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EVERY
FRIDAY.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
Sept. 25th,
1948.



The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

Only Her Horse Could Now Save Larry From Capture—Written by GAIL WESTERN

MERLE'S DESPERATE RUSE

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, to be raced for at Red Hill Rodeo.

Larry Denvers, a strange young cowboy working on the ranch, entered Merle's name for the race. He also told Merle there was a traitor on the ranch.

Slim Harris, the ranch foreman, declared Larry was the traitor, and the cowboys threatened to run him off the ranch unless Merle dismissed him.

In an effort to prove Larry's innocence, Merle went to a hollow oak tree that was being used as a "post office" by the real traitor and a rascally rancher named Nathaniel Garsten.

There she found a note, but before she could read it it was snatched from her by a masked man she knew to be her secret enemy at Happy Valley, and he informed her that the sheriff was now on his way to arrest Larry.

THE sheriff on his way to arrest Larry!

The news stabbed Merle like a knife thrust. In wide-eyed horror she stared at the masked traitor, then hot, indignant colour rushed into her cheeks.

"It's not true!" she cried. "It can't be true! You're just trying to frighten me. Why should the sheriff want to arrest Larry? He's done nothing wrong."

Nathaniel Garsten's hireling laughed.

"Maybe not, but he's going to be yanked off to gaol all the same."

"You mean that—that Garsten's trumped up a false charge against him?"

The mystery traitor laughed again. "Put it that way if you like. It doesn't matter what words you use,

The main thing is, the sheriff is convinced that Denvers was the guy who was responsible for that outbreak of cattle rustling over at Snake Canyon a few months back—an' rustlin' is a mighty serious offence in these parts. Guess a feller can get as much as five years for it."

In his malicious desire to gloat over her the masked man half forgot to disguise his voice. If Merle had been on the alert she might have recognised it and thus identified him.

But she was too distressed to heed his voice. All her thoughts were centred on the young cowboy she had learnt to admire and trust.

It was dreadful to think that he might be sent to prison—and that because of her. For it was she whom Garsten was really hitting at. By securing Larry's arrest he hoped to kill two birds with one stone—make it easy for the unknown traitor to bring Happy Valley Ranch to ruin, and to make it impossible for Merle to compete in the all-important Gold Rider race.

Desperately Merle's hands clenched. "I've got to save him—warn him of what's afoot," she told herself, and turned to where her horse was grazing under the trees.

But, as if he guessed what was in her mind, the masked man shot out a hand, grasping her arm.

"No you don't," he snapped. "Guess you're goin' to stay here until there's no chance of your interferin'."

"Let me go! Let me go!" she panted.

But he only grinned and his fingers clung to her with brutal strength. Frantically she strove to wrench herself free while her horse, lifting his velvety nose from the grass, stared with puzzled eyes at the unusual scene.

"Pommie! Pommie!"

Out of sheer desperation Merle called and instantly the intelligent chestnut came cantering forward. That shout seemed to tell him that his beloved mistress was in danger,

and as she called again he bared his teeth and lunged out his sleek head.

The masked man let out a howl as he felt himself grabbed by his shirt. Letting go of Merle, he swung round furiously, one hand dropping to the gun holster at his belt.

Merle's heart stood still. There could be no mistaking the look of ruthless cruelty in the unknown's eyes. But she need not have worried. Pommie was well able to take care of himself. Even as the traitor dragged out his revolver, the horse lunged out again with his head. It took the man right in the pit of the stomach and he went reeling back, the gun flying from his hand.

Merle did not stop to see any more. Already she was reaching for Pommie's trailing reins.

"Oh, well done, honey!" she panted and, leaping into the saddle, sent him galloping off down the path.

From behind came a furious shout, then the crack of a gun. Blindly Merle rode on, twisting and turning through the trees. Her one thought was to get clean away—to make certain that the traitor did not pursue and overhail her.

For ten minutes she galloped on, and then to her relief she realised that the masked man had been left far behind.

"Now, I must get back quickly and warn Larry," she gasped.

She turned Pommie into a side-path that she knew would lead him back to the main road.

Reaching it, she checked her horse and peered anxiously right and left, apprehensive lest Garsten's hireling should be waiting there to seize her.

But to her relief the road was deserted.

She started to ride on, then abruptly stopped again, a look of startled horror in her eyes.

Fifty yards farther on, a track joined the main road, and jog-trotting along this were two horsemen. Merle recognised them at once.

Nathaniel Garsten and the sheriff. "They're heading for Happy Valley

Ranch! They're on their way to arrest Larry!" she told herself with a gasp.

In consternation she watched them.

What should she do?

Futile to try to gallop by. Once they saw her they would be sure to hail her and they would become instantly suspicious if she did not stop. Nor would it be any good to seek the shelter of the woods and make a detour. That would mean she would reach home too late. They would get there before her.

Yet she could not remain here inactive. At all costs Larry must be warned. For his sake as well as her own, he must not become the victim of Garsten's latest plot.

By now the young cowboy would have returned from Lone Pine. She could picture him at work in the stables, unloading the oats he had been sent to collect, completely ignorant of the danger that loomed ahead. The knowledge sharpened her wits and suddenly she slid out of the saddle and gazed desperately at Pommie.

"There's just a chance," she muttered. "But it all depends on you, honey—only you can save him!"

As she spoke, she dragged a notebook and pencil from the pocket of her blouse and with furious haste started to write.



GARSTEN IS BEATEN

"Danger! The sheriff is on his way to arrest you!"

That was all Merle had time to print on the scrap of paper she

lore from her notebook. Every second was precious if her daring plan was to succeed.

Swiftly she folded and pinned the warning message to the saddle, then, winding the reins around the pintle, she looked appealingly across at the intelligent chestnut.

"Home, honey—home as fast as ever you can," she ordered.

Pommie turned his head and regarded her. Surely his beloved mistress did not really want him to gallop off without her?

"Home—as fast as you can," she commanded again, and brought her hand smacking down on his glossy flank.

Pommie tossed his head, then a little reluctantly went racing on down the dusty road.

Her heart in her mouth, Merle watched him. She knew that, if allowed to, the well-trained horse would make straight for his stable, and there Larry would see him—see, too, she hoped, the message she had pinned to the saddle.

But what would Garsten and the sheriff do when they saw the riderless horse go galloping by?

The two men had almost reached the junction of the two roads now, and she saw them check their horses as they heard the clatter of on-coming hoofs. Suddenly the sheriff gave a startled cry.

"Hey, that looks like a runaway horse!" he exclaimed. "Seem to recognize it, too!"

"It's that chestnut of Merle Wason's," growled Garsten. "But what is—"

He made to ride after Pommie, but at that moment Merle flung herself down on the road and shouted frantically.

"Help! Help!"

Involuntarily Garsten checked his horse. The sheriff had already done so, when he saw Merle lying in the dust.

"Guess she's been thrown," he declared. "Come on, Garsten, never mind the runaway. We must see if she needs attention."

And to Merle's delight the sheriff came cantering towards her. A little reluctantly Garsten followed. There was a suspicious look on the latter's gaunt, foxy face.

"What happened?" he demanded as

he reined in. "Never known you to be thrown before."

Merle's heart was thumping, as she scrambled to her feet and dusted herself down.

"It must have been a bee or something startled Pommie," she panted. "Anyway, he shot off as if possessed. Still, there are no bones broken, thank goodness." Then, anxious to avoid the rancher's probing, suspicious gaze, she turned to the sheriff. "Hallo, Mr. Johnson, what are you doing in these parts?" she asked.

The sheriff—a thick-set, stolid man with bushy eyebrows and a straggly brown moustache—frowned rather uncomfortably.

"Reckon we were just on our way to your place, Miss Merle," he said. "Got a matter of urgent business to attend to."

Merle pretended to look innocently surprised.

"With me?" she asked.

Sheriff Johnson frowned again.

"Partly. Rancher Garsten's registered a complaint," he said slowly.

"Yep—about that explosion last night," the owner of the V-Bar-V cut in. "That dynamite blew a gap wide enough to take the whole of my herd, and as a result several of my best steers are missin'."

"Reckon they must have strayed," said the sheriff.

"Unless they've been rustled," said Garsten, with a disagreeable laugh.

"Things are in such a bad way at Happy Valley that there's no tellin' what might happen there."

Indignantly Merle's cheeks burnt.

"Don't you dare make insinuations about Happy Valley!" she cried. "Let me tell you, Nathaniel Garsten, you won't find any rustlers on my ranch."

"No?" The rancher regarded her sneeringly. "What about that feller Denvers?"

"Larry Denvers is as straight as a die," flashed Merle.

"Fraid you're wrong there, Miss Merle." It was the sheriff who spoke. "For a long time we've had our eye on him, on account of that rustlin' over at Snake Canyon, and now, thanks to Mr. Garsten's public spirit, we've got all the evidence we need. As a matter of fact, I was on my way to pull him in when your hoss ran away."

"What evidence?" cried Merle. "I don't believe—"

"Now, now, Miss Merle, it's no use you arguin'. The evidence against him is watertight. Sorry to have to cause unpleasantness on your ranch, but I must do my duty. And as we're ridin' your way maybe you'd like a lift."

Merle nodded, lips tight, and swung up behind him. Next moment the two horses were again cantering down the trail. There was no sign of the supposed runaway, and Merle's heart gave an anxious leap.

Had Larry seen Pommie? Above all, had he seen her note and acted upon it?

It was on tenterhooks of suspense that she approached the ranch. The yard was deserted and there came no sign of life from the stables. When he had dismounted Sheriff Johnson turned to her.

"Where am I likely to find Denvers?" he demanded.

A little nervously Merle pointed to the stables.

"In there. He was collecting and unloading oats to-day, I believe."

"Okay." Purposefully the sheriff strode forward. Nathaniel Garsten chuckled, as the stable door opened, then closed.

"Guess that's put paid to you," he declared softly. "Once Denvers is out of the way—"

But that was as far as he got, for at that moment the sheriff reappeared and one look at his weather-beaten face told Merle all she wanted to know. Her eyes gleamed. Larry had got away!

"No one there—except that hoss of yours," the sheriff announced. "Reckon he must ha' found his way home. But where's Denvers?"

Before either Merle or Garsten could speak a plump figure in a print frock emerged from the ranch-house. It was Mammie, the negro housekeeper, and the sheriff beckoned her.

"Seen anything of that feller Larry Denvers recently?" he asked.

Mammie showed her white teeth in a dazzling smile.

"Shure thing, massa Johnson. He gone."

"Gone?"

"Yass. He pack up his things and ride away not ten minutes ago. He tell me that he fed-up with workin' here on account of the rest of the cowboys not trustin' him."

The sheriff's face was a study in angry disappointment while Nathaniel Garsten gave an explosive roar.

"He must have been warned! We've been tricked!" Furiously he whirled on Merle. "You're behind this!"

"Me?" Merle's eyes were wide and innocent. "But how could I possibly warn him, even if I wanted to? I've been with you and Mr. Johnson all the time."

To her delight the sheriff gave a nod of agreement.

"Of course you have, Miss Merle. Don't talk wildly, Garsten. Come on, we'd better collect a posse to search for him."

"But what about my missin' steers?" demanded the irate rancher.

"Can't worry about them. Catchin' Denvers is my job. Anyway, I expect they've only strayed. Come on."

And, whirling his horse, the sheriff went thundering down the trail. Garsten glared at the sweetly smiling Merle, hesitated, then galloped away in turn.

Radiant-faced Merle watched them go before rushing across to the stables. There she flung her arms around Pommie.

"It worked, honey—thanks to you!" she cried. "Larry's got away, and now he's got a good start they'll never catch him! For once Garsten wasn't clever enough. His plot has failed and—"

Abruptly her voice trailed away, for a disturbing thought had occurred to her. Larry had gone, but so had his horse, Prince—the horse that she was relying on to help her win the Gold Rider race next week.



AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND

"Don't worry worry, missy. Massa Larry he disappear as completely as a coloured gentleman in a coal mine."

And from the doorway Mammie beamed soothingly across at Merle. She smiled gratefully.

"Then you think, like I do—that Larry is innocent?" she asked quickly.

Vigorously Mammie nodded. "Course I do, missy. Jake Binns and those other dunder-headed cowboys have no more sense than a one-eyed goose. Massa Denvers is a perfect gentleman. He never do any rustlin'. I take my oath on that, and he am too clever to be caught, so don't fret, missy."

It was grand to hear that Larry had another staunch friend on the ranch. Nevertheless, Merle found it difficult to cheer up.

"It isn't only Larry I'm worrying about Mammie," she said. "It's about his horse. He promised to lend him to me for the rodeo. You know, I must have two horses if I'm to race for the Gold Rider, and—"

She stopped in surprise, for Mammie's right eye had closed in a huge wink.

"There am no need to worry about Prince," she declared. "A little bird tell Mammie that he will be delivered in time to race."

Merle's heart gave a leap.

"You mean—"

(Please turn to the back page.)

The HOUSE OF WEIRD HAPPENINGS



By PETER LANGLEY

THE LIGHTS GO OUT

"THERE'S a house beyond those trees, nunky!" exclaimed June Gaynor, her voice almost drowned by a sudden clap of thunder. "We might be able to phone from there."

"A good idea!" declared Noel Raymond, as he flashed his torch on a pair of rusty iron gates, giving access to a gloomy drive. "In any case, we could ask them to let us shelter till the storm's over. What do you say, Miss Austin?"

The dark-haired, attractive girl chauffeur who had met the famous detective and his young partner at the country station nodded agreement.

"I'll phone Mr. Harvey, and explain about the damaged axle," she replied, a trifle unsteadily. "He'll be terribly annoyed, as he was expecting you for dinner, but I really couldn't help the car skidding—"

"Of course it wasn't your fault," put in June, glancing at the smart grey coupé with its front wheels embedded in a ditch. "The road must be slippery after all this rain. It's a bit of luck that we landed up near a house. Let's go, nunky, before the storm gets worse."

Noel pushed open the creaking gates, waiting for the two girls to follow him. The accident had occurred while he and June were on their way to visit his friend, Malcolm Harvey, the celebrated art collector—and the storm had made matters worse.

At that moment a glimmer of lightning lit up the crumbling gate-posts. Instantly the girl chauffeur drew back.

"Anything wrong?" asked Noel, eyeing her keenly.

The girl's gaze was turned half-fearfully towards the name carved on the post.

"Shadow Grange!" she breathed. "I believe I've heard of this house, Mr. Raymond. They tell strange stories in the village—"

Her words were interrupted by a louder clap of thunder, and the rain pelted more furiously through the leafless branches.

June glanced quickly at her uncle, and Noel shrugged.

"I don't think we need be put off by village gossip, Miss Austin," he said reassuringly. "We'll certainly get soaked through if we wait here. You said yourself that it would take an hour or more to repair the car."

The girl laughed a trifle shamefacedly.

"Of course—please forgive me. I must have got a touch of nerves this evening. Let's hurry!"

But she held tightly to June's arm as the young detective led the way to the house.

A glimmer of light threw it into

relief—a rambling, half-timbered mansion with overhanging eaves and lattice windows. No welcome chink of light showed from either windows or doors.

Noel tugged at the rusty bell-pull, and a muffled clanging came from somewhere within. June, who was standing in the porch, leant accidentally against the door. She gave a startled cry as it swung open unexpectedly in a gust of wind, crashing back on its hinges.

"Hallo!" called Noel. "Anyone at home?"

He flashed his torch—and the brilliant gleam revealed cobwebs hanging thickly from the rafters and ceiling and panelled walls, and over the few ancient pieces of discarded furniture.

"It—it's an empty house!" June exclaimed.

The girl chauffeur started.

"Then—then this is the house they told me about in the village," she gasped, staring round fearfully. "They say—they say that it's haunted by the ghost of an old miser who— Oh!"

She caught June's arm as the massive door slammed behind them in a sudden gust of wind.

"Steady!" exclaimed Noel, with a reassuring smile. "Because a house stands empty, it doesn't mean that it's haunted. There's no phone, unfortunately—but at least it'll provide shelter."

The rain was pelting against the shuttered windows, and there seemed no point in venturing out again till there was a lull in the tempest.

"I suggest we try to find some lights," went on the young detective cheerfully. "There may be an old lamp, or—"

"Candles!" exclaimed June, surprise in her tone. "Look, nunky—on that table!"

Noel turned, torch in hand. Surely enough, on a dusty table lay a number of unused candles—apparently discarded by a previous tenant.

"Good! These will help to make the place more cheerful!"

He lit the candles—half a dozen in all—sticking some in a massive old candlestick and some on the rickety table. Their soft yellow light dispelled the gloom, throwing flickering shadows on the dark panelled walls.

From the capacious pocket of his raincoat the young detective produced a thermos-flask of coffee and a packet of sandwiches intended for the journey; while June unearthed some chocolate from her handbag.

"Now, Miss Austin," said Noel, as he poured out a cup of steaming coffee and handed it to the shaken girl, "suppose you unburden yourself of this story you've heard? That'll help to get it off your mind—and maybe we can explain it."

His cheery manner had its effect. While Noel bolted the massive door to shut out the gale, June and the girl chauffeur pulled up a bench into the circle of candlelight—and Lana Austin hesitantly repeated the story current in the village.

It concerned a previous occupant

of the house, known locally as "the miser"—a bearded hunchback. He lived alone, rarely leaving the house, but would emerge with his gnarled stick to chase away curious villagers who ventured too close, or would sit in his rocking-chair by the window, counting his money.

One wild stormy night the old miser vanished completely—and no one saw him go. The house was shut up and remained untenanted for years; but the villagers declared that they sometimes saw a bearded face at the window, and heard the miser's stick tap-tapping through the empty house.

"Ugh!" breathed June, as the girl concluded. "It's just a legend, of course; but no wonder you were startled when you saw the name on the gatepost. I expect— Why, nunky, what is it?"

For Noel had risen to his feet and was listening intently. And now a little shiver ran down June's spine as, above the moan of the wind, a curious sound came from the next room or from overhead—the unmistakable tap-tapping of a stick.

The girl chauffeur gave a stifled cry.

"Hark!" she gasped. "It's—it's—"

"All right!" cut in Noel, his voice terse and reassuring—though his blue eyes narrowed. "It's possibly a loose shutter rattling in the wind. But I'll make quite certain. You girls wait here."

He pulled out his torch and made for the door that opened into the passage. They heard his footsteps receding—mounting the stairs. The tapping had ceased as suddenly as it had commenced.

June breathed more freely and crossed to the door.

"Nunky!" she called, her voice echoing through the rambling house. Just then something seemed to move on the wall, and June glanced round quickly as one of the candles on the table flickered out.

"Goodness—there must be a draught!" she exclaimed, and fumbled for the book-matches in her handbag.

But the other girl had started up, her dark eyes wide with fear.

"L-look!" she gasped.

June turned—and her blood ran cold. For, one by one, the other candles were blinking and snuffing out—as though extinguished by an unseen hand!



THE CHAIR ROCKS

White to the lips, June saw the last candle flicker out. She fumbled frantically for the matches.

"I knew it!" came her companion's frightened cry. "There's someone—something in this

house. "We ought never to have come here—"

"Nonsense!" declared June, though her voice shook slightly in spite of herself. "The candles must be damp. Ah—that's better!"

A match spluttered, and one of the candles flared up with a welcome yellow gleam—then another—and another. The girl detective examined the remaining candles curiously. There was no trace of the wicks being damp—and no apparent draught. Yet something had extinguished the flames.

The girl chauffeur came close to her, obviously making a plucky effort to control her fear.

"Miss Gaynor—I'm sorry," she said unsteadily. "All this is my fault for losing my nerve and bringing you to his horrid house. The rain has stopped. If you would find Mr. Raymond, I'll try to get the car going. I daren't stay here—"

June pressed her arm reassuringly. "Nunky can't have gone far," she declared. "But don't unbolt the front door yet. I shan't be a minute."

Picking up the candlestick, she stepped out into the passage. An ancient grandfather clock, worm-eaten with age, stood in a corner. Beyond, a door opened into another room—apparently once used as a parlour, for tattered curtains still hung from the bay windows, and an old rocking-chair was dimly visible in the shadows.

June fancied that she heard someone moving about the room.

"Nunky!" she called softly, and pushed the door wide, holding up the candlestick.

Then her heart jumped. There was no one in the room, and the sound she had heard was made by the rocking-chair as it swayed gently to and fro, as though someone had recently vacated it.

June stared at it, the hair creeping at the nape of her neck, her natural common-sense fighting against the eerie atmosphere of the house.

Then she bit back a scream, nearly dropping the candle, as an unmistakable footstep sounded behind her.

"Nunky!" she choked in relief—for Noel stood there, torch in hand, a puzzled expression in his blue eyes.

"All right, June!" he said. "I've made a round of the house and searched every nook and cranny. I can assure you there's not a soul in the house, except the three of us."

"But, then," June gulped, "how do you explain the tapping stick, nunky—and that?"

She pointed to the rocking-chair that was still swaying slightly. Noel started forward incredulously.

"You haven't touched this, June?"

"I didn't go near it. And neither Miss Austin nor I touched those candles—"

Breathlessly she commenced to explain what had happened—when the candles grasped in her hand were snuffed out in the same mysterious way.

With a stifled ejaculation, Noel flashed his torch, snatching the candlestick from June's fingers.

"I don't believe in ghosts, June," he said grimly, "but those candles were not blown out by the wind—and the chair did not rock of its own accord."

"Nunky, then how do you explain it?"

"There's deliberate and dangerous trickery here," said Noel sternly. "Where did you leave Miss Austin?"

"In the hall—"

The words were frozen on her lips, for through the house had echoed a girl's scream.

Even as June raced down the passage after her uncle, she saw for a fleeting moment a grotesque shadow on the wall—the shadow of a hump-backed, bearded figure, a stick raised in its hand.

Then it had gone, and June had reached the hall, sobbing for breath. The candles stood smoking on the table, and the gleam from Noel's torch revealed the bolted door, the shuttered windows, and the cobweb-clustered beams.

"Miss Austin!" shouted Noel. But the girl chauffeur had disappeared, as surely as though the sinister shadow had called to take her away.

"SHE'S not in the house, June!" declared Noel, brushing the dust from his clothes as they returned from a fruitless search. "And I think we'd merely waste our time in scouring the grounds. There's deliberate villainy behind this affair."

"You mean—she's been kidnapped, nunky?" gasped June. "By that—that bearded man—"

"There was no bearded man here," said Noel. "The doors and windows were secured on the inside, and I've satisfied myself that the walls are solid—no secret panels or anything of that kind."

"But—but we saw him!" exclaimed June. "At least, we saw his shadow—"

"We saw a shadow," agreed Noel, "in the same way that we heard a tapping stick and saw a chair rocking." His eyes narrowed suddenly. "That rocking-chair might give me a clue!"

June followed her uncle into the parlour, and watched him as he bent to examine the ill-omened chair.

She was terribly worried about the girl chauffeur; but it seemed to her that Noel had something else on his mind—that the girl's uncanny disappearance had become of secondary importance.

A satisfied ejaculation suddenly escaped his lips. He flashed his torch from the chair to the wainscoting, following it as far as the old grandfather-clock. He wrenched open the case, beckoning June. Bewildered, she glanced over his shoulder—to see a tangle of wires and batteries.

"A cunning gadget," said Noel grimly, "operated by the old striking apparatus in the clock. At a certain time—fixed beforehand—an electric current was flashed to a motor secured under the chair, causing it to rock while a loose piece of wood tapped the floor."

"But the miser's shadow?" gasped June.

"Was operated in a similar way—look!"

Noel touched the apparatus in the clock; a light shone suddenly behind the glass face, and a miniature cardboard figure raised its arm, its shadow enormously magnified, falling on the opposite wall.

"There's your 'ghost,' June," added the detective. "Those candles were treated with some chemical, to cause them to flicker out after burning for several minutes. The whole thing was part of a cunning plot—"

"You mean—a plot against Miss Austin?" exclaimed June, pale with indignation and excitement. "But how was she kidnapped—if no one but ourselves came into the house?"

Noel frowned.

"I'm not certain yet what has happened to Miss Austin," he said gravely. "It's clear that the skid in the lane was somehow deliberately contrived by the crooks, in order to get us up to the house. What they hoped to gain from it—apart from making away with Miss Austin—is still a mystery—Great Scott!"

He broke off, starting towards a window on the other side of the passage—a window with a loose shutter. June saw him pluck a scrap of dark material from the splintered woodwork.

"This was the way Miss Austin vanished," he said tersely, "while your attention was distracted by the rocking-chair. This shutter was opened from the inside—"

"Then one of the crooks must have been hiding in the house all the time?"

Noel's face looked suddenly grim as he wrenched open the window, flashing his torch on the soft ground outside.

"There's more behind this than a kidnapping plot," he declared. "I'm convinced now it was a cunning attempt to prevent our keeping our appointment with Malcolm Harvey! Come on, June—they've tricked us

into wasting precious time, as it is. Even now we may be too late!"



THE REASON FOR IT ALL

June's mind was in a whirl as she raced after her uncle down the dark drive towards the gates.

"Nunky," she pleaded, "you're not going to leave—without finding Miss Austin?"

"I mean to find her," said Noel; "but it's useless to search here. The trickster we're up against is far too clever for that. We've got to get to Harvey's place before eight o'clock—the time he mentioned in his letter."

He led the way to the car, still tilted in the ditch.

"But—the car's damaged, nunky," protested June. "And we can't contact the garage—"

"I'll have to risk driving it," declared Noel, as he bent to examine the wheels and axles. "I've an idea it can be repaired for the time being."

He opened the bonnet, busying himself with the tool-bag. A few minutes later he had the engine running and managed to back the car out of the ditch.

"Two miles, June—and just under ten minutes in which to do it!" he jerked, ramming his foot on the accelerator.

June held tightly to the seat as the car leapt forward, its headlights cutting a brilliant path along the gloomy lane.

For a while neither of them spoke—for Noel was intent on his driving, and June was trying to clarify her racing thoughts.

Though her uncle had exposed the trickery behind the terrifying happenings in Shadow Grange, the weird experience had left a deep impression on June's mind. And she felt conscience-stricken—at the thought of leaving the house, without a final effort to find the young girl chauffeur.

"Nunky," she blurted out at length, "are you certain that no one was in that dreadful house when we left?"

"No one, June," replied the young detective grimly. "But someone was there before we arrived—possibly this afternoon. The scoundrel who fixed up those electrical gadgets—I found his finger-prints on the chair. He's a broad, powerfully built man—and he has a finger missing from his left hand."

"You think he was behind Miss Austin's disappearance?"

Noel shook his head. "Unless I'm mistaken, that was the work of a daring accomplice—the real brains behind this dastardly plot. I only hope we're in time to avert disaster."

His grave words left a chill at June's heart.

At length they pulled up on the drive of Malcolm Harvey's big, modern residence, and Noel sprang out.

"You might turn the car and keep the engine running, June," he said. "If I'm mistaken in my theory, we'll have to search elsewhere."

Leaving June in charge of the car, Noel hurried up to the house and knocked loudly. The door was opened by a manservant.

"Mr. Harvey's been expecting you, sir," he declared, glancing at Noel's card. "There's a gentleman with him in the library—a dealer. Mr. Harvey kept him waiting, as he was anxious for you to be present at the sale—but I believe they are just completing their business—"

Noel drew in his breath sharply, his eyes glinting.

"Did you notice if the gentleman had a finger missing from his left hand?"

"Why, yes, sir—"

But Noel did not wait. In a bound he had crossed the hall, to fling open the library door.

Malcolm Harvey, grey-haired and distinguished, was standing by his

(Please turn to the back page.)



The FOURTH GREY GHOST

By DOROTHY PAGE

PENELOPE'S RUSE

PENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, sympathized 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 to prove the innocence of Glynn Tracy, a boy who had been expelled.

Calling herself the "Fourth Grey Ghost," Penelope appeared at a meeting of the Secret Society, and offered to help it. She refused to reveal her identity, and, a little mistrustful, the Grey Ghosts gave her a test task. She was to secure for them an ancient plan which they hoped would reveal the location of a secret room where was hidden vital evidence.

Penelope discovered that her father had sent the plan to the local booksellers for restoration. Breaking bounds, she paid a before-breakfast visit to the town, only to be caught by Mr. Aspell.

FOR once Penelope was completely without words to save herself from a disastrous position.

She fidgeted on the pavement, almost in a panic, uncomfortably conscious of Mr. Aspell's searching stare.

"I find this very peculiar indeed," he said slowly. "That you, of all people, should have broken bounds." Penelope gulped. Then desperately she played for time.

"I—I didn't want daddy to know I was coming in to town, Mr. Aspell."

His smile was cat-like and unpleasant.

"So I imagine, Miss Cartwright!" Penelope fluttered her eyes around, seeking inspiration in the cobbled street, the rows of shops.

What could she say to him—or to her father? If either of them ever suspected that she had come to the market town to try to see the plan so vital to the mission of the Grey Ghosts—

She shuddered inwardly. Oh, what a disaster this was! She had failed the boys—and was faced with exposure herself!

"Most peculiar," said Mr. Aspell, watching her intently.

It was then that Penelope's rather desperate gaze fell on a shop a little farther along the street. An elderly woman stood in the doorway.

She caught her breath. That shop suggested a slim chance of escape. She fought for control, looked up and sighed very dolefully.

"Oh, Mr. Aspell, I did so want to keep my secret—"

"Secret! Ah! I suspected there was something behind this, Miss Cartwright! You would be wise to tell me!"

Penelope twisted a handkerchief between her fingers.

"I—I know it was awfully naughty to break bounds," she faltered. "But for daddy's sake—"

She paused. His eyebrows shot together.

"What did you say! For—your father's sake?"

"Yes!" Penelope nodded sadly. "Oh, I did so want it to be a big surprise for him. I expect you'll think I'm silly, but if daddy found out I'd bought the wool he might guess what I was going to do—and that would spoil everything, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Aspell stared into her wide, innocent eyes.

"Bought wool!" he repeated dazedly. "Do you mean to say you came here only to buy wool?"

"Only! Oh, Mr. Aspell, you mustn't say it like that—please. Daddy's birthday present is awfully important. It's going to be a lovely pullover, and—and that shop there is the only one that sells the right wool—"

She paused, sniffing into her handkerchief.

"And—and I did so want it to be a big surprise to him."

Mr. Aspell's bewildered gaze instinctively flitted to the wool shop. He met the stare of the elderly woman. It was an indignant stare, for she had overheard most of the conversation. He hurriedly looked back at Penelope.

"Miss Cartwright," he said slowly, "is it possible—?" He paused, uncertain, her acting was so perfect. "I thought—"

Penelope saw his indecision. She gave a brave, tremble smile and took a daring risk.

"But you must do what you think best, of course, Mr. Aspell," she quavered, making as if to turn. "Shall we go back to school now? I—I don't mind being punished for breaking bounds, but—she gave a realistic sob into her handkerchief—"but the surprise—dud-daddy's surprise—"

"Shame!" came a clear and frigid remark from the woman in the shop doorway. "Making the girl cry!"

Two spots of colour crept into Mr. Aspell's high cheek-bones.

"Miss Cartwright—control yourself," he said hastily. "You foolish girl—I did not understand. You must not cry in the street—people are staring."

"I k-k-can't help it," gulped Penelope, clutching at his arm. "I've done wrong, and now dud-daddy's surprise will be spoilt when you tut-tell him—"

The master almost ground his teeth in exasperation.

Reporting Penelope to her father when it seemed that she was not all she appeared to be had appealed to his suspicious and malicious nature.

But this was different. It was part of his cunning policy never to let the headmaster know of his tyranny—to appear firm, but just, in his eyes. Reporting Penelope for breaking bounds to buy wool for her father's present would verge on the trivial and gain him nothing.

To add to his furious embarrassment passersby were pausing, staring curiously at Penelope.

"Miss Cartwright, will you stop," he hissed. "I had no idea. If this sur-

prise is so important I will, of course, say nothing. Go and buy your wool! And please let go of my arm."

He wrenched his arm free. Penelope did not mind. She was almost overwhelmed with glorious relief—relief so great that she nearly forgot her part. But not quite.

"Oh, Mr. Aspell, how nice of you! And perhaps to show my gratitude"—she smiled mistily—"perhaps you would like me to knit you a pullover, too?"

The master breathed hard.

"I do not wear pullovers—I dislike them," he snapped. "You must excuse me now; I have to get back to the school—immediately!"

He almost sprang on to his cycle and rode off, driving hard and angrily at the pedals.

Penelope watched him go, and then she chuckled.

"Oh, gee-gosh! Penny, you did it! You did it! You outwitted Mr. Aspell—otherwise the Wasp!"

Entering the wool shop, she bought some wool; for she really did need some, then made her way to Crouch's, the booksellers. Now to get the ground plan of the Abbey—the plan which the Grey Ghosts were sure would show the location of the secret room in the school.

The shop was now open, and, pushing wide the door, she stepped inside. An elderly, stooping man appeared behind the counter.

"Good-morning," Penelope said briskly. "I am Miss Cartwright, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt. I believe you have an old plan of the abbey here of my father's for restoration—"

"Why, Miss Cartwright!" he exclaimed, smiling. "You are just too late!"

Penelope stared at him.

"Just too late!" she repeated blankly. "I—I don't understand."

"It's just been collected, by someone you must know."

"By—by someone—"

She faltered, thunderstruck, uneasy. He nodded.

"Yes, indeed—almost immediately after I opened. I finished the plan earlier than I expected, last night in fact—and Mr. Aspell has just collected it!"



IN SEARCH OF THE VITAL PLAN

Penelope sat dazedly in the bus carrying her back to Harcourt.

She still had not got over the tremendous shock.

Mr. Aspell had collected the vital plan! It was staggering. But what possible interest could the tyrannical senior master have in the ancient plan of the school?

She felt baffled and strangely uneasy, and then, as an idea occurred to her, she smiled. Suppose Mr. Aspell had originally gone to Betting-ley that morning for some other reason, and that her father, knowing this, had asked him to look in at Crouch's and see if the plan was ready. Surely that was the answer? It must be.

"In which case," Penelope decided

eagerly, "the Wasp will hand the plan to daddy on his return—and what's to stop me actually asking daddy to let me have a look at it? Oh, goody!"

Her spirits soared again, and lightly she descended from the bus and returned to the school. It was just nine o'clock—breakfast time—when she entered Head's House, but when she made her way to the dining-room she received a little shock, for her father was already there, eating his breakfast.

"Ah—Penelope!" He looked up rather sharply. "Where have you been? I wished an early breakfast as I am starting early with the senior boys. I could not find you to tell you."

Penelope quickly hid her momentary confusion.

"It was such a lovely morning, daddy," she murmured innocently. "I thought a—stroll before breakfast would be beneficial."

"I see." He nodded, somewhat pacified. "I have no objection to your strolling in the grounds before breakfast, but punctuality is a virtue, and I dislike to see you rush into breakfast at the last second."

"Yes, daddy," said Penelope meekly. "I'm sorry."

Relieved, she kissed him and sat down. Her gaze, eager and swift, searched a pile of papers at his elbow. But there was no sign of the long flat envelope she had seen tied to the carrier of Mr. Aspell's cycle and which, obviously, contained the all-important plan.

That uneasy thrill returned to her. Suppose her father hadn't asked Mr. Aspell to collect the plan? In which case—why had the Wasp done so?

Why?

"Excuse me, my dear. I must get over to Senior House."

The head rose, collecting his papers.

"Oh, daddy—" she blurted impulsively.

"Yes, Penelope?"

And there she stopped, gulping, mentally furious with herself.

It had been on the tip of her tongue to ask him if Mr. Aspell had collected the plan for him. But she didn't. She couldn't possibly mention the plan without giving away the fact that she had broken bounds—without arousing his suspicion at her interest in the old document.

"Du-don't work too hard, daddy," she almost gasped out.

He eyed her a little curiously, then faintly smiled.

"That will apply more to the seniors than myself, Penelope," he remarked dryly. "But thank you, my dear. Be sure you have a restful morning. Don't overdo things. Remember your health."

He left the room, leaving Penelope staring blankly at her plate.

"Restful morning," she groaned ruefully. "Oh, daddy, if only you knew!"

She composed herself as Anne, the maid, entered with her breakfast.

As she ate, she heard first lesson bell begin to toll.

"The Wasp's got that plan for some reason," she muttered anxiously. "Suppose he spots what the Grey Ghosts are after—"

Abruptly she broke off and leapt impulsively to her feet. Mr. Aspell would have had no time to examine the plan yet. He would have gone straight in to breakfast in Dining Hall on his return.

"Penny," she announced fiercely, "you've jolly well got to get your hands on that plan. And, just in case the Wasp is up to something, you've got to get your hands on it quickly. You can't let down the boys!"

Characteristically she went into action without any clear plan in mind. As a precaution she glanced into her father's study in case the plan was there. It wasn't. No—Mr. Aspell obviously still had it.

While in the study, she saw in her father's letter rack several envelopes similar to the one the Wasp had. She hesitated, nodded thoughtfully, and took one, hastily stuffing it with blank paper.

"A substitute may be useful!"

Then she whirled upstairs to her bed-room, grabbed her knitting bag, tucked the envelope inside and in five seconds was out of Head's House, walking quickly—but primly—towards the school buildings.

Second lesson bell was due to ring; a few stragglers were hurrying into Junior House. Penelope made also in that direction, but her steps slowed.

"Now what?" she muttered. "Where would the Wasp have that plan—"

She paused, stepping quickly into the cover of rhododendron bushes.

For on the far side, some twenty feet away, was the open window of the Fourth Form class-room—and she had just seen Mr. Aspell moving through the desks towards his dais.

And in his hand he held the vital envelope!

Penelope gasped; her widening, excited gaze glued like a magnet to it. She could see it was still sealed.

Fourth-formers were hastily settling at their desks. But Penelope had no eyes for those within her vision, even though she knew that the daring Grey Ghosts were of their number. She breathlessly craned her neck to watch the master.

Thrilled, she saw him slip the envelope into his desk. He would not be able to study the plan until after lessons.

As he turned with his habitual cold look towards the settling form, his gaze passed the window. Penelope hastily stepped back, ducking, and nearly tumbled over something under her feet.

She steadied herself and glanced down. That something was an old, grass-stained tennis ball.

Penelope peered through the leaves towards the window. Inside the class-room, in the Wasp's desk, was the vital envelope.

If only—if only she could get her hands on it somehow!

She moved restlessly, staring at the ground, and noticed the tennis ball again. Her eyes became fixed; her heart began to bump excitedly.

"Oh, Zimmy!" she gulped. "You—you aren't, Penny! It's a crazy idea. It might not work, anyway. And if you were caught—oh gosh!"

She closed her eyes, skin prickling at the thought that had leapt almost unbidden to her mind. She found she was holding her breath; she found that she was stooping slowly to grasp the tennis ball.

"Dare I? Dare I—"

Her arm swung back; she steadied herself, and threw.

The ball raced truly through the open window—soared on—and knocked Mr. Aspell's mortar-board down over his eyes!



THEY THOUGHT SHE WAS A SNEAK

Penelope bolted like a hare for the main entrance to Junior House.

She was almost aghast at her own daring—and its startling result. She had meant to cause a diversion with that tennis ball, no more.

"And—gu-gosh, I hit the Wasp!"

In spite of herself, she couldn't prevent a gurgling laugh.

There was a sudden uproar in her rear, but by then Penelope, unseen, was safely inside the dim, lofty entrance hall, heart jumping.

She knew what was going to happen—or hoped she did.

"Hiding place. Penny—quick!"

The big main door was half open. She leapt behind it, just as a door banged up the corridor to the left and footsteps rapped along the floor.

Still as a mouse, breath held, Penelope crouched back. Through the crack between the hinges she caught just a glimpse of Mr. Aspell, cane in hand, face dark with fury, as he rustled past.

The senior master was in search of the tennis ball thrower.

His feet clattered down the outside steps, and Penelope relaxed a

little, patting the regions of her heart.

"It worked! Now quick—if you're going to get that plan!"

On quiet, but speedy, feet she raced away down the corridor to the Fourth Form class-room. Outside the door she paused for breath and composure.

A din of excited chatter reached her from inside, and clearly sounded chuckles and excited comments:

"Who on earth did it?"

"The Wasp's face! Jever see the like—"

"I say, what price it was one of those Grey Ghosts?"

"Gee, maybe! What a nerve. Wonder who they are—"

"Go steady by that window, chaps," came the cool voice of Hugh Mason.

"The Wasp might spot you watching him."

Penelope smothered a breathless grin and gently opened the door.

Practically the whole Form were out of their desks, crowded round the window, peering to catch a glimpse of Mr. Aspell hunting in the bushes.

In the rear, speaking softly together, were Hugh Mason, Bob Gower, and the tall, dreamy Harvey Doane. Penelope could almost guess at their discussion. For they were the Grey Ghosts, and doubtless they were wondering who had daringly thrown in that tennis ball.

But only a fleeting glimpse Penelope gave them before her gaze flashed on anxiously towards the master's desk on the dais.

She drew a deep breath—then coughed disapprovingly.

It was heard. The chatter cut short like a knife. Heads whirled.

"Cave," came Bob Gower's surprised growl. "The Beak's sneaky daughter—"

Instinctively, some of the boys made a move to their desks; for Penelope, quite unjustly, had a tale-bearing reputation—and for the sake of the role she played, she pretended to live up to it.

"Good gracious, boys! Such a dreadful noise! Where is Mr. Aspell?"

She stepped on to the dais and frowned round severely.

A battery of stares was directed on her, some hostile, some curious. One or two boys sniggered. Nobody spoke.

"I am sure," continued Penelope primly, "that my father would not approve of this commotion in the absence of your master. Ah—Hugh Mason, no doubt you can tell me where he is?"

Hugh was standing beside his desk. That hint of uncertainty, puzzlement, was in his dark eyes as they steadily met hers.

"He is outside. Miss Cartwright," he answered coolly. "Searching. I imagine, for a boy—"

"Definitely," drawled the bespectacled Harvey Doane.

Bob Gower, ever aggressive, just glared scornfully at her. But a ginger-haired, cheeky-looking boy chimed in:

"Somebody bunged a tennis ball at him, Miss Cartwright. I don't think your father would approve of that either, would he?"

Penelope saw the twinkle in his eyes; heard some smothered chuckles. She wanted to grin herself; instead she looked suitably scandalised.

"He certainly would not!" she exclaimed—and behind the cover of the master's desk she softly zipped open her knitting bag and got her hand on the dummy envelope. "Who could have had the audacity to throw things at dear Mr. Aspell?" she added indignantly, resting her free hand on the lid of the desk.

"Perhaps," murmured Hugh, his lean, good-looking face blank, "it was one of those chaps who call themselves Grey Ghosts? I—er—don't think they like Mr. Aspell!"

Penelope knew a tiny thrill at his calm daring. But she knew a bigger thrill as slowly, never looking down, she began to lift the lid of the desk.

(Please turn to page 299.)



THE SECRET ENTRANCE

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westmouth Holiday Camp, discovered that some jewels belonging to the Caslon family were hidden in Spy Tower on near-by Dartfleet Island, now owned by Admiral Hardacre.

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful but unscrupulous girl, also staying at the camp, was plotting to secure the jewels for herself. Thanks to her scheming, the campers turned against Pat and Chris, and she was elected to play the rôle of empress in the forthcoming regatta.

Learning that Dolores was to pay an early-morning visit to the island, the chums rowed across and tried to gain entrance to Spy Tower by means of a secret tunnel.

Fallen rock, however, barred the way and desperately Pat and Chris started to shovel away the debris.

"STICK it, Chris! We've simply got to get to the Spy Tower before Dolores!"

"Rather! She's not going to beat us now!"

As she spoke, Chris wiped her arm across her moist, warm face, then resolutely again set to work with her shovel. At her side, Pat worked just as furiously, for both girls knew that it was going to be a race against time.

Could they possibly dig their way through the secret tunnel before their rival finished breakfasting with the admiral and set out on her rascally mission?

Looking at the great pile of fallen debris that barred the way, Pat privately doubted it, but she said nothing to her chum, and breathlessly they worked on.

The time seemed to speed by, but foot by foot they battled their way along the sloping tunnel, and at long last Pat gave an excited gasp.

"I do believe we're through!" she panted. "Yes—there's a hole through the rest of it. Do you think we can wriggle through, Chris?"

"Watch me try!" cried Chris, and, dropping her shovel, she dropped flat on her face.

The hole was not much more than eighteen inches wide, but determinedly Chris squirmed and squeezed her way through it. Pat eagerly followed, and when they scrambled to their feet on the other side and Pat switched on her torch they found themselves in a square, rocky chamber. At the far end was a flight of crumbling stone steps.

"That must be the way into the tower!" cried Chris. "Come on!"

As she rushed wildly forward something dropped from her pocket. It was her uncle's diary, and Pat, snatching it up, thrust it into her own pocket, then eagerly she followed her chum up the staircase.

Up and up, and then, abruptly, the steps came to an end. For a moment or two they stared around in dismay, then Pat gave a shout as ahead she saw a trapdoor, operated by a lever

sticking out of the wall. Running forward, she pressed an anxious ear to it.

From the other side came the sound of footsteps, and Pat gave a gasp of consternation.

"Oh, golly, that must be Dolores!" she exclaimed. "She's got into the tower before us, after all!"

"But she's not going to rob me of my uncle's secret," vowed Chris through gritted teeth. "Open that door."

Pat dragged down the lever. There came a clanging sound, and the trapdoor swung open, revealing the sunlit room, crammed with Admiral Hardacre's show-cases, on the ground floor of Spy Tower, and kneeling on the winding staircase leading to the top story was a furtive figure.

"Dolores!" cried Pat.

At the shout the mischief-maker looked up, and for a second or two she stared helplessly, dumbfounded by the sight of the two chums. Then she plunged a hand into what seemed to be a secret cavity under the ninth step and dragged into view a small washleather bag. Triumphantly she held it up, completely herself again.

"So you've come," she said, mockingly. "I rather expected you would. Poor Pat! What a lot of trouble you and Chris do go to for nothing! I suppose—looking down at the bag—" "You were after the jewels?"

"You know jolly well we were!" Pat quivered. "And you know jolly well that that bag belongs to Chris—"

"This bag," Dolores corrected acidly, "belongs to Admiral Hardacre, if anybody. But he doesn't know it—and naturally he's never going to have it!"

No, don't try anything," she added as Chris made a move forward, and there was something in her tone—a sudden quiet, deadly menace which told both girls that Dolores was far from having played out her game.

"I don't think," she added mockingly, "that it would be any use your going to the admiral with that story, Pat. As you know, he doesn't believe in this treasure. And, in any case, I should, of course, deny every word you uttered."

"You—you two-faced thief!" gasped Chris.

Dolores laughed.

"Calling me names won't help you," she declared. "I've beaten you, and—" She paused, and abruptly her manner underwent a startling change. "You fools, do you think my father has worked all these years to find these hidden jewels to let them slip through his fingers? Do you think I've endured your beastly holiday camp for nothing? These are mine—and his!" she cried vibrantly. "And there's nobody in the world who can prove otherwise."

"No?" Pat asked. "That's where you are mistaken, Dolores. We've got all the proof we need—proof that may land you and your precious father into gaol. You didn't know—did you?—that Charles Caslon left this behind?" Pulling the diary from her pocket, she held it up. "This proves that the jewels in that bag

DOLORES The Mischief-Maker

belong to Chris. It proves—Dolores!" she ended in a shriek.

For with amazing swiftness the mischief-maker had hurled herself forward. Before Pat could realise what was happening the diary had been snatched from her and she had received a vicious push.

Crashing into Chris, she reeled and fell, her chum on top of her. By the time they had scrambled to their feet, Dolores had gone dashing up the winding staircase.

"After her!" panted Pat.

PAT'S DARING DIVE



Up the stairs plunged the chums. At the top was an open skylight, and on the flat roof they saw Dolores. She was engaged in tying something white to the washleather bag, but as they came storming up she straightened and laughed.

"So this diary will reveal the truth, will it?" she jeered, and with another mocking laugh hurled it over the parapet.

Chris gave a cry of dismay, but Pat was too angry to heed the loss of the diary. She scrambled through the trapdoor and raced to where the mischief-maker stood.

"Diary or no diary, you shan't get away with the jewels!" she cried.

"No?" Dolores lips curled tauntingly, and then, even as Pat made a snatch at the washleather bag, she also hurled that into the air.

Too late Pat realised the significance of the white object she had seen Dolores tying to the bag. It was a tiny silk parachute, and as the bag went whirling over the parapet the strong breeze filled out the chute.

Down it began to drift—down towards the sea far below.

Rushing to the parapet, Pat leaned over and watched the bag fall, until at last it hit the water, there to float. Chris, joining her, felt the tears spurt to her eyes, for it looked as if Dolores, in her angry desperation, had made certain that no one should secure the jewels.

But, as if guessing Chris' thoughts, the mischief-maker laughed.

"Don't worry, the bag won't sink—it won't remain in the water long enough," she said. "See that boat? Well, my father's in that. You see, we made plans to meet every possibility."

In horror, the chums stared at the small boat containing a single oarsman that had suddenly appeared from around the headland. It was making straight for the washleather bag, now bobbing up and down on the waves.

"You—you awful trickster!" gulped Chris. "To think—" And then she broke off, swinging round in alarm as she heard a frantic movement at her side. "Pat!" she shouted.

For her chum had clambered up on to the parapet, was now raising her arms above her head. Her purpose was plain. She intended to dive.

"Pat—you mustn't!" cried Chris in alarm.

"Come back, you fool—you'll dash yourself to pieces on the rocks!" exclaimed Dolores.

But Pat paid no heed. Her face white and resolute, she leapt off the parapet, went diving headfirst to the sea far below.

In anguish Chris watched. Then, as her chum disappeared with a mighty splash, she swung round, rushed for the trapdoor, and before Dolores could stop her had gone racing wildly down the stairs.

Reaching the door of the tower, she wrenched it open and flew outside. And then she paused as, she saw, standing on the cliff edge not fifty yards away, the figures of Bruce Feltham, the young sports master, and the admiral and his nephew.

"Admiral!" she cried.
The three of them, as if spell-bound, were gazing out to sea. In his hand—though Chris did not spot that then—Bruce held a tiny leather-bound diary. The wind had blown it into his surprised face when Dolores had blindly flung it from the top of the tower. They did not hear Chris' call. They were gazing downwards, as if utterly entranced, and suddenly the admiral gave a booming shout:

"What a dive! And what a girl! Never seen anything like it, begad! If that was Dolores, then there's no one else fit to be regatta queen."

"But it wasn't Dolores!" Chris panted, rushing up to them.

"What!" cried the astounded admiral, turning to stare at her.

"No—it wasn't Dolores—it was Pat!" gasped Chris. "And she risked her life in order to stop Dolores from robbing me of a fortune!"

The admiral stood as if he could hardly believe his own ears, while his nephew and Bruce gave startled gasps.

"Quickly—oh, quickly!" rushed on Chris, clutching at the admiral's arm. "Pat needs our help. She's in danger. You see"—and she pointed over the cliff edge—"that man in the boat is Dolores' father, and he's after the fortune, too!"



THE FINAL ADVENTURE

The dive which had so alarmed Chris had thrilled Pat. Never for a moment had she felt any fear. This had been the daring dive

she had planned for the regatta, and she had been filled with a sense of elation as she had gone shooting through the air.

Perfectly she had hit the water, and now, breaking the surface, she wiped the spray from her eyes and looked eagerly around.

At once she saw the silk parachute and its precious burden, bobbing on the crest of a wave not fifty yards away. She saw also Phillip Bellamy, rowing furiously towards the drifting bag.

Instantly she realised it was going to be a race. Who would reach the bag first?

"I've got to—simply got to," she told herself, and furiously she struck out, swimming as she had never swum before.

From ahead there came an angry shout, and she realised that Dolores' rascally father had seen her. He was rowing as if possessed, a savage scowl of determination on his face.

Desperately Pat's arms cleaved the water; desperately she struck out with her legs.

On she shot—nearer and nearer the bag. Now it was a bare ten yards away—five—three—

There came another furious bellow from the boat.

"You leave that bag alone! Don't you dare—"

But Pat was not even listening. Already one hand was lunging out towards the drifting bag. Her fingers closed on the silk parachute and a gasp of triumph escaped her lips.

"Done it! I've beaten him!" And then she became conscious that the row-boat was alongside, that Phillip Bellamy was bending over the gunwale, one oar brandished threateningly.

"Hand it over!" he snarled.

But Pat's grip tightened on the bag.

"I won't!" she gasped, and dived. Down through the water she plunged, to remain under as long as ever she could, but when she shot back to the surface she was dismayed to find that the boat was still very near her.

"Give me that bag!" roared Phillip Bellamy, and now she saw he was standing upright in the rocking boat, a noosed rope in his hands.

Wildly she made to dive, but the rope hissed through the air at lightning speed and the noose fell over one arm. Treading water, she strove to tear it off, but a vicious tug tightened it, and there came a grunt of satisfaction from Dolores' father.

"Got you!" he growled, and like a hooked fish Pat felt herself being dragged through the water.

It seemed that, after all, she had made her daring dive in vain, but just as despair engulfed her she heard shouts.

"Don't worry!"

"Stick it, Pat!"

"We'll be with you in a jiffy!" Pat could hardly believe her own ears and she almost fainted from sheer joy as she glimpsed a motor-boat speeding from the island towards the scene. And in it were Chris, Bruce, and the admiral and his nephew!

She felt the rope on her arm tugging her nearer the row-boat, heard a furious shout from her chum, then a grim order from Admiral Hardacre:

"Run the lubber down!"

And then a black cloud seemed to engulf her, and her senses left her.

When she recovered consciousness she was lying in the bottom of the motor-boat and Chris, tears of anxiety in her eyes, was bending over her.

"Pat—Pat, are you all right?" came in an agitated whisper.

Pat blinked, opened her eyes and smiled.

"Yes, thanks. But—but what about the washleather bag?" she asked.

"Don't worry about that. We managed to get it—and we got that awful scoundrel, too," gasped Chris.

Pat sat up, and then she saw Phillip Bellamy in the stern of the boat, a scowl on his face, and beside him was—

"Dolores!" Pat gasped in surprise, for she had not known that the admiral had forced the mischief-maker to accompany them on their rescue chase.

"Yes—Dolores!" that girl said. Her lips curled. "How nice for you, Pat Rockwell! What a heroine you must be feeling yourself! I congratulate you upon your victory. But next time—"

"There'll be no next time," Bruce Feltham said grimly. "I think we know you now, Dolores! We were fools ever to doubt what Pat and Chris tried to tell us about you, and I perhaps was the biggest fool of all. But now"—his eyes flashed and his gaze for a moment was very tender as it fell upon Pat—"we know the truth, and we'll take good care the whole holiday camp knows it as soon as we get back. In the meantime—"

"In the meantime," Dolores said, with a sneer, "I suppose Pat becomes empress?"

"By hookey, I'll say she becomes empress!" the admiral bellowed. "If

she doesn't—well, then, sink me, nobody shall come ashore on my island! Now stop talking all of you and let's get Pat back to my house for lunch. And that invitation," he added, with a glare at Dolores and her father, "doesn't include you. Once we get ashore you can get into your cabin cruiser and hook it—"

"You mean, sir, that you're not going to prosecute?" Bruce asked.

"Why waste the time?" The admiral glared. "They ought both to go to gaol, I suppose, but the scandal would hardly do the camp or the regatta any good, would it? Unless," he added, "Pat and Chris have got different ideas about it?"

But Pat and Chris hadn't. They felt that the humiliation Dolores had suffered and the loss of the fortune for which she had schemed so cunningly was punishment enough.

And so Dolores and her father went, and the holiday camp never saw either of them again.

BUT before the day was out—the happiest day in the lives of Pat and Chris—many things happened.

First, of course, there was the question of the ownership of the jewels in the washleather bag. But they, as the admiral said, plainly belonged to the Caslon family since further documents, found in the secret cavity in the ninth stair, plainly bequeathed it to whatever members of the Caslon family should be living when it was found.

And then, of course, came the apologetic explanations of Bruce, after that the return to the mainland which the Bellamys had hurriedly visited in order to collect Dolores' belongings.

The camp was ablaze with rumour and sensation. Bruce put an end to it all by calling an immediate meeting in the canteen. And there he told them all what had happened, ending up by calling for cheers for the chums—cheers which were given with enthusiastic goodwill.

From that moment there was never an unhappy moment in the holiday camp. Even Lucy Day, humiliated, like everyone else, to find that Dolores had just used her as a pawn in her hypocritical game, became one of the chums' most enthusiastic admirers. And when, just for formality's sake, Pat was put forward for empress, it was Lucy who seconded her.

And so Pat became empress. But when, after the election—really a foregone conclusion—she thanked Lucy, that girl shook her head.

"It was the least I could do," she said. "I got you into half the trouble you had because of my belief in that cat—Dolores. But now," she gulped, "I know what she is, and I also know that she would not have made such a splendid empress as you, Pat."

"I heartily agree!" laughed Bruce. "Pat is the empress for us."

And so the others acknowledged, and on the day of the regatta how pleased Westonmouth was that it had made the decision. Backed up by Chris and Bruce—Bruce playing the part of emperor—Pat made a thrillingly realistic drama of the fight between the Romans and the Britons and the breathtaking sensationalism of her final dive from Spy Tower was something all Westonmouth talked about for months afterwards.

From start to finish the regatta went with a swing. At the end of it there was a great celebration in the holiday camp, with Pat and Bruce the heroes of the party, a beaming admiral as the guest of honour. At the end of it he got up and made the only public speech of his life.

"Which is to say," he said, "that I'd just like to mark this occasion by paying a compliment to the two finest girls I've ever met—Pat and Chris. And I hope, in spite of the fact that Chris is a pretty rich girl now, that they'll come here and visit us every year—"

At which went up a vociferous and enthusiastic:

"Hear, hear!"

THE END.

LEADER OF THE ALPINE REVELLERS

This grand new serial will give you all the fun and excitement of a winter sports holiday in Switzerland. Don't miss the enthralling opening chapters in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By

DAPHNE GRAYSON

SO UNLIKE SALLY

"COME on, Sally! We've got a busy time ahead of us," Johnny Briggs said that with boisterous enthusiasm.

The scene was one of the lecture-rooms on board the liner Ocean Star—known as the Floating College and bound for Australia.

Lectures for the day had just concluded, which accounted for Johnny's boisterousness. And his enthusiasm was aroused by the fact that a sports competition was due to begin that afternoon among the students on the School Ship.

Athletics, swimming and deck games were among the contests to be held out of college hours during the course of two or three days, and there looked like being intense rivalry between the various classes—or grades as they were known on the School Ship.

"Yes; we ought to get through some of the hurdles events before tea," said Don Weston excitedly. "Come on, Sally!"

But Sally Warner, the blue-eyed, popular leader of the students, still sat at her desk. Sally, indeed, seemed curiously reluctant to leave it. And when fair-haired Fay Manners tugged at her arm, Sally shook her head.

"You go on," she told her chums. "Eh?" Johnny stared in surprise. "But you're coming, aren't you?"

"Not yet." There was a strange tenseness about Sally. Her usual merry smile was missing. "Listen, there's something I want to do—"

"Less noise, everybody!" It was the annoyed voice of Mr. Matthew Stoker, the science master. "Kindly remember you are still in the lecture-room! Well, what is it, Riccardi?"

A swarthy-skinned boy, with sleek, dark hair, had approached the master.

"If you please, senior, it is my wish to remain so that I may do extra studying," he said.

Johnny grinned. Some chaps had the queerest ideas, he was thinking. And then he received a shock. For a startled gasp had broken from Sally's lips, and now she leapt to her feet.

"Mr. Stoker, I'd like to remain also," Sally said swiftly. "I—I want to do some swotting, too!"

Johnny's mouth gaped open.

"Dud—did you say swotting, Sally?" he spluttered.

Sally nodded.

"But look here, Sally—"

"Silence, Briggs!" interrupted the science master. "It is gratifying that two members of this Grade have sufficient interest in their work to wish to do extra study—an example others might do well to follow. If anybody else wishes to remain—"

There was an immediate move for the door. But Sally's chums were still staring at their leader incred-

ulously. Sally had been as enthusiastic as anybody about the sports. She it was who had spent hours organising all the details of the complicated schedule of events. And now, just as the sports were due to start, here she was staying behind in the lecture-room to swot.

"My hat!" gulped Don. "Are you all right, Sally? I mean—"

"Stop talking and move on, Weston!" said Mr. Stoker.

Sally's chums were hustled out of the room by the master, the door closed, and then there was silence within.

Sally smiled faintly. She could understand her chums' astonishment. Then she glanced across at Pablo Riccardi, seated a few desks away from her, and she saw that the Argentinian boy was scowling furiously. She could understand that, too.

For Sally happened to know that he had no more intention of swotting than she had. It had been merely an excuse to remain behind in the lecture-room—just as it had also been an excuse on Sally's part.

Riccardi was looking for something in that room. Sally herself was looking for it, too—and she wanted to find it before he did.

It was a diary. It did not belong to the boy, but he had been trying to steal it from one of the ship's stewardesses—a girl named Rosita—ever since both of them had joined the Ocean Star at the last port of call. He had been struggling for possession of it that morning indeed, and the diary had fallen through the fanlight into the lecture-room.

Sally knew this because Rosita herself had told her the story just before lectures began, imploring her to find the diary. What was behind it all, why Riccardi should be so desperate to get the diary, Sally didn't know. Rosita had been secretive on that point; but obviously, from her frantic manner, it was of great importance to her.

So Sally, always ready to do anybody a good turn, had willingly agreed to help. She had not had a chance to tell her chums about it, however.

"The seniorita Sally surprises me," said Riccardi suddenly, "that she should want to stay in a stuffy room on a so beautiful afternoon. You should not miss your so exciting sports."

He was trying to tempt her to go; but Sally had no intention of going—not until she had found that diary. She did not believe he was aware that Rosita had appealed to her for help, was pretty sure he did not suspect her purpose in being here—yet!

"Sport?" she echoed, and sniffed disparagingly. "Silly kids' games! Work is more important."

She stood up and began to pace

the room. She noticed Riccardi look at her frowningly.

"Oh, don't mind me!" said Sally brightly. "I always pace when I'm swotting!"

But actually she was staring around her as she paced—staring around for a glimpse of that diary. Where could it have fallen? Already, throughout lectures, she had tried to spot it, but with no success.

"It is a good idea!"

And Riccardi himself also began to pace the room. Up and down between the desks they both paced, apparently deep in thought—but both searching. The boy sidled towards the cupboard.

"Got it!" Sally exclaimed suddenly, and saw Riccardi swing round, his eyes glittering. "The name of the book I've been trying to think of," she added, and skimmed in front of him, reaching the cupboard first. "Maybe it's on the top," she went on, quickly jumping on to a chair and rummaging among the books there.

Still no sign of the diary, however. And now Sally became aware that Riccardi was watching her more closely than ever, as if beginning to suspect her purpose.

Masking her feelings, still smiling coolly, she jumped down from the chair just as the door of the lecture-room opened.

A uniformed bell-boy came in, a cheeky grin on his freckled face.

"Miss Sally Warner?" he asked, looking in her direction. "Professor Willard wishes to see you at once!"

Sally gave a start. Pablo Riccardi smiled openly.

"A summons from the headmaster himself. You cannot ignore that, seniorita!"

Sally almost groaned aloud in her dismay. Riccardi was right, and no wonder he was looking so exultant—for it meant that he would be left alone in the room to continue the search for the diary.

STAGGERING FOR THE HEAD



Sally eyed the bell-boy in consternation.

"You're—you're sure Professor Willard said I was to see him at once?"

The boy nodded and left the room. Sally prepared to follow. It was no good—she dared not ignore that command. Her only hope was that Professor Willard would keep her only a few minutes and she could race back here before Riccardi had found the diary.

Again the boy grinned mockingly. Then, with a despairing shrug, Sally sped out of the room, hurrying along D Deck. Farther along, where the deck widened, the sports were already in progress. Three boys were skimming over hurdles and, judging by the cheers from the excited on-lookers, it was a close race.

Sally would have loved to linger, but there was no time for that.

She ran towards a companion-way

which led down to C Deck, where Professor Willard's suite of cabins was situated. Even as she reached the steps Johnny came bustling up, a wide grin on his cheery face.

"Gee, it worked, then!" he chortled. "I thought that message would wangle the trick. 'Clever of me, eh? Now forget all about swotting and come and enjoy the sports!'"

Johnny chuckled again. But Sally had stopped dead, a sudden suspicion leaping into her mind.

"Did you send that bell-boy along with the message?" she demanded. "D'you mean it was a hoax and the Head doesn't want to see me?"

"I did, and he doesn't!" beamed Johnny. "If you think we're going to let you stay swotting—Gee! What's the idea of glaring at me like that, Sally?"

"Oh, Johnny, you old chump!" she gasped. "You don't understand—"

But before she could begin to explain there were shouts from along the deck.

"Hey, Johnny! Where's Briggs? He's in the next event and we're waiting for him!"

"Come and watch me win, Sally!" grinned Johnny as he went charging off.

But Sally was racing back towards the lecture-room. Still her chums did not know what was happening, but that could be remedied later; the important thing at the moment was to continue her search for Rosita's diary.

When she reached the lecture-room, however, she found Edgar T. Phineas, the head prefect, standing outside the door.

"No one's allowed in here!" he said authoritatively. "Riccardi doesn't want to be disturbed while he's swotting!"

"Golly!" A startled light leapt into Sally's eyes. Riccardi was trying to keep her out of the room. He suspected her. "But I'm swotting, too—"

"Riccardi says you're just messing around and interrupting him! Keep back, Sally! You can't go in, and that's an order!" added Phineas. "You can't kid me that you really want to swot on an afternoon like this!"

Once more Sally fumed. The excuse of wanting to swot had fallen through, so she must find some other way.

Recklessly, she caught hold of Phineas' tie and flipped it in his face.

"That to you!" she said cheekily.

"No sauce, Sally!" growled Phineas.

"And not so much noise!" Clatter! Bang! Crash!

Sally had knocked over a pile of deck-chairs which had been standing near by.

"If you did that on purpose, Sally—" he began.

"Oh, of course she didn't! It was an accident, wasn't it, Sally?" And Fay came hurrying on to the scene, accompanied by Don, for they had heard from Johnny that their leader was now on deck.

"I did it, and I meant to do it!" declared Sally. "And I can't say I'm sorry, either!"

Her chums gasped, staring at her in amazement. That was asking for trouble—which was exactly what Sally's game was, had they but known it! If swotting wouldn't get her into the lecture-room, then she would get into it through being punished!

She saw Phineas pull out a pile of forms and a pencil from his pocket. Her heart beat high with hope. Phineas, as she knew, was a stickler for discipline and took his position of head prefect very seriously. Everything that happened on board the Floating College was recorded on his complicated system of forms and then filed away in his even more complicated index system. She saw him smooth out the punishment form, and then, to her dismay, he put it away again.

"I'll let you off this time, Sally," he growled. "I don't want to punish anybody if I can help it now the sports have started."

"Phew! Thank goodness for that!" said Don in relief. "Come on, Sally!"

But Sally stood her ground. She had peeped in through one of the lecture-room portholes and she could see Riccardi still searching desperately. Not yet had he found the diary, but he might do so any moment.

Sally braced her shoulders. She'd got to get herself punished and sent into that room!

"Golly, you needn't think I care if I'm punished!" she said recklessly. "I like to give Phineas plenty of work to do filling in his silly forms—"

"Sally!" gasped Fay.

"And messing around with his ridiculous filing system!" added Sally defiantly.

That ought to work the trick, she thought. If anything enraged Phineas it was a slight upon his precious efficiency system. Phineas' eyes bulged behind his spectacles.

"Take fifty lines, Sally!" he rapped. "Hurrah!" cheered Sally. "I'll do them now!"

She made to dodge past the head prefect into the lecture-room. Don was looking at her in amazement, then he caught hold of Phineas' arm.

"Gee, have a heart, Phineas!" he said appealingly. "Sally's due to race shortly—"

"Oh, all right!" agreed Phineas.

"Do the lines to-night, Sally, and now clear off!"

"Yes, do come away, Sally!" cried Fay imploringly.

"My hat! Here's the Head! Off with her before there's real trouble!" exclaimed Don agitatedly.

Professor Willard, strolling around the deck, arrived on the scene to witness Fay and Don tugging at Sally's arms with Sally herself resisting desperately.

"Bless my soul! Is this a demonstration of a new sort of tug-o-war?" inquired the headmaster humorously.

Sally's blue eyes blazed with a reckless light. If she couldn't upset Phineas sufficiently, then she would have to try it on the Head!

"It's not fair!" she cried. "Why shouldn't I swot if I want to swot? Is this a college, or isn't it? Work, work—that's what I say! But—oh, no! I get swatted for wanting to swot!"

"Bless my soul!" Professor Willard raised his eyebrows at the outburst. "Do I assume, Sally, that you wish to do some—hem!—some swotting?"

"I jolly well do!"

"There is no need to shout—my hearing is perfectly normal. A very worthy desire, Sally," the Head beamed. "But come, surely you don't wish to do it on a beautiful afternoon like this—and with our sports in progress, too!"

Sally gulped. Even the Head was in a genial mood.

"Blow the sports! I want to swot!"

"Good gracious! An interest in sport is as essential as an interest in work, my dear," said Professor Willard affably. "Now you run along and watch the races—"

Sally drew a deep breath—and then really did ask for trouble!

"Eyewash!" she said distinctly. "I want to swot, and Stinker Stoker said I could swot!"

"Sally!" came a gasp of consternation from Fay and Don.

"Stinker" was a nickname the students had given the science master; but it was very hush-hush, and to use it in front of the headmaster—

"Gosh! Sally isn't feeling very well this afternoon, sir," said Don in a desperate effort to cover up this latest and most astonishing lapse on her part.

But the damage was done. Professor Willard's genial smile had faded.

"Miss Warner, are you referring to Mr. Stoker?" he demanded ominously.

Sally saw which way the wind was blowing, and she beamed.

"Sure!" she said coolly. "Old Stinker—"

"Silence! How dare you speak so disrespectfully!" exclaimed the Head

angrily. "You will write five hundred lines, Miss Warner—"

"I've already given her fifty, sir!" put in Phineas, busy with his forms now.

"Indeed! Then you will write them all now, Miss Warner. Go into that lecture-room at once!"

"Thank you, professor!" Sally was smiling happily—though the prospect of having to do five hundred and fifty lines had shaken her somewhat.

But she had achieved her objective. She flew into the lecture-room, having glimpsed through the porthole that Riccardi was still searching. But now, as she entered, he suddenly dived floorwards, stretched out a hand under a cupboard.

And then Sally's heart gave a sickening lurch as she saw him ram something into his pocket. He jumped upright.

"I hope the seniorita enjoys writing her lines!" he said mockingly, and next moment had raced out of the room.

Sally felt as if all the strength had gone out of her, so that she could not move.

In her efforts to frustrate the boy she had collected this enormous imposition—and all in vain. Pablo Riccardi had found the diary!

RICCARDI'S BLUFF



It was a bitter moment for Sally. Rosita, the young stewardess, had been relying on her. Sally had promised she would find the diary

and prevent Riccardi from getting hold of it—and now she would have to admit failure.

Sally's eyes suddenly flashed. She wasn't going to admit anything of the sort—she wasn't beaten yet. There might still be a chance of getting it back from Riccardi and returning it to Rosita.

Sally made a dash for the door, arriving there just as Edgar T. Phineas came in. Once again he barred her way.

"And where do you think you're going?" he demanded. "You've got that imposition to do, and I'm staying here to see that you do it!"

"Look here, Edgar—" For a moment Sally was tempted to tell him the whole story, but it was a serious accusation she would have to make against a fellow-student, and she could not be sure that Rosita would want her to do it. The stewardess had been secretive about the whole affair. "It—it's dreadfully stuffy in this room," Sally added, desperately striving for some excuse.

"That didn't seem to worry you when you were so anxious to come in here and swot," Phineas retorted.

"I—I've changed my mind. I—I'm sure I shall faint if I stay in here. Let me do the imposition on deck," Sally pleaded, peering past Phineas and just getting a glimpse of Riccardi as he scuttled down a companion-way.

Phineas hesitated. Truth to tell, he wasn't keen himself on staying in the room; he wanted to get along and watch the sports.

"All right!" he grunted. "But those lines have got to be finished by eight o'clock—"

"They'll be done!" cried Sally, and charged out of the room.

No sooner did Sally appear than Fay and Don and Johnny swooped down on her.

"Sally, you chump!"

"Sally, have you gone crackers this afternoon?"

"Why on earth did you act like that?"

Sally was still running, and her chums were running alongside as they fired out their questions.

"Did you see Riccardi?" asked Sally breathlessly. "Was this the companion-way he went down—"

"Blow Riccardi! What's he got to do with it—"

"Everything," said Sally, and she briefly told them salient points of the affair.

By that time Sally was thudding down the companionway, staring ahead in search of her quarry; and Don and Johnny and Fay pelted down in her wake, taking in somewhat dazedly what their leader had just told them.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Johnny, blowing out his cheeks. "What a girl! You never know what old Sally-kins is going to do next."

"Sally for surprises!" chuckled Don. "But we're rallying round now. We'll help—"

"You can!" broke in Sally swiftly. "If you and Fay will do some of those lines for me—"

"Eh? Oh! Gee, of course we will, Sally!"

"And Johnny can come with me," Sally added.

Johnny was the fighting member of the Co.—and there might be a fight when it came to getting back that diary from the Argentinian boy! "I'm right at your heels, Sally!" whooped Johnny.

He was, too, as he and Sally went hurrying along the corridor, while Fay and Don, loyal chums that they were, made their way back, prepared to forgo the enjoyment of the sports to get started on their leader's hefty imposition. That was the way with the Merry-makers!

"Anybody seen Riccardi?" Sally asked that question again and again as she sped along the corridor.

"Sure! Saw him going down to B Deck," volunteered Linda Powell, the girl from Chicago. "And he was muttering something about A Deck. Say, Sally, don't forget you're in the hundred yards sprint—"

Linda found herself talking to thin air. Sally, followed by Johnny, had gone racing on.

And so she and Johnny trailed Pablo Riccardi right down to A Deck, where the holds and storage compartments were situated. Then Johnny gave a shout as the Argentinian boy was seen to emerge from one of the stores-rooms.

"Looking for something?" inquired Riccardi mockingly.

"Where's that diary?" demanded Sally. "You know very well it isn't yours—"

"No?" Riccardi grinned again, glancing back at the room he had just vacated. "I've hidden it, see? He snatched. "And you'll never find it!"

"Oh, won't we?" snorted Johnny truculently.

He went charging into the stores compartment. But Sally didn't follow. Suspiciously she was staring after Riccardi as he went hurrying back along the passage.

He had very obligingly told them that the diary was hidden in that storage compartment; he had very obligingly made it easy for them to trail him down here. He had been so helpful, indeed, that now Sally suspected a trick.

Did it mean that, in actual fact, he had NOT found the diary? That he was only bluffing, and that this was a trick to keep her down here occupied in a futile search while he went back to the lecture-room to continue his quest?

Sally couldn't be sure—but she was going to make sure.

"Johnny, keep on searching!" she said quickly. "I've got a hunch, and I'm going up on deck again!"

Ten minutes later she knew that hunch was justified. For when she reached the lecture-room—there was Riccardi groping round the floor on his hands and knees.

She rushed in. The boy's face darkened with anger.

"Get out—get out!" he cried furiously.

"I'm in, and I'm staying in!" Sally told him. "Your bluff hasn't worked, and you haven't found the diary yet! So I'm—"

She broke off and hurriedly ducked as Riccardi, losing his temper, started snatching up books and throwing them at her.

"Get out!" he cried shrilly. "You shall not interfere! Get out!"

Sally felt a stinging pain on her knuckles as she deflected one of the books over her head—rather like a goalkeeper tipping the ball over the crossbar.

Upwards that book flew, striking a crossbeam which stretched across the room. And then, next moment, Sally and Riccardi uttered simultaneous shouts. Something had been dislodged from the top of that beam as the book sailed over—something small that now fluttered floorwards.

"The diary!" Sally reached it first; but Riccardi was only a fraction of a second after her. Now he lost all control of himself. Kicking, punching, he struggled for possession of the little diary.

With an agonised gasp, appalled by his fury, Sally staggered backwards. In that moment he would have snatched the diary from her. But then the door crashed open—and in charged Don. From his position on

deck where he had been industriously writing lines for Sally, Don had seen first Riccardi and then her enter the room. Don had come to investigate.

"Okay, Sally! Leave the rotter to me!" he cried. "Take that—"

Riccardi took the blows on his chin and reeled back. And then, as he saw Sally pick up the diary, he realised that he was finally beaten and fled.

"Thanks, Don!" gasped Sally. "Now I can take this along to Rosita—"

"Sally! Where's Sally Warner?" came shouts from the deck outside. "She's wanted for the hundred yards!"

"Be back in a few ticks!" cried Sally, and went racing along to the cafeteria on C Deck, where she knew she would find the stewardess.

Rosita's look of joyous gratitude as she saw the precious diary warmed Sally's heart.

"Thank you, senorita—thank you!" the stewardess said with emotion. "This diary—it is my father's, and means so much to him. He is a research chemist, and he is working on a new formula. All his notes are in this diary."

And Pablo Riccardi had known that, and had been trying to steal the secret of that formula for his own father, who was employed by a rival firm. Rosita was working her passage to take the diary to her father. Again, with glowing eyes, she began to thank Sally.

"I'm only too glad to have helped," Sally laughed. "And now—on with the jolly old sports!"

And on with the sports it was, with Sally winning her race. But activities came to an abrupt stop when Johnny couldn't be found for the event in which he had entered.

"Golly, I've just remembered!" exclaimed Sally. "I left him down in one of the holds!"

And still there they found him, perspiring and dusty, having turned the storage compartment inside out in his efforts to find something that wasn't there!

But Johnny didn't care when he knew that everything had ended satisfactorily. Johnny went in to win his race—and while he was doing it Sally and Fay and Don continued to win another race against time by finishing off those five hundred and fifty lines between them.

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's story Sally paints a picture, and that is the start of a really amazing adventure.

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 294.)

Being higher than the boys, they could not see the action.

"Do not speak of those awful Grey Ghosts!" She shuddered grimly—and deftly slipped the dummy envelope into the desk, groping quickly for the vital envelope—just as rapid footsteps scudded in the corridor.

"The Wasp!" someone hissed. "Cave!"

Penelope nearly panicked. Her fingers were on the all-important envelope, but there was no time to get it into her knitting bag. The Wasp was just outside the door.

She whipped it out, slipped it like lightning into the shallow shelf immediately below the desk and stepped quickly to the side of the dais.

Mr. Aspell stormed in. He saw Penelope and stared. She took the bull by the horns.

"Oh, Mr. Aspell"—she fluttered forward—"I have just heard of this disgraceful affair. I was passing and there seemed to be commotion—"

"Commotion was there!" he gasped, glaring round at the Form. "Miss Cartwright, I applaud your sense of duty in looking in. But if I find the boy who threw that ball

His hand clenched on his cane. The Form was quiet. Penelope nodded primly, very aware of scornful looks directed at herself. But that was something she must bear in her mission for the boys—a mission she had nearly completed.

She couldn't prevent a darting glance at the desk. To her unbounded relief the vital envelope was well out of sight. Goody! Mr. Aspell would never suspect its presence there—and she could easily collect it later.

"I trust you will, Mr. Aspell," she said gravely, and left the room.

In the corridor her gravity went. She gasped. She grinned.

"Was that close—wow! Golly, and don't those boys think you're a real sneak!" Her grin grew rather rueful. "But in a way that's all to the good. No suspicion on little Penny. And you did it—did it! It'll be easy to collect the plan during the lunch hour. Wonder what the Wasp will think when he opens the dummy!"

She couldn't guess. In that joyous moment she didn't care. Chuckling, she hurried away and the rest of the morning she spent knitting her father's pullover.

At long last the bell for end of lessons sounded. Penelope greeted her father as he came in through the garden gate.

"Busy morning, daddy? I hope you—"

And there she faltered. Her father's heavy eyebrows were drawn together in an ominous frown. She had seldom seen him look so forbidding.

"Please come with me to my study, Penelope," he said quietly.

"Yes, daddy."

She followed him uneasily. He sat at his desk. She stood meekly in front of him, trying to hide the apprehension she felt under his penetrating gaze.

"Penelope," he said slowly, "this morning you entered Mr. Aspell's classroom during his absence."

Her heart lurched.

"Why, yes—yes, daddy. You see I—"

He checked her.

"During that period something happened."

He paused, watching her face. Penelope went hot and cold. Oh, surely, surely he didn't suspect. His hand went inside his gown.

"Penelope, have you seen this before?"

And to her utter horror he placed on the desk in front of him an opened envelope, blank sheets of paper protruding from it. It was the dummy envelope she had placed in Mr. Aspell's desk!

Will Penelope be exposed as a secret helper of the Grey Ghosts? Look out for more surprises and excitement next Friday.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 299.)

The plump housekeeper looked carefully around, as if frightened there might be an eavesdropper about, then stepped closer.

"Massa Larry leave a message before he go," she said in a whisper. "He say Mammie was to tell you that everything will be all right. He know of a hidin' place that not even a ferret could find. And he promise that he will find some way of gettin' Prince to you. That good, eh?"

Merle's eyes were shining. "Oh, it's simply lovely, and if Larry has promised he will send me Prince then I'm certain he will find some way of doing it!"

"Course he will. Now youse stop worryin' and come help Mammie bake pies for the cowboys' dinner."

It was with a singing heart that Merle followed the motherly housekeeper back to the ranch-house, and when she served the cowboys their dinner she was still smiling happily. Slim Harris and the others regarded her in surprise.

"Glad to see you lookin' so cheerful, Miss Merle," said the young foreman. "We were afraid you'd be takin' this news about Denvers to heart. Seein' that you trusted him so much—"

"I still do," cut in Merle.

"But that's plumb crazy, Miss Merle!" gasped Jake Binns. "I don't want to be disrespectful, but it's clear that we boys was right. Accordin' to what I hear the sheriff has got gilt-edged evidence that Denvers is a rustler. What's more—"

"That's enough, Binns." A little angrily the foreman interrupted. "We don't want any more arguments. Denvers has gone and that's all that concerns us. All the same—" He paused and looked sympathetically across at Merle. "It's tough luck on you, Miss Merle," he added. "I mean, about the race next Thursday. Now that you won't be able to ride Prince, I suppose you'll have to scratch."

"Scratch?" Merle gave a silvery laugh. "Not likely! I've made up my mind to beat Celia Garsten—made up my mind to win the Gold Rider—and I'm jolly well going to," she declared.

Slim and the cowboys stared blankly.

"But what about a second horse?" asked the foreman. "Where you goin' to find another hoss to take Prince's place?"

Merle laughed again, enjoying their bewilderment.

"Oh, I'll find one somehow," she said carelessly, and started to cut a meat pie.

"But where can you hope to get a hoss good enough to race with Pommie?" persisted Slim.

Merle shook her head mischievously.

"Ah, that would be telling," she said, then adroitly changed the subject. "That reminds me, Slim, Garsten's been complainin' that some of his cattle have strayed on to our range. After dinner, take a search party out to look for them, will you?"

The foreman nodded, and Merle left the dining-hut. That afternoon she spent in the saddle, practising for the forthcoming race. When she returned at tea-time, she found Slim awaiting her, a worried look on his face.

"We've searched everywhere, Miss Merle, but we can't find a trace of those steers of Garsten's," he reported.

Merle shrugged. "Never mind," she said. "I expect they've made their way home. Anyway, it's Garsten's worry, not ours." And she thought no more about it.

Next day she practised again for the race, and when she returned to the ranch she found two pleasant surprises awaiting her. One was a letter from her uncle, announcing that not only was his injured leg making excellent progress but that he hoped to be fit enough to travel to Red Hill for the rodeo. The other was a message from Larry!

It was Mammie who handed over the folded scrap of paper and she

chuckled as she saw Merle's delighted astonishment.

"A little piccaninny from the town brought it while youse was out," she explained. "He said a young white gentleman in a checked shirt gave him a dollar to deliver it, and he say it am very secret."

Excitedly Merle smoothed out the piece of paper and eagerly Mammie craned over her shoulder, every bit as thrilled as Merle was.

Neither of them was aware of the shadowy figure that had appeared at the window and was now peering into the room.

"He wants you to meet him in Broken Canyon this evening!" cried the negro housekeeper. "He say he mean to hand over Prince so that you can practise on him."

"And he says he's got some grand news for me, as well!" ejaculated Merle, her eyes sparkling as she looked up from the note. "Gee, what can that be, Mammie?"

The housekeeper shook her head. "Me no good at guessin', missy, but youse hurry up and finish your tea. You mustn't keep Massa Larry waitin'."

Merle nodded and reached for the bread and butter.

And at that moment the shadowy figure which had been standing outside the window tip-toed away.

Making his way to the ranch office, the man lifted the receiver and dialled a number.

A few moments later he was speaking softly into the mouthpiece.

"That you, boss?" he asked.

"Yep—what's the news?" It was Nathaniel Garsten's voice that answered. "Has she read the note?"

The mystery figure chuckled. "Yes—and she's goin' to Broken Canyon immediately she's had her tea."

There came an answering chuckle along the wire.

"Good! Then that means she's walkin' right into our trap. There's no fear of her racin' for the Gold Rider now!"

What is this trap? What will happen when Merle reaches Broken Canyon? Next week's instalment contains many surprises.

THE HOUSE OF WEIRD HAPPENINGS

(Continued from page 292.)

open safe. In his hand was an exquisite jewelled casket.

As Noel entered, he was in the act of handing the casket to a burly man in a blue serge suit—evidently the dealer. On the table was a large bundle of crisp notes.

"Why—Raymond!" Harvey exclaimed, his face lighting up. "You're just in time to witness the sale. Mr. Watson here has bought the rajah's casket for the princely sum of ten thousand pounds—cash down!"

Noel stepped forward. "Congratulations, Mr. Watson," he said, "on a very astute deal."

The burly man turned, his small eyes narrowing suddenly as his hand crept to his pocket.

"Ah—no, you don't!" rapped Noel. Ducking, he sprang unexpectedly at the visitor, twisting a revolver from his hand, sending him sprawling—stunned by a well-aimed blow to the jaw.

"Raymond, are you crazy?" gasped Harvey, staring at his friend in amazement.

"On the contrary," panted Noel, snatching up one of the notes on the table and scrutinising it. "As I thought! This scoundrel is no more a dealer than I am! He's Dirk Manders, notorious counterfeiter—I suspected it when I found his fingerprints at the Grange. These notes are worth only the paper they're printed on."

Malcolm Harvey turned pale.

"Great Scott—and I nearly handed

over the priceless casket. If you hadn't arrived just then—"

"It's lucky that I arrived at all," jerked Noel. "With the aid of a clever accomplice, Manders arranged for June and myself to be decoyed to an empty house—where we were kept busy on a fake mystery while he brought off the scoundrelly deal. Luckily I saw through the plot before it was too late."

"Look out!" shouted Harvey suddenly. "The casket—"

Noel whirled in the nick of time. The dazed crook had recovered, and made a snatch at the precious casket. He was heading for the window as Noel overtook him—and with an unexpected move he sent the casket crashing through the window-pane into the shrubbery, before Noel snapped the handcuffs on his wrists.

"Keep an eye on him, Harvey," rapped the young detective. "I'll fetch—"

His words trailed away as through the broken window came a girl's startled scream.

"June!" exclaimed Noel.

Leaping for the window, he shattered the remaining glass and sprang over the sill. Even as he plunged through the shrubbery, out on to the drive, he saw the grey coupé, its engine still running, drawn up near the house. And struggling in the glare of the headlamps were two figures.

One of them was June, and the girl detective was clinging pluckily to a taller figure, whose features were hidden by a hooded cloak.

"Nunky—quickly!" she gasped. "He came out of the shrubbery carrying—"

At that moment the cloaked figure

broke from June's hold and made for the car. But in a flash Noel was after it. As the cloaked figure reached the car door Noel lunged swiftly forward, grasping at one outflung arm.

Struggling fiercely, the cloaked figure endeavoured to escape—but Noel snapped home a pair of handcuffs, even as June came racing up, followed by Malcolm Harvey.

"Nunky—thank goodness you're all right!" gasped June.

"Who is the scoundrel?" panted Mr. Harvey.

Noel jerked the hood back, and June gave an incredulous cry.

"Miss Austin!" The girl chauffeur confronted them, her attractive face twisted in baffled fury.

A cunning plot, Miss Austin," said Noel coolly. "You thought to keep us busy searching for you at the Grange while you returned here to collect the priceless casket from Watson. Unfortunately for you, I suspected your story of a damaged axle and took the precaution of removing a small but vital part of the engine before we went up to the house. But for that, you would have left us stranded."

"But, nunky, how did she get here?" cried June.

Noel smiled grimly. "We brought her here, June—in the luggage compartment! I'll admit that the possibility of her hiding there had not entered my mind—and it was only your pluck that prevented her escaping with the casket."

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's story—JUNE'S STRANGE TASK—tells how the girl detective runs one of the biggest risks of her career.