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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
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Dec. 13th,
1947.



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

Sally's Mysterious Behaviour Convinced The Head Prefect That She Was Planning To Rob The Captain's Safe!—By DAPHNE GRAYSON

ALEC BURT IS CURIOUS

REMEMBER, boys, not a word to anybody about what we're doing!

Sally Warner spoke in an unusually serious tone, and there was an expression of urgency on her pretty face as she hurried along, a parcel tucked under her arm.

"Absolutely hush-hush!" nodded Don Weston.

"And we shall lock the door just to make sure that we're not disturbed," added fair-haired Fay Manners.

"You won't be disturbed," assured Johnny Briggs.

Sally and Fay vanished inside the cabin which they shared on board the liner Ocean Star—known as the College Ship, because it was taking a crowd of students to Australia.

The door of Cabin 20 closed and the key clicked in the lock. Don and Johnny took up positions outside, rather like a couple of sentries.

A few moments later, from inside the cabin, came a whirring sound.

It was all very mysterious, and very secretive.

Along the corridor came Linda Powell, the vivacious and likeable girl from Chicago.

"Sally in her cabin, boys?" she asked with a smile. "I want to see her for a minute—"

"Leave it till later, Linda," advised Don with a shake of the head.

"Okay. Just as you say." But the American girl looked somewhat surprised as she turned away.

Five minutes later up bowled the plump figure of Frank Winwood, known to everybody as Tubby.

"I've got that swimming list for Sally," he said, waving a sheet of paper. "I just want to talk over one or two things—"

"Later, old chap," said Johnny. "Leave the list with us."

Tubby, like Linda, looked surprised. But he went on his way happily enough, reflecting that the five minutes or so he would have spent discussing the swimming list with

Sally could now be devoted to an extra cream bun in the tuckshop on D Deck.

It was surprising how many of the students wanted to see Sally within the next twenty minutes. As official leader of the Merry-makers' Club, and unofficial leader of the students, she was always busy and much sought-after.

One and all, however, were turned away by Don and Johnny as they patrolled outside the cabin. From inside, the whirring sound continued. Those who were familiar with such things recognised it as coming from a sewing machine.

"Everything all right, boys?" called out Sally during a lull in all this activity.

"Fine!" answered the boys. "How are you getting on?"

"We'll be able to make a good job of it—"

"Hrrrrr!" Don cleared his throat and coughed loudly—a signal to the girls that danger was approaching.

A narrow-shouldered, weedy-framed boy came sauntering along the corridor.

"What's going on?" Alec Burt wanted to know inquisitively.

"Nothing to interest you," retorted Johnny. "Hopit!"

Alec Burt came from the rival camp led by Carmenita Pascali, the beautiful but tempestuous Mexican girl, and he was no friend of the chums. The sneak of the College Ship was always ready to make trouble for Sally & Co., and he was the last person they wanted prying into this affair.

"Being jolly mysterious, aren't you?" went on Burt.

"That's our business," Don retorted, and echoed Johnny's sentiment: "Hopit!"

"Might be my business, too," persisted Burt, not moving. "Looks fishy to me. Furtive, in fact!"

"Furtive fiddlesticks!" snorted Johnny. "What d'you think we're doing—planning to rob a safe?" And he roared with laughter at his own joke, and was just going to give Burt

a push to send him on his way when the cabin door opened.

"What's this about robbing a safe?" smiled Sally, emerging with Fay and quickly locking the door before Burt had a chance to look inside. "Mustn't give away our secrets, Johnny," she added with a chuckle. "Come along. I feel like a stroll on deck."

And Sally hustled her chums towards the main staircase which led to the upper decks.

They did not see the queer glitter in Alec Burt's mean little eyes as he sauntered away. Burt, snooping from the end of the corridor for the past half hour, had been very intrigued by what he had heard and seen. And, being the inquisitive, trouble-making type that he was, he had decided it was his business to discover what was afoot.

Burt had a sudden idea, and went scurrying away to find Edgar T. Phineas, the head prefect.

Meanwhile Sally & Co. had reached the promenade deck, gay with lights, but somewhat deserted save for a few students, for the first-class passengers who were also travelling on board the Ocean Star were down at dinner.

It was a warm evening, with a velvety, starry sky overhead and a pale yellow moon just rising over the South Atlantic. There was a slight swell, but Sally & Co. hardly noticed it as the big luxury liner steamed on towards Rio de Janeiro, her next port of call.

"There's Tom!" exclaimed Sally suddenly, spotting a white-coated figure crossing the deck.

Tom Lacey was a deck steward, young, cheery and impetuous. It was his impetuosity which had landed him in a jam—and Sally & Co. were helping him to get out of it. That was the reason for their secretiveness, for if what had happened came out, then young Tom Lacey was going to get into serious trouble with Captain Thorne, skipper of the Ocean Star.

Lacey, in fact, had committed the

startling crime of damaging the skipper's newest and best uniform!

Anxious to know if he would be getting leave when the ship reached Rio de Janeiro, he had rashly slipped into the skipper's cabin to have a look at the leave list. Then, hearing approaching footsteps, he had panicked and hidden himself in the wardrobe. The fact that he was carrying a tray with a coffee-pot had caused the disaster.

The coffee had spilled over the uniform and, as Lacey had made a frantic grab at the toppling pot, the spout had ripped the jacket lining.

Those approaching footsteps had been Sally's, on her way to deliver a note to the captain from Professor Willard, the headmaster of the floating college.

To her the frantic steward had poured out his tale, and Sally, in that generous, warm-hearted way of hers, had offered to repair the damage. Aware that such a story, if known, would spread like wildfire and probably reach the captain's ears, Sally had realised the necessity for secrecy. Telling Tom Lacey to make himself scarce before he was caught, she had hastily parcelled up Captain Thorne's damaged jacket and then rejoined her chums.

Now, as young Lacey saw them appear on the deck, he hurried across.

"I was just coming down to see you, Miss Warner," he said, a worried look on his pleasant face. "Is—is everything all right?"

"Fine," Sally assured him, for she and Fay had already repaired the torn lining. "What we want now is—"

"I've got it here," said the deck steward, producing a small paper-wrapped bottle from his pocket.

Sally took the stain-remover.

"It won't leave a trace?" she asked.

"Not a mark."

"Then that's just what we want for the job," Sally smiled. "All evidence of the crime removed, eh, Tom?"

"That's right, Miss Warner. Gee, if it got to be known—"

"It won't be," Sally said confidently. "Only my chums know, and they're helping. Come down and see us in half an hour, Tom."

"But, Miss Warner," Tom protested, "are you sure it's all right? If you and your chums are found out—"

"Don't worry, Tom, we won't be," Sally said confidently. "Trust us not to leave any clues."

Sally & Co. turned to go back to the students' quarters on B Deck. And because of a sudden shout from someone coming up a companionway farther along, the chums failed to hear a gasp which sounded from behind a nearby deckhouse.

Crouched behind it in the shadows were two figures—those of Edgar T. Phineas, the head prefect, and Alec Burt. They had heard every word of that conversation, and now Phineas' eyes were goggling behind his thick, horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Jumping snakes, you were right, Burt!" he hissed. "Those four are up to something mighty fishy. Looks like they're mixed up in some plot. Going to rob a safe, did they say?"

Burt's eyes gleamed maliciously. He knew very well that that remark had been made jokingly by Johnny, and just as jokingly supported by Sally. But Burt was out to cause mischief as well as discover the nature of the chums' secret.

"That's what they said," he replied. "What are you going to do, Phineas? What d'you reckon that parcel contained?"

"Maybe acid—or some sort of explosive. That's the stuff used for cracking safes—I've been reading about it in a thriller," Phineas said excitedly. "But I've got to be sure before I take the appropriate action under Schedule 19d—burglary clause, you know. I'm going to watch 'em, Burt. Goshakes, the honour of the college is at stake with a scandal like this!"



PHINEAS KEEPS WATCH

Sally & Co., blissfully unaware that their secret efforts to help Tom Lacey were likely to invoke the drastic action required under Schedule 19d—burglary clause—arrived back at Cabin 20.

Never did they dream that their good intention of repairing the captain's uniform was being mistaken for a sinister plot to blow up a safe!

"Soon have the job done now," smiled Sally cheerily as she unlocked her cabin door. "You boys going to keep guard outside again?"

"You bet!"

"Good-o! But don't make it too obvious," Sally said, and then went inside with Fay.

Once again the door was locked. Once again Don and Johnny patrolled outside. Johnny grinned with satisfaction. It gave a chap a good feeling to be helping someone else out of a jam. Johnny had been in so many jams himself that he could appreciate that!

One or two of the students came up, wanting to see Sally. Don and Johnny turned them away. Then they became aware of a figure acting in a peculiarly furtive fashion at the end of the corridor.

It was Edgar T. Phineas, on the watch.

"Peep-bo, Edgar!" called out Don brightly. "I can see you!"

Phineas frowned. He wasn't supposed to have been seen.

He was still shocked. He could hardly believe that Sally & Co. were contemplating such a thing. They were a nuisance at times and always giving him trouble—especially that Briggs—but he had never thought they would become involved in a plot of this nature.

Robbing a safe! Handling acid or explosive! Come to think of it—he licked his pencil and hastily took a form out of his pocket—that came under Schedule 18c, dangerous merchandise clause.

But, incredible though it seemed, there could be no getting away from it. He had overheard part of the plot himself, and he had Burt's evidence to support him.

Phineas was really shaken. His imagination, already stirred by that thriller he had been reading, was now running riot.

Having been seen, he decided on more direct action. He hurried forward, pausing outside Sally's cabin.

Don and Johnny promptly backed against the door, but they were looking a little anxious. They had to remember that Edgar T. was head prefect, and he couldn't be turned away like any ordinary student.

"Hrrrrrr!" Don gave his warning cough to the girls inside the cabin.

"Better see matron and have that cold attended to, Weston," said Phineas. "Been prowling round at nights, eh, hatching up things?" he added knowingly.

"Eh? I'm no chicken—"

"Skip it! What's going on?" demanded Edgar T.

"Well, we're here, and you've just come along—"

"No cheek, Briggs! What's the idea of turning people away from this cabin and saying that they can't see Sally?"

"She's busy. Phineas—doing a special job!"

"Job, eh?" The prefect's eyes glared. "What sort of job?" he shot out.

Johnny looked at Don and winked. "Is it safe to tell him?" he asked jocularly.

"Not safe," grinned back Don.

"Safe!" Phineas seized on the word, and then added grimly: "I want to see Sally, and I want to see her cabin."

"Hallo, Edgar!" The cabin door opened after a clicking sound from the lock and Sally peered out with a bright beam. "Here I am, and come right in. Just a safety pre-

caution, you know, locking the door. No crime in that, is there?"

Crime—safe! The words buzzed in Edgar T.'s brain as he strode in. He glared round suspiciously. In amazement the chums watched him peer under the twin beds and under the furniture. He even peered in the wardrobe, and stamped around on the carpeting.

But Sally, of course, had safely hidden the captain's jacket and the bottle of stain-remover, and Phineas found nothing suspicious.

He frowned. He still couldn't be absolutely sure. He must investigate further. But to ask more questions might arouse the chums' suspicions and make them aware that he was wise to their game. He decided to be like the detective in that thriller—play canny, play a waiting game until he could pounce.

"Huh!" he said gruffly. "All right, that's all. Just an inspection, you know," and hurried out.

Sally was looking alarmed.

"I—I believe he suspects something!" she hissed, and then, as an afterthought, she dodged quickly across to the door. Outside she heard a hurried retreating of footsteps. "Yes, and he was spying on us," she added. "Golly, let's get the captain's coat back to Tom straight away. It's finished, and it's come up beautifully. No trace of a stain at all!"

She retrieved the jacket from under the bedclothes. Eagerly they all inspected it, nodded with satisfaction as they saw that it looked as good as new. Carefully Sally wrapped it up and then crossed to the door.

"You go first, boys," she said.

"Has Phineas gone?"

"No; he's at the end of the passage," reported Don.

"Make a dash for the stairs," whispered Sally. "Hide in that alcove, and then dash back and use the other stairs!"

The ruse succeeded. Phineas was fooled, and there was no sign of him as Sally & Co. reached the promenade deck. There they almost bumped into Tom Lacey, who was on his way down to see them.

"All your troubles are over, Tom," Sally smiled. "Here's the jacket, looking brand new again. Shall we slip it into the captain's cabin or will you—"

"What about the trousers?" asked Tom.

"The—the trousers?" gasped Sally. "But I haven't got the trousers. I didn't know—"

"They're worse than the jacket!" groaned Tom. "Great Scott, that's caused it. The Old Man's steward will be laying out the uniform tonight for him to wear in the morning."

Tom Lacey was looking frantic. He knew that he would lose his job if it was discovered what he had done.

Sally herself was filled with consternation. They had only done half of the job! This was a completely unexpected development. She had just grabbed up the jacket, never dreaming that the trousers were as badly damaged.

But one look at Tom's haggard face and Sally determined to see this thing through.

"Don't worry, Tom," she said. "We'll do the trousers as well. We'll collect them as we take the jacket back!"

"Gee, you're being grand," said the steward huskily. "I'd do it myself, but I'm still on duty and it's difficult to slip away."

"Of course it is. We'll do it," Sally said. She paused thoughtfully, and did not see a figure furtively conceal itself in the background—a figure wearing thick horn-rimmed spectacles. Phineas had picked up the trail again. "Is the captain's cabin empty now?" she added.

Phineas pricked up his ears. "No. But he'll be going on to the bridge at nine o'clock," Tom informed them. "The cabin will be deserted then for at least an hour."

(Please turn to the back page.)



HER STRANGE ROLE IN EGYPT

By GAIL WESTERN

HASSAN ASKS FOR THE SCARAB

IN order to help her sister Sybil, Ray Chilton assumed the name of Rene Claire, and travelled aboard an Egypt-bound steamer in disguise, taking with her a mysterious golden scarab that James Nolan and his daughter, Nora, were anxious to secure.

Ray made friends with a cheery boy named Mike and his aunt, Mrs. Van Croom.

When Alexandria was reached Ray received a letter, apparently from her sister, and as a result went to a house in the Arab quarter where she hoped to see Sybil. Her sister, however, did not appear, and on going to the door Ray was startled to discover it was locked.

WHY had the Arab messenger locked her in?

Startled, bewildered, Ray stared at the door, then icy fingers seemed to clutch her heart as a frightening thought occurred to her.

Suppose she had been led into a trap! Suppose her sister was not staying in this house at all!

"But she must be," she told herself desperately. "That letter she sent me distinctly said—"

She stopped, the blood draining from her cheeks as another thought came to her. Except for the signature, that letter had been type-written, and it would not be difficult to copy a girl's name. The possibility that the letter had been a forgery could not be ruled out.

But who should want to decoy her away from her friends?

"The Nolans would," she whispered. "Perhaps this is the plan I heard them discussing. Perhaps the radiogram Nora's father sent off the night before we arrived in Alexandria was to give instructions to that Arab messenger."

The suspicion caused her alarm, and involuntarily her fingers closed around the carved Egyptian beetle in her pocket. If she was right, then it was the golden scarab that the Nolans' hireling was after—the mystery curio which her sister was so desperately anxious should be delivered to the House of Sounding Brass.

"But they shan't have it," she vowed. "Whatever happens, they shan't have it!"

Acting on sudden impulse, she crossed to one of the low tables on which stood a copper vase filled with sprays of scarlet hibiscus. Pushing the blossoms to one side, she dropped the scarab into the vase, then she whirled, her muscles tensing.

Slipped her feet were padding down the corridor. The footsteps ceased outside the door and there came a metallic thud, as if the bolts were being pulled back.

She caught in her breath.

Who was about to enter—her sister, or Ali, the Arab messenger?

Slowly the great door swung open, and Ray's eyes rounded with surprise, for it was neither Sybil nor Ali who stood there on the threshold, but a complete stranger—a plump, bearded Arab, wearing richly embroidered robes. Hands clasped before him, he bowed, an apologetic smile on his face.

"I deeply regret keeping you waiting," he declared, "but unfortunately Ali was mistaken. Your sister is not at home. She has been called away on business. But do not worry, she will return in the morning. Meanwhile, please regard this house as your own."

Rich and warm was his voice; friendly his manner. Yet Ray did not trust him. She could not forget the fact that she had been locked in.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He bowed again.

"Hassan el Rikh—your sister's trusted adviser. It is my privilege to help her in the important mission she has set herself. We are—how do you say it in English? Ah, yes! Partners. That is it—partners in the enterprise concerning the golden scarab."

His bearded lips wreathed in another pleasant smile, then he gestured towards the table containing bowls of fruit, sweetmeats and a tall pitcher.

"But please be seated. You must be both tired and hungry. Permit me to serve you."

And, filling a goblet with milk from the pitcher, he handed it to her. As she took it she watched him intently.

"Why did Ali lock the door just now?" she demanded.

"Lock the door?" For a moment he seemed startled, and then he laughed. "But what a nervous fool that Ali is! Just because once his house was ransacked by robbers he is frightened of his own shadow. Always he locks everywhere behind him. But let us not concern ourselves with him. Let us eat, then discuss our business."

"Business?" echoed Ray quickly, still uneasy and very much on the alert.

"But of course," He nodded genially. "About the scarab. Your sister is very anxious that it should be delivered to the House of Sounding Brass to-night, and she has entrusted me with the task, so if you will please give it to me—"

He held out a beaming hand, his dark eyes twinkling at her.

But Ray did not move. Abruptly she came to a decision.

"I am sorry, but I have not got the scarab on me," she said.

"Not got it!" His black, bushy brows rose in startled dismay. "But you must have it! In her letter your sister gave implicit instructions for it to be brought here."

"But Sybil didn't understand the

difficulties," declared Ray, her eyes never leaving his face. "You see, an attempt was made to steal it on the voyage, so I entrusted it to the care of Mrs. Van Croom."

"To Mrs. Van Croom!" There could be no mistaking his angry disappointment now. "Do you mean —" He broke off, and his benign manner seemed to fall off him like a cloak. A fierce scowl replaced his smile. "You must have the scarab!"

"But I haven't!" protested Ray.

"Well, that shall soon be put to the test," He clapped his hands, and almost instantly two Arab women appeared. He gestured towards Ray. "Search her," he ordered, "and when you have finished, sound the bell."

As he departed the two women advanced on Ray.

"Remove your clothes," said one.

For a moment rebellion flickered in Ray's eyes, then silently she obeyed. As she took off each garment it was snatched and skilled, eager hands probed and fingered it. But all without result, of course. No trace of the scarab was found. At last the women sullenly handed back the clothes, and when Ray had re-dressed the bell-rope by the door was pulled.

Harshly a bell clanged, and in response to its summons Hassan reappeared. His dark eyes went to the Arab women. Silently they shook their heads, and Ray caught in her breath as she saw the savage look on Hassan's face.

"So!" he said. "It seems that you have not the scarab after all. Perhaps your story is true. But that will be quickly tested. There are those near Mrs. Van Croom who will know. I hope for your sake that they will confirm what you say."

With an impatient hand he sent the two Arab women scuttling from the room, then he flashed Ray a dark, menacing look.

"If you have tricked me you will rue it," he declared. "Long have we waited for the golden scarab. None shall rob us of it now."

On slipped feet he left the room, the door closed softly behind him, the bolt thudded home, and Ray was alone.



TRICKED BY THE OPEN DOOR

"Oh, what a fool I was to think that Sybil was in Egypt!"

Sinking down on to a pile of cushions, Ray stared helplessly about

her. The truth was obvious now. Her sister had never sent that letter; it had been part of a cunning trick to rob her of the scarab. Hassan's story about being Sybil's partner was false;

actually he was in league with Norah Nolan and her father.

For the moment she had outwitted her captors, but for how long would her trick avail her? Once Hassan got in touch with the Nolans he would learn definitely that Mrs. Van Croom had given the scarab back to Ray, and then—

Ray shivered. Hassan would be ruthless when he discovered how he had been fooled; he would stop at nothing to secure the golden scarab.

But why were he and the Nolans so desperately anxious to gain possession of it? What secret could it hold?

Ray shook her head. The mystery was beyond her.

Her heart pounding apprehensively, she sat there, her gaze fixed on the bolted door. Slowly the minutes dragged by, but Hassan did not return, and Ray, exhausted by the strain, felt her eyes closing, and eventually her worried thoughts found relief in sleep.

It was morning when she awoke and shafts of sunlight were streaming through the latticed shutters. For a few moments she hardly knew where she was, and then, as she stumbled to her feet and gazed about her, she gave a groan.

In a little over two hours the train would be leaving for Cairo. Already Mike and his aunt must be expecting her to join them at their hotel. What would they think when she failed to turn up?

Her heart gave a sudden excited leap.

"Surely Mike will guess that I'd never break my promise," she breathed. "Surely—"

She broke off as she heard footsteps pattering along the corridor. They came to a halt outside the door, and there came a metallic thud as the bolt was pulled back.

Was it Hassan, come to force her to reveal the hiding-place of the scarab?

She braced herself for the ordeal which threatened, then her tensed muscles relaxed, for it was not the black-bearded Hassan who entered, but one of the Arab women who had searched her clothes the previous night.

She was carrying a tray on which stood a steaming coffee-pot and a plate of maize cakes. Setting it down on one of the low tables, she looked at Ray with hostile eyes.

"Eat. Soon the master will come," she said, and without another word withdrew, softly closing the door behind her.

Ray did not move. She ignored the breakfast tray. Her gaze was concentrated on the door. Her heart was pounding wildly.

For though she had listened intently, she had failed to hear the telltale thud that the bolt always made as it was shot home. Was it possible that the serving woman had forgotten to bolt the door?

Hardly daring to breathe, quivering with excitement, she tiptoed across the luxurious Persian carpet. Stealthily she raised the heavy latch and pulled.

Next moment she almost cried out with delight, for the door swung open. The Arab woman had failed to lock her in. There was nothing to stop her from escaping.

"Oh, what a bit of luck!" she exclaimed, and, darting across to the copper vase, she extracted the golden scarab and thrust it into her handbag.

Stealing down the corridor, she raced down the marble staircase, and she was just about to try to open the front door when a mocking voice spoke:

"I fear, Miss Claire, you are only wasting your time. The door is locked and the key is in my possession."

Ray spun round as if shot, then the blood drained from her cheeks. Facing her, his hands clasped in front of him, a sardonic twinkle in his dark eyes, was Hassan el Rikh.

"I regret the trick that it was necessary to play on you," he said.

"Trick! What trick?" she faltered. "The little business of Yashada pretending to forget to bolt the door

of your room. Very effective, was it not? For, of course, thinking that Fate had come to your rescue, you retrieved the scarab from wherever you had hidden it. You would not be likely to leave that behind, would you?"

He laughed softly and stepped forward.

"Don't dare touch me!" Ray panted. "Let me go, or I'll scream the place down!"

"If it amuses you, scream by all means, Miss Claire, but it will avail you nothing. You will not be permitted to leave until I give the order, and then I regret you will not be allowed to return to your friends. You will go to my home in the desert."

"Your—your home in the desert?" she whispered.

"Yes—far away from all possible help; to a place where you will learn to rue the day that you sought to foil our plans."

"You'd never dare kidnap me!" she gasped. "When I don't turn up at the hotel—when my luggage there isn't claimed—my friends are bound to become suspicious and they'll inform the police."

He laughed.

"Your friends will believe that you are a fraud and a trickster. Mr. Nolan will see to that. But enough of this talk. The scarab, please, Miss Claire. Kindly give me the scarab."

And softly but menacingly he began to advance towards her.



JAMES NOLAN SOWS SUSPICION

"Morning, everyone. I hope you all slept well."

It was breakfast-time at the hotel, and James Nolan smiled

pleasantly as he entered the dining-room where Norah, Mrs. Van Croom, and Mike were just finishing their breakfast.

Norah shot her father a quick look. "You sound as if you did, anyway," she commented. "I've never known you to be in such good spirits so early."

"I have reason to be, my dear. I have just heard excellent news about a little curio I'm interested in." He flashed her a covert, meaning look, then turned to Mike. "Hallo, why are you looking so glum?" he asked.

Mike ruffled his curly hair. "It's Rene," he muttered. "I can't understand what's delayed her. She ought to have turned up by now. The train goes in just over an hour and she promised—"

He flushed uncomfortably. He had taken a great liking to the girl he knew as Rene Claire.

James Nolan exchanged another expressive glance with his daughter, while Mrs. Van Croom regarded the boy reassuringly.

"There's no need to worry, Michael," she said. "There's plenty of time yet, and I am sure Rene will not let you down."

"Of course she won't," put in Mike stoutly. "Rene's not the kind to let anyone down. It's only that—well, I suppose I'm a chump to get hot and bothered like this, but—" He broke off and stared across at Norah. "What are you looking so pleased about?" he demanded.

Norah hurriedly ceased to grin and looked hurt.

"I'm not looking pleased," she protested. "Just the reverse, in fact. I feel very sorry for you. It seems an awful shame that you should be deceived."

"Deceived! What do you mean?" Mike glared rather angrily. "Look here, if you're trying to suggest—" he began, when Mr. Nolan intervened.

"Steady on, young man," he said smoothly. "I know how you feel and can sympathise, but there's no need to go for Norah like that. The fact is, I'm afraid Miss Claire has no intention of joining us here."

"What!"

In startled amazement, both Mike and his aunt regarded Norah's father.

"Why are you so certain?" demanded the boy.

"I will explain in a moment, but first of all I would like you both to look at a photograph. It is one that was taken when Norah and I were staying with Mrs. Van Croom's brother, Sybil Chilton in the group, and if you study her features you will notice a very remarkable fact."

As he spoke Mr. Nolan took a photograph from his pocket, and as Mrs. Van Croom studied it she gave a startled gasp.

"Why, Sybil Chilton is very like Rene Claire!" she exclaimed.

"Of course she is," put in Norah spitefully. "And no wonder! For that girl's name isn't Rene Claire at all. As I've tried to convince you all along, she's Sybil Chilton's sister—nothing but a fraudulent trickster!"

But Mike did not even look at the photo. He continued to glower at Mr. Nolan.

"Why are you so certain that Rene doesn't intend to join us here?" he demanded again.

"Because the messenger who brought that letter last night has come for her luggage," was the unexpected reply.

"Come for her luggage!"

Mike gave an incredulous cry. "Yes," Mr. Nolan nodded.

"I saw him when I passed through the hall just now, and surely that is a significant thing in itself. If Miss Claire is really genuine, then why should she not come for her luggage herself, or at least send a message explaining why she is not keeping the promise she made to you?"

Mrs. Van Croom began to look distressed. But Mike was still red and indignant.

"I don't believe Rene's a trickster!" he burst out. "There must be some mistake. I'm sure—"

Leaving the sentence unfinished, he went rushing out of the room. The hall was deserted, but out in the courtyard was a horse-driven carriage, and a tall Arab was engaged in loading luggage into it. Vaguely Mike recognised him.

"It's that chap who brought Rene the letter when we docked!" he gasped, and went flying through the swing doors and down the steps. "Hi, is that Miss Claire's luggage?" he shouted.

All turned and bowed.

"Yes, effendi. This belongs to Miss Claire. She send me to collect it."

"But didn't you bring a message?" asked Mike. "Didn't she give you a note for me—for Michael Williams?"

"No message—no note—nothing, effendi. Miss Claire just tell me to collect luggage. She only add that it would be wise if no one saw me take it."

Mike felt a pang of dismay. It looked as if what Norah's father had said was true.

"Where are you taking the luggage to?" he asked the Arab.

All hesitated.

"Beyond the hills—to the House of Three Palms," he said. "Tis a long journey."

Mike hesitated, and then turned unhappily away. But in the hotel entrance he paused and stepped back, moodily to watch All climb into the carriage. It seemed that his friendship with the girl he knew as Rene Claire was at an end.

"But I can't believe she's a trickster," he muttered again. "I can't believe—"

He broke off, his eyes opening in startled surprise as he stared down the road after the carriage, which was now in motion. For suddenly he had noticed something that had strengthened the feeling of uneasiness in his heart—something that convinced him that Rene Claire had not deliberately broken her promise to him!

"There's been trickery right enough!" he gasped. "But it's not Rene who's caused it." And madly he went running back down the hotel steps.

You will see what Mike has discovered in next Friday's grand instalment.

All The Conjuror's Efforts Failed To Make The "Vanished" Girl Re-appear. What Had Become Of Her?



The MYSTERY OF THE MAGIC CABINET



THE TRICK THAT MISFIRED

"THAT'S Vic Chane, nunky—the illusionist!" whispered June Gaynor, as she and Noel sat in the crowded concert hall rented by their host for his daughter's coming-of-age party.

Noel Raymond glanced with keen interest at the good-looking young man in immaculate evening dress, who had just appeared on the stage.

The party, to which the famous detective and his niece had been invited, included a variety concert—in which Victor Chane, the rising young conjuror, was the star turn. The lively applause that greeted his appearance was accentuated by the romantic rumours coupling his name with that of Mr. Heath's charming daughter, Daphne.

As Vic, with an engaging smile, commenced his preliminary "patter," Noel seized the opportunity to scan the packed audience. Though ostensibly invited as an ordinary guest, he had been asked specially by Mr. Heath to keep an eye on the family heirlooms that were to be presented to the young heiress later in the evening.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Vic was saying, with a bland smile, "I don't claim supernatural powers—but I shall do my best to mystify and intrigue you—as my reputation as a wizard depends on it!"

There was a ripple of laughter and applause as he waved his wand—and on to the stage trundled a large wheeled cabinet, apparently drawn by invisible wires.

"He's good, nunky—you watch!" whispered June, her eyes sparkling.

Smiling, Noel leaned forward as Vic proceeded to introduce his assistant for the evening—an attractive brunette, wearing a dainty blue frock trimmed with sparkling sequins.

"This is Miss Una Farrell's first appearance on the stage," he explained. "She was kind enough to volunteer at a minute's notice, and has no idea what is in store for her!"

There was more laughter and loud clapping as Una bowed shyly, and stared with some apprehension at the gilded cabinet, ornamented with witches, black cats and signs of the zodiac.

"This is the Wizard Merlin's original magic cabinet," explained Vic gravely as he threw open the door, revealing that it was empty except for a low, carved stool. "Miss Farrell—will you please take your seat, in view of the audience? Thank you! Now—watch closely, ladies and gentlemen. I am going to close the cabinet—and fasten it—so! Quite comfy, Miss Farrell?"

"Yes—thank you!" came the muffled reply.

The young conjuror raised his wand, rapping it on the cabinet.

"Hey presto—music!" he called.

There was a sudden, crashing chord from the piano; a murmur of expectancy from the onlookers. June suddenly gripped Noel's arm.

"Nunky—did you hear?" she breathed. "Someone screamed!"

Noel nodded, with a puzzled frown. He, too, had heard that stifled cry almost drowned by the music—and he was staring hard at the debonair conjuror. It seemed to him that Vic's good-looking face had turned a shade pale under his make-up.

Noel and June were seated at the end of the front row, nearest the stage. No one else seemed to have noticed anything amiss.

"Maybe it's part of the show," he whispered. "Watch!"

The young conjuror had pulled himself together and was smiling composedly as he threw open the door of the cabinet.

A gasp of amazement arose as the interior was shown to be empty; the girl assistant had vanished!

"Hi—where's my sister?" shouted a bespectacled, aggressive young man in the second row.

"Gone for a trip to the moon!" came the suave rejoinder, as Vic swung the cabinet round on the stage to show there was no deception. "I'm expecting her back by the next plane!"

Noel joined in the laugh that greeted this sally, but June saw that her uncle's eyes were narrowed as he gazed at the cabinet.

The girl detective had a feeling that something was amiss, but she could not put it into words. She tried to dismiss her fancy as she glanced at the handsome young conjuror, who had closed the cabinet again and was waiting for silence, his wand poised.

"Hey presto!" he called cheerfully. "Can you hear me, Una? I command that you return—now!"

As he spoke he flung wide the cabinet door. June caught in her breath sharply, starting to her feet.

No one came out of the cabinet: there was no one—nothing—there!

The whispers in the audience rose to a bewildered mutter as June tugged at Noel's sleeve. The expression on Vic Chane's face had startled her.

"Nunky—something's wrong!" she gasped.

"Come on!" whispered Noel tersely, as he slipped noiselessly from his seat and made his way behind stage, June close at his heels.

As they reached the wings, the

By PETER LANGLEY

young illusionist was trying to calm the indignant audience.

"A mere hitch, ladies and gentlemen!" he declared, with forced jocularity as he encountered the bewildered reproach in Daphne's blue eyes and Mr. Heath's questioning frown. "Miss Farrell's return appears to have been—er—delayed. There will be a short piano interlude, then I will continue the performance."

The curtain descended at his signal, muffling the indignant voices. The young conjuror gripped a chair as though to steady himself as Noel strode on to the stage.

"Chane," said the detective, without mincing words, "where is Miss Farrell?"

Vic's reply came jerkily, and in a tone that froze June's blood.

"I wish to goodness I knew, Mr. Raymond. Una—Una's disappeared!"

"Disappeared?" gasped June. "You mean—it isn't—it wasn't a trick?"

Vic made a helpless gesture.

"It was a trick," he muttered, "but—something ghastly has happened. I've vanished her—but I can't get her back!"

For a moment Noel stared at the young man searchingly; then he spun on his heel, pointing to the cabinet.

"Show me how the trick works!" he ordered.

Eagerly, his hands trembling, the young conjuror obeyed. By pressing a concealed spring on the door, a second door opened at the rear of the cabinet, hidden from the view of the audience.

"Una's instructions were to leave by that door and slip through a slit in the back cloth while I distracted the audience's attention," he explained unsteadily. "When I heard that scream I knew that something had gone wrong. But—where is she?"

Noel turned to the grizzled caretaker, who had charge of arrangements on the stage. The man, who was hard of hearing, swore that he had not seen Miss Farrell after she entered the cabinet, and he had not heard anyone scream.

"If she came out, she must have disappeared into thin air, sir," he declared. "I was in the wings and in view of the stage door. She didn't leave that way."

"What about the other artistes?" demanded Noel.

"They'd all changed, sir—and gone back to their seats."

Noel dropped to his knees by the cabinet, flashing his torch inside as he operated the secret mechanism. A

stified ejaculation escaped his lips as he picked up something wedged in a corner at the back of the cabinet.

It was a girl's white satin shoe, with a broken strap!

He turned swiftly, holding it out, his eyes stern. Vic Chane caught in his breath sharply, and June gave a cry.

"Why, that's Miss Farrel's shoe!" "A strange thing, Chane," said Noel grimly, "that Miss Farrel should disappear of her own accord—wearing only one shoe!"

"What—what are you getting at?" demanded the young man.

"The truth!" said Noel. He rose to his feet as the clamour from the audience grew louder, almost drowning the piano. "You'd better try to pacify them, Chane," he added. "June—slip round to the front and have a word with Mr. Heath. Ask him to have every door in the hall guarded: no one must be allowed to leave or enter till I give permission! And you'd better remain with Daphne."

June nodded, and hurried to join her host and his charming daughter.

While Vic Chane agitatedly prepared for his next trick, Noel made a thorough search of the wings. Behind the back-cloth he halted, flashing his torch on the dusty boards. Something reflected the brilliant light, and Noel bent to touch the glistening patch.

A soft whistle escaped his lips. "Sequins!" he muttered. "Sequins from the girl's frock. We're getting warmer!"

He made his way along the narrow passage behind the stage, following the trail of sequins. It ended abruptly, and as Noel bent down he saw a crevice in the boards. A trap-door!

A few minutes later, Noel emerged from the dark regions below the stage, his eyes grim. He had not found the vanished girl—but there was something grasped in his hand.

As he reached the stage he heard an excited clamour. Mr. Heath was standing in the front row, shaking his fist angrily at the young illusionist, who was vainly protesting. "What's happened now?" demanded Noel sharply.

"Happened?" barked the indignant Mr. Heath. "Young Chane's shown himself to be a fraud! Not content with disappearing his assistant, he's had the audacity to borrow my daughter's valuable bracelet and disappear that in his confounded cabinet! He declares it was an accident!"

"That's the truth!" exclaimed Vic unsteadily, his good-looking face very white. "There's something going on that I don't understand! Daphne, you do believe me?"

"I—I don't know what to think!" whispered Daphne tearfully.

"Well, I do!" exclaimed the aggressive young man in the second row. "It's my opinion that Vic Chane is worse than a fraud. Where's his sister? Tell me that, you scoundrel!"

Vic clenched his hands, stepping forward; but just then Noel intervened grimly.

"Does anyone recognise this?" he demanded—and held up a torn satin handbag.

"That's Una's!" exclaimed the young man hoarsely, as he sprang forward to take the bag. "Something's happened to her. She's been robbed, and—Ah!" He pulled a crumpled slip of paper from a pocket in the torn lining, and scanned it swiftly. "I knew it!" he gasped. "This is proof. Una's met with foul play—and he's responsible!"

And he pointed a shaking, accusing finger at the young illusionist.

my suspicions about Vic Chane: now I'm certain! He's up to no good—and he knows I suspect. I'm writing this in case anything happens to me—"

The message trailed off abruptly, as though the writer had been interrupted. Noel's eyes hardened as, at Mr. Heath's request, he read the strange note aloud.

The commotion increased. People were insisting on Vic Chane's arrest; Daphne, in tears, was clinging to June.

Noel called for silence, and his commanding voice and manner had their effect.

"Until the missing girl is found," he said, "and can tell her own story, we have not sufficient evidence for Chane's arrest. But"—he eyed the young illusionist grimly—"it will be necessary to detain him while a search is made. Is there a room in the hall where he could be locked up, Mr. Heath?"

"The caretaker's room," was the reply. "I will see about it at once!"

The young man was led away, in spite of Daphne's tearful protest.

"It is only a precaution, Miss Heath," said Noel gently. "Nothing has been proved against Chane yet. There's no reason why your party shouldn't continue. I understand there is to be a dance in the adjoining hall—"

"But I couldn't enjoy it, with this horrible cloud over Vic!" protested Daphne.

"Let's try," urged June, slipping an arm round her chum's shoulder. "You and I believe Vic innocent—and we can trust Nunky to prove it!"

Noel smiled approvingly as June departed with Daphne to rally the other guests. Gradually the concert hall became deserted as the young people headed for the ballroom. Norman Farrel made up a party to search for his sister in the adjoining grounds.

Thoughtfully Noel returned to the stage. The caretaker was sweeping the floor, and only one dim light had been left burning.

The detective crossed to the magic cabinet, wheeling it into the centre of the stage, as he tried to recapitulate the amazing mystery. Suddenly he stiffened. He was staring at the grotesque face of a witch painted above the door. For a moment, incredible though it seemed, he thought he saw those painted eyes flicker.

Just then Mr. Heath came back into the hall, followed by June.

"Any news?" asked the detective quickly.

"No news of the girl," rejoined Mr. Heath. "She's vanished completely! Her brother's at his wits' end. He wants to call in the police at once."

A board creaked as the caretaker shuffled nearer.

"Where are the heirlooms?" asked Noel loudly. "The emerald necklace and pendant?"

"Here," announced Mr. Heath, producing a flat case from his pocket and opening it. June gasped at the sight of the flashing gems in their bed of white velvet.

"With your permission," said Noel gravely, "I suggest I lock them up in some place of safety. I understand there's a safe in the manager's room that was to have been used for the guests' valuables. Have you the combination?"

Mr. Heath nodded, handing him the jewel-case, with a slip of paper. Noel repeated the combination out loud, as though to memorise it. Apart from June and Mr. Heath, who were standing close to him on the stage, the caretaker was the only person in sight; and he was supposedly deaf.

A few minutes later Mr. Heath went to join his guests, followed by the caretaker. June turned quickly to Noel.

"Nunky, what does it all mean?" she asked. "Is Vic Chane guilty—and what has happened to Una Farrel?"

"To your first question I'd say 'no'!" replied the detective emphatically. "As for your second, I'll be in a better position to answer that

when I've conducted a little experiment. There's a pot of white paint in the wings. Will you fetch it?"

Mystified, June hurried to obey. When she returned, Noel motioned her to silence, and commenced to paint a large circle around the stage, with two triangles in the circle and several other mysterious symbols.

Finally, he turned out the remaining light and, going into the manager's office, put the jewel-case in the safe, locking it securely with the combination. Then, noticing June's wondering look, he smiled.

"I'm hoping that, as a result of my magic circle, I'll be able to bowl out a clever trickster," he declared.

THE ball was at its height when the startling news ran round like wildfire. Vic Chane, the illusionist, had escaped! He had been locked securely in the caretaker's room, but apparently had managed to get out by forcing a window.

June hurried to find her uncle. He was not in the ballroom, and she entered the darkened concert hall.

The pale moonlight streamed through the windows, revealing the deserted hall and the magic cabinet on the stage. The door of the manager's office stood ajar, and June heard a faint movement within.

"Nunky!" she breathed, as she crossed quickly to the door. Nunky, are—"

Her voice trailed away in a stifled scream as a shadowy figure sprang out at her and something dark and muffled was thrown over her head.

Desperately June struggled in her captor's grasp, but she was tripped and fell heavily to the floor.

At the same instant she heard a shout—the splintering sound of breaking glass, and a distant clamour of voices.

A few moments later the muffling cloth was whipped from her head, and she stared up dazedly into Vic Chane's pale handsome face.

"Miss Gaynor—thank goodness you're all right!" he panted. "I—"

Just then the lights blazed up as a party of excited guests streamed into the hall, headed by Mr. Heath and Noel Raymond.

"June!" exclaimed Noel, hurrying forward. "What—?" He broke off at the sight of young Chane, and an angry murmur arose from the guests.

"So there you are, you scoundrel!" boomed Mr. Heath, seizing the young illusionist by the arm. "What are you up to this time?"

Questioned by Noel, June blurted out her story, and the angry murmurs increased.

"It's clear that the young scoundrel attacked Miss Gaynor when she surprised him," Mr. Heath declared, then gave a startled cry. "The heirlooms, Raymond—the jewels!"

He started forward, switching on the light in the office, and a horrified ejaculation escaped his lips. The safe gaped open, and the jewel-case, with its priceless contents, had vanished!

In a moment the young illusionist was surrounded by an angry crowd, but Noel's voice rang out above the commotion.

"Wait! Chane can't have been the thief this time!"

"Why, what do you mean?" boomed the indignant Mr. Heath. "He was caught practically red-handed."

"Was he?" demanded Noel coolly. "By the torn state of his clothes and that gash on his hand, I fancy he broke in through that shattered window—after June was attacked. Is that right, Chane?"

"Absolutely right!" declared the young man frankly. "After I escaped from the caretaker's room I hid in the shrubbery, and I heard Miss Gaynor's scream. I smashed that window to come to her assistance, and—"

"That trues up with June's own story," declared Noel. "And there's something else." He flashed his torch on the floor. "Those are the thief's

(Please turn to page 165.)

NOEL'S MAGIC CIRCLE

In the sensation that followed, Noel snatched the paper and read the terse message that had been scribbled in obvious



haste and agitation.

"Dear Norman,—I told you I had

VOTE
FOR
GLORIA



Gloria-

The Sensation of The School

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

THE STOLEN DESIGN

JILL HASTINGS, captain of the Fourth Form, had to win a scholarship if she was to remain at Towershill School. Her staunch chum was Vicky Clayton, the junior games captain, and also sharing their study was Gloria Beverleigh-Browne, a spoilt, rich, and dazzlingly pretty new girl, who quickly proved to be a disturbing influence.

Gloria was determined to become sports captain. She was nominated, and carried on an expensive election campaign.

In their study Jill and Vicky heard cries of acclaim for Gloria coming from the tuckshop, and they hurried out to investigate.

THE tuckshop, when Jill and Vicky reached it, was crowded and noisy. It was evident at once that something very exciting and unusual was happening. A milling throng of girls all seemed to be talking at once, and Gloria's name was heard above everything else.

"I say, what's cooking?" Jill asked.

Gloria, in the middle of it all, turned. Her lovely face, more arresting than ever in its flushed excitement, was lively and animated. She waved a welcoming hand.

"Zi-pee, Jill! And you, Vicky. Come amongst us! Come and inspect the badges!"

"The what?" Jill gaped. "Badges! Special Sports Club badges!" Gloria announced triumphantly. "I designed them, had them made, and they're to be presented to all Junior Sports Club members at the hockey practice tomorrow."

Jill glanced at Vicky. The same thought passed through both of their minds. Gloria, of course, was out to put herself on the crest of popularity; Gloria interested only in winning the forthcoming election, was out to get votes at any price. Goodness knows how much it had cost her to get those badges made in such a short time—but money, of course, meant nothing to the amazing new girl.

"It's a wizard idea—simply great!" Patty Hollins bubbled enthusiastically. "Who ever would have thought of it except Gloria?"

"And so jolly novel," Lottie Midland glowed. "We've never had a special club badge before. Why didn't you think of it, Vicky?"

Vicky ignored Gloria's toadies. She didn't feel it necessary to explain that she had worked on a similar idea for months—only to have her work ruthlessly ruined in the end. Instead, she followed Jill as her chum pressed forward, until at length they came to Gloria trium-

phantly queuing it behind one of the tuckshop tables.

On the table were arrayed a score or so of exquisite silver and enamel badges, each with a silver clasp.

"Dinky, aren't they?" Gloria chuckled. "Do tell me what you think of them, Jill? I thought it a bit of a shame that the Junior Sports Club hasn't got its own badge, and as I'll probably soon be its captain I felt it was up to me to put the matter right. Pretty, aren't they—and so expensive, my dears! Get a close-up of one!"

She picked up one of the badges and dropped it into Vicky's palm. Then, with a beam at Jill, she groped for another to give to the form captain.

But Vicky, staring at that badge, suddenly burst out:

"Gloria—this is my design!" "I beg your pardon!" Gloria raised her eyebrows.

"You heard what I said—this is my design!" Vicky cried.

"Rats!" scoffed Lottie Midland. "Just a moment!" interrupted Jill quickly. She, too, had looked at the design—and suddenly her eyes were blazing.

She remembered how she and Vicky had found Vicky's design ruined on the day Gloria had moved out of the study, and, in remembering, Jill guessed the truth.

It was Gloria who had ruined the design! But first she had copied it, to make expensive badges—to influence the form in her favour when the election took place.

"What Vicky says is true!" Jill stated clearly. "Vicky had the idea of a sports badge—and this is Vicky's own design!"

"Oh, Jill, no!" Gloria protested. "You can't seriously mean that Vicky's idea was exactly the same as mine—"

"Of course not!" scoffed Lottie. "Vicky's just jealous she hasn't got in first with the idea."

"Why—" choked Vicky furiously. "I tell you—"

"Steady, Vicky!" Jill broke in, fearful that her hot-headed, blunt-speaking chum might lose control and make things worse for herself.

"Now, listen to me, girls," she added. "You know jolly well there's nothing petty or unsporting about Vicky, and I know for a fact that she did do this design. For weeks she's been working on it—"

"And nobody," Alpha Ainsworth scoffingly interposed, "knew anything about it?"

"Vicky was keeping it secret."

"Then in that case," Alpha argued, "why should Gloria, practically a new girl, know all about it?"

"Hear, hear! That's a point! Get round that one, Jill!"

Jill paused. She thought she could answer that one, remembering that Gloria had been a co-sharer of

Study C, and therefore had had ample opportunity of finding out everything that was going on in the study, but before she could answer Gloria herself spoke up.

"Oh, let's drop it!" she said impatiently. "Why all the chunter? I'm sorry if, by accident, I have copied Vicky's idea—but how was I to know? Anyway, does it matter? We've got the badges—all paid for and ready to be handed out! I'm sorry about this, Vicky, and just to prove it"—she dimpled—"I'm going to give you your badge—now."

With a smile she proffered the trinket.

Vicky looked at it. A sudden fit of anger shook her. To think that she had wasted weeks of her spare time in making capital for this unscrupulous girl!

She did not think what she was doing. She just did it. She took the badge. Before Jill could stop her she had flung it back upon the table. And then, while everybody stared, she walked out.

Jill almost groaned aloud then. For though she so thoroughly understood and sympathised with her chum's feelings she knew that Vicky, by that impulsive action, had sacrificed a big slice of the support she would otherwise have retained.



GLORIA'S AUDACIOUS CHALLENGE

Yes; a very worried girl was Jill after that tuckshop incident, although she did her best not to let Vicky see it. There was a

lot of talk in the Fourth that night—talk which reacted not at all to Vicky's benefit.

The Fourth, with some exceptions, in fact, felt that Vicky was behaving in a most unsportsmanlike manner over the whole election question.

Girls like Clarissa Brentford, Phyllis Adams, Bertha Mumford, and Tressida Fayne, still remained loyal to Vicky. They did not understand her present attitude, but the fact that Jill was backing her up was good enough for them.

But many of the waverers had plainly gone over to Gloria's side. Her generosity, her charm, that dash of audacity and recklessness in her character made a strong appeal.

Vicky herself, sensing the feeling in the form, was by no means happy the next day. Before hockey practice in the afternoon she spoke to Jill about the tuckshop incident for the first time.

"Not doing too well, am I?" She made a little grimace. "I've heard things to-day, Jill, and—oh, dash, if you weren't backing me up so splendidly, I'm pretty sure my chances would be glum. I was a chump, of course, to do what I did—but—well, you know how I felt. I just couldn't help myself, Jill, frankly, what do you think?"

"I think," Jill said steadily, "that I wouldn't worry overmuch if I were you. The form haven't got

down to voting yet, and when they do I'm pretty sure they'll have a good think themselves. Come on! Come out and play a jolly good game and forget it. That's the best way to make 'em realise who's the best sports captain."

Vicky nodded. Her face cleared a little. Action—especially sports action—was her own cure for worry. Looking more determined and confident, she quitted the study with her chum. Together they descended into the hall, and there abruptly paused.

For there, surrounded by a dozen other girls—half of them already in heckey garb—was Gloria, carrying under her arm the little box which contained the badges. She beamed as she saw Vicky and Jill.

"Zi-pee, here you are!" she called cheerfully. "Vicky, can I have a word with you?"

"About what?" Vicky asked bluntly.

"About these badges!" Gloria nodded brightly at the box she carried. "Vicky, I really am sorry if I accidentally cashed in on your idea, but, believe me, I didn't mean it! And just to prove it"—she held out the box—"I'm going to hand the badges over to you so that you can do the presentation after the practice."

There was a murmur. Vicky flushed, instinctively drawing back. But before she could speak, Jill, quick to see Vicky might appear in a bad light, stepped before her.

"That's nice, Gloria," she said, "but don't you think we'd better get the practice over first?"

"As you say," Gloria laughed. "What the form captain says goes with me! I'll park these in the pavilion then till it's over."

Agreeably she strolled along with the rest to the Junior Side. But when they reached the ground—

"Oh gosh!" Vicky exclaimed in annoyance. "What the dickens do we do now? Parker's rolling the pitch."

Parker, the gardener, was rolling the pitch—seated at the wheel of the school's huge motor-roller which was operating in the middle of the ground. A bit of a set-back that, especially as Parker did these jobs as extras, and was allowed to choose his own times. Parker certainly would make a fuss if they tried to turn him off.

"All the same," Vicky decided, "he'll have to be turned off. We've got to practise."

"Zi-pee, and why not—without peeving Parker?" Gloria said suddenly. "Why should we use this pitch, anyway? Look—and she nodded to Senior Side where a group of Sixth Formers also bent on practice had just stepped on to the ground. "What's the matter with asking the Sixth to give us a game?"

"The Sixth?" Jill gasped, while everybody else stared at Gloria. "You must be crazy. The Sixth never play juniors."

"Then," decided Gloria coolly, "it's about time they made a start. What's wrong with a scratch practice? Wait a jiffy. Let me park this box and then challenge them."

"Gloria, you'd never dare!" Alpha Ainsworth breathed.

But Gloria only laughed. For a minute she disappeared into the pavilion to place the box of badges on the shelf above the stove. Then, supremely confident, she turned towards Senior Side.

"Gosh, what an amazing girl she is!" Clarissa Brentford breathed. "Let's see what happens."

"They were all keen to see that. Jill with Vicky at her side, followed as interestedly as the rest, though she felt that this was just another try-on in Gloria's bid for supreme popularity."

Coolly Gloria strode on to the Sixth Form ground and approached Brenda Maddox, who was in charge of the Senior's practice team—a team Jill quickly noticed, which contained three members of the regular First Eleven, the rest reserves. Brenda stared.

THE GIRL WHO PUT FLAME FIRST

You will enjoy every word of this magnificent new serial about a girl who lived only for her horses. The opening chapters will appear in next Friday's

GIRLS' CRYSTAL

"Hallo, what do you kids want?" "Game for a game?" Gloria inquired.

"A what?" "Game," Gloria brightly nodded. "Thought you might like to take us on, you know, as we're just practising like yourselves."

Brenda stared incredulously. Her team regarded the self-possessed Gloria as though she was an oddity.

"You mean to say," Brenda breathed, "you're having the cheek to challenge the Sixth?"

"Why not?" Gloria looked surprised. "What's wrong with it? You're senior girls, of course—but aren't the seniors supposed to instruct us? And we'll give you a good game, you know."

The Fourth stood blinking, their breaths taken away. But Gloria was serious. Gloria obviously could see no reason why her challenge should not be accepted. And then, just as Brenda was about to break into an angry retort, Grace Farthinghall, a member of the First Eleven, broke into a peal of laughter.

"Go on. Take them on," she said. "They deserve a lesson for their cheek."

"But—dash it, they're only juniors!" Brenda objected.

"And this," Gloria interrupted serenely, "is only a practice."

Brenda breathed heavily. Then, as she looked round at her team, she grinned herself.

"O.K. We'll take you on," she said. "A quarter of an hour each way, and—gosh, how did I get into this? I—but wait a minute, who's skipping this team? You, Vicky?"

"I am," Vicky said, flushing.

"Shouldn't have noticed it," Brenda grunted. "Right—ho, then cut along and get your things. And I hope you're not going to be sorry for it."

"Gosh, is Vicky red?" Lottie Midland whispered with a chuckle. "I say, who says Gloria for sports skipper now? It's a captain with ideas we want—and has Gloria got 'em?"

"Come on," Gloria said.

She herself led the way back to the pavilion, the dazed but utterly elated juniors streaming after her. But Jill, serious-faced, knew that Gloria had scored a new triumph. What astonishing new things would this amazing girl turn to next?

News of it, in some magic way, had travelled round even during the short period that the Fourth Form team were in the pavilion. Quite a crowd of girls were gathered on the side-lines and conversation was buzzing.

Vicky was captain, of course, and once the match had started, her whole attention was concentrated on the Fourth doing well. She forgot that Gloria was her rival in the elec-

tion—remembered only that she was a daring, dashing individualist who could do the most spectacular things if the openings were made for her.

It was Vicky who, after cleverly drawing the defence, gave the ball to Gloria ten yards from the striking circle to enable her rival to dart through and slam in a shot which almost tore a hole through the net.

First blood to the Fourth! The juniors round the side-lines almost went wild.

"Goal! Goal! Good old Gloria!" "Whizzo! What a girl!"

The cheering was all for Gloria. Jill noticed. None for Vicky who had made that goal possible.

The Sixth, from the restart, were more serious. They realised they had under-estimated their younger opponents. More determinedly they settled down to business, and, strongly attacking, forced the juniors on defence.

But again it was Vicky's generalship which prevented them from breaking through until two minutes before half-time when Brenda, cleverly robbing Alpha Ainsworth in mid-field, took the ball on to score the equaliser.

And so half-time came, with the score one-all, and with a congratulatory crowd surrounding Gloria.

It was then that Jill noticed the binding of Vicky's stick was getting loose, and pointed out the fact to her.

"On, golly, I hadn't noticed," Vicky cried. "Half a jiffy, and I'll run back to the pav. and change it for another stick."

She did. She had just selected the new stick and was on the point of departure when Gloria came in.

"Oh," she said in surprise. "Didn't notice you were here. Vicky. Just came along to dig out some lemon-drops for the troops. I say, the team's playing frightfully well, isn't it?"

"Awfully!" Vicky said hurriedly. "But excuse me—"

And she rushed off, only too glad to be out of her rival's company. She rejoined the team, and two minutes later, just as the second half was due to start, Gloria came up to hand round the bag of sweets she had secured.

"Vicky, do have one," she said. And Vicky, catching a nod from Jill, took one.

"Doing well, Vicky," Brenda approved, strolling over. "Didn't know you kids could put up such a good fight. Grand bit of skipping of yours—and that Gloria of yours certainly is promising. But watch this half."

And in the second quarter of an hour the Sixth played flat out. To the Fourth's dismay Grace Farthinghall slammed in a goal a minute after the restart. Five minutes later, leaving the Fourth all at sea Brenda Maddox got another.

It looked for a minute as though it was going to be all up with the Fourth. But Vicky, shrewd as she was, saw that the Sixth were weakest in defence on Gloria's wing. Rapidly she came up into the centre-forward position and motioned Phyllis to change places with Jill so that Jill now became inside-right.

And in the next five minutes, thrusting through against the Sixth's weakest point, Jill got the second goal. Two—three. Could the Fourth bring off a draw?

Excitement was intense. This way and that the battle swayed, with the Fourth, led by Vicky, pressing hard.

Then one minute before time Vicky, beating two of the Sixth, shot out a perfect pass to Gloria.

"Go it, Gloria! Go it, Fourth!" Gloria, in sole possession, paused. Vicky was three yards behind her then, backing up. Swiftly Gloria looked round.

"To you," she breathed, and made as if to pass the ball.

Vicky at once sprinted forward. She had hardly touched the ball, however, before Gloria's stick came out again and clashed against hers.



WHO BURN'T THE BADGES?

That match! It was a game, unimportant on the surface as it was, which lived in Jill's memory for long afterwards.

News of it, in some magic way, had travelled round even during the short period that the Fourth Form team were in the pavilion. Quite a crowd of girls were gathered on the side-lines and conversation was buzzing.

Vicky was captain, of course, and once the match had started, her whole attention was concentrated on the Fourth doing well. She forgot that Gloria was her rival in the elec-

and at the same moment Grace Farthinghall, of the Sixth, rushed up, hooked the ball from between the two sticks and cleared, just as the whistle blew for time. And what a howl went up from the juniors on the side-lines.

"Vicky—you idiot! Why did you spoil Gloria's chance?"

For that, of course, was what it looked like from the side-lines. It looked, indeed, as though Vicky had robbed Gloria in the moment of her triumph. Jill, near enough to see it all, realised what had really happened. But before she could protest Alpha Ainsworth furiously rushed forward.

"You mutt, Vicky! Why didn't you leave it to Gloria?"

"She did!" Jill protested.

"Oh, stuff! You're just sticking up for her!" Alpha cried irritably. "Now we've lost the game."

"Yes, rather," sneered Lottie. "And if you ask me, Vicky's just jolly well jealous. She didn't want to win because this game wasn't her idea in the first place."

And that, to Jill's dismay, was the general opinion.

In a somewhat disappointed group the team strolled back to the pavilion, with Vicky, shimmering, trailing in the rear with Jill.

Jill touched her arm.

"Cheer up," she whispered. "It wasn't your fault, Vicky. I saw. It was Gloria who made the mistake."

Vicky said nothing. The conviction was strong in her mind that Gloria had deliberately engineered that muffed pass, knowing that she would throw the onus of defeat upon Vicky herself.

The same thought was in Jill's mind and inwardly she was burning with indignation to think that Vicky could have been made the victim of such a trick. But another shock was coming.

For when they reached the pavilion the—

There was a pungent smell of burning. Dead silence from every girl there greeted them. Half a dozen eyes were directed at Vicky from girls clustered around the stove. Gloria.

among those girls, was shaking her golden head as she stared at her box of badges—the box itself smouldering on top of the hot stove, the badges in it audibly crackling—more badges strewn on the ground at her feet. Reproachfully her eyes fastened upon the startled Vicky.

"Oh, Vicky, I do hope it was just an accident!" she said. "How did you come to upset the box of badges I left on the shelf above the stove?"

"It," the flabbergasted Vicky cried. "Well, somebody has," Gloria pointed out, staring at the wreckage.

"But," Jill cried instantly, "it wasn't Vicky. Why should she upset the badges?"

"Because," Lottie Midland flashed. "she's jealous! Didn't she show it by preventing Gloria from scoring the equalising goal? Vicky didn't want those badges presented—and that's why she came here at half-time. Vicky, you upset those badges. You did it out of spite. Dare to deny it!"

Another exciting instalment next Friday.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MAGIC CABINET

(Continued from page 162.)

footprints—and they come from the direction of the stage!

He pointed to a blurred yet unmistakable white trail leading from the darkened stage to the door of the office.

"White paint!" gasped June. "So that's why you drew that magic circle, nunky!"

"Precisely," agreed Noel. "I rather suspected the thief would come from that direction, so I set a little trap."

"But, I say," cut in Norman Farrell, who had joined the group, "only one person has access to the stage, and that's the caretaker!"

"Hodgson!" exclaimed Mr. Heath, with a start. "Has anyone seen him?"

There was a general shaking of heads. Noel's eyes were grim.

"Some of you had better keep guard on Chane," he said. "Mr. Heath, will you come with me?"

He led the way at a run towards the stage door, followed by Daphne's father, with June and Norman Farrell bringing up the rear.

The caretaker's cubby-hole was adjacent to the stage door, and as Noel pushed open the door he drew in his breath sharply.

"That lets out Hodgson!" he said and he flashed his torch on a bound and gagged figure that lay on the floor. It was the grey-haired caretaker. He was unconscious and there was an ugly bruise on his forehead.



NOEL IS "VANISHED"

"It stands to reason," exclaimed Norman Farrell excitedly, "it must have been Vic Chane! He was the only person who had the opportunity to vanish my sister and steal Miss Heath's bracelet. The rest of us were all in the audience at the time. And we've only his own word for his movements after he broke out during the dance."

Mr. Heath nodded sternly. "He must have hidden the heirlooms. I have telephoned the police, and I'll charge him with theft and kidnapping!"

There came a broken cry of protest from Daphne, but Noel held up his hand. "One minute! The heirlooms are safe." With a grim smile he took the shimmering gems from his pocket. "The thief only got away with the empty case!"

June imagined she heard a stifled, chagrined gasp, but there was no one near to her as she stood on the stage, except Noel, Mr. Heath and Daphne. Norman Farrell and the other guests

were surrounding Chane, in the body of the hall.

Uneasily she peered into the shadows as the relieved Mr. Heath took charge of the heirlooms.

"That was smart of you, Raymond," he declared, "but it doesn't exonerate Chane. He's still got my daughter's bracelet—and we've still found no trace of that unfortunate girl."

His words were followed by an uneasy hush. The same question was in every mind: What sinister fate had befallen Una Farrell, the girl who had vanished?

June was looking at her uncle and she saw a curious gleam in his eyes.

"Bring Chane up here!" he called.

The prisoner was marched up to the stage, his good-looking face pale and defiant.

"Victor Chane," said Noel sternly. "I am giving you a last chance to prove your innocence and expose the real culprit. I want you to perform, once again, the trick you performed on the stage this evening!"

A buzz of excitement arose.

"Great Scott, man!" exclaimed the amazed Mr. Heath. "Do you mean that you want him to vanish someone in that magic cabinet?"

"Precisely," rejoined Noel, with a dry smile. "I want him to vanish—me."

A broken cry escaped June's lips as a shout of amazement went up.

"Nunky—you can't mean that! Supposing—supposing—"

Noel pressed her arm reassuringly.

"I'm willing to take a chance!" he announced, glancing round at the startled faces of the onlookers. "Are you ready for the experiment, Chane?"

The young illusionist drew a deep breath.

"I'm ready!" he declared.

In a few minutes the stage was cleared except for Noel and Vic Chane.

His hand shaking slightly, the young illusionist threw open the door of the empty cabinet and Noel took his seat on the carved stool.

June's blood ran cold, and she bit her lip hard as Vic closed the door and latched it.

There was a breathless silence in the audience.

"Hey presto!" exclaimed Vic hoarsely as he rapped the cabinet with his wand, and swung the door wide. A gasp rippled round the hall like the wind.

Noel Raymond had vanished! June started forward.

"And now—now you'll bring him back!" she exclaimed, almost fiercely. "I'll—I'll try," muttered the young illusionist, his face very pale.

He closed the door, rapped on the cabinet with his wand, then jerked open the door again.

June screamed, and a shout of amazement arose from the onlookers. Seated on the ebony stool inside

the cabinet was—a handcuffed girl! "Una Farrell!" shouted Mr. Heath in bewilderment.

A chair went over with a crash as Norman Farrell sprang to his feet in the audience.

"Una!" he shouted hoarsely. "What ghastly trick is this?"

"The last trick, Farrell!" rapped Noel Raymond's voice, as the detective stepped from behind the cabinet, revolver in hand. "Stand where you are! Miss Farrell—come out of that cabinet!"

White to the lips, the handcuffed girl obeyed.

"What—what does this mean?" gasped the amazed Mr. Heath.

"It means," said Noel sternly, "that Miss Farrell never left the cabinet! The whole thing was a dastardly plot concocted between Una and her brother—with the object of stealing the emeralds and throwing the blame on Chane."

"But, I say, Mr. Raymond," burst out the bewildered young conjurer, "I don't understand! That cabinet was—"

"Is not the one you ordered," said Noel dryly. "It contains an extra secret of which you were ignorant. In addition to the secret door at the back the floor of the cabinet can be raised or lowered like a lift by touching a concealed spring inside. During the hue-and-cry, Miss Farrell—a girl of slim build—was concealed in the top of the cabinet, awaiting her cue to slip out and steal the emeralds."

"But, nunky—those clues," protested June. "The shoe, the sequins, and the note in the torn handbag—"

"Were fakes!" declared Noel grimly. "Placed there either by Una or her brother before the show started. The idea was to suggest foul play. Once Una had 'vanished,' no one would connect her with the thefts, while all the evidence pointed indisputably to Vic Chane."

"But if you remember, Una did not have her evening bag when she entered the cabinet. I saw her hand it to her brother. So it must have been planted there afterwards. That was what made me suspect them."

"But the attack on the unfortunate caretaker—" ventured Mr. Heath.

"Was Norman Farrell's work," declared Noel. "He was afraid that Hodgson, who had the keys to the stage door, might take his sister by surprise."

"Then—then Vic's innocent!" exclaimed Daphne, her eyes shining as the young conjurer sprang from the stage to take her arm.

"And trust Uncle Noel to prove!" laughed June.

(End of this week's story.)

THE SECRET OF THE CHRISTMAS CRACKER—that is the title of next Friday's intriguing detective story featuring Noel and June.



KAYE'S FEUD WITH THE Skating Star

But—would she be in time? José's fate depended on the answer.

BLUFFING GAYFORD

IN order to save José Revelle from the schemings of Trevor Gayford, a popular skating star, Kaye Lawrence determined to win the Dupont Trophy in the Martinsville skating tournament.

Although everyone else believed that Kaye's friend a fugitive Mountie named Rex Foster, was an outlaw known as the Cloaked Rider, Kaye knew that the Cloaked Rider was really Trevor Gayford.

On the day before the skating contest, Kaye was kidnapped by a Red Indian hireling of Gayford's.

KAYE struggled in vain to free herself from the ropes that bound her to the sleigh. She was a helpless prisoner.

A few minutes later the sleigh drew up outside a lonely cabin, and the Redskin driver gave a shout. The door opened. Outlined against the light inside stood a hard-faced Indian squaw.

Without a word, she and the Redskin carried Kaye into the hut and placed her on a rough couch where her bonds were removed, and a jug of water and a piece of bread was placed beside her.

Then they left her, slamming and locking the door. Pale-faced, but very determined, Kaye struggled to her feet.

"I must escape—I must—must!" she gritted. "Trevor Gayford shall not keep me out of the tournament!"

She looked desperately round the hut. But the narrow window was closely barred, and the lock on the door defied all her efforts. Exhausted, she returned to the couch and fell into a troubled sleep—to be awakened by the excited barking of a dog-team outside.

It was daylight! Dazedly, Kaye slid to her feet. At the same instant, a key grated in the lock. The door opened and she spun round to confront—

Trevor Gayford!

The skating impostor stood in the doorway, dressed in skiing attire, a mocking smile on his handsome face.

"Good-morning, Miss Lawrence," he murmured. "I trust you slept well?"

"You—you villain!" Kaye took a step forward, her face pale. "You can't keep me here—"

Gayford laughed.

"Can't I?" he said softly. "My dear Kaye, you of all people should know me better! You've chosen to meddle in my affairs once too often. My one regret is that you won't be present at the skating tournament to witness the triumph of José—to see her win the challenge cup in which I am so interested!"

Kaye's eyes blazed. She knew his plan. She knew that the challenge cup held a secret vital to the unsuspecting José. She knew that once José had won the cup it

would not take Trevor Gayford long to get it from her.

"I am well aware," continued Trevor Gayford calmly, "that you planned to beat José in the contest and win the cup yourself, thus preventing me getting my hands on it. But you have failed. José and those other fools will never know me for what I am—until it's too late—"

He snapped short, for Kaye had suddenly acted. Taking him off his guard, she leapt forward. The next moment she was out through the doorway, running desperately over the snow. She burst into the cover of the trees that surrounded the lonely clearing with a furious shout from Trevor Gayford ringing in her ears.

He was on her trail.

She passed through the trees into the open again, and a little cry of despair was torn from her lips.

Her way was barred by a treacherous chasm, almost hidden by the snowdrifts. Fortunately, she had seen it, in time—for another step might have meant a terrible drop on to the jagged rocks far below.

Kaye's natural wits, sharpened by her peril, seized on a reckless plan. Frantically snatching off her scarf, she dropped it on to a narrow ledge; then, with all her strength, she contrived to dislodge a heavy stone, sending it crashing down into the chasm, carrying an avalanche of loose snow in its wake.

Even as Trevor Gayford's running figure came into view, a girl's piercing scream rent the air.

Gayford pulled up within a few yards of the chasm, his handsome face suddenly white.

Kaye, crouched behind a bush, her heart pounding, heard him yell out to the Redskin servant who was following with the sleigh.

He made his way cautiously to the edge of the precipice and peered down. With a stifled ejaculation, he bent to retrieve the crumpled scarf.

"The young fool!" he muttered huskily, unsteadily. "But she brought it on herself. It was her own fault."

But his hand shook as he mopped his forehead, waiting for his servant to overtake him. When the man appeared with the dog-team, he gave a few terse instructions, pointing down into the chasm. Then, with a final backward glance, he cracked his whip over the dog-team, and set out on the trail to Martinsville.

Kaye watched its departure, her hands clenched. It was doubtful if the thought of her supposed "fate" had occasioned Trevor Gayford more than a moment's compunction.

The ice tournament was to take place that morning, at eleven—and for the impostor's callous purpose she was well out of the way!

"That's what he thinks!" breathed Kaye, her eyes glinting recklessly as she remembered seeing a pair of old skis in the corner of the log-cabin.

She would wait her chance till the Redskin servants were engaged on their search; then—the trail to Martinsville!



THE CLOAKED RIDER AGAIN

"Ladies and gentlemen—" the voice of the announcer echoed across the frozen lake at Martinsville, momentarily hushing

the excited murmurs of the crowded onlookers—"the next item on the programme is the Figure-Skating Contest! Will all competitors kindly assemble outside the promoter's office? The contest will commence in exactly five minutes' time. Any late-comers will be disqualified. Thank you!"

"Oh, queek—queek! Zis is my turn!"

Her dark eyes sparkling, her attractive face flushed with excitement, José made her way through the crush, followed by several of her skating chums.

In the speed contests, the Silver Lake team had come out with flying colours. If they could hold their own in figure-skating and the waltz competition they bid fair to obtain the shield for the best all-round team—while José herself had set her heart on the coveted challenge cup to be presented to the most promising solo skater.

There was only one cloud on her horizon. It was the thought that her erstwhile chum and staunch partner would be skating against her—as a rival!

José had not seen Kaye since the previous afternoon, when they had met during their practice on the lake. And she had not yet put in an appearance at the tournament. It seemed almost as though she had regretted the impulse that had prompted her to enter.

The competitors for the figure-skating were lining up outside the promoter's office, while Mr. Harker himself stood by, watch in hand.

Trevor Gayford was there, his handsome face looking a trifle pale. He smiled and nodded as José came up, though his manner was less composed than usual.

"Feeling fit, José?" he inquired, with a kind of forced cheerfulness. "It should be a walk-over for you! No competitor I've seen here is within miles of your usual form."

José shook her head with a tremulous smile.

"You're forgetting Kaye," she said. Gayford stiffened slightly, looking away.

"Kaye's not arrived," he remarked carelessly. "Shouldn't be surprised if she backs out. Entering against her own team was just bravado on her part—and I doubt if she'll go through with it."

José bit her lip. In her loyal, warm heart she bore no grudge towards the chum whom she believed had wronged her so deeply.

The promoter was looking at his watch.

"One minute to go," he announced, "and there's a competitor still missing. Miss Kaye Lawrence! Has anyone seen Miss Lawrence?"

There were murmurings among the onlookers, and the Silver Lake girls exchanged questioning, meaning glances.

"She's funkyed it!" declared Valda Travers, in a sly aside.

Trevor Gayford lit a cigarette with a hand that shook slightly.

"Half a minute to go!" boomed Mr. Harker. "I'm afraid that I shall have to disqualify—"

"Wait!" cried José suddenly, as she saw a stir in the crowd. "Zere is someone coming! It ees—it ees Kaye!"

A breathless figure was pushing her way through the crowd—and Trevor Gayford's handsome face turned suddenly pallid under his tan. He looked like a man who had seen a ghost.

The promoter frowned slightly, glancing at his watch.

"You've run it pretty fine, Miss Lawrence," he said curtly. "Are you ready?"

Kaye nodded. She felt a momentary surge of triumph as she encountered Gayford's baffled, incredulous stare.

"She" had made the hazardous journey only in the nick of time—to change into her skating attire and race out to the lake. Keyed up by excitement, she had almost forgotten her fatigue.

"Quite ready!" she breathed, looking straight at the skating impostor as she spoke.

Gayford made an effort to recover his usual composure.

"Congratulations, Miss Lawrence," he drawled. "José—you will be on your mettle, after all!"

With a careless nod, he withdrew from the group, vanishing among the crowd—and Kaye drew a deep breath, trying to thrust him from her thoughts as she took her place with José and the other competitors on the ice.

Though she had outwitted Gayford, the danger still remained. His villainous plot against her chum might still succeed—if José won the contest!

Amid an excited hush, the skating commenced, each girl taking it in turn to perform her breathtaking and spectacular act before the packed audience and the watchful judges.

The applause was generous, and it rose to a crescendo when José, a slight, dainty figure, skimmed out on to the lake—her skates barely seeming to touch the ice as she spun and pirouetted like a leaf twirled in the autumn wind.

Kaye clapped excitedly with the rest, momentarily forgetting the grim purpose that compelled her to compete against her chum. Then she heard her own name called.

Could she hope to equal—let alone beat—that brilliant performance?

José, returning to the bank, flushed, saw Kaye waiting. Impulsively she took a step towards her.

"I—I wish you luck!" she breathed. "Remember—we are rivals—and we must both try to win!"

Kaye flashed her a grateful glance, as she spun out across the lake. She skated with a reckless abandon—turning, twirling and spinning as she cut the intricate figures on the ice.

And momentarily she forgot her weariness as the spell of the skating gripped her. She forgot the hushed crowds on the bank—the watchful judges. She remembered only José—the chum from which she had been estranged—José, whose fate hung upon her success—or failure.

Her last spin brought her close to the rugged, picturesque cliffs that towered over the lake, forming a perfect setting to the ice arena.

One final figure remained—and Kaye tensed herself for the breathless leap and dizzy twirl that she had been practising for days.

But even as she poised, like a gull in flight, a horrified scream rang out from the crowded bank and a slim figure sprang on to the ice, skimming towards her.

"Kaye!" It was José's voice, high-

pitched, terrified! "Kaye—look out! Ze man on ze cliff—"

Startled, Kaye looked up, and her heart froze as she saw a white, cloaked shape, barely visible against the snow.

José sprang towards her, dragging frantically at her arm—as with a rending, splintering crash a pine sapling hurtled down the face of the cliff, thundering on to the ice on the spot where she had been poised a moment before.

A wave of faintness swept over Kaye as she staggered, falling in a crumpled heap at her chum's feet.

Trevor Gayford had played his last, dastardly trick!



REX SAVES THE DAY

When Kaye recovered, she found herself in the promoter's office. José was bending over her, pale and tearful—and himself was present, biting agitatedly on his cigar.

"Kaye—cherie—how are you?" breathed José, the little word of endearment slipping out unthinkingly.

For the moment at least their broken friendship was forgotten.

"Say, Miss Lawrence," cut in the promoter in relief, "I guess you had a narrow shave that time! It was an accident, of course. Miss Revelle, here, thinks she saw a man on the cliff—but a search-party has failed to locate him. That tree must have been splintered in the recent storm."

Just then there came a sound of cheering outside, and the promoter crossed to the door.

"I guess the results are going up," he declared. "Feel well enough to come out an' watch, Miss Lawrence?"

As in a dream, Kaye stepped out on to the terrace, leaning on José's arm. The tournament results were being chalked up on a board, and a roar of applause went up as they joined the onlookers.

"Hurrah!" gasped José. "Ze Silver Lake team wins ze relay race!"

Kaye cheered with the others, but her heart was gripped with a sudden, cold fear.

For the result of the figure-skating contest was now to be announced.

Kaye watched the judges consulting—watched the marker, his chalk poised over the board. To her ears came the murmurs of the Silver Lake team—the girls who had once been her friends.

"I guess it's a cert for José!"

"Tough luck on Kaye—but it serves her right for the rotten way she treated José—and Mr. Gayford—"

"S'eh—watch!"

There was a moment's tense hush as a name was chalked up boldly—followed by a loud cheer from all except the Silver Lake team.

For the name on the board was:

"MISS KAYE LAWRENCE."

"Kaye—bravo!" cried José, her own disappointment swept aside as she gripped Kaye's hand in unfeigned delight. "You have won!"

As though in a dream, Kaye was hustled forward through the crowd of cheering onlookers to the platform. Dazedly she took the silver challenge cup that was placed into her hands—the prize for which Trevor Gayford had schemed and plotted for so long.

Kaye's heart was pounding, and her eyes shone with a strange excitement, as she retraced her steps through the cheering throng—to halt opposite the Silver Lake party.

"Miss Quentin," she said boldly, encountering that woman's cold glance, the unfriendly stares of the others, "I entered this tournament for a purpose! There's something I want to tell you all—a secret I have not dared to mention till now. It concerns Trevor Gayford—"

Her voice trailed away as there

came a sudden disturbance in the crowd—loud screams and shouts, and a clatter of hoofs.

"Stand where you are—all of you!" rapped a voice hard as steel. "One false move will mean death. The young lady who has won that cup will hand it to me—without delay!"

Kaye's blood froze as she turned. Mounted on a superb horse, a revolver in his hand, the sinister figure in the white cloak stared at her through the slits in his mask.

"The Cloaked Rider!" came a shuddering whisper from the crowd.

Those cold, vindictive eyes held no mocking banter now. Kaye jumped back, clutching the precious cup, as he leaped from his saddle and strode towards her.

But at that instant, a dishevelled, boyish figure rushed from the crowd, hurling himself at the startled scoundrel.

"Rex! It—it's Rex!"

With a choking, incredulous cry, Kaye saw the young Mountie snatch the revolver. She acted as quick as thought. In quick strides she was before the rider and had whipped the mask from his face.

There was a moment's deathly silence, followed by a shout of horrified amazement.

"Trevor Gayford! The skating star!"

"Steve Dillford—impostor and crook!" exclaimed Rex Foster sternly, covering the white-faced scoundrel with his own revolver. "The real Trevor Gayford has been his prisoner for weeks. He is here now to tell his own story. I escaped from prison and found him."

An amazed gasp went up as a good-looking, rather haggard young man stepped forward—a young man strikingly like the suave scoundrel whom Kaye knew as Trevor Gayford.

His story was simple, yet dramatic. While skating in Canada, he had accidentally come across an old diary that had belonged to José's father.

The diary told of a forgotten goldmine, discovered years ago by Monsieur Revelle—the secret of which had been hidden in a brooch bequeathed to his young daughter.

The skating star, excited by his discovery, had set out to visit José—and had been attacked on the way by the Cloaked Rider, Dillford, who had robbed him of his diary and assumed his identity.

Rex then took up the story—describing his own and Kaye's long battle against the cunning impostor—a battle that had ended when Kaye won the silver challenge cup, which contained in its base a chart of the mine, and a will drawn up by José's parents, bequeathing everything to their young daughter.

With a little sob of happiness and remorse, José flung her arms round Kaye—while the handsome impostor who had called himself Trevor Gayford looked on with a sardonic smile.

"Congratulations, Kaye!" he drawled. "It seems that you win—and I lose. Perhaps, some day, we shall meet again!"

Cool and insolent to the last, he was led away by Rex, while the Silver Lake team gathered excitedly round Kaye, quick to express their sorrow for their treatment of her, loud in their praise of her courageous fight against the skating impostor.

But it was the way José clung to her arm, the look in her dark eyes, that was Kaye's real reward.

"Kaye—cherie," she breathed. "You will forgive me—yes? And we shall be friends—always?"

"Always," said Kaye softly. "And skating partners, too," put in Miss Quentin smilingly. "You're coming back into the team, Kaye—please. We want you—"

The approving cheers of the girls made Kaye's happiness complete.

THE END.

Next Friday you will read the opening chapters of a very unusual new serial. Animal lovers particularly will be delighted by "The Girl Who Put Flame First."

THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 158.)

"Then that'll be our chance," Sally said.

"Don't be caught," said Tom anxiously.

"We shan't!"

"Gosh, this is worth a fortune to me. I won't forget you," breathed Tom.

Sally just smiled and walked away with her chums. With a sigh of relief Tom Lacey went back to his duties. While in the shadows Edgar T. Phineas stood quivering.

They were going to rob the captain's safe! Four students from the floating college had been bribed by a scoundrelly deck steward to take part in a robbery!

Shaken to his depths, Phineas hurried away.

Sally & Co. stood by the rail, fascinated by the phosphorescent glow in the foaming sea as it hissed back from the side of the moving ship.

"Ten minutes to nine," said Sally, looking at her watch and hugging the parcel under her arm. "Come on, shipmates!"

There was anxiety in her expression which she had not displayed to Tom Lacey. She knew it would be no easy matter getting to the captain's quarters on an upper deck which was forbidden to students and passengers alike.

For Tom Lacey's sake they mustn't be caught.

Slipping past an officer, they negotiated a companionway and were cautiously making their way towards the captain's cabin, when suddenly Sally pulled up with a gasp of dismay.

For there, pacing up and down outside the cabin, was—

Edgar T. Phineas!



IN THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN

Too late the chums drew back out of sight.

Phineas had seen them.

"I've been waiting for you," he said sternly, and advanced up to them.

"H-h-have you?" stuttered Sally, wondering what on earth they could do now.

Never had she seen the head prefect looking more grim. And yet there was a peculiarly sorrowful look in his eyes.

Edgar T. Phineas was shocked and horrified. All the necessary forms to deal with this dreadful situation were filed up and in his pocket. Even now he could hardly believe that Sally Warner and her friends were capable of committing such a crime. In many ways Edgar T. admired and respected Sally.

"Don't do it, Sally," he advised. "Crime doesn't pay!"

"Dud—doesn't it?" stammered Sally, and stared at him.

"Think of our college," Phineas went on persuasively. "Do you want to besmirch its reputation—and ruin your own careers?"

The chums blinked. They had reason to believe that the head prefect suspected them; but they felt he was being peculiarly melodramatic.

"Nun—no," gulped Sally.

"Then why go on with it? Are you in the vile clutches of that deck steward?"

"Golly! Oh, I say!" And Sally looked harder than ever at the prefect. She didn't quite know how much he knew; but he was certainly putting a queer twist on what he did know. As if they were committing some terrible crime. "We're in nobody's clutches, ass—hem!—I mum—

mean, Edgar! But we're in a hurry, and the job's got to be done—"

"You shan't do it!" exclaimed Phineas passionately. "I won't let you do it. I'll save you from turning into a gang of crooks—"

"Kik-crooks! Look here, this is a bit of a lark, really—"

"You call it a lark, to rob the captain's safe?"

"Wh—what?—R—rob the kik-captain's sus—safe—oh, hold me up!" And Sally nearly collapsed.

But suddenly the truth began to dawn on her. In some extraordinary way—she could not fathom how—Phineas actually believed they were here to commit a robbery in the captain's cabin! No wonder he had seemed so melodramatic!

"Gosh, what's the chump drivelling about—," began Johnny, and then stopped as Sally flashed him a quick look.

Sally's eyes were twinkling. It seemed that Phineas had got hold of the wrong end of the stick, and knew nothing about the captain's uniform. That was a relief. What they had to do now—and time was getting short—was to trick Phineas out of the way so that they could clean up the skipper's trousers and return the jacket. And suddenly Sally saw a way of doing it by playing up to Edgar T.'s extraordinary story.

"So—so you know," she murmured, hanging her head as if in shame.

"I do."

"Hem! But—but do you know about the rest of the loot?"

"The rest of it? D'you mean you've already started on this life of crime! Goshakes—"

"Come along to that store-room on Deck A and we'll show you," Sally said.

"Take me there now," Phineas said sternly, not seeing the wink Sally directed at her chums.

The chums obliged. They reached the empty store-room and Sally opened the door. Phineas went striding in—and next moment Sally had slammed shut the door and shot home the bolt.

"Now we've added kidnapping to our list of crimes!" she said recklessly.

"Let me out!" roared Phineas.

"Later—when you've had time to get some sense into that cracked thing you call a brain!" Sally told him. "Come on, shipmates!"

They raced back to the captain's cabin, after Sally had delayed a couple of minutes to fetch the bottle of stain-remover from her own cabin.

"Time's getting short, so we'll clean up the trousers on the spot," she told them. "Tom said the coast would be clear until ten o'clock!"

They reached the captain's cabin without mishap and immediately became busy. Johnny kept guard at the door. Don unwrapped the uniform jacket while Sally and Fay cleaned up the trousers. That stain-remover was certainly the right stuff for the job. Magically the marks left by the coffee vanished, and soon not a trace of them remained on the trousers.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Sally. "That's the end of Tom's worries. The uniform looks brand new again. Where's the hanger, Fay? All right—here it is!"

As Sally hung up the uniform Fay used what was left of the stain-remover to wipe out the coffee marks on the carpet near the wardrobe.

"Come on!" said Sally, as she closed the wardrobe door. "Now to release Phineas—"

"Gosh, here he comes!" gulped Johnny from the doorway. "And the Head—and an officer!"

Before the dismayed chums could even think of making a belated attempt to escape, Phineas rushed into the cabin, followed by Professor Willard and First Officer Hendrick.

"Tried to lock me up, eh?" roared Phineas. "But Burt released me, and now you're caught!"

"Oh, my goodness! Listen!

You've made a mistake! You've got hold of the wrong story—," began Sally, when she was interrupted by a shout from the first officer.

"The safe has been rifled!" he exclaimed, striding across the cabin. "It's open, and there's money missing!"

Sally whirled round. For one awful moment her heart seemed to stop beating.

It was the first time any of the chums had noticed the safe. They had been so intent on attending to the captain's uniform. But now—

Open—and money missing from it!

Sally's cheeks drained of colour as she realised the awful implications. Phineas had believed they had come here to rob the safe—and there had been a robbery! And now they had been caught, and it would look as if the head prefect's story was true.

Professor Willard gave a horrified exclamation.

"This is appalling! Send for Captain Thorne—"

Even as he spoke the captain himself appeared in the doorway.

"What's this—an invasion or a deputation?" he rumbled.

"It would appear that these students have robbed your safe, sir," First Officer Hendrick said gravely.

"Good gracious!" The captain stared at the safe, and then—amazingly—he grinned. "No need for panic, I left it open myself, and I've just taken that money down to Mr. Bellamy, the purser!"

Sally felt peculiarly weak at the knees. The shock—and the glorious relief as she heard that explanation—caused her to sway against the table, knocking over the bottle of stain-remover.

"Look out!" yelled Phineas, diving forward and nearly twisting himself into knots as he caught at the falling bottle. "This contains acid, or some sort of explosive—"

"Oh, golly!" gurgled Sally.

"Phineas, have you been reading a crime thriller? This bottle contains stain-remover!"

"Eh? I don't get it!" gulped Phineas. "You've been acting mysteriously. I caught you coming up here—you can't deny it!"

Sally's thoughts were whirling. Desperately she wanted to avoid telling the whole truth, for that would mean implicating Tom Lacey.

"I—I—hem!" Suddenly her eyes gleamed. "I had to bring a letter here for Professor Willard—"

"That's right," agreed the headmaster. "But that was earlier on."

"Y—yes. Well, I brought it and—some coffee got spilled!"—Sally looked down at the carpet—and we came along and cleaned it with this stain-remover!"

"Come to mention it, I noticed those stains," said Captain Thorne.

The tension was relaxing. Sally's chums were looking at her admiringly. That was something they would never have thought of.

"But—but—" stuttered Phineas. "I heard you talking to that deck steward—"

"Oh, Tom Lacey?" Sally smiled. "He gave us the stain-remover!"

The Head was smiling now. So were the captain and the first officer. Only Phineas couldn't see anything funny about it, and his face was growing redder and redder.

"But Burt said you said you were planning to rob a safe—"

"Burt knew jolly well we were only joking!" Sally said indignantly.

"J-joking!" spluttered Edgar T., and suddenly went charging out of the cabin to look for Alec Burt.

A minute later, smiling, Sally & Co. took their departure also. In the corridor outside they passed Tom Lacey, who had been an agitated witness of what had happened. Sally winked—and Tom winked back.

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's grand story you will read how Sally & Co. spent Christmas aboard the college ship.