word. But it came upon her forcibly that the car had been deliberately tampered with, and it meant the end of Johnny's driving, the end of their coveted motor-picnic on Saturday—unless something could be done about it!

With a gleam in her eyes Sally drifted out of the clubhouse. Avoiding the dean's quarters, she made her way by a circuitous route to the garage. She was going to take a close look at Johnny's car. Something had gone uncannily wrong with it, and she was going to examine

it for more solid evidence than could be attributed to a wooden effigy.

Entering the garage door, she clambered into the driving-seat of Johnny's car. The first thing she noticed was that the wheel turned loose in her hand. The next thing she noticed was that a screw had been removed, so that the wheel was no longer engaged with the steering-rod!

Sally's pulses hammered. That screw couldn't have removed itself! Who could have done it? The guilty hand must surely have left some telltale mark, some scrap of evidence here? Who—

Click! And the door softly closed upon her, plunging the garage into sudden darkness.

Sally started up with a gasp—just in time to hear the key turn in the outer door, locking her in.

PAT WATERS stole tremulously across the garage yard.

Her nerve always failed her when she came here.

Some time, if only she dared, she would snatch that fearsome vampire from Johnny's car, and she would burn it, between five bricks, with clover-leaves beneath it and julep sprinkled over it, just as the book said.

But meanwhile, until the monstrous thing was exorcised, how could she thwart its malevolent spell?

So desperately she had tried to warn Johnny, tried to bring home his danger to him, and it had been no use. He wouldn't listen to her. No one would listen. They turned and blamed her instead. They couldn't help it. It was all part of the chain of trouble the vampire was weaving.

There was only one way to ward off its insidious spell. That was for Johnny to carry a special kind of charm—a talisman—and the book said it must be a white object belonging to a tall dark man. But how was she to get that white object?

Pat gazed fearfully towards the dean's house.

She saw Hickey's lanky figure hurrying there now. And suddenly it struck her that Hickey was dark! Dark, and certainly tall! Why, Hickey would serve her purpose! And here was his jacket, hanging on the knob of one of the garage doors! Was there a white handkerchief she could borrow from his pocket?

Without further thought, Pat dived her hand into Hickey's pocket, but the handkerchief she drew out was a bilious green. With a pang of dismay she tried the next pocket. She drew out a sheet of notepaper. It was a letter. But it was white! A white object belonging to a tall dark man!

Pat rushed away with it without giving herself time to hesitate—rushed straight back to the Merry-makers' Club, to Johnny.

"Johnny, I don't care what you say, you've got to keep this and never be without it!" she panted, thrusting the letter excitedly into his hand. "It's a talisman—it's your only hope of warding off any more ill-luck from the vampire!"

"Wh-what?" Johnny gaped stupidly at the letter.

"It belonged to a tall dark man—it belonged to Hickey. I borrowed it from his pocket without asking!" quavered Pat. "I know it sounds awful, but I had to do it, or it would have been more awful still. It's the only thing to protect you!"

"Gee!" gasped Johnny, who was staring at that letter now with his eyes popping out of his head.

"Briggs!" cried a stern voice from the doorway.

Johnny looked up as if in a trance. He saw the dean standing there, with Hickey at his elbow.

"Briggs, I am told that an attempt has been made to defy my orders!" cried the dean. "Someone has gone to the garage and has tried to move that car of yours!"

"It was Miss Warner, sir!" Hickey said gloomily. "I felt it was my duty to report it, seeing as Miss Warner might have driven the car away somewhere and hidden it, letting me in for the blame. So I locked her in and came straight and told you, sir!"

"I should think so!" exclaimed the dean. "Come, Briggs! I shall demand an explanation from Miss Warner—and from you!"

"I think it can be explained, sir!" Johnny said in a queer, suppressed voice.

He and Don exchanged excited whispers as they accompanied the dean to the garage. Pat followed, fearing a fresh calamity.

"Miss Warner!" sang out Hickey, as he grimly unlocked the garage door. "You know why I locked you in, and you know you had no good right to come in here!"

"But you don't know what Miss Warner was looking for!" echoed Johnny swiftly. "She didn't find it, Hickey—but Pat Waters did!" And he thrust that letter into Sally's hand.

Hickey gave one look at that letter and wilted.

It didn't take Sally a second to grasp the meaning of that letter which Hickey's friend had written to him:

"At all costs you must keep young Briggs and his friends away from Bluestone Falls on Saturday. If they see me working in Mr. Pepper's house as butler, the game is up. They bowled me out before, and they will recognise me at once as Flash Luke—"

"Miss Warner!" came the sharp voice of Mr. Grittal, who had hurried to the scene. "The dean is waiting for an explanation!"

Sally's eyes flickered grimly to the livid Hickey, and she handed his letter to the dean. "It means, sir," she said quietly, "that if we don't go to the motor-picnic on Saturday, there's going to be a wholesale jewel robbery there—carried out on the other guests by a friend of Hickey's!"

"What?" gasped the dean, and stared down incredulously at the letter in his hand.

"It's not true, sir. I—"

With a gesture the dean silenced him, and Hickey drew back, glancing uneasily around for some way of escape. But not a chance. The chums had closed in around him.

The dean was perusing the letter, his brow darkening, his lips pursed.

At last he looked up. Very deliberately he folded the letter and turned to Hickey.

"Hickey," he said in icy tones, "you will accompany me to my study. Then—then you can pack your bags and go."

"But, sir—"

"That is enough!" And the dean turned to the chums.

"I must apologise, Briggs. If it hadn't been for Miss Waters finding this letter, serious trouble might have arisen—"

"And what about my car, sir—can I drive —" Johnny faltered to a stop.

"Of course, Briggs. And I hope you enjoy yourselves next Saturday!" the dean beamed.

IT was Pat who had turned Johnny's luck after all, and it was a slap-up feast the chums gave her in the cafeteria that evening. Even Elsie Pym admitted, humbly, that she had wronged her. It was Hickey who had phoned that sly message to the coll., just as it was Hickey who had deliberately wrought all the other calamities. Yet it was no use trying to convince the superstitious Pat that her fears had all been false. She still insisted that Johnny's mascot was harmful, despite the fact that he won three races at Saturday's motor-picnic, and all of them enjoyed an unbroken chain of good luck and had a rollicking good time.

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will contain another grand story featuring the ever-popular Sally & Co



GIRL RIDER of the ROCKIES

WYNNE DELAYS THE SHERIFF

WYNNE COMPTON, who lived with her uncle at Silvertops Ranch, hoped to become a champion horse-rider. Her magnificent horse, Wonderlad, once belonged to Brock Barton, whose father owned the neighbouring V.B. Ranch.

Brock hated Wynne's uncle, declaring that he was responsible for his father being thrown into prison as an outlaw. Nevertheless, Wynne, liking Brock and wanting to help him, persuaded him to come to the ranch to train Wonderlad for the qualifying steeplechase in the Rocky Mountains Championship, to win which was her big ambition. But her uncle, John Morton, and others on the ranch became suspicious that Brock was up to no good.

Important papers were stolen from her uncle's office. Brock was suspected of the theft. Wynne, however, believed that the manager of the ranch, Mack Glenthorne, and his daughter, Irma, might be responsible, and were plotting against Brock.

On the morning of the big steeplechase, Brock traced a Redskin who could guide him to a place called Laughing Falls, where he hoped to find proof of his father's innocence. Just after the start of the race Wynne saw the Redskin go off with the Glenthornes. Startled by the sight, Wynne lost control of her mount for a moment, and found herself lying last.

"FOR Brock, Wonderlad! For Brock! For Brock!"

Wynne kept on repeating those words as desperately she bent over the neck of her flying mount. She knew now that it was hopeless to think of winning the race, but could she finish in the first three?

That also seemed hopeless at the moment. With three fences to go, and the nearest horse ten lengths ahead, what chance had she?

But she must get a place. She must—must! Otherwise she could not qualify for the next race which would carry her on into the Rocky Mountains Trophy Race. Her whole heart was set on that. It was the main, the biggest ambition of her life. On, Wonderlad!

But Wonderlad was responding. Was it the magic name of Brock that spurred him to the effort he was making now? Every muscle

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

strained to give its utmost, he pounded the ground with flying hoofs.

Wynne, with the reins gripped tightly in her clenching palms, with her eyes fixed on the obstacle ahead, saw that he was closing the gap between herself and the rearmost runner. Then came the fence.

"Wonderlad!" she breathed.

She did not attempt even to lift him this time. Brock's advice was ringing in her ears: "Let him ride free. Give him his head." She knew in this moment that Wonderlad had his own ideas about running the race, and she allowed him to become master.

She held her breath as she felt herself sailing through space, and braced herself as the landing came—with only the slightest shock and check. And from the crowded rocks around the course came a wondering murmur.

Nobody knew, of course, why Wonderlad had taken the third fence so badly. They had been amazed to see the horse which had appeared to have every chance of winning the race so unexpectedly become uncontrolled and drop behind. But now here he was again, making them rub their eyes, making them gasp.

For Wonderlad, soaring over the fence, had left one of his rivals behind. Now he was up with the next—now was passing—now approaching the next fence. And again—they gasped and unbelievably stared—he was over it, and was thundering on at amazing speed.

There were five horses in the race now, Wonderlad the last. There was one remaining obstacle to be negotiated—the tallest and most difficult, for behind it was an unseen ditch.

Before they had reached the fence Wonderlad had passed his nearest rival; was straining every gallant nerve to catch up with the fourth horse. He and the fourth went over the fence, and—crash went No. 4 right into the ditch. Now in front of him were the other three.

Three! Wynne's heart began to lift in hope. Could she do it! Could she do it?

With less than two hundred yards to go, could she overtake the last competitor and finish with the leaders.

"For Brock! For Brock!" she whispered.

She felt the quiver that went right through Wonderlad's magnificent frame. And, breathless as was the speed at which he was traveling, she now became aware that it had increased; that he was after No. 3; that he was catching up with No. 3; that now he was abreast with No. 3.

She heard, as from a distance, the shout of wonder that came from the crowd. She saw the winning-post ahead; saw, as in a blur, the thundering form of No. 3 racing alongside her; felt herself drawing away. Then—

"What a race!" she heard a roaring voice.

"Thought Wonderlad was out of it!"

"Wonderlad's third!"

Third! Until that moment Wynne had been hardly conscious that they had passed the winning-post. But now Wonderlad, quivering and panting, was slowing up.

Then, bursting out of the crowd, she saw Brock—Brock, hatless and breathless, running on to the course.

He came up, caught the reins, and halted Wonderlad, patting his neck. Then he looked up.

"What went wrong at the third fence? It seemed—"

Wynne slipped quickly from the saddle. She was panting herself, still only half-appreciating the near victory she had snatched from the jaws of defeat. But swiftly in her mind was the memory of what she had seen; the necessity for swift urgency. She gasped out:

"Brock, I was put off because I saw Glenthorne—and Irma—and Red Moose! And I'm sure the Glenthornes bribed Red Moose to take them to Laughing Falls, and they've gone; went along towards the Wannalong Trail. They're after the secret, Brock. They—"

She saw the startled look that leapt into his eyes; saw for a moment his face set granite hard, and his eyes flash as though lit by a steel spark.

"Glenthorne?" he repeated. "He's after the secret? Where does your uncle come in?"

"He doesn't come in. Oh, Brock, can't you believe—even now? Uncle's got nothing to do with this. You're just misjudging him. This is Glenthorne's plot, pure and simple—"

"O.K." He shrugged, but his face was still hard. "Keep your faith, Wynne. Perhaps, if you weren't so wrong, I'd like you for it. You can't tell me that Glenthorne's doing this without orders. How long did they go, you say? Ten minutes?"

"About that. But, Brock—"

"I'll be after them," he said briefly, and swiftly turned.

Abruptly he commenced to run, heading for Ranger, who, a hundred yards away in the next field, was tethered to a tree all by himself. As he did so, John Morton and the sheriff came up, leading their horses.

"Good work, Wynne, though I guess you ought to have won," her uncle said. "But"—he looked round—"where's Brock? The sheriff wants to question him."

"Question—Brock?" Wynne faltered.

"About those papers that disappeared."

Wynne looked around. Brock, for the moment had disappeared in a fold of the ground. But she knew that he would reappear the next minute; would then be spotted and hauled back. And Brock mustn't be delayed now. Every minute—every second was vital if he were to catch up with Mack Glenthorne.

It was Wonderlad's reins still in her hand which inspired the idea. The sheriff's horse was jerking its head impatiently. A loose loop of rein swung towards her, and in an instant Wynne had caught at it; had quickly passed her own reins through it, neatly looping them together.

"Haven't you seen him?" asked the sheriff.

"Seen him? Who—Brock? Why, yes, of course!" Wynne was desperate now to gain every second of time by any delaying action. "I saw him before the race."

"And you saw him after the race!" the sheriff grunted. "We spotted him—from halfway along the course—rushing out to meet you—"

"There he is!" her uncle cried suddenly. "He, unlike the sheriff, had been gazing around him, and had just spotted Brock astride Ranger. "Hi, Brock! Brock!"

The sheriff jumped round. He saw, too. Wynne's heart began to thud as he let out an exasperated exclamation, as he, too, shouted.

But Brock, urging Ranger into a full-stretch gallop, took no notice. Heading for a clump of trees near by, he swept into them and vanished from sight.

"Come on! After him!" the sheriff roared.

He spurred forward. His horse jumped in response. But he only jumped a pace. The next he pulled up with a jerk at the end of the reins Wynne had so cunningly entwined with that of Wonderlad's.

Wonderlad's reaction was natural—if a little alarming. He gave a snort of protest, reared up, and then jerked round crashing into John Morton's mount and throwing all three horses into a confused mix-up.

It was two minutes before order was restored, but in that two minutes Brock had probably got a half-mile start. The sheriff choked.

"Miss Wynne, I guess you did that on purpose!"

"Me?" cried Wynne. "Oh, sheriff—"

"You did it on purpose—yes!" her uncle snapped. He, too, had seen through the ruse, and his face was very angry now. "You knew Brock was getting away. You wanted him to get away, and I guess you've succeeded. Why did I ever let you have anything to do with that lad?" he added bitterly. "Why ever did I think of inviting him to my ranch? I guess I'm just a fool!"

"Ay. And I guess there're two of us!" the sheriff said. "And, while we're confessing it, that young thief is a mile along the trail. Come on!"

He set spurs to his horse. John Morton followed him.

For one second Wynne stood, undecided. Then, abruptly making up her mind, she leapt into Wonderlad's saddle, and, with a "Good boy, then!" set off in the wake of the sheriff and her uncle. Wonderlad, though tired by his race, seemed to understand that all this was on Brock's behalf and, with a willing eagerness, responded.

She was not far behind her uncle and the sheriff when they reached the clump of trees. Beyond that a sandy trail pointed plainly to the direction Brock had taken. They followed it, Wynne keeping back, in the hope that she wouldn't be noticed.

Finally, the single trail merged into the larger, more confused trail of the Wannalong.

Ahead John Morton and the sheriff were galloping. It was easy enough for Wynne to keep them in sight on the well-trained Wonderlad. Grimly they went on—mile after mile—until, entering the rocky foothills of the mountains, the gallop became a trot, the trot often slowing to a walk owing to the boulder-strewn nature of the ground.

Suddenly she heard the sheriff call out something; saw him urge his horse forward, her uncle on his heels.

"Oh, gosh, now what have they spotted?"

Wynne murmured.

She urged Wonderlad to a faster speed. Then she saw, and her eyes widened as she took in the scene.

A hundred yards ahead lay Mack Glenthorne, the manager, with his daughter Irma on one knee, beside him, bathing a wound in his head. To one side their horses stood quietly cropping the tufts of grass that sprouted from the rock.

"Oh, goodness, what's happened now?"

Wynne wondered.

She saw her uncle and the sheriff dismount. Swiftly she pushed forward. She was just

in time to hear Irma's angry reply as the sheriff put a question to her.

"Who did it?" she cried. "Who do you think did it? Brock Barton, of course. He attacked my father because my father tried to get back from him the papers he stole from Mr. Morton here."

THE CUNNING OF IRMA



"THAT'S A lie!" Wynne cried ringingly.

The words were out of her mouth almost before she was aware that she had uttered them. But she was reckless now. Passionately aroused in her defence of the boy she trusted, she was in no mood to think

what she said.

She sensed immediately a fresh plot on the part of Irma and her father. But her uncle wheeled, his face like thunder.

"Wynne," he barked, "where did you spring from?"

"I followed you," she said. "I thought—"

"I know it," her uncle said. "You thought that as we were on the track of Brock Barton you might be able to help him some more, eh? Have you no sense of loyalty or respect? But stand aside! We'll have the low-down on this! Come on, Irma! What happened?"

Irma stood upright. Mack Glenthorne, with a sigh, fell back and closed his eyes. If he was acting, he was acting well, Wynne thought.

"We saw Brock—with the papers," Irma said. "We saw him galloping away on Ranger. Well, naturally, we gave chase—"

"Yeah, go on!"

"Father, galloping ahead of me, caught him up here," Irma continued. "He forced him to dismount. There was a struggle; then father snatched the papers, and Brock—well, Brock just caught up a stone and crashed it over his head. As father went down Brock snatched at the papers in his hand—"

"What a fib!" Wynne quivered. "What a trumped up story!"

"Be quiet, Wynne!" her uncle snapped.

"Then I rode up," continued Irma, with a furious look at Wynne. "Just as father collapsed. But even though he was collapsing he still kept the other half in his possession. And if you want proof of that"—she thrust her hand into her dress and brought out a sheaf of documents torn across—"here it is."

The sheriff stood still, his lips pressed thinly together. Slowly John Morton took the torn papers, his face working as he saw the mutilated results of his labours of the last week.

The sheriff drew a deep, grim breath.

"This settles it, I guess," he growled. "I'd hoped for better things from Brock. I thought he was a decent lad—at heart. But like father like son, they say, and I guess that's right in this case. Morton, you can look after your manager, I guess. I'm going back to Snakeriver and put the Mounties on the job. And when they bring Brock in—"

"Then?" John Morton asked.

"Then I guess he'll be charged with—banditry. From this moment Brock Barton's on the black list as an outlaw—"

"No!" Wynne cried.

The sheriff growled.

"And maybe, young lady, you'd better watch your step, too," he said sourly. "It ain't wise to help an outlaw."

He turned to his horse as he said that. Wynne stared at him, shaken, feeling suddenly hemmed in by danger. Brock was to be declared an outlaw. Brock, like his father, was to be hunted down and sent to gaol, while she—she stood in danger of being dubbed his accomplice.

But that was absurd, of course. The sheriff was saying that only to try to scare her. Nevertheless, she saw that it gave Irma a thought; for suddenly she caught the swift, spiteful gleam in the other girl's eyes, and knew that Irma had stored that threat for further use.

As the sheriff rode off and Irma turned again to her father, John Morton looked grimly at his niece.

"Well, I guess that's that," he said heavily. "We know where we stand now. Brock's an outlaw, like his father, and I can't say I'm sorry. I reckon this is where you call time to your friendship with that young scoundrel, Wynne."

Wynne's chin came up.

"Brock isn't a scoundrel, and if you mean I'm going to break with him because of this"—she flung a scornful glance at Irma and Mack Glenthorne—"you're wrong, uncle. I still say Brock didn't do this. I still say that he's honest and upright. Brock had no more to do with this than you did."

Her uncle's eyes glimmered.

"Be careful what you say, Wynne. You're practically accusing my own manager of conspiracy. Are you plumb crazy?"

"No. But I should be crazy if I believed this. I know Brock. I believe in Brock, and, in spite of what he seems to have done, I shall still be friends with him."

"Against the sheriff's orders?"

"The sheriff was just saying that to try to frighten me."

"Was he?" John Morton's eyebrows came together. "We'll see. But apart from the sheriff, I'm going to have a say in this, Miss Wynne. I'm giving an order now, and I expect you to obey it. Either you break with that boy once and for all, or—"

"Or?" Wynne challenged, proudly erect.

"Or," he said, "I guess I don't like saying it, Wynne, but I've had enough. Or—you leave Silvertops. You go packing back to England. I like your horse-riding and I guess I've got big hopes in you. But I won't have you friendly with a young outlaw, and I won't have you putting him before me. That's all. Now you'd better hit the trail while I help Irma to get Glenthorne back to right."

THE BOY OUTLAW COMES BACK



WYNNE slowly climbed back into Wonderlad's saddle. She dared not look at her uncle again, standing there so sternly erect with his torn papers in his hand. But as she jogged along the rocky trail her being was filled with tumult.

The price of her friendship for Brock was her banishment back to England!

Could she contemplate friendship on such terms?

She looked around her. Here was the country she had come to love, here the country of all her dazzling hopes, and her eager ambitions. Here, she felt, her feet were set definitely in the stirrups of horse-riding fame. Here was everything she had ever desired—everything she could ever hope to attain. And she might throw it all away by—

There, fiercely, she pulled herself together. What was she thinking?

Mentally she called herself a selfish pig. She had stood by Brock at the ranch. She, and she only, knew the sterling unselfish worth of his friendship. Was she going to desert him now—when he was more in need of her friendship than ever?

"No," Wynne said fiercely.

Brock needed her now. She would not fail

(Please turn to the back page.)



The PHANTOM Tennis Player

(Continued
from
page 424.)

THE HAND OF DANGER



"SO!" murmured the young detective with a grim smile, as he took the tennis ball from his pocket, noting how his finger-tips glowed faintly as he touched it. "My little experiment worked, after all—but what's Miriam's game?"

The girl had fallen into his trap, in her desperate anxiety to recover the clue! But—what did it mean? Could Miriam be the phantom-player—and, if so, what was her purpose?

Noel frowned thoughtfully as he strolled back along the lane towards the club. He was in no hurry. The night was oppressively hot, and he had no desire to return to the inn.

Besides, the strange mystery of the tennis club had him in its grip. His own business in Mildene could wait till the morning; at the moment, his keen brain was grappling with the curious problem on which he had stumbled.

The possibility of a ghost he had discarded from the first—and now he was faced with a more human issue.

Why should any girl try to scare her fellow club members? Jealousy—spite? Noel banished the suggestion. There was more behind it than that. The most curious feature was that the "phantom" made no attempt, to attract attention to itself—as would have been the case if a mere practical joker was responsible.

In fact, it was seemingly by the merest accident that its presence on the deserted court was ever discovered. No one would have seen it to-night, had it not been for Allison's zeal—and her unlucky accident.

Was the spectre responsible for the broken bough—and young Pam's terrifying shock—to say nothing of the startling events at the club-house?

If so, there was a desperate purpose behind its nightly appearance on the deserted court—behind the ghostly game played with an unseen partner.

Noel was determined to discover that purpose, and to unmask the trickster before any worse harm befell.

If Miriam Franklin was the culprit—

Instinctively Noel shrank from the thought: yet so far everything pointed to the girl's guilt. Of the little group of club members he had met that evening she had been the only one not accounted for when the ghost appeared!

As Noel turned in through the gates he saw that the club-house windows were still lit up. No doubt Allison was making certain that the place was securely locked and barred before she left. The young secretary was an unusually determined girl, thought Noel, smiling faintly as he cut across the grounds towards the desolate, disused court.

It looked more eerie than ever when he reached it. This time he studied it more carefully—the high wall surrounding it on three sides, the tumbledown summer-house—the narrow path leading to the club.

How had the spectre contrived its amazing disappearance? It could hardly have dissolved into the air, or the solid ground. And yet—

Noel drew in his breath sharply, his hands clenching. Someone—or something—was moving close to the summer-house! Though there was no breeze, the long grass was swaying, and a shadow crossed the pale moonlight.

Silent and stealthily as a panther, Noel moved across the court. Then—

"Got you—" he rapped, his hand closing on the shoulder of someone crouching in the shadows.

A stifled scream was followed by an angry gasp.

"Oh—it's you! How you scared me!" Instinctively Noel's grasp relaxed, and he stared with mixed feelings into Allison Dare's attractive, indignant features.

"You might have told me you were coming back, Mr. Raymond!" she said.

Noel eyed the young secretary contritely. "Sorry, Miss Dare—I returned on the spur of the moment," he confessed. "I thought you were busy at the club-house—"

"And decided to steal a march on me!" put in Allison, with a slight toss of her head. Then her expression softened, and her eyes twinkled slightly. "But I'm glad you've come. You see, I've been hunting for clues—and I was longing to tell you that you were all wrong!"

"Wrong? What about?" demanded Noel, staring.

"About footprints," said Allison, taking his arm. "You said there weren't any—but you looked in the wrong place! There aren't any on the court, of course—or in the long grass—but there's an old flower-bed over here by the wall, which you overlooked!"

Eagerly she led the way across to the wall, Noel following her with a perplexed frown.

If the spectral player had gone that way he felt certain he would have seen her, for the moonlight had been on the wall at the time.

But Allison seemed positive that she was right, and the young detective stepped forward curiously as she parted the bushes, pointing to a patch of mould.

A soft whistle escaped Noel's lips, as he flashed his torch. Surely enough, there were the footprints—an impression of small, rubber-soled shoes on the mould.

"She must have climbed the wall about there!" breathed Allison. "That's how she managed to escape. Then she could cut along the road, and round to the front of the club—"

"Why?" demanded Noel quickly.

"Why—to cause that damage at the club-house," said Allison. "She must have done it while we were vainly searching the court, and—look!"—she pounced on something concealed in the shrubbery—"another clue!"

It was a girl's white kid glove, and Noel examined it, his eyes suddenly stern. It bore the initials "M.F."

"Miriam Franklin!" whispered Allison unsteadily. "Then—then it was—"

"It looks like it," admitted Noel gravely. "Please, Miss Dare—not a word about this to anyone! We've got to take the trickster by surprise—and I think I know how."

"What are you going to do?" Allison surveyed him anxiously as they returned to the summer-

house. "I suppose you'll have the police keep watch on the club—"

Noel shook his head with a grim smile. "Not yet. I've a better plan. You see, I've also been looking for clues—and I found this." He opened his hand to reveal a scrap of reddish clay. "Know where this comes from, Miss Dare?"

The girl shook her head, her grey eyes wide with perplexity, and faint disappointment. "Just a scrap of mud! It might have come from anywhere—I know!"—she brightened suddenly. "There's red soil in the lane outside the club-house."

"I'd noticed that," said Noel, "but it's mixed with gravel. Do you know where the reddish soil in the district came from, in the first place? From the old Mildene quarries! And that's where I'm going to search, Miss Dare. Like to come with me?"

Allison shook her head with a quick laugh. "Sorry—my ankle's not up to it. Besides, I think you're on the wrong track! What ever could the quarries have to do with the phantom player?"

"That's what I want to know," replied the young detective gravely. "Going back to the club?"

Allison nodded. "I'm going to keep watch—in case the phantom comes again! This time she won't escape!"

"Splendid!" said Noel. "We'll compare notes when I come back. I've an idea I'm on the right trail. So long, Miss Dare—and good hunting!"

The girl waved to him as he left the court, and pushing his way through the shrubbery, climbed through the gap in the wall nearest the deserted quarry.

The Mildene quarry had not been worked for many years. Practically invisible from the road, it lay in the centre of a tangled thicket—a barren-looking chasm of rocks and weeds.

Noel discovered a flight of rough-hewn steps leading down into the hollow. He paused for an instant to light a cigarette—and just then a faint sound caused him instinctively to turn.

A white hand was reaching out from the bushes behind him!

As the young detective spun round, flinging up a defensive arm, something leaped out at him.

His foot slipped on the treacherous ground, and he made a desperate grab at the bushes. He heard a soft, mocking laugh, and then he was plunging helplessly down the slope, till an agonizing jolt brought momentary oblivion.

Noel opened his eyes dazedly, to find that a stunted bush had broken his fall.

Painfully he tried to recall what had happened. In his ears still echoed a girl's mocking laugh.

With an effort, Noel pulled himself together, and managed to climb down into the hollow. His torch, luckily, was unbroken—and the young detective made a painstaking search before retracing his steps with difficulty out of the quarry.

Pale and dishevelled, he made his way back to the club-house, to find the door open and a single light burning. The young secretary had not yet locked up, though it was long past midnight; possibly she was still following her clues, though Noel, smiling faintly.

He picked up the telephone, dialing the number of the local police station. The next moment he was speaking to the sergeant on duty.

"Noel Raymond here. I just rung up to inquire if there's been any more trouble since I saw the inspector—What's that?" The young detective whistled, his eyes gleaming. "Another burglary, you say—during the last hour! Diamond necklace belonging to the Countess Martinau—young man and girl seen in lane near the quarry—All right, sergeant! Leave this to me!"

He slammed down the receiver and rose to his feet, as a startled gasp came from the doorway.

Her face white, Allison stood staring at him as though she had seen a ghost.

"What—what are you doing here?" she gasped. "What's happened?"

Noel crossed over to her, taking her gently by the arm.

"Sit down," he said. "You've had a shock. Tell me about it."

The girl's hand was trembling as she loosened her light coat.

"I've seen the phantom player!" she breathed. "I—I went out into the drive, and she was standing there, by the hedge. I saw her face in the moonlight—white with fury. She escaped when I tried to grab her—but she dropped this."

Noel whistled softly as he examined the dainty, crested jewel-case the young secretary took from her bag.

"Empty—of course," he muttered. "I might have guessed it. But she's been a bit too clever this time, Miss Dare! You say you saw her face—you recognised her?"

Allison nodded, her lips trembling. "It was Miriam Franklin!" she breathed.

THE LAST GAME!



NOEL'S eyes were stern as he reached for the telephone.

"What—what are you going to do?" breathed Allison.

"I'm going to phone the police, for a start," said Noel, "and have them throw a cordon round the grounds. I'm taking no chances of the trickster slipping through our fingers! Then I want you to fetch me a list of the members on the phone—and we'll have a private ghost-hunt!"

Allison hurried to obey. When she returned with the list, Noel was putting down the receiver.

"That's settled! Now—for Ray Norton, and a few others!"

Quickly he contacted half a dozen members, asking them to come over to the club at once. Most of them lived close by, and ten minutes later they were crowding the club-room in an excited, questioning group.

"Did you do as I ask?" he inquired of Ray.

The young man nodded. "I called at Miriam's cottage. The door was locked, and there was no one in. I climbed through a window—just to make sure."

Noel's face turned a shade paler. "There's no time to lose," he snapped. "Wait here, all of you, while I find out if the police have arrived. Then—we'll act!"

The others waited in an uneasy silence, broken by desultory conversation, as the minutes dragged by. A quarter of an hour passed—twenty minutes—

Allison started to her feet with a strangled sob.

"This is awful!" she breathed. "Something must have happened to him. I can't stand it—"

The door was thrown open with a crash. Noel stood there, his face pale and damp with perspiration, but a triumphant gleam in his eyes.

"It's all right," he panted. "Sorry to keep you waiting, but I've been checking up on things. There's not a chance of the trickster escaping—police in the road, everywhere. I say—Miss Dare, d'you feel all right? You look faint!"

There was quick concern in his tone as he took the girl by the arm.

"I feel a bit dizzy," said Allison. "If—if you don't mind, I think I'll rest in my office—"

"Good idea!" declared Noel. "You've done

more than enough, for one evening. Wish I could leave someone to stay with you, but I need every possible searcher."

Swiftly he gave his instructions, dividing the little search party.

"We'll search the club grounds first—and leave the haunted tennis court to the last. I doubt if she'll appear there," he said. "Ray—I want you to come with me. All set?"

"Good luck!" whispered Allison, with an unsteady smile. "I wish I could come with you."

She waved good-bye from the doorway. "Allison's a real brick," declared Ray gruffly. "Wish there were more like her. I say—it was a bit of a shock about Miriam. She always acted suspiciously—but to think that she's been tricking us all this time!"

Noel eyed him strangely as they hurried across the courts.

"Has she?" he asked. Ray stared at him, his eyes narrowed.

"Well—of course! She's the phantom player, isn't she? Allison said so—you practically said so yourself!"

Noel nodded with a grim smile. "Yes," he said. "Miriam Franklin is the phantom player! And Allison saw through her before I did. The point is—we mustn't let her escape!"

"But—how can she—" panted Ray. "The police are surrounding the grounds—"

"She has ways and means," declared Noel. "You saw her vanish yourself—we all saw her. Come on!"

"But, I say," protested Ray, "we're making for the haunted court."

"I've changed my mind," said Noel. "I've an idea she may try a last game." They came in sight of the court, and Noel gripped his companion's arm. "Keep out of sight," he breathed, "and don't make a sound!"

They dropped into the undergrowth and waited. Then—

"Look!" he whispered. A slender figure was gliding stealthily across the court, white and spectral in the moonlight. It made for the old summer-house.

Noel rose to his feet, torch in hand. "Now!" he breathed.

They sprang across the court together, closing in on the summer-house from either side.

The spectral figure was groping in a desperate way over the ground by the summer-house, as though seeking frantically to find something she had lost.

"The game's up. Miriam Franklin!" exclaimed Ray.

In a flash the girl was on her feet, staring at them both through the gossamer veil that hid her face.

Something glittered in her hand as she shrank back.

"Keep away!" she breathed huskily. "Make a move—either of you—and you'll pay for it with your lives!"

Ray hesitated, but with a laugh Noel continued to walk slowly towards her.

"I think not," he said coolly. "I took the liberty of unloading your dangerous toy earlier this evening! I felt certain you'd have no scruples in using it, and you proved that, by our little encounter at the quarry. The trap-door by which you hoped to escape, by the way, is bolted. I took that precaution half an hour ago—"

With a broken, furious gasp, the slender figure made a dive to escape—but her way was barred by two ghostly shapes that stepped silently from the shadows.

At the same instant Noel sprang forward, twisting the weapon from the girl's hand.

"That's better," he said grimly. "I was afraid your finger might slip accidentally on the trigger. It was only my bluff about unloading it. It was bluff about the police, too—the nearest one's a mile off—but I wanted to make certain you'd try to escape this way—"

The girl gave a broken, angry sob—that changed suddenly into a laugh as she snatched off her veil.

"Allison!" shouted Ray, in blank amazement, as he stared into the young secretary's attractive, defiant face.

"You fools!" exclaimed Allison. "I tricked you all along—and even now you haven't caught the phantom player!"

"No!" rejoined Noel sternly. "And I never shall. The phantom player has caught you, Miss Dare!"

As he spoke, one of the ghostly figures who had barred the girl's way stepped out into the moonlight—a pale, dark-haired girl in tennis costume, carrying a racket that glowed with an eerie light of its own.

"Miriam Franklin—the phantom player!" gasped Ray. "Mr. Raymond—you've made a ghastly mistake—"

"I've made no mistake," retorted Noel sternly, and a pair of handcuffs snapped on Allison's wrists.

"I knew that Miriam was the phantom player," he said, "and Allison knew it! She knew, too, that Miriam had no intention of playing ghost—that she was practising desperately, at night, coached by a partner who dared not be seen by day. Her brother, Jim Franklin—ex-chauffeur and one-time tennis pro—wanted for the burglary at Heathcote Manor!"

A tall young man, dressed completely in black from head to foot, stepped from the shadows.

"Jim was her invisible partner," said Noel. "They used luminous paint for the racket and balls—in order to see them on dark nights. A forgotten passage leading from the quarry, where Jim was hiding, gave them every means of escape. It was vital for them that Miriam should win the championship, and visit Heathcote Manor—in order to find the proof of her brother's innocence."

There came an amused, scornful laugh from Allison.

"A pretty story!" she said. "But what about the scares—the attack on Pam—the damage at the club-house—"

"Your work, Miss Dare!" said Noel sternly. "As was the attack on me! It suited your purpose to foster the scares—to make use of the 'phantom' player for your own ends!"

He picked up the bulging handbag the young secretary had dropped, and emptied its shimmering contents on the court in the moonlight.

The other searchers had arrived by now, and were standing round in a tense, amazed group.

"The proceeds of the recent burglaries!" went on Noel, as he picked up a flashing necklace and dropped it among the pile. "Miss Dare has been using the club as her headquarters for months—while she and her gang carried out their daring robberies."

"It suited her to allow Miriam and her brother free rein. If she got into a tight corner, she knew that she could always expose them—"

THEIR THRILLING DESERT QUEST

By RENEE FRAZER

This grand long complete story, featuring the adventures of two girl holiday-makers in colourful North Africa, will appear in next Friday's

GIRLS' CRYSTAL

foist the blame on to them. But meanwhile the ghostly scares helped to distract attention from her own nefarious activities.

"Sooner or later she intended to have Miriam turned out of the club—if there was any real danger of her winning the Heathcote Championship and visiting the old manor.

"Luckily, the proof of Jim Franklin's innocence was in a letter I found in the club-house—a letter written by one of Allison's confederates!"

Miriam gave a little sob of relief as she caught at her brother's hand.

"How did you suspect Allison, in the first place?" demanded Ray, his face pale and bewildered.

Noel smiled grimly.

"She lied to me about a broken bough, that had obviously fallen from a tree trunk weeks before! And she tried to lead me up the garden—with some manufactured footprints, made with a pair of old pimsols I found later in the summer-house. She also stole one of Miriam's gloves to use as proof against her—but what she overlooked, in her haste, was that both pimsols belonged to left feet!"

And he shook his head reproachfully at the baffled girl crook.

THE END.

GIRL RIDER OF THE ROCKIES

(Continued from page 436.)

him. She knew that Glenthorne was Brock's enemy. She did not know how he had come by the cut on his head—but Brock would not—could not—have done it as Irma described.

More probably, she reflected, it had all arisen out of an accident which Irma had turned to swift and cunning account. Brock must have pursued the manager. He must have tried to outstrip Brock, and probably his horse had stumbled in the process. But Brock's concern would not have been so much with him he didn't want those papers now. Brock, anxious to get to Laughing Falls, would have shot on in pursuit of the old Indian guide, Red Moose.

She knew that Glenthorne had stolen those papers. She knew that the Glenthornes were the real villains behind the scenes, despite what Brock believed about her uncle—would she ever get that stubborn idea out of his head, she wondered?

For some reason Glenthorne wanted those papers as badly as Brock had wanted them—and Glenthorne had stolen them. But why—why, Wynne found herself asking. Not surely just to get Brock into further disgrace? And in a flash the answer came to her, piercing like a ray of bright hope into the gloom forebodings that had been possessing her.

"Supposing," she whispered to herself—"supposing it was Mack Glenthorne who got Brock's father sent to prison? Supposing it was he who made out that it was my uncle's doing—such an easy job for a man in his trusted position? Supposing that is why he wanted those papers—because he thought they might prove Vic Barton's innocence?"

The thought thrilled her. If it could be proved! If only she could prove it! If only she could clear Brock's father, and in clearing him, also clear Brock's mind of all the bitter suspicions he cherished against her uncle, John Morton!

"You, Wynne, must do for Brock what Brock is trying to do for his father," she told herself. "You must help him to clear his name and bring the real villain to book at the same time."

It was an inspiring thought. It was a

golden goal which she set herself on that lonely ride back to Silvertops. And when she arrived there came more news. It was given her by Ted Hyams, the old foreman, returned from the Stagshorn Racecourse a good two hours ago.

"Well, I guess you were in too almighty a hurry to hang around the racecourse and wait for your prize and the announcements," he said. "The prize you'll find in your uncle's room, but the announcement is this, Miss Wynne. I guess there's going to be no Wannalong Competition, same as was planned for the next qualifying round of the Rocky Mountains Trophy. I guess that's been scratched because they can't get the course ready in time."

Wynne stared at him.

"Then you mean that the next race will be the last one before the big steeplechase for the Rocky Mountains Gold Cup?" she asked.

"Yep. Reckon that's about the size of it," Ted answered. "More time for training, eh, Miss Wynne. And the next race," he added, "is next Monday—at Scarpley Pines."

Wynne laughed. She was utterly delighted with the news. But the mention of training brought her up short. Oh, golly, how to train now, with Brock an outlaw, with Wonderlad removed from his sphere of influence? Could she, with the handsome start she had made, manage Wonderlad on her own account?

"I must—I must!" she told herself. "But—oh, if only this awful wretched business had never happened! Only Brock can get the best out of Wonderlad. Only Brock could train him as he ought to be trained."

She drifted into the ranch-house. Presently she heard that her uncle had returned, and Mack Glenthorne had been put to bed. Then she heard other news—news that sickened her inwardly.

Brock Barton was publicly declared an outlaw! There was a reward for his capture; from now until he was arrested every man's hand was against him!

That night when she went to bed she was dreadfully worried. Dreadfully unhappy. Did Brock know this? Did he know he was outlawed? Mightn't Brock at any moment come riding into the ranch unaware of the dreadful fate which hung over his head? Where was Brock? What was he doing?

She tossed restlessly as she tried to sleep. In the distant hills she could hear the coyotes howling, the night birds calling, and down in the corrals was the shuffle of horses.

Out there, amid the vast rocky silence, was Brock—Brock, whom she longed to see, to talk to, to warn.

What was that?

In a moment Wynne had jerked upright, an electrified thrill running through her. She listened intently. And then unmistakably the sound came once more—a rattle of gravel stones and sand against her window, tinkling in the silence like a flurry of winter hail on a tin roof. And as its echo died into the silence there came a whisper.

"Wynne!"

"Brock!" she gasped, and like a flash was out of bed.

Noiselessly she opened the window, stepping out on to the small veranda.

She looked down, and then her heart gave a leap as she saw him standing there, half in and half out of the shadows, but with the moonlight beating upon his upturned face. He looked wildly excited, and urgently waved his hand. She heard his whispered words.

"Wynne, come quickly! I must see you! I must speak to you—now!"

Brock comes with exciting news! Read all about it in next Friday's grand instalment.