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# GIRLS' CRYSTAL <sup>3<sup>D</sup></sup>

Week  
Ending  
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1948.

AND 'THE SCHOOLGIRL'



## LEADER OF THE ALPINE REVELLERS

What Was The Secret Of The Torn Piece Of Music?—By ENID BOYTEN

### A TRAP FOR MAGDA

JILL GARDINER and her cheery band of girl chums who were staying in Switzerland for the winter sports, were being coached for the difficult Havensburg test by Hans Peterson, an ex-guide. Jill was convinced that Hans had been unjustly accused of cowardice.

No girl had ever before gone in for the test, and Max Kildare, the coach who was training the boys at the hotel, believed it was too difficult for them.

Jill began to suspect that Magda Beaumont, one of the Revellers, was working against herself and Hans.

Magda stole the contents of a letter addressed to Jill. But when Jill examined the envelope she discovered something which Magda had missed. And as she unfolded it a cry of amazement left her lips.

"WELL, of all the strange things!"

The startled murmur burst from Jill's lips as she gazed at the half-sheet of paper she had drawn from the air-mail envelope. Whatever she had expected to find, it certainly wasn't this.

"It's music!" she gasped. "Part of a tune!"

She stared in utter amazement at the seven or eight bars of music that were written by hand on that half-sheet. The crochets and quavers seemed to dance bewilderingly before her eyes in the bright Alpine sunshine.

It wasn't a complete tune, for the paper was torn across, leaving a jagged edge.

And on top were scrawled a few brief words:

"Gondolier's Waltz. H.C., Switzerland, 1932."

Yes, it was a waltz tune—or part of one. Jill could read music, and softly she hummed these few bars of haunting, lilting melody which broke off so strangely in the middle.

But why should anyone want to prevent her from getting the torn piece of music? And what had been the contents of the typewritten letter which had accompanied it? The latter she was certain Magda Beaumont had stolen!

Jill shook her head in bafflement. Then, as she gazed at the initials "H.C." that followed the title of the waltz, her heart gave a sudden leap. Involuntarily her gaze went to the lofty gap between the distant mountain peaks.

Havensburg Pass! The perilous way that led to the next valley where stood romantic Havensburg Castle, home of Mr. Paul le Grand, who would soon be holding his famous Venetian Ice Carnival there.

"Do those initials stand for Havensburg Castle?" she asked herself, pulses racing. "Does it mean the waltz was played there during the carnival revels in 1932?"

The thought thrilled her strangely. Yet, even so, what meaning could it have for her in 1948?

She shook her brown curls. How baffling—mystifying—it was!

Yet one fact was clear.

This made it all the more important that she should achieve her ambition, for she felt certain that that fragment of melody was linked in some mysterious way with Havensburg Castle, the goal of her hopes.

That thought was in her mind as she sped into the hotel and raced up to her room to get ready for lunch.

She halted quiveringly there, gazing around her.

"I must find a hiding-place!" she breathed. "I can't risk this clue to the mystery being stolen."

One of the bricks in the old-fashioned fireplace was loose, and Jill decided to conceal the torn scrap of paper behind it.

And before I go down to lunch," she told herself, "I'll lay a little trap, just in case Magda or her friend do come in search of that paper."

A few minutes later she was run-

ning lightly downstairs to the big dining-room.

It was certainly a gay lunch-party. Jill and her girl chums shared a table with Gerald Clarke, Tony Barnes, and their other boy rivals, who were also training for the Havensburg Test, and, as usual, there was plenty of good-natured banter from the boys.

"How's the training going, girls? How many spills so far?"

"If any of you have cold feet, I've got a jolly old hot-water bottle I can lend you!"

And then, in Gerald's rather lofty tones:

"If you feel like resigning, girls, don't mind us. I'll see that nobody pulls your legs about it. Frankly, I think it's a bit stiff for girls, and—"

"Come off it, Gerald!" laughed Jill. "It'd be a load off your mind if we're resigned, no doubt. Perhaps you're scared of six girls beating you, eh?"

But though she joined in the chatter, Jill's mind was elsewhere.

Through her brain throbbed a few bars of melody in waltz time. A haunting t u n e—mysterious, unfinished!

She didn't even notice Rosemary's uncle, Mr. Gavin Walsh, watching them with a doubtful little frown from another table.

Mr. Walsh had been doubtful about letting Jill and Rosemary train for the difficult test under their boy coach, and judging from his expression, he still hadn't made up his mind on that point.

Jill noticed nothing, however, and as soon as the meal was over she sped up to her room again, and her glance went to the little writing-table against the wall.

On that desk she had left the empty air-mail envelope, carefully noting its exact position.

"It's been moved!" she breathed, her heart thudding.

Somebody had been in here during lunch-time, searching for that intriguing half-tune. It wasn't Magda,

because she had been lurching with the rest of them.

"It must have been her unknown ally!" Jill told herself.

Her pulses racing, she searched the room to make sure no intruder was concealed there. Then she knelt in front of the hearth and removed the loose brick.

The folded paper was still securely tucked away.

"Thank goodness it's safe!" she breathed.

But she must be on her guard. How very important that half-tune must be for her if these mysterious plotters were making such efforts to secure it!

### JILL'S NEW IDEA



That waltz tune haunted Jill's mind during the days that followed. She just couldn't get it out of her head, and sometimes she would wake up at night with those lilting notes throbbing in her brain.

But her puzzlement didn't prevent her throwing herself heart and soul into the winter sports practice with their boy coach, Hans Peterson.

"What a wizard trainer he's proving!" Jill told herself, one afternoon when she and the rest of the Alpine Revellers set out for another practice.

Hans had told them to bring skates as well as skis, and they were all excitedly curious as to what new form of training he had devised for them.

They had arranged to meet him on a snowy, tree-studded slope that swept up from the bank of a small, frozen lake, and when they reached the spot they saw that the Swiss boy had certainly been busy.

He had rolled a number of logs into position on the slope, like obstacles, about ten yards apart. He had just put the last one in place when the girls hailed him.

Jill gave him a laughing salute. "The Alpine Revellers report for duty, captain!"

Hans returned her smile gravely. "Ready for a difficult test, Jill?" he inquired. "Something special?"

"I should jolly well think we are!" Jill declared.

"After the lunch we've just had," giggled plump Suzie Millard, "we're ready for anything!"

Without another word, he led them to the top of the steep slope and dizzily they looked down at the frozen lake far below.

"Golly, talk about a switchback!" Druie murmured.

Hans chuckled softly.

"Watch!" he said. Grasping his ski sticks, he bent forward, studying the slope beneath him. Then he swooped.

Never had they seen such breath-taking ski-ing. At every log he dug his ski sticks into the snow and cleared the obstacle with a flying leap, whizzing forward to the next one, over and over.

And then, on the bank of the lake, he took off his skis, pulled on the skating boots he had left there, and glided across the rough, difficult ice, waving to them from the opposite bank almost before they realised he had started.

"I've been timing him," Jill murmured, her eyes glowing. "One minute forty-three seconds from start to finish!"

"Staggering, Jill!" "Utterly smashing!"

Jill knew a sudden thrill as she heard their admiring exclamations. They were coming to appreciate the worth of their coach—that odd, moody boy whose friendship Jill felt she was winning.

Only Magda was silent, watching them from under her long lashes in that mocking way of hers.

Magda had been very quiet these last few days. She had made no more treacherous attempts to upset their practices, though not for one moment did Jill trust the black-haired girl.

And then Hans was back again.

"That little test," he told them, "should teach you three things—to jump obstacles on a slope, to take off your skis quickly—which has to be done sometimes in an emergency—and to skate across rough ice, very different from what you are used to on the hotel rink. All things you'll need to know for the Havensburg Test. Are you ready to tackle it?"

Jill tried it first, and never would she forget that first breathless swoop, her skis hissing over the snow and the logs seeming to rush towards her.

Somehow she cleared them—all except the last, when she misjudged her distance, and took a tumble on the soft snow. But she was up in a moment, removing her skis, pulling on her skates.

A minute later she had completed that tricky bit of skating across the rough ice and was turning to wave gaily to her team.

Pluckily they followed their leader. Even Magda seemed to be straining every nerve, her face set and hard, as she tried to do better than Jill.

Of course, there were tumbles at first. But, with Hans correcting their faults, they tackled it again and again till even Suzie could do it without a fall.

Breathless and flushed, they paused for a rest, and eagerly Jill turned to their boy coach.

An idea had dawned on her, and it brought an impetuous sparkle to her brown eyes.

"Hans, how does our performance compare with what boys could do?" she asked. "I mean the ordinary boy guests at the hotel who've been training with Max Kildare?"

His deep-set eyes gazed at her earnestly.

"They might do a little better," he replied, "but not much."

"Then how about issuing a challenge?" Jill cried, wheeling on her chums. "A challenge to the boys!"

They stared at her excitedly.

"A challenge!"

"It sounds thrilling, but—"

"No 'buts'!" sparkled Jill. "We'll do it! We'll draw up a challenge in proper form and hand it to Gerald & Co. to-night. Boys versus girls! A preliminary contest before the Havensburg Test itself. Of course, we couldn't hope to beat them, but we might run them jolly close."

Rosemary and Brenda were catching on to the idea now.

"Say, it's a dandy scheme!" drawled Brenda.

"It's fizzing!" Rosemary laughed. "And won't it chuckle as I watch Gerald's face when we hand him the challenge!"

Jill was thinking fast.

"There's something else," she went on quickly. "You know that Rosemary's uncle and some of our parents are not too keen on us training for the test at all. Max Kildare, the boys' coach, has stuffed them up with the idea that it's too hard for us. We'll invite them to watch this preliminary tussle. We'll give them ringside seats for the boys-versus-girls event, and convince them that they were wrong."

"Good wheeze, Jill!"

"It's the tops!"

And Jill, quivering with excitement, had now caught Hans' arm.

"And you'll help, Hans?" she appealed. "Because we want the coaches to be in this, too. Hans versus Max, as well as girls against boys!"

The rugged face of the boy guide wasn't often broken by a smile, but he certainly smiled now at Jill's flushed and eager face.

"O.K., Jill! I'll help!"

Jill drew a deep breath, and then she saw that Hans was pointing to a circle of smooth ice in the centre of the lake.

"Jill," he said, with another rare smile, "don't you think your team need a treat after all that hard work? How about some skating on the smooth ice to music?"

"To—music?"

For answer, the Swiss boy marched off to a spot behind the bushes where

he had left his rucksack and other belongings. He came back with an accordion slung over his sturdy shoulder.

Next moment he was playing a lively two-step, and, with whoops of delight, the Alpine Revellers glided on to the smooth ice and began to dance.

Jill, paired with Rosemary, met her chum's blue eyes.

"That challenge idea is really topping, Jill," Rosemary breathed, "because Uncle Gavin is still awfully doubtful about letting us go on with the plan. He keeps dropping hints about it to me. If we can put up a good show against the boys and convince him—"

"We will! Never fear!" laughed Jill.

For half an hour Hans played on, but at last he paused, while the girls came to a standstill on the ice, clapping.

And then— Jill caught her breath as the Swiss boy began to play again, his fingers idly passing over the keys.

For a moment he seemed to have forgotten Jill and the other girls. A lilting, haunting melody floated out from the accordion. Just a few bars in waltz time.

A few notes of strange, intriguing melody that Jill had certainly never heard before.

Yet, as she listened with straining ears, her heart began to throb wildly. Something seemed to click in her brain, and she whirled round on Hans.

"Hans! That tune—" she burst out impetuously.

For she felt almost sure that those lilting notes Hans had played were a continuation of the dance tune that had been sent to her so mysteriously from London. The other half of the "Gondolier's Waltz"!



### A STRANGE DISCOVERY

Jill's words died on her lips, for a startling change had come over the boy guide's manner.

Something of the old moody, stubborn light flashed in his eyes. His lips set almost grimly as, with a quick movement, he unstung the accordion.

"Oh, it was nothing!" he muttered. "A few notes, played at random. Nothing at all."

"But, Hans, won't you tell me the title of that tune?"

He shook his head.

"I've forgotten," he muttered.

"Anyway, it is of no interest to you."

"But—"

Jill stopped abruptly as Magda came gliding forward. At all costs, that girl's suspicions must not be aroused, so Jill quickly changed the subject.

"Thanks, Mr. Trainer, for the music, and the coaching, and everything!" she said. "I take it we will meet again to-morrow at the usual time?"

"Hear, hear!"

"We've had a smashing day, Hans! We've learnt a lot, thanks to you!"

The others chimed in enthusiastically. A few minutes later they had taken leave of Hans, and as they made their way back to the hotel the Alpine Revellers chattered excitedly about the challenge they were to issue to the boys, but Jill hardly heard what was said. She was thinking of the mystery tune, and, once back in her room, she took the torn sheet of paper from its hiding-place and softly hummed the notes written there. Then from memory she added on the few bars that Hans had played.

Her brown eyes glowed excitedly as she did so.

"It fits in!" she whispered. "Hans was playing the other half of this tune. I'm sure of it now!"

(Please turn to the back page.)

# MYSTERY AT THE Pets' Shop



By PETER LANGLEY

## THE CLUE OF THE FEATHER

"NUNKY—what was that?" June Gaynor gasped out the words as a sharp report rang out, wakening the echoes of the picturesque little valley.

"A shot of some kind," remarked Noel Raymond. "It seemed to come from the direction of the hotel. There are people hurrying across the grounds—something must have happened."

He stared towards the hotel that stood on the cliff, its grounds sloping down to the sea.

The famous detective and his young partner were on their way to the hotel, where Noel had booked for a late autumn holiday. They had walked from the station, taking a winding path that led them through the quaint fishing village nestling in the hollow.

"Oh, look—it's a bird!" cried June indignantly. "Someone's shot it!"

She darted forward, to drop to her knees beside a squawking, fluttering bundle of black-and-white feathers that had landed among the bushes.

"Hallo—a magpie!" exclaimed Noel, as he joined her. "And a tame one, by the look of it. There's blood on its wing—let me see!"

Deftly, without hurting it, he examined the bird's injured wing.

"Is it—is it badly hurt, nunky?" asked June, peering over his shoulder.

"Only a graze, luckily," replied Noel, "but it should be treated. There may be a chemist's or pets' shop in the village. I'll make inquiries about the shooting when we reach the hotel," he added grimly.

Together they hurried up the cobbled village street with its picturesque cottages and scattered shops. As they approached the corner they noticed a quaint, gabled house that had been converted into two shops on the ground floor.

The nearer of the two was a typical seaside curio stores, its bay window stocked with a miscellaneous collection of old pewter and china, fishing-tackle, postcards, and model ships in bottles. Its grey-haired owner paused in the task of sweeping the step to beam at them hopefully over his spectacles.

But his expression changed as he saw the bird fluttering in June's hands.

"Why—that's Nita Dane's magpie!" he exclaimed. "She keeps the pets' shop next door. The bird must have slipped out of its cage while her back was turned. She'll be that upset—"

Just then a fair-haired girl came running from the doorway of the adjoining shop, her attractive face pale with distress.

"Uncle Jeff!" she exclaimed. "Blackie's got out again—and I heard someone shooting from the hotel. Mr. Chadwick, the manager, threatened to—"

She broke off as she caught sight of the two visitors.

"Oh, you've found him!" she breathed, a catch in her voice. "He isn't—they haven't hurt—"

"Nothing serious," put in Noel reas-

suringly. "The bird fluttered to the ground, more scared than hurt. But it must have been a narrow shave. You were saying"—he eyed her keenly—"that the hotel manager actually threatened to shoot your pet?"

The girl nodded as she took the frightened magpie in her arms.

"He—he—you see—"

"There's been a spot of bother up at the hotel, sir," explained the curio-dealer, meeting her appealing glance. "Some of the guests have been losing valuables—rings and such-like—and Mr. Chadwick's got it into his head that Nita's magpie's to blame—"

"But it's not true!" exclaimed the girl. "Blackie—Blackie would never do such a thing. I've brought him up from a tiny fledgling—and he's the only one of the pets that isn't for sale. But just recently he's taken to escaping from his cage—I can't understand how—"

"Suppose we have a look at the cage, Miss Dane?" suggested Noel, his interest keenly aroused.

He made to enter the shop, only to turn again, as there came the distant sound of a car approaching along the winding, cobbled street.

"That—that's the car from the hotel!" gasped the girl. "They're coming to make inquiries—"

"Better get the bird back into his cage before they spot him, Nita," advised Jeff Hudson.

The girl nodded, and Noel and June followed her into the shop.

They were greeted by an excited yapping of puppies, the mewing of kittens and a general twittering and squawking from the feathered occupants of several cages.

On a table at the rear of the shop was an empty cage, its door wide open. While June quickly assisted the girl to bathe the magpie's injured wing, Noel examined the cage door.

It had a strong metal catch that could not possibly have come open accidentally; and it seemed equally improbable that the magpie could have opened it with its beak, however intelligent the bird might be.

And yet Blackie had escaped—and someone had shot at him!

Noel's eyes narrowed as he examined the latch more closely. There was a tiny scrap of gummy substance clinging to the metal-work, but it flaked off on his finger as he touched it.

"Varnish!" decided Noel. He glanced quickly towards the attractive owner of the little shop, who was still anxiously tending her pet. "Miss Dane," he said, "have you been using any varnish lately?"

For a moment the girl looked puzzled, then she nodded.

"Why, yes," she exclaimed. "I thought that wall there looked a little dull, so I bought a jar and varnished it early this morning. But why—"

"Did you leave the shop at any time this morning?" he interrupted her.

"Yes, I did. But only for a few minutes while I put the kettle on to make a cup of tea."

"Could anyone have entered the premises without your hearing them?"

"Impossible!" declared Nita. "The door rings a bell in the kitchen, and the puppies always yap like anything at the sight of a customer. No one could have come in—"

"Then how did Blackie manage to fly out of the shop?" put in June, her grey eyes puzzled. "Quite apart from getting out of his cage."

"By the open skylight, I imagine," said Noel, with a quick glance towards the ceiling, then turned as a burly man wearing tweeds and carrying a shot-gun, strode into the shop.

"Mr. Chadwick!" gasped Nita, stepping protectively in front of the cage.

The newcomer scowled.

"I want a word with you, Miss Dane," he snapped, ignoring Noel and June. "That bird of yours was a bit too quick for me this time—but I'm standing for no more of his thieving tricks—"

"So—you shot at him!" exclaimed June indignantly.

The manager rounded on her with a frown.

"I had a perfect right to shoot, young lady," he rejoined grimly. "As you know, magpies are notoriously given to stealing, and that bird has been systematically robbing my guests of small, valuable pieces of jewellery. And as Miss Dane seems unwilling or incapable of keeping the creature in check, I'm taking matters into my own hands. The bird must be destroyed, or—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Chadwick," Noel interposed dryly, producing his card, "perhaps I can help. Miss Gaynor and I have booked to stay at the Chine Hotel—so we are naturally interested."

The manager's truculent attitude changed immediately as he glanced at Noel's card.

"Mr. Raymond—the detective!" he exclaimed. "Why, this is a fortunate coincidence. I must apologise, Miss Gaynor, for speaking a trifle abruptly—but you will understand that this business is very upsetting to my guests, and to the reputation of the hotel—"

"Do I understand that there has been another theft—this afternoon?" asked Noel keenly.

"Barely twenty minutes ago," nodded the manager. "A valuable brooch was stolen from the mantelpiece in one of the guest-rooms. The owner left it there while she went to her room to change. Two members of my staff actually saw the thieving bird flying away from the

open window; they gave the alarm, and I hurried out on to the terrace in time to see the magpie fluttering over the trees."

"Mr. Chadwick," Noel said, "my niece picked up the bird, slightly injured by your shot. There was nothing in its beak or claws—"

"Then it must have dropped the brooch—or hidden it," retorted the manager. "I tell you, the bird was practically caught in the act. The owner of the brooch has threatened to sue the hotel, and I hold Miss Dane directly responsible."

Noel looked thoughtfully at the magpie for a few moments.

"With your permission, Mr. Chadwick, I should like to investigate these thefts—from the hotel end," he said at last. "Meanwhile, I suggest that Miss Dane takes special precautions here."

Unsteadily the girl explained that when they had arrived she had been about to lock up the shop, as she had some deliveries to make. On Noel's advice, she closed the skylight, and the young detective himself saw to the fastening of the magpie's cage. They left the shop together, locking the door securely.

The manager escorted Noel and June to his car, insisting on driving them to the hotel.

At Noel's suggestion he led the way at once to the guest-room from which the brooch had been stolen. It was a spacious room on the third floor, and a glance from the window convinced the young detective that no ordinary thief could possibly have scaled the wall.

June saw her uncle bend swiftly as though to adjust the heavy velvet curtains; there was a glint in his eyes when he straightened himself.

"I should like to check the stories of the room-maid and the porter who actually caught sight of the bird," he said.

The manager hurried away, and Noel lit a cigarette, glancing thoughtfully at his young partner.

"Well, June, what do you make of it?" he asked.

"I'm certain that Blackie's innocent!" declared June warmly. "Even if he did escape from his cage, it doesn't prove that he came here—or stole the brooch. It was probably some tramp or gipsy—"

"Unfortunately," murmured Noel, "gipsies don't have wings!"

As he spoke he opened his hand—and June gasped.

There in his palm lay the object he had picked up from behind the curtain.

It was a glossy black feather that might have fallen from a magpie's wing!

### INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE



"N u n k y," June faltered, "that means that Blackie did come here, after all! You think he was the thief?"

"I didn't say so, June. There's a bigger mystery here than I imagined at first—and I'm wondering exactly what connection there can be between these thefts and the magpie's recent inexplicable escapes from the shop.

"Our first job, however, is to discover how this flying thief operates—and here come our witnesses, I believe."

The door opened as he spoke, and Noel swiftly concealed the incriminating feather as the manager entered, accompanied by a fair-haired, perky room-maid and a rather sullen porter.

Bella, the maid, gave her evidence first. She had come into the room with some fresh flowers, when she heard a fluttering sound and saw something streak out of the open window. Her cry had brought the porter running—and he, too, had been just in time to see a black-and-white bird heading for the tree's.

"And you noticed that the brooch was missing from the mantlepiece?" asked Noel keenly.

"Oh, yes, sir—I spotted it at once," replied the girl, "and informed the manager. He hurried to fetch his gun and ran out on to the terrace."

Both Giles, the porter, and the manager himself confirmed her story in detail.

"I see," murmured Noel at last, and turned towards June. "This flying thief is certainly a menace. June dear, you had better take great care of that valuable ring Aunt Agatha gave you. You're in the habit of leaving your things lying about—and it's simply inviting trouble!"

June gulped, concealing her bewilderment. She had never owned a valuable ring in her life—and she certainly did not possess an Aunt Agatha!

"Er—yes, I'll remember, nunky!" she murmured.

A few minutes later they descended to the restaurant for tea.

"Nunky, what on earth are you getting at—about that ring?" gasped June, when they were out of earshot. Noel's eyes twinkled.

"I'm afraid I rather sprung it on you, June," he said. "As a matter of fact, the idea only just came to me. You'll notice I raised my voice for the benefit of anyone who might be listening—outside, for instance."

A glimmer of enlightenment dawned in June's eyes.

"A trap!" she whispered excitedly. "Then—you don't really think that Blackie was guilty?" she added glady. "But—where is this supposed ring?"

"I'm just going out to buy it!" replied Noel. "I noticed a bazaar of sorts as we turned in through the hotel gates."

While June selected a table in the restaurant, close to the doors that opened on to the pleasant terrace, Noel went for a stroll.

When he returned he showed June his purchase—a very ornate ring with a large imitation diamond.

"A pretty good copy, as it happens," he murmured. "Well worth half-a-crown!" Then, raising his voice, he added: "If you're quite certain you left the ring in your jewel-box, my dear, we may as well go out. I'll fetch my hat."

June looked at him expectantly as he rejoined her.

"All set, nunky," she breathed, following him out on to the terrace, lit now by the last rays of the setting sun.

Noel nodded, drawing her into the shadow of an overhanging tree.

"We can see the window of your room from here," he murmured, "and if anything goes in—or comes out. I left it open purposely."

June's pulses quickened with mingled excitement and suspense.

"Blackie's shut up safely in his cage in the shop," she said. "So if anyone—or anything—makes an attempt this time, nunky—"

"It's not likely to be Nita's magpie!" agreed Noel softly. "But keep an eye on the window, June. The light's fading quickly, and nothing may come of my little experiment—"

"Nunky—look!" June broke in suddenly.

Noel stared up as, with a whirr of wings, a dark, feathered shape shot out of June's open window, speeding towards the trees. At the same instant there came an excited clamour from within the hotel.

His face flushed and angry, the manager raced out on to the terrace.

"Mr. Raymond," he panted, "that dashed bird—did you see it? It flew past Bella on the landing, and disappeared out of the window. Two guests have reported the loss of valuable trinkets—"

"June," rapped Noel, "slip upstairs quickly and see if your ring is safe." June sped on her errand. She returned breathlessly.

"Nunky—it's gone!" she gasped. "Miss Dane's magpie has been up to its thieving tricks again!" barked the angry manager.

"Miss Dane's magpie could not possibly have escaped!" retorted Noel. "Leave this to me, Hardwick—and I'll

guarantee to catch the thief. Come on, June!"

Together they hurried out of the hotel.

"Nunky," panted June, as they made their way quickly down the cobbled street, "that thing we saw was a bird—a black-and-white bird—and it looked just like a magpie! Do you—do you think that Blackie could possibly have escaped—again?"

"We'll soon know, my dear," rejoined Noel tersely. "Ah—here is Miss Dane!"

They overtook Nita, a basket on her arm, hurrying towards her little shop. They caught her up.

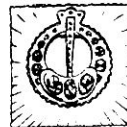
"Miss Dane," began Noel grimly, "a ring has been stolen, among other things from the hotel. You haven't been near your shop since we left you?"

"No—I was just on my way back," she told him. "Everything looks all right." She fumbled for her key, unlocking the door. They were greeted by a loud, excited squawk as they entered the darkened shop. "Blackie—thank goodness he's still here!" she exclaimed, with a tremulous laugh of relief.

Then the laughter was frozen on her lips—and June gave a horrified gasp as she pointed.

For Blackie, the magpie, his feathers ruffled, was perched on the roof of his open cage, squawking excitedly. And gleaming brightly on the floor of the cage was a ring—the imitation diamond ring that had been stolen from June's room at the hotel!

### THE FEATHERED IMPOSTOR



"Blackie! What—what have you done?"

With a little broken cry of dismay, Nita stared from her ruffled pet to the tell-tale ring gleaming in the cage.

Noel strode forward without a word, snatching up the ring and examining it closely. His face grim, he slipped it into his pocket, and bent to scrutinise the cage door, while June stared incredulously at the ruffled bird.

Blackie—Nita's pet—was the flying thief! But how had he escaped from his cage—and from the locked shop? By what uncanny means had he contrived to carry out his daring raid, in spite of the precautions taken?

Noel turned at last to the fearful girl owner of the pet store. He placed a reassuring hand upon her shoulder.

"Miss Dane, I am not going to mention this to anyone. That ring belongs to my niece, so the matter will go no further. But I want you to promise me that you will not let that magpie out of your sight during the day—and to keep all the doors and windows shut after dusk."

"Of course—of course I promise!" exclaimed the girl gratefully. "I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Raymond. I promise that Blackie won't escape again!"

After making a further examination of the shop, Noel and June departed.

As they strolled back to the hotel in the autumn dusk, June stole a glance at her uncle's stern face.

"Nunky," she challenged, "I still don't think that Blackie is guilty. There must be another explanation—in spite of that ring!"

"There is, June," Noel replied grimly. "That ring proves the bird's innocence!"

"How?" gasped June incredulously. Noel took the ring from his pocket, handing it to her.

"Notice anything?" he asked. "Why, there's a piece of thread tied to it!" said June in surprise.

"I tied it there myself," nodded Noel. "The other end was fastened securely to your jewel-box which I emptied of its other contents. No bird could have snapped that thread, June. The ring was snatched by a human hand—the same hand responsible for those other thefts."

"But how did it come to be in Blackie's cage?" June gasped. "And

(Please turn to the back page.)



# The FOURTH GREY GHOST

By DOROTHY PAGE

## TOO CLEVER FOR PENELOPE

**P**ENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, joined a secret society known as the Grey Ghosts, the members of which were Hugh Mason, and his two chums, Harvey Doane and Bob Gower of the Fourth.

The society was out to fight 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.

To do this they had to find a secret room in the old school belfry. But after leaving a meeting of the Grey Ghosts, Penelope was dismayed to hear her father and Mr. Aspell talking by the belfry and saying that it must be put out of bounds to the school.

"OH zimmy!" exclaimed Penelope. "Why has daddy decided to shut up the belfry?"

Impulsively she hurried through the dust to the old tower, and as she saw the two figures standing in the doorway she called out.

"Daddy, so here you are!" she cried brightly.

Both masters turned, peering in the poor light.

"Miss Cartwright!" Mr. Aspell started, then added softly: "Now, I wonder, Head, what brings your daughter to the old belfry?"

Penelope tensed a little. She detected a ring of suspicion and—was it mockery?—in his purring voice.

Her father watched her come up, with a slight frown.

"Penelope, what are you doing here? It is getting late—"

"Yes, indeed, daddy," she murmured meekly, "but I heard your voice and I thought you sounded rather anxious about something."

"I am anxious," he responded gravely. "Perhaps it is as well you are here, so that I can warn you before posting an official notice."

"Warn me, daddy?" Penelope asked.

"Yes, my dear. Mr. Aspell has brought to my notice a most disturbing fact." He waved his hand towards the old stone tower. "He has discovered that the belfry is unsafe—in a very dangerous condition—"

"Unsafe! But—but—"

"Aspell, in making his round, heard a rumbling noise. He hastened to investigate, and found there had been a fall—as you see, my dear."

As he spoke he touched with his foot two heavy blocks of granite lying just outside the arched doorway of the belfry.

Penelope dropped her gaze; she started violently. Like a cold gush of water the truth burst upon her.

Oh, the cunning of the Wasp! For these were the two blocks she had earlier seen him deliberately levering down from inside the doorway. So this was the explanation of that amazing action—to give the false impression that the tower was unsafe!

And, she caught her breath, there

could be one reason for his so doing—because, somehow, he knew that the Grey Ghosts had designs on the tower! Because, for some strange purpose of his own, he had determined to smash their efforts by having the belfry locked up and put out of bounds!

"It was fortunate I happened to be in the vicinity, don't you think, Miss Cartwright?" Mr. Aspell's suave voice came as from a distance. "It would have been disastrous if anyone had been near the tower."

"Indeed," The Head nodded gravely. "You must keep well away from this area, Penelope. It is dangerous."

She was speechless. She stared at Mr. Aspell. She sensed cold triumph in his smile; knew he had suspicions of her. Sudden anger at his two-faced cunning shook her usual control; a fierce, burning desire to rattle him and defeat his purpose swept through her.

"Goodness, daddy," she burst out, "surely Mr. Aspell has made a mistake? Those stones don't look as if they fell naturally at all—"

"Penelope!" Her father was thunderstruck, as much by her outburst as her actual words. "What are you talking about?"

"An amazing statement indeed," murmured Mr. Aspell.

"They look to me," continued Penelope with dangerous recklessness, "as if they'd been levered out of position from inside the doorway. Daddy, I'm sure that if you examine—"

"Excuse me, Miss Cartwright," broke in Mr. Aspell quickly, "but how do you know those stones did fall from inside the archway? You cannot possibly see that from out here!"

Penelope could have kicked herself. She realised that she had endangered herself in her desperate effort to defeat this blow at the Grey Ghosts.

"Why—why—?" She rallied. "Why, it's obvious they must have rolled out from the doorway. And, daddy, if you look—"

Her father's sharply upraised hand checked her like a knife. In amazement and stern disapproval he regarded her.

"Penelope, be silent this instant! Really, your manner is quite extraordinary and discourteous, to say the least. What possible authority have you for daring to state in the face of Mr. Aspell's evidence that the belfry is in a safe condition? What can you know of the matter?"

Penelope was silent. Even she hadn't the nerve to pursue further under her father's very obvious displeasure and surprise.

"Let us have no more of this nonsense," added the headmaster curtly. "You had better return to the house. I wish to make arrangements with Mr. Aspell for closing up the belfry and placing it out of bounds."

He turned back to the senior master. It was her dismissal.

"Y-yes, daddy." Penelope spoke meekly, for all she

seethed inside. Beaten—cunningly beaten by the Wasp! And worse, the senior master suspected the Grey Ghosts' purpose; was fighting against it!

She caught a crooked smile from him as he politely raised his mortarboard. To her that smile said as plainly as words: "I suspect you, my girl. Well, if my suspicions are correct, I've been far too clever for you!"

Back through the dusk to the Head's private house Penelope wandered, all her high hopes of the past hour shattered.



## A VISIT TO THE WASP'S STUDY

The hoot of an owl sounded in the dark shadows of the school grounds. Silence followed, broken by the slight whisper of the wind in the tall elms. And then from the bottom of the headmaster's garden came an answering, softer, bird call.

Two dim figures moved forward and met.

"Hallo, Hugh!"

"Hallo, Penny! Have any difficulty getting out?"

"Not a bit. Daddy's working in his study. I just, dropped from my bedroom window."

"You dropped from—?" Hugh peered down at her; a wondering grin split his rather serious features.

"Gosh, what a girl you are! But, Penny, have you my robe? I haven't much time. The raid on the belfry—"

Her hand on his sleeve checked him. Her smile had gone.

"Hugh, here's your robe, but—but there's awful news!"

And then, in a swift, urgent whisper, she told him of the dismaying events in the belfry with her father and Mr. Aspell. Hugh heard her through without a word, but she felt the muscles of his forearm tense as he fiercely clenched his hands.

"So you see, Hugh?" Penelope finished, peering up anxiously into his lean face. "The Wasp knows something—goodness knows how—and he means to stop the Grey Ghosts getting into the belfry."

For a few seconds the boy did not answer. He was plainly badly shocked and worried.

"Oh jiminy!" he muttered at last. "Penny, this is bad. Top marks to you for getting the gen, but—"

He stopped, biting his lip, running a hand through his dark hair. "Penny, we've got to get into that belfry! For Glynn's sake. And, don't you see? This means for certain that the Wasp is mixed up in this somehow. We've got to beat him, too!"

Penelope nodded. "But, Hugh, how? What can we do?"

A leader herself, she nevertheless looked to Hugh in this anxious moment. He was silent again for a while.

"There's one chance, Penny," he said slowly. "I—I hate to ask you to do it—especially as the Wasp suspects you—but it shouldn't be risky—"

"What is it, Hugh?" she asked eagerly. "And blow the risk! I'm one of the Grey Ghosts, aren't I?"

His smile came back momentarily, warm and admiring.

"It's this," he said. "Try to find out, without raising suspicion from your father, who is going to hold the keys of the belfry. If you can discover that, then—a determined ring entered his level tones—"then somehow the Grey Ghosts will get their hands on those keys and so enter the belfry. Do you think you could find out, Penny?"

She thrilled and nodded energetically.

"The very plan, Hugh! Of course I will leave it to me—"

"If you succeed," he cut in quickly, "contact one of us. No dangerous acting on your own, Penny. Promise now?"

Her eyes sparkled. He was thinking of her again.

"Promise, Hugh. Nothing that I consider dangerous."

And on that they parted, he to dodge back into Junior House, she to slip into the Head's house unobserved. She went with spirits that were suddenly soaring again. Trust Hugh to see a way! The keys—of course! They would beat the Wasp even yet, and then the terrific thrill of finding the secret of the belfry!

But finding who held the keys of the barred and padlocked belfry was not to prove so easy—as Penelope discovered at breakfast next morning. She casually mentioned the belfry to her father, meaning to lead up to a question that would elicit who held the keys. But her father, perhaps remembering her strange—to him—behaviour of the previous night, gave a rather curt reply which was clearly meant to dismiss the subject, and Penelope dared not press the matter without arousing his suspicion.

When lesson bell rang he went off to Senior House. Penelope roamed in the grounds with her knitting, thinking hard. Who held those keys? Perhaps her father? More probably the Wasp? Perhaps Jinney, the porter?

She sought out Jinney—or tried to. He was not to be found. Penelope began to feel she was up against a brick wall.

And then came hope. This was when, just before break, she met her father coming from Senior House, a pile of papers and a book under his arm.

"Ah, Penelope, my dear! I have a lot of papers to correct; would you take back Mr. Aspell's book to him, with my thanks? He should be out from lessons shortly."

Penelope's heart gave a leap. Instantly she saw the chance of investigating the senior master's study in search of the belfry keys.

"Of course I will, daddy," she murmured, hiding her eagerness.

He passed over the book, giving it a little pat.

"A wonderful work indeed, my dear," he said warmly. "Aspell's research work must have been monumental and it is told so brilliantly. I am not surprised it won the Dorcliffe Prize. Indeed," he added, with a faint smile, "it so impressed the governors that Aspell will probably come into a headmastership one day. You should read the book, my dear."

"Yes, daddy," murmured Penelope, who really couldn't have cared less about the senior master's "History of Harcourt Abbey" and was very anxious to get to the Wasp's study while it was still empty.

She left him, walking sedately, book under arm. But once he was out of sight she fairly sprinted. The quadrangle was empty; break bell had not yet rung, so there was no one to see her.

Quite breathless, she entered Junior House and sped up the staircases, only slowing in the masters' corridor. Hoping against hope, she tapped gently at Mr. Aspell's door.

"Come in!"

Her heart sank at that snapped, irritable reply. The Wasp was there! She patted her disordered hair, opened the door, and walked primly in.

The senior master was seated behind a paper-littered desk, pen in hand. He glanced up impatiently, and instantly his eyes narrowed.

"Ah," he purred, "my dear Miss Cartwright! You almost look surprised to find me here. May I ask," he added, intently watching her face, "what you want here?"

"Of course you may, Mr. Aspell," said Penelope imperturbably. "Daddy asked me to return your book, with his thanks."

"Oh!" He glanced at the book; the suspicion faded from his hawk-like features. "I see. Put it down, please, Miss Cartwright."

She stepped primly forward and placed the book on his desk. As she did so she glanced down, and saw two large, shiny new keys in a half-open drawer. There was a label attached to them, but before she could see what was written on it the drawer was swiftly closed.

She looked up, to find the master's glittering eyes watching her.

"I am very busy, Miss Cartwright," he said pointedly, "otherwise I would be delighted to have a talk with you—about, say, those scoundrelly Grey Ghosts, in whose adventures you have so unfortunately been dragged on several occasions. Or about," he added very softly, "your strange conviction that the old belfry is safe!"

Penelope did not bat an eyelid. She just smiled demurely.

"My conviction about the belfry may appear strange," she said quietly, "and as you say you're busy—"

Mr. Aspell frowned impatiently. "I certainly am busy," he declared. "Unfortunately, Miss Cartwright, I have had to take over the duties of fire master this week, and the orders for the first practice are taking some time, so much so that I shall be in this study for the rest of the day."

A great thrill of certainty rushed through Penelope then. Those keys in the drawer were the vital keys; that last remark of the senior master's had been something in the nature of a mocking warning.

Not by one iota did she allow her expression to add to his suspicions of her. Indeed she shook her head sorrowfully.

"I'm sure you work too hard, dear Mr. Aspell," she murmured. "I wouldn't dream of interrupting you a minute longer. Good-morning!"

And with a bright smile, and an inward joyous thrill at the sudden, almost venomous gleam that entered his eyes, she left the study.

In the corridor she gently closed the door and stepped out briskly. But round the corner she stopped, her face transformed, her heart increasing its beat alarmingly.

"They're there—the keys!" she breathed. "Oh zimmy! If only—if only—!" She paused, her brain whirling with reckless thoughts. "But he's going to be there all day, thanks to this wretched fire master business—"

She stopped short. Her hand flew to her mouth. An idea, so incredibly audacious as to make her feel weak, had leapt unbidden to her mind.

"Penny, that's crazy! No, it's not—it's wonderful! It would work—or would it?" Starry-eyed, she argued and counter-argued with herself. "Supposing you were caught? But why should you be? And no one could suspect you. Oh, Penny, don't stop to think! Do it—do it!"

She whirled, just as the break bell started to ring. Down to the floor below she scuttled. She heard boys streaming from their class-rooms. And then, at the end of the corridor, she saw the Junior House fire point, where hung two brass bells, the smaller one marked "Practice Bell."

Penelope stopped, heart behaving most erratically. She closed her eyes, opened them again, and rushed forward. Seizing the leather thong on the tongue of the practice bell, she sent brazen, high-toned echoes ringing through the house!



## THE VITAL KEYS

"Practice bell!"  
"Get moving. Out into the quad!"  
Shouts and counter-shouts rang through the Junior House. The

boys, who always treated fire practice as rather a spree, went whooping down the staircases.

Up in the master's corridor a door banged open. Mr. Aspell raged into the corridor, staring glittering-eyed up and down.

"Who rang the bell?" he gritted. "Some rascal—!" Dark-faced, gown rustling behind him, he sped for the floor below. "If I catch—"

At the foot of the staircase was an alcove, half-curtained. He passed it in a rush and his footsteps receded. The curtain quivered, and Penelope's rather pale but excited face peered after him.

"Now!" she gasped. "Like a streak, Penny—the keys—the keys—"

Still rather amazed at her own daring, she fled silently up the staircase. The uproar below was considerable. She hardly heard it. In twenty seconds she was inside Mr. Aspell's study and the drawer of his desk was opened.

With trembling fingers she snatched at the keys. The label bore the single, recently pencilled word "Belfry."

"Got them—oh, got them! But get moving, you ass—quick!"

Thrilled and joyous she was, but not out of the wood yet. She shot into the corridor and sped down the back staircase, thus ensuring she would not run into the senior master.

One floor down she joined a stream of grinning juniors.

"Oh dear!" fluttered Penelope. "A fire, boys! Do hurry!"

They winked and nudged each other.

"Better run, Miss Cartwright," said one boy solemnly. "Must be a jolly big fire to cause all that ringing! Make way for the Head's daughter, chaps!"

They grinningly made way, amused to see the headmaster's daughter scurrying down in a way so unlike her prim and proper self. Penelope, hiding her inward glee, made the most of the chance and ran even faster.

On the floor below another stream of boys swelled the exit from the building, and she found herself not a yard away from Hugh Mason. He saw her; his eyes flickered in surprise.

"Gracious, isn't this awful, Hugh Mason?" Penelope fluttered, and adroitly forced her way to his side, purposely falling against him.

"Hugh," she hissed into his ear, "I got the keys—from the Wasp's study. I'm slipping them into your pocket. Please contact me later about plans."

She heard his tiny exclamation; caught a gleam of wondering admiration in his eyes before she allowed herself to be carried on in the throng of schoolboys.

At last, really breathless, but gloriously triumphant, she was out in the open, and while the boys hurried to form up under masters and prefects on the fringe of Little Side, she turned towards the Head's house.

She reached it to see her father standing at the drawing-room window, staring, with a slight frown, towards Junior House! He beckoned her.

"Penelope," he asked as she joined him inside, "was that a fire practice I heard?"

"Yes, indeed," murmured Penelope. "Most exciting, daddy. The bell must have gone just after I left Mr. Aspell."

"H'm! Aspell's taken over duties of fire master this week, but I arranged with him to have a practice this afternoon. It's not like him to alter plans without consulting me."

Penelope looked at the ceiling with an angelic little smile.

"Mr. Aspell's so keen, daddy," she murmured. "Perhaps he'll have another practice this afternoon as well."

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# The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

## THE SEARCH FOR THE LETTER

COME on, Sally!" "Up with her into the triumphal chair!" "This way for the election parade! Sally for captain!"

A laughing, excited crowd of students surrounded Sally Warner as she stood by the rail of the Ocean Star, otherwise known as the floating college, en route for Australia.

But Sally, usually so gay and ready to enter into any fun, was looking rather pale and very unhappy. Beside her, Don Weston, her special boy chum, gazed out to sea with a gloomy expression on his face. While Johnny Briggs, another member of the little group, sat slumped in a deckchair.

"Just look at them!" cried Linda Powell, the American girl student. "Say, snap out of it, you three! You look as if you've lost your best friend! Oh, gee!" Linda clapped a contrite hand over her mouth, her pleasant face reddening as she saw Sally wince. "I'm sorry, Sally!" she murmured. "Guess, I'm just a clumsy idiot!"

"That's all right, Linda," Sally forced a smile to her lips. "It—it's just that I—I don't feel like triumphal chairs and so on."

"Then you've jolly well got to feel like it!" said Tubby Winwood vehemently. "We know you're feeling upset about Fay, Sally, and we're jolly sorry about the whole thing. But we want you for captain of the Merry-makers' Club, and you've just got to win that election this afternoon—" "Or Carmenita will push you out!" put in Slick Kaplin.

"They're right, Sallykins," said Don seriously. "Try to forget about Fay for a bit, eh?"

Try to forget Fay! Sally bit her lip. Fay, her dearest chum, the fourth member of the little group—or she had been until recently. What had brought about the change in her? What had made her suddenly desert her old friends with whom she had always been so happy and go over to Alec Burt, Carmenita Pascall, and their cronies?

Sally could find no answer. She only knew that Fay, instead of helping her in her election fight, was now parading round waving Carmenita's banner aloft. That had been the final straw for Sally, had hurt her so deeply, so bitterly, that she had cut Fay dead when she had seen her a short while ago. And ever since she had done that Sally had bitterly regretted the action. She should have been more patient with Fay, she told herself remorsefully: should have tried harder to find out what was the underlying cause for this change of heart.

But she mustn't brood on it now. She owed something to these other good friends of hers, too. They

wanted her to win the election—and she wanted to win it, too, so very much. She had been captain of the Merry-makers' Club since its inauguration, and that meant a great deal to her.

So somehow she forced a semblance of gaiety into her pretty face, seated herself in the gilt-painted, gaily decorated chair which was mounted on four poles, and was hoisted aloft on the shoulders of Don, Johnny, Tubby, and Slick.

Behind her Linda Powell piped untunefully on a tin whistle, while Sylvia Cresswell and Bob Halliwell held aloft a large banner:

"SALLY FOR CAPTAIN."

Despite herself, Sally found a chuckle coming from her lips, and her heart lightened as she heard the resounding cheers with which the procession was greeted.

"Speech!" roared Bob Halliwell. His demand was greeted with loud cheers. Sally waved her hands for silence.

"In a few minutes," she replied. "I've got some notes in my cabin for several improvements I've thought of for the club. Back in a jiffy."

She jumped from the chair and darted off towards the companion-way which led to the students' cabins. And there she suddenly drew up, sharply, a flood of colour rushing to her cheeks. For approaching the companion-way from another corridor was a pretty, but wan-looking, fair-haired girl.

"Fay!" Sally choked, a sudden feeling of tenderness rushing over her. "Oh, Fay!"

Fay heard the whisper. She stopped short, a look of incredulous happiness flooding her eyes. Now was her chance to speak to Sally, to explain

"Hallo, Fay!" said a reedy voice behind her. "Have you got those notices yet?"

Fay whirled round. There stood Alec Burt, the weedy, sneaking student, one of Carmenita's cronies. There was an unpleasant sneer on his face as he looked sharply from Fay to Sally. And Fay, seeing that sneer, seeing the suspicion in his crafty eyes, clenched her hands convulsively.

"I'm just getting them, Alec," she said meekly. "I'll bring them up to you."

Burt gave a little snigger as Fay marched forward, brushed past Sally as though she didn't exist, and hurried down the companion-way. Sally, shrinking, white-faced, from that deliberate cut, could not guess just what it cost Fay to treat her this way.

Fay, rushing blindly down the stairs, pressed a hand to her trembling lips to choke back her sobs. Oh, why had Burt arrived on the

scene just then? Another moment and she would have been able to explain to Sally about the letter—that awful letter which Burt had typed on a sheet of paper bearing Sally's signature, a letter speaking in most disparaging terms of Senor Gonzalez, the school governor who was at present in the ship's hospital.

Burt had been clever, no doubt about that. He wanted Carmenita to win the election, and if she couldn't win by fair means, then he'd see she won by foul. Once Senor Gonzalez had that incriminating paper in his hands, there would be no use pleading with him, trying to explain. He was the type who would not listen to arguments. The letter was signed by Sally, therefore Sally must have written it, he would assume.

As a result, Sally would undoubtedly be thrown out of the election, out of the Merry-makers' Club. Perhaps it would even affect her school career.

But Fay, utterly appalled when she had overheard this plot, had determined that it should not succeed. She must find out where the letter was hidden, get it back. And if, in doing so, she had to appear friendly with Burt & Co., whilst ignoring her own friends—well, she was prepared to do more than that for Sally, the best and truest friend a girl could have.

Just the same, it hurt unbearably to have her chums think even for a moment that she could turn against them so completely, especially at election time, when normally she would be going all out to help Sally.

"Oh, Sally," she breathed to herself. "If only you could know. Yet, if you were in my position you'd do the same—and it's almost over now, anyway. We'll soon be friends again."

Resolutely Fay swallowed hard; and though her lips still quivered, her eyes grew bright with hope and determination. Her act had succeeded. She had fooled Burt & Co. completely—so completely that they had spoken unguardedly in her presence about the whereabouts of the letter.

"And in just a few moments I'll have it!" she said, with a fierceness unusual to her gentle nature. "Then I'll be able to explain to Sally, Johnny, and the others. Everything will be all right then."

She hurried to Burt's cabin. Once inside, she crossed to the bureau; with an eager hand pulled at the drawer.

As it came open she gasped with dismay. It was full of an untidy mass of papers. Feverishly she raked through them, heedlessly spilling the discarded papers on the floor. Where was the letter? It must be here. She had heard Burt say so—

Crash! With a wild cry, Fay flung round as the door swung back. Carmenita and Alec Burt stood there. They stared, stared, then glanced meaningfully at each other.

"So that's it!" exclaimed Alec Burt. "So Fay's playing a clever little game, eh? Just too bad," he added, sneering, "that you were caught out!"



### FAY IS TRAPPED

At those sneering words a surge of anger took possession of Fay. She glared at Burt and Carmenita.

"Where is that letter?" she cried passionately. "Where is it?" "My, my! Quite the firebrand!" taunted Carmenita. "So that's what she's been after all along! Trying to save Sally! Show her the letter, Alec. She wants to see it."

With his crafty eyes glinting with malice, Burt thrust a hand into the top pocket of his shirt, withdrew an envelope, and waved it tauntingly in Fay's face.

"There you are!" he said mockingly. "Take a good look at it—because," he added, his voice changing to threatening tones, "it's the last time you'll see it before I hand it over to Gonzalez. And when he does see it—"

"Give me that letter—give it to me!" Fay cried wildly. "You shan't do this to Sally—"

She leapt, whipping out her hand to snatch the letter. But Carmenita was quicker. She jerked forward her foot, and Fay tripped over it, sprawling to the floor. Before she could get up Carmenita and Burt were out of the cabin. The door slammed.

"We'll let you out—when Sally has got it in the neck!" called Carmenita spitefully.

Fay staggered up in time to hear the key turned in the lock. Then the precious pair's footsteps retreated along the corridor. She hurled herself at the door, shouting, banging. But it was no good.

Fay suddenly sank back on her heels, white and distraught. Heart-broken sobs racked her slender body.

She'd failed Sally, after all. All her scheming, her toadying to Carmenita & Co., had been to no purpose. She'd failed to get the letter.

Even now Burt was making his way to the ship's hospital; would be leaving the letter for Senor Gonzalez. At any time now the governor would be reading the letter, and then— Fay shuddered. Then, as Carmenita had slanged said, Sally would get it in the neck with a vengeance.

That thought acted like a douche of cold water on Fay.

"I'm not beaten yet!" she told herself fiercely. "I can't give up this easily. I must get out—I must!"

She stared at the locked door, then suddenly a light sprang into her eyes. She remembered the trick Sally herself had shown her on one occasion when some practical joker had locked them in their cabin.

She leapt over to Burt's bunk; grabbed up the ship's newspaper which had been flung on it. Very, very carefully she slipped it under the door; then, taking a clip from her hair, she inserted it into the keyhole and pushed gently.

Carmenita, she knew, had only given the key one turn, just sufficient to lock the door. There should be no difficulty about pushing it out. A satisfying little plop told her there was no difficulty, but had the key fallen on the paper? Would she be able to get it under the door if it had?

Carefully Fay pulled the sheet of paper. Slowly, slowly it came under the door. She gave a whoop of joy. The key—she had it!

With hands that trembled, she grabbed it, inserted it into the lock, flung open the door. Perhaps even now she could reach the hospital in time to prevent Senor Gonzalez from reading the letter.

She raced along the seemingly interminable corridors; climbed countless stairs until finally she reached the ship's hospital.

A quick glance through the glass-pannelled door into the glistening white ante-room showed that Burt and Carmenita were nowhere about. They must have left the letter by now. Perhaps the governor was already reading it!

Fay gave a sob, swayed a little. Then she stared incredulously. For on one of the white-enamelled tables was a wire basket. And that basket bore a neat label:

"Senor Gonzalez—Correspondence."

Fay could hardly suppress the cry that rose to her lips. In a flash she had whipped open the door, slipped inside. With a quick look round, she tiptoed over to the table, picked up the pile of letters and flicked through them.

Then she cried aloud in joy. For here was the letter—she recognised the envelope Burt had waved mockingly before her.

So, despite all his cunning, all his trickery, all her heartbreak, she had won through in the end! She had the letter—she had it! Oh, wonderful—wonderful!

With her heart singing, she put the others on the table. And then a brisk voice sent her whirling round with a cry of fright.

"Why are you interfering with Senor Gonzalez's correspondence?" asked the disapproving voice of a white-clad nurse. "Put that letter back in the basket at once!"



### JOHNNY VISITS ALEC BURT

Fay took a step backwards, clutching the letter to her. She couldn't give it up now—she wouldn't give it up, not when it

meant saving Sally. Her thoughts in a wild turmoil, she somehow managed to force a smile to her pale lips.

"I—I—" she stuttered, searching frantically for inspiration. "It—it's a letter to do with the election, you see. Two of—the other students delivered it a few minutes ago, and—and a mistake has been made. I—I must alter it before the governor sees it."

The nurse peered at the envelope, then, to Fay's heartfelt relief, gave a friendly nod.

"That's right. I remember them bringing it in. Something to do with your club elections, isn't it? O.K.! But don't be too long altering it. Senor Gonzalez will be coming out soon." And, with a pleasant smile, she passed again through the swing doors into the hospital.

Fay stood still, feeling weak with relief.

Then a wave of joy swept through her. She'd done it. Sally was saved! And she'd be able to go to Sally now, explain everything.

With a happy smile, she swung round, then stared incredulously. For there, just in the doorway, stood Sally herself. A strangely altered Sally, with a gentle, tremulous smile playing about her mouth, with a misty look in her blue eyes.

### A WORD FROM YOUR EDITOR

Dear Readers,

This week I have good news for you. In response to many requests, I have decided to re-introduce the double-length complete stories which were once so popular.

All your favourite authors are contributing to this grand new feature, and the first story, which will appear in next Friday's issue, has been written by Renee Frazer, the author of "Their School On Castaway Isle" and many other famous serials.

"Prisoner of the Boy Sheik"—that is the title of Miss Frazer's fine story, and I can promise you it will contain something new in the way of excitement. Look out for it next week.

Your Sincere Friend,

THE EDITOR.

"Sally!" choked Fay, her face suddenly working. "Oh, Sally!"

And, with an impulsive movement, she flung herself towards her friend. Sally's arms closed round her; held her tightly while Fay muttered incoherently into her shoulder.

"Oh, Sally—Sally, I'm so terribly sorry about everything!" blurted Fay. "I th-thought you'd never speak to me again! It's been awful!"

"It certainly has," agreed Sally in a wobbly voice. "I feel pretty terrible about the whole thing myself, Fay—"

"I didn't want to be so beastly—really, I didn't," said Fay, drawing back a little and gazing beseechingly into Sally's face. "And I really and truly loathe that horrible Burt & Co. You see, it—it was all over this letter for the governor—"

"Don't worry about it any more, Fay dear," said Sally gently. "We're friends again now—"

"But you don't—" began Fay. Her words ended in a little shriek of horror as the envelope was suddenly plucked from her fingers.

"Ah, this is the letter about the election, yes?"

Before Fay could move, Senor Gonzalez ripped open the envelope; began to withdraw the sheet of paper inside.

"No!" cried Fay hoarsely. "Oh, no! Please, Senor—"

"Shush-shush!" said Senor Gonzalez impatiently, frowning testily at Fay as he began to unfold the letter.

"But—but it isn't ready!" blurted Fay. "I mean, you mustn't— Oh, goodness!"

She relaxed, watching in horror. Too late now.

She should have destroyed the letter straight away. By omitting to do so she had failed her chum—her friend, Sally, who stood by now with a tender smile on her face, little realising the terrible blow that was to fall.

Fay's breath caught on a sob.

Slowly, without a change of expression, the governor read to the end of the page. Slowly he raised his eyes. And even as Fay took a step forward, in a last desperate attempt to shield Sally from the worst of the storm, he cast a beaming smile upon that girl.

"Thank you—thank you!" he said in a pleased voice. "As you say in England, I hope the best man wins. Now off you go—yes?"

"Yes," said Sally promptly, and, taking Fay's arm with a firm hand, she led her outside. "Brace up, old thing!" she said anxiously. "Everything's all right."

"But—but I just don't understand," muttered Fay bewilderedly. "Do you mean there never was a letter written by Burt—?"

"There certainly was!" Sally's voice was suddenly grim. "But I have it here in my pocket."

"You—you have it?" Fay stared at her dazedly. "Oh, Sally, I—I don't understand, but I'm so—so glad—"

The sudden release of the dreadful tension, the strain under which she had been living seemed to overcome her. She swayed a little. With a sharp exclamation of concern, Sally led her to a deckchair; tenderly helped her into it.

"Not another word," she said firmly, "until you've had a cup of hot coffee to buck you up. Sit still. I'll be back in a jiffy."

Sally was as good as her word. Under the stimulating influence of the coffee, the colour began to creep back to Fay's cheeks, the sparkle to her eyes.

"Now tell me how you knew about the letter—how you managed to get it," she said, looking at Sally fondly.

"Well, after you cut me on deck"—here Sally gave Fay's hand a tight squeeze to show that she understood now just why Fay had acted as she did—"I went down to the cabin. I was feeling pretty low, especially when I saw you go into Burt's cabin. Later, I heard upraised voices. I didn't take much notice for a

(Please turn to page 50.)





# The COWBOY Who Mystified Merle

## THE TRAITOR'S LAST BID

**M**ERLE WASON was anxious to win the Gold Rider Trophy race, which meant so much to the future of her home, Happy Valley Ranch.

Nathaniel Garsten, a rascally neighboring rancher, and his daughter Celia, were working against Merle, with the aid of an unknown traitor on Merle's ranch.

As a result of Garsten's scheming, Larry Denvers, a young cowboy who was helping Merle, was outlawed.

Riding Larry's horse, Merle won the Gold Rider race. But as the trophy was being presented to her, Celia Garsten appeared on the scene, demanding that Merle should be disqualified.

**T**HE trophy she had striven so hard to win was in danger of being taken away from her!

The startling development which had followed her success at Red Hill rodeo was so totally unexpected that Merle was robbed of her breath. For a moment she could only stand and stare, her eyes filled with consternation.

The cheers of the crowd had died away. It was as if Celia Garsten had exploded a bomb in the judge's enclosure. Dazed and shocked, everyone gaped, first at the white-faced Merle, then at the spitefully glaring Celia.

The chief judge was the first to recover. His face stern, he looked down at the rancher's daughter.

"It's a very grave accusation you're makin'," he commented. "I hope for your sake that you can justify it."

Celia tossed back her head and laughed shrilly.

"Of course I can justify it," she snapped. "Everyone knows that that horse Merle Wason rode doesn't belong to Larry Denvers. The sheriff himself warned her that it was stolen."

"It's not true!" gasped Merle. "Larry never stole anything in his life. Prince really does belong to him and I had a perfect right to ride him in the race."

"You hadn't!" Celia shouted. "I insist you hand back that trophy. It's not fair that you should keep it."

Desperately Merle's fingers tightened their hold on the Gold Rider as her rival made to snatch the trophy from her.

"You shan't have it!" she panted. "I won it fairly and I'm going to keep it. You shan't—"

She broke off as she saw the judge jumping down from his box, and involuntarily the two girls separated.

"Just a minute, please." It was to Celia he spoke. "I happen to be in charge here and it's for me to say, not you, whether Miss Wason is entitled to keep that trophy or not."

The watching crowd raised a murmur, and from the Happy Valley cowboys present came approving shouts.

"Hear, hear!"

"Tell her where she gets off, mister!"

"Missy Merle shuah won fairly!" added the indignant voice of Mammie, Merle's negro housekeeper.

The judge held up his hand for silence, then again turned to Celia.

"Let's get this quite clear," he said. "Your application that Merle Wason is disqualified is based on the fact that she is alleged to have ridden a stolen horse?"

Celia nodded.

"That's the only cause for complaint?"

"Yes—and it's enough, too! Without that stolen horse she could never have beaten me."

The judge stroked his chin with a reflective hand.

In an agony of suspense Merle waited for him to give his decision.

Surely he would not order her to hand back the precious trophy?

The mere possibility filled her with dread. The Gold Rider meant so much to her. Hidden in it, she was convinced was the other half of the map that would reveal old Sam Crogan's secret—that secret which was in some mysterious way bound up with the future prosperity of the ranch she and her uncle loved.

Anxiously she surveyed the judge, striving to read his thoughts from the expression on his face, but his features were impassive. He stroked his chin again, then he looked up.

"My decision is," he announced slowly, "that the objection won't hold water."

There came a delighted cheer from Mammie and the cowboys, while Merle's heart gave a wild leap for joy. As for Celia, her cheeks went scarlet with rage.

"But that's crazy!" she shouted. "She rode a stolen horse. I tell you, and that ought to disqualify her!"

The judge regarded her steadily.

"I've only your word for it that the horse was stolen," he said. "Anyway, there's nothin' in the rules to say a competitor can only ride their own horses. If Merle Wason has broken the law, then that's a matter for the sheriff—not for me."

"But—"

The judge raised his hand impatiently.

"It's useless to argue. You've heard my decision. If you're not satisfied, you must lodge a complaint with the rodeo committee."

And he turned away, leaving Celia standing there, red with baffled fury. There came another cheer from Mammie and the Happy Valley cowboys, then Slim Harris, the young foreman, stepped forward.

"Your uncle's waiting for you in the stand, Miss Merle," he said. "He wanted to come over to congratulate you, but his broken leg's still a bit stiff. If you like, I'll take charge of your trophy while you pop over and have a word with him."

Merle shook her head.

"Thanks, Slim, but I'll hang on to it myself," she said. "I've got something to do before I see uncle. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll be off. And thanks for all your good wishes."

She smiled happily around, gave the

beaming Mammie a hug, then pushed her way through the crowd.

Eager though she was to see Uncle Stephen, she felt she simply must first examine the Gold Rider. She would know no peace until she had discovered whether or not the other half of the precious map really was hidden in it.

The trophy clutched tightly, she made her way to the stables set apart for the use of the competitors. There she could examine the statuette without fear of interruption.

Slipping into one of the deserted huts, she seized the golden head of the cowboy and gave it a twist. To her delight the head turned. With quivering fingers she unscrewed it and peered into the cavity beneath. Her heart gave a wild leap.

"There's something there—a piece of paper!" she gasped. "Then—"

She broke off and spun round as she heard the door creak open behind her.

It was to see that someone had entered the hut, and at sight of him she recoiled in startled fear.

For it was a masked figure that stood there—a figure whose slim body was hidden beneath a long macintosh slicker.

Merle's face went deathly white. It was the one person she had forgotten in the excitement of her triumph.

The mystery traitor!



## THE UNMASKING

His eyes glinting mockingly through the slits in his mask, the traitor stepped forward, one hand tucked in his macintosh cape.

"So the second half of the map is hidden in the trophy," he commented, his voice husky and obviously disguised. "Waal, I'm afraid you'll never learn its secret."

Merle stood as if petrified.

"What do you want?" she gulped, though she knew only too well.

He laughed and pointed to the gold, glinting trophy.

"That!"

Merle gave a horrified cry.

"No, no! You shan't have it!" she gasped.

"Don't be a little fool! Give it me before you're hurt," he ordered. And suddenly a gun appeared in his right hand. "Come on, hand it over!"

Menaced as she was by that gun, Merle dared not disobey. Tears of despair in her eyes, she reluctantly held out the statuette. With an exultant laugh, the traitor snatched it with his free hand, then, still keeping her covered, he backed to the door.

"If you take my advice you'll stay here until I'm well clear," he said. "There's no one about—everybody's watchin' the buck-jumpin'—so it's no good you expectin' help."

As he spoke he kicked open the door and slipped out into the open.

Despite his warning, Merle instantly rushed forward, but by the time she reached the door the unknown man had mounted his horse and had already begun to gallop away.

"He'll take it to the Garstens!" she gulped hopelessly. "Oh—"

Her voice trailed away, and with wide, incredulous eyes she stared

For suddenly there had come the thunder of hoofs from away to the left, and into view rocketed a slim, boyish figure, mounted on a beautiful chestnut horse.

"It's Pommie!" she gasped, "And—and that's Larry riding him!"

Larry who, when she had last seen him, had been striving desperately to escape from the sheriff's pursuing posse!

But what was he doing here? What daredevil audacity had brought him, a hunted fugitive, to the rodeo?

Breathlessly she shouted, but the young cowboy did not seem to hear. His gaze was concentrated on that masked figure galloping for the gateway. Settled low in the saddle, he thundered across at right angles, obviously trying to cut off the traitor's way of escape.

Her heart in her mouth, Merle watched the battle of speed.

The fugitive was almost at the gate now. Larry was creeping up—up!

Merle gave a yell. Larry had suddenly kicked his feet free of the stirrups and hurled himself out of the saddle.

Through the air he plunged, and Merle gave another cry as she saw him crash against the traitor and knock him clean off his horse. With a thud both men hit the ground.

For a moment Merle dared not look. Then, as she opened her apprehensive eyes, she saw that the two figures were rolling over and over, struggling for the mastery.

Frantically she screamed for help and went running forward. For the traitor had managed to get to his feet—and whip out his gun.

"Larry, look out!" shrieked Merle.

But there was no need for the warning. Larry was alive to the danger, and even as the traitor made to fire he grabbed at his legs.

The gun went off, but the bullet whistled harmlessly up into the air, for that flying tackle had swept the traitor off his feet. With a bone-jarring thud he hit the hard ground, and as, dazedly, he strove to rise again, Larry's right fist cracked home on his chin.

There was a groan, then silence. The masked figure lay still.

"Larry! Oh, Larry!" gulped Merle again. "But for you he would have got away with the Gold Rider!"

Larry wiped his bruised hand and grinned coolly.

"Aw, it was nothin', honey!" he drawled. "Guess I just happened to be around, that's all."

Scornfully he looked down at the unconscious traitor, and wonderingly Merle's eyes followed his.

"But—what who is he?" she whispered.

He chuckled. "Curious, eh, honey? Waal, that's soon remedied."

And, bending, he plucked off the disguising mask.

Merle took one look, then she gasped, for the man who lay there was the very last person she had expected to see.

It was Slim Harris, the young foreman she had always so blindly trusted!



### THE SECRET AT LAST

"Slim! The traitor was Slim!"

There was an almost incredulous note in Merle's voice.

"Oh, I can hardly

believe—"

"It's true all right, honey," said Larry, his tone grim. "And playin' traitor at Happy Valley isn't the only trickery he has been up to. It was he who rustled those cattle up at Snake Canyon for which I was blamed. But never mind that coyote. Let's discuss something more pleasant."

He picked up the Gold Rider, which had fallen to the ground, and held it out.

"Open it up, honey," he urged. "Let's see exactly what it was old

Sam Crogan hid in there just before he died."

Her mind still in a turmoil, Merle made to grasp the trophy, but abruptly she paused, swinging round as she heard excited shouts coming from the near-by grandstands. It was to see a crowd of men running towards the stables. Evidently her screams and that revolver-shot had been heard, and leading the oncoming figures was a burly man.

At sight of him Merle's face paled.

"The sheriff!" she gulped, and looked in dismay across at Larry. "Quick, ride for it!" she cried. "You mustn't be captured! Hurry! Oh, hurry!"

But the young cowboy did not seem to share her apprehension. Calmly he stood there.

"Aw, I guess I've done enough ridin' for one day!" he drawled.

"But don't you realise you'll be arrested! Sent back to gaol!" Merle gasped. "Oh, please don't fool, Larry! This is no time for joking."

"But I'm not joking, honey. I'm serious. And stop worrying. Open up this trophy. I guess I'm tickled pink to learn its secret."

Merle did not know what to make of his amazing behaviour, but she made no attempt to take the Gold Rider. Deepening apprehension in her eyes, she watched the crowd come rushing nearer. There was a gun in the sheriff's hand, and as he saw the young cowboy standing there it moved swiftly.

Merle gasped. It seemed that it was all up with the young cowboy now. But, to her amazement, the sheriff made no attempt to level the gun. Instead, he thrust it back into his holster and grinned.

"So you got him," he said unexpectedly.

Calmly Larry nodded.

"Yep, you can take charge of the coyote now," he drawled. "I've finished with him. Guess he'll make a fittin' prison pal for Garsten."

"For—for Garsten?" Merle, hardly knowing whether she was on her head or her heels, gaped from the grinning Larry to the sheriff. "Do you mean that—that Celia's father has been arrested?"

The sheriff nodded.

"Yep; we took him away as soon as we learnt the truth."

"The—the truth?"

"Guess I'd better explain, honey," Larry said, his voice more gentle than she had ever known it before. "It's a shame to tease you. I was able to satisfy the sheriff of my innocence a good hour ago."

While Merle listened, first dazedly, then in increasing delight, he explained that some time ago he had discovered that Nathaniel Garsten had locked in his safe an incriminating letter which proved that Slim Harris, his secret hireling, had rustled the Snake Canyon cattle, but the problem had been how to get hold of that vital evidence.

His chance had come during the race when he had knocked Garsten down in order to give Merle an opportunity to ride on. Before fleeing, the young cowboy had taken the safe key from the rascally rancher's pocket and had ridden post-haste to the V-Bar-V.

He had managed to throw off the sheriff and his men, but just as he had opened the safe and secured the letter, which not only proved the treacherous foreman's guilt, but also showed that Garsten himself had secretly been engaged in cattle-rustling, the rancher had come rushing in.

In the fight that followed Celia's father had been knocked out, and when the sheriff had arrived on the scene it had not taken long to convince him of the truth.

"So you see, honey, there's nothin' to worry about," said Larry, with a grin. "Now, no more arguments, please. Get crackin' on solving old Crogan's secret."

On fire with relief and happiness, Merle at last consented to take the statuette from him, and with quiver-

ing fingers she unscrewed the tiny, golden head of the cowboy.

Everyone watched, most of them wonderingly. Then a gasp went up as she was seen to withdraw a folded scrap of paper. One look at it confirmed all Merle's hopes.

"It's the second half of the map!" she exclaimed.

Eagerly she smoothed it out, and with thrilled, expectant eyes she surveyed it. The map portrayed the eastern half of the Happy Valley Ranch. Dotted lines led from the jagged edge across to the rugged hills marked on the far corner, and drawn there in red ink was a curious kind of tower.

Frowning Merle surveyed it, then her gaze went to the single line of writing underneath, and instantly she knew the whole amazing truth.

"Oil!" she gasped.

"Oil, honey?" echoed Larry in surprise.

Excitedly she nodded.

"Yes; this tower is a derrick, and it marks the spot where there's oil. That's old Sam Crogan's secret. He discovered that there are rich oil deposits on uncle's land. My goodness, but no wonder the Garstens didn't want me to get hold of this map! No wonder they tried to get hold of the ranch!"

She caught in her breath and in speechless delight gazed around.

She realised what this meant to her—to the ranch.

No longer would they have to struggle for existence. The money the oil deposits would bring to them would enable them to restock—and extend—the land they now owned.

"Oh, oh, it's wonderful!" she gasped, her voice shaking. "And, for uncle this will be the best news ever—we're rich. And we can make

Happy Valley the biggest and best ranch for miles around."

"It sure is splendid," murmured Larry.

Before any of them could get over the first shock there came a shout, and a tall figure came hobbling on to the scene with the aid of a stick.

"Uncle!" Merle cried joyfully.

For a moment they clung to one another, then, of course, Merle had to explain all the amazing happenings of the day. Uncle Stephen listened in silence, then his own eyes gleamed as he studied the map.

"Oil!" he exclaimed. "Then that mean's we'll be wealthy, my dear!"

Happily Merle nodded.

"Yes, uncle, thanks—to Larry!"

THAT night there was the biggest, happiest celebration Happy Valley Ranch had ever known.

Mammie cooked a dinner that for months afterwards was the talk of the whole district.

And when everything was ready in the gaily decorated dining-room Merle rushed off in search of Larry.

She found him in the bunkhouse with Jake Binns, Ted Gardner, and the rest of the cowboys, and as she pushed open the door she was just in time to hear a delighted cheer go up.

With shining eyes she looked in.

"Are you all friends, then?" she cried.

It was Jake Binns who answered.

"Sure we are, Missy Merle. Reckon we've apologised for bein' such a pack o' fools and Larry's agreed to forgive an' forget, like the good 'un he is. We was just cheerin' the news o' his new appointment when you opened the door."

"New—new appointment?" echoed Merle.

His eyes twinkling, Larry looked across at her.

"Yep; my appointment as foreman. Seem' that you're in need of one, I've decided to take on the job. I hope it's O.K. by you, honey?"

But there was no need for Merle to answer. The look in her eyes was enough!

THE END.

You must regret leaving Merle and Larry, but next week's surprise should compensate you. It is a double-length complete story entitled: "PRISONER OF THE BOY SHEIK."

## THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 56.)

moment, then I heard my name mentioned. I listened—

"And you heard enough to tell you what was going on?" put in Fay.

"I certainly did," agreed Sally. "And, Fay, I just can't forgive myself for ever having doubted you. I was a fool. I should have known there was something like this behind your sudden change towards me."

"At least I've proved myself a good actress by fooling you so completely," murmured Fay. "But never mind about me, Sally. Go on."

"It peeped out into the corridor just as Burt and Carmenita hurried off. Sorry I couldn't wait to release you, old thing, but I knew I just had to do something about that letter straight away. So I followed that precious pair to the hospital. As soon as they left the letter and sloped off, I sneaked in and got it. Then I quickly wrote the proper letter to Senor Gonzalez, notifying him of the elections. The gum on the envelope was still wet, so it was easy to change the letters. And that was that."

"Then I nearly destroyed a perfectly innocent letter," said Fay, with a shaky laugh. "What a chump I am!"

"No, never that," said Sally in a voice filled with 'gratitude and admiration. "You're just the truest, best friend a girl ever had, Fay, and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you did—and suffered—for me."

"Thanks, Sallykins!" smiled Fay tenderly. "It's a nice feeling to know you'd do the same for me any time I needed it. But what about taking me along now to make my peace with Johnny and Don?"

"Of course!" agreed Sally. "And there's a little matter of an election to go through—remember?"

"That's something I'll never forget," said Fay feelingly.

Arm-in-arm, the two friends hurried along the deck, their faces wreathed in radiant smiles. Looking so happy, indeed, that Don and Johnny, on their way to look for Sally, stopped and stared in amazement.

It took only a few moments for Sally to tell them the whole story. And the looks of admiration, the words of praise they showered on Fay made that girl blush rosy red with pleasure.

"You're a little brick, Fay," said Don, "and I should have my fool head examined for ever having doubted you!"

"She's one of the best!" agreed Johnny fervently. "Gee, Fay," he added boyishly, "am I glad you don't really like that pill Burt better than you do me! You had me worried. Couldn't understand what you saw in him after you'd been around with me."

Which remark was so typically Johnny that the chums dissolved into peals of laughter.

"Just the same," he added grimly, "there's a little settling up due with a certain little cad—"

He said no more, but there was a light of battle in his eyes which boded ill for Alec Burt.

"But what are we going to tell the others?" asked Don.

"Nothing," said Fay quickly. "Just—just let them think it was all a stunt on my part to find out how Carmenita was getting on with her election campaign or something. Seeing we're all friends again, they can't disbelieve it. And—and I'd much rather there wasn't any fuss."

So it was agreed. The rest of the Merry-makers were a little puzzled at first, but the excitement of the election quickly drove all speculations on the strangeness of Fay's conduct out of their minds.

"I guess Sally ought to win by a huge number of votes," speculated Linda Powell, as the Merry-makers

fled into the large state-room where the voting was to be held.

"She ought to, no one else could make such a good skipper," Bob Halliwell said cheerfully.

"Hear, hear! Good old Sally!" cried Slick Kaplin. "She'll still be captain!"

Fay heard them and her heart glowed. She, too, believed that with all her heart.

No one was going to throw over such a splendid girl as Sally for the wildcat they all knew Carmenita to be.

A buzz of excitement went up as Professor Willard strode on to the platform, accompanied by Senor Gonzalez. Sally and Fay saw the sly grin that came into Carmenita's eyes, saw her turn to look for Alec Burt. But Burt, strangely enough, was nowhere around. Neither, Sally noticed with quick surprise, was Johnny. But of course he'd be along in a few moments.

Professor Willard raised his hand for silence. Carmenita's smile became even more malicious. This, she thought, was the moment of Sally's humiliation—the moment for her own triumph.

Sally and Fay, watching her, almost chuckled aloud at the ludicrous look of dismay and rage on her face as Professor Willard simply announced the names of the two candidates, and stated that voting would be by a show of hands.

"Senor Gonzalez agrees with me that that is by far the simpler method," he said beamingly. "And now—hands up for Carmenita Pascali. Get ready to count, Phineas," he added in an aside to the head prefect.

Up shot a number of hands. Edgar Phineas solemnly counted.

"Now—Sally Warner," announced the headmaster. A veritable forest of hands went up. And as Phineas counted, a cheer swelled out.

"Good old Sally! Sally wins! Sally for captain!"

"Cheers for Sally!" And then, before Carmenita's chagrined, utterly stupefied gaze, Senor Gonzalez descended from the platform, smilingly shaking Sally's hand.

"I say the best man win, yes?" he beamed. "It is good?"

"It's very good," put in the voice of Johnny Briggs as the governor left.

And Johnny, rubbing a pair of very sore-looking knuckles, joined the group around the beaming Sally and Fay. He smoothed down his very untidy hair, pulled his tie from around his left ear. "Yes, very good," he murmured again, his eyes straying to a quarrelling group on the other side of the room.

And Sally & Co. glancing over, understood. For there was Alec Burt, sporting two rapidly blackening eyes, frantically trying to stem the torrent of Carmenita's wrath.

"Burt's had his punishment, it seems," chuckled Don. "And I imagine Carmenita has, too, by losing this election. And—ahem! About the committee members, Fay. I suppose your recommendation doesn't still stand?"

"It does not," announced Fay firmly. And taking a pen she drew a thick black line through Alec Burt's name, substituting that of Bob Halliwell in its place.

"And that's that!" said Sally, beaming delightedly. "Now, shipmates, what about a celebration in the cafe—all of you, roll up!"

There was another outburst of cheering, a wild surge as the crowd swarmed towards the cafe, singing lustily. "For she's a jolly good fellow!"

"She is indeed," said Sally softly, "the best ever."

And the gratitude and admiration in her eyes as she looked towards Fay made that girl blush with sheer pleasure.

(End of this week's story.) Sally plays an important part in a romance aboard the Ocean Star in next week's story.

## THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 51.)

Her father nodded, still frowning, and turned back to the table, on which Nelly, the maid, had set the mid-morning coffee and biscuits. Hardly able to contain her excitement and joy, Penelope joined him.

Within three minutes there came an agitated step in the garden, followed swiftly by a tap on the door. Before the Head could answer it opened, and Mr. Aspell almost burst in.

His thin features were working with anger. "Really, Aspell——" protested the Head sharply.

Penelope, half expecting the visit, felt a slight quickening of the pulses, but stared with the utmost innocence into the glittering, suspicious eyes that fastened on her immediately.

"Forgive me, Head," gritted the senior master. "I had to see you——"

"About this practice, Aspell?" The Head frowned. "I am surprised you held it just now. I arranged for it to be this afternoon during lessons——"

"Head, it was not I who sounded the alarm! And it was only indirectly that I wished to mention the fire alarm. It is connected with a far more serious affair!"

The Head stared at him blankly, but Penelope drew in a deep breath.

She knew what was coming. There could be only one reason for Mr. Aspell's visit, she decided.

"He's come about the keys," she told herself. "He must have discovered that they are missing."

For a moment she felt apprehensive; suppose he suspected that she had taken them? Even worse—suppose he had come to accuse her!

Her heart missed a beat, and then her eyes glowed confidently.

There was no need to worry. She was certain she had left no clues behind. Let Mr. Aspell suspect what he might, she had nothing to fear. The Wasp's angry voice cut into her thoughts.

"Some young scoundrel" went on the senior master harshly, "deliberately sounded the practice bell with the sole purpose of luring me from my study and making a raid on my absence!"

"What!" exclaimed the Head. "Gracious, how frightful!" murmured Penelope innocently.

Mr. Aspell regarded her frowningly. "I am glad you think so, Miss Cartwright," he said. "But, of course, as the headmaster's daughter, you naturally appreciate the gravity of the offence."

"Naturally," agreed Penelope. The Head rose sharply, his face extremely forbidding.

"Aspell, this is outrageous! I gather—Have you these Grey Ghosts in mind as the persons responsible?"

The senior master nodded. He had calmed.

"I am convinced it was one of them, Head."

"And you have no clue? They have escaped again?"

For a second Mr. Aspell did not answer. Then he smiled slowly, his cold, bright eyes turning towards Penelope, and suddenly she experienced a dreadful sinking feeling. There was so much meaning, so much gloating triumph in that darting gaze.

"On the contrary, Head, I have a very conclusive clue—and I must ask you to prepare yourself for an extremely considerable shock!"

He licked his lips, savouring the moment, while Penelope felt every muscle tense under the chill of horror. His eyes still held hers.

"I not only know the identity of the person who pulled that bell and raided my study," he purred, "but I can prove to you without the vestige of doubt who it is—here and now!"

Will Mr. Aspell accuse Penelope? See next Friday's thrilling chapters.

## LEADER OF THE ALPINE REVELLERS

(Continued from page 50.)

But was it, after all, only a coincidence?

Jill had never heard that tune before, though she had a good knowledge of dance music. But perhaps Hans had heard it somewhere, and had just been playing from memory. "No, it wasn't that," she told herself. "Because his manner was so strange as soon as I mentioned it. He shut up like an oyster."

And there was another point that occurred to her now.

"He didn't begin at the beginning," she mused. "He started half-way through, just where my half leaves off."

In growing excitement, she gazed at the half-sheet of paper.

Was it possible that Hans had the other half which would just fit the jagged edge of this part? If so, what a strange link it would be between her and the boy guide.

"I must see Hans to-night—right away!" she vowed. "Question him, as I couldn't with Magda looking on. Find out—"

A sudden thought checked her. "Steady, Jill!" she warned herself.

For she was remembering how Hans had shut up like an oyster as soon as she had referred to the tune that his fingers had played almost by accident on the accordion.

"He looked really grim for a moment," she mused. "Just as he did when I first met him. But I teased him out of his grimmish before, and I can do it again, only—"

Only she couldn't go rushing across to the cottage, bursting out with questions right away. If, for some reason, Hans was touchy and secretive on this point, she would have to go carefully.

She must have some other excuse for paying him a call.

"Jill, you'd runder head!" she chuckled. "The challenge to our boy rivals! That's your excuse, for you'll certainly need to consult Hans about that."

She flew to the writing-desk, grabbed the biggest piece of paper she could find, seized her pen, and wrote as follows:

### "CHALLENGE!

"The Alpine Revellers have the honour to challenge their boy rivals to a preliminary contest before the Havensburg Test. Events to include skiing through woods, jumping obstacles, ski-joring, skating over rough ice, etc. The coaches, Max Kildare and Hans Peterson, to take part, too, matched against each other. How about it, boys?"

Jill flung down her pen with a chuckle and breathlessly changed out of her ski-ing kit into an evening frock, slipping a warm coat and hood over it.

Into her handbag she tucked her

half of the "Gondoller's Waltz," and then folded the challenge and popped it into the bag, too.

She hurried out into the snow and some time later reached Hans' little cottage. A light glowed in the sitting-room window, and the front door was slightly ajar, but there was no answer to her ring.

"Golly, it's cold!" she murmured. "Hans can't be far away, since he's left the door ajar. He won't mind, I'm sure, if I wait inside."

Next moment she had stepped lightly into the cosy little sitting-room with its glowing stove.

Her eyes sparkled as, on a chair, she spied Hans' accordion.

"Suppose I give him a surprise!" she chuckled impulsively. "Suppose I greet him by playing the first half of the waltz! That ought to make him understand that I'm naturally anxious to know where the other half is—and what it all means."

She picked up the accordion, and then gave a startled gasp. Her finger had accidentally pressed a tiny depression in the polished wood at the back of the instrument. There was a sharp click and a small panel flicked back, disclosing a cavity from which fell a folded paper.

Jill picked it up, then her heart leapt. The paper had a jagged edge. It was the other half of the mystery tune!

Next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will contain another exciting instalment of this enthralling serial.

## MYSTERY AT THE PETS' SHOP

(Continued from page 52.)

what was it we saw flying from the window?"

"That, June," replied Noel grimly, "is the mystery we've got to solve—before anything more serious happens! Mr. Chadwick informed me that he is expecting a foreign countess to visit the hotel to-morrow—a lady renowned for her jewellery. Should anything be stolen, it will be a serious matter for Nita Dane and her magpie—unless we can bring the real thief to book!"

THE next afternoon Noel and June set out with a picnic-tea, announcing that they would spend the time exploring the neighbourhood. After visiting Nita's shop, to make certain that the magpie was safe, Noel browsed for a while round Jeff Hudson's curio-shop and bought a good pair of second-hand binoculars.

Armed with these, they set out on their walk—but they did not go far.

Among the luxuriant trees that covered the slopes of the valley, Noel selected a vantage-point from which they could keep watch on the distant hotel and the nearer pets' shop, without any risk of being seen.

While June read, and Noel busied himself with his notes, they took it in turns to keep watch through the binoculars.

But it was not until dusk was falling, and the outlines of the hotel were becoming blurred, that they heard a sudden, distant outcry—a clamour of voices.

June snatched up the binoculars, and a gasp escaped her lips.

"Nunky—there it goes! It's the magpie! It's flying from the hotel towards the shop—"

Noel looked up swiftly, his eyes narrowing. The feathered thief was almost directly overhead—and June cried out as she saw her uncle whip a revolver from his pocket and take deliberate aim.

"Nunky—stop! You can't—"

There came a deafening report that echoed back from the cliffs as Noel fired twice. The feathered shape, checked in its flight, turned

over and fell like a stone into the bushes near the pets' shop.

"Oh, you've shot it, nunky—you've shot Blackie!" exclaimed June, in bewildered reproach.

"Don't worry, June," said Noel tersely. "We've got the thief this time—but there's not a moment to lose!"

He raced up the winding path towards the spot where the feathered shape had fallen. But even as they reached the village the car from the hotel swung round the corner, and Mr. Chadwick sprang out, followed by an agitated woman guest.

"My diamond pendant—my precious diamond!" she exclaimed. "The maid said that bird take it from my room—"

Just then the manager caught sight of Noel, the revolver still in his hand.

"Well done, Raymond!" he panted. "You're a better shot than I. Where did that magpie fall—"

June heard a broken sob behind them—and she turned in time to see Nita Dane running frantically back towards her shop.

"Blackie!" she sobbed. "Where is he? You—you have killed him—"

"Miss Dane—the key of your shop, please," Noel spoke quickly.

He took the key from her and swiftly unlocked the door.

An amazed cry escaped June's lips—for out of the shop fluttered Blackie, the magpie, to perch on his young mistress' shoulder.

"I don't understand! What—what on earth does this mean?" spluttered the bewildered manager.

"Come on!" jerked Noel. "The thief can't be far away."

He led the way at a run into the garden at the rear of the two shops. Old Jeff Hudson was busily gardening, but he straightened himself, staring, at the sight of his visitors.

"What's happened?" he exclaimed. "Have you caught the thief—"

"I have!" rapped Noel, seizing the curio-dealer by the shoulder. A pair of handcuffs snapped on his wrists. "Look under the weeds in the barrow, June—it's probably there."

June searched beneath the weeds in the barrow. An amazed cry went up as the girl detective drew out a feathered shape that, at first glance, looked surprisingly like a magpie.

"Nunky—it's a model plane!" she gasped. "A plane covered with feathers—"

"And you'll find the stolen jewels inside, I fancy," snapped Noel. "As I thought! It was a cunning plan, Hudson. Your confederate, Bella, the room-maid at the hotel, actually stole the jewels and slipped them into the model plane—giving the alarm after she had released it."

"At the same time, with the aid of a fishing-rod—and a secret panel which I discovered in the wall between the two shops—you managed to unhook the latch of the magpie's cage, and also open the skylight, enabling it to escape. I saw varnish on a fishing-rod in your shop when I bought the binoculars—and that gave me the clue I wanted!"

"But how did you suspect the truth, nunky?" demanded June, as the scowling trickster was led away by the village constable.

"I suspected Bella when she gave her story about the flying thief," Noel told her. "According to her statement, she noticed at once that the brooch was missing from the mantel-piece. But how did she know that the brooch was there in the first place—unless she had been spying on the occupant of the room?"

"So that's why you set that trap with the ring?" asked June.

Noel nodded.

"I'll admit that finding the ring in the magpie's cage rather shook my theory," he admitted. "It was clear that Bella couldn't have put it there. Then I remembered the trace of varnish I'd found on the cage."

"When we visited Jeff Hudson's shop next door I saw the fishing-rod and took the opportunity of examining the wall closely."

"Hudson cleverly disposed of the ring—when he realised that it was a fake—by slipping it over the end of the fishing-rod and dropping it into the cage."

"But the feathered plane, nunky—what made you think of that?" persisted June.

Noel grinned. "That black feather we found, June, was old and brittle. It belonged to a magpie that had been dead for a long, long time. And Blackie was very much alive!"

(End of this week's story.)

You will meet Noel and June again in the future. In the meantime look out for a series of grand double-length complete stories. The first is next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.