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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
Dec. 20th,
1947.



The
**GIRL WHO
PUT FLAME
FIRST**

Meet Silver Dawson, The Girl Who Lived For Horses, In This Magnificent New
Serial—By ENID BOYTEN

HER GUARDIAN'S NEWS

"I'm going to raise the top bar another peg, Flame boy," said Silver Dawson. "That will make it just four feet six. And you'll clear it again, with inches to spare—I know you will!"

Click! Up went the pegs and the bar, and with shining eyes Silver turned to her chestnut horse, running slim fingers over his satin-smooth skin, while he tossed his head and nuzzled her silk shirt.

"Ready, boy?" she laughed.

Her left foot in the stirrup, she swung herself up, and trotted Flame round the paddock till he was facing the white-painted jump again. For a moment she eyed it steadily, feeling the horse beneath her quivering with eagerness to try his skill again.

"Now!" she breathed.

Once more she set him at the jump at a steady canter. Never did he rush his fences with Silver in the saddle! On he went, till suddenly came that slight pressure of Silver's legs, which told him it was time for the take-off.

He soared over — effortlessly, smoothly — with Silver leaning forward, heels well down, knees gripping, with gentle hands just keeping enough pressure on the reins to let him know she was there to help him. Over they went, girl and horse moving together in one splendid action.

And the landing was as perfect as the take-off, without a hitch or a falter.

She drew him up at the end of the paddock, leaning forward to stroke his gleaming neck.

"Grand, Flame! That was grand!" she cried. "I love the way you tuck your hind legs up as you clear the bar, for that shows you're a born jumper."

Flame's ears were pricked forward, as they always were when he heard Silver's voice.

Did he understand what she was saying? Perhaps he did — almost!

"I've got plans, Flame," she went on softly. "Great plans — for you — and for the stables. You're going to bring fame to Hawthorn Stables this season, Flame!"

Ever since Uncle George's death two months ago she had left the little local school and managed the stables, with the aid of old Jock Mackane, the groom. The horses — and, above all, Flame — had been in her dreams and thoughts night and day.

And now the time was coming to put her plans into action.

Flame was the centre of those plans — her magnificent three-year-old chestnut, who would allow no one but herself to ride him. So far she had never entered him for any sporting event in the district; she had schooled and trained him, and waited patiently until, at last, he was ready.

"There will be preliminary races," she told him. "But the most important one is the Gaylord Trophy — the big cross-country race for lady riders. If you win that, you'll be famous!"

And such a win would bring fame to the stables. Everyone would want to hire horses from the stables where Flame had been schooled. Clients would flock from far and near, wealthy and influential people whose fees would help realise her dream of enlarging and improving the premises.

Of course, there was Mr. Graham Forsyth to consider.

He was the distant relative who had been appointed to act as her guardian after Uncle George's death. He lived in London, but she was expecting a visit from him any day now.

She had already written to him, telling him about Flame — and the other horses and her schemes for the stables. She had sent him photos of every animal in the stables, describing all their odd, lovable ways and habits.

He hadn't said much in his reply, but she was sure he would be only too pleased to let her carry on.

She straightened suddenly in the saddle, pale-gold hair glinting in the sunlight, a smile on her tanned face.

"Once more, Flame," she said.

She wheeled him round the paddock, facing the jump again, and this time she dropped the reins as they cantered forward, and took the jump with folded arms, giving Flame his head and gripping only with her legs,

and they soared over the bar as easily as before.

There was no one to watch or applaud, but that didn't trouble Silver. She never wanted an audience. She was happiest alone with her horses — above all, with Flame.

But then as she drew the chestnut to a standstill something happened.

A great, shining blue car came whirling round the bend, following the track alongside the paddock. Silver, intent on her horse, did not notice it at first. She did not see the red-faced man at the wheel, or the haughty-looking girl beside him.

No sooner had they drawn level with Flame than the driver pressed his hooter, sending out a raucous, ear-splitting blast.

"Flame!" Silver gasped. "Steady, boy!"

For Flame had reared, pawing the air with his forefeet. He was highly strung, with nerves like quicksilver, but even the quietest horse would have been startled by that ear-splitting hoot.

Silver managed to keep her seat, but, expert though she was, she could not hold Flame back. He came down on all-fours, and then bolted up the paddock like a streak of lightning, jumping the hedge with Silver bending low over his neck, flying along the lane and then clattering down the village street.

Slowly but surely Silver brought him under control, though not until they were in the forest beyond the village. With firm, gentle hands she checked that wild gallop, until at last he came to rest in a leafy glade, hanging his head with an odd little shake.

She knew what that meant. He was telling her, in his own way, that he was sorry for that wild gallop.

"But, Flame, it wasn't your fault," she whispered, as she slid to the ground. "Wait till I see 'that red-faced man in the car, if I ever do. I'll tell him what I think of someone who startles a horse in that crazy way!"

She turned her head suddenly, and her lips parted in a smile of delight.

"Oh, Flame — look!" she breathed.

Timidly from the hawthorns three shaggy forest ponies were peeping out. They were wild ponies, such as roamed in the forest all the year round.

"They're ours!" she whispered.

"Our special three!" She held out her hand. In her soft voice she called three names:

"Soldier! Dusky! Pom-Pom!" For she had named these three ponies weeks ago. She had named others of the wild ponies, too; many of them would come at her call, and all of them loved her.

In the bitter cold of the previous winter Silver had saved the lives of many of these wild ponies. Through frost and storm and blizzard she had fought her way, carrying hay and other feeding stuffs to the ponies cut off by the snow in their forest haunts.

She had wanted no reward. But the warden of the forest, John Danvers, had told her personally that she could pick out three ponies for her own use, if she wished.

The offer had fired Silver's imagination, for it had linked up with a pet scheme of hers.

She wanted to make Hawthorn Stables renowned as a school for child riders. She loved teaching kiddies to ride; she had a real gift for it. And so she had jumped at Mr. Danvers' offer.

Here were the three she meant to take—little animals that would be ideal as children's mounts.

"Flame, you've brought me to the right spot!" Her gay laugh rang out. "It's time our ponies were taken home and schooled. They're tame enough to follow. You'll see!"

She took an apple from her pocket and quartered it—a piece for each of the ponies, and one for Flame. Holding it out, she called, and the wild ponies came trotting towards her.

Silver's eyes danced with happiness. This was what she loved most—away from everyone, alone with her horses and ponies.

She swung into the saddle again, and set Flame trotting sedately back towards the stables. And her clear voice rang out:

"Pom-Pom! Dusky! Soldier! Follow! Follow!"

The ponies tossed their heads and trotted after her like big dogs, their eyes fixed on the slim, fair-haired girl whom already they had come to love.

But when the little procession entered the stable yard, Silver stared in surprise and excitement.

In the background was the blue car she had seen before, with the red-faced man and the girl standing near. But it wasn't at these that Silver stared. Her gaze was fixed on a tall, grey-haired man who was waiting near the little office.

"Guardian!" she cried, and slipped from the saddle and ran towards him.

"Silver, my dear!" He bent and kissed her, eyeing her a little quizzically. "Yes, I'm here at last, and I've brought good news!"

Good news! Silver laughed for sheer joy. What else could it be, except that she was to carry on at the stables, just as she wished?

"Yes, I've had a letter from the headmistress of Lowchester School," Mr. Graham Forsyth went on. "There's a place for you at the school, Silver. You're lucky to get into such a big school, my dear. And—you start to-morrow!"

For a moment Silver stood as motionless as a statue. Her face paled under its tan, her blue eyes opened wide, her breath came quickly.

"School?" she whispered dazedly, as if she could not believe her ears. It seemed to her as if her world was tumbling to ruins!

GOOD-BYE TO THE STABLES

Tense silence fell on the stable yard, except for a jingle of harness as Flame tossed his head. Silver's slim hands were clenched.

Her whole body was quivering with wild rebellion.

But first she must think of the horses.

"Guardian! Wait—please!" she choked out.

She had caught sight of the weather-beaten face of Jock Mackane, the groom, as he came from the harness-room, and she darted towards him.

"Flame's had one of his mad gallops," she said. "Give him a good rub down, Jock—and rugs afterwards, of course. The ponies can be put out at grass in the paddock, and—Jock—"

"Aye, missie?" His kindly eyes twinkled at her.

"They want to send me away," she told him. "But they won't, Jock—never!"

She whirled round, running back across the yard. The dark girl standing with the red-faced man by the car gave her a sneering look, but she didn't see it. Mr. Forsyth had moved to the porch of the house, and they went inside together, and were in the little study overlooking the stables when they came face to face again.

Silver flung back her head, eyes flashing.

"I want to get this clear right away, guardian!" she cried. "I've finished with school!"

Stormily she flung her challenge at him.

"I think not, Silver," he replied quietly. "Possibly the little local school can't teach you much more, but a year or so at a big school like Lowchester is a very different matter. It's what you need."

"What I need?" she echoed amazedly. "But, guardian, didn't you get my letters? Didn't you read about all my schemes and plans for the stables? Didn't you like them?"

Mr. Forsyth smiled—a kind smile, but firm.

"I loved them, my dear," he said. "But they only proved that you've been alone with the horses too long; you need a school and girl companions, and lessons and games."

"I don't—I don't!" she choked out.

She flung away from him, standing at the window, staring out with unseeing eyes.

Oh, if only he would understand! If only he would realise that she couldn't leave the stables. How could she desert the horses—how could she leave Flame?

"It was your Uncle George's wish," that quiet voice went on behind her. "In his last letter to me he expressed the fear that you were running wild, Silver. He felt you should go away to a big and really good school."

Silver gulped, blinking back hot tears.

She had loved Uncle George. If it was his wish—

There was a long silence. Then she gave a little sigh.

"I'll try it," she said at last in a small voice, "because it's your wish, guardian, and Uncle George's. But, I warn you, it won't work. I'll never stick it. I'll always come back to the horses—always!"

She still felt as if this was some bad dream. Vaguely she heard her guardian explain that he was coming to live at Hawthorn Lodge for a while, and that Jock was to be in charge of the stables while Silver was at school.

"And Jock's got a new client already," Mr. Forsyth smiled. "That red-faced gentleman is Mr. Buckley, who has come to live near here—a wealthy man who intends to do quite a bit of hacking, I believe. He's been looking round the stables and making inquiries. And the dark girl with him is his daughter, Muriel, who is also at Lowchester. You'll meet her there, Silver—"

Mr. Forsyth chatted on, plainly trying to soften the shock that his news had brought to Silver, but she scarcely heard him.

Oh, it must be a nightmare! It couldn't be true!

"First thing in the morning I'll have the car round," Mr. Forsyth

went on. "I'll drive you to Lowchester myself, Silver. After all, it's only a few miles away. And I've ordered most of the school kit you'll need. You'll be happy, Silver."

Silver gulped. She felt she just couldn't stay in that room any longer without breaking down.

"Guardian, may I go—please?" she whispered. "I—Oh!"

And she fairly fled from the study, racing up the stairs, and not stopping till she had locked herself in her bed-room.

She gazed round the room, with its pictures of horses, with the wooden model of the stables that dear old Jock had carved for her last winter. There was the diary in which she wrote up every night an account of all her doings at the stables and with the horses.

The sun was sinking behind the elms, but she scarcely noticed how time was passing. She wanted no supper, and she answered no knocks on her door.

The moon had risen, and everything was very quiet when Silver at last stole out into the stable yard.

Never yet had she missed her good-night round of the stables, taking a favourite tit-bit to each horse. She didn't mean to miss it now, but this time it would be good-bye as well as good-night. For she couldn't face parting with the horses to-morrow with other folk looking on. She would say her good-byes to-night.

She went first to the paddock, now bathed in clear moonlight, where the ponies came frisking and trotting to her call, jostling one another as they tried to get close to her.

"An apple for you, Pom-Pom!" she whispered. "And for you, Soldier! Wait, Dusky—wait your turn, you rascal!" And, in spite of herself, she laughed as Dusky, the liveliest of the three, contrived to grab a couple of small apples at the same time.

To-morrow she had planned to start schooling them, but now—

"It's good-bye, ponies!" she breathed. "For a little while, at any rate. I'll be back, of course, on half-holidays, but—"

But it wouldn't be the same! That was her unspoken thought as, rather wistfully, she turned away and made the rest of her round of the stables, until at last she reached Flame's loose box.

The lantern-light glowed on his gleaming skin, with the powerful muscles rippling beneath. Jock had groomed him well. He was a horse to be proud of, and Silver's heart swelled as she gazed at him.

"Flame!" He came to her, and she slipped a cool hand over his nose, leant her pale-gold head against his velvety shoulder.

"It's going to be tough on both of us, boy," she whispered. "Because I'm going away, not very far, but—oh, it'll seem as if oceans are between us! And you'll feel lonesome sometimes, Flame, and so shall I. You'll be puzzled and fretting. You'll think, maybe, I've deserted you."

"But I'll never desert you, Flame," she said softly. "Not for all the schools and mistresses and guardians in the world. I'll find ways of coming back. And you mustn't pine or get out of condition, boy, because our plans still stand. The Gaylord Trophy is our ambition—our goal!"

So she talked on in the dim-lit stable, while Flame tossed his head and rubbed his muzzle against her sleeve.

She tore herself away at last, slipping out of the stable with a choking lump in her throat.

Her lantern bobbing, she hurried across the yard, coming to a halt under the wall of the Lodge.

And as she stood there, taking a last look at her stables under the yellow moon, a voice floated faintly to her ears.

"That girl's going away to-morrow. She'll never come back."

Startled, Silver lifted her head, gazing around her. No sound or

(Please turn to the back page.)





THE WARNING NOTICE

"WHAT fun to be back at Baycroft Holiday Camp, nunky!" exclaimed June Gaynor.

Her detective uncle nodded as they paused on the snow-covered path and looked appreciatively across at the gaily painted chalets.

"Yes—it's going to be as jolly as it was in the summer," he agreed.

Merry laughter drifted to their ears as a party of youthful campers raced past, drawing a sledge piled high with holly and mistletoe.

"Coo-ee, June!" came a cheery cry from one of the girls. "Coming to help us put up the decorations for our party?"

"Rather!" answered June, and looked questioningly at Noel, but he wanted to see Mr. Wilford, the manager, so, leaving him, June joined the group of boys and girls.

"We're holding our party in the Pirate's Cabin," announced red-haired Dave Lester, as he led the way to a large hut that had been constructed out of the timbers of an old galleon.

As it was reached, a girl named Molly Furness produced a key from her pocket, but as she made to open the door June caught her by the arm.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "Whoever wrote that?"

And she pointed to a notice pinned to the door. In startled surprise the youthful campers surveyed it.

"DANGER! Don't decorate the Pirate's Cabin!"

"It must be someone playing a joke," declared Molly, and, unlocking the door, she led the way in. For a moment June lingered, to study the notice through frowning eyes, then she also entered the large hut, to gaze about her with delight.

"Oh, I say—how topping!" she exclaimed.

For the youthful campers had been busy that afternoon. The big hut was partially decorated with paper-chains, tinsel and coloured lanterns. A large Christmas-tree stood near the dais, with a life-sized cardboard figure of a snow-man; and on a table lay a giant Christmas cracker.

"Come on, June!" called Dave. "Lend us a hand with the snow-man. We'll shove him on the dais, next to the tree."

June helped him to lift the light cardboard and plaster figure on to the stage, then looked across at the table.

"What are you going to do with the cracker?" she asked.

"I thought we'd hang it up on a kind of cradle from the overhead beams," explained Molly eagerly. "You see—"

She was interrupted by a startled clamour, as every light in the hut was extinguished. There was a strange

rustling sound—a girl's stifled scream.

"Oh! Something—something fell on me!"

"What—what's happened?" gasped Molly.

"Looks as if someone's been monkeying with the lights," declared Dave.

"Stand still, everyone!" came June's clear voice, as with swift presence of mind she sprang to the door and closed it.

The gleam from her small pocket-torch stabbed the darkness, revealing the white, startled faces of the youthful campers.

It revealed, too, a tangled web of paper-chains that had fallen from the ceiling as though snapped by a ghostly hand.

"If anyone came into the hut," said June clearly, "they're still here! Dave—can you fix the lights?"

Dave crossed to the switch-box and examined it.

"Fused!" he said. "There's something funny going on here. I'll have it right in a jiffy."

A moment later the lights blazed up, and everyone blinked round in the dazzling glare.

But there was no stranger present—nothing to explain who or what had caused the scare—and an excited search failed to reveal anyone in hiding. "It's a mean trick, whoever played it!" declared Molly. She commenced to gather up the scattered decorations. "All our hard work—and the party's to-morrow evening and—"

"Don't worry," cut in Dave breezily, as he rolled up his sleeves. "We'll soon put that to rights! All hands to the jolly old pump. As for the mystery—that's something in June's line!"

"June, will you try to clear it up for us?" pleaded Molly.

June nodded, and there was a thoughtful and perplexed look in her eyes as she gave a hand with the decorations. She had a feeling that this was something more than a prank.

At last the paper-chains and coloured lanterns were in place, with festoons of holly and mistletoe. The scores of small gifts were duly arranged on the Christmas-tree, and packed in the giant Christmas cracker and in the snow-man's sack, dainty, useful trifles, purchased locally, and ranging from toys for the youngsters to a hand-painted tobacco-box for the oldest camper.

June volunteered to put out the lights and lock up, and when she had done so she was about to make her way to the camp restaurant to rejoin Noel when she saw something fluttering in a bush near the entrance to the hut.

In a moment she had retrieved it.

By PETER LANGLEY

It was a girl's handkerchief with some faded initials in the corner.

"L. B.," murmured June.

Quickly she ran over in her mind the names of her camping chums, but not one of them fitted.

Thoughtfully she made her way to the restaurant, to find Noel waiting for her. Before she could tell him what had happened he broached another subject.

"I've been talking to Wilford, June. They've had a spot of bother at the camp. D'you remember that dark-haired waitress who used to serve at our table when we were last here?"

June nodded.

"What about her, nunky?"

"She's disappeared!" said Noel briefly.

"Disappeared?" exclaimed June.

While they had tea Noel explained. About a week ago, when the camp had reopened for the Christmas holidays, there had been some trouble over certain missing belongings—and suspicion had fallen on the young waitress. A few days later she had vanished from her chalet, at dead of night, and had not been traced.

"What was her name, nunky?" asked June, struck by a sudden thought. "I don't think she ever told us—"

"Lucy Brent," said Noel, referring to a slip of paper.

June caught in her breath sharply, as she pulled the handkerchief from her pocket and pointed to the initials in the corner.

"Look, nunky—'L. B.'—it must be hers!"

Breathlessly she explained what had happened at the Pirate's Cabin. The detective whistled softly, his expression grave.

"When we've finished our tea, June, we'll pay a visit to the Cabin," he said. "There's more behind this than meets the eye!"

During their meal it had been snowing heavily, and paths and flower-beds lay white and untrodden in the moonlight. Outside they encountered Dave and Molly, carrying more decorations.

"June—the very person!" exclaimed Dave cheerily. "We're on our way to the Cabin, and you've got the key."

"Isn't there another key?" inquired Noel.

"No." Dave shook his head. "Mr. Wilford said there was only one cut, by an oversight. Are you coming along, sir?"

Noel nodded, and the little group made their way to the darkened Cabin. The snow lay around it in feathery drifts.

"No one's been here since we left—that's a cert," declared Dave. "Open up, June!"

June unlocked the door, and Dave groped for the switch. As the lights blazed up, there came a choking, horrified cry from Molly.

For the interior of the Cabin looked as though it had been struck by a tornado. Torn decorations hung forlornly from the walls, the Christmas-tree had been overturned, and the gifts packed in the giant Christmas cracker and in the snow-man's sack had been scattered and smashed.



THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

"Nunky—what does it mean?" gasped June. "There are no footprints in the snow, so how could anyone have got in?"

"And why should anyone play a rotten trick like this?" asked Dave. "It doesn't make sense!"

Molly, fighting back her tears, was looking round at the wreckage of the chums' handiwork.

"It's a horrid, jealous prank—" she began, with a gulp.

"It's more than that, I'm afraid!" cut in Noel, as he turned to examine the life-sized snow man. "Whoever did—"

He was interrupted by a scream from Molly, who was pointing at a shaking hand towards the window. They all turned, and June's heart froze.

Pressed against the glass was a face—a girl's face as white as death, the dark eyes dilated with fear.

"Nunky," gasped June, finding her voice, "that—that's Lucy Brent—the missing waitress!"

Noel was already leaping towards the door, and the others followed him pell-mell out into the snow.

They were in time to see a girl's slender figure, like a will-o'-the-wisp in the moonlight, racing towards the trees.

But she had gone when Noel reached the spot, with June panting at his heels, and here, where the frozen ground was devoid of snow, it was impossible to pick up her tracks.

"Nunky," panted June, "surely it couldn't have been Lucy who caused that damage?"

Noel shook his head. "I very much doubt it," he declared. "For one thing, it would have been impossible for her to have got into the Cabin after you locked up. There's a mystery within a mystery here, June—and I mean to get to the bottom of it!"

Returning to the Cabin, they found that Dave and Molly had been joined by several other indignant young campers, and by Mr. Wilford, the manager.

"This is an extraordinary business, Raymond!" said Wilford, as he stared round at the damage. "It's not as though there's anything here worth stealing. It must have been sheer spite on the part of that girl!"

"You mean Lucy, the waitress?" chorused several voices.

Wilford nodded grimly. "Possibly it's her idea of revenge."

"But Nunky says it was impossible for her to have got into the hut!" protested June.

Noel nodded gravely. "I'll go further than that," he said. "It would have been impossible for anyone to have entered the Cabin without leaving footprints in the snow—and there were no footprints!"

A blank silence followed his words. "Look here, Raymond," burst out the puzzled manager, "what are you trying to suggest?"

"I prefer not to explain until the whole mystery's cleared up," said Noel. "Meanwhile, I suggest you young people carry on with your arrangements for the party—"

"But what about our decorations?" chorused several anxious voices.

June had collected some of the torn paper hangings, and she passed them

to Noel at his request. The detective glanced over them swiftly, paying particular attention to some attractive hand-painted views of the district, ripped to shreds by the unknown enemy.

"Can we obtain some more decorations, Wilford?" he asked.

The manager nodded. "I'll ask Mr. Harker, he's part proprietor of the local stores, and he's calling on me this evening, and—ah, here he is!"

The door had opened, to admit a dapper, grey-bearded little man.

"What has happened here?" exclaimed Mr. Harker, staring round in amazement.

Checking an excited clamour of voices, Mr. Wilford apologetically explained, at the same time introducing Noel to Mr. Harker. Fortunately, the local store still had some decorations left, and Mr. Harker promised to send a fresh supply in the morning. When he had gone, Mr. Wilford turned to June and Noel.

"Harker's one of the kindest men I know," he declared. "It was he who recommended Lucy for her job here—and this is her gratitude!"

The manager departed, to organise a search for the runaway girl, while the youthful campers dispersed to make fresh plans for to-morrow's party.

Finally Noel and June were left alone.

"Nunky—you've scratched your finger on something!" breathed June, as the detective closed the door.

Noel glanced sharply at his hand, and his eyes narrowed as he took out his handkerchief and dabbed at a faint crimson stain.

"It's not a scratch, June," he murmured. "It's—Great Scott!" A soft, incredulous whistle escaped his lips. "It doesn't seem possible, and yet that's the only explanation!"

"Nunky—what do you mean?" gasped June excitedly.

"I mean," said Noel gravely, "that I'm still in the dark as to how and why the mischief was done—but the clue to the enemy's game is here, under our very noses!"

As he spoke he crossed swiftly to the table on which lay the giant cracker. For a moment he examined it through his magnifying-glass, then he beckoned.

"Look at this, June!" he cried. Excitedly she hurried to his side, staring blankly at the cracker.

"I don't see anything, nunky—except some drips of water on the table. Molly said that the roof was leaky. It's soaked into the red crepe paper and—"

She touched it gingerly, and a crimson stain showed on the tip of her finger. "So that's how you got it on your hand, nunky!"

"On the contrary," Noel smiled strangely. "I haven't touched that cracker since I came into the hut. June! Just think that over—and pass me that tray of decorations."

Completely baffled, June obeyed. Noel selected a small cardboard box from the tray.

"I think, June," he said, a glint in his eyes, "that is all we need to trap a very cunning rogue!"

He held out the box, and June stared blankly at the inscription: "Artificial Xmas Frost—Use Sparingly!"

"Nunky, what ever—" she gasped. But her uncle had slipped the box into his pocket with a dry smile.

"To-morrow," he said quietly, "you'll understand!"

IN spite of an extensive search, no trace could be found of the runaway waitress. But the faint cloud that the strange events cast over the spirits of the youthful campers was dispersed by the next morning.

Christmas Eve—and the day of the party!

While Noel was busy making certain inquiries on his own, June and her chums worked with a will to renovate the interior of the Cabin. A new Christmas-tree was dug up from

the grounds by Mr. Wilford's permission; fresh supplies of holly and mistletoe were gathered by willing hands.

Towards the evening a van arrived with the promised decorations from the local store.

The van-driver willingly lent a hand in the work of decorating, and within an hour of the time for the party to commence the Cabin presented a gay and festive scene.

The life-sized cardboard snow-man's sack and the giant Christmas cracker had been refilled with gifts that fortunately had been locked in the cupboard, and, therefore, had escaped damage.

"Everything's gorgeous, June!" declared Molly, her eyes sparkling. "The kiddies and the old people are looking forward to it especially. I—I do hope nothing goes wrong—"

"Leave Uncle Noel to take care of that!" said June, smiling. "He's been very busy all day—and I'm certain he's got something up his sleeve."

But in spite of her confident tone, June meant to take no chances. While the others hurried back to their chalets to change for the party, the girl detective surreptitiously let herself into the darkened Cabin, locking the door behind her.

She was determined to keep a secret vigil—just in case!

The pale moonlight streamed through the windows, lending a ghostly air to the Yuletide scene—making the decorations look unreal and fairy-like.

In spite of her steady nerves, June's heart beat rather quickly as she remembered the warning message on the door—the frightened face at the window.

Was it possible that the runaway young waitress could have—

June's heart froze suddenly as she heard a stealthy rustling behind her. She turned, and a choking scream was torn from her lips as a shadowy figure pounced on her suddenly in the moonlight, bringing her to the ground.

THE PARTY
OF SURPRISES

June's cry had been heard. There was a clamour of voices outside the Cabin, and a few minutes later the door was burst open

by a splintering blow.

Into the hut, headed by Noel and Mr. Wilford, raced the excited campers.

"June—what happened?" demanded Noel huskily, as he assisted his dazed young partner to her feet.

Unsteadily the girl detective explained, and a hurried search was made in the Cabin—without avail. There was no trace of her attacker.

"But this—is incredible!" exclaimed Mr. Wilford. "The door was locked, and the windows are shut. There's only that narrow skylight in the roof. You can't tell me anyone could have squeezed through there—"

He broke off, and June's heart turned cold as, from somewhere outside, came a girl's terrified scream.

Everyone raced for the door, Noel leading. The detective led the way round the Cabin—and a stifled ejaculation was torn from his lips as he came to an abrupt halt, dropping to his knees beside a slender figure spread-eagled in the snow.

It was Lucy Brent, the runaway young waitress—and she was unconscious.

"She—she must have fallen from the roof," exclaimed Mr. Wilford. "That explains it! The reckless girl was trying to escape through the skylight—"

"Impossible!" snapped Noel. "She could never have reached it, for one thing—and for another there's not a trace in the snow on the roof. This girl has been attacked!"

(Please turn to page 179.)

GIRLS' CRYSTAL—20-12-47



MIKE ON THE TRAIL

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

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

In Alexandria Ray was taken prisoner by an Arab confederate of the Nolans.

Mike, becoming anxious, saw Ray's luggage being taken from the hotel, and as he watched he gave a startled shout. His suspicions had been aroused.

"I HAD a feeling all along that there was something jolly queer about this business, and this proves it!"

There was a grim, worried look on Mike's face as, having reached the hotel gateway, he stared down the wide, palm-lined road that ran as straight as an arrow to right and left.

In the distance could be seen the horse-drawn carriage containing the luggage of the girl he knew as Rene Claire. It was heading not for the hills beyond the town, but for the Arab quarter around the docks.

What did it mean? Why, if Rene was staying at the House of the Three Palms, was her luggage being taken in the opposite direction?

Mike did not know, but as he realised that Ali may have lied to him his feeling of uneasiness deepened, and more and more he became convinced that Rene had not deliberately broken her promise to him.

"This wants looking into," he told himself.

He looked quickly around. The only way of solving the mystery was to follow Ali; to find Rene and question her. And not a moment was to be lost, for already the carriage was almost out of sight.

Drawn up in the courtyard was another carriage, but it was unattended. Mike raced across to it, beckoning as he did so to the hotel porter.

"When the driver comes back tell him I've borrowed his cab. I'll see he's well paid."

"But, effendi—" Mike, however, ignored the porter's protest. Already he was clambering up into the high driving seat, and as he gathered up the reins he shouted again.

"And tell my aunt—Mrs. Van Croom, you know—not to worry. I'll join her at the station."

The rattle of wheels drowned the porter's answer. Out through the gateway hurtled the horse-drawn carriage. It skidded round, then went plunging down the road.

Passers-by—red-fezzed Egyptians, veiled Arab women, and white-robed Berbers—all stopped and stared in

amazement. A British boy driving a native carriage at breakneck speed through the streets of the town was a unique sight. But Mike was oblivious of the sensation his impulsive action was creating. His gaze was riveted on the carriage far ahead. At all costs he must keep it in sight.

The chase led him deeper and deeper into the Arab quarter, through a maze of dark, sinister-looking alleyways. Street vendors scattered before the approach of the wildly galloping horses. A water-seller leapt for his life as the carriage skidded round a bend, narrowly missing a stall piled high with melons.

Then Mike reined in in dismay, for his quarry had vanished. What could have become of him? The long street ahead was empty and there were no side-turnings.

"Yet he was only fifty yards ahead," he muttered. "He couldn't possibly have—"

He broke off as he noticed an arched opening on the left. Jumping to the ground, he approached it cautiously, for there was something very sinister about this narrow, deserted back street. He peeped through the archway, and then his eyes gleamed.

Drawn up in a dark courtyard was the missing carriage, still piled with Rene's suitcases and large trunk. And standing in the doorway of the gloomy house at the far end of the courtyard was Ali, the driver, talking to two burly, ruffianly looking Arabs.

A loud guffaw reached the crouching boy.

"So the trick worked, eh? No one suspects that the English girl is in our power? It is good. The master will reward you well for this, Ali."

Mike's heart gave a startled leap. Here was sensational confirmation of all his fears. Rene had not kept her promise because she had been kidnapped! She must be a prisoner in this dark, forbidding house now.

How could she be rescued?

Mike's heart sank as he realised no help could be sought in this sinister district, and his eyes filled with dismay as he saw the daggers with which Ali's companions were armed.

"TWENTY to nine! In another twenty minutes the train will have left for Cairo! Already Mike and his aunt will have given me up—will think I've broken my promise."

The speaker was Ray Chilton—the girl whom Mike knew under the name of Rene Claire—and fearfully she stared across at the locked door. Then her quivering muscles tensed as she heard footsteps out in the corridor. The bolt was shot back, the door opened, and Hassan el Rikh entered, followed by a small procession of servants, staggering beneath the weight of a large trunk and three or four suitcases. Ray gave a startled cry as she recognised the bags, and Hassan smiled mockingly.

"Yes, Miss Claire, it is your own luggage," he said. "I have had it

Her Strange Role IN EGYPT

brought from your hotel. Very thoughtful, am I not? But then, I would not wish you to be uncomfortable in your new home in the desert."

Springing to her feet, Ray faced him wildly.

"I won't go! You shan't kidnap me!" she panted. And, seized with a feeling of desperation, she made a mad rush for the door.

But for all his plumpness, Hassan reached it first, and, barring the way, he seized her roughly by the arm, dragging her back.

"You little fool!" he hissed. "Do you think that I would let you escape now that my friend and I have got both the scarabs?"

"B-both?" stammered Ray, in bewilderment.

"But of course. The one I took from you and the one that was stolen in England. Surely you have not forgotten the little affair in which Sybil Chilton was involved? That scarab was just as important for our plans as the one you brought to Egypt—so we made arrangements for a certain English girl to steal it for us."

To an outsider his words would have suggested that Sybil Chilton herself had been the thief, but Ray knew that, although her sister had been dismissed for suspected theft, actually Sybil was innocent.

Then—then—

She gave a startled gasp as she realised the truth. The English girl of whom Hassan had spoken must have been Norah Nolan! It was she who had robbed Mrs. Van Croom's brother, falsely laying the blame on Sybil!

As Hassan saw the horrified look in Ray's eyes he laughed.

"Do not worry—the truth about Sybil Chilton will never be discovered. Nor will the scarabs ever be recovered. Thanks to the excellent work of my little English friend, we have them both."

He gave Ray a push that sent her sprawling back on to the cushions, then, at a signal from him, the Arab servants deposited the luggage on the floor and retired. He went to the door with them, but there he paused.

"We shall be setting out on our long journey very soon, Miss Claire," he declared. "In a few minutes, when I have made certain arrangements, I will return for you."

The door closed behind him; there came the thud of the bolt shooting home.

In numbed horror Ray sat there. All was lost.

Soon she would be whisked off to a house in the desert, far from civilisation—far from help of any kind.

There was little chance now of ever solving the mystery.

"Oh—what—"

Involuntarily her gaze was attracted to the big trunk that had been deposited in the centre of the carpet. In startled amazement she stared at it.

The lid was lifting!

With a gasp, she sprang to her feet; then, as the lid fell back with a clatter, she gave a wild, incredulous cry.

For scrambling up out of the trunk was a boyish figure.

"M-Mike!" she gasped. "It's-it's Mike!"



A DARING ESCAPE

And Michael Williams it was who clambered out of the trunk and surveyed her with a breathless smile.

Seizing his opportunity when Ali and his two armed companions had disappeared into the house for a moment, the boy had daringly hidden himself in the trunk, and as a result had been carried by the unsuspecting Arabs into the very room in which Ray was imprisoned!

"Mike!" gulped Ray again. And in her wild delight she rushed forward and seized his arms. "Oh, but how ever did you know I was here?"

He grinned, pleased by the warmth of her greeting.

"Well, that's rather a long story, old thing, but don't worry—I know the whole truth now and I'll soon have you out of here."

"The—the truth?" she echoed.

He nodded.

"Of course. I overheard all that Johnny said just now. But don't let's stop chinwagging. The sooner we get away the better."

He darted to the door and eagerly lifted the latch. He frowned as he realised the door was bolted, and frowned again as he saw that the latticed shutters over the windows were firmly secured.

Ray's feeling of delight died as quickly as it had come. For it looked as if Mike's daring ruse was to be of no use. Instead of helping her, he had only run into danger himself.

"Oh, Mike, it's wonderful to see you," she whispered, "but you shouldn't have come! Those villains will be coming back any minute, and when they find you here—"

Her voice trailed away, and in despair she faced him.

"Keep your pecker up, old thing," Mike urged. "We'll beat 'em yet." Speculatively he gazed around the room for a minute or two, then, crossing to where a heavy cedarwood chest stood against the wall, he grasped it firmly. "The first thing to do is to keep out all unwanted visitors until we're ready to receive them!"

Wonderingly, Ray watched him drag the massive chest across to the door and there firmly wedge it under the latch. Panting, he turned.

"That'll take a bit of budging," he chuckled. "Now to tackle those jolly old shutters."

Snatching up one of the copper-topped stools, he ran to the biggest window, but before he could attack the metal lattice-work there came a startled gasp from Ray.

"They're coming, Mike!"

Even as she spoke the latch rattled, then came an angry bellow as Hassan found that the door refused to budge.

"The little fool's wedged it," he muttered, and furiously hammered on the carved panels with his fists. "Open it!" he ordered. "This will avail you nothing. Open the door or I will have it smashed down."

Both Ray and Mike remained silent. There was a few moment's suspense, then—

Crash!

The irate Hassan had summoned his servants and they were battering at the door. Under their furious assault it quivered and shook, but Mike grinned excitedly. The noise would drown any row that he made, and so coolly he began lashing at the lattice-work with the heavy stool.

Ray, snatching up another stool, rushed to his aid, and as a result of their joint efforts the lattice-work broke and they were able to step out on to a small balcony overlooking the courtyard.

Mike cast one quick glance over the ornamental iron rail.

"The coast's clear, Rene. Everyone's upstairs—battering at the jolly old door. Bunk down the suitcases, old thing, while I manufacture a rope."

Swiftly Ray obeyed, then she stood watching as Mike dragged down the stout curtain cords, knotted them together, and tied one end of the

improvised rope to the balcony railing.

Her heart was in her mouth, for the door was beginning to crack and split. Already the latch had been smashed and slowly but surely the chest was being pushed out of position.

"O.K.! Down you go!" hissed Mike.

With desperate haste she clambered over the railing, grasped the rope, and began to slither down to the deserted courtyard. Mike followed, just as there came a crash and the door burst open.

Ray swung safely to the cobblestones, but Mike was still six feet up when Hassan's rage-convulsed face appeared over the balcony. A dagger glinted in his hand, and with a vicious slash he cut the rope.

Down dropped Mike, and Ray cried out with fear. But luckily the boy was unhurt. Panting and dusty, he scrambled to his feet, nodding to the carriage beyond the archway.

"Get aboard, old thing—"

And, grabbing up her suitcases, he led the way across the courtyard. From the house came a chorus of furious yells, then the thud of feet. But long before Hassan & Co. could descend the stairs Mike had tossed the cases into the carriage, helped Ray up, then leapt on to the driving-seat.

"O.K.! Now it's non-stop for the station!" he cried, and sent the horses bounding forward.



THE MESSAGE IN THE CUP

"Oh, where is Michael? What can possibly have become of him?"

Standing outside a first-class compartment of the Cairo express, Mrs. Van Croom gazed worriedly along the platform, for in a few minutes the train was due to depart.

Norah and her father, who stood beside Mike's aunt, frowned.

"I fear he must have gone in search of that impostor girl," James Nolan declared, "though he's only wasting his time. He will never find her."

"Never," agreed Norah, making no attempt to hide her spiteful jubilation. "Thank goodness she's cleared off for good. We'll never see her—"

Her voice trailed away, and with wide eyes she and her father stared, for a horse-drawn carriage, driven at break-neck speed, had just come careering into the station.

Mrs. Van Croom gave a cry of relief. "Michael! And— Goodness gracious, that looks like Rene with him!"

The Nolans said nothing. Alarmed and staggered, they stood there. The carriage drew up, and Ray jumped down and came running up the platform, carrying one of the suitcases. Mike, laden down with the others, made to follow, but was stopped by a shouting, wildly gesticulating Egyptian. It was the owner of the horse carriage. He had come to the station in search of his property, and Mike paused to appease him with a handful of coins.

Meanwhile, Ray hurried joyfully on, and, unaware of what the Nolans had told Mrs. Van Croom, she greeted Mike's aunt with a breathless smile. "Sorry, we're so late, but, you see—"

She stopped, suddenly realising that all was far from well. There was no welcoming smile on Mrs. Van Croom's face.

"I must confess that I did not expect to see you, Miss Claire," she said stiffly. "After the way you have deceived us all—"

"Deceived you?" stammered Ray, staring in dismay.

Norah, recovering from the first shock, glowered furiously.

"Yes—don't try to bluff! We've discovered the truth about you at last!" she cried. "We know you're in league with Sybil Chilton! We know you're actually the sister of that thief!"

It was as if Ray had been struck in the face. So her secret was out!

"It's not true!" she gasped, meaning that it was not correct that Sybil was a thief.

"Of course it's not true! It's the biggest bunk I've ever heard!"

And Mike, having settled with the owner of the cab, came striding forward, his face flushed and angry.

"Rene, Sybil Chilton's sister?" he exclaimed. "It would be funny if it wasn't so absurd! Wait until you've heard my story, aunt, before you listen to Norah's nonsense. Why, I've just rescued Rene from Sybil Chilton's hirelings!"

They all stared blankly—Ray as startled as any of them. Grimly Mike nodded, then he related what had happened. The Nolans exchanged anxious looks as they listened, while Ray could hardly believe her own ears, for clear it was that Mike had misunderstood the conversation he had overheard while hidden in the trunk.

"I tell you I heard this Hassan chap boasting about how Sybil Chilton had stolen uncle's scarab. Heard him openly say that she was his confederate. So is it likely," the boy demanded, with a scornful look around, "that Rene can be the sister of the very girl who helped to kidnap her!"

The Nolans said nothing. They were frightened to intervene in case they themselves should be accused. Mrs. Van Croom's frown had disappeared, but she still looked puzzled.

"But what of that photograph Mr. Nolan showed us?" she asked. "That suggests Sybil Chilton and Miss Claire are very alike."

Mike gave an impatient snort. "Pooh! Just a coincidence," he declared.

"Now stop being so mean, aunt. Rene's had a shocking time and she needs all the sympathy you can give her."

To Ray's delight, Mrs. Van Croom nodded, and it was contentedly that she regarded the girl at her nephew's side.

"Mike is right, my dear," she declared. "Once again we have misjudged you. Please accept our apologies." She gave Ray's arm a remorseful squeeze, then turned as there came the patter of slippers feet along the platform and a husky voice called out:

"Sherbert! Rich, cooling sherbert!"

And a slim Arab girl, her eyes peeping mysteriously out above the veil that screened her face, approached the group around the carriage door. Slung around her neck was a large wickerwork tray on which were two curiously designed bottles containing a fizzy, greenish liquid and a nest of bowl-like paper cups.

"Effendi buy a sherbert?" she asked, smiling across at Mike.

He grinned. "Rather! After the rush here I could do with cooling down."

The girl turned to Ray.

"White missy also like a drink?" she asked. "Please!" she added, and Ray was surprised to detect a strange note of entreaty in her voice.

She nodded, and, taking the cup which the veiled Arab girl filled for her, she mechanically took a sip.

The Arab girl moved closer, a queer look appeared in her eyes.

"White missy, drink the cup dry," she urged.

"Rather!" cut in Mike. "The jolly old train will be leaving in a couple of ticks."

Hurriedly Ray finished the sherbert, and she was about to hand back the paper cup when suddenly she paused. What was this? Her heart gave a startled leap, and in blank amazement she stared. For on the bottom of the paper cup was written a message—a message which made her catch in her breath in excited wonder.

"Do not despair," it said. "You are not friendless in Egypt. If you would recover the scarab, when you reach Cairo seek out Ahmed, the fortune-teller."

Owing to the Christmas holidays, next week's copy of the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale on Wednesday the 24th instead of Friday the 26th.



GLORIA — The SENSATION OF THE SCHOOL

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

SUSPICION AGAINST VICKY

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, who was losing popularity thanks to 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.

She stole Vicky's idea for special Sports Club badges, and left them in the pavilion during a hockey practice. When they returned the badges were lying, scattered and burnt, on top of the hot stove, and Vicky was accused of upsetting them out of spite.

ANGRILY Jill gazed at Lottie Midland, as that girl flung out her accusation against Vicky. "It was Vicky who damaged Gloria's badges!" repeated Lottie shrilly.

Vicky was still staring with dazed eyes at the smouldering box and the ruined badges scattered round the stove in the pavilion dressing-room.

Quickly Jill thrust her way forward, for she saw with inward dismay that a lot of the girls there were ready to believe Lottie.

"Lottie—take that back!" she cried furiously. "You know jolly well that Vicky would never dream of such a mean thing—"

"Hear, hear!" Bertha Mumford stoutly supported, while Gloria, raising her big blue eyes from contemplation of the wreckage, half nodded her golden head as if in agreement.

"But this isn't a dream—it's real!" Lottie sneered. "And who says Vicky isn't mean? Who slandered Gloria because of that letter she wrote? Who made out that Gloria had pinched her badge idea? Who prevented Gloria from scoring the vital goal against the Sixth this afternoon? Isn't all that mean? Vicky's jealous of Gloria—and hates her because Gloria's put up against her in the sports captain election—hates her because she knows Gloria will make a better captain—"

"Why, you—" Vicky fumed, starting forward; but swiftly Jill caught her arm, afraid her chum would completely lose her temper.

"Well, if Vicky didn't do it, who did?" Alpha Ainsworth wanted to know. "Who else could have done it? She was the only one here during half-time!"

"What about Gloria? She was here, too!" Vicky cried, but at once there was a cry of protest. As if Gloria would deliberately ruin her own badges! But it was Gloria herself who took up the cudgels then.

"Zi-pee, don't make such a fuss," she chipped in. "And leave Vicky alone! It must have been an accident, of course, if Vicky says so!" She dimpled at Vicky, who, utterly

taken aback by such unexpected support, was staring at her. "Anyway, what're a few badges more or less?" she added gaily. "All I've got to do is to send a cheque along to the silver-smith's and we'll have another batch in no time. Now, who says tuckshop—to celebrate our playing the Sixth. My treat—of course!"

There was a whoop at once. But Jill breathed hard. She saw again that Gloria, by her apparent forgiveness, her anxiety to make light of the ruined badges and exonerate Vicky from blame, had captured the girls' sympathy. But Vicky, she knew, was still registered as guilty in the minds of half the girls there.

Though they admired Gloria for her tolerance, they were deeply disgusted with their captain. Jill admitted to herself that had she not known Gloria better she might herself have been deceived. But—

"Vicky, let's go!" she said quietly. "Oh, Jill, please join us," Gloria pouted. "And, Vicky—let's forget we're rivals for a minute! Dash it, we have played the Sixth!"

"I'm sorry, we're busy," Jill said. She led her chum away. Half way across the quad, however, Vicky paused.

"Jill, thanks," she said huskily. "For what, old thing?"

"Thanks for being such a splendid pal. Thanks for backing me up—and preventing me from making a fool of myself!" Vicky shook her head.

"Gosh, Jill, I don't know what I'd do without you!"

"Silly old Vicky," Jill smiled, but her eyes were misty suddenly. "Don't worry! Keep the old pecker up. We'll win through yet, despite what Gloria does."

But would they? She was beginning to have a doubt herself now, with a girl like Gloria to contend with.

Gloria had scored heavily by her cool cheek in challenging the Sixth. She had put Vicky deeper in the Fourth's bad books by the trick she had played just before time in front of the Sixth's goal—and that, Jill knew, had been a trick deliberately manoeuvred.

And she was wondering—though she did not express that suspicion to Vicky—had Gloria, in fact, destroyed her own badges just in order to make it appear that Vicky had been acting out of spite?

She was capable of it. To a girl of Gloria's wealth the loss of the badges meant nothing, provided she scored a new triumph over her rival.

"Well, what about tea?" Jill asked, when she and Vicky reached Study C. She glanced into the cupboard and grimaced. "Fraid it will have to be in hall. We finished the jam, and we've no cake—"

She paused as the door opened. Dora Wright of the Second Form entered, placed a large parcel on the table and, with a pert grin, hurried out again.

"What the—" Vicky said. "Hallo, this is addressed to us, Jill. What the dickens is it?"

"Let's see," Jill suggested practically.

She opened the parcel and then both she and Vicky gasped. For in the parcel was a lovely iced cake—one of the tuckshop's most expensive rarities—half a dozen jam tarts and half a dozen smaller cakes.

"But, who sent it?" Jill cried in mystification, and lifted up the cake, then started again as she found a card beneath it.

It was one of Gloria Beverleigh-Browne's crimson, and gilt election-eering cards. One side of it the printed message said: "VOTE FOR GLORIA." On the other was a message in Gloria's own characteristic hand.

"Sorry you can't be with us, but we don't want you to miss the fun. Please accept this—with my love."



THE THIRD ARE IMPRESSED

Amazing, this Gloria—always, it seemed, doing the unexpected. Once again Jill felt baffled as she gazed at the extravagantly generous gift from Gloria.

"Well, what do we do about this, Vicky?"

"Nothing," Vicky said gruffly. "Send it back. She must know that we don't want her cakes."

"Yes," Jill nodded. "But—wait a minute! Gloria's got some reason—and golly, yes, that's it! She sent this from the tuckshop! All the girls there must know about it, and, think it pretty splendid of her. If we turn it down now—"

Vicky started. She realised what Jill meant. Gloria, playing her role of Lady Bountiful, was out to keep on impressing the Fourth, at the same time embarrassing Vicky and Jill by her apparent goodwill. If they refused the gift—

"The Form will just think we're being churlish," Jill said. "Up goes Gloria's stock another peg—and down comes ours. See her plan? Well, it won't work! We've got to think about the election, Vicky. We'll jolly well accept these cakes—and I'll pop along after tea and thank her in person!"

And so, thanks to Gloria, they sat down to tea in the study. And after tea, leaving Vicky to make out the team which was to play the neighbouring school of Oldbridge on the following Saturday, she popped along to Gloria's study.

Gloria was there—alone, languidly polishing her finger-nails from an expensive-looking manœuvre set which rested on the study table. She smiled radiantly as Jill quietly thanked her.

"Nice of you, Jill—and thanks for the thanks," she said gaily. "I hope you enjoyed the cake. Send you another to-morrow if you'd like it—"

"Oh, thanks, no, we've got heaps," Jill said.

"Well, don't forget—if you ever need anything, the same old rule still applies," Gloria said generously. "Just come along to Auntie Gloria and ask. Like the study?" she added carelessly, glancing around at its luxury. "Not a bad dump, is it? And don't forget, Jill, you and Vicky are coming to the study warming as soon as the election is over and I've got absolutely settled in. Give Vicky my

love," she went on with a smile as Jill turned to the door, "and tell her I still hope the best girl wins."

There was a hint of mockery in those last words. Jill, though she sensed it, ignored it. With a feeling of relief she found herself in the corridor again; thoughtfully she strolled off. And just as she was passing Study J she heard Pearl Bell's voice—Pearl, who until this moment she had counted a supporter of Vicky.

"Oh, of course it's pretty plain," she was saying. "Vicky's jealous—and can you blame her? Gloria's the girl who has the ideas; she'd make a marvellous captain. Anyway, my vote is going to Gloria."

Jill winced as she heard that. She felt a renewed anxiety. How many of the girls on whose support she was counting shared the same opinion?

And then, entering Study C, she received a fresh surprise when she found Bertha, Stella, Tressida, Clarissa and Coralie gathered there.

Vicky was absent—presumably pinning up her team on the Junior Sports board in the Hall.

"Oh, Jill, here you are," Clarissa said. "Thought we'd better pop along and see you. We're rather worried."

"About what?"

"Well, about Vicky, of course. We're all voting for her, though she has been a bit of a puzzle lately. We all know, whatever happens, that she's the best sports captain—but we can't speak for others in the Form. Phyllis and Sarah will vote for her, of course, but that won't give her a majority. We wanted to know what you thought about it."

"I think," Jill said instantly, "that Vicky'll pull through. Back her up and rally the girls who are wavering and we'll get her in, never fear—"

But when, after some further discussion, Vicky's supporters had left, she shook her head. Things definitely were going against Vicky. They had to do something—something pretty speedily now.

"But, of course—why not?" Jill breathed. "Nobody really canvassed the Third—except to send them the election notices. Why not go along and stir them up? Their vote would more than settle the issue."

She felt excited all at once as she thought of the possibilities. The Third was only twenty strong—but every girl in the Third was entitled to a vote. As soon as ever Vicky came in she mentioned the idea to her and Vicky's enthusiasm was immediately bubbling.

"Jolly good idea," she voted. "Let's go down to the Third Common-room and see Eve Handsworth, the captain."

There and then they went off. To Jill's delight quite a lot of the Third were present when they reached the Common-room. Eve Handsworth was among them. Expectantly she looked up as Jill approached her.

"Oh, corks don't say you've found it?" she breathed.

"Eh? Found what?" Jill asked. "My handbag! I lost it yesterday, you know—with four-and-sixpence in it."

"Sorry, Eve, never heard about it until this moment," Jill said. "We'll have a hunt round. As a matter of fact, we came here to talk about the election. If you don't mind us saying a few words—"

"We don't," Dolores Britt said, coming forward. "Vicky's got my vote anyway. She's been a ripping captain for two terms and I don't see why anyone should oust her now—in spite of what they're saying in the Fourth. I say—Vote for Vicky."

"And I'm not so sure," Nancy Farrow put in. "Let's have a change. After what Vicky's done—"

"Which is what?" Eve Handsworth chipped in. "Never mind what Vicky's supposed to have done—it's what sort of sports captain she is that matters. Now be quiet, everybody. Go ahead, Jill, and do the talking."

And Jill did, in that quiet, sincere voice of hers. And the Third listened. They liked Jill. They respected her and, as in her own Form, her word

A Merry Christmas To You All

May you have plenty of fun and plenty of presents. All my staff, authors and artists join with me in sending very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to all GIRLS' CRYSTAL readers.

Your Editor

carried weight. Jill saw that she had "got" them; saw that she was impressing them and warmed to her theme.

"Well, it all sounds topping," Eve said, when she had finished. "The way you put it, Jill, there's no possible choice but Vicky. All the same, Gloria is a jolly good sport and—"

"Zi-pee, a merry voice at the door broke in. "Is Eve here?"

Jill flung round. At once all eyes switched to the new figure which came in—Gloria, her most dazzling smile upon her lovely face, her glorious golden hair rippling softly about her shapely shoulders. In her hand she carried a cardboard box.

"Lo, Jill—and Vicky—didn't know you were here. But it's Eve I want to see—"

"Oh! Are you canvassing, too?" Eve suspiciously demanded.

"Canvassing? Me? Goodness, no," Gloria laughed. "I've just heard about your handbag, Eve. I'm frightfully sorry. And—she opened the cardboard box and Eve and everyone else held their breath as a gleaming, brand-new handbag in shiny, expensive leather and gilt fittings slid into view. "Would you like this in its place, Eve?"

"Me?" Eve said incredulously. "Gloria, you don't—you can't—mean it. That bag must have cost pounds."

"It did!" Gloria laughed carelessly. "Paterflap bought it for me, but it doesn't match anything I have, so I'd like to pass it on, Eve. There," she added, and thrust the bag into the dazed Eve's hands. "No; don't worry about thanks—just take it. So long."

And she sauntered from the room.



WHERE IS GLORIA?

The Third was tremendously excited, and Jill and Vicky for the moment were entirely forgotten as they all clustered round to examine the superb new treasure which Gloria had, thrust upon their leader.

Grimly the two chums looked at each other. Knowing Gloria, they could not help suspect that this latest act of hers was just another subtle plan to gain popularity.

And there was no doubt that it had caused a sensation in the Third. No doubt that it had put Gloria bang in the forefront of their minds. In desperation Jill tried to rally them. "Well, Eve?" she asked. "What about it? I'm asking you—all of you—to vote for Vicky. I know Gloria's jolly generous and all that, but that doesn't say she'll make a good captain—"

"I know," Eve flushed. "We're interested only in backing up the best girl, but—she looked round—"it seems to me now that the best girl has got to prove it—"

"Hear, hear!" supported Nancy Farrow.

"But how on earth—" Vicky protested.

"I'll tell you," Eve said. "The day after to-morrow the Oldbridge hockey match comes off, doesn't it? Both Gloria and Vicky will be playing in it. Right. We'll be there, too. And,

Jill, you know as well as I do that a lot of girls in the Third regard the best players as the best captain, so you can take it that the majority of the Third will back the one who puts up the best show against Oldbridge."

And with that decision Jill and Vicky had to be content. But back in Study C Jill looked at her chum.

"Vicky, the Third's vote can make or break us," she said. "But if you play the game of your life—"

"Don't worry, I will," Vicky said quietly.

And so Saturday—the day of the Oldbridge match, with the still more exciting election for sports captain to follow in the evening, dawned. And after lunch most of the hockey-minded, election-minded Junior School tramped over to the Oldbridge playing ground, which was barely a mile from Towershill School.

Jill and Vicky went on before the rest—Vicky serious and determined. Jill glanced at her.

"Top form, Vicky?"

"Tops!" Vicky replied. "I'm going to play the game of my life."

They reached the ground, where the Oldbridge captain was waiting to greet them. Together they inspected the pitch, were introduced to the rest of the opposing team and the umpires—one of whom was their own Brenda Maddox. By that time the rest of the Towershill team had turned up—all except Gloria.

"I say, where is Gloria?" Clarissa Brentford wanted to know. "I haven't seen her since lunch."

"Don't worry," Coralie Jason said dryly. "She's probably hired a car to bring her. You can bet Gloria will do this in style. But—hey—who are these people?"

For four men, two of them carrying cameras, were strolling along to the pavilion. Expectantly they looked round.

"Miss Beverleigh-Browne here?" one asked.

"Not yet. Why?" Vicky asked.

"We want to get in touch with her. We're reporters and photographers from her father's paper, the Highdale Courier, and they're holding back half a page for an illustrated review of the match—"

"Oh, gosh," breathed Alpha Ainsworth.

"You mean—Gloria ordered you to come?" Jill asked.

"But, of course."

The Fourth gaped. And just then Brenda Maddox came up.

"'Bout time you were ready," the prefect, said to Vicky. "Where's Gloria?"

"I—I don't know."

"Don't you?" It was Lottie Midland—Lottie, acting as reserve—who suddenly thrust forward. "If you don't, nobody jolly well does," she accused. "It was you who sent her off after lunch."

Vicky stared blankly.

"What on earth are you talking about? I never did anything of the kind."

"No?" Lottie's eyes were gleaming. "Then who left Gloria a note saying that the reporters wanted to see her at the gates?"

"But look here, we never sent Miss Beverleigh-Browne any message," one of the reporters protested. "In fact, we never even went to the school."

There was a sudden, breathless hush. Vicky reddened.

"I tell you, I never sent Gloria any note," she defended.

"You left it in her study," Lottie insisted. "She obeyed it—and hasn't been seen since! If you ask me—"

"We're not asking you anything," Jill put in sharply. "You know you're just talking spiteful nonsense, Lottie. You've got no proof—"

"Haven't I?" Lottie gibed. And suddenly she whipped a note from her pocket. "Brenda," she added excitedly to the Towershill prefect, "will you read that? It's the note that Vicky left for Gloria!"

The air seemed charged with electricity as the surrounding crowd—including the pressmen—surged forward and Lottie thrust the note into Brenda's hand.

Another exciting instalment next week.



The Merry-makers Afloat

By
DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE MINCE PIES THAT VANISHED

"MAKE way there! Make way for Father Christmas!" sang out Sally Warner. "But he's not giving away presents this time—he's collecting them instead!"

Johnny Briggs, dressed in the white whiskers and red robes of Father Christmas, strode along the deck and hailed Linda Powell, the cheery girl from Chicago.

"What are you giving?" he asked. "A cash donation or a gift for the Christmas auction?"

"Both," drawled the American girl. She handed Johnny five dollar bills, and then put a dainty box of brand-new hankies in the bulging sack on the sledge-like contraption which was being hauled along by fair-haired Fay Manners and Don Weston.

It was Christmas Eve on board the liner Ocean Star—known as the College Ship because it was taking a crowd of students to Australia.

Sally and her merry-making chums—Don, Fay, and Johnny—had had the happy idea of raising funds for a deserving seamen's charity. So far the response from students and passengers had been generous and whole-hearted. Many of them, like Linda, had donated both cash and gifts—the latter were going to be auctioned, thus raising more money for the good cause.

"Thanks, Linda," smiled Sally. "Now, who's next? Whoop-hoo!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Here comes Mr. Patchett. We ought to get a fat donation from him."

Coming towards them along the promenade deck was a tall, lean man with greying hair and rather gaunt features. He was a morose-looking individual, and was something of a hermit on the ship, keeping very much to himself and to his cabin. But Cyrus K. Patchett was reputed to be wealthy, so Sally & Co. swooped down on him.

"Morning, Mr. Patchett! We're collecting for a very deserving charity, and we're sure you'd like to make a donation," began Johnny enthusiastically.

"Never make donations!" said Mr. Patchett in a testy voice.

"Oh! I say! Johnny was taken aback for a moment, and then he gave a knowing grin. "You're joking, of course."

"Nor am I in the habit of making jokes!" snapped Mr. Patchett. "Go away!"

"Oh, please, Mr. Patchett, do make a contribution! After all, it's Christmas—"

"Whoa—Gosh! Look out!"

That sudden warning shout came from Don Weston as something whizzed past him. It was the sledge which he and Fay had left a little

way along the deck. The ship had dipped in the South Atlantic swell, and the sledge had shot forward.

Swiftly gathering momentum it missed the chums by inches—but did not miss Cyrus K. Patchett. It swept against his legs, sending him sprawling, and as he fell, something was jerked out of the inner pocket of his jacket.

Sally saw it fall to the deck—a small leather-bound book. It could have been a diary, with a lion's head embossed in gold on the cover. But, anxious in case Mr. Patchett might have been hurt, Sally did not pause to pick it up, and then all thought of it was driven from her mind as the man rounded on her and her chums furiously.

"You rascals! I might have been hurt! You did that purposely!" he accused.

"Oh, we didn't!" gasped Sally indignantly. "It was an accident."

"Bah! I do not intend to argue. But if you come pestering me again I shall complain to your headmaster!"

He got to his feet, glared, and then stamped away, unaware that the book had dropped from his pocket.

"My goodness, what a miserable old meanie!" exclaimed Fay, who had been scooping back into the sack the gifts which had spilled out as a result of the mishap.

"Scrooge come to life!" said Don. "Fancy having him at a Christmas party—"

A shout from along the deck interrupted him.

"Snack-time, Merry-makers! Who wants one of these?" And there was Tubby Winwood, plump and beaming, beckoning to them with one hand and holding aloft in the other a dish of golden brown mince pies which he himself had made that morning down in the galley.

"Lead me to them!" laughed Sally—and herself did the leading. They all knew what an expert pastrycook the Michigan boy was. "Do we help ourselves, Tubby?"

"Sure. They're all for you—well, perhaps I'll have just one myself to keep a bottle of pop company," added Tubby as an afterthought.

He went off, heading in the direction of the students' tuckshop, leaving the dish on the tarpaulin cover of the lifeboat against which the chums were now standing.

"What-ho!" exclaimed Johnny, having removed his Father Christmas beard. "That was super. Think I'll have another one."

"Plenty more," smiled Sally, stretching out a hand to reach for the dish. And then she blinked in surprise. "Funny! I thought there were more than that," she added.

She had been under the impression that there were nine left on the dish,

but now there were certainly only seven. Obviously she had been mistaken.

Don took one, leaving six. "Luscious!" exclaimed Fay. "Pass me another one, Sally, please."

Once again Sally turned to reach for the plate. And once again she blinked.

Now there were only five pies left! And no wonder, for she was just in time to see a hand, clutching one of the mince pies, disappear under the tarpaulin cover.

"Golly, so that's the game!" she cried indignantly. "No wonder they've been disappearing. Who is it? Come and show yourself, you!"

She lifted up the tarpaulin, to find herself staring into the startled brown eyes of a curly-headed boy she had never seen before.

"Say, don't give a fella away!" he said in a husky voice. "I was crazy, taking those pies—just asking to be spotted. But, gee, I couldn't resist 'em! Guess I'm hungry—have hardy had a bite since we left Bahia!"

Sally's blue eyes were wide as she realised the truth.

"You—you're a stowaway!" she gasped.

"Yep!"

"But—but— Goodness, there'll be trouble if you're caught!"

"I'm not going to be caught—that is, if you don't give me away. Listen! I'm on the level—honest. I am—so please keep my secret. I've just got to remain hidden a little longer—just got to!"

And in urgent appeal, the stowaway looked at the chums. Sally's thoughts were whirling. She knew that really, she should report this—and knew in the same moment that she couldn't resist his urgent appeal. Instinctively, she liked the boy.

"We won't give you away," she said, and added impulsively: "In fact, we'll help you— Dodge out of sight quickly!" she finished on a note of urgent warning.

For suddenly she had become aware of a weedy, saw-toothed boy peering furtively in their direction from the opposite side of the ship. It was Alec Burt, the sneak of the floating college, and no friend of the chums. If Burt discovered there was a stowaway on board there would be no keeping it a secret.

"You're swell," the stowaway was saying from under the tarpaulin. "All clear yet?"

"I don't think Burt spotted anything," Don was saying. "He's gone off up the deck."

The stowaway's head popped into view again.

"Listen! If you could get me some grub I'd be mighty obliged. I've got a swell hideout down in one of the holds. I'm only in here because I'm looking for someone." A trace of bitterness crept into his voice. "Know a Roger Purlow?"

"Roger Purlow? Never heard of him," Sally said after a moment's pause.

"Reckon he's on the boat—"

"I say, Burt's talking to one of the ship's officers!" broke in Johnny. "Perhaps he did spot something."

"Then you're no longer safe here!"

Sally said quickly to the stowaway. "Come on, make a dash for it! You can hide in one of our cabins until we get you some food!"

The boy's eyes were eloquent of his gratitude as he scrambled out of the lifeboat. In a bunched group, the five of them made a dash for the nearest companionway.

But they never got to B Deck, where the students' cabins were situated. Even as they reached D Deck shouts sounded from above.

"Search the decks! There's a stow-away on board!"

"And find Sally Warner!" came Alec Burt's shrill, piping voice. "She knows something about it!"



THE SEARCH FOR THE STOWAWAY

Sally felt her heart give a sickening lurch of dismay, while the mystery boy regarded her in remorse.

"Say, I've got you into a jam!" he gasped. "I'll scam!"

He made to dash off down the deck, but Sally caught him by the arm. She had promised to help the stowaway, and help him she would if it were humanly possible.

"You'll be caught. Hang on—I've got an idea. In here, everybody!" she hissed urgently, leading the way into a deserted lecture-room.

"What's the wheeze, Sally?" asked Johnny.

"I want you to lend your Father Christmas costume to—"

She broke off and looked questioningly at the stowaway.

"My name's Glenn Beaumont," the American boy said. "You mean that I should disguise myself as Father Christmas?"

"Good old Sally!" chortled Don. "She's the girl for brain-waves. The beard will hide your features, and everybody will think you're Johnny."

"You can come round collecting with us," Sally went on. "That'll throw everybody off the scent, and then later we'll smuggle you down to your hideout. In the meantime, Johnny, you'll have to keep out of sight!"

"Leave it to me," Johnny nodded. "Here you are, Glenn."

He had taken off his robes and was helping the stowaway to put them on. With the beard they made a perfect disguise.

They were only just in time. The search party, consisting of an officer and seamen, passengers and students, came swarming down on to D Deck.

Johnny dodged out of sight. Sally and the others were calmly strolling along the deck when they were met by the searchers.

Third Officer Tony Payne, in charge of the party, stepped forward and confronted Sally.

"Well, Miss Warner, where is he? Where's this stowaway?"

"Stowaway? Have you found a stowaway?" Sally asked innocently.

"We haven't found him yet, but we shall," Payne said. "We're searching for him now, and—"

"Are you really? I say, we'd join in, but as it happens we're collecting for that charity, you know," Sally said—and added brightly: "That reminds me, we're expecting a contribution from you, Mr. Payne—"

"They're pulling the wool over your eyes," interrupted Alec Burt unpleasantly. "I heard Sally say something about a stowaway."

"I said what?" Sally asked as if in bewilderment, then burst out laughing. "Oh, how absurd! I expect I was saying something about stowing away Tubby's delicious mince pies. We had a lovely tuck in!"

Third Officer Payne looked at her hard, then turned to his men.

"Carry on with the search," he said. "And I hope for your sake, Miss Warner, that we don't find a stowaway, otherwise I shall put two and two together and your Christmas might not be a very merry one."

Sally & Co. found themselves alone. But the officer's words had made Sally realise the seriousness of her action, so impetuously undertaken. Glenn Beaumont realised it, too.

"Gee, it was swell the way you kidded that officer along," he said. "You've all been grand. But now I'll carry on alone. I'll make tracks for my hideout in Hold No. 6. But what about this costume?"

"We'll come down and collect it later—and bring you some food," Sally said. "We'll give you half an hour, and then Johnny can come out of hiding and nobody will be any the wiser that you've been taking his place."

With a hurried word of thanks, the stowaway disappeared down one of the companionways. When he had gone Sally, Don, and Fay went up to the promenade deck to fetch the sack of gifts, meaning to hand it to the purser, who was to take charge of the auction sale that afternoon.

Members of the crew were putting up garlands and streamers and other decorations, and already the liner was taking on a festive appearance. The only thing not Christmasy was the weather, for the Ocean Star, heading for Rio de Janeiro, was still in tropical waters. But Christmas was going to be celebrated in the traditional way, with festive fare and special entertainments.

Mr. Bellamy, the purser, had his office on C Deck. Here also were situated the passengers' cabins and suites. He beamed his satisfaction when the chums had handed over the cash and gifts.

"Grand work, youngsters," he congratulated them. "There'll be a nice big sum of money by the time we've held the auction. The captain will be very pleased indeed. Hallo, where's Briggs?" he added, spotting that there were only three of them.

"Oh, he's knocking around!" Sally replied casually.

"Right! I'll get these gifts parcelled up and hung on the Christmas-tree in the first-class lounge. Not the accepted way to run an auction perhaps, but this is Christmas—"

He broke off as there came a shout from along the corridor.

"I've been robbed! My cabin's been burgled!"

The purser shot a startled glance at the chums and then went racing out of his office. Sally & Co. followed hot on his heels.

There at the end of the corridor was Cyrus K. Patchett, his shouts bringing people on to the scene from all directions.

"I've been robbed," Patchett cried again. "I saw somebody in a Father Christmas costume come out of my cabin, but he dashed away before I could catch him."

"In a Father Christmas costume?" echoed the purser. "Young Briggs has been wearing that outfit all morning—"

Suddenly he swung round on the horrified chums, a look of suspicion quickly crossing his face.

"And he wasn't with you when you came along to see me just now. Miss Warner, where is Briggs?"

Sally stood tongue-tied and filled with consternation.

A robbery had been committed by someone wearing a Father Christmas outfit, and everybody on the liner knew that Johnny had been in such a costume. What they did not know was that Johnny had lent it to a stowaway.

Then Glenn Beaumont must be the thief!



THE SECRET OF THE DIARY

"I asked you a question, Miss Warner." The purser's voice was sharp with suspicion. "Where is Briggs?"

Before Sally could speak a cheery voice rang out.

"Hallo, hallo! Somebody want me? What's all the excitement?"

It was Johnny's voice, and Sally gave a start as Johnny himself came striding along the corridor. Even at that moment she noticed that he seemed curiously excited, that he gave Mr. Patchett a peculiarly penetrating look.

"So here you are, Briggs," the purser was saying. "I see you are not wearing your Father Christmas costume now. Do you know anything about—"

But Mr. Patchett cut the officer short.

"That isn't the boy! He has fair hair, and I happened to notice that the thief's hair was dark and curly—I saw that because the hood was partly off his head. He's got to be found and the missing thing recovered. Do something, somebody, instead of just standing about gaping!"

"Yes, Mr. Patchett," said the purser hastily. "The matter will be investigated immediately, and in the meantime I'd like full details from you. There are rumours that there's a stowaway on board. He may be the thief."

"Extremely likely!" rapped Mr. Patchett.

Overwhelming relief was surging through Sally, for it looked as if Johnny had been cleared. But should she reveal what she knew about the stowaway? It was surely her duty to, and yet—

Suddenly she became aware that Johnny was tugging at her arm. The crowd had broken up and the chums were alone.

Sally, there's something fishy going on!" Johnny hissed.

"Not so fishy at that!" Sally said.

"It looks as if Glenn kidded us along. You might have been landed in a tight spot then, Johnny—"

"I mean there's something fishy about Patchett!" Johnny broke in. "I was hiding on top of a cupboard near his cabin, keeping out of the way, you know—and just before he started shouting that he'd been robbed I heard him muttering to himself. 'It's that boy,' he was saying. 'He's on my track and he's got it.'"

"Got what?" asked Sally breathlessly.

"I don't know. The best thing we can do, Sally, is to see Glenn and find out what it's all about."

"You're right, Johnny," Sally said eagerly. "Come on, we'll slip down to Hold No. 6 now."

She was intrigued, mystified, still torn by doubts about the stowaway. What was the connection between him and Cyrus K. Patchett? Glenn had said he was looking for a man named Roger Purlow.

The chums made their way down into the holds. On reaching Hold No. 6 they opened the heavy iron, water-tight door and went in.

"Anyone here?" called Sally.

A curly head peered above a pile of crates and the anxious look on Glenn Beaumont's face turned to a smile as he saw the chums.

"Sally, I dodged 'em O.K.—"

"Apparently you very nearly didn't," Sally broke in. "Glenn, why did you break into Mr. Patchett's cabin?"

"Patchett?" Glenn gave a start. "Is that what he calls himself? I know him as Roger Purlow—the rat! But I didn't get what I wanted."

"Johnny heard Patchett or Purlow or whatever you call him saying you had. What did you want, Glenn?"

"A diary. And until I've got it I can't bowl him out for the swindler he is—"

"A diary?" Sally repeated excitedly. "One with a lion embossed on it?"

"Yep! But what do you know about it?"

"It fell out of Patchett's pocket this morning—"

"And I"—Fay, too, was quivering with excitement—"and I put it amongst all the other gifts. I thought it had fallen out of the sack!"

Glenn caught both of them by the arms, while Don and Johnny stared in gaping amazement.

"Then where is it now?" the American boy asked eagerly. "That diary means everything to me and my dad, and without it I can't prove a thing—"

He broke off with a hoarse cry. The door had burst open, and in swarmed a group of figures. There were two ship's officers, followed by Professor Willard, the headmaster of the floating college; and in the background lurked Alec Burt, his spiteful eyes glittering with satisfaction.

"I reckon we've caught the stow-away," said one of the officers, looking grimly at Glenn. "And these students have been helping him, by the look of it—"

"I told you they were!" shrielled Burt. "I heard them talking!"

"Disgraceful!" rapped Professor Willard angrily.

"A serious offence," concurred the officer. "Come on, my lad!" he added, grabbing Glenn by the arm. "Hallo, there's the Father Christmas outfit! Is this the boy you saw running out of your cabin, Mr. Patchett? Where is Mr. Patchett?" he finished, staring round in surprise.

"He went running back as you came in," declared Burt.

The stowaway began to struggle, a look of desperation coming into his face. And Sally knew why.

"He's gone to get the diary!" he panted. "He'll destroy it!"

"Don't worry—we'll get it!" cried Sally.

The chums made a concerted rush for the doorway.

"Stop!" roared Professor Willard. He caught hold of Fay, the other officer seized Don. That left Burt barring the way out of the hold.

Johnny bowled him over with one rush, and then he and Sally were charging up the steep steps which led to the decks. As they gained the main deck they saw that Mr. Patchett, running with surprising agility for one who looked in his middle fifties, had

almost reached the door of the lounge where the auction was being held.

A seaman stood there on guard.

"No one allowed in here until three o'clock, sir—My stars!"

Mr. Patchett had charged past him into the lounge.

"No one allowed in here, youngsters—" began the seaman again. "Say, I'm stopping one of you!"

Johnny, too, had swept past him. But the seaman had managed to grab hold of Sally, and, in spite of her struggles, he succeeded in locking the door and pocketing the key.

"I'm going to fetch an officer," he said, releasing Sally then.

He strode off, dazed by these whirlwind events. Sally rushed round to one of the open portholes.

Inside that gaily decorated lounge was a big Christmas-tree, loaded with the gifts which were to be auctioned. Panting and desperate, she stared in.

Johnny had not seen the diary and did not know what to look for. Instead, he hurled himself upon the man; and again received a shock as that apparently elderly individual swung round an arm which sent Johnny staggering.

Then Mr. Patchett leapt towards the Christmas-tree. A cry of triumph left his lips as he saw the diary and eagerly he snatched it.

A shout came from along the deck, and, turning, Sally saw the seaman returning with an officer. Then, looking back, she saw Mr. Patchett fling the diary out of the porthole with all his strength.

Through the air it soared. It would sail over the rail and fall into the sea.

Sally leapt. Out flashed her hand, catching the diary just in time. "Fie!" roared Johnny. "Now, you rotter—Gosh!"

He stopped struggling, staring in wide-eyed amazement. For suddenly the man's hair was a glossy black, making him look much younger. The

wig of grey hair had slipped from his head.

"Say, what's the idea? What's happening?" demanded the astonished officer. "That's Mr. Patchett, isn't it?"

"Also known as Roger Purlow," said Sally. "I think he's a crook—"

"Purlow—Purlow—I know that name," said the officer. "He's on our black list of people we're on the look out for. A confidence trickster—"

Now the man had been seized. Sally was smiling triumphantly at Johnny.

"Come on, Johnnykins!" she cried. "Let's give this to Glenn!"

IN the captain's cabin Glenn Beaumont told his story—and had the diary to prove it. The story of how Roger Purlow had tricked Mr. Beaumont out of a considerable sum of money and also the deeds of a mineral mine which Glenn's father had discovered.

Purlow would have destroyed the diary, with its incriminating entries, before but for the fact that it contained details of the location of the mine. But at the end, in his desperation, he had been prepared to sacrifice that rather than be exposed; but he had failed. In the first place, of course, he had thought Glenn had taken the diary, not knowing it had dropped on the deck earlier on.

And so everything was cleared up. It was Purlow who went into close detention; while Glenn borrowed sufficient money to pay for his passage and to send a cablegram to his father.

"Say, Merry-makers, I hope we're going to be buddies," he grinned.

"I'm sure we are," smiled Sally. "Whoops!" Now for a merry Christmas!

And a merry one it was.

(End of this week's story.)

Another enthralling Sally & Co. story in next week's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**, which owing to the Christmas holidays, will be on sale on Wednesday instead of Friday.

THE CLUE OF THE CHRISTMAS CRACKER

(Continued from page 172.)

A sudden, horrified hush fell on the little group as June bent over the unconscious girl. Noel came to a swift decision.

"I'm going to call in the police, Wilford," he said, "but there's no need to alarm the rest of the campers. Let the party go on, as planned."

Half an hour later the party commenced. Though the youthful organisers were a little subdued, they managed to hide their uneasiness from their guests, and gradually the celebrations warmed up, and festive gaiety took full charge.

Only June remained watchful and alert, as she stood on the platform with Dave, Molly, and the other organisers, leading the revelry of the laughing youngsters.

The bustling entry of a jovial Santa Claus, bearded and robed, brought a ripple of expectant laughter from the guests.

First he handed out the children's gifts from the tree, then came the turn of the older folk, whose presents were in the giant cracker.

Dave and Molly elected to pull it, with Santa Claus presiding.

"One!" intoned Santa Claus, in his deep voice. "Two—"

There was a sudden shout, and a frightened scream from the youngsters, as once again the lights in the cabin suddenly went out.

The blinds had been drawn across the windows, and in the pitch dark there was danger of a panic.

But June's clear voice rang out clearly above the commotion.

"All right!" she called. "Please keep your seats—everyone! This—"

this is just part of the entertainment."

Her calm, soothing manner had its effect. The commotion died down, but at that instant there came a startled cry from Molly.

"The cracker! Someone's ripped up the cracker—"

The red-robed Santa Claus switched on a torch, and as it stabbed the darkness everyone gasped. The torch-light revealed a silvery trail that led from the torn cracker, lying on the stage—a trail of artificial frost leading to the base of the cardboard snow-man.

"Stand by, Dave!" Santa Claus rapped—and, with a start, June realised that that bearded, robed figure was her Uncle Noel.

As he shouted, Noel Raymond leapt forward and seized the hollow, cardboard figure, lifting it from its base.

An amazed shout went up as a dapper, bearded figure was seen crouching in the glare of Noel's torch. "Mr. Harker!" came in an incredulous shout from the campers.

"What does this mean?" gasped Mr. Wilford, suddenly appearing on the scene.

"It means that Harker has been trying to hide his guilty secret from the man who trusted him," said Noel sternly, "and to blacken the name of Lucy Brent."

To an astonished audience Noel explained. Lucy's grandfather, a wealthy recluse named Samuel Brent, had entrusted the care of the young girl, who was a talented painter, to Mr. Harker, a distant relative, allowing him a considerable income to pay for her fees at a boarding school for young artists.

Instead of sending Lucy away to school, Harker had sent her to work as a waitress at the camp and had squandered the money himself. Many of the girl's paintings had been used to ornament the Christmas decorations and gifts bought by the

campers. So Harker had been alarmed when he learned that not only did Mr. Brent propose to spend Christmas at the holiday camp, but that he was also to be presented with a tobacco-box painted by Lucy.

Frightened lest the truth should come out, Harker had bribed the camp electrician to get Lucy disgraced, and had then shut her up in the house. By hiding in the cardboard snowman, he had also set out to destroy the incriminating decorations and gifts, escaping on the first occasion in the hue-and-cry that had followed Lucy's appearance at the window.

The girl had escaped and had attempted to warn the campers, but was caught and attacked by Harker's confederate.

"It was Harker's handshake that gave him away," said Noel, with a grin smile. "The dye from the giant cracker was on his fingers when he greeted me. That's how I came to get the dye on my hand. I knew then that he was the culprit—and laid a little trap for him. Lucy's grandfather is here," went on the detective, "and he does not wish to call in the police. But I advise you, Harker, to leave the district—while the going's good!"

And he pointed sternly to the door.

IT was shortly afterwards that Lucy herself joined the party, wearing an attractive frock lent by June for the occasion, and her grandfather watched with approval the gay Christmas revels.

(End of this week's story.)

In next week's grand detective story, June and Noel again come to grips with the Jackdaw, the man of many disguises. Don't forget that, owing to the Christmas holidays, the next **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale on Wednesday the 24th instead of Friday the 26th.

THE GIRL WHO PUT FLAME FIRST (Continued from page 176.)

movement came from anywhere, but it seemed to her as if she saw a dark shadow against the flable wall. Then that shadow dissolved, vanished—there was nothing there. It must have been her fancy.

"I'm getting jumpy," she thought. "Fancying things!"

She tiptoed up to her bed-room. She stayed at the window for a long time, gazing unseeingly into the night. And when at last she climbed into bed and fell asleep, it was only to dream of her horses again.



SILVER AT SCHOOL

"And this, Silver, is your study," matron said. "You will share it with another girl—Joan Hartnell. I'm sure you'll be very

comfortable here."

Matron glanced a trifle dubiously at Silver. She didn't quite know what to make of this odd new girl. Silver's cheeks were pale and her lips tightly set. She stared around her, hardly seeming to realise where she was.

"And let me give you one word of advice, my dear," matron went on. "Try not to be too dreamy. You'll find we're all very much alive and wide awake at Lowchester. And now I'll leave you to settle in."

With her brisk smile, matron bustled off.

Silver drew a deep breath.

So this was her study! Her first thought was that it looked so cold and bare, so different from her own little room at Hawthorn Lodge.

"There's nothing to look at," she thought. "No pictures—"

Ah, that was it! If she hung up her pictures of horses the study would seem more home-like at once.

Most of her school kit had come in a big trunk, but she had a suitcase with her, and in it were her precious pictures, with the model of the stables that Jock had carved for her and other prized possessions.

She snapped open the case, eagerly lifted out the first picture.

It was an oil painting of herself on Flame, which a visiting artist had done during a stay in the district and given to her.

She hung it over the mantelpiece, and for the first time since she had come to Lowchester that morning a radiant smile curved Silver's lips.

"Flame!" she breathed. "Gosh, but it seems more home-like with you up there, boy!"

As soon as she could she must visit him. Before leaving the stables she had made it quite clear to Jock that no one but herself must ride Flame. Jock could exercise him in the paddock and the fields, and that was all.

She turned to the other pictures. There were photos of every horse in the stables, and she darted here and there, hanging them to the best advantage.

Voices and laughter floated up from the grounds and corridors of the school, but Silver didn't hear them—until suddenly—

"Sorry to butt in," said a cheery voice behind her. "I've said good-morning three times, but you still don't hear."

Silver swung round, to see a spectacled girl standing in the doorway.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she exclaimed. "You see, I was busy with my horses. I just didn't notice anyone had come in."

"O. K. Don't worry," replied the newcomer. "I'm Joan Hartnell, and I guess you're Silver Dawson. For a moment," she added, glancing round the walls, "I thought I'd breezed into a jolly old horse show!"

Joan stepped to the table. On it lay the last of Silver's pictures, for which she hadn't yet found space on the walls.

Inside the frame were photos of several horses, arranged round a blank space in the middle.

"Well, now, that's a rum-looking nag up there in the corner!" exclaimed Joan, blinking through her spectacles.

Silver gasped.

"A rum-looking nag?" she echoed. "But that's Monarch, the horse that won the Gaylord Trophy when the race was first started in 1937. He was a grand four-year-old, Joan—a wonder! And underneath is Phantom, the grey mare who won the following year in pouring rain, with horses falling and slipping all around. I've pasted photos of all the winners here right up to last year. And Joan, guess what that blank space in the middle is for!"

Joan shrugged.

"Haven't the foggiest," she said. "It's for the horse that will win this year," Silver whispered—"for Flame!"

"Flame?"

"Yes—look!" She grabbed Joan's shoulder and twirled her round.

"Look at that picture over the mantelpiece. That's Flame! He's a—"

She stopped short as a jangling bell echoed through the school.

"Gosh, you certainly get all het-up about horses!" Joan said, her grey eyes twinkling. "Never had much to do with 'em myself. But that bell means we've got to report in the class-rooms. Come on, Silver! We'd better hurry, because Miss Hatch is a real tartar."

She caught Silver's arm, fairly pulling her out into the corridor.

They joined the streams of girls who were making their way to the various class-rooms.

"That's Dot Wainwright, our Form captain," Joan said, indicating a red-headed girl in front. "She's a jolly good sort."

Silver nodded absently. The only girl she recognised in the class-room was Muriel Buckley, who tossed her black hair and gave her an odd, sneering look as she sat down.

On each desk was a large sheet of white paper. Miss Hatch, after calling the roll, explained its purpose.

"We are here to draw up the time-table for the term," she announced. "You will kindly note down the times and dates of the various lessons as I dictate them to you."

Vaguely Silver heard the mistress's voice. As she stared at that white paper her imagination peopled it with horses; they swept across the white expanse before her mind's eye—greys and chestnuts; splendid Arabs and roans and piebalds, galloping, cantering, jumping, manes and tails flying. She pictured Flame at the head of them all—

"Silver Dawson!"

With a start, she became aware that Miss Hatch was almost shouting her name from the mistress's desk.

"Stand up, Silver!" she commanded.

Silver stood up bewilderedly, blue eyes fixed on Miss Hatch's rather sharp-featured face.

"In case you are not aware of it," the mistress went on, with heavy sarcasm, "we are engaged in drawing up a time-table for the term's work. You, I see, are making no notes at all."

Silver flushed a little.

"I'm sorry, Miss Hatch," she replied frankly. "I was thinking about something else—about horses."

There came a loud titter from Muriel Buckley. Other girls turned and stared curiously at Silver, while Miss Hatch stiffened with indignation.

"Silver!" she exclaimed. "How dare you say such a thing! Such impudence—"

Silver stared at her in genuine surprise.

"Impudence, Miss Hatch?" she re-

peatedly puzzledly. "I wasn't being impudent—honestly. I really was thinking about horses—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The burst of laughter came spontaneously from the Fourth-formers. They stared at Silver. She was definitely something unusual in the way of new girls.

"Girls—silence! Silence immediately!" Miss Hatch's voice rasped out on a note that checked the laughter very quickly. "Now, Silver—"

Breathing hard, the mistress turned again to Silver.

"By impudence, Silver," she snapped, "I was referring to the fact that you were thinking about horses when you should have been attending to what I was saying! Strangely enough," she added with biting sarcasm, "we do not consider at this school that sitting and dreaming of horses is more important than the instructions of a Form-mistress!"

Silver coloured. She understood clearly enough now.

"I'm sorry, Miss Hatch," she said quietly. "I really didn't mean any disrespect. But horses mean so much to me, and—and it's rather difficult not to think about them sometimes. I'm sure you'll understand."

The Form nearly gasped. Quite a few of them recognised and appreciated the earnest sincerity in Silver's words—but they all knew it wasn't the sort of thing to say to sour-tempered Miss Hatch.

"Silver Dawson," fumed the mistress, quite red with anger. "I do not understand! I am not interested in horses!" "I dislike them. They are dangerous, unreliable animals, and—"

A quick cry of shocked protest burst from Silver. It was incredible to her that anyone could speak so of horses.

"Oh, Miss Hatch," she cried. "You can't mean that—you can't! Why, horses are wonderful! There is nothing like them! If you only knew my Flame—"

"Silver!"

Miss Hatch almost screeched the word, and the Fourth held their breath. There seemed not the slightest doubt that this amazing new girl was going to hit trouble now!

But before anything more could be said, a startling thing happened.

The Fourth had an upstairs class-room, with open french windows giving on to a line of balconies. Below the balconies was the headmistress's flower garden. And beyond the garden wall was a rough, wild stretch of country known as the Heath, full of rifts and treacherous gullies, which was fenced in to prevent animals straying on to it.

But now a movement on the Heath caught Silver's eye. A horse was galloping madly about the rough ground, kicking up his heels, rearing, plunging.

Silver went deathly pale.

"It's Flame!" she cried aloud, pointing with trembling finger.

He must have been driven from the stables, deliberately driven on to the Heath with its dangerous pitfalls. Who had done such a thing? Who had put Flame in danger?

Wildly Silver rushed on to the balcony, while Miss Hatch's outraged voice rose behind her:

"Silver Dawson! Come back this instant!"

The girls jumped to their feet, and there was a buzz of astonishment. Silver never even heard it. Never heard Miss Hatch's shrill command. She climbed over the parapet, leapt to the ground, and rushed across the headmistress's flower garden.

Next moment the garden gate slammed behind Silver.

She was gone!

Further chapters of this splendid new serial next week. Remember that owing to the Christmas holidays your copy will be on sale on Wednesday the 24th instead of Friday the 26th.