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GIRLS' CRYSTAL^{3D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

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The COWBOY who MYSTIFIED MERLE

The Vital Water-Hole Fenced Off! Again It Seemed That Larry Was Acting
Against Her—Written by GAIL WESTERN

LARRY'S AMAZING STATEMENT

MERLE WASON believed that a secret, vital to the future of her home, Happy Valley Ranch, was hidden in a trophy called the Gold Rider.

She encountered a strange young cowboy named Larry Denvers. Although he worked for Merle's enemy, Nathaniel Garsten, a neighbouring rancher, Larry declared himself to be her friend.

Later, Slim Harris, the ranch foreman, brought news to Merle that Garsten had hit another blow at her by fencing in a vital water-hole—and apparently it was Larry Denvers who was doing the job.

Furiously Merle rode off to investigate.

ANGRILY Merle rode across the sun-baked home range, past the cattle that were streaming back from the richer pastures at the foot of the hills.

Her heart throbbled with indignation as she realised that Nathaniel Garsten had not only dared to drive the Happy Valley steers away from the boundary, but had actually sent one of his men to fence off the disputed water-hole.

"This is his revenge because I won the hurdle race," she told herself, as she sent Pommie galloping on. "But he's not going to get away with it."

Wheeling round a small copse of pine-trees, she checked her chestnut horse, for ahead was the water-hole which was of such vital importance to the ranch now that the supply of water on the home range had almost dried up.

The water-hole consisted of a jagged, rocky basin situated at the mouth of the steep gully which separated Happy Valley from the V-Bar-V. A long, curving fence now enclosed it, shutting it off not only from Happy Valley, but also from the entrance to the gully.

Near the newly erected fence stood a magnificent black horse, and beside it was a boyish figure wearing woolly chaps and a checkered shirt. He was engaged in banging at one of the wooden bars with a hammer.

Merle's eyes flashed. She recognised both horse and cowboy. "So what Jake told me was right!" she gasped. "It is Larry!"

With a touch of the heels she sent Pommie cantering forward.

"What are you doing on uncle's land?" she demanded angrily. "How dare you trespass! And how dare you interfere with Happy Valley property!"

Hammer in hand, he turned, but he made no attempt to answer her questions. Instead, he smiled cheerily.

"Oh, hallo, honey! This is a surprise. Guess I didn't expect to run across you here."

She regarded him in withering contempt.

"I don't suppose you did. Your idea was, I suppose, to sneak away the moment your rotten work was done!"

"Rotten work? Gee, that's tough, honey! I thought I was makin' a real swell job of it. I'm sorry you don't approve."

"As if I'm likely to approve! Oh, how dare you try to make fun of me! You—you trickster! I hate you!"

Merle swung down from the saddle and strode forward, one hand furiously thrust out.

"Give me that hammer!"

"Sorry, but I still want it, honey. I haven't finished yet."

"And you're not going to finish!" cried Merle fiercely.

"But, honey—"

"Don't you 'honey' me! Hand me that hammer at once! If you think I'm going to let you finish building that fence you're very much mistaken!"

"Build it!" Larry stared at her red, angry face. "Gee, you've got it all wrong, honey!" he protested.

"Somebody else put it up, and—guess I was knockin' it down!"

"Wha-a-at!"

Mouth wide open, eyes goggling with the shock, Merle gaped at him. He took a lusty swing at one of the cross-bars, and then, as it went clattering to the ground, he grinned again.

"Yep! Just knockin' it down," he repeated.

Merle gasped.

"Do you really expect me to believe that?" she cried. "Do you really expect me to believe that you'd dare disobey your boss?"

"But I'm not disobeyin' my boss, honey," he declared cheerfully.

"What!"

"You see, I'm no longer workin' at the V-Bar-V. Nat Garsten an' me have kinda fallen out, so I've left."

"L-left?"

"Sure thing, honey, and it's not surprisin' really. Celia was easy to fool, but her dad was another kettle of fish. Guess there are no flies on Nat Garsten. Sooner or later he was bound to suspect that I wasn't really on his side. I managed to string him along for a time, but even I found it mighty difficult to explain how I came to lose the hurdle race at Lone Pine. Then, when he learnt I'd handed you back the Silver Rider trophy—well, I guess that kinda clinched things."

Merle stared dazedly. Her brain was in a whirl. Larry's statement was so unexpected, so astonishing, that she was left breathless.

"Are you trying to tell me that you never were in league with Garsten?" she asked, her voice little more than a whisper. "That you only went to the V-Bar-V in order to trick him?"

Calmly he nodded.

"Sure thing. You see, it was the only way to help you. Only by bein' right on the spot could I discover exactly what he was plottin'."

Despite herself, Merle's heart began to glow. The mere possibility that

she might have misjudged Larry—that he might be, after all, a friend and not an enemy—sent a delicious thrill coursing through her veins.

But searchingly she looked at him. "If all along you were only out to help me, then why did you make such a mystery of it?" she demanded. "Why didn't you tell me?"

He shrugged, a rather bitter expression on his face.

"Would you have believed me if I had done, honey?" he asked. "Me—a stranger—a guy who everyone thinks is a cattle rustler!"

She flushed, for she knew that this was true. Then, as she remembered yesterday's hold-up, she frowned.

"What about that mask and gun we found in your saddle-bag?"

"Guess they belonged to the real hold-up man. I grabbed 'em at the same time as I did the trophy."

"Then you must know who the outlaw was?" she cried excitedly.

He nodded.

"Sure, I know him."

"Then who was he?"

He hesitated, then his steel-grey eyes looked straight into her own.

"I guess you trust all the fellows on Happy Valley Ranch, don't you?" he asked.

"Of course!" cried Merle. "But I don't see—"

"And you wouldn't believe a word against any of 'em?"

"Not likely! They're all grand chaps!"

"O.K. Then I'll say nothin' more." Merle felt the blood rushing to her cheeks.

"Are you daring to suggest that that masked man came from Happy Valley?" she gasped. "That there's a traitor on the ranch?"

"I'm suggestin' nothin', honey. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll get on with my work. Got to earn my pay, y'know."

"Earn your pay?" Merle ejaculated. Calmly he nodded, that sardonic gleam again in his eyes.

"Sure thing," he drawled. "For you'll be delighted to know that I've decided to join the Happy Valley outfit—that I've decided to become one of the staff!"



GARSTEN'S THREAT

Helplessly Merle stood there. Larry's cool announcement took her breath away.

It did not seem to occur to him that she might not believe his astonishing story—that she might not wish to employ him. And how typical it was for him to announce that he had decided to accept employment, instead of asking whether she would give him a job!

Then there was the disturbing hint that the masked rascal who had robbed her was actually one of the Happy Valley cowboys. Surely Larry had not been in earnest? And why did he want to join the ranch?

As she stood there, grappling with the conflicting emotions which seized her, there came the thud of hoofs and angry shouts.

"There he is!"

"There's the coyote who's in Nat Garsten's pay!"

"And, by the look o' it, Miss Merle's caught him red-handed!"

And on to the scene came galloping Slim Harris, Jake Binns, Ted Gardner, and the rest of the Happy Valley cowboys. They glared at they recognised Larry, glowered more furiously than ever as they saw the hammer in his hand, and, in a threatening half-circle, they reined and dismounted. But Larry seemed to be oblivious of their hostility.

"Howdy, pard?" he said, with a casual wave of the hand. "Guess you're just in time to hear the glad news."

"Glad news? What d'you mean?" barked the young foreman.

Larry grinned.

"That I've just decided to join the outfit," he drawled.

Slim & Co.'s faces were a picture. "Join the outfit!" Slim shouted. "You must be plumb crazy to talk like that! Come on, pard! Grab the pesky cattle rustler! Run him off the ranch!"

Instantly an angry rush forward was made, but impulsively Merle stepped between her cowboys and Larry.

"No!" she gasped. "I don't want any rough stuff at Happy Valley!"

"But, Miss Merle—" protested the foreman.

"No!" said Merle again. "Let him go—please!"

Reluctantly the cowboys drew back, and, as if oblivious of their scowling looks, Larry tossed down the hammer, then sauntered leisurely across to his horse.

"Guess too many cooks spoil the broth, so I'll leave you fellers to finish knockin' down the fence!" he commented, as he swung into the saddle and gathered up the reins.

"So-long, honey!" He grinned cheerfully down at Merle. "I'll be along at tea-time, to fix up the details about my job."

And, with another flip of the hand, he sent Prince cantering forward. Dark, furious eyes watched the young cowboy disappear amongst the trees. Then Slim turned almost desperately to Merle.

"It isn't true, is it?" he asked hoarsely. "You don't intend to employ that tricky rascal?"

Merle did not reply. Her brain was still rather in a whirl.

"But you can't, Miss Merle!" he shouted. "Why, it would be just askin' for trouble! You know Nat Garsten's plottin' against you, an' you know Larry Denvers is workin' for him!"

"But he isn't," put in Merle, finding her voice at last. "He and Garsten have quarrelled, and Larry's packed up and left."

Slim gave a derisive laugh.

"That's what he says, but how d'you know it's the truth? Suppose Garsten an' that young cattle rustler have rigged up this yarn between 'em! Suppose it's just a cunning' trick to plant an enemy right here in Happy Valley!"

Merle gave a start. She had not thought of that.

Seeing the uneasiness on her face, the foreman clutched at her arm.

"You can't do it, Miss Merle!" he cried. "If that feller has the nerve to turn up at tea-time you must send him packin'!"

Merle bit her lip. She hardly knew what to say.

"I'll—I'll think about it, Slim. Meanwhile, there's work to be done. Jake"—she beckoned to the horse-breaker—"knock down the fence, will you? The rest of you help me to drive back the cattle."

Eagerly Jake picked up the hammer, and he attacked the fence with savage relish. The other cowboys followed Merle to the home range, to set to work to round up the steers that were restively wandering over the sunburnt ground, seeking in vain for juicy grass. They needed little persuasion to return to the rich pasture at the foot of the hills, and it gave Merle fierce satisfaction to see them crowding round the water-hole, drinking thirstily.

That was one plot of her enemy she had beaten. And she was ready for any more he might try, she told herself.

Returning to the ranch-house, she had lunch, consulted Mammy about one or two household matters, then re-saddled Pommie and set out for the hospital.

When she reached it she saw the motor-ambulance that was to take her uncle to the convalescent home drawn up outside the door, and a few moments later the injured rancher, swathed in blankets on a stretcher, was carried down the steps.

Uncle Stephen seemed greatly excited, and he clutched at her arm as she bent to kiss him.

"Have you found out what race the

Gold Rider is being offered at?" he asked. Merle shook her head, and he chuckled. "Well, I have. The doctor says it's being put up for a race at Red Hill Rodeo next Thursday week. He thinks that entries have to be made at the sheriff's office."

Merle's eyes sparkled.

"That's fine!" she exclaimed. "I'll ride over to Red Hill as soon as I've seen you off and put in my entry."

It was an affecting leave-taking she had with her uncle, and her eyes were misty with tears as the ambulance went purring away. With an effort she mastered her emotion, swung back into the saddle, and sent Pommie galloping down the winding mountain road that led to the near-by township of Red Hill.

On her way her mind was a-buzz with a mixture of thoughts. She thought of the Gold Rider, that all-important trophy which she believed contained the other half of Sam Crogan's secret. She must win that trophy!

She thought of Larry, and wondered whether she dared ignore Slim's warning and trust the young cowboy. And then the suggestion Larry had made crept into her brain.

Was it possible that there was a traitor at Happy Valley Ranch?

Fiercely she shook her head.

"No! I refuse to believe it!" she told herself. "Slim and the rest are loyal and trustworthy."

At that moment there came the clomp-clomp of hoofs and the rattle of wheels from ahead, and she reined in Pommie as she saw a horse-drawn buggy come whirling into view, for the road was narrow.

Two figures sat in the buggy, and Merle frowned as she recognised them.

Nathaniel Garsten and his daughter, Celia!

Anxious to avoid an angry scene, she made to squeeze by, but the rancher reined in and raised a detaining hand.

"Just a minute—you!" he barked. "I've just heard you've had the impudence to pull down the fence I put around my water-hole!"

Merle flushed indignantly.

"Your water-hole!" she cried. "You mean, uncle's water-hole!"

"I mean nothin' of the kind! It's on my property, and you'd better keep your hands off it, or there'll be trouble! You seem to forget that I'm a person of influence in these parts!"

Merle gave a scornful laugh.

"I don't care if you're the State Governor himself; you can't scare me!" she snapped. "That fence is down, and it's staying down!"

His bushy brows met in a furious scowl.

"So that's the way it is, eh? Waal, I'll soon teach you to defy me! I've set my heart on ownin' the Happy Valley, and from now on I won't rest until I've got you and your fool uncle slung out." You just wait, my gal! I'll see—"

And then his bullying, threatening voice died away as his daughter put a soothing hand on his arm.

"Don't upset yourself, dad," she said. "This cheeky pauper's only carryin' on like this because she thinks she's going to win the Gold Rider!"

Merle's eyes flashed.

"So I mean to!" she declared.

"Yes?" Celia laughed sneeringly. "That's what you think, but you wait until you get to Red Hill! You'll change your tune then!"

"Ay, that she will!" agreed her father, and he gave a booming laugh.

"What do you mean?" Merle demanded quickly.

The Garstens laughed again.

"You'll see soon enough!" gibed Celia.

And then her father sent the horse plunging forward, so quickly that the buggy almost knocked Pommie down, and in a cloud of dust the rascally pair whirled round the corner and out of sight.

(Please turn to the back page.)

The CASE of the BROKEN TOYS

By PETER LANGLEY

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

"WE'RE trespassing, I'm afraid, June," remarked Noel Raymond, the famous detective, glancing round him with a smile. "When we followed this path through the spinney, I thought it would be a short cut to the station—"

"And instead of that, it's led out into someone's private drive!" murmured June Gaynor. "We must have taken the wrong turn—oh!"

She broke off with an involuntary start, as a shrill, purposeful voice came from the bushes behind them. "Han's up!" it ordered.

They both turned, and June's startled expression gave place to a quick smile, while Noel's eyes twinkled.

Confronting them was a sturdy, curly haired youngster of six years old or thereabouts. His blue eyes regarded them with solemn determination, and in his chubby hand was a new water-pistol.

June flashed a laughing glance at her uncle, and raised her hands. Noel followed suit.

"Oh dear!" said June, trying to look suitably alarmed. "I hope you won't really shoot us! What's your name?"

"Tony," replied the youngster. "That's my house over there, an' if you're burglars I'm goin' to shoot!"

"That's fair enough, Tony," said Noel gravely. "A big man like you must look after his property. But we're not burglars, as it happens—just trespassers. You don't shoot them, I hope?"

The youngster considered, turning the large word over in his mind; then, finding it too much for him, he became suddenly confidential, as small boys will.

"I shot a burglar this morning," he announced proudly. "But that one had a big, black mask—an' he got away."

"Hard luck, Tony!" said June, smiling. "Next time—"

A twig cracked sharply behind them, and a burly figure loomed against the fading afternoon sunlight.

"Hey, Master Tony—what are you doin' so far from the house?" demanded the newcomer gruffly. "And who might you be?" he added aggressively, staring from under grizzled brows at the detective and his attractive young partner. "These grounds are private!"

Noel smiled apologetically as he took in the other's appearance at a swift glance—from his greying hair and weather-beaten face to the gardener's green baize apron and hobnail boots.

"I'm sorry," said the young detective. "I'm afraid we're trespassing accidentally—"

"That you are!" growled the gardener. "You get off these grounds, sharp—before I turn you off!"

Noel was taken aback by the other's tone, and June flushed. But it was clear that young Tony was quite at home with the gardener, as he held trustingly to his hand.

"There'll be no need for that," said the young detective dryly. "We'd better say good-bye, Tony. Come on, June—"

His words trailed away as, from the direction of the house, came a muffled, horrified cry.

June's heart missed a beat. The

gardener's aggressive frown gave place to a look of sharp anxiety.

"Not again!" he muttered. "It can't be—!" He glanced at Tony who, quite unalarmed, was examining the trigger of his water-pistol. "You stay here, Master Tony—just for a while."

With another suspicious glance at Noel and June he made off at a run towards the house.

"I'm going to look into this, June," said Noel. "Better keep an eye on the youngster."

He hurried after the agitated gardener, while June took Tony's hand, following more slowly, and talking gaily to distract the little boy's attention.

Noel reached the house, close on the heels of the gardener. A pale, attractive woman—obviously Tony's mother—came out of the porch, accompanied by a maid.

"Mrs. Farrel—what's happened, ma'am?" panted the gardener.

"The same thing, Foster!" replied Tony's mother, her voice shaking. "Nellie went into the nursery just now—and saw—!" She broke off. "Where is Tony? He mustn't suspect—"

Just then Noel stepped forward, ignoring the gardener's suspicious glare.

"Excuse my intruding, Mrs. Farrel," he said courteously. "I am a detective. Perhaps I could be of some assistance?"

Mrs. Farrel glanced quickly at his card.

"Mr. Raymond—I've heard of you, of course. I should be deeply grateful if you could help us. We had intended to call in the police, but we were all anxious to avoid scaring Tony. You see," she added unsteadily, "he is so imaginative, and if he learnt about this masked man—"

"Masked man?" echoed Noel curiously. But Mrs. Farrel touched his arm warningly as June appeared on the drive with Tony.

"Han's up—everybody, 'cos I'm a policeman!" announced the youngster solemnly, flourishing his pistol.

Mrs. Farrel whispered to the maid, who hurried to take charge of the little boy.

Noel introduced his young partner. "And now, Mrs. Farrel," he said quietly, "what is this about a masked man?"

June started, her grey eyes widening as Tony's mother explained.

On three occasions a sinister, masked figure had broken into the house and caused deliberate, malicious damage. Twice he had been actually seen by the servants as he escaped, but they had only been able to give a sketchy description of him.

It was thought that he had gained

access by means of a balcony outside the window of Tony's nursery, which was also his bedroom, but all this had carefully been kept from the little chap's ears.

The servants were all devoted to the boy—especially Foster, the gardener, who had appointed himself Tony's bodyguard.

Noel smiled faintly, meeting June's glance.

"I can confirm that," he murmured. "My niece and I narrowly escaped being thrown out. Now I should like to see the damage caused by the scoundrel," he added. "It may give me some clue to his purpose."

Mrs. Farrel looked at him in a troubled fashion.

"That is the strangest part about the whole thing, Mr. Raymond. But—come and see for yourself."

She led the way upstairs to the nursery, opening the door and pointing without a word. An amazed, indignant cry escaped June's lips, and Noel caught in his breath sharply.

The nursery was a pleasant room, with cream-papered walls, a small, white bed, and a cupboard stocked with toys to delight a youngster's heart.

But a number of the shelves had been ransacked, and on the floor lay a heap of broken, splintered toys—wantonly smashed by an unknown, vindictive hand.



ANOTHER RAID ON THE NURSERY

June was the first to break the amazed silence.

"Toys—broken!" she gasped, her voice shaking with indignation.

tion coupled with bewilderment. "Do you mean that this masked man actually broke into the house to smash the little chap's treasures?"

Mrs. Farrel nodded, hardly trusting herself to speak. Noel, who had been examining some of the broken toys, intervened:

"Was nothing else damaged, Mrs. Farrel? Or stolen?"

"Nothing at all," replied Tony's mother. "That is what frightens me. It's not as though the man were an ordinary thief. I'm afraid—for Tony—"

"Steady, Mrs. Farrel," put in Noel gently. "We mustn't jump to conclusions. I wonder, is there any chance that one of your servants is responsible—through spite, say?"

"Mr. Raymond, that's impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrel. "They have been wonderful—all of them."

Noel thoughtfully lit a cigarette.

"We seem to be up against purposeless mystery," he murmured. "But I

suggest, Mrs. Farrel, that we take certain precautions at once. This room is far too accessible from outside. If you could have the remainder of the toys removed to some place of safety, and allow Tony to sleep in another room for to-night, I'll do what I can to trap the scoundrel."

"I shall see to it at once!" declared Mrs. Farrel, crossing to the door. "It's Tony's bed-time now. He is devoted to his room, and that's the only reason why I haven't moved him before. On the last two nights Nellie has slept with him, and my own room adjoins the nursery, so that I could hear at once if he called out. I'll persuade him to sleep in the spare room to-night, and—"

At that moment a tearful, appealing voice sounded on the stairs.

"I'm tired of staying in the garden, Nellie. I want to go up and play with my toys!"

Noel encountered Mrs. Farrel's anxious glance.

"June, keep the youngster away from here," he breathed warningly.

June hurried out on to the landing, followed by Mrs. Farrel. Tony, his blue eyes a little rebellious and tearful, was tugging at the maid's hand.

June dropped to her knees, taking him firmly by both arms.

"So here you are, Mr. Policeman!" she exclaimed, smiling. "I've been waiting for you to tell me some of your exciting adventures."

Tony cheered up immediately.

"Auntie June, tell me a story," he said. "About big, bad burglars,"

Mrs. Farrel and Nellie looked startled, but June smiled at them reassuringly. "It's Tony's make-believe," she whispered. Then, turning to the little boy, she added: "All right, Tony. And for a treat mummy's going to let you sleep in a grown-up room—just for to-night. Come quickly, before I forget that story!"

Obediently, quite pacified, Tony accompanied June and his mother to the spare room, while Noel bustled himself in the nursery, examining the door and window and making certain preparations in case the intruder returned.

On his instructions, all the toys were removed to a box-room at the end of the landing, and Noel himself took charge of the key. Finally the young detective descended to the garden, completing his arrangements below the nursery window.

As he straightened, a footstep crunched on the gravel path, and the gardener appeared in the dusk, cap in hand.

"Beg pardon, sir," he remarked gruffly. "I reck'n I spoke a bit sharp like to you an' the young lady just now. I was worried about Master Tony and these here scares. If you want anyone to help keep guard, sir, I'm your man."

And he held up a stout, knobby stick in his powerful hand.

Noel grinned boyishly.

"Thanks, Foster—I could do with your help. You might collect the other servants, and we'll have a council of war."

Half an hour later all arrangements were made. Noel himself was to patrol the grounds in the vicinity of the house. The gardener was posted in the now empty nursery, ready to tackle the masked intruder if he came through the window. The remaining servants were to keep watch in the downstairs rooms, while June and Tony's mother took it in turns to remain with the little chap till he fell asleep.

June assisted Tony to undress, and sat by his small bed, inventing a not-too-exciting "burglar" story to satisfy the youngster's demands.

Gradually Tony's blue eyes closed, and he fell fast asleep, his curly head nestled on the pillow. With a smile June rose to her feet—and then she stiffened.

From somewhere in the house or grounds came a startling crash—a muffled shout, and something like a groan.

Paling, June flashed a quick glance at the peacefully sleeping youngster, and ran to the door.

On the landing she encountered

Tony's mother, her eyes wide with anxiety.

"Tony?"
"He's all right—sleeping," breathed June. "I'll find out what's happened."

She raced along the landing, and with a little gulp of relief she heard Noel's voice downstairs questioning the servants. The next moment she encountered him as he hurried upstairs.

"Tony?" was his first question.

"He's safe, nunky. But what's happened? Who called out?"

"That's what I want to know," jerked the young detective. "I was keeping watch on the nursery window, but there was no sign of an intruder. The servants swear that no one came upstairs, but that crash—"

"The toys!" gasped June.

Without a word Noel sprinted down the passage to the box-room, unlocking the door, and flashing his torch. June held her breath, peering over his shoulder. But the toys were unharmed, lying neatly piled where Noel had left them.

Just then there came another distant groan. The young detective whirled, staring along the darkened landing.

"The nursery!" he muttered.

"Foster's on guard there, but—"

Breaking off, he led the way down the landing, to find the scared servants assembled outside the door of the nursery.

"There's something wrong in there," faltered Nellie, her teeth chattering. "Mr. Foster didn't answer when we called."

"Stand back, all of you!" cried Noel.

He applied his shoulder to the door. It was not locked, but there was something in the way. With an effort he forced it open, switching on the light.

June gave a horrified gasp, and there came a scream from the servants.

Lying behind the door by an overturned table was Foster, the gardener, his eyes closed, an ugly bruise on his head. The window was open, the curtains fluttering in the breeze.

But it was at the dainty, cream-papered walls that June was staring. Thickly daubed in tar over the paper were hideous, grotesque drawings—drawings of leering witches and grinning goblins, calculated to strike terror to any youngster's heart.

"Nunky, that's been done to frighten Tony!" she gasped. "But who could have done such a hateful thing, and why?"



THANKS TO TONY

June's question was echoed in every heart. The white-faced servants whispered agitatedly, as they crowded in the doorway, while Noel bent over the injured gardener.

"The scoundrel's a powerful and daring fellow, whoever he is," he commented grimly. "He seems to have laid Foster out with a blow on the back of the head, and set to work to daub those pictures on the wall while the hue and cry was actually on. It's quite clear that he wasn't after the toys. He brought that tar-pot and brush with him for the purpose. If it's an attempt to frighten Tony, the scoundrel certainly means business."

He was interrupted by a stifled cry from the doorway, and Mrs. Farrel appeared, her attractive face deathly pale.

"What—what has happened?" she gasped, staring from the injured gardener to the hideous tar drawings. "Terribly Noel explained."

"Tony mustn't see them!" Mrs. Farrel whispered. "Whatever happens—"

Just then June's sharp ears heard a patter of small, bare feet on the landing. With a swift glance at her uncle, she ran to the door, in time to see little Tony, in striped pyjamas, his eyes still misted with sleep, pattering

sturdily down the landing, water-pistol in hand.

"Tony!" she exclaimed, quickly barring his way. "Why are you out of bed, dear? It's much too late for little boys—"

"I'm not a little boy," declared Tony stoutly. "I'm a big policeman, an' I've come to find the bad burglar."

"You're a very brave policeman," agreed June, taking him firmly by the hand, though there was an anxious lump in her throat. "But the burglar isn't here, Tony—you must have left him in dreamland. Let's go back to find him."

But the youngster refused to be coaxed away, declaring that he wasn't sleepy any more. He wanted to go and play in his nursery.

Just then, to June's relief, Mrs. Farrel came to his aid, looking very pale but more composed. Between them they persuaded the little chap to go into his mother's bedroom adjoining the nursery.

With a sigh of relief June heard the door close after them, and hurried to rejoin her uncle, who was examining the nursery.

The gardener had recovered under Noel's skilful ministrations, and had been assisted downstairs by his fellow servants to have his head bandaged.

He blamed himself bitterly for what had happened. He had been taken completely off his guard, he said, and had not even caught a glimpse of his assailant. Like the other servants, he was furious at this latest, dastardly attempt to scare little Tony.

The grotesque pictures leered at June from the wall as Noel beckoned her to join him.

"What do you make of this, June?" he asked.

He pointed to the sill, and her eyes widened as she saw that it was covered by finely powdered chalk.

"I sprinkled that powder there over an hour ago," said Noel quietly, "and it hasn't been disturbed. Moreover, several strands of black cotton that I stretched across the flower-bed below the window are still unbroken."

June drew in her breath quickly.

"You mean the masked man didn't come in through the window?" she said. "But if he came in through the door he would have been seen by the servants below. Nunky!" She caught at his sleeve. "You don't think—it couldn't have been the gardener himself—but, no—that doesn't make sense! His injury—"

"Quite!" agreed Noel, with a grim smile. "Foster would hardly have struck himself a stunning blow on the head for the sake of daubing a few frightening pictures on the nursery wall."

"Then what is the explanation?" gasped June. "And what can we do to prevent—"

"To prevent anything worse happening?" Noel's tone was grave. "Looking round in here, I think I've got a glimmer of the truth—fantastic and incredible though the whole affair seems. The servants are all anxious to help. They'll take it in turns to keep watch, and even Foster, in spite of his injured head, has promised to stay up all night, if necessary, cleaning those tar drawings off the wall—in case Tony should catch sight of them in the morning."

At that moment the gardener came in carrying a mop and pail and a bottle of turpentine. His grey head was bandaged, but he grinned dolefully in response to June's sympathetic inquiries.

"Don't you worry about me, missy. Takes more'n a masked man to settle with Jeff Foster. If he comes back he'll get a taste of his own tar!"

"Good for you!" said Noel. "I've a feeling that we've not seen the last of the scoundrel. Come on, June!"

"What are we going to do, nunky?" asked June, as the door closed behind them.

"We're going into the next room," Noel replied calmly. "To ask young Tony to help us solve the mystery."

June stared at him in amazement; but with a warning glance Noel tapped on the door of the adjoining

(Please turn to the back page.)



DOLORES

The Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

OID DOLORES KNOW THE TRUTH?

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum Chris Casloa, who were staying at Westmouth Holiday Camp, were anxious to obtain a mysterious brass plate in the possession of Admiral Hardacre, who owned nearby Dartfleet Island, for they believed it was a clue to a secret connected with Chris' dead uncle.

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful wealthy girl staying at the camp, was also after the plate, and she visited the admiral in order to try to borrow it.

The chums were too clever for her, however, and managed to get hold of the vital plate. They examined it in their chalet—and Pat suddenly discovered the secret it held.

"THESE figures are the key to the secret—I'm certain they are!" Excitedly Pat pointed to the figures scratched on the back of the brass plate, then hastily she snatched up a pencil and piece of paper. "Half a tic! Wait until I've jotted them down!" she cried.

Wonderingly, Chris watched as her chum first copied the figures, then the words engraved on the front of the plate.

The result completely baffled her.

"1, 5, 7—18, 22, 27, 30, 31—32, 37, 38, 45, 46—47, 50, 57, 61. Sharpey Kirabee, Captain of the Waterymph, Inverfirth, Scotland. Died Sept., 1837."

"I don't get it," she said.

Pat chuckled.

"It's simple, really," she declared. "Those figures show which letters in the statement about Kirabee are part of the hidden message. For instance, the first figure is a '1,' so we take the first letter—that's an 's.' The second figure is a '5,' so the next letter in the message is the fifth one across—a 'p.' Then comes the figure '7,' so we select the seventh letter, and so on. Now do you see?"

Slowly Chris nodded.

"I think so. Then '18' means the eighteenth letter—a 't.' '22' refers to the 'o,' '27' or the 'w,' '30' for 'e' and '31' for 'r.' Golly, there's a name there!" she exclaimed.

"I'll say there is," agreed Pat. "Spy Tower! That's the old tower on my map. But go on—read on."

Excitedly the chums set to work to decipher the rest of the message. Now that they had the key, it did not take them long to write down the whole of it:

"SPY TOWER, NINTH STEP."

"Then that must be where the secret's hidden!" cried Chris, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glistening. "Under the ninth step in the Spy Tower! But what can be hidden there, Pat?"

Pat shook her head.

"Haven't the foggiest idea, but it must be something valuable, or no one would have gone to the trouble of concocting this message. Let's see where exactly the Spy Tower is situated." Getting out her map of Dartfleet Island, she studied it. "Why, it stands right on the edge of the cliffs!" she exclaimed. "Come on! Let's get cracking, Chris!"

And, stuffing both map and brass plate into her pocket, she jumped to her feet. Her chum regarded her in bewilderment.

"Where are you going?" she asked. Pat laughed.

"Why, to try to wangle an invitation to visit the island! The admiral's still in the camp, so why not ask him? There's no time to be lost, you know. For all we know, Dolores may have solved this clue as well as us."

"Golly, you're right!" gasped Chris, and her face paled as she thought of their rival. At all costs they must visit the Spy Tower before her.

Leaving their chalet, they rushed down the main path—just in time to meet Willis Green, Lucy Day, and the rest of the campers returning from the beach.

"Where's the admiral?" asked Pat eagerly.

Willis grinned. "Half-way back to his jolly old island by now, I should imagine," was his unexpected reply.

The chums stared at him in dismay.

"But he was staying to lunch," protested Chris.

"I know, but he changed his mind. Apparently, he suddenly remembered a spot of business that needed attending to."

Willis and the others passed on, and rather ruefully Pat and Chris eyed one another. Then Pat smiled.

"There's only one thing for it," she said. "We must see Bruce and get his official permission to go over to the island and see the admiral. It wouldn't be wise to go without permission. There would be a fine old row if we were spotted breaking bounds."

Chris nodded, and they hurried across to the office, where they guessed they would find the popular young sports master; but as they approached the open door they paused and stared in dismay, for Bruce Feltham already had a visitor. It was Dolores, and clearly they could hear what she was saying.

"But, Bruce, I simply must go across to Dartfleet Island," she was declaring earnestly.

"Why?" asked Bruce. For a moment Dolores seemed to hesitate, then—

"Oh, to talk to the admiral about the regatta!" she said. "He ought to be given full details now we've got him interested, and I'd like the job. Please let me go over this afternoon, Bruce."

Pat caught in her breath. Not for a moment did she believe the mis-

chief-maker had given her real reason for wishing to visit the island.

"She has solved the message on the brass plate," she whispered. "She wants to go over there, so that she can visit the Spy Tower!"

Chris nodded, and anxiously they waited for Bruce's reply. To their delight, he shook his head.

"Sorry, but I don't think it would be wise to worry the admiral so soon," he said.

Appealingly Dolores regarded him with her lovely eyes, but for once the young sports master was proof against her charm.

"No, there's no hurry about supplying the details," he said, "and, unless any of us has some really urgent reason for going to the island, I think we ought to leave the old admiral alone for a day or two. Though he's interested in the regatta, he's a peppy old fellow, and—"

He broke off as he saw Pat and Chris standing there.

"Hallo! What can I do for you two?" he asked cheerily.

Pat, seeing the angry scowl on Dolores' face, hesitated, and then, to Chris' surprise, she took the brass plate from her pocket and held it out.

"We've come to consult you about this," she declared.



THE SPY TOWER

At sight of the brass plate Dolores gave an anxious start.

"Don't say you've solved the clue that it's supposed to contain!" she cried.

To Chris' increasing wonderment, Pat shook her head.

"That's what we've come about," she said, and turned to the sports master. "Bruce, we've just got to see the admiral," she asserted. "We want his help."

"To solve the clue, you mean?" asked Dolores, and her eyes gleamed mockingly as she saw the look of dismay on Pat's face.

"Yes, the admiral may know what this jumble of figures means," Pat said. "Chris and I have studied them, but—"

She shrugged helplessly, and her heart leapt as she saw how gleefully Dolores was smiling. The mischief-maker had completely been taken in by her bluff. She really thought the secret of the brass plate had baffled the chums. That was splendid. If Dolores thought her rivals were at a loss, then she was less likely to try to prevent them from being allowed to visit the island, for she knew that there was no danger of Admiral Hardacre devoting sufficient time to solve the all-important clue.

"So, you see," went on Pat, again turning to Bruce, "Chris and me simply must visit Dartfleet Island. Unless we see the admiral—"

But Bruce was already shaking his head.

"Sorry, Pat, but I'm afraid I can't give permission," he said. "I've already refused Dolores."

"But this is different!" Pat exclaimed. "You can't refuse, Bruce."

This secret may mean everything to Chris. You can't rob her of a chance to solve it, and I'm sure that if he saw the admiral on his own he'd agree to help."

"Of course he would," put in Chris, who now understood Pat's subtle scheme to fool their rival. "Oh, please, Bruce, say we can go! So much is at stake. And this may be our only chance!"

Bruce hesitated, then looked across at Dolores.

"What do you say?" he asked. "You won't think it unfair if I give them permission, will you? After all, this is an urgent, private matter."

Dolores did not reply immediately. She was regarding the chums sharply, evidently considering carefully all that had been said. Then suddenly she smiled.

"Of course I won't consider it unfair," she said, and Pat and Chris' hearts leapt.

The mischief-maker had no suspicion of the truth. Convinced that the admiral could not help them, she had decided to win Bruce's approval by pretending to be generous.

"Very well," the sports master said, with a smile. "You can go after lunch."

Delightedly the chums withdrew, and the moment lunch was over they set out in a rowboat for Dartfleet Island. As they neared it, they scanned the top of the high cliffs eagerly, and suddenly they saw an old stone tower perched on the edge, but so overgrown with ivy was it that it was almost indistinguishable from the green copse that backed it.

"No wonder we didn't notice it before!" Chris observed, as she pulled again on her oar. "But what's the programme, Pat?"

"We'll ask for the admiral—try to get him to allow us to explore the tower," said Pat. "Golly, but I wonder what secret can be hidden there? And what connection had your uncle with it?"

On tenterhooks of expectancy, they beached their boat on the tiny beach and rang the bell fastened to the iron gates. Malcolm, the admiral's nephew, answered the summons, and he frowned when he learnt their business.

"Uncle's out rabbit shooting," he said. "I don't know whether he will agree to see you, and it may take me some time to locate him, anyway."

"Well, do your best, there's a pet!" urged Pat. "We'll wait on the cliff-top."

To their delight, Malcolm nodded, and when he had unlocked the gate he led the way up the steep steps. At the top he left them, and the moment he had gone from sight Pat clutched her chum excitedly by the arm.

"Now's our chance to have a look around," she said.

As she spoke she glanced along the cliff path leading to the old, ivy-clad tower. Did this really hold the secret that Charles Caslon had written about?

"But it must!" she said aloud. "There couldn't have been a mistake; there's no other tower on this island."

"Let's look!" Chris said impatiently. Their hearts thumping, they ran along the cliff-edge to the Spy Tower but when they reached it they saw that the door was padlocked.

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Pat. "That means that unless the admiral gives us his permission to visit it, we're stumped."

She pulled ruefully at the padlock; then, seeing a jagged hole in the ancient door, she eagerly put an eye to it. Dimly she made out a stone-walled, circular room lined with glass showcases, but before she could locate the staircase Chris gave her a warning nudge.

"Look out!" she whispered.

Hurriedly Pat straightened up, but not before an angrily suspicious voice had rung out:

"What are you two girls up to? What do you mean by prowling around without permission?"

And there, striding towards them, followed by his nephew, was Admiral Hardacre himself.



THE ADMIRAL APPROVES

Desperately Pat racked her brains. She saw that the admiral was in one of his most touchy moods. It would be fatal to ask him to let them explore the Spy Tower without some very good excuse.

As she and Chris stood there the admiral frowned again.

"What were you gals doing there?" he demanded again.

The germ of an idea flashing into her active brain, Pat conjured up her most winning smile.

"Oh, just looking!" she said. "I hope you don't mind, but, you see," she rushed on, the idea in her mind quickly taking shape, "we've thought of a simply wonderful stunt."

"Stunt?" growled the admiral.

"Yes—for the regatta. I'm sure you'll approve of it. Oh, but it will just make our plans perfect!"

She paused, and Chris regarded her wonderingly. As for the admiral, slowly his suspicious scowl began to fade.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"It's a stunt for the empress to perform," declared Pat. "You know that when she escapes from the Ancient Britons she rushes to the edge of the cliff and throws herself into the sea?"

"Aye, I know," Admiral Hardacre agreed, "and it will take a dashed plucky girl to do it; but I don't see what that's to do with you gals prowling about my tower."

"But the tower's the king-pin of my idea!" cried Pat. "What I suggest is that, instead of diving from the cliff-edge, the empress dives from the top of the tower."

"Golly!" gasped Chris.

"Don't you think it's a peach of an idea?" Pat asked, surveying the admiral with shining eyes. "Just picture it. The empress imprisoned in the tower by the Ancient Britons, then climbing up inside to the top and plunging down into the sea. Why, it'll be the thrill of the pageant!"

To her delight, the admiral slowly nodded.

"Sink my timbers, but it certainly would cause a sensation!" he agreed. "Yes, it's an excellent idea, but—"

He paused and frowned. "But where would you find a girl with nerve enough to make a dive like that?" he asked.

It was Chris who answered, and as she spoke she gazed admiringly across at her chum.

"Pat could do it," she declared. "She's a wizard diver! If she's elected empress—"

"And even if I'm not," put in Pat. "I'm certain we can find someone else. Do you give your approval to the idea, admiral?"

"Aye."

"Then could we just take a look inside the tower now," asked Pat, "just—just to get an idea as to how difficult the stunt would be?"

But, to her dismay, the admiral shook his head.

"Haven't got the key, and can't spare the time to get it," he said. "But—"

"No, you'll have to wait. I'm not very keen on people tramping about inside the tower. It's packed with

some of my most prized curios. I'll open it up on the day of the regatta, but even then I don't want a whole heap of people rushing around. It will be enough if the empress enters."

"But—but what about practising?" asked Chris, disappointed that her chum's scheme had only partly succeeded.

"You can practise on the mainland," the admiral declared. "There are plenty of Martello towers that will do. Now you must excuse me. I've wasted too much time here as it is. Off you go, my gals! Malcolm will escort you down to the beach. You can tell Feltham that I approve of your idea, but, remember"—he shook a warning finger—"only the empress will be allowed inside, and only she on regatta day."

The chums nodded and followed the admiral's nephew down the cliff steps. When they had taken leave of him they began their long row back. When they were some distance away from the island Chris looked back and surveyed rather nervously the high cliff on which the Spy Tower stood.

"Do you really think you could dive from the top of there?" she asked.

"Positive I can," Pat replied. "And that's what makes my stunt so perfect, for Dolores is a rotten diver. I've been watching her in the swimming-pool, and she even finks diving off the low board, so that means—"

"That Dolores won't be able to play the part of the empress!" Chris cried in delight. "So you're bound to be appointed empress, Pat, and when you're locked inside the tower, waiting for the signal to do your stunt—"

"I'll be able to search under the ninth step and collar the jolly old secret!" laughed Pat.

It was happily that the two girls rowed on. When they reached the camp a crowd of curious campers, including Dolores and Bruce, met them.

"How did you get on?" came in a chorus. "Did the admiral help you to solve the mystery of the brass plate?"

Pat shook her head, and Dolores frowned suspiciously as she saw that the chums didn't seem to be very downcast.

"Fraid not," said Chris. "But the admiral simply jumped for joy when he heard about Pat's Spy Tower stunt."

"Spy Tower?"

There could be no mistaking Dolores' alarm now, and, as Pat proceeded to explain, she bit her lip angrily. For to the quick-witted mischief-maker it was obvious that she had been tricked.

"Good for you, Pat!" said Bruce. "That was a real brain-wave, but it means that the girl who plays empress must be a fine diver."

Pat saw Dolores' lip tighten as Bruce spoke. Perhaps she was realising her helplessness.

Then Chris, face animated, had stepped forward.

"And that's Pat!" she cried eagerly. "She's the only one who can do that stunt."

"Steady on! What about Dolores?" put in Lucy Day.

Chris laughed.

"She's out. She could never dive from the tower," she declared confidently.

"Now, now, Chris! You mustn't under-rate me too much, you know." It was Dolores who spoke, and, though there was a friendly smile on her lips, there was a look of desperate cunning in her lovely eyes. "As a matter of fact," she went on calmly, "I'm not too bad at diving. Anyway, just to make a sporting fight of it, I'd like my name to be considered."

Pat and Chris gasped. This development had taken them completely by surprise. They were positive Dolores would never have the nerve to dive from the high Spy Tower.

What, then, was her object in nominating herself for the daredevil role of empress?

More surprises and thrills in next Friday's enthralling chapters.

KEEP IT UP

Waste-paper—and cardboard, too—is still urgently needed, so don't slacken your efforts. Save every bit you can and ask your dustman to collect it. And ask your chums to do the same.



the FOURTH GREY GHOST

By DOROTHY PAGE

A SURPRISE FOR THE SECOND FORMERS]

PENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, sympathised with a secret society calling themselves the Grey Ghosts. They were out to fight against the tyranny of the bullying senior master, Mr. Aspell, and for a mysterious boy named Glynn Tracy.

When Penelope asked her father about Glynn Tracy he refused to discuss him, and as he had complete confidence in Mr. Aspell, and did not approve of Penelope taking part in school affairs, she found it impossible to open his eyes as to the senior master's bullying character.

Penelope found a note arranging a meeting of the Grey Ghosts in the Abbot's Room in the east wing. Later, on her way to explore the Abbot's Room, Penelope realised she had dropped the note—and that Harold Smeeke, a sneak who was out to expose the Grey Ghosts, would find it.

PENELOPE'S lively features were a picture of dismay as she stared through the window on the top landing of east wing.

She could clearly see the furtive figure of Harold Smeeke searching in the bushes by the clock tower.

"He's sure to find that slip of paper with No. 1's orders on it!" she groaned. "He'll give it to Mr. Aspell. The Grey Ghosts will be bowled out—and it'll be my fault!"

Mentally kicking herself, she whirled anxiously from the window.

A helter-skelter dash down the winding staircase might get her to the clock tower before Smeeke found the paper.

But at the top step she checked with another groan. From below she could hear the boys clattering out of their class-rooms for break.

Time was precious, and yet she, the headmaster's supposedly prim and proper daughter, couldn't possibly barge her way down through that mass of boys like a runaway horse.

Frantic, her brown eyes flickered to right and left, then lit up.

She had seen a double, barred door marked "EMERGENCY EXIT."

"The fire-escape! A chance! Get cracking, Penny!"

She pelted for the doors, pushed on the bar, and banged them open. She found herself on an iron platform, looking out from the rear of east wing over Big and Little Sides. There was no one about.

"Wizard!" she gasped, and started down the iron stairs at almost dangerous speed, skirt swirling, hair tossing. "Wow, if daddy could see me now!"

But, thank goodness, this was at the back of the school. Down, down, typically ignoring the danger of a possible slip in her anxiety to get to the clock tower, somehow check

Harold Smeeke, and save the Grey Ghosts.

She lithely leapt the last seven steps to the ground.

"Now," she gasped, "forward to— Oh, gosh, that's torn it!"

Standing some ten feet away, gaping at her blankly, were half a dozen highly intrigued Second Formers.

They had turned the corner of east wing, carrying a cricket net between them, in time to see the last part of Penelope's whirlwind descent.

And, worse still, in their rear was Mr. Burchell, the double Blue sports master, equally as thunderstruck.

Penelope nearly slumped, having awful visions of her tomboyish behaviour getting back to her father, and having to face sharp and penetrating questions as to its meaning.

She recovered her poise like lightning, and masked her dismay by glancing earnestly down at her wrist-watch.

"Twenty-two seconds!" she announced aloud, with a prim little nod of satisfaction. "Excellent time! Ah, little boys," she added, apparently seeing them for the first time, "I trust you will note my actions and profit by them!"

The "little boys" just stared at her. A couple of them sniggered.

"In case of fire," continued Penelope, frowning on them severely, "do you think you could get down from the top landing in twenty-two seconds? I doubt it—I doubt it. Practice, boys—practice! That's what is needed instead of—er—ragging about! Good-morning, Mr. Burchell! Good-morning, little boys!"

And, with an inward gurgle at the little boys' varied expressions, Penelope turned and walked sedately away, leaving the sports master mildly amused—but certainly with not the slightest suspicion of the real purpose behind that surprising descent!

With dignity, Penelope retired, but once from their sight—she pelted. There was now no one to see her. The main mass of boys streaming from school were already thronging the tuckshop in the Cloisters.

The irrepressible smile slipped from her face suddenly.

Had Harold Smeeke found that vital note?

Then she saw him and slowed.

The burly, rather fat Fifth Former was on his hands and knees by the hedge surrounding the garden, peering under and around bushes.

Penelope's heart turned over. Another few yards and he would reach the spot where she had dropped the betraying slip of paper!

It was a moment for desperate decision—snap action.

And Penelope had inspiration. She strode forward.

"Oh, you wicked boy! I have caught you—in the very act!"

The Fifth Former jerked round in blank amazement. He stared up at Penelope, his heavy jaw sagging.

Then he struggled to his feet, and

put on the ingratiating smirk he reserved for those connected with authority.

"Miss Cartwright! I say, what on earth do you mean?"

Penelope's face was a mask of shocked disapproval.

"You cannot deceive me, boy! I saw you quite clearly crawling under the hedge!"

"But, look here, I don't understand—"

"Disgraceful! Fruit-stealing at your age!"

Harold Smeeke almost reeled.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Do not shout at me, boy!" said Penelope stiffly. "And haven't you been taught to raise your cap in the presence of young ladies?"

A venomous glitter showed in the sneak's eyes. With an effort he checked the snarling words on his tongue.

"Look here, Miss Cartwright," he choked, tugging at his cap, "you've got it all wrong! I'm a Fifth Former, and I don't go about pinching fruit. I was merely—"

"Then why were you creeping under that hedge?" asked Penelope suspiciously. "The fruit-trees are just on the other side—and your pockets appear rather full—"

Despite the importance of the moment, Penelope was beginning to enjoy herself. Time was passing, and she had checked the search—got the unscrupulous sneak's mind off it.

"Will you let me explain?" he spluttered. "I was searching. I tell you—searching for that robe I'm sure was thrown away by one of those Grey Ghosts this morning!"

"Robe?" repeated Penelope, hedging for time. Her heart began to beat faster. He would find no robe—thanks to her—but if he continued with this search he would find the vital note.

"Dear me, can this be true?"

"Of course it's true!" he cried furiously. "I was—"

He broke off, gritting his teeth. The bell signalling the end of break had begun to toll. Penelope concealed her surge of relief and eyed the angry Fifth Former with wide-eyed innocence.

"Well, goodness, why didn't you explain this before?"

"Why—why didn't I—?" Harold Smeeke fought for breath.

"Now you'll have to wait until lunch-time to search, silly boy!" said Penelope severely. "But hadn't you better hurry along? Break is over, and I'm sure as a senior you should set a good example!"

He glared at her. He breathed hard and furiously. Then his gaze wandered to the bushes about him. It was clear he was thinking of making a last swift search.

"Hurry!" said Penelope, with a quick frown. "I should not like to report to my father that you were deliberately late for lessons!"

That did it. Worst type of sneak and toady himself—ever eager to keep on the right side of authority—Harold Smeeke clasped Penelope with himself when it came to tale-bearing.

He hesitated, then, with a sullen tug at his cap, he turned and stamped away towards Senior House. Penelope watched him, and sighed.

"Phew! Was that hot—or was it!" She gave a tiny dance of glee. "But you dished him, Penny, without him suspecting a thing! And now—"

She hurried through the bushes, suddenly anxious. But that anxiety swiftly vanished, for there, where she had dropped it, lay the orders for to-night for the Grey Ghosts, written by the darling No. 1.

With a tiny thrill, she whipped it up and scanned those exciting, intriguing words again:

"SEVEN O'CLOCK... ABBOT'S ROOM... FIGHT FOR G. T."

There was a step, a sudden exclamation behind her.

"Miss Cartwright—that note, please! You have made a most important discovery—"

Before Penelope could get over the shock of that harsh, excited voice, a hand had taken the note—a hand that belonged to the master who had sworn to catch the Grey Ghosts.

Of all people—Mr. Aspell himself!

SHE MUST WARN THEM

It was heart-stopping, the bitterness of bad luck, so great that Penelope could not prevent her face showing it. She nearly

groaned.

If Mr. Aspell had looked at her then he must inevitably have been suspicious. But he didn't. His attention was riveted to the note.

"Excellent—excellent!" he muttered. "This refers to to-night! I shall have them now!"

His eyes flashed with an eager triumph that shocked and repelled Penelope.

"Miss Cartwright, you have done the school a great service by inadvertently stumbling across this slip of paper!"

Penelope somehow hid her sinking dismay.

"Really, Mr. Aspell, I—I am surprised. There appeared to be but a few rather meaningless words—"

"Not meaningless to me, Miss Cartwright! By no means!" He ran a finger over his moustache, and his smile was slow, cruel, cat-like. "You will be delighted to hear that your finding of this note will enable me to crush utterly this scandalous secret society!"

Penelope writhed.

"Most—most excellent indeed!" Somehow she forced the words out. "Mr. Aspell—er—what do you intend to do?"

Again that slow smile.

"My dear Miss Cartwright," he purred, "there is no need for you to worry your pretty head about this outrageous affair. Rest assured that after to-night the school will not be bothered further by these young scoundrels. But you must excuse me. Break is over."

He strode away, gown flapping about his lean figure.

The polite, interested smile on Penelope's lips froze. Her brown eyes flickered with contempt and anger.

"You—you awful type!" she choked. "Gloating—like that—hateful! 'Worry my pretty head,' indeed! Ugh! I'd—like to—"

She stopped. The anger faded to blank horror.

"But—oh, Penny, think of that boy Hugh! Think of the rest of the Grey Ghosts! Mr. Aspell's dangerous! No wonder he's called the Wasp! He's got that note! He'll know they'll go to Abbot's Room, and he'll lay some horrible trap for them!"

She gulped, staring miserably at the ground. She daren't think of the consequences to the Grey Ghosts if they were caught and unmasked.

"And you'll be to blame, Penny!" she told herself, with sudden fierceness. "Oh, you thought yourself so jolly clever, but you let that note fall into Mr. Aspell's hands! So you've got to do something, do you hear? You believe in the Grey Ghosts. You've got to save them—somehow!"

She turned back towards the Head's private house, thinking furiously. She wandered round the Head's

garden, rather absent-mindedly picking flowers for the lunch-table.

"Warn them!" She stopped suddenly, tilting her chin aggressively. "That's it! You've got to warn them of the danger. It's the only way. But—think, you impulsive ass, there are snags!"

Snags there were. They began to mount one by one in her mind.

Firstly, she knew the identity of only one of the Grey Ghosts. That was Hugh Mason, of the Fourth Form, their daring leader.

"Good old Hugh!" she muttered involuntarily. "He's a wizard type, though"—she grimaced ruefully—"he can't be thinking much of me, thanks to that little act I had to put on this morning!"

Secondly, could she even get hold of Hugh Mason before seven this evening? She had no idea where his study was, and her father had sternly forbidden her to wander about the school buildings.

And suppose she could manage a private word with Hugh—what then? After this morning, would he possibly believe that she, the Head's daughter, was planning to save the Grey Ghosts from danger?

"He—he might think it was some sort of mean trap," she muttered. "And, Penny, if you start telling people the part you're playing and it leaks out to daddy's ears—"

That was a really frightening thought: she must keep her part in this a secret at all costs. She loved her father and she knew he loved her, but he wouldn't tolerate or understand such a thing for one moment.

Already she had tentatively tried to speak for the Grey Ghosts—and against Mr. Aspell—and had been sharply rebuked for her pains.

"Daddy doesn't know what Mr. Aspell's really like. But—oh, what am I going to do? I just can't—won't—he beater, even if there are a hundred difficulties!"

Brave words, and Penelope meant them. But the day wore out, with her anxiety deepening and no solution presenting itself.

After lunch with her father, she took a prim stroll on the fringes of the stone-flagged quadrangle, hoping against hope that she might catch a glimpse of Hugh Mason and somehow—goodness knows how—warn him.

The stroll was in vain. Hugh Mason did not appear. Time passed. Seven o'clock was the dead-line, and she began to feel desperate.

But when tea in the Head's drawing-room had been finished, and Nellie, the maid, had cleared away—

"Penelope, my dear"—John Cartwright, B.A., rose from the table—"I am expecting Mr. Aspell at eight o'clock to-night—on a matter, I believe, of some importance—"

Penelope's heart leapt, her mind flashing to the Grey Ghosts. It was at eight o'clock, obviously, that the Wasp hoped to arrive in triumph. She looked anxiously at her father, but his rather forbidding face told her nothing.

"Also," continued her father calmly, "he was bringing over a copy of his 'History of Harcourt Abbey,' which he is kindly lending me as a reference for my own work on 'Monastries of England'—"

He paused, smiling slightly.

"You are perhaps aware, Penelope, that Mr. Aspell has written a really brilliant work on Harcourt Abbey from the Middle Ages, a masterpiece of research that has earned him some fame."

Penelope did not know. She couldn't have cared less. Her thoughts were all for Harcourt Abbey of to-day—on the peril of the Grey Ghosts.

"But, as I have an hour to spare for my writing now, Penelope, would you be kind enough to go over to Mr. Aspell and request an immediate loan of his book?"

Penelope caught her breath. Here was a chance to get into Junior House—a chance to find Hugh, perhaps, and somehow warn him!

"Oh, yes, daddy! Of course I will!"

It took all her self-control not to show her excitement. And what an effort to walk with slow dignity from Head's house and across the open quadrangle to Junior House!

But once through the entrance of the old stone building, she hurried—for the cool hall was empty—up the main staircase.

The masters' quarters were, she knew, on the third floor; studies mostly on the second. Her heart began to flutter with anticipation.

"The boys will be starting prep," she murmured, "but I'm sure to find someone I can casually ask about Hugh—"

She stopped and froze. From somewhere quite close at hand a voice said softly:

"Who is the Fourth Grey Ghost?" Penelope nearly cried out in startled wonder. It was as if that question had been directed at her.

She jumped round, eyes wide—and saw no one.

For a second she had a sense of eeriness. The stone-flagged passage was rather dim. It was quiet; her crepe-soled shoes made no sound. A shivery thrill crept up her spine as again came the soft voice:

"If it wasn't either of you who wore the spare robe, then—it must have been this chap who signed himself the Fourth Grey Ghost last night—"

Penelope gave a tiny sigh. She relaxed, and a flicker of excitement widened her eyes. She saw now that just ahead and to her left was a door marked "Art Room."

The voice came from beyond that door, and the voice, steady, cool, was that of Hugh Mason, No. 1 of the Grey Ghosts.

"Then the Grey Ghosts are inside!" she breathed excitedly. "They're meeting—all three! Oh, zimmy! And—and, although they don't know it—they're talking about me!"



WHAT PENELOPE OVERHEARD

The discovery held her enthralled. Curiosity about these three daring boys made her step softly to the door—three

boys who had courageously banded together to defy the tyranny of Mr. Aspell.

More than that—three boys with a strange mission centred around a mysterious boy called Glynn Tracy.

"We had to meet like this, risky though it is," she heard Hugh Mason say quietly, "because we've got to make up our minds about this unknown No. 4. Who is he? What does he know? Does he know who we are? And—is he to be trusted?"

Penelope smiled. If only they knew that No. 4 wasn't a boy at all—but herself!

But wait. Another voice was answering, a lazy, drawing voice:

"He's got nerve, Hugh, whoever he is—definitely. And he saved us last night. My humble suggestion is—trust him and go ahead with your plan. What says friend Bob?"

"Not certain, Harvey. It's up to Hugh. He's leader."

There was a little silence. Penelope waited. This conversation about herself thrilled her.

Her hand was lightly resting against the Art Room door. A slight, inadvertent pressure on it caused the door to open a little.

She froze. Had that movement been seen inside?

But there was no outcry, no sign of alarm. And now—

The golden flecks in Penelope's eyes sparkled with intense excitement. Through the open doorway she could see into the room.

The three Grey Ghosts, without their concealing robes and hoods, were before her.

Holding her breath, Penelope eagerly studied them.

Standing near a big easel, feet planted firmly apart, hands deep in his blazer pockets, was the boy who

(Please turn to page 251.)

Don Weston



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

DON IS WORRIED

"I'll fix it! I have a way with girls, and I'll have Sally Warner doing just what I want her to do!"

Don Weston, strolling along the students' deck on board the Ocean Star—known as the Floating College and bound for Australia—stopped as he heard that snatch of conversation.

Sally Warner, leader of the Merry-makers, was Don's girl chum, and to hear her name mentioned naturally interested him. But now he frowned. It was not so much the words he had overheard, as the tone in which they were uttered, that gave him cause for thought.

The voice was boastful, with a note of satisfaction in it; and there had been an underlying hint of something else—Don could not quite define what—that immediately had him worried.

He took a quick upward look at the iron steps of the companionway just ahead of him, and up which two boys were making their way to the promenade deck above. One was a boy named Rolf Ferani—it was his voice Don had heard—and the other was his pal named Manuel Rosso. Both were comparative newcomers among the students, having joined the college ship at the last port of call.

They vanished from sight along the deck. Don made to follow them, then paused again.

"Wonder what they were talking about?" he muttered, still frowning. "I wonder what they want Sally to do? Dashed if I liked the sound of Ferani's voice as he said it—something sly about it. Or am I just imagining things?"

Don attempted to grin, but the brown soon furrowed his brow again.

"Think I'll have a word with Sally, anyway, just in case. Ferani might be one of those japing bounders who's got some idea of playing a trick on her."

And with that thought, Don went hurrying off in search of Sally. But, as it happened, he just missed her.

Sally Warner, blue eyes bright, her pretty face deeply tanned by sun and sea breezes, went up one flight of stairs as he descended another. Arriving on the promenade deck, she was looking round for Don and her two other chums, fair-haired Fay Manners and energetic Johnny Briggs, when she almost collided with Rolf Ferani as he suddenly appeared from round a corner of the Palm Lounge.

"I'm so sorry!" The boy stepped back, giving her a little bow.

"That's all right," smiled Sally. She wasn't to know that the near-collision had been carefully staged.

She made to move on, but Ferani suddenly caught her by the arm.

"Sally, may I speak to you, please?" he asked politely.

He was undoubtedly very good-looking, she thought, with his sleek black hair, flashing eyes, and a most fascinating smile.

"Of course," she replied laughingly. And then his expression became serious, and he seemed to lose a little of his confidence.

"I—I don't quite know how to begin and—Sally, we don't know each other very well yet, but I hear the students talk about you, and I say to myself how nice you must be. There is a girl, I say, who is kind and always ready to do a kind act. And so I come to you."

His tone was very sincere. Sally turned a little pink. She didn't quite know what to say.

"Well, here I am, Rolf." And she looked at him wonderingly, interestedly.

"Yes. It is very difficult. I'm doing this, not for myself but for someone else. Sally, a friend of mine has done something very silly, and he will get into terrible trouble with the headmaster if it is found out. If you would help him—please do, Sally!"

Sally was very conscious of Rolf Ferani's earnest gaze upon her. She felt she liked him for making this appeal on behalf of a friend. That showed real friendship—the sort of friendship that existed between her and her own chums.

"In what way can I help, Rolf?" she asked. "What's the trouble, and who's your friend?"

"Ah!" Rolf looked distressed. "Sally, I would rather not tell you that—you understand? As for what the trouble is, I'll explain."

And he did. His friend had handed in a French primer to Professor Willard, the headmaster. And, when it was too late, he had remembered that he had scrawled in the book a number of remarks and caricatures of the Floating College masters, including the Head himself.

"It was done only as a joke," Rolf added, "but perhaps they're just a little offensive, and you can imagine how angry Professor Willard will be."

Sally could indeed. The headmaster's sense of humour was not one of his strong points.

"You're right," she agreed. "But how can I help?"

"By getting back the book before the Head sees it!" Rolf said. "I tried to get it myself about an hour ago, but Professor Willard almost spotted me. I dare not try again, or he will become suspicious. But you, Sally—you'll have the opportunity, for you're seeing him a lot just now."

Sally was, for she was busy organising an arts and crafts exhibition in which the Head was taking a great personal interest. She wanted to see him again that afternoon, as it happened.

"Please say you'll do it, Sally?" pleaded Rolf. "My friend's in an awful state about it, expecting to be hauled on the carpet any moment. You can't miss the book—it has a blob of red ink on the cover, and is on the shelf behind the Head's desk. It will be very simple to get it."

Yes, it would be simple enough, Sally realised. And she could see no harm in getting back the book. Always ready to do anyone a good turn, she nodded smilingly.

"I'll do it, Rolf."

"Thank you, Sally. But there is just one thing. Will you promise to tell no one—for my friend's sake? It is better that no one should know anything about this. You do understand?"

Sally did, and again she nodded. She found herself liking Rolf Ferani, for apart from his charm he was certainly proving himself a true friend to the other boy.

"I promise," she smiled, and then heard approaching footsteps along the deck. "All right, Rolf. Leave everything to me. I'll see you later."

"You're very kind." The boy gave her another courtly little bow, and then hurried away.

Sally turned, smiling cheerily as she saw that the newcomers were her three chums.

"Been looking for you, shipmates," she told them.

"And I've been looking for you, Sally," said Don, staring after the retreating figure of Rolf Ferani. "Fay and Johnny said you'd come up here. What did that chap want?" he added.

"Oh, we've just been talking!" Sally replied, and looked at her boy chum in surprise. "Golly, don't sound so fierce, Don."

Don glanced quickly at Fay and Johnny. Then he turned to Sally again.

"What's Ferani asked you to do, Sally? I wanted to warn you that he may try to get up to some tricky business. I don't trust that chap, after what I heard."

Sally laughed, amused by Don's manner.

"He's very nice, Don. What did you hear him say?"

"That he was going to fix something. That he'd have you doing just what he wanted you to do."

Again Sally smiled. It sounded as if Rolf had been very confident that she would agree to help him.

"Well, what's wrong with that, Don?" she asked. "I am doing what he's asked me to."

"And what's that?"

"Sorry, Don, but I can't tell you. I promised not to."

"Oh! I still think you ought to be careful," Don said anxiously. "If you'd heard his tone of voice—"

"I assure you there's nothing to worry about," Sally chuckled. "It's all very simple, so do stop getting hot and bothered. And now I must go along to see the Head about the exhibition. Be back later. Oh, by the way, Don, the ship's carpenter said he had that piece of wood for your model aeroplane! He wants you to collect it. Be seeing you, Merry-makers."

And off went Sally with a cheery

wave of her hand. While Fay and Johnny found themselves steamer-chairs, for the afternoon was at its hottest, Don wandered towards the stern of the ship to see the carpenter.

Don was feeling a little happier now. Sally had assured him there was nothing to worry about, and he was trying not to. But what ever was she doing for Rolf Ferani, and why the secrecy? He and Sally and Fay and Johnny didn't usually have any secrets from each other.

"Oh, well, Sally knows what she's doing—"

But a moment later Don's thoughts received a jolt. For from around the ship's superstructure just ahead of him came a voice—Ferani's voice.

"She fell for it just as I said she would! We'll be sitting pretty, Manuel, and Sally Warner won't suspect a thing!"

Don clenched his hands. Now, hearing that, he knew that his fears had been justified. Sally was being tricked in some way by Rolf Ferani!



SALLY'S STRANGE BEHAVIOUR

Sally made her way along to Professor Willard's study on C Deck, and just for a moment her cheery smile faded and she became thoughtful.

Don had certainly been agitated about Rolf. Sally knew that he was not in the habit of jumping to wild conclusions. Johnny did at times, in that impetuous way of his; but not Don. And, of course, she didn't really know much about Rolf Ferani.

Then her smile returned. Rolf had sounded very sincere, and she had no reason to disbelieve what he had told her. Don was worrying himself, on her behalf, over nothing. It was sweet of him, of course—but then, he always was. Sally thought with a little glow.

She reached the headmaster's suite, knocked, and his voice bade her enter. She went into the study, and found Professor Willard seated at his desk. He had one of the drawers open, and was raking around inside it; but he looked up as the door opened.

"Ah, come in, Sally! I expect you've come for that plan of the exhibition you wanted me to examine. An excellent arrangement—excellent! I'm very pleased indeed with your handling of everything, Sally."

"Thank you, professor." Sally beamed her pleasure and took the sheet of paper he passed her. Then he opened another drawer and began searching inside that one. He was evidently looking for something, and Sally decided that this was just the opportunity, while he was thus preoccupied, to get the book she had come for.

"Hem!" She coughed politely to show that she was still there.

"Yes, Sally? What is it?"

"I wonder if I might borrow the complete passenger list, please? I believe you have one—"

"Yes, you'll find it on the top shelf over there."

Sally had known it was there—that was why she had asked for it. She crossed over to the shelves. Her gaze went quickly to a lower shelf where there was a pile of French primers, and almost immediately she saw the one with a red-ink mark on the cover. She stretched out a hand towards it.

"On the top shelf, Sally," came the Head's voice.

Sally gulped. Hastily she reached up to the shelf above, took down the passenger list, which was neatly slipped in a leather folder. A quick glance showed her that Professor Willard was examining a drawer. She caught hold of the French primer and swiftly slipped it into the folder.

"Thank you, professor," she said. "I have it now. I will return it this evening."

She made for the door. The Head looked up again.

"Oh, just let me look inside that passenger list, Sally."

Sally's heart thumped. Getting

away with the book wasn't proving at all simple!

She juggled with it, holding it behind her back as she handed the folder containing the passenger list to Professor Willard. He peered through it, then handed it back. Once again Sally made for the door. Outside in the corridor, she sighed with relief.

"Golly, I nearly came unstuck!" she murmured. "If he'd seen the primer he might have looked through that, too—and then the fat would have been in the fire. He seems to have lost something, that's obvious."

She walked on down the corridor. She hoped this was the right book; but it must be, because it had been the only one in the pile with a blob of red ink on the cover.

Rolf would be pleased—and his friend, And Don, if ever he knew the explanation, would be amused how he had suspected that the boy was trying to trick her. Funny that Don should have jumped to that conclusion.

Sally began flicking through the pages of the book: not because she wanted to see the caricatures and remarks in it, but just to make sure that they were there.

And then she started, ran through the leaves again. There were no caricatures inside it; no remarks of any sort written in it.

What did it mean? It meant—it surely meant that Rolf had not told her the truth.

There was a startled light in Sally's eyes now. Golly! Had Don been right, after all? Had she been tricked? If so, why?

Sally sped on down the corridor, her thoughts racing.

And at that moment Don appeared at the other end. Extremely agitated and worried after hearing that second snatch of conversation between Rolf Ferani and Manuel Rosso, he had come charging after Sally, knowing that she had intended to see the Head. He'd got to warn her, and this time he'd make her listen to him.

He saw Sally with the book in her hand, and guessed she must have collected it during her interview with the Head. He chased after her, but a moment later was staggering back as Edgar T. Phineas, the hustling head prefect, came racing down a companion-way in even more of a hustle than usual.

"Sorry, Weston—" began Phineas, recovering first and adjusting his horn-rimmed spectacles. "Oh, here I am, sir!" he added briskly. "I came down at once after getting your telephone call."

Don saw that Professor Willard had emerged from his cabin. The Head did not see Don leaning against the wall and getting his breath back.

"We must look into this at once, Phineas," the professor said agitatedly. "One copy is missing—a very grave matter indeed. I first missed it from my volume of Lautrez's French primer. I have searched everywhere. And now I find that the primer is also gone. Obviously there is a connection between the two. The culprit will be most severely punished."

"Yes, sir! A terrible thing to happen. May I ask when you missed them, sir?"

"Within the last hour, Phineas." And have you been in your suite all that time, sir? Can you remember who has been in to see you?"

"I have had to slip out on two occasions. Sally Warner has been the only caller. She borrowed the passenger list, that is all. Phineas, I will rely on you to make the closest investigations immediately."

Phineas rushed off. Don, too, broke into a run. And now his eyes were horrified. The Head had said that Sally had borrowed only the passenger list; but Don had seen her with a blue-covered book—which could have been the missing Lautrez's French primer!

Don became frantic with fear. He knew—he was sure—that Rolf Ferani was behind this. In some way he had persuaded Sally to take that book, and now there was going to be a terrific upheaval because it—and

something else much more important which had been contained inside it—were both missing.

He found Sally on the promenade deck in the act of being joined by Johnny and Fay. Don rushed forward and grabbed her arm, noticing as he did so that she had only the passenger list in her hand now.

"Sally," he hissed frantically, "where's that primer? You've got to put it back in the Head's study as soon as you can. There's going to be awful trouble—"

Sally stiffened.

"Really, Don, I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"Listen, old thing!" gulped her chum. "You've been tricked by that Ferani fellow—"

"Don, I'll have you know he's my friend!" Sally said indignantly. "I don't like you talking about him in that way!"

Her chums stared at her in amazement. Sally, speaking to Don like that!

"Sally," he pleaded, "he's taking you in. I know, and I'm just trying to warn you—"

"Thank you, but it's not at all necessary. I'm quite capable of choosing my friends. Surely you're not jealous, Don? Now, please let go of my arm. I have a lot to do."

Don was looking at her in pained surprise. He was shaking his head as if he couldn't believe this was really happening. While Fay and Johnny just stood as if transfixed. Never had they known Sally treat her boy chum like this before.

Sally, her face pale, strode on. And then she smiled as Rolf Ferani suddenly appeared.

"Oh, hallo, Rolf! I was coming to look for you," she said, and held out her arm.

He took it, and together they went off along the deck, leaving a stricken silence behind them. Deeply hurt, almost dazed, Don watched them go.



HER CHUM TO THE RESCUE

Rolf Ferani's dark eyes glittered with satisfaction.

"You got the book, Sally?" he asked eagerly.

Sally nodded. "That's wonderful!" The boy could hardly keep a gloating note out of his voice. He flashed her his fascinating smile. "Give me the book now, Sally, and—"

"I'll see you in my cabin," Sally hurriedly broke in, breaking free from his arm. "I just want to see Fay about something."

She turned and ran back along the deck before he could say anything more. She seemed to be labouring under the stress of some great emotion.

Don and Johnny had gone. But Fay was there—Fay almost near to tears. She was shocked and bewildered, and, for once in her life, angry with Sally. Angry with her because she had treated Don so shamefully, when Don had been only trying to help her.

"Sally," she cried now as that girl rushed up, "oh, how could you do it?"

Sally's voice quivered when she replied.

"Because I had to, Fay! I didn't mean it! Oh, poor old Don! But I didn't mean it. I knew Ferani was listening, and I had to play a part to bluff him."

Fay blinked, utterly astonished. But the joy was back in her eyes.

"Oh, Sally, and I thought—"

"Fay, Don's right about Ferani. I know it now. Listen, there's a dear! Run along and tell Don how frightfully sorry I am—tell him what I've just told you. And tell him—"

Sally spoke quickly for a few moments. The smile was back on Fay's face now; then a startled expression chased across her features. She went hurrying off in the direction Don and Johnny had taken.

While Sally made her way down to her cabin. Her eyes were thoughtful,

but her lips were set in a tight, grim line, and the spasmodic clenching and unclenching of her hands showed the anger that consumed her.

Rolf Ferani, as she had expected, was awaiting her in the cabin. He turned eagerly as she came in.

"The book, Sally!" Sally stood by the door. She took up the book from where she had concealed it behind a cushion. Her eyes were cold now.

"It isn't only the book you want, is it, Rolf?" she asked.

He gave a little start.

"What ever do you mean, Sally—"

"You know what I mean," Sally said icily. "In fact, it's not the book at all you want, but something concealed in it. Fortunately I've found—"

"You meddling fool!" The smile was wiped off Ferani's face like a flash. "You've looked down the spine and found it—"

"The spine! So that's where it is!" Sally gave a triumphant laugh, and next moment was thrusting the tips of two fingers down the spine of the book. Then she was pulling out a tightly rolled-up sheet of paper. "Just a little bluff, Ferani, pretending I'd already found it—"

"You—you let me have it!" The boy's face was savage as he leapt towards her.

But already Sally had unrolled the piece of paper; had taken a quick glance at it. Horror filled her eyes—and contempt, too.

"The questions and answers for next week's exam— Let go of my arm!"

She screwed up the paper in the palm of her hand. Then she was struggling fiercely as he caught hold of her.

"Give me that paper!" He was showing himself in his true colours now. His eyes flashed with vicious fury.

"I won't! What do you think you can do?" Sally panted. "I shall tell the Head—"

"And I shall deny it!" Ferani grated. "It will be your word against mine. But I'm going to have that paper—"

His grip on her wrist tightened viciously. She cried out as he slowly twisted it. And then—

"Hands off, you rotter!" The door burst open, and Don Weston came rushing in like a whirlwind, Fay and Johnny behind him. "O.K. Sally, Fay gave me your message. We heard everything. And now—"

His fist shot out, striking Ferani on the jaw. The boy staggered to the floor.

"Get up and take what's coming to you!" Don exclaimed.

"Give him socks, Don!" yelled Johnny. "Look here, I'll take him on for you, if you like—"

"You leave him to me, Johnny! I'll teach him to try to trick Sally—"

"Look out!" cried Fay. For Ferani, still on the floor, had suddenly lashed out with one foot. Just in time Don dodged, and as the other boy leapt up and rushed he stopped him with his right fist.

"Now a left, Don!" roared Johnny.

Don followed that advice, Ferani went reeling across the cabin. And Sally was content to stand there, knowing that the boy was receiving his just deserts. With the exam paper still clutched in her hand, she paled as she realised what might have been the consequences had she not discovered in time how she was being tricked.

Such an uproar, however, could not go on long unnoticed. Already a crowd of excited students were gathered in the doorway. And then Phineas' voice was heard.

"What's going on down here? What—" He arrived outside the cabin with a rush, saw what was

happening, and stepped in. "Weston—Ferani! What's the meaning of this—"

"Better ask Ferani," Sally said quietly. "And you'd better take this, Edgar." She handed him the exam paper, and the prefect's eyes bulged behind his spectacles as he saw what it was. "Ferani will explain that, too!"

The beaten boy stood there, panting, wiping his bruised face. He knew that there was no way out of it. Sally and her three chums had overheard everything.

He owned up, confessing how he had known the exam paper was in the French primer in Professor Willard's study. He had tried to sneak away with it, but had been interrupted by the headmaster's return and had concealed the paper down the spine of the book. Another attempt to get the book and paper had failed, and then, knowing that Sally was frequently visiting the Head's study, had hit on the idea of getting her to do it for him.

Phineas scribbled it all down on one of his forms, ready for filing in his precious index system.

"Say, what a worm!" he grunted. "Now you can come and tell that all over again to the professor, Ferani!"

He hauled off the boy, and sent another prefect to get Manuel Rosso, who was also implicated.

"Oh, Don—Sally was looking at her boy chum—can you forgive me for playing that part—even though it was to bluff Ferani and bowl him out?"

Don grinned happily. "Now that I know why you did it, Sallykins—gee, just forget it!"

(End of this week's story.)

A very intriguing pet plays an important part in next Friday's story of Sally & Co.

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 248.)

had last spoken. Very sturdy, fair-haired, and rugged-faced, Penelope instantly recognised the outspoken Fourth Former who had shown scorn that morning because of her apparent sneaking to Mr. Aspell.

"That's Bob Gower," she told herself quickly.

In direct contrast was a slender boy, lounging back in an armchair. He was very tall, long-faced, wore glasses. His blazer was a perfect fit and cut; the knot of his blue-and-red school tie was exquisite; the crease in his flannels knife-like.

He was apparently lazily absorbed in admiring his brightly polished shoes.

"Harvey Doane," Penelope nodded, as she now recognised him. "Obviously not such a dreamer as he looks. And—oddly she felt her interest quicken—" and Hugh!"

The leader of the Grey Ghosts was just within her intent vision.

Well-built, seated on one of the Art Room stools, was the Fourth Former who had so impressed her. There was an air of restless energy about him, for all his steady voice, the calmness on his lean, good-looking face, topped by curly black hair.

He was nodding with decision.

"Right! Then we trust this No. 4—until we can discover more about him. I needn't tell you chaps that things are getting hot. The Wasp suspects that the Grey Ghosts are Fourth Formers. Some of his Form may wonder, too, but they'd be on our side. The Wasp'll do anything to get us—"

"Definitely," murmured Harvey Doane. "Not forgetting the unmentionable Fifth Former, Harold Smeekes—"

"And don't forget, either," put in Bob Gower, with an aggressive thrust of his jaw, "that we've got another sneaking type in the school now—the Head's daughter!"

Penelope started. She gave a tiny grimace. It wasn't exactly pleasant to hear that, though she didn't blame the outspoken Bob for his honest conviction. It was actually a compliment to her acting that morning.

"You weren't there, Harvey," continued Bob angrily, "but Miss Cartwright nearly put Hugh in the soup! Just like a girl! They're all the same—sneaky types! Wouldn't surprise me if she starts to toady round the Wasp like that lout Smeekes!"

"Steady, Bob," said Hugh quietly. "Keep your voice down. We shall hear anyone approaching on that stone passage, but no need to take unnecessary risk."

"Sorry!" growled the fair-haired boy. "But you know yourself that that girl's a sneaking type."

Hugh ran a hand thoughtfully through his curly hair.

Suddenly, strangely, Penelope found herself expectant, as if his answer was of utmost importance.

"I don't know, Bob," Hugh was speaking slowly. "You'll think I'm crazy, maybe, but—somehow when I first saw Miss Cartwright I felt she wasn't that sort. I haven't a sister. I don't know much about girls, but—"

He broke off, a slight flush on his lean cheeks, perhaps conscious of Bob Gower's stare and of the fact that Harvey Doane was staring curiously at him.

Penelope—absurdly, she told herself—felt a little surge of pleasure.

"But forget Miss Cartwright," said Hugh abruptly. "If she is a danger, we'll be on the alert for her. We can't afford to take any chances—there's too much at stake—" He hesitated. "Look, chaps, you're still with me in this, whatever happens? Even if it's expulsion?"

"Ass!" grunted Bob.

"Definitely!" drawled Harvey.

"Don't waffle, Hugh!"

Penelope's heart warmed to them both. Varied types—but wizard types!

"Thanks," said Hugh quietly.

"Then listen. Orders for to-night. And, remember—to-night we strike

the first blow for Glynn Tracy. The Abbot's Room is our chance. I'm sure. Now, we haven't much time—"

Penelope swiftly drew back, intrigued by that reference to Glynn Tracy and the Abbot's Room, but mentally kicking herself. She had been so intent on the little scene that the real, urgent purpose of her visit had receded into the background of her mind.

The Grey Ghosts must be warned that they would walk into a deadly trap set by Mr. Aspell!

But they must be warned—especially after what she had just overheard—in such a way that they implicitly trusted her warning; in a way that would show no possible connection with herself.

Time was growing dangerously short. Her brow wrinkled with fierce thought as she heard snatches of Hugh's cool voice.

"We meet in robes, of course. Any questions? If not, we'll scatter. The less we're seen together, the less chance of being suspected—"

Penelope began to feel frantic. She must do something—and quickly.

"Oh, zimmy. I've got it! A chance," she breathed, and softly stepped back towards the end of the passage, "if only I can bring it off!"

She stopped; drew out a pocket diary, a pencil. Words were scribbled swiftly on a blank sheet. She tore it out and folded it in her palm. Footsteps sounded in the Art Room. The Grey Ghosts were preparing to leave.

"Now for it, Penny—and act for your life!"

She tensed, thrilled by the daring and unusualness of her plan to save the three Fourth Formers.

The Art Room door started to open. This was the moment! Penelope parted her lips, infused startled alarm into her voice, and cried out:

"Oh! The—the Grey Ghosts! Help! Help!"

What is Penelope's plan? And will she save the Grey Ghosts? There will be further exciting chapters of this grand new serial in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

THE CASE OF THE BROKEN TOYS

(Continued from page 244.)

room. Mrs. Farrel's soft voice bade them enter.

The boudoir was dimly lit by a shaded lamp. Little Tony was ensconced in a cosy chair, obviously against his will, his mother seated beside him. She rose quickly as they entered, her eyes inquiring.

"I want to go back to my nursery," Tony announced.

"So you shall, laddie," replied Noel. "But first Uncle Noel wants to tell you a story."

Tony brightened up immediately.

"About a burglar!" he insisted. "About a burglar," promised Noel gravely. "You sit over there with Auntie June, while I have a word with mummy."

He drew Mrs. Farrel aside, asking a swift question. She looked startled, but replied in an undertone, nodding across the room.

"Thanks!" murmured Noel. "And now for the story, Tony." He pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Once upon a time," he began, "there was a brave little boy called Tony, who lived in a big house with his mummy. One day a bad burglar came along—"

"Like the burglar-man that Tony shot this morning?" interrupted the little boy eagerly.

Mrs. Farrel looked rather startled, but Noel nodded gravely.

"Just like that one, Tony. He came first for Tony's toys, but Tony shot at him, and he ran away."

"So that's what the burglar-man came for?" murmured Tony.

"That's what he pretended to come for," replied Noel. "But he was very clever. He knew that Tony loved his nursery, and he was trying to frighten Tony's mother so that Tony should be put into another room. That was his real purpose—"

Abruptly he paused. He seemed to be listening. But June could only hear the clock ticking loudly on the mantelpiece, and a faint sound like a mouse in the wainscoting.

"But Tony was too brave to be scared by the burglar-man," went on Noel, "so that man tried something more frightening—". He paused, and June knew that he was thinking of those terrifying pictures daubed in tar. "Something that was to scare Tony's mother, and to cover up the man's real purpose. You see, Tony—"

—Noel rose, to his feet—"you see, Tony, the burglar-man was really trying to steal something very valuable—mummy's jewels—"

Mrs. Farrel bit back a cry as Noel flashed her a warning glance.

"And this is where the story gets really exciting, Tony," he said softly, "because Uncle Noel is going to make it come true. We're going to catch that old burglar—but don't make a sound. Just watch!"

Tony's blue eyes grew very wide, and he held tightly to June's hand as Noel crossed the room noiselessly and pulled aside a picture that hung on the wall—revealing a small, hidden cupboard with a metal door.

"The key, Mrs. Farrel—quickly!" he breathed.

Her hand trembling, she took the key from her bag, and Noel inserted it in the lock, turning it swiftly and jerking open the door.

There came a gasp from June—a cry from Mrs. Farrel. The thin metal at the back of the cupboard had been gashed, the bricks and plaster behind it had been removed—and through the opening a gloved hand was groping to open the jewel-box.

June saw the flash of handcuffs, and heard a sharp click, a furious, snarling grunt as Noel dropped the picture back into place.

Little Tony clapped his hands delightedly.

"A burglar-man—in the wall!" he exclaimed.

Noel glanced reassuringly at Mrs. Farrel, and beckoned June.

"You're right, Tony!" he declared. "We've caught the burglar-man—thanks to you. Now wait here with mummy."

Her thoughts racing, June followed him out of the room and into the adjoining nursery. As Noel switched on the light she saw Foster, the gardener, his face convulsed with fury, one hand in a gaping hole in the wall, where it was securely handcuffed to the handle of Mrs. Farrel's jewel-box!

June gasped. She began to understand now.

"The game's up, you scoundrel!" said Noel sternly. "You knew of the wall safe, but couldn't gain access to it except through the nursery wall, and when no one was about. So you hatched this despicable plot to scare the boy's mother and the rest of the household to make certain that you would get the room to yourself."

"Your offer to keep guard was simply a blind to hide your real

activities. And those tar daubs were made to frighten but also to—"

"Of course!" broke in June. "They also helped to conceal where he had been working at the wall."

"Exactly!" said Noel grimly. "June, will you phone for the police?"

"BUT, nunky," demanded June, as she joined him after the excitement was over, "what made you suspect Foster in the first place?"

Noel's eyes twinkled.

"Tony can tell us that, June."

Once again they entered Mrs. Farrel's room. She greeted them with a grateful smile, for she had been acquainted with what had happened.

"You've come to tell me another story, Uncle Noel?" Tony demanded.

"No, Tony," replied the young detective. "This time you're going to tell the story. Show mummy and Auntie June exactly how you shot that burglar this morning. On second thoughts," he added hastily, his eyes twinkling, "we'd better have the window open."

While June and Tony's mother looked on in bewilderment, Noel flung the window wide.

"Come on, Tony," he said. "You were playing in the garden this morning when you saw a masked burglar-man hurrying towards the trees. What did you do?"

Eagerly, as though playing a thrilling game, Tony produced his water-pistol, and marched over to the window.

"Stop!" he called in his shrill young voice. "Han's up, or Tony'll shoot you. Bang—bang!"

As he spoke he pressed the trigger, and a stream of crimson liquid shot over the sill.

"Red ink!" cried June.

"Oh, Tony!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrel. "You must have been at my bureau again!"

Noel's eyes twinkled.

"Perhaps you would forgive him this time, Mrs. Farrel," he said. "You see, the red ink that Tony shot at the burglar scattered the man's boots. It was that Tony clue, and the fact that I noticed that Tony's pistol was stained with red, that enabled me to bowl out the scoundrel. So really," he added gravely, "it was you, Tony, who caught the burglar-man after all!"

(End of this week's story.)

WHEN JUNE BLUFFED NOEL is the unusual title of next week's detective story—a story in which you will read of very unusual happenings.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 242.)



TOO LATE TO ENTER FOR THE RACE

"What were they getting at?"

Again and again Merle asked herself that question as she rode on down the

mountain road.

Nathaniel Garsten's declaration that he would stop at nothing to secure possession of Happy Valley Ranch had come as no surprise. Nor did his threats worry her at the moment. What sent an icy shiver down her spine was Cella's dark, mysterious reference to the Gold Rider.

Why was she so confident that Merle would not win the trophy? Why had she hinted that Merle would change her tune when she reached Red Hill?

With an effort Merle smothered her fears.

"She was just being spiteful—out to scare me."

Yet it was anxiously that she galloped on until at last she saw the frame houses and red roofs of the little township loom before her.

The sheriff's office was at the far

end of the wide, dusty main street, and Merle's eyes lit up as she saw a big placard nailed to the veranda post.

"Red Hill Rodeo—Entries Received Here," it said, and in bold type amongst the list of prizes were the words: "GOLD RIDER TROPHY."

Jumping down from the saddle, Merle tethered Pommie to the hitch-rail, gave him a fond pat, then walked eagerly towards the veranda steps. But at that moment there came a surprised voice from behind her:

"Well, if it isn't Merle Wason! Say, we don't often have the pleasure of seeing you in these parts!"

Merle turned. She smiled as she saw a plump man crossing the road, one hand outstretched.

"Hallo, Mr. Higgins!" she cried, recognising an old friend of her uncle's. "How are you?"

"As full of bounce as a ball!" he chuckled. "But what's brought you this way?"

Merle indicated the placard. "I've come to enter for the rodeo. I've set my heart on winning the Gold Rider."

"The Gold Rider!" William Higgins stared at her. "But you can't enter for that race!"

Merle looked bewildered. "Why ever not?"

Her uncle's friend tugged at the gold watch-chain that adorned his ample waistcoat.

"Waal, for one thing, it's a kind o' relay race," he said.

"Re—relay race?"

"Yep. Every competitor has to enter two horses, and I happen to know, my dear, that you haven't much choice at Happy Valley. Pommie's a grand feller, but you'd never be able to find a companion for him."

Merle's heart began to sink. "I'll have to find one somehow," she declared. "Maybe I can train up one of the cowboys' horses."

William Higgins shook his head. "Doubt it, my dear. But that's not the only obstacle. I'm afraid you've left it too late."

"Too—too late?" stammered Merle. He nodded.

"Yep. All entries have to be in by this afternoon—"

"You mean—"

Merle's voice died away, and the blood drained from her face as Mr. Higgins pointed.

"Look for yourself, my dear," he said gruffly.

Merle stared across at the sheriff's office, and her heart sank as she saw that the door was closed, saw that in the window was a card—a card on which were printed three words:

"CLOSED UNTIL TO-MORROW."

What a blow to all Merle's hopes! What can she do now? You will see in next week's fine instalment.