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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^d}

Week
Ending
Oct. 2nd,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



LEADER of the ALPINE REVELLERS

Fun, Mystery And Adventure In Switzerland Is Featured In This Grand New Serial—
By ENID BOYTEN

JILL'S BIG IDEA

"WHAT an utterly marvellous place for a winter sports holiday!"

The thought flashed through Jill Gardiner's mind as she paused on a snowy crest, standing upright on her skis, gazing around her with glowing brown eyes.

On every side snow-clad peaks towered up against the brilliant blue sky, while down below in the valley were the red roofs of the Swiss resort where she was spending the grandest holiday of her life.

"And now," she told herself, "to try this slope again!"

Jill had come out for a little skiing practice on her own, and in front of her a steep slope dipped down towards the pinewoods. In the middle of the slope was a kind of snowy hump, and it was this that had upset her. Twice, in fact, she had come a cropper in trying to whiz down the slope.

"Third time lucky!" she chuckled, tossing back her brown curls.

She pushed herself off. Ski sticks trailing behind her, slim figure bent forward, she whizzed down the slope; a plume of fine, powdery snow flying behind. And then—swish!—she hit the hump.

It threw her into the air as it had done before. But this time she managed to keep her balance, waving her arms wildly, forcing the front of her skis down so that they were parallel with the slope on the other side of the hump.

She staggered breathlessly as she landed, but somehow she kept her feet, shooting onwards.

"Done it!" she laughed.

Happily she skied on down to the hotel where already she had established herself as the leader of a band of cheery girls who had nicknamed themselves the Alpine Revellers.

As she neared the hotel she braked

to a swift halt, for a fair-haired girl had appeared in sight and was waving to her.

It was Rosemary Walsh, Jill's best chum. Rosemary had really been responsible for Jill coming to Switzerland, for it had been thanks to her that her uncle and aunt had invited Jill to join their winter sports party.

"Golly, you shot down that trail like a pro, Jill!" exclaimed Rosemary admiringly. "I came out to see what had happened to you. There's big news at the hotel."

"Big news?"

"Rather!" For the boys—specially!"

"And why specially for the boys?" asked Jill. "Why not for the girls, too?"

For answer Rosemary grasped her chum's shoulder and pointed up to where, between two mountain peaks, a snowy pass glittered in the sunshine.

"See that pass away up there?" she inquired. "That gap between the mountains?"

"M'm! Looks wonderful, doesn't it!" Jill nodded.

"It's the Havensburg Pass," Rosemary informed her. "And it leads to the next valley where Havensburg Castle stands. And that's where, every year, Paul le Grand holds his Venetian ice fete and carnival."

"Sounds thrilling!" exclaimed Jill.

"It certainly is," nodded Rosemary. "And Mr. le Grand has sent his usual invitation to junior guests at High Gables Hotel to spend a week at the castle during the fete."

Jill drew a deep breath.

A Venetian ice fete at Havensburg Castle! It sounded so romantic as she gazed up at the distant snowy pass.

"You mean, we're all invited?" she breathed.

Rosemary shook her head.

"Not a bit of it!" she replied. "No

one gets a ticket unless they can pass the Havensburg test!"

"The—what?"

"A special test," Rosemary explained. "You see, the trip into the next valley means a difficult two-day ski tour over the mountains, and no one can go unless they pass a skiing and mountaineering test. That's why the boys are so thrilled. The hotel sports coach is going to train them for the test."

Jill gazed at her chum. Into her eyes flashed that gay, reckless sparkle that Rosemary knew so well.

"Are you sure, Rosemary, that Mr. le Grand's invitation was for junior guests at the hotel?" she inquired. "Were those the very words?"

Rosemary nodded. "Certain of it. His letter is pinned up on the hotel notice-board. I've just been reading it."

"And are we juniors?" Jill inquired.

"Of course!"

"And guests at the hotel?"

"Certainly, but—"

"Then why," demanded Jill, "does it apply only to the boys? If a girl passed the test, couldn't she go, too?"

Rosemary looked doubtful.

"I don't think so," she replied. "The invitation comes every year, but I believe only boys have ever gone in for the test. I suppose they think it's too hard for girls."

"Too hard? What rubbish!" cried Jill.

Again her glance went up to the mountain pass that separated them from the next valley.

"Rosemary! Just think of it!" she whispered. "A ski tour over those marvellous mountains. And then a week in that romantic castle during the Venetian ice fete and carnival. Doesn't it thrill you? Wouldn't it be worth straining every nerve to get such a chance?"

"Rather!" Rosemary agreed. "But

Max Kildare, the sports coach, says that—

Jill's gay laugh interrupted her. "Never mind what Max said. I'll talk him over. Rosemary. I'm not called the leader of the Alpine Revellers for nothing. Come on! I'll ask him right away!"

Impulsively she glided forward on her skis, Rosemary hurrying beside her, catching some of her chum's enthusiasm.

They rounded a bend and came in sight of the hotel, its terrace filled with a gay holiday crowd. Just beyond could be glimpsed a small frozen lake where skaters were wheeling and gliding, while an orchestra played lulling waltz tunes.

But Jill had eyes for only one person.

Standing with a group of boys was Max Kildare, the young sports coach attached to the hotel.

Breathlessly Jill glided up to him. "Hallo, Jill!" His blue eyes twinkled a greeting. "You look excited."

"I certainly am," Jill cried. "I've just heard about the Havensburg test. And, Max—"

She paused a moment, gazing up at him in smiling appeal.

"Max, it seems that only boys have ever gone in for the test," she said. "But I want you to make a change this year. I want you to coach the girls for it, too. Please, Max!"

She held her breath. It seemed to her, then, that she had never wanted anything quite so much as a chance to qualify for the ski tour to Havensburg Castle. But her heart sank as the smile died from Max Kildare's face and he shook his head regretfully, but firmly.

"Sorry, Jill!" he replied. "Fraid you must put that idea right out of your mind. I'm going to coach the boys for the test, but not the girls. It just can't be done!"



HER PERIL ON THE MOUNTAIN SLOPE

There was a brief silence.

Jill felt her heartbeats quicken as she gazed determinedly up at the young sports coach. She wouldn't take "No" for an answer. She just wouldn't!

"But, Max the invitation is for junior guests at the hotel," she pointed out. "That includes girls, surely?"

His blue eyes twinkled again.

"Perhaps it does," he replied. "But I've quite decided that the test isn't suitable for girls, Jill. It includes forest-running on skis, skiing, knowing how to bridge crevasses, and what to do if someone is hurt up in the mountains—all kinds of things. Quite a few of the boys always fail in the Havensburg test. Sorry, Jill, but—I'm just not changing my mind on that point!"

There was a murmur from the group of boys who had been listening.

"Hard luck, Jill!" cried red-headed Tony Barnes sympathetically.

"But, of course," Gerald Clarke put in loftily, "Max is quite right. It's never been known for girls even to try for the Havensburg test, let alone pass it."

Jill hardly heard them.

"So that's your last word, Max?" she exclaimed.

He nodded, patting her shoulder in a friendly way.

"Afraid so, Jill. But don't let it upset you. There's loads of winter sports fun in the valley without bothering about Herr le Grand's invitation."

Still she stood her ground.

"Suppose," she challenged, "that we found someone else who was willing to coach us? Then surely we could enter for the test."

"You're a determined young lady, Jill," Max said. "But I'm afraid you couldn't do that, for the simple reason that every Swiss guide and sports coach in the valley is fully en-

gaged with holiday visitors. Not one of them has a moment to spare for any extra jobs."

With another friendly smile he turned to the boys.

"We'd better get going, fellows, if we want to put in a spot of practice up in the forest this afternoon," he told them. "Got your skis, all of you? Right. We'll get moving."

Chatting excitedly, they started off. "Cheerio, Jill and Rosemary!"

"Sorry you're not joining us, but—well, it can't be helped!"

"Wish us luck in the Havensburg test, girls!"

The two chums heard their voices dying away.

"So that's that!" sighed Rosemary. "It was a lovely idea, Jill, but—"

Jill whirled on her.

"And it still is!" Jill cried. "The Alpine Revellers aren't going to miss this golden chance. Of course, we couldn't enter a test like that without proper training, but surely there's someone here who could help us." Rosemary looked doubtful.

"You heard what Max said," she objected.

"I know. But I'm certain there is someone who could coach us," Jill cried. "I'm going to ask the hotel manager. He knows all the guides and sports coaches around here."

Rosemary, however, was glancing at her wrist-watch.

"Golly! I promised uncle and aunt I'd go a sleigh drive with them in five minutes' time!" she exclaimed.

"Wish I could stop and help, Jill, but I must fly!"

"Okay, off you go!" Jill laughed. "I'll have some news for you and the rest of the Alpine Revellers by this evening."

Jill certainly wasted no time.

She sought out Herr Mayer, the general manager, and put her question to him. Like Max, he seemed quite convinced that she wouldn't find a sports coach who had any time to spare, but he gave her a number of names and addresses.

Armed with her list, she sped away on her skis.

Two hours later she was almost forced to admit that she had failed.

She had been to every address on her list. She had pleaded—begged—but always the answer was the same.

No one had any time to train a party of girls for the Havensburg test. Jill's last call was at a chalet high up on the mountainside. But here again the answer was "No!"

There was an odd little pang in her heart as she began to ski down a winding slope, with the pinewoods on one side of her and the glorious peaks on the other.

She had been so looking forward to bringing the thrilling news to her girl chums at the hotel. She knew how excited they would be at the thought of trying for the Havensburg test.

"Looks as if I've drawn blank, though," she confessed. "I just hate to give up the idea, but without a proper coach we shouldn't stand an earthly."

Recklessly she sped downwards, her skis swishing over the hard-packed snow.

Perhaps it was the sense of disappointment that made her careless, for she never even saw the notice-board that warned "Danger!"

Ahead of her the trail swept round in a sharp curve. She must make a neat stem turn here, points of skis close together, the weight of her body on her right foot so as to bring her round sharply to the left.

And then suddenly—disaster!

She had swept out to the edge of the trail, and suddenly the snow crumbled beneath her and she fell headlong.

"Gosh! What's happened?" Jill gasped.

She had shot over the brink of the trail, where a steep, icy bank sloped downwards. She was lying full length, arms outstretched above her, slowly slipping down over the icy surface.

Breathlessly she raised her head, glancing over her shoulder down the steep bank.

Then her cheeks paled, and a frightened cry escaped her.

For at the foot of the bank yawned a deep rift in the ground. A crevasse! One of those icy chasms into which hapless folk sometimes fell, never to be found again.

And she was slipping towards it—slowly, steadily!

Desperately she tried to dig her fingers into tiny crevices in the icy surface, but she couldn't find a hold that would stop her for more than a few moments.

It felt as if some merciless force was dragging her towards the icy chasm below.



THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T SMILE

"Help! Oh, help!"

Desperately Jill shouted, but only the echoes seemed to answer her, and on she slid—nearer and nearer the crevasse. She was about to despair when suddenly she thought she heard the sound of footsteps in the snow above her. She looked round and then a wild thrill ran through her.

A boyish face was peering over the edge of the bank. A rugged face with ruffled brown hair.

A wave of thankfulness passed over Jill, even as she slipped still lower.

Her call had been answered. Help was at hand!

Not one word did her boyish rescuer utter, but he certainly acted with skill and swiftness.

He swung himself down the icy slope above her. She saw that his right hand gripped a small ice axe, and he struck this into the slippery surface so that it formed an anchor to which he could hold.

And now at last he spoke.

"Catch my leg!" he called.

What an odd, sombre voice he had! She noticed it even in the midst of her peril. But with a gasp of relief she grabbed the boot that dangled just above her.

Then a new fear gripped her suddenly.

"I—I'm very close to the brink of the chasm!" she panted out. "I may pull you over, too. Take care!"

His voice in reply was almost curt.

"Don't talk!" he muttered. "And hold tight!"

She relaxed into silence. Yet her feeling of panic was ebbing away: the nightmare horror which had gripped her was becoming a thing of the past. As she gazed up at the sturdy, boyish figure above her, some instinct told her that she was safe in the care of this unknown rescuer.

He wasn't hampered by skis, as she was. His other boot had found a tiny foothold in a crevice, and now he was loosening the axe which had anchored him. It came out of the ice, leaving a jagged little hole into which he thrust his left hand, while his right swung the axe at a point still higher up.

Pulling on this fresh anchor, he raised himself a foot or two, and raised Jill, too.

Without fuss or worry he worked his way up—steadily, methodically. And he was edging sideways as well as upwards, so that they reached a spot where the surface was more broken and not so smooth and icy. Jill could help a little here, easing him of the strain.

What a sigh of gratitude and relief she heaved as at last he helped her over the edge on to firm snow.

"That was—marvellous!" she whispered, her voice shaking a little. "I've never been so scared in my life, and I don't quite know how to thank you."

How moodily he was gazing at her. His deep-set brown eyes were as sombre as his voice.

For answer, he pointed to one of the notice-boards with its single word "Danger!"

"The warning is plain," he said, "You should have read it."

(Please turn to the back page.)



The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

By GAIL WESTERN

GARSTEN'S TRAP

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.

As a result of the scheming of Nathaniel Garsten, a rascally neighbouring rancher, Merle learnt that the sheriff was out to arrest Larry. She warned him and he left the ranch.

Later she received a message asking her to meet Larry at Broken Canyon. Little did she realise that the message was part of a trap set by Nathaniel Garsten and a secret traitor at Happy Valley Ranch.

WHAT was the good news that Larry had for her?

Excitedly Merle asked herself that question as she rode across the range to keep the appointment made in the note she had received.

When she reached Broken Canyon she found that the young cowboy had not arrived, so, dismounting from Pommie, she perched herself on the top of the fence that had been erected across the entrance and settled down to wait.

A quarter of an hour passed, and still there was no sign of Larry. She began to feel a little worried. What could have delayed him?

"Surely—" she began, then broke off, listening in surprise, for from inside the canyon had come a totally unexpected sound.

The bellowing of restive cattle!

But steers were never kept in Broken Canyon. Who could have put them there, and why?

Puzzled, she climbed over the fence and went striding forward. She rounded a rocky bend and saw, penned in at the foot of one of the high cliffs, twenty or thirty steers.

There was a faint, acrid smell of burning in the air. It came from the cattle, and Merle, climbing into the pen, saw the reason for it.

"Why, they've only just been branded!" she exclaimed. "But who—"

She broke off in amazement as she saw the marks burnt on the flanks of the steers. At first sight it looked as if they belonged to the Happy Valley ranch, but as she looked closer she saw that underneath was another brand. Someone had deliberately altered the marks, and she knew a sudden uneasiness as she recognised the original brand.

"V-Bar-V!" she gasped. "Then these must be the steers that Garsten said had been rustled! But why should the thief re-brand them with uncle's mark? Why—"

And then as she strode forward she gasped again, for there, in the face of the cliff, was a cave, and in it stood

a brazier, its charcoal still glowing red. Bending over it, clutching a red-hot branding-iron, was a boyish figure, and incredulously Merle stared.

"Larry!" she cried.

"Merle!"

His face as startled as her own, the young cowboy whirled.

Just for a second Merle knew an awful fear. Surely it could not be Larry who had stolen Garsten's cattle! Surely it could not be he who had seared that false brand on the rustled steers!

With an effort she smothered the alarming thought, but her heart was pounding uneasily, as she watched him run out of the cave and make his way towards her.

"Merle!" he exclaimed again. "Gee, whatever brought you here?"

She regarded him in astonishment. "But you asked me to come!" she protested.

"I asked you to come?"

Her own bewilderment was mirrored in his steel-blue eyes, and she nodded vigorously.

"Yes—your note told me to meet you here in Broken Canyon."

"My note!" He drew in his breath sharply. "But I didn't send you any note. If you got one, then it must have been a forgery."

"A—forgery?"

Her brain whirling, she stood there. Why should anyone want to lure her out to Broken Canyon by means of a false letter? She looked across at the rustled steers, and as she saw again the false brands they bore she shivered.

Larry seemed to guess the horrifying thought that had gripped her, for he nodded.

"Yep—this is another of Garsten's tricks, and a mighty cunning one," he said quietly. "It must have been he who had his cattle hidden here, and it's crystal clear that it was he who arranged for them to be re-branded, so as to make it seem you're responsible."

Merle's face was the colour of paper.

"So that was why that fake note was written," she whispered. "It was a plot to trap me."

Larry nodded grimly.

"It sure was, honey. By now Garsten will have reported that some of his steers have been stolen, and you can bet he aims to have them found while you're still here."



LARRY'S PRISONER

Merle clutched at the top rail of the pen for support.

If she were caught here with the supposedly stolen cattle

it would look as if she had planned their theft. It was bad enough that they should be hidden away on Happy Valley land, but the fact that the brands had been altered was doubly incriminating. No one would ever believe her innocent. She would be condemned as a rustler, and that would mean—

She shivered. With her uncle away at a convalescent home and herself arrested as a cattle thief, there would be no one left to run the ranch. It would have to be sold, and easy enough it was to guess who would buy it—Nathaniel Garsten.

And that was not all.

In five days' time the race for the Gold Rider would be staged, and if she were in prison—

In an agony of despair her hand gripped the rail.

"I won't be able to compete," she whispered. "It will be Celia Garsten who'll win the Gold Rider, not me. She who will find the secret hidden in the trophy, and—"

Her voice trailed away, and helplessly she stood there, overwhelmed by the ominous prospect. But suddenly she frowned puzzledly.

"I can understand how Garsten tricked me into coming here," she said, "but how could he be sure you'd come to Broken Canyon as well?"

Larry shook his head.

"He didn't. It's just a coincidence that I'm here. You see, honey, I've got my hide-out at the far end of the canyon, and hearin' the sound of cattle, I came along to investigate. Unfortunately, I got here too late to grab that traitor."

"Traitor!" Merle gave a startled gasp. "You mean, it was my secret enemy at Happy Valley who branded the steers?" Larry nodded and excitedly she clutched at his arm. "Then you must know who he is!" she cried.

He nodded again.

"Sure thing, honey. In fact, I've had a shrewd suspicion all along as to the coyote's identity, but never mind about him. We've got to get busy, and the first thing is for you to clear out. Whatever happens, you mustn't be caught here."

"What about the cattle?" Merle asked.

"Guess I'll look after them."

"But that means you may be caught! Oh, no, I can't risk that. You're in bad enough trouble as it is, but if you were seen with these steers—"

He did not let her finish.

"Never mind about me. It's you who counts. At all costs you've got to race on Thursday. Nothing must stop you from winnin' the Gold Rider. The whole future of Happy Valley depends on you findin' old Sam Crogan's secret."

"But—"

"No argument, please. Guess I'm in charge, and you've got to carry out my orders."

That old masterful note she knew so well had crept into his voice.

"V-very well," she said reluctantly.

"But—"

And then her voice trailed away and they both stiffened, for above the restless bellowing of the penned-in cattle had come a new sound. The sound of shouting voices and the thunder of hoofs on the sun-baked ground.

Her heart leaping wildly, Merle raced across to the narrow mouth of the canyon and peered out across at the range. What she saw drained the blood from her cheeks.

A whole posse of riders, and at their head three figures she could not fail to recognise.

Nathaniel Garsten and his daughter, and the broad-built, grim-looking sheriff!

Merle stumbled back to where Larry stood.

"Garsten and the sheriff are riding this way!" she gasped. "Quick—where's your horse? We must try to escape before they see us!"

But he shook his head.

"Guess I left Prince in a cave at the far end of the canyon. There isn't time to get him."

Merle's heart sank.

"Then we're trapped—both of us," she declared.

"Nope—I reckon there's one chance and one chance only," snapped Larry, and snatching a coiled rope from his belt he shook out the noosed end.

"What do you mean?" Merle gasped, staring in bewilderment.

Larry did not reply. Instead, he sent the open noose hurtling through the air. It dropped over Merle's head and she gave another gasp.

"Larry! What—"

But that was as far as she got. The young cowboy had tugged at the rope and the noose had tightened, pinning her arms to her side!



THE VITAL HORSE

"There's her horse—and I guess that proves it. Merle Wason wouldn't ride out to Broken Canyon for fun. You mark my words, Johnson, we'll find my missin' cattle hidden away in there!"

A cunning glint of satisfaction in his eyes, Rancher Garsten looked confidently across at the sheriff, while Celia grinned to herself. It looked as if their villainous plot was going to be successful.

At sight of Pommie, grazing outside the fence that barred the way into the canyon, the sheriff frowned. Though the Garstens had done their best to poison his mind on the ride out, he still found it difficult to believe that Stephen Wason's niece was a rustler. Then, as they all reined in and dismounted, his frown deepened, for from within the canyon there came an unmistakable bellowing.

Nathaniel Garsten gave a grim nod. "Steers! My steers, I'll be bound!" he snapped. "Come on—we'll catch that girl red-handed."

He clambered over the fence. Silently Sheriff Johnson and his men followed the Garstens. They rounded the bend and then pulled up in startled surprise.

In the hurriedly built pen were the missing cattle, and standing amongst them, a branding-iron clutched in one hand, was a slim figure in a check shirt.

"Denvers!" shouted the sheriff. "The rustler who slipped through our hands the other day. Reach for the sky!" he ordered, and whipped out his six-gun.

Larry let the branding-iron clatter to the ground and shrugged his shoulders wryly.

"O.K., I'm caught," he admitted. Keeping him covered, the sheriff strode sternly forward.

"You admit it was you who rustled these steers?" he demanded.

Larry shrugged again.

"Not much use my denyin' it, is there?" he asked. "Secin' that you caught me—"

But an irate shout from Nathaniel Garsten interrupted him.

"Never mind that young coyote!" he growled. "He's only a hireling. It's the ringleader we want. Where's Merle Wason? Come on, you men, scatter round and search for her. She must be hidin' near by."

The sheriff's assistants began to move forward, but Larry intervened, that characteristic sardonic gleam in his steel-grey eyes.

"Guess there's no need to search," he drawled. "You'll find her in the cave."

Instantly Nathaniel Garsten and his daughter plunged forward, only to pull up in blank amazement as they reached the cave, for lying in the entrance was a girlish figure

"Merle!" gasped the rancher. "And bound hand and foot!" exclaimed Celia.

They gaped down at the trussed-up girl, and Sheriff Johnson glared angrily across at Larry.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Did you tie her up?"

Larry grinned calmly.

"Who else?" he countered. "Reckon it was the only way. When she caught me brandin' those steers—waa, I reckon I just had to treat her rough."

The sheriff's jaw dropped.

"You mean that—that you and her aren't in league?"

"Of course they are!" His gaunt face red with anger, Garsten whirled round. "This is a trick!" he shouted.

"This girl is Denvers' partner!"

But the sheriff was not listening. Leaving his men to disarm and handcuff Larry, he dropped to his knees and tore off first Merle's gag, then her bonds.

"Is what that young scoundrel says true?" he demanded. "Did he tie you up because you caught him makin' off with those steers?"

Merle's eyes filled with tears and a great lump in her throat seemed to be choking her.

By a single nod she could save herself, but to do so would be to doubly condemn Larry. Not only would he be charged with rustling, but also with attacking her.

She felt she could not do it.

She knew that Larry wanted to sacrifice himself. While roping her up he had explained his plan. All that mattered, he had insisted, was that she should remain free to ride in the relay race on Thursday. She was not to worry if he were arrested, for he was certain he could prove his innocence before long. Very confident he had seemed, yet as Merle saw him standing there, surrounded by the grim, hostile sheriff's men, she felt suddenly ill at ease and apprehensive.

"Waa, what have you to say?" Sheriff Johnson demanded again.

Merle looked across at Larry, saw him gesturing covertly at her, then gulped again.

"Yes—it's true," she whispered. "He—he knew I was going to ride off for help, so he tied me up."

There, it was done, and mistily she saw the sheriff give a nod of satisfaction and lumber to his feet.

"O.K.—that settles it," he announced. "Take him away, men, and don't be afraid to shoot if he tries to escape. Guess a guy who attacks a girl doesn't deserve mercy."

Roughly the young cowboy was hustled away, but there came an irate bellow from Nathaniel Garsten.

"Don't be a fool, sheriff!" he roared. "Merle Wason is as bad as Denvers. They're in league, I tell you!"

Sheriff Johnson frowned. He didn't like the rancher's hectoring manner.

"It's you who's the fool!" he barked. "Why should Denvers gag and bind her if she's his partner? It just doesn't make sense."

But it does. It's a trick to—

But the sheriff was not listening. He had turned to gaze sympathetically across at Merle, who had now scrambled to her feet.

"Like us to see you back to the ranch?" he asked.

But she shook her head.

"No, thank you. I'm—I'm quite all right."

"O.K. Then we'll be gettin' on. But come along to my office this evenin' please. I'll want you to formally charge Denvers with assault."

To charge the boy who had so nobly sacrificed himself for her sake! The thought was like a knife thrust in Merle's heart. Wretchedly she stood there until the sheriff and his men had ridden off with their prisoner, until the Garstens, furious at the failure of their plot, had also gone galloping away. Only then did she remember the last words Larry had whispered to her.

"You'll find my horse in my hide-out—take him back and use him in the race. That's all that matters—you winnin' the Gold Rider."

Collecting Pommie, Merle cantered up the canyon. She had some difficulty in finding the cave where, ever since he had been a fugitive, Larry had lived, for its entrance was well screened by bushes and boulders.

"I'm sure it's among these bushes somewhere," she said aloud, after searching in vain for a few minutes. "Larry distinctly said so. Where—"

She frowned, momentarily non-plussed. Then suddenly her eyes gleamed excitedly.

"Call, Pommie!" she cried to her horse. "Call to Prince!"

Pommie pricked up his ears intelligently. Heart palpitating, Merle repeated her command again, and her pet, seeming to understand, threw back his head and gave a shrill whinny.

Instantly there was an answering whinny. It came from a clump of thick shrubs.

Merle rode in the direction of the sound. At last she located it, and there, in a deep, well-hidden cave, was Prince. He greeted Merle with a delighted whinny and eagerly enough let her lead him back to the ranch.

Arriving there, she made him comfortable in the stable, groomed her own horse, then went indoors to tell Mammie the news. It was not long before Slim, Jake, and the rest of the cowboys learnt what had happened, and their obvious delight at Larry's arrest added to her wretchedness. Suppose, she thought, Larry were unable, after all, to prove his innocence!

How she passed the rest of the day Merle hardly knew, but after tea, carrying a basket of food for Larry, she saddled up Pommie and rode into town to see the sheriff.

She reined in outside his office and dismounted. Her face was pale and worried, for she could not forget that the sheriff wanted her to testify against Larry. But how could she ever bring herself to do it?

She gave a heavy sigh and entered the office. The sheriff was seated behind his desk, and he looked up with an eager smile.

"Have you brought the horse with you?" he asked.

"H-horse?" stammered Merle, utterly at a loss.

The sheriff's bushy eyebrows rose.

"Mean to say Garsten didn't ring you up?" he said. "Well, never mind. Reckon he and his daughter will collect it and bring it along when they come into town later on to see me."

Merle, though bewildered, felt suddenly uneasy.

"What horse are you talking about?" she gasped.

It was Sheriff Johnston's turn to be surprised.

"Why, that rustler's," he replied. "You took him to your ranch, didn't you?"

"You mean Prince?"

"Yep—that's his name. Garsten said that as he was callin' at Happy Valley he would bring him to me, but I'm a bit surprised he didn't ring you up and warn you I wanted the horse."

"Want him?" Merle stared dazedly. "But you can't have him. I want him myself. Prince is one of the two horses I've entered for the relay race. I've arranged to ride him over at Red Hill on Thursday. You see—"

Merle broke off, for the sheriff was shaking his head.

"Sorry, my dear, but I'm afraid you'll have to change your plans. That horse has got to be impounded."

"Impounded?"

Sheriff Johnson nodded, and his next words sounded the death knell to all Merle's hopes.

"Fraid so. You see, Garsten's sworn a statement that that horse really belongs to a friend of his. It seems that Denvers isn't only a cattle rustler, but a horse thief. Prince doesn't belong to him, so until Garsten's statement can be thoroughly investigated the horse must remain locked up here, in my charge."

Cunningly the Garstens have struck again. How can Merle overcome this fresh blow? See next Friday's fine instalment.

What A Shock For Penelope When The Class-room Lights Were Switched On And She Found Herself Face To Face With Mr. Aspell



The Fourth GREY GHOST

By DOROTHY PAGE

THE VITAL PLAN

PENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, sympathised with a secret society calling themselves the Grey Ghosts. They were out to fight against the tyranny of the bullying senior master, Mr. Aspell, also known as the "Wasp," 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.

She learnt that the plan was in an envelope in Mr. Aspell's desk in the Fourth Form class-room. During morning lessons she created a diversion and managed to hide the plan and to substitute for it an envelope containing blank sheets.

At lunch-time her father called her to his study and confronted her with the substitute envelope.

ANSWER me, Penelope! Have you seen this envelope before?" The headmaster's voice was quiet, dangerously so; it frightened Penelope.

She stared at the envelope before her, the envelope she had put in Mr. Aspell's desk in the Fourth Form class-room in place of the one containing the vital plan.

"Daddy, may I—," she hedged, faltering, "may I look at it, please?"

He watched her, grey eyes searching under bushy brows. Without a word he lifted the envelope and handed it across the desk.

Penelope took it. She pretended to examine it, her heart fluttering.

"Why, daddy," she gulped, "it—it's full of blank sheets of paper—"

"I am well aware of that, Penelope! Have you seen it before?"

She looked up and tried to smile. "Goodness, daddy, are you joking? Where could I have seen this—"

He checked her sharply. "Very well, Penelope, I shall ask you a more direct question."

He heart lurched. This was it! He was going to ask her if she had made the substitution!

"Penelope, when you were in the Fourth Form class-room in the absence of Mr. Aspell, did you or did you not see any of the boys put this envelope into Mr. Aspell's desk and take out another, similar one?"

Penelope stood stock-still. His words still rang in her ears, but she could hardly believe she had heard aright.

"Answer me, Penelope." The tenseness went out of Penelope. Her knees felt trembly. Oh, gosh—then—she was not suspected after all!

"No, daddy." She almost gasped the words, her relief was so great. "While I was there I didn't see any boy go near the desk—I didn't see any boy with an envelope like that. On my word of honour, daddy."

For a second he held her eyes. He nodded.

"Thank you, Penelope. Your word is sufficient."

She relaxed, then felt a sudden wave of tenderness that was stronger than relief. Dear daddy! He was stern—yes, forbidding sometimes, but always fair.

"This seems to absolve the Fourth Form," he murmured, half to himself. "It would seem apparent now that the substitution was made when Aspell had his jacket off in the wash-place."

That supposition increased Penelope's glorious relief. And now, all her courage surging back, she realised that here was her chance to learn something of vital importance—to learn why Mr. Aspell had collected the old plan of the abbey from the book-shops.

"But, daddy," she said innocently, "what was in the other envelope?"

He frowningly looked up.

"An old plan of the abbey, Penelope. Curiously enough it was the very plan you mentioned yourself last night."

"In—indeed, daddy?"

He nodded.

"Yes. After you had gone to bed I casually mentioned it to Aspell. He had to go into Bettingley early this morning and said he would see if it was ready. He was very interested in my description of the plan and asked to borrow it for to-day if it was ready."

Penelope drew a quick breath. So this explained the Wasp's reason for collecting the plan. An innocent reason—or was it?

"Daddy," she said as casually as she could, "why should Mr. Aspell want to borrow that old plan?"

He eyed her sharply.

"A strange question, Penelope. I might point out that last night you were interested in the plan yourself."

Penelope could have kicked herself. She was on perilous ground.

"Yes, of course—," She smiled rather feebly. "Er—I wonder who on earth could have taken it, and why?"

"That I hope to discover," her father said grimly. "I am rather of the opinion that Mr. Aspell himself holds that these audacious boys calling themselves the Grey Ghosts are responsible. An act of pure petty spite!"

Her heart sank. Another black mark against the daring Grey Ghosts!

And she could not spring to their defence.

"Well, thank you, Penelope," said her father, rising. "The matter need concern you no longer. We will have lunch."

There was finality in his voice. She followed him meekly.

But now there was but one thought in her mind.

Recover the vital plan from where she had slipped it under the desk in the Fourth Form class-room—and then contact the daring Grey Ghosts and tell them she had succeeded!

But recovering that plan was going to be more difficult than she imagined, as she discovered after lunch, when she slipped into Junior House—only to find that the door of the Fourth Form class-room was locked.

It was something she had not expected. Obviously the class-rooms were locked when not in use.

"Oh, Zimmy, that's not so good. And I can't climb in through the window with people about," she thought. "Then how—"

She paused, then grinned. There was only one thing for it. She must recover the plan this evening, when the whole school was at prep.

It was dark when she set out, and over her clothes she wore the hooded robe of the secret society. This was a protection for if she was spotted and had to bolt for it, no one would suspect the prim and proper Head's daughter.

Making her way to the Junior School, she slid open one of the windows of the Fourth Form class-room and climbed through. Softly she fitted between the desks, adjusting her hood so that she could see clearly through the eye-holes. Up on to the dais, feeling under the master's desk.

Her hand closed on the envelope she had risked so much to gain!

"Oh, Zimmy—so easy, after all," she gurgled delightedly.

Into her knitting bag she tucked it, swung the bag under her robe—

And then the class-room door opened!

Penelope whirled, her heart in her mouth—just as the electric lights blazed on.

Mr. Aspell stood in the doorway.



GREY GHOSTS TO THE RESCUE

Penelope did not move. She could not. Her limbs felt powerless. A lone, slim-robed figure, she stood just below the dais, a target for the master's glittering gaze.

"So," he grated. "So at last I have one of you! How unfortunate for you that while I was passing I heard the sound of a movement in here."

Penelope's heart was thudding madly in her ears. A momentary awful vision of being unmasked, of being hauled before her father—with that plan in her possession—swam before her eyes.

Perhaps it was that vision, perhaps it was the patent, gloating triumph of the master, that stirred her into desperate action. She flung up her free hand.

"Stop!" she gasped, her voice blurred. "Stop—you tyrant!"

A flame of rage shot into his bright, hard eyes.

"You young scoundrel. You dare to call me—"

"Yes, I dare!" flashed Penelope almost wildly, having the wit even then to speak huskily. "We—the Grey Ghosts—know you for what you are. We know the truth—"

A strange expression crossed the master's face. He stopped.

"We know," repeated Penelope, edging to the right, towards the window, "and we are vowed to expose you to the headmaster—"

And there, her nerve almost cracking, she snapped short and made a wild dash for the window. But he was prepared. One lean arm shot out; fingers clamped like a vice on her arm, checking her.

"I think not!" he panted, and as she struggled frantically to free herself, he cuffed her viciously across the head.

The hood and her thick hair took off a little of the force of the blow, but even so, it was enough to send Penelope, sick with sudden pain, reeling to the class-room floor.

Almost dazed, she was helpless. He bent over her, grasping for her hood. "And now, my young friend, we shall see—"

He got no further. There was a rush from the window, a ringing cry: "You coward!"

Miraculously, Penelope saw Mr. Aspell shoot backwards, a grey-robed figure clinging to his legs in a rugby tackle. He hit the dais, rolled over behind it, gasping, momentarily winded.

Back from him sprang the robed figure—a figure with No. 1 painted on the hood. And now, through the open window, swift and silent, came two more grey-clad boys.

Bewildered, shaken, Penelope let out a great gasp.

"The—Grey Ghosts!"

The boys were here—here miraculously to her rescue, with Hugh Mason, their daring leader, first to spring to her aid. It was breathtaking, incredible almost.

"Quick!" Hugh was at her side, robe rustling, helping her up. "To the window—like lightning—"

He rushed her back. Mr. Aspell was reeling to his feet, his thin face a mask of fury. And the commotion had been heard; shouts and footsteps sounded in the corridor.

"Stop—stop—" choked the master.

"Desks—two and three," jerked Hugh. "Tip them over—bar the way—"

Half-dazed, Penelope felt herself being helped by his strong hands through the window. She dropped into the dusk, hearing the thud of desks behind her as Bob Gower and Harvey Doane sent them flying.

"You—whoever you are—Hugh was beside her in the gloom—"what were you after? I saw you go to the window just now. I got the others—"

Penelope fumbled for the vital envelope, thrust it into his hand.

"The plan of the abbey," she gasped.

"What! You mean— Oh, grand chap! But no time now! Bolt! Watch for a message to-morrow in the secret letter box. Quick—we must scatter!"

She stumbled away into the bushes, hearing him give the hoot of an owl—the Grey Ghosts' signal.

She staggered on breathlessly. The uproar behind her increased. Thuds sounded, the patter of flying feet. The Grey Ghosts were out of the window, scattering in the darkness to her left.

As she ran Penelope wrenched at her robe. She got it off somehow, cramming it into her knitting bag. Her head still sang from the master's blow. She hardly knew what she was doing.

But she need not have feared. The boys, bunched together at the start, were leading the pursuit away from her. The shouting and running receded as she neared the headmaster's private house.

Out of breath, she slowed. With

KEEP IT UP

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

her last strength, it seemed, she slipped past her father's study window and desperately climbed the porch over the front door to her own window.

She nearly fell through and slumped down on to her bed.

Her heart slowed its mad pounding; her nerves steadied. At long last she sat up, switched on the light and tucked away the grey robe in her chest of drawers.

She darted to the window. What of the Grey Ghosts? Had they been caught? she wondered.

Anxiously she peered through the gloom. All was quiet at first, but suddenly footsteps rapped outside the garden. Penelope knew those footsteps—the Wasp's! She caught up her knitting and purposely sat in the window seat, so that she could be seen from below, apparently working away industriously.

The footsteps entered the garden, paused beneath her. A sharp rap on the front door. She heard her father answer. The door opened and closed.

Instantly Penelope leapt up, left her bedroom, and quietly advanced to the head of the stairs, listening.

Her father's study door was not quite closed. She could hear Mr. Aspell's rasping voice.

"I'm afraid, Head, they escaped—"

Penelope sighed. But, wait—

what was the master saying now?

"Their purpose was obvious, Head—to wreck the class-room! Another example of their lawless behaviour. Desks were overturned—ink was spilt, books damaged—and the whole crowd of them set on me—"

Blank wonder started to steal over Penelope's face. It changed abruptly to furious scorn. She was appalled.

"Oh, the awful wretch!" she gasped. "He's deliberately lying! He's twisting this to make it worse for the boys—"

And then she paused, her face pale, as her father's quiet voice spoke.

"Aspell, no effort must be spared! These boys must be found—unmasked, all four. And when they are—they shall be expelled without mercy!"

Her face white, Penelope withdrew to her bedroom. Her father's stern words had filled her with consternation. To continue to help the Grey Ghosts after this would be terribly risky, and she dared not think what would be her fate if she were caught, but—

Her lips set in a reckless, determined line.

"Penny," she said, "you're going to make a vow! This is it: Whatever happens you must stick by the Grey Ghosts—as they stick by you to-night. You're going to be one of them—help them. You're going to do all you can to unmask that tyrant to daddy. And the first step—"

And the first step was on the morrow, when she would receive a message from No. 1, when she would join the Grey Ghosts as No. 4—and learn the secret of the plan.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH HUGH

"Look out, chaps! The Beak's daughter—knitting, as usual!"

"Gosh, what a snooty, prim type she is—"

"Don't giggle, or she'll guess we're laughing at her, and go and tell the Beak or something!"



And the three young Second Formers put on supernaturally solemn expressions and gravely raised their caps.

"Good-morning, Miss Cartwright!" they chorused.

Penelope, strolling in the Cloisters during break time next morning, looked up from her knitting, hid the twinkle in her eyes.

"Good-morning, boys! I trust you have not eaten too much in the tuck-shop," she remarked primly. "Hurry along to your lessons now—and be a credit to your Form."

They nudged each other, sniggered, and passed on.

Penelope heaved a little sigh of relief. She glanced swiftly around. Morning break was nearly ended, and she had been anxiously waiting for the three juniors to leave the tuck-shop in the Cloisters.

She stepped swiftly to the old fountain in the centre of the square bounded by the Cloisters.

That fountain had been out of use for many years now—but Penelope knew that one of the grinning gargoyle heads from which water had originally spouted was now used as a secret letter-box by the Grey Ghosts.

Another cautious glance around. No one to see her. She felt inside the stone heads, and her face fell a little. There was nothing there.

"Perhaps Hugh hasn't had a chance yet," she murmured. "Perhaps—Oh!"

She reeled back against the stone wall.

A boy had quietly, swiftly rounded the corner of the Cloisters and bumped into her.

"I say, I'm terribly sorry!"

Penelope steadied, and her heart gave a little bump, as she found herself looking into the lean, handsome face of Hugh Mason himself.

"Forgive me, Miss Cartwright. I was in a hurry!"

Penelope collected herself.

"Indeed?" she murmured. "I'm

afraid the tuckshop is already closed!"

Her mischievous spirit prompted that remark. Next second she almost regretted it. A curious, half-puzzled expression crossed his face, as if he suspected a humorous impulse completely out of keeping with the prim and proper headmaster's daughter.

"I'm not interested in the tuck-shop," he said slowly.

No, thought Penelope, with a thrill of excitement—you're thinking of putting a message in the old fountain! And I'm going to collect it!

"Let me see," she said, frowning slightly, "you're the boy suspected of being one of those awful Grey Ghosts, aren't you?"

His eyes flickered, but coolly came his answer.

"I was, Miss Cartwright. And I believe you are interested in helping Mr. Aspell in his efforts to bowl them out!"

The slight touch of contempt in his steady voice brought a spark to her eyes. If Hugh only knew! An imp of mischief drove her on.

"I am sure," she said stiffly, "if I turned my mind to it I could be of great assistance. Girls' brains are so much keener than boys'—"

She paused. He was staring at her, his curt manner changing.

"Miss Cartwright, that's a nasty bruise you have on the side of your head."

Her hand shot up—and her heart jumped. The slight breeze had blown back her hair, showing clearly the result of Mr. Aspell's cowardly blow. "You ought to let matron see that," he said, with a quick concern that warned Penelope. "How on earth did you get it? It looks like—"

He paused, frowning. It was almost as if he was sensing a connection between a bruise on the head and something that had happened recently!

"It's nothing—nothing at all!" gasped Penelope hastily. "I—er—foolishly hit my head. But perhaps I shall see matron. Excuse me—"

(Please turn to the back page.)

June's Strange Task

By PETER LANGLEY

THE PROFESSOR RETURNS

"EVERYTHING all right, June?" asked Noel Raymond.

His question came muffled to the ears of the girl detective, as she crouched in the darkness of a large wicker trunk—the only piece of luggage in the hired delivery-van.

"Okay, nunky!" she rejoined. "It's a bit cramped, but there's plenty of air. Can I open the lid from inside?"

"There's a lever on the right of the left-hand latch. Try it!"

June flashed her torch, found the small lever and pulled it. In a moment she had raised the lid, to encounter her uncle's keen, questioning glance.

"Sure you want to go through with this, June?"

"Positive, nunky!" June's grey eyes shone with excitement. "I wouldn't miss it for anything—especially if there's a chance of discovering the plans of The Spider's next coup."

"Good for you!" said Noel. "We're nearing the house, now."

Instinctively June glanced out of the front of the van, to see a large, gloomy house standing back among the trees, almost shrouded by the eddying mist.

"I've suspected for some time that the soundrels we're operating from that house," went on Noel quietly. "It was rented over a month ago by a Professor Martel—but he is rarely seen at home. I am convinced that the professor is none other than The Spider!"

June shivered slightly at the thought of the dangerous character they were out to trap—the leader of a widespread and ruthless gang.

"And you believe he's away at the moment, nunky?"

"I wouldn't let you take this risk, June, unless I'd satisfied myself about The Spider's movements," said Noel. "I've reports that he's been seen in London—though he may be on his way here. We've no time to lose!"

The van pulled up at that moment, out of sight of the house. The driver, a plain-clothes officer, climbed out, accompanied by another officer, and commenced to lower the tailboard.

"All ready, Henson?" asked Noel. "You and Wheeler will carry the trunk up to the house—and explain that it was ordered by Professor Martel, with instructions that it was to be placed in his study!"

"Who's in the house now, nunky?" asked June.

"A caretaker named Vowles, and his daughter," said Noel. "I could have obtained a warrant to search—but that would have aroused their suspicions, and they might have destroyed valuable evidence. Your daring suggestion solved my problem, June. If you can get some clue as to The Spider's latest game—we shall be able to beat him."

The girl detective's eyes glowed, as she knelt down once more in the trunk.

"The best of luck, June. We're going to lure the caretaker from the house on some pretext, so that if anything should go wrong, you'll only have his daughter to contend with.

And remember I'll be watching in the grounds in case you need me."

Noel closed the lid and June crouched, waiting. She felt the trunk lurching as it was carried across the road and down the drive. Then a bell jangled, the sound of bolts being withdrawn—and gruff voices.

Finally the lurching ceased, as the trunk was placed down. A door slammed, and there was silence.

After waiting for what seemed ages, June cautiously operated the lever inside the trunk, and raised the lid inch by inch—grateful for the chance of stretching her cramped limbs.

Only dimly could she make out her surroundings. A faint grey light filtered through the tall windows of a room that might have been a study or workshop. June groped for her torch, and flashed it on a shadowy object standing near to her. A startled cry was frozen on her lips.

She was staring at a grotesque white face, larger than life, grinning at her from a shelf. Ranged beside it were other huge cardboard heads, with painted features, some comical, others fearsome.

Bewildered, her heart thumping, June stared around her. Hanging from pegs on the wall were a number of strangely padded costumes, apparently made to fit the cardboard masks.

What kind of house was this? What possible connection could these bizarre objects have with The Spider?

A swift examination left her none the wiser. The masks and costumes were simply carnival novelties. She found no trace of a clue to The Spider's plot—details of which were so vital to her uncle.

June commenced to hunt more feverishly, opening drawers and cupboards and flashing her torch over shelves. Then her eyes lit up as, groping on the mantelshelf, she came across a gilt-edged card with a neat inscription.

"With Compliments—The Malda Carnival Co."

There was an address printed in the corner of the card, and something scribbled in pencil on the back, which June tried vainly to decipher.

She was intent on her task, when she heard the faint click of an opening door. The girl detective whirled, instinctively switching out her torch.

The door opened wider, admitting a gleam of yellow light. A tall, dark-haired young woman entered, carrying a lamp which she placed on a side table. The caretaker's daughter!

She had not seen June, for the girl detective was standing partly in the shadows. The young woman picked up one of the costumes, and turned to the door—when the slight creak of a board caused her to turn.

She saw June. A gasp escaped her lips.

"A spy!" she hissed—and rushed forward.

June dodged past her and made for the door, the other in pursuit. Along a dark passage and down a flight of steps June heard panting breath close behind as she dragged open a door—only to find another flight of steps, leading to the cellars.

Quick as thought she stepped back, flattening herself behind the door, as the young woman appeared. For a moment she paused at the top of the steps—then cautiously she commenced to descend.

With a little gasp of triumph June threw herself at the door, slamming it and turning the key. The other's angry cries came muffled to her ears. She took no notice, but quickly retraced her steps, closing another door behind her.

The girl detective's heart was beating quickly as she paused to listen. The young woman's cries were barely audible now.

June caught in her breath sharply. From the grounds outside had suddenly come a pistol shot, muffled by the fog!

She thought of Noel. Her uncle had undertaken to keep watch in the grounds, while the other two lured away the caretaker. Supposing something had happened to him—

Her face pale, June sped up a flight of stairs into the gloomy hall. The massive front door was bolted and chained. June's fingers trembled in her agitation as she removed the chain and pulled back the heavy bolts.

Eagerly she flung the door wide, starting out into the porch; and then with a cry she drew back, her blood running cold.

Standing there, shrouded by the mist, was a motionless figure. Even as June stared, the figure took a noiseless step forward, pushing her back into the hall and closing the door.

The yellow light from the open door of the study revealed the tall, cloaked figure—eyes scrutinising her coldly from his impassive face. Instinctively she knew who he was.

The Spider!

A TRAP FOR NOEL

June fought pluckily against a chilling fear.

She had often heard Noel speak of this man—elusive as he was dangerous; the brains

behind a sinister web of crime. But she had never expected to meet him face-to-face.

When he spoke his voice was soft, but icily cold.

"Where is your father?"

June felt her heart jump, as she stared at him. His question could



only mean one thing. He had mistaken her for the caretaker's daughter! But, surely, he must have seen—

His next words answered her unspoken question:

"You are Miriam Vowles? You were away from home, I believe, on the occasion of my last visit. Don't stand staring at me, girl—answer my question!"

June clenched her hands, mastering her fear. A reckless light crept into her grey eyes. The visitor's mistake might turn to her own and Noel's advantage if only she could keep up the unwitting imposture.

She lowered her head.

"Yes, professor—I'm Miriam," she murmured. "Father is out just now. If there is anything I could do—"

"The doll!" A flash of anger showed for an instant on the other's pale face. "He had no right to go out, leaving the house unguarded. I'm convinced I saw someone lurking in the grounds, near the lake, as I came through the private entrance. I fired, and heard a splash—the thin lips curled unpleasantly—"I'm an excellent shot, Miriam," he added softly. "Whoever or whatever fell into the lake did not come up again."

June had a momentary, horrifying vision of Noel keeping watch by the ornamental lake, within sight of the house—guarding her against surprise, of a stealthy figure creeping on him through the mist—a swift, deadly shot—

She closed her eyes, biting back an involuntary cry.

"Is anything wrong, Miriam?" asked the visitor coldly. "Your father informed me that you were a girl with plenty of nerve—who would not be squeamish about what she saw or heard?"

Desperately June looked into the other's merciless face, forcing a careless smile.

"I was just wondering if anyone could have discovered your plans—" she ventured, to be interrupted by a snarling intake of breath.

"It would be most unfortunate for all of us if that were the case," came the cold retort. "You and your father are as deeply implicated as the others. I came here to give Vowles a message, but I shall leave it with you—as I have to return to London to-night. Go into the study, girl!"

The command was peremptory, as he removed his hat and coat, and pointed to the open door, beyond which the yellow lamplight reflected on the grotesque masks. June obeyed automatically. It was too late to draw back now, even had she wished. She must go through with her task—the task of pitting her wits against this scoundrel—even though her mind was torn with anxiety for Noel.

The study door closed softly behind her.

"Just how much has your father told you about my plans, Miriam?"

June's brain was working swiftly. This was her chance to find out more!

"Very little, professor," she replied truthfully. "Of course, I know you are going to use these things"—she waved her hand lightly towards the painted masks and costumes—"but exactly how and when—"

The other chuckled softly.

"You may well wonder, young lady. It was an astute plan on my part—and your father, as an ex-stage-hand, was of considerable help in obtaining the necessary properties. But I have sufficient for my purpose now—and this store is becoming dangerous—"

He stabbed his finger towards the shelves.

"These are my instructions. This place must be dismantled, at once, and the stuff taken to the address that your father holds. Everything has been arranged for to-night—at twelve o'clock. That is, in five hours' time. The police are unsuspecting. I feared only one man—his eyes became malevolent, and June's blood ran cold as he yelled out a name—"Noel Raymond! That meddling detective has been on my trail—but

I've an idea I may have settled with him in the grounds just now."

He laughed.

"In any case," he went on, "he will not cross my path a second time! But to business—he took out a bulky wallet—"you will need money—ten pounds should be enough—"

He stiffened in the act of counting out the notes, and June's blood ran cold. From somewhere in the depths of the house came a muffled cry—faint, yet unmistakable to June.

The prisoner was trying to make herself heard!

"What was that?"

June gave a quick, desperate laugh. "A cat, I think, professor. We keep one downstairs, and the house is full of strange echoes."

The other regarded her unwinkingly.

"A cat?" he murmured. "Very strange. But you should know best. You look pale, young lady—and you've dropped your handkerchief. Permit me!"

He retrieved the handkerchief, a thin smile on his lips as he handed it back to her. Then he recounted the notes.

"I have not enough here," he added, "but I left a roll in my greatcoat pocket. I will get it."

He left the room silently, with the door slightly ajar. June started towards the window, tight-lipped, her grey eyes reckless. She had learnt more than she had dared to hope, and now her one thought was to escape before the professor returned—to find Noel.

With a shock she realised that the tall windows were securely fastened—with burglarproof bolts, high out of her reach. If she made the attempt, she was almost certain to be caught.

Only one other chance remained—a desperate, forlorn chance. Snatching the torch from her pocket, she flashed an urgent signal:

SOS—June.

If her fears were unfounded—if Noel was unharmed, and the mist had lifted sufficiently for him to see—then she was certain that he would come!

Twice—three times, she flashed her despairing signal, her ears strained for the sound of the professor's returning footsteps.

Not a sound reached her, not even the stealthy opening of the door. But suddenly, with chilling certainty, she knew that he was in the room behind her—and she turned with a stifled cry to encounter his malevolent smile.

"So!" he breathed, as he reached her in a single, noiseless stride, twisting the torch from her fingers. "I was expecting that move—my dear Miss Gaynor!"

White to the lips, June stared at him, bitter chagrin mingled with her fear.

"You—you knew—you guessed—"

"I am not a fool, Miss Gaynor! I know the difference between the cry of a cat and a girl's cry for help—and the initials on your handkerchief confirmed my suspicions. You are an astute and daring young woman—as Miriam Vowles discovered to her cost. But you went too far when you tried to hoodwink—The Spider!"

He thrust her back into a chair as he spoke, and took a ball of stout cord from his pocket.

"What are you going to do?" gasped June.

For reply he caught at her wrist, twisting it behind her. The next moment he was securing her arms and legs to the chair, regardless of her frantic kicks.

"When June Gaynor is around—Noel Raymond will not be far distant!" he murmured. "I purposely gave you the opportunity to signal—because, Miss Gaynor, I'm wondering if the fog made my aim faulty just recently. We shall soon see!"

June watched him cross quickly to the lamp, turning it low, throwing everything into deep shadow.

At the same moment, from outside the house—muffled yet unmistakable—came a low, clear whistle, thrice repeated.

June's eyes shone suddenly. It

was Noel's signal! He was safe—and coming to her rescue!

But her joy was short-lived. The professor had moved silently towards the door, and a revolver glittered suddenly in his hand as he stood there like a sinister shadow, watching and waiting for the young detective to come.



AT THE MILLIONAIRE'S BALL

As June realised the other's intention—the dastardly trap which she, in all innocence, had helped to bait—she drew a deep breath.

"Nunky!" she called frantically. "Nunky—look out! The Spider is here, and he—"

With a panther-like spring the other had reached her, and a scarf was whipped round her mouth, choking back her cries.

"You little fool!" came the professor's hissing tones. "If you think that will help your precious uncle, you may think again. The gallant Noel Raymond will simply blunder more hastily into my trap."

He returned to his position behind the door. The blood pounded in June's temples, as she made a despairing attempt to free her mouth of the stifling gag.

The whistling was repeated, nearer this time. The professor crouched like a watchful cat. Then suddenly, through the house, came the muffled clamour of the front door knocker.

June's heart jumped as the professor shifted his position slightly.

"The outer door is unlatched, Miss Gaynor!" he whispered. "He should be here very soon—very soon—"

With a splintering crash one of the tall windows was shattered from the outside, the glass tinkling to the floor.

The professor whirled, and two shots rang out as he fired viciously through the broken window. June heard a muffled, anguished shout—then silence.

A choking sob rose in her throat. The professor chuckled, sending two more shots out into the mist.

"I think, Miss Gaynor," he murmured, "that settles Noel Raymond's account! He thought to hoodwink me by that ruse with the knocker but—"

"And he succeeded, professor—more easily than he hoped!" rapped a cool, pleasant voice from the doorway of the study.

Too late, the professor's hand swung round. The revolver was sent spinning across the study, and Noel Raymond's bunched fist caught the scoundrel under the chin, sending him reeling into the fireplace.

Noel sprang to the lamp, turning it up.

"June!" he exclaimed huskily, and he whipped out his knife to cut the things that bound her.

With a little pent-up sob of relief she clung to him, while Noel covered the dazed, scowling professor with his revolver.

"Nunky, I was afraid—I thought—oh, you're hurt!" she choked, staring at a deep graze on Noel's forehead, and realising suddenly that his clothes were soaking wet.

The young detective smiled grimly.

"The professor's first shot by the lake was nearer the mark than he realised," he said tersely. "If I hadn't dived, in the nick of time, there might have been a different story—eh, professor?"

The professor stared at Noel, a venomous gleam in his eyes.

"As it was," explained the young detective, "I was dazed when I reached the bank—and it wasn't till I saw your signal, June, that I was able to pull myself together. Fortunately the house is so arranged that the front door is literally within a stone's throw of the study window—and I was able to play that little trick to divert our friend The Spider—"

"Very clever of you, Mr. Raymond!" breathed the professor, an unpleasant smile curling his lips. "And it is

(Continued on page 311.)

What Surprising Secret Surrounded Sally's Painting?



The Merry-makers Afloat

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE PAINTING COMPETITION

"GEE, look at Sally's painting! Isn't it marvellous? I wish I could paint like that," said Don Weston admiringly.

And that was a wish being echoed by many other students on board the College Ship as they stood watching Sally Warner.

Sally, with the soft sea breeze ruffling her dark curls, was busy with her paints and brushes, and seemed hardly aware of the group around her as she sat on a small stool in front of her easel.

She was absorbed in painting the lovely tropical island which was coming ever nearer as the Ocean Star steamed on through the Southern Pacific en route for Australia. It was the South Seas Island of Taniki, and the liner was due to make a brief call there later that morning.

"Finished!" There came a satisfied grunt from Johnny Briggs, seated next to Sally. "How's this for a masterpiece?" he added, deciding it was time he gained a bit of the lime-light.

For he, too, had been painting that approaching island—as, indeed, were all the students, for Mr. Digby Rawson, the art master, had decided that it made an ideal subject to test the artistic abilities of his pupils.

The group now moved over to inspect Johnny's effort. They had been watching Sally with rapt attention, but now there came a chorus of chuckles. Sally, undoubtedly, was a clever and promising young artist, but Johnny could lay few claims in that direction.

"Goodness!" spluttered fair-haired Fay Manners. "Is that supposed to be the island, Johnny? It looks more like a dot in a soupy sea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny gave her a glare.

"It's a jolly good sea," he retorted spiritedly, "and the island's supposed to look like a dot, anyway, because that's how I saw it when it was a long way off. The trouble is," he added, in an injured tone, "that some people can't recognise originality!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was another outburst of laughter.

Sally hardly heard it. She was still absorbed in her painting. Looking over the deck rail in the direction of the island, she had seen a small sailing boat suddenly come into view. It had a bright red sail, which contrasted vividly with the blue of the sea.

At once Sally saw the possibilities; that boat would bring life and movement to her painting.

Quickly she began to brush it in. The boat, its red sail billowing in the breeze, seemed to be moving towards a headland of the island. Then sud-

denly it heeled over, settling lower and lower in the water.

"Golly, I believe it's sinking!" Sally exclaimed in a startled voice. "It is—look, look!"

Her voice became even more startled. For now, as the boat sank lower into the water, something white fluttered from that fast-disappearing craft.

"A distress signal!" Sally cried. "My goodness, I wonder if they've seen it on the bridge?"

Obviously it had been seen, for even as she spoke the big liner changed course and increased speed. Members of the crew were rushing to man one of the lifeboats.

Everybody was lining the rail now. They saw the rescue that followed. The sailing craft had sunk, and a man was seen swimming in the water. He was picked up by the rescue party and brought back to the Ocean Star, which then resumed course, heading for the other side of the island, where it was due to anchor.

There was a buzz of excited talk, interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Rawson, the art master.

"Back to work!" he told the students. "And I have an announcement to make. The girl or boy who paints the best picture will receive an offer for it from Mr. John Beamish, one of the passengers!"

Again there was a buzz of talk. Mr. Beamish, it appeared, was disembarking at Taniki, and, hearing that all the students were painting watercolours of the island, he had expressed a wish to take the best one so that he could hang it in his bungalow-home. He would offer a prize to the winner, who, with a few friends, would also be invited to accompany him ashore, as his guests, on a brief trip.

"Gosh, this sounds good!" whooped Johnny. "I'll let you come ashore with me, Sally—and Fay and Don, too, even though they have been insulting about my winning masterpiece!"

"My hat, if you win I'll turn into a South Seas Islander!" scoffed Don. "But we'll be going ashore, all right. I reckon. Sally will be the winner. Hey, Sally, get cracking on that painting again. We're relying on you!"

Laughingly Sally returned to her easel. And all the other students were doing the same, all hopeful that their own painting would be selected as the winning one.

Half an hour later the Ocean Star had reduced speed and was slowly steaming towards a safe anchorage on the deep-water side of Taniki.

"How's it going, Sally?" asked Don eagerly.

Don himself had finished his painting now, but he wasn't very optimistic about his chances of winning the

competition. Fay felt the same about her own effort, and so did Johnny about his—though he wasn't admitting it to anyone but himself. All three of them were banking on their leader; and, inspecting her painting now, they felt their confidence was justified.

"Just finishing," Sally smiled. "A few more minutes—whooa, there! Oh, my goodness!"

For at that moment a burly, bearded man came up the companionway near which Sally was sitting. He barged past her, and his foot knocked against one of the legs of her easel. Over it went, and the precious painting, still wet, fluttered to the deck.

"Look out!" yelled Don in alarm. "Don't tread on it, sir. That's our winning painting!"

"Look out yourself!" snapped the man surlily. "You shouldn't clutter up the deck near those stairs!"

Next moment he would have trodden on the painting, but, just in time, Johnny dived forward and scooped it up. Johnny glared at the surly-tempered man, and then he gave a start.

"My hat, you're the chap who was rescued, aren't you?"

"So what?" growled the man unpleasantly, and strode on along the deck without as much as a word of apology.

"Gosh, he's a nice sort of bloke—I don't think!" exclaimed Don.

The chums nodded. The incident had come as a shock to them. Up till now they had been ready to sympathise with the man, having heard what had happened—how, whilst out on a pearling expedition, he had been blown a hundred miles off his course by a fierce storm, his disabled boat finally capsizing as it drifted towards Taniki.

But now, after this first actual encounter with the man, Sally & Co. were beginning to think that he wasn't deserving of much sympathy. He was obviously bad-tempered and unfriendly.

"Huh! I was hoping to have a yarn with him," said Johnny, "but I don't think it matters now. Is the painting all right, Sally?"

"Yes, thank goodness!" Sally replied. "Think I'll call it finished, after all. We have to take them along to Number Three lecture-room, don't we? Right, on our way, then."

Collecting up their paintings, the four chums took them along to the lecture-room and handed them to Mr. Rawson, who was pinning all the entries along the walls.

"When will the judging take place, Mr. Rawson?" asked Fay eagerly.

"In about half an hour, Fay," the art master replied. "Sally, this is splendid—really splendid!" he added, as he looked at her painting.

"Is it going to win, sir?" Don wanted to know.

"Ah, that I cannot say yet," the master replied cautiously.

The chums went out, making their way to the rail. The Ocean Star was

manoeuvring into a natural deep-water harbour. They watched the island for some minutes.

"Gosh, what a thrill when we go ashore," Johnny said excitedly. "Sally's bound to win—hem! I mean, she will, if I don't! All the paintings will be in by now. Let's go along and nodd a sort of unofficial judging among ourselves!"

Eagerly the chums nodded, and back they went to the lecture-room. They strode in, to find someone already there. Standing by one of the walls was a burly, bearded figure in a somewhat tattered white linen suit—the bad-tempered man who had been rescued from the sailing-boat. And then, even as Sally saw him, she gave a startled shout of dismay.

For the man had removed one of the paintings from the wall. In an instant she saw that it was her own painting, and there could be no mistaking what he intended to do. Gripping it in both of his big hands, he was just about to tear it in half!



NOT FOR SALE

"Golly!" shouted Sally in a horrified voice. "Stop! Don't you dare touch that!"

She went rushing forward, snatching the precious painting away from him just in time.

A fierce expression crossed the man's bearded face, and it seemed that he would try to retrieve the painting by force: but just then Don, Johnny, and Fay raced up beside Sally.

"You were going to tear that picture!" Don stood on no ceremony and came right out with the accusation.

For a moment the man's huge fists bunched, and then a grin spread over his features.

"Tear it up?" he echoed. "Say, take it easy, youngster. You've got me wrong. I was admiring the picture. Sure, it's a swell piece of work, and what interested me particularly was that you'd got the Dinah Lee in it!"

"The—Dinah Lee?" stuttered Johnny.

"Sure. That sailing boat of mine. A trim little craft she was, and I was sorry to lose her. Guess she must have got holed on a rock. I'd sure like to have this picture of her!"

Sally gave the man a shrewd look, and she was not deceived by his manner. She was convinced he had been going to tear up her painting: she was remembering that first clash with him on deck. She didn't like the man, and this suddenly assumed friendliness wasn't going to make her change that opinion.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I want the painting."

"You bet Sally does!" added Don. "That picture's entered for a competition, and it's going to win and get us a trip ashore."

The man's eyes glittered.

"I'll buy it from you!" he said. "I'll double the prize, whatever it is. I tell you I'm sure keen to get this picture of my boat." He brought out a big wad of notes. "Three times the prize! Is it a deal?"

Sally blinked in surprise. The man seemed desperate to get the painting.

"I'm sorry—" she began, shaking her head.

"Four times, then!"

"No!" Sally said quietly.

At her refusal, his attitude again changed. Back came the threatening, bullying manner.

"Confound you!" he grated. "I tell you I want that picture—"

"And I tell you you can't have it!" Sally retorted.

He glared at her furiously. Suddenly, without another word, he stamped out of the room.

"Phew!" whistled Don. "He's an ugly specimen, if ever there was one. I'm glad you didn't let him have your painting, Sally!"

"What puzzles me," Sally mur-

mured, "is why he's so jolly desperate to get it!"

She replaced the picture on the wall. Her feeling of mistrust towards the man was deepening; and it was for that reason that, as an afterthought, she locked the door of the room when eventually she and her chums went out.

"A good idea!" nodded Don. "He might come back and try some more funny business. Your painting is precious, Sally. It's a cert winner—"

"Golly!" chuckled Sally. "Talk about counting your chickens before they're hatched! But let's treat ourselves to sundae in the tuckshop and then come back here for the judging."

It was a suggestion which met with unanimous approval. A quarter of an hour later the chums were once again making tracks towards the lecture-room. Sally peered in through the porthole to see if the judging committee were there. Next moment she gave a dismayed exclamation.

"My painting—it's not there!"

"Eh? Not there? It must be!" snorted Johnny, rushing along to the next porthole and pressing his face against the glass. "Gosh, it's not!" he yelled in a startled voice. "There's a blank space where Sally pinned up her painting. Hey, what's happened to it—"

"That man!" Sally's blue eyes were bright with suspicion. "He wanted the picture. I may be making a mistake, but I don't trust him after what's happened, and he may have managed to get in here and take it—"

"You're not making a mistake!" broke in Don angrily. "You've about hit the nail on the head. Who else would want to pinch it? But he's not going to get away with it. Come on, let's track him down!"

And indignantly the chums went running down to C Deck, knowing that the rescued man had been temporarily given a vacant cabin on that deck. They were certain he was the culprit and, thoroughly incensed, they did not stand on ceremony.

They barged into the cabin.

"Not here!" Johnny grunted. "But Sally's painting probably is, and we're going to find it!"

Again, in their anger, the chums gave no thought to the possible consequences of their actions. They proceeded to search the cabin—and they made a thorough job of it.

Drawers in the dressing-table and the built-in wardrobe were turned out. The carpet and the bed-clothes were turned back, but there was no trace of the missing picture. And then, even as Sally & Co. were looking at each other in dismay, the man himself appeared.

Fleetingly, Sally caught a glimpse of the crafty grin that crossed his face. Then he let out a bellow of rage.

"What are you youngsters doing in here? I've been given this cabin, and now I find you snooping in here and turning the place into a shambles!"

He shouted at the top of his voice, and such a rumpus was not likely to go undetected. And, unluckily for Sally & Co., it was Professor Willard, the students' headmaster, who was attracted to the scene, and with him was Captain Thorne.

"Sally, what is happening? What are you doing in here?" questioned the headmaster sternly.

"They're wrecking the place—that's what they're doing!" stormed the man in the linen suit.

"We're looking for Sally's painting because we think he's pinched it out of the lecture-room!" shouted Johnny recklessly.

"You think what—Silence, Briggs!" Professor Willard looked scandalised. "You should all be ashamed of yourselves! Do you not realise that Mr. Kohler has just passed through a most dreadful experience? And now you accuse him of stealing a painting—"

"It's preposterous!" broke in Carl Kohler furiously. "I don't know these youngsters, and they don't know me. I've been on board little

more than an hour, and, anyway, what should I know about a painting?"

"I agree, Mr. Kohler! I regret more than I can say the outrageous behaviour of these students—" Professor Willard broke off as another figure came into the cabin.

It was a member of the crew, and he went across to Captain Thorne.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, saluting. "But I heard mention of a painting, and I've just found this in the corridor."

He passed over a piece of card which was creased and soaking wet. The captain smoothed it out, and as Sally saw it she gave a choked cry.

"My painting!"

"Your painting, eh? The one I was supposed to have pinched and hidden here, huh?" sneered Carl Kohler.

The chums were staring at it in dazed horror. All the paint had run, and Sally's lovely painting was utterly ruined.

"Oh, gosh, just look at it!" groaned Don. "And that was the picture that was going to win Sally the prize and get us ashore as guests of Mr. Beamish—"

"Get you ashore!" rapped out the headmaster. "You four students will be confined to your cabin. Even if one of your paintings does win you will not be allowed ashore after this disgraceful behaviour. Now go!"



THE ROBOT TO THE RESCUE

Sally & Co. went, stunned by the disasters that had befallen them. But seething anger filled them, too, as they saw the look of

gloating triumph on the face of Carl Kohler.

He had taken Sally's painting and spoilt it—they were convinced of it. Yet they had no proof.

"But what's his game?" asked Fay in bewilderment when, ten minutes later, they stood in a group by the rail discussing the situation. "He wanted to buy the picture not long ago. Now he ruins it—Goodness, that's why he wanted to buy it!" she added, as understanding dawned on her.

"Exactly!" Sally nodded grimly. "And what does it mean? It means that he wanted that painting out of the way—that he was afraid of it being seen!"

"Afraid of who seeing it—and why?" asked Don.

"That's the mystery—" Sally was replying, and then she gave a little start. "He wanted the picture in the first place because I'd painted in his boat. And, as far as I know, mine was the only picture showing that boat. Golly, I wonder if there's any connection?"

The others stared at her.

"Could be, I suppose," muttered Don. "But I still don't get the hang of it all. Why should he be scared of anyone seeing the painting of a boat?"

Sally's brain was still working furiously as she tried to find a solution to the mystery, to account for Carl Kohler's extraordinary behaviour. What was the purpose behind it all?

"Could it be that he was afraid of someone on the island seeing the painting?" she asked suddenly. "What if he had heard that it might win the prize and would be taken to Taniki by Mr. Beamish? I'm guessing, of course—"

"Let's ask Mr. Beamish," suggested Fay eagerly. "He lives on the island and might know something about this Kohler."

But Fay's inspiration came too late. Even as they turned they saw the genial, sandy-haired figure of John Beamish striding along the quay.

From Linda Powell, the girl who had the knack of getting to know all the news, the chums heard that Mr. Beamish had not been able to stay for the judging of the painting competition, after all. He had asked Professor Willard and Mr. Rawson to do that

for him. A girl in Grade 5 had won, and she and her friends would be joining John Beamish later during the day.

"Scuppered!" sighed Sally. "The mystery remains a mystery— Oh, golly, look!" she suddenly exclaimed, pointing over the rail. "There's Kohler. He's going ashore, too!"

They saw Carl Kohler making his way down the gangway, and then he went hurrying along the waterfront.

"If we could find out why he was so frightened of anyone seeing that painting!" Sally muttered. "I'm sure he's playing some fishy game. And why's he going ashore— Hallo, what's the matter with you, Johnny?"

Johnny, standing a little apart from his chums, and unusually silent for the last few minutes, had suddenly given a shout.

"I say, look at this!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" Sally asked, seeing a slip of paper in Johnny's hand.

"I've only just remembered this," Johnny said excitedly. "I found it in one of the drawers in Kohler's cabin when we were searching for the painting. I slipped it into my pocket just as he came in—didn't have a chance to look at it. It's a map of the island—"

"What?"

"Sure is!" Johnny nodded vigorously. "And what do you think of this—he knew the Ocean Star was due to reach Taniki at eleven o'clock."

"Let's have a look at it, Johnny!"

Excitedly the chums peered over his shoulder as he spread out the sheet of paper. On it, as Johnny had said, was a roughly-drawn map of Taniki; and in the centre of it was a spot marked with a cross. While at the top right-hand corner of the paper had been written the words: "Ship due 11—headland 10.30."

"What do you make of it?" Johnny asked. "Shows he knows something about the island, anyway."

Sally was staring at those pencilled words; from them to that cross in the centre of the map.

"Golly, I've got a hunch!" she cried excitedly. "He knew the ship was coming, and we first spotted his boat near the headland. What if he deliberately capsized that boat so that he would be picked up?"

"Sally!" came a chorus from her chums, and then Fay was shaking her head.

"But why should he do that—"

"That's what we've got to find out!" broke in Johnny, his voice cracking in his excitement. "And find out what that cross means, too. We'll go ashore and trail him—"

"Chump!" exclaimed Don. "Of course, we'd go ashore if we could. But we can't. We're confined to ship!"

But Sally's eyes were gleaming. She looked as excited as Johnny.

"Blow that! We've got to follow this up, Merrymakers! We're going—"

"And how are we going when there is Phineas standing like a sentry at the gangway?" demanded Don. "Gee, I want to go, but—"

Sally smiled.

"Percy!" she said. "Have you forgotten Percy?"

"Gosh! Yes—Percy! You mean, ask Slick— Oh, wizard idea!"

Samuel Leander Kaplin—known as "Slick"—was the boy inventor of the Floating College. And Percy was his most amazing invention—a robot which looked the living image of Professor Willard, and could speak and act like the headmaster.

"No one except the chums knew about Slick's wonderful dummy. They had used Percy before—and now they were going to use him again."

EDGAR T PHINEAS straightened up hastily. The head prefect had been leaning against the gang-

way, sweating in the heat of the midday sun. He was there to see that no students left the ship. But now he stiffened to attention as he saw a figure, in flowing gown and mortar-board, come strutting along the deck. "The Head!" Phineas muttered. "And he's got those Merrymakers with him. Just making sure they go down to their cabins, I expect."

That approaching figure certainly bore an uncanny likeness to Professor Willard. Phineas wasn't to know that it was Percy the Robot. But Sally Warner, guiding the dummy, one hand near to the series of switches which operated the intricate mechanism, knew a quail as she approached the prefect. Phineas had eyes like a hawk, and in the bright sunlight, at close quarters, he might become suspicious.

She pressed a button.

"Follow me!" came Professor Willard's voice—commandingly, authoritatively, amazingly realistic because it was actually a recording of Professor Willard's voice.

"Of course, sir! Head's orders, Edgar!" Sally said sweetly, bestowing a smile upon the prefect.

Phineas shook his head somewhat dazedly. But the Head's word was law, and so he stood aside, allowing the chums and Percy to march down the gangway.

On the quay below, Sally & Co. looked at each other with shining eyes.

Recklessly they had defied the headmaster's ban. And now—what adventures awaited them on this lovely island? What was the mystery of Carl Kohler—and what was the secret of the chart which reposed in Sally's pocket?

(End of this week's story.)

Fun, excitement and mystery await Sally & Co. and Percy on Taniki Island—as you will discover in next Friday's story.

JUNE'S STRANGE TASK

(Continued from page 308.)

equally fortunate that I do not travel unaccompanied. Those last two shots of mine were a signal—"

"Nunky—look out!" screamed June. Noel whirled, sweeping June behind him with a swift movement of his arm, as two hulking figures appeared in the doorway.

"Gaspard—Lopez—get hold of Raymond!" snarled the professor, as he struggled up. "I'll deal with the girl while—"

The two men launched themselves on Noel. She felt the professor's bony fingers on her shoulder and with a flash of inspiration she did the first thing that entered her mind.

Her foot shot out, overturning the small table on which stood the lamp. It went over with a crash, plunging the room into smoky darkness.

"Good for you, June!" came Noel's ringing voice.

She dodged away from the professor's clutched hand and next moment felt a pair of powerful arms sweep her from her feet.

"Hold tight, dear!" Noel breathed in her ear.

In a bound he had reached the shattered window, climbing over the low sill and springing down into the shrubbery.

A fusillade of shots whipped through the mist. On rushed Noel, while June felt her senses reeling and everything suddenly went black.

DAZEDLY the girl detective opened her eyes, conscious of a strange throbbing in her ears. She realised that she was lying on a comfortably upholstered seat, and that the throbbing came from the engines of a powerful car, as it sped through the night.

Seated opposite her was Noel.

Tersely he described what had happened. She had fainted during their desperate escape from the grounds,

and Noel had carried her to a nearby house from where he had phoned the police.

Henson and Wheeler, the two plain-clothes men, had arrived with reinforcements—and the professor's house had been surrounded.

"But the birds had flown, June," said Noel grimly, "and taken all their stuff with them! It looked as though The Spider had beaten us, after all— till I found that card in your pocket."

"Card?" June's eyes lit up, as she remembered the Malda Carnival Co.'s card. "Nunky—was it a valuable clue?"

"I should say so, June!" declared Noel, with a smile. "It's given me a certain address in London, which shall be visited to-night—with the police. I'm taking you along to our flat, to wait there till I return—"

June vigorously protested, declaring that she felt quite well enough to see the adventure through to its end. In reply to Noel's questions, she repeated what the professor had said.

The young detective's eyes gleamed. "Twelve o'clock, eh? That clinches it, June!" he declared. "Thanks to your pluck and resource, I've got the key to the whole riddle!"

"But, nunky—what is the answer?" demanded June. "What use could The Spider have for those cardboard heads and strange costumes?"

Noel chuckled grimly.

"Remember the story of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,' June? Remember the jars of oil—and what was hidden in them?"

Sudden, amazed enlightenment dawned in June's eyes.

"Nunky, you don't mean—"

"We'll see to-night whether my surmise is correct!" put in Noel. "The address on the back of that card, June, was that of Alex Markham, the millionaire—who happens to be giving a midnight ball to celebrate his return to England. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if he has hired his costumes and decorations from the Malda Carnival Co.—a company

which only exists in The Spider's fertile scheme of operations!"

NOEL'S amazing theory was proved in a startling fashion that night, when June accompanied her uncle on a sudden police raid at the millionaire's house, only Mr. Markham having been warned beforehand.

As they burst into the brilliantly lit hall, with its dazzling assembly of bejewelled guests, June caught at Noel's arm.

"Nunky—look! Those are the things!"

Ranged around the walls were a number of grotesque cardboard figures, apparently supported by wires—carnival decorations hired for the occasion.

But as Noel strode forward, accompanied by several police officers, startled cries went up from the guests; for the young detective snatched the cardboard head from one of the figures, revealing a scowling face—and a burly ruffian was handcuffed as he made to escape.

Other members of the gang—cleverly smuggled into the house in the guise of the dummy figures—were swiftly arrested.

And at the height of the sensation, one of the guests, a tall, masked Harlequin, made a sudden dive for the window.

"Stop that man!" shouted Noel.

"He's The Spider!"

The outwitted trickster spun on his heel, firing a shot at the glittering chandelier—and plunging the ball-room into darkness. By the time that lights could be obtained, The Spider had made his escape.

"My account with the professor is not settled yet, June," said Noel, with a grim smile. "Thanks to you, his plot to rob the guests has failed—but I've an idea that he won't forget!"

(End of this week's story.)

WHEN ROSINA BAFFLED THE SCHOOL is the title of next Friday's detective story, which re-introduces Rosina Fontaine, the daring girl crook.

LEADER OF THE ALPINE REVELLERS

(Continued from page 302.)

"I know!" Jill agreed. "I was thinking of something else, and I'm frightfully sorry, for it brought you into danger as well as me. But I've learnt my lesson. I'm reading every jolly old notice-board I meet from now on!"

She flashed him a gay smile—a smile which most people found so friendly and infectious.

But there was no answering smile on the face of the boy who had saved her. Frowningly he gazed at her, his mouth set in a firm, hard line.

Without a word he turned to where his skis were propped against a tree and began to strap them on. He wore a workmanlike wind-jacket which showed off his broad shoulders.

But what an odd, moody boy! He seemed to have no taste for conversation at all.

Yet he had saved her life. And somehow beneath that rugged, unfriendly look she sensed something strong and dependable. She remembered how safe she had felt as she had clung to him on that perilous slope.

Never, she told herself, would she let him walk away without even telling her his name.

"I'm Jill Gardiner," she said lightly. "I'm staying at High Gables Hotel, down in the valley. It's a grand spot. I'm going to have the finest holiday of my life."

No answer! No word from that sturdy boy who, with the breeze ruffling his hair, was putting the finishing touches to his ski bindings. Jill's chin went up with its determined little tilt.

So he had retired deep within his shell, had he? But she just wouldn't let him stay there. After what he had done for her, she was determined to get on a friendly footing with him somehow or other.

"I don't think I've seen you at the hotel," she smiled. "In fact, I don't believe you're a visitor at all. I've an idea that you live here."

He had straightened up now, his unsmiling gaze fixed on her once more.

"Yes," he replied abruptly. "I live in this valley."

Jill's smile was radiant now as an idea dawned on her mind.

Perhaps her afternoon hadn't been wasted, after all. Perhaps, after all, she wouldn't have to drop her plan for the Havensburg test. As she gazed back at this broad-shouldered boy, a wild hope broke on her.

"I guess you know all about winter sports," she ventured. "About skiing and ski-joring and skating and mountaineering, and—and everything."

"I know as much as most folk," he muttered.

He stooped to pick up his ski-sticks. In another moment, unless she stopped him, he would be off. He was already turning his back on her, as if he had forgotten her very existence.

Jill quickly glided round on her skis till she was facing him.

"I was wondering," she brought out, "if you were a professional guide? Because if you are—"

The words died on her lips. She was startled by the change which this harmless question caused in him.

His cheeks paled beneath their tan. His fists clenched, and those deep-set eyes flashed angrily at her. He drew a quick, deep breath, almost as if she had struck him.

"No!" He almost shouted the word, advancing on her stormily. "Hans Peterson is not a guide. No!"

She was utterly taken aback. Never had she expected such a fierce outburst in answer to her query. And again the feeling grew on her that there was something strange—

mysterious—about this moody, tact-turn boy who had just saved her life.

And she could see now that he wasn't a guide. All recognised guides in this Swiss valley wore a special badge, and there was no badge on this boy's jacket, though the material was torn just a little where the guide's badge would have been worn.

Why should he have been so upset at her innocent question?

She was completely baffled. But, at any rate, she had learnt his name!

Before she could utter another word, however, there came an interruption.

Voices and laughter echoed out from the pinewoods behind them. Jill felt sure she recognised the sounds. It was Max and the boys returning from their ski practice.

Smilingly she turned to her companion.

"Hans! It's some of my friends from the hotel," she told him. "I'd like them to know just what you did for me this afternoon."

Perhaps that would be the best way to bring him out of his shell!

But again she was startled by the bitter look on his face as he frowningly shook his head.

"Your friends would not wish to be seen with me," he exclaimed harshly. "Neither will you when you have heard the gossips in the village. Forget that you have met Hans Peterson. Forget him!"

So saying, with startling swiftness he glided forward on his skis, shooting between the tall pines, gathering speed with every moment.

"Stop!" she gasped. "Just a minute, please—"

Momentarily arrested by her tone, he halted, but his expression was grim.

"I do not wish to meet your friends," he said. "Please will you take that as my answer—and do not follow."

And in a flash he was off again, watched by a bewildered but admiring Jill.

Never had she seen such ski-ing. He was twisting, turning, swooping between the tall tree-trunks, using his ski-sticks to take flying leaps over fallen logs. On and on down the tree-studded slope till he vanished from her view.

"Hey, Jill!"

"Come and hear about our forest ski-ing practice, Jill. It's great fun."

"Any luck in finding a coach for the Havensburg test, Jill?"

The cheery voices hailed her from the edge of the trees. Tony Barnes, Gerald Clarke and several of the boys had come into view, waving to her, and the tall figure of Max Kildare could be seen in the background.

Jill moved across to greet them, but in her mind's eye was still a picture of the flying figure of Hans Peterson swooping downwards through the woods. More than ever she was certain there was some mystery about that boy. But she felt certain of something else also—that Hans, if he wanted to, could train them to pass successfully the Havensburg test.

"Yes, I've found a coach," she replied, a reckless gleam in her eyes.

There was a chorus of surprise.

"You have? Gee-whiz!"

"Good for you, Jill!"

And then Max Kildare's voice:

"But I don't understand, Jill. I'm almost certain there is no one in the valley who could coach you girls for the Havensburg test. Who is it?"

Jill laughed gaily.

"His name's Hans Peterson," she said. "I haven't asked him yet, but I feel confident I can get him to agree. Anyway, I'm going to ask him now."

With a merry wave of her hand she shot forward, following the ski-marks that Hans had left.

But from behind her came an agitated cry from Max.

"Jill, stop! You mustn't ask Hans Peterson to train you for the test."

There's a special reason. Stop, and I'll explain."

But impulsive Jill scarcely heard him as she twisted and turned down the tree-studded slope, her brown eyes aglow.

He's the kind of boy who'll say 'No' at first," she murmured. "But somehow I'll tease him into helping us. He must! He must!"

For it meant so much to her. It would be such an immense thrill to pass the Havensburg test and take that ski tour across the mountain passes to the romantic castle beyond.

And now she could glimpse a tiny cottage at the foot of the trail. Was this Hans' home?

She braked sharply, forcing the points of her skis together to bring herself to a halt.

Then suddenly she drew in her breath puzzledly.

Loud, jeering calls came to her ears. And then an angry voice—surely it belonged to Hans? And then the sounds of a scuffle.

What was going on? What was happening behind the screen of snow-laden bushes around the little cottage?

Her pulses quickening, Jill darted forward.

This grand new serial will provide you with all the fun and thrills of a winter sports holiday. Whatever you do, don't miss next Friday's enthralling instalment.

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 300.)

She turned, nodding primly, and quickly walked on, feeling hot and cold—and feeling, too, that not much missed the dark eyes of Hugh Mason.

"Bit too close for safety, Penny," she murmured. "Gosh, though—he's nice, especially considering that he must think of you as a priggish sneak—"

Cautiously she glanced back, and her pulses began to dance. Hugh had vanished into the Cloisters!

She had no doubts. He had waited until near the end of break so that he could slip into the fountain a message from the Grey Ghosts!

Penelope gave a tiny skip of excitement. Very soon now!

She headed straight on towards the school gardens, not looking back again. Hugh must never suspect she was interested in his movements.

In the shrubbery, she at last paused and cautiously peered back through the leaves—just in time to see Hugh's distant figure at the fountain, see his hand leave one of the gargoyle heads, before he turned and sped in the direction of Junior House.

"Zimmy!" breathed Penelope eagerly. "It's there! The message, Penny giving details of the next meeting of the Grey Ghosts."

She waited until Hugh was well out of sight, then she began to steal forward, only abruptly to pull up. For a figure had rushed from the shadow of the Clock Tower—a burly, furtive figure who had obviously been watching Hugh.

It was Harold Smecke, the Fifth Former spy of Mr. Aspell. Petrified, she watched him run towards the fountain.

Full realisation of what this meant burst upon her.

Smecke would collect the note—signed by the leader of the Grey Ghosts. Hugh Mason would be implicated without hope, faced with expulsion—and the Grey Ghosts' plans known to Mr. Aspell!

"No—oh, no!"

Wildly Penelope burst into a sprint. But even as she ran through the garden she knew it was hopeless. She could not possibly get to the fountain before Harold Smecke!

Will Penelope be able to prevent Smecke from reading the hidden message? See next Friday's exciting chapters.