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# "DETECTIVE JUNE'S STRANGEST CASE"

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

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



THAT DUTCH HOLIDAY OF SURPRISES





# Detective June's STRANGEST CASE

By PETER LANGLEY

## THE TELL-TALE MALLET

**J**UNE GAYNOR, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous detective, went to Folkestone to meet her uncle, who was returning after a long stay abroad.

While there she was amazed to see a man closely resembling Noel break into a museum and smash a porcelain statuette of the Green Archer, a legendary figure who was supposed to haunt Knoll Castle whenever anyone dared live there.

When June met Noel he denied he had been the person she had seen, and she assumed her uncle had a double.

Later, June was asked by Ronald Garth, an author whose story about the Green Archer was to be filmed at Knoll Castle, to go there under an assumed name, as he believed an attempt was to be made to prevent the film being made.

June suspected that the threatening letters Mr. Garth had received were connected with the smashing of the Green Archer statuette.

And then she made a startling discovery! In the pocket of Noel's overcoat she found the mallet which had been used to smash the statuette!

**D**AZEDLY June stared at the mallet she had found in Noel Raymond's overcoat.

Beyond question it was the weapon which had been used to shatter the Green Archer statuette, and it seemed equally certain that only Noel himself could have put it in his pocket.

In consternation, June sank down on to the nearest chair.

It hadn't been any double she had seen in the Folkestone museum. It had been Noel himself. And it must have been he who had smashed the lovely porcelain statuette.

The discovery overwhelmed her. Mystified her, too.

She knew her uncle too well to think that he would destroy anything wantonly. He must have had some good—some overwhelming—reason for his extraordinary act. But what could it have been? And why, having committed it, had he gone out of his way to deceive her?

Slowly the girl detective's gaze went to the two pieces of paper clutched in her other hand. One of them was the threatening message written by the unknown man who, for some mysterious reason of his own, was anxious to prevent the film about the Green Archer being made.

Into June's whirling mind came her conviction that the statuette had been smashed by the writer of the anonymous letter in order to make it seem that the legend of the Green Archer was coming true.

But if that were so—  
She gave a horrified gasp. It meant that Noel himself had written that threatening note! That he was the person plotting against the film!

Violently June shook her head.

She would never believe that. Loving and admiring the famous detective as she did, she had no doubts, yet desperately her agitated mind sought some way of putting the question beyond all doubt. She gazed again at the ink-blotting piece of paper; then, as she noticed the inky finger-print in one corner, she caught in her breath.

"I'll soon prove it!" she cried, and, dashing out of the room, she entered Noel's study.

In a steel filing cabinet standing in one corner were cards bearing the finger-prints of all the notorious people she and her uncle had helped to bring to justice. There, also, were prints she and Noel had made of their own hands.

With quivering fingers, June ran through the cards. At last she came to the one with the name "NOEL RAYMOND" typewritten at the top. Extracting it from the file, she carried it to the desk, sat down, then picked up a magnifying-glass.

With feverish intensity, she compared the print on the card with that on the threatening note.

There were a few moments of awful suspense, then she sat back with a gasp of relief.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed.

For the two prints bore no resemblance. Then it couldn't have been Noel who had written that note!

That was satisfactory as far as it went, but there was still Noel's extraordinary behaviour at Folkestone to be explained. For that it had been he who had smashed the statuette seemed certain.

What could have been his object?

June shook her head. She was completely baffled. But in her heart was no fear, only unbounding trust. Her uncle must have had good reason for acting as he had done. Sooner or later he would explain—take her into his confidence. Meanwhile—

"I'll try to forget all about it," she whispered. "I'll concentrate on this other mystery. But who is this person who's plotting against the film? He isn't nunky's double. I know that now, for there isn't any double; but—"

Breaking off, June picked up the other piece of paper Ronald Garth had given her. It was a letter asking Simpson & Simpson, the theatrical agents, to give the bearer a small part in the film.

The girl detective felt her pulses

**Before June Could Start Solving The Mystery Of The Green Archer She Had To Submit To A Film Test**

race as she remembered how urgently Ronald Garth had wanted her to travel to Knoll Castle, where the film was to be produced, and to stay there under an assumed name.

The prospect had thrilled her at the time, and now she felt more eager than ever to accept the mission.

"I'm certain nunky won't have any objection," she murmured, "so—here goes!"

Stuffing the letter into her pocket, she jumped to her feet, but at the door she paused irresolutely.

The author of the film had emphasised the importance of keeping her real identity a secret, so—should she don a disguise before going to Simpson & Simpson?

She frowned thoughtfully, then shook her head.

No, a change of name would be sufficient. Unlike Noel Raymond, whose photograph was constantly appearing in the newspapers, her features were unknown to the general public.

"A different name—that'll be sufficient," she decided. "Now, what shall I call myself?" She wrinkled her nose, then laughed. "Carolyn Stuart! That sounds like a real film name," she told herself, and, with a chuckle, set off.

The agency was situated at the top of a tall block of buildings near Wardour Street, and when she entered the waiting-room she found half a dozen other girls seated on forms arranged around the walls.

They were older than June, and looked glamorous enough to be film stars themselves. It was a little pityingly that they regarded the newcomer, and one of them, swinging a nylon-clad leg, laughed outright.

"You're wasting your time, dear," she drawled. "By the look of it, there's not much time for us, so you won't stand a dog's chance."

June flushed, and her heart gave an apprehensive leap.

Unless she got even a small job in the film, she would have to abandon all hope of discovering the mystery which surrounded the legend of the Green Archer—a mystery which she felt was in some way connected with her uncle.

So it was anxiously that she seated herself. After a minute or two an inner door opened, and a grey-haired, wizened-looking clerk appeared. He shook his head apologetically at the crowd seated round the walls.

"Sorry, ladies, but there's nothing doing," he announced. "Mr. Cronberg says all the crowd parts are filled."

Shrugging their shoulders, the girls rose to their feet, adjusted their stylish coats, and sauntered to the outer door. June, however, did not move, though her usual high spirits had begun to evaporate.



If none of these experienced girls were wanted, what chance had she?

Somewhat timidly, she held out the letter Ronald Garth had written: "What's this, my dear?" The clerk took it, then frowned. "Sorry, but I'm afraid this won't get you anywhere. Theodore Cronberg never takes any notice of recommendations. Get dozens every week, you know, and—"

"Stanton! Stanton! Haven't you got rid of those dames yet?" roared a stentorian voice which rumbled around the waiting-room like thunder.

June whirled, expecting to see some giant of a man, but the owner of that reverberating voice was hardly taller than herself. But he was nearly as broad as he was high, and in one corner of his mouth was tucked a cigar that jutted out like a miniature flagstaff.

His horn-rimmed spectacles perched above his bushy eyebrows, he glared short-sightedly around, to give another stentorian roar as dimly he perceived June.

"Stanton! Didn't I tell you to get rid of the whole bag o' tricks?"

"Yes, Mr. Cronberg."  
"Then what's this girl doin' here?" Striding forward on tiny feet, he glowered at June. "Run along. All the crowd parts are filled. Didn't Stanton tell you, hey?"

And the cigar wagged ferociously. June nodded.

"Yes, but I was hoping you might find room for me, Mr. Cronberg," she said. "You see, I've brought a letter of recommendation from—"

But the famous film producer did not let her finish. He gestured irritably.

"Don't care who it's from! Never read 'em. Guess Theodore Cronberg relies entirely on his own judgment. So scram, my girl—scram! I'm busy!"

And, jerking down his spectacles with an impatient hand, Mr. Cronberg whirled round on the clerk.

"Now, Stanton, let me see the photos of those applicants for that young girl part!" he ordered.

With difficulty, June swallowed her disappointment and turned away. It looked as if all her hopes of getting to Knoll Castle and solving the mystery were shattered.

### THE FILM TEST

AS the girl detective walked slowly across to the door, there came exasperated grunts and exclamations from the film producer, who was examining the photographs the clerk had handed him.

"Pah! No good at all! Utterly useless! Jumpin' Jehosaphat, but has your agency gone crackers, Stanton? Most of these dames will never see thirty again, let alone seventeen! What I want is—hey!"

Once again that deafening roar belled out, causing June nearly to jump out of her shoes. Turning, she saw that the film producer was making jabbing motions in her direction with his cigar.

"That's the kind o' girl I want!" Theodore Cronberg declared. "What d'you mean by wastin' my time like this, Stanton? If you'd already got a suitable candidate, why did you show me these tomfool photos?"

"But that girl isn't a candidate, Mr. Cronberg. She came for a crowd part. Besides, you've told her to go."

"That was before I had my specs on! How do you expect me to see without my glasses?" roared the film producer, and wagged his cigar at June once more. "Hey, girl, have you ever done any filmin'?"

Regretfully June shook her head. "Afraid not, Mr. Cronberg, but I've done some amateur theatricals," she said.

"Amateur theatricals? Pah! What good are they? The question is: Can you act? No, no, don't tell me. You're bound to say 'Yes.' The only way to decide is to give you a test. Be back here at two o'clock—and sharp's the word! Understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Cronberg. But what—"  
Impatiently he waved his cigar.

"Come on, Stanton! I want to see you about those contracts! Come on, man! Time's money!"

And the film producer rushed back into the inner office, dragging the flustered clerk with him. It was as if a hurricane had passed through the room, and June hardly knew whether she was standing on her head or her heels.

"Golly, what a character!" she gasped. "But I bet his bark's worse than his bite. But what a bit of luck—him not liking any of those photographs! And what a bit of luck he had a second look at me—with his specs on this time!"

Chuckling, she descended the steep stairs and made for the nearest cafe for lunch, but all the time she was waiting for two o'clock, wondering anxiously how she would measure up to the test. And what kind of a part was it that the temperamental Mr. Cronberg thought she might be suitable for?

Promptly at two o'clock she returned to the agency, to be ushered into a small room fitted up as a dressing-room. There a motherly woman took charge of her, making up her hair and face, and telling her what she would have to do in the film test.

"Don't be nervous, my dear," she urged. "You'll find the arc-lights trying at first, but—"

"Isn't my acting any good?" she asked.

The producer shook his head. "Not very. But don't worry about that, my dear. You'll be O.K. in my hands. Guess I could make a stuffed rabbit act once I had it on the set. The main thing is—you look the part."

June caught in her breath. "You mean that—that I'm engaged?" she gasped.

Theodore Cronberg scowled. "Course I mean it. Don't you understand plain English?" he roared; then unexpectedly that puckish grin appeared on his fiery face, and he patted her shoulder. "Now run away, my dear! Stanton will fix you up. I've got a thousand and one things to do."

And, leaving clouds of cigar-smoke trailing behind him, he rushed off as if he had not a second to spare.

From the wizened clerk June learnt that the small role she was to play was that of the schoolgirl daughter of the owner of the castle where the film was to be produced. She also learnt that all artistes and technicians were to live at the castle, and, after a contract had been signed, Stanton told her to catch the midday train North next day.

It was happily that the girl detective made her way home. It was only



"So you're going to stay at the castle," said the taxi-man. "Well, better you than me, miss. I wouldn't stay there if I was paid ten pounds a night."

"Hey! Where's that girl? Get a move on, there! Guess time's money, and I haven't all day to waste!"

The now familiar roar came from the room adjoining, and, hurriedly stepping through the doorway, June saw the little film producer sitting astride a chair, his arms folded along the back; and another big cigar jutting pugnaciously out of the corner of his puckish mouth.

Two dazzling arc-lamps threw two beams of light on the floor, and as June stood there, hesitating, Theodore Cronberg actually grinned.

"Don't get flurried. Just act naturally, my dear. Now, you've been told what to do."

The girl detective drew in a deep breath. She had acted in many amateur plays, but this was different, and, for all his smile, she sensed that the fiery little film producer was watching her like a mouse.

Desperately remembering her instructions, she walked across the floor and picked up the scarf she found lying there. Then, with a gasp of dismay, she recoiled, letting the scarf flutter from apparently nerveless fingers.

There were other acting routines she had to perform, and all the time the arc-lamps beat down with a suffocating heat. But suddenly Theodore Cronberg jabbed out with his cigar.

"That's enough!" he declared. June stared in dismay.

as she let herself into the flat that she remembered the mallet she had found—remembered also how strangely her uncle had behaved ever since he had come back from the South of France. But resolutely she thrust away all those disturbing thoughts.

"Nunky's worried over that case he's engaged on," she told herself. "That's what makes him act so differently. But once he gets settled down he'll take me into his confidence—explain everything."

As she closed the front door behind her she heard the sound of movement in Noel's bedroom. Her uncle had returned. If his investigations had gone well he might agree to clear up all the puzzling things which worried her. Eagerly she ran forward.

"Nunky!" she cried. "Nunky!"  
And then, in the bedroom doorway, she stopped, staring in surprise. It was not the famous detective who was in the room, but Parker, his solemn-faced manservant, and he was engaged in rolling up the mattress.

"What ever have you stripped the bed for?" June asked.

Parker swung round, his face as grave as usual.

"Thought it best, Miss June, seeing that the maste' won't be using it for a bit," he said.  
"Not be using it!" June stared harder than ever. "You mean that—that he's going away?" she cried.  
Parker shook his head.



"Not going, Miss June—gone."  
"G—gone?"  
"Yes, miss. He caught the mid-day plane for the South of France, and, judging by the amount of luggage he's taken with him, he won't be back for some weeks."

"How extraordinary!" The exclamation came unbidden to the girl detective's lips. He never even hinted at the possibility of his being called away this morning, but I suppose there must have been some unexpected development in that mysterious case he's engaged on."

She gave a wistful sigh, for deep down in her heart she could not help feeling a little upset at Noel's failure to tell her anything about his latest case.

"I suppose he left me a note?" she said, after a moment.

To her astonishment, the manservant shook his head.

"Fraid not, Miss June. There was no time. He was in and out of here in less than half an hour."

"But surely he left a message saying where I could get in touch with him?" persisted June.

Once more Parker shook his head. "No, Miss June. He didn't leave any address. Just said he was going to the South of France, and said you weren't to worry if you didn't hear from him for a bit."

June nodded and slowly turned away. This unexpected development had driven all thought of her own exciting case out of her head.

"How unlike nunky to be so secretive!" she murmured, as she entered the study. "I can't understand—"

She broke off, her eyes widening, for as she stepped into the study her attention was immediately attracted to the grate.

It was full of charred paper, and a mass of other half-burnt papers lay in the hearth. Evidently Noel Raymond had destroyed many of his private documents before leaving so hurriedly. But why?

Wonderingly June stared; then she gave a start as amongst the debris she noticed the torn cover of one of her uncle's diaries. Its date showed that it had been the one he had used during his long stay in the South of France, and beside it lay several scorched pages.

On the impulse of the moment June bent and picked up one of the blackened sheets. Instantly her heart gave a startled bound, for two words seemed to leap out and hit her between the eyes.

Two words which spelt a name.  
The name of the Green Archer!

### AT KNOLL CASTLE

"WELL, if this doesn't beat everything else!"

In blank amazement, the girl detective stared at that crumpled, half-burnt sheet of paper.

Until yesterday she had never heard of the Green Archer, that legendary figure which was supposed to haunt Knoll Castle whenever anyone took up residence there.

And yet, apparently, her uncle had known all about him for weeks, for this entry had been made soon after he had gone to the Continent.

What did it mean?

Involuntarily her mind returned to that worrying incident of the wooden mallet, and again she found herself wondering what Noel Raymond's connection with the Green Archer could possibly be.

For a moment she hesitated, not liking to read her uncle's private notes, yet seized by an overpowering feeling that that half-scorched entry was of tremendous importance not only to him, but to herself.

"I must find out all I can," she told herself, and her eyes quickly scanned the torn leaf.

The heat had obliterated many of the words. Only a few odd phrases were left. But sufficient was legible to set her pulses racing.

"Every day it became more and more obvious that this affair is of supreme importance . . . not tell

June . . . too worrying . . . but must succeed . . . failure would be disastrous . . . The Green Archer film—"

That was all, so with feverish haste June snatched up the remaining pages of the burnt diary. All except one were completely charred, and on this only three phrases remained:

"Another idea about the Green Archer to-day. Must investigate . . . May find the solution at Monte Carlo."

Suddenly the girl detective's heart began to thump, and with spinning eyes she straightened up. For at last she believed she had an inkling as to what her uncle was up to.

"He's engaged on the same case as myself!" she cried. "He's also trying to get to the bottom of those threats against the Green Archer film!"

The more she thought about it the more certain she became.

But why had Noel decided not to confide in her? And why would the consequences become so disastrous to himself if his investigations failed? Was it possible that in some way the case could affect the personal destiny of the detective?

"It looks very much like it," June told herself. "But how wizard—that we should both be engaged on the same case! While he's investigating down in the South of France, I'll be able to keep an eye on things up at Knoll Castle."

Breathlessly she stared across the study. Oh, how glad she was that she had decided to go to the theatrical agents to-day—had managed to get that part in the film! It was simply grand to know that, even if hundreds of miles separated her uncle and herself, they would really be working in partnership.

And then, abruptly the thrilled glow in her eyes faded. Once again the memory of that incriminating mallet flashed into her mind.

What could have possessed her uncle to steal into the Folkestone museum and deliberately smash that lovely statuette of the Green Archer? How could such an extraordinary act possibly help him to solve the mystery?

She shook her head.

She did not know, and she was in no mood to worry about that disturbing incident. Noel would explain when he returned from the Continent. Meanwhile she must concentrate all her energies on carrying out her part of the investigation.

She spent the rest of the evening packing, and next day she caught, as arranged, the one o'clock train North. It was dark by the time she reached Lerwick, the nearest station to Knoll Castle.

A solitary taxi stood in the yard. To her relief it was disengaged, but the driver—a grizzled Northumbrian who looked more like an old-fashioned coachman than a taxi-driver—shook his head when he learnt her destination.

"So you're going to stay at Knoll Castle," he said. "Well, better you than me, miss. I wouldn't stay there—no, miss, not if I was paid ten pounds a night!"

"You mean because of the legend?" asked June.

He nodded, and needed little prompting to tell her all about it. What he said was similar to the story which Ronald Garth had related to the girl detective in Noel's study.

Fatally wounded in a duel, the Green Archer had sworn to haunt the castle out of which he had been cheated, and he had threatened dire retribution would overtake anyone who dared to live in it.

"All through the years the curse has come true," declared the taxi-driver as he climbed up behind the steering-wheel of his ramshackle old car, and slammed the rickety door. "You mark my words, miss, your film company will rue the day they ever decided to make a picture about the Green Archer. As for deciding to live there—'tis flying in the face of Providence."

And, with a gloomy shake of the head, he drove out of the station yard.

June could not shake off the uneasy feeling that the grizzled old Northumbrian might be right. But it wasn't the curse which worried her, but the threatening letters Ronald Garth had received.

If trouble did come, no ghost would be responsible, but the writer of those anonymous notes.

But who was the man? And why should he be so desperately anxious to prevent the film being made?

June did not know, but she meant to find out. And her discovery that in some strange way her uncle seemed to be involved personally in the mystery made her all the more determined to discover the truth.

Once Lerwick had been left behind, the taxi turned into the coastal road. On one side bleak moors ran as far as the eye could see, on the other were bleak, jagged cliffs, with the wintry sea beyond.

In such a setting it was easy to believe in that legend, and when suddenly Knoll Castle loomed into view June involuntarily caught in her breath.

Perched almost on the edge of the cliff, its black, battlemented mass seemed to crouch there like some monstrous beast. A great, crumbling wall encircled the castle on three sides, and on the fourth was a sheer drop of three hundred feet to the surging, heaving sea.

There was not another house in sight, and the ramshackle taxi grained and creaked as its wheels skidded over the ruts of the road.

"The back of beyond it is for sure," commented the driver, applying his brakes and pulling up before a great archway cut into the three-foot thick walls. "If you'll take my advice, miss, we'll let me drive you back to Lerwick. This is no place for a girl like you."

June laughed, but her heart was thumping as she clambered down to the road.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of ghosts!" she declared. "Besides, I'm not staying here on my own, you know. There'll be a whole crowd of us—more than enough for the Green Archer to tackle."

The taxi-driver shook his head forebodingly when he had pocketed his fare.

"Mebbe you know your own business best, miss," he muttered, "but dinna say I didn't warn you."

And, as if in a hurry to get away from the desolate place, he hurriedly turned his car and went driving back down the road at top speed.

Leaving her luggage where he had dumped it, June walked across to the archway and looked for a bell. She failed to find one, but the great oak doors stood open, and beyond the vast, stone-flagged courtyard she glimpsed lights in several of the narrow windows of the castle.

"Well, there's somebody at home—that's one comfort," she murmured.

Anxious to get someone to give her a hand with her luggage, she started walking across the courtyard. Her footsteps echoed eerily, otherwise there was absolute silence—until suddenly—

She pulled up, her heart leaping. Goodness, what was that?

It sounded like—  
Yes, it was—a scream! A scream in a girl's voice!

And as she stood there she became aware of a lithe figure which had with magical suddenness appeared up on the battlements.

A figure dressed in a curious green costume—a figure that clutched in one hand a great longbow.

With a gasp, June realised where she had seen such a figure before. In the museum at Folkestone!

That green-clad form high above her was an exact replica of the statuette which Noel Raymond had deliberately smashed!

"The Green Archer!" she exclaimed. "It's the Green Archer!"

Look out for more dramatic developments in next week's chapters of this thrilling story.





# The SECRET of the HARLEQUIN TEAPOT

By RHODA FLEMING

## THE AUCTION SALE

"A SALE!" announced Phil Oakleigh, with enthusiasm. "Take a look at this, girls!"

His sister, Cherry, raised expressive blue eyes to the placard pasted on the old brick wall. Unslinging her satchel, she winked at her chum, Leila Soames.

"I ought to have warned you before we came on this hike, Leila," she sighed, "that Phil would probably stop at the first village we reached to buy a steamroller or something. He's crackers about sales!"

"The trouble with girls," snorted Phil, ignoring his sister's candour, "is that they've no business acumen. Now here's a chance to pick up a real bargain!" He cleared his throat, and read aloud: "'At the Old Barn, Glynford, on Wednesday, twenty-second—that's to-day—Messrs. Pilbeam, Clark & Pilbeam will sell by Public Auction a collection of Valuable Furniture and other Effects—including antique and modern china, a lawn-mower, a gas-cooker—'"

"And who," interrupted Cherry sweetly, "is going to carry the gas-cooker?"

Leila laughed outright at Phil's withering stare.

"You two," she said, settling herself more comfortably on the fallen tree-trunk, and gazing with appreciation at the magnificent view, "do you ever agree about anything?"

Phil, who was Cherry's senior by eleven months, chuckled good-humouredly.

"Well, how about it?" he asked. "Why not let's stop at Glynford for lunch and look at the Old Barn? There's no telling—we might stumble on something good—"

"The doormat, dear—if I know anything about you," said Cherry. "I suppose that's Glynford, down there in the hollow?"

From the gorge-covered slopes they could glimpse the red roofs and chimneys of a picturesque old-world town, intersected by a river.

"Glynford," Leila read from her guide-book. "Market town on the River Glyn. Population: 5,000. Noted for its ancient castle."

"Phil will probably end up by bidding for the castle," murmured Cherry. "It's lucky I'm minding the fifteen pounds holiday money we've got between us!"

"Do we go to the sale—or don't we?" interrupted Phil, grinning.

It was another voice—a quite unexpected voice—that answered him.

"Oh, please!" it said breathlessly. "Please forgive my interrupting, but if you're going to the sale, will you—will you buy the Harlequin Teapot for me?"

In considerable amazement, the three chums turned to stare at a dark-haired, attractive girl who had emerged suddenly from the bushes.

She was pale and out of breath, and the appeal in her eyes was mingled with something like fear.

"Did you—did you say 'Harlequin Teapot'?" asked Cherry, wondering if she had heard aright.

The girl nodded, glancing with quick anxiety from one to the other.

"I—I know it must seem cheek for me to ask you," she breathed. "But it means so much to me, and—and I daren't go there myself. It's the Harlequin Teapot, with the chipped spout—Lot No. 7, I think. You couldn't mistake it. If you would please bid for it, I'll pay you whatever it costs. I'll meet you at the Mill House after the sale. My name is Maureen Dare, and—"

She broke off with a little gasp as there came a sound of approaching footsteps. With another look of urgent appeal at the astounded chums, she dived among the bushes and was lost to sight.

"My Sunday hiking-boots!" commented Phil, meeting the bewildered stares of the two girls. "What'd you know about that?"

"S'sh!" breathed Cherry, with a warning gesture.

The footsteps were approaching more rapidly. There now appeared in view a lanky, saw-toothed youth, who eyed the chums suspiciously as he strode past them, descending the steep footpath that led to the town.

They waited breathlessly till he was out of sight. Then:

"There's something funny going on here!" declared Phil.

"Funny's not the word for it!" agreed Cherry, her blue eyes perplexed. "I'm sure that girl was really scared of something—and that lanky boy seemed in a dreadful hurry!"

"But has it anything to do with us?" ventured Leila cautiously.

Cherry nodded emphatically.

"Of course it has! The girl asked us to help, I say!" She started up impulsively, eyes sparkling. "I vote we go to the sale and bid for this teapot—just for fun! It'll only cost a few shillings, and—well, I'd rather like to meet Maureen again!"

Phil chuckled.

"I should have warned you, Leila," he said solemnly, "that Cherry would find someone or something she wanted to befriend before we'd gone a dozen miles! Last hike we had, it was a lame dog; now it's a mysterious girl who wants a teapot—"

He broke off as Cherry neatly aimed a clump of moss at him.

"Come on, let's go!" she said, linking her hand through Leila's arm.

Animatedly discussing the mystery, the cherry trio made their way into the town. It was not curiosity alone that caused Cherry's pulses to quicken as she approached the Old Barn—now used as an auction-room. The haunting appeal in the young stranger's eyes had affected her deeply. Phil, for all his assumed flippancy, was obviously intrigued; while Leila did not attempt to hide her excitement.

The auction was in full swing as they pushed open the door and entered the lofty, oak-beamed room.

On a dais at the far end stood the auctioneer, wielding a small hammer with much aplomb. Beside him stood a mournful assistant in a green baize apron, whose duty it was to exhibit the various "Lots."

The onlookers—mostly local farmers, with a few stray visitors drawn there by curiosity—seemed slow in making their bids. Only one rather high-pitched voice was raised as the chums entered.

"Seven!" it called.

"Seven!" repeated the auctioneer, beaming. "Any advance on seven? Come, this is a bargain, gentlemen! A genuine hand-painted teapot, with a unique Harlequin pattern!"

Cherry started, nudging her chum, and Phil peered interestedly over their shoulders. They were just in time! The assistant was holding up an old china teapot with a chipped spout and a quaint pattern of figures in a Harlequinade.

Seven shillings seemed a lot to pay for a damaged teapot, but Cherry remembered the girl's appealing eyes.

"Eight!" she exclaimed, almost without thinking.

"Nine!" snapped an unpleasant voice.

Cherry glanced instinctively at the speaker, and she caught in her breath. The rival bidder was the lanky youth of whom the girl had seemed so scared!

He was glaring in her direction, but Cherry returned his stare boldly.

"Ten!" she called.

The auctioneer transferred his beam to Cherry.

"Ten!" he repeated. "The young lady at the back of the hall offers me ten for this unique teapot. Any advance on ten?"

"Eleven!" rapped the lanky youth, scowling at the chums and feeling for his wallet.

Phil nudged Cherry warningly.

This Week's Grand Long Complete Relates The Strange Adventures Of Three Cheery Young Hikers



"Steady on!" he muttered. "Eleven bob's eleven bob, and we don't know that girl!"

But Cherry's fighting spirit was aroused. She did not like the way the youth was staring at her, as though trying to intimidate her into silence. Besides, the mystery girl had promised to pay whatever the teapot cost.

"Twelve!" she exclaimed recklessly. A little murmur went round the room. Curious eyes were turned towards the chums. The lanky youth was fumbling with his wallet, his scowl deepening. He caught the auctioneer's eye.

"I say, I didn't expect the bidding to go up to this," he explained. "Haven't got the ready cash on me. If I could have credit—"

"Sorry, sir, this is a strictly cash sale," interrupted the auctioneer. "The young lady over there has bid me twelve. Any advance on twelve?" He looked round expectantly. "Once—twice—three times!" The hammer smote the desk, and the auctioneer beamed affably at Cherry. "The Harlequin Teapot is sold to the young lady—a genuine bargain at twelve pounds!"

The floor of the auction-room seemed to rock under Cherry's feet. She heard Leila's gasp—Phil's stifled groan.

Twelve pounds! And she had imagined they had been bidding in shillings!

"We'd better get out of this, Cherry—quick!" Phil muttered. "Tell 'em there's been a mistake. I'll speak up, if you like. That girl will never refund all that money!"

"I should say not!" put in a sneering voice at Cherry's side. "You kids have got yourselves into a jam, but I'm willing to help you out!"

Cherry whirled. The lanky youth stood there, wallet open, rustling a sheaf of notes. His expression was loftily condescending, and there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"I can't quite make it twelve," he said, "but I'll take up the bid at eleven—and let you out. Is it a deal?"

"You'd better accept his offer!" whispered Leila.

"Nothing else for it, I suppose," muttered Phil, eyeing the youth with some dislike.

But Cherry's hands were clenched, and her mind worked swiftly. Why was the youth prepared to pay eleven pounds for a chipped teapot—unless he was anxious to prevent it from being bought on behalf of the mystery girl?

Maureen had been desperately eager that they should buy it—at any cost. And Cherry felt convinced of the girl's honesty.

"Come on, I can't wait all day!" cut in the lanky youth, flourishing the notes in her face, while the puzzled assistant stood by with the Harlequin Teapot.

Cherry's chin came up. While Phil and Leila stared aghast, she opened her handbag and carefully counted out twelve pound notes, handing them to the assistant and receiving the chipped teapot in exchange.

"Our giddy holiday money!" groaned Phil. "Who's crackers now?"

The lanky youth concealed his chagrin with a sneer.

"I wish you joy of your teapot!" he said unpleasantly, and strode out of the auction-room.

Silently, the three companions filed out into the wintry sunlight, Cherry hugging the precious teapot—the teapot on which she had pledged their slender resources.

Then Phil exploded. With brotherly frankness he informed Cherry just what he thought of her hare-brained action in risking so much for a complete stranger. Cherry, unabashed by his half ragging, half reproachful outburst, maintained her faith in the mysterious Maureen. Leila, though obviously shaken, stood loyally by her chum.

His feelings relieved, Phil's good nature reasserted itself.

"Oh, well, Cherry, maybe you're right. The girl may be okay, but twelve pounds—pew! The sooner

we get along to the Mill House and hand over the blessed teapot, the better!"

They set out eagerly, after asking their way. Coupled with their anxiety to regain their money was a keen curiosity about the whole baffling affair. And only Maureen Dare, the mystery girl, could explain.

The Mill House, when they at length reached it, proved to be a picturesque building of Tudor style, converted into a guest-house. In one of the windows was a notice: "Room To Let."

The door was opened to them by a motherly woman, wearing an apron. She smiled at the young hikers expectantly.

"Excuse me," said Cherry, stepping forward anxiously and holding the precious teapot. "We have called to see a Miss Maureen Dare."

"Miss Dare? I'm afraid you're too late," replied the woman. "She paid for her lodgings and left here barely an hour ago. She said she wouldn't be coming back, and she didn't give an address!"

### ANOTHER MEETING WITH MAUREEN

THREE distinctly chastened young hikers sat at a corner table in a small café overlooking Glynford's cobbled High Street. They had ordered coffee and buns, after carefully counting the money remaining from their combined savings—three pounds, four shillings and fivepence exactly.

On the table between them stood the Harlequin Teapot.

Cherry forced an unsteady smile. "Th-this is all my fault—" she began.

"Rot!" cut in Phil, with gruff cheerfulness. "We were all taken in by that girl. Naturally you thought we'd get the money back when we met her. How could we have guessed that she'd walk out on us like that?"

"But why did she do it?" Leila asked. "She seemed such a nice girl—not the kind who'd go round playing foolish jokes on people she'd never met!"

Cherry looked up, her expression troubled.

"I still think that she meant to meet us!" she declared. "I'm certain that something must have happened—to prevent her keeping her promise. The whole thing's a mystery!"

"Forget it!" grunted Phil. "We'll never see that girl again, Cherry, so we may as well face the facts. Here we are, minus twelve quid—and saddled with a blessed teapot with a chipped spout! Question is, where do we go from here?"

"How—how much holiday could we manage on three pounds, four and fivepence?" asked Leila, in a small voice.

Phil took out a stump of pencil and made a rapid calculation on a corner of the menu card.

"With care, we might last out two days," he announced at last.

"Two days!" Cherry whispered unsteadily. "And this was to be a week's hiking holiday!"

Phil thrust out his jaw.

"I'm not taking this lying down!" he declared. "We paid twelve crisp pounds for that piece of old junk! Surely we might get a few bob back on it?"

The girl stared at him.

"You mean, sell it?" asked Cherry. "Why not?" Phil grinned recklessly.

"At a pinch, we might auction it in the market-square. All you need is a hammer and a loud voice. Ladies and gents"—he picked up the teapot in one hand and a spoon in the other—"here's a very fine piece of old English chinaware! Useful for watering the aspidistra, or sending to Aunt Jane with an Easter egg!"

Both girls laughed despite themselves, and Cherry felt fonder of her brother than ever, knowing how he must really be feeling about the lost money.

"Pardon my interrupting!" boomed a pleasant voice from the next table. Phil nearly dropped the teapot, grabbing it in the nick of time. Cherry turned.

Seated at the adjoining table was

a dapper, middle-aged man with keen eyes and a pointed beard. He might have been an artist, Cherry surmised. He certainly did not fit in with this sleepy old market-town.

"Forgive my butting in," he went on affably, "but I could not help overhearing part of your conversation. Though I'm no authority myself, that teapot looks uncommonly like genuine Worcester pottery—probably quite valuable!"

The chums' faces lit up; they regarded the Harlequin Teapot with more respect.

"I say, sir, d'you really think so?" Phil asked eagerly.

The other nodded.

"Why don't you take it along to an expert for valuation?" he asked. Cherry's pulses quickened as she squeezed Leila's arm. Things were beginning to look up!

"I'm afraid we're strangers round here, sir," said Phil. "Do you happen to know—"

"Of a reliable dealer? Certainly!" He waved a hand towards the cobbled street visible from the window. "Go to the top of the High Street, turn left, and you'll find the shop on the right-hand side, close to the river. Ye Old Antiquary. I believe it's called. The owner's quite a character, but you can rely on his judgment. And the best of luck to you."

They thanked him gratefully and, paying their bill, they hurried out into the sunlit street. Phil had taken charge of the teapot—no longer a piece of "old junk," but a potential money-spinner!

"I say, girls, how much d'you think I could ask?" he demanded, as they hurried up the street.

"Five pounds," Leila suggested cautiously.

"Make it ten," said Cherry, with returning optimism. "We'll get our week's holiday yet!"

The trio hurried through the quaint old town. A weight of self-reproach had been lifted from Cherry's mind. The only remaining cloud was the thought of the mysterious Maureen Dare. Phil and Leila had forgotten her already, but Cherry could not banish the girl's haunting eyes entirely from her thoughts.

"This must be the shop!" announced Phil suddenly.

They halted, gazing with excited anticipation at the bow window of a quaint old shop backing on the river. In the dim interior suits of armour and antique furniture were flanked by shelves of dusty glass and pottery.

They entered boldly, and a tinkling bell behind the door brought the presiding genii of the shop from an inner room. He was old and bent, and he peered at them shrewdly over his spectacles.

"We want to sell a teapot," Phil said, coming straight to the point. "A valuable—er—Worcester teapot, almost as good as new except for the spout!"

He placed his fragile burden gently on the counter. The dealer adjusted his spectacles and examined the teapot critically.

"How much?" he asked.

"Ten pounds," prompted Cherry, as Phil hesitated. "We paid more than that for it!"

The dealer grunted non-committally, and carried the teapot into the room behind the counter, switching on a bright light. The chums waited in suspense for his return. He shuffled back a moment later, the teapot in his hand.

"I'll give you thirty bob for it," he said.

"Thirty shillings? But it's genuine Worcester!" exclaimed Cherry, her hopes sinking.

"Worcester Sauce!" retorted the dealer. "Who ever told you that can't recognise a fake when he sees it? Thirty bob, or nothing!"

Dismayed, the chums looked at one another, their high expectations collapsing like a pack of cards.

"Don't take it, Phil," breathed Cherry. "We'll try somewhere else."

"Just as you please," grunted the dealer, overhearing her whisper.

"Take it away!"



Phil held out his hand for the teapot. The dealer fumbled short-sightedly.

"Oh, look out!" gasped Cherry. There was a splintering crash as the ill-fated teapot hit the edge of the counter, falling to the floor in a dozen pieces.

In stunned dismay, the trio of chums stared at the remains of their twelve pound "bargain."

"That's done it!" groaned Phil. He turned to the dealer. "You dropped it!" he accused.

"You flustered me!" grumbled the old man. "Look here, I'll be generous. It's a dead loss to me, but I'll give you a pound to compensate you for the damage. That's my last word."

The chums held a hurried consultation. In the end they decided ruefully that even a pound was better than nothing, and Cherry insisted on taking the broken fragments with her, wrapped in her scarf.

"We might mend it for an ornament," she explained, smiling pluckily.

They all made an effort to treat the accident lightheartedly, but the prospect of their hiking holiday looked suddenly very bleak. Even if they found the mystery girl now they could hardly demand twelve pounds for a broken teapot!

"Never mind," said Cherry, with a gulp. "We'll just have to go carefully. There are plenty of ways we can enjoy ourselves without spending money. We've still got the sandwiches we packed this morning, and a flask of coffee. I vote we picnic in the castle ruins."

"Oh, yes, let's!" Leila agreed eagerly. "I love ruins!"

Phil assumed enthusiasm at the prospect. They were all acting a part to cheer one another up. But as they set out along the winding path that led to the ruins, the crisp air and bright sunshine helped to banish their depression. By the time they came in sight of the ancient castle they had practically recovered their buoyant spirits.

"What a gorgeous place!" exclaimed Cherry, looking round at the ivy-grown battlements that cast mysterious shadows across the grass.

"Isn't everything quiet?" Leila whispered, her imagination stirred. "You could almost fancy that it was haunted!"

"Hark!" breathed Cherry, catching at her brother's arm.

They all listened, and Cherry's heart beat more quickly. From somewhere close at hand came an unnerving sound—a girl's broken sobbing!

Cherry was the first to break the spell.

"Oh, come on!" she breathed. "That isn't a ghost!"

She hurried beneath a crumbling stone arch, the others at her heels. Then, as her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she gave a little cry.

"Why, it's Maureen!"

Undoubtedly it was the mystery girl—a bedraggled, tearful figure seated on a moss-grown flight of steps. Her face lit up as she recognized them, and she tried to speak.

"I say, what's the big idea?" demanded Phil gruffly, for he was still smarting from the memory of the way they had been let down.

But Cherry intervened, impulsively dropping to her knees beside the girl. All thought of their own dilemma was momentarily banished.

"What is it?" she asked gently. "Are you hurt?"

The girl nodded, and broke down completely, sobbing out a disjointed story. She had intended to meet them at the Mill House, though she had given up her room there—but she had been forced to hide from someone, and had taken refuge in the old castle.

"I—I slipped on the steps," she gulped, "and sprained my ankle. I thought of my appointment with you and tried to walk, but—but I couldn't."

"Who were you hiding from?" asked Cherry, her mind in a whirl.

The girl clenched her hands.

"My—my guardian," she whispered.

"He's hateful! He tried to bully me into revealing my grandfather's secret—the secret of the Harlequin Teapot!"

Cherry started, exchanging a quick glance with her brother and chum.

"Go on!" she breathed as the girl hesitated.

Unsteadily Maureen explained. Her grandfather, an eccentric recluse, had died in apparent poverty; but in his will he had bequeathed her his collection of old pottery. One piece had been stolen—a Harlequin Teapot—about which he had written to her before his death.

"He said there was a secret connected with it," whispered Maureen, "and he urged me to search for it. I had a little money of my own, and I meant to buy back the teapot if ever I could find it. But my guardian came across granddad's letter, and he and Basil—that's my foster-brother—planned to get hold of the teapot themselves!"

"The lanky boy," said Cherry, nodding quickly. "So that's why he bid against me at the sale!"

A look of despair crossed the girl's attractive face.

"Then—then they've won. He out-bid you!"

to the curio dealer! He must have exchanged it when he went into the inner room—and broken the fake one purposely, so that we shouldn't find out till it was too late! We've been tricked!"

## ON THE TRAIL OF THE TEAPOT

A STUNNED silence settled on the little group in the shadow of the old castle ruins.

"But why should he trick us?" burst out Leila at last. "We'd never seen him before in our lives."

"I bet he was expecting us!" Phil said darkly. "Someone must have tipped him the wink."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Cherry. "The stranger in the cafe—the man with the pointed beard!"

Maureen started, her face turning even paler.

"Who?" she breathed. Cherry described their encounter with the affable stranger, and Maureen's lips trembled.

"That was Uncle Norman—Norman Foster—my guardian!" she whispered. "Basil must have told him about you—and he followed you to the cafe."

"And he's hand-in-glove with that



"Twelve pounds!" gasped Cherry, staring in consternation at the cracked old teapot which had been knocked down to her. She thought she had been bidding in shillings!

"He didn't!" grunted Phil, with a wry glance at his sister. "Cherry got the teapot for twelve quid, but—He hesitated. "I suppose we'd better tell her, girls!"

"It's broken!" blurted out Cherry remorsefully, and described what had happened.

To her surprise the girl's face lit up with delighted relief.

"You've still got the pieces?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," admitted Cherry. "But—"

"Then everything's all right!" declared the girl eagerly. "The secret's in the Harlequin pattern just under the spout. Quickly! Let me see!"

Piecing the teapot together was a thrilling task in which they all joined. It was like a game, Cherry thought, but for the vital issues depending in its success. This time it was not their hiking holiday that was uppermost in their minds—but the happiness of this young stranger whose very future was at stake!

At length they had the front half of the teapot completed, together with the spout. Maureen bent forward eagerly; then a little cry of disappointment escaped her lips.

"But—but there's no pattern here," she faltered. "It can't be the Harlequin Teapot—not the right one!"

Cherry caught in her breath.

"Phil, look, the spout isn't chipped!" she exclaimed. "This isn't the same teapot that we handed

dealer!" Cherry burst out. "We were taken in properly, Phil!"

"But he's not going to get away with it!" her brother said grimly. "We'll go straight back to the curio shop and make that man give us back the right teapot!"

Maureen's attractive face lit up with sudden hope as she looked from one determined face to the other.

"If only that were possible!" she whispered. "I know that everything would be cleared up if I could decipher the pattern on the real teapot. You see"—she lowered her voice, looking round anxiously—"I've an idea that the secret is somehow connected with the castle ruins. Granddad used to spend a lot of time here, and he mentioned the castle in his last letter—only luckily they didn't see that page."

Cherry's pulses quickened. "That settles it!" she declared. "Back we go to the curio-shop. But what about you, Maureen?"

"I'll be all right here till you come back," said the girl quickly.

But Cherry insisted on treating the young stranger's sprained ankle before they departed, leaving her their flask of coffee and some sandwiches, and promising solemnly to keep her secret.

A quarter of an hour later they marched up to the curio-shop, Phil leading. Then they halted, staring in dismay.

For the shutters were up at the



window, and a heavy grille barred the door. The shop was shut.

Just then Cherry gave a little gasp, grabbing her brother's arm.

"Phil—look—over there!" she breathed.

The others turned, and Phil hastily checked an excited whistle.

A lanky figure carrying a parcel wrapped in green paper had emerged from a gate at the rear of the premises, and was hurrying down the slope that led to the river.

"It's him—it's Basil!" whispered Cherry. And that parcel—

"It looks like the teapot!" declared Phil eagerly. "But we've got to make sure. Come on, let's follow him."

They waited till the youth was out of sight, and then hurried after him, stepping cautiously over the bushes that bordered the tow-path.

"He's taking out a boat!" breathed Lella.

Sure enough, the lanky youth was in the act of launching a green-painted skiff. They saw him place his parcel carefully in the bows and climb in after it.

The chums crouched behind the bushes, watching their quarry row away from the bank, heading upstream.

"Phil, there's another boat moored to the landing-stage!" Cherry whispered excitedly.

They hurried down to the landing-stage. The boat moored to the steps was a roomy, tub-like vessel, not built for speed; but it was that or nothing. They scrambled into it, and Phil grasped the heavy oars, while Cherry cast off the mooring-line.

"Hi!" bellowed a voice from the tow-path, and a burly man in a blue jersey came hurrying down the steps. Obviously he was the owner of the boat.

Phil had to pull back to the landing-stage, and precious minutes went by while he endeavoured to explain that they only wanted to hire the boat.

In the end, a pound note was produced from their dwindling resources, and the boatman, only partly mollified, watched them push off.

"We'll never catch up with that boy now," Lella said despairingly. "He's out of sight."

"But not out of mind!" flashed Cherry. "Quickly, Phil—let me take an oar. Two pairs of arms are better than one. Lella, grab the steering-rope!"

The rowlocks creaked as the unwieldy boat churned upstream, Cherry striving to keep up with her brother's more powerful strokes, while Lella peered anxiously ahead.

All three chums were on their mettle now. They had been hoodwinked by the lanky youth and his plausible father. The Harlequin Teapot—on which they had pledged their hard-earned savings—had been stolen from them by a cunning trick; and

Maureen, the girl they had befriended, stood to lose everything to a pair of unscrupulous rogues.

"Any sign of our quarry, Lella?" panted Phil.

"There he goes—pulling into the rushes just beyond those willow-trees!" Lella replied.

Suddenly, as the stream broadened out, they came in sight of the green skiff moored to the bank under the trees. But there was no sign of their quarry—or the vital parcel.

"Where the dickens can he have gone?" muttered Phil, resting on his oar. "If that lanky blighter gives us one slip after all this—"

"Cherry, who had started to her feet in the rocking boat, gave a sudden cry.

"Look! There's a bungalow beyond those trees. And I think I saw someone going round the back!"

"Steady, girls!" warned Phil, as they scrambled on to the bank. "You wait here. I'm going to investigate!"

He went towards the bungalow. A long time passed, and Cherry grew anxious as her brother failed to return.

"Come on, Lella," she breathed. "Let's see if we can find out what's happening. I can't understand why Phil hasn't come back."

The two girls approached the silent bungalow. Most of the windows had the curtains drawn, as though the occupants were away. Cherry managed to peep into one or two of the rooms, without obtaining any satisfaction. Then suddenly she gripped Lella's arm.

"Look!" she whispered, her voice shaking with excitement.

They had come round to the side of the house, and she was pointing to some french-windows that stood ajar. They could see clearly into a smartly furnished lounge. And there, on a table near the window, stood a parcel—the parcel. Cherry recognised it by its shape, and the unusual green wrapping-paper.

"That boy must have left it there," she whispered, "and gone out again for something. This is our chance, Lella!"

Lella was close behind her chum as Cherry entered the room. In the excitement of the moment, the fact that they were trespassing seemed of little account compared with the vital importance of that parcel.

Cherry's hands trembled eagerly as she picked it up and hastily untied the string, removing the wrappings. Then Lella gasped—and Cherry's heart sank.

She was holding in her hands a rather ugly flower-bowl, shaped like a teapot!

As they stood there, looking at each other in stunned dismay, footsteps sounded on the terrace outside. The chums whirled, to find their escape cut off by a burly policeman. And accompanying him was the man

with the pointed beard—whom they now knew to be Mr. Norman Foster, Maureen's rascally guardian.

"I thought as much, constable!" declared Mr. Foster, while the girls stared speechlessly. "These are the same young hikers who've been going round the town trying to swindle people by raising money on a worthless teapot. It looks as though they came here on a similar game—and have broken into my bungalow to do so!"

#### EXCITEMENT AT THE CASTLE

HER thoughts numbed, Cherry felt Lella's hand tighten on her arm as the policeman took out his notebook.

"Anything to say?" he demanded, eyeing them grimly.

Cherry gulped. She had a lot to say, but the words refused to come. Too late, she realised that they had played into the enemy's hands!

The lanky Basil must have guessed that he was being followed—and he and his father had hastily contrived a neat little trap. The parcel had been deliberately placed where it would attract their attention, the contents having first been changed. Now she and Lella had been caught trespassing.

"It—it's not true!" she burst out, as the constable repeated his question. "We—we came here to get back a teapot that was stolen from us—"

"Naturally they will deny everything and try to concoct some story of their own!" interrupted Mr. Foster.

He smiled, fingering his beard, and then calmly gave his own version of the encounter in the teashop.

"I did my best to help them, constable—guessing that they'd run short of cash," he explained. "It was only later that I learnt from Wilkins, of the curio-shop, that they were going round demanding an exorbitant price for their supposed curio."

"Oh!" gasped Cherry, her eyes blazing indignantly. "Of all the fibs—"

"That will do, miss!" put in the policeman sternly. "Are you making a charge against these young people, sir—for entering your bungalow?"

Mr. Foster laughed easily.

"Oh, no, constable—I don't think that will be necessary. They had no right to trespass, of course, but I'm willing to make allowances. I suggest you warn them off from this district—before they get into further mischief."

"That I will, sir," said the constable, and then eyed the two girls.

"You hear?" he went on grimly. "If I see you in this district again you can expect trouble. Now be off with you—and keep moving."

The chums were speechless at the cunning way in which Mr. Foster had twisted the facts to put them in the wrong, and to cover himself. Cherry's blood was boiling, but there was nothing she could do or say. They had not a scrap of proof to back up their amazing story.

Only the evidence of the girl they had befriended; and they had promised to keep Maureen's secret!

Dejectedly, followed by the stern gaze of the constable, the two chums left the bungalow. Outside there was still no sign of Phil. That still puzzled Cherry. What had happened to her brother? And she was also wondering how they could break the news to Maureen—anxiously awaiting their return in the ruined castle. They would have to tell her that they had failed in their quest; that all hope was gone—

"Hist!" breathed a voice, seeming to come from the rushes bordering the river bank.

The girls started violently as the reeds parted. Then Phil's head appeared in view, and warningly he raised a finger to his lips.

"Come on!" he breathed. "Quickly!"

They joined him on the bank. "Phil, it's no use," Cherry said glumly. "They—they tricked us and brought in the police. We've been ordered out of the district—"

(Please turn to the back page.)

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# Colin Forrest—

## That Amazing New Master

By RENEE FRAZER

### THEY MUST WARN COLIN

VICKY MARLOW and her chums of the Junior Dramatic Society of St. Gwynn's were anxious to enter their play in the Local Schools Drama Festival.

They learnt that Miss Appleby, their tyrannical Form-mistress, was plotting against them.

Despite the help given them by Colin Forrest, the new languages master, and nephew of the headmistress, Miss Appleby succeeded in persuading the headmistress to ban the play and confiscated all costumes and grease-paints.

Colin Forrest provided the girls with new costumes and grease-paints and arranged with them to carry on with their rehearsing in secret.

He also discovered that the mystery of Miss Appleby's scheming could be solved if he found a certain package hidden in her study. Believing Miss Appleby had gone out, Mr. Forrest left the chums, intending to search her study. But a little later Vicky & Co. were horrified to see the Fourth Form mistress approaching the school.

THEIR faces white, the chums exchanged dismayed glances as the realisation of the young master's peril dawned on them.

"Girls, we've got to save Mr. Forrest!" gasped Vicky. "He's dared everything for us—and now it's our turn to help him. If he's caught searching in Crabby's study, after that interview with the headmistress, he—he'll be dismissed from the school."

Her voice broke, and her hands were clenched desperately as she stared out of the window, watching Miss Appleby's tall figure hurrying up the drive.

Karen pressed her chum's arm reassuringly.

"Steady, Vicky! We know why he's gone to the study. If he finds that package with the green seals, he'll have enough proof to bowl out Miss Appleby and her confederate—and save our play—"

"But suppose she discovers him before he finds the packet?" Vicky interrupted unsteadily. "He's already in the headmistress' bad books—thanks to Crabby—and it would look as though he were trying to get his revenge. I—I'm going to stop him!"

She made for the door, her chums at her heels. Out of breath, they reached the senior mistress' study—to find the door locked, and the room in darkness.

Vicky gave a little gulp of relief.

"He's not here yet," she panted.

"Listen, girls"—there was a sudden, reckless gleam in her grey eyes—

"Mr. Forrest believes that package is vital to us and our play. It's so important that he was willing to stake his good name and position in this school to get it for us. But we can't let him run such a risk on our account."

"If I know anything of Mr. Forrest," Karen said dryly, "it'll take more than wild horses to stop him—once his mind is made up."

"But supposing someone else gets the packet first?" asked Vicky softly. "Then Crabby will be beaten, just the same—our play will be saved—and Mr. Forrest won't be in any danger!"

They both stared at her, and enlightenment dawned in Karen's eyes.

"Vicky, you don't mean—"

"I mean I'm going to get it!"

Vicky faced them determinedly, her pulses racing. "After all, this mystery concerns me more than anyone else—and it's only fair I should take the risk. I know where there's a duplicate key, in the porter's office."

"But Crabby will be here any minute," gasped Merle. "If she catches you—"

Vicky made an impatient gesture.

"It would be worse if she caught Mr. Forrest! And in any case she won't come straight to her study. She always goes up to her room first to change. I've probably got five minutes—and a package with green seals ought not to be hard to find."

"Then we're going to help!" declared Karen, and Merle nodded emphatically. "We're all in this with you, Vicky!"

Vicky smiled unsteadily.

"Thanks, girls! I need your help—but it'll be safer for one of us to search. I want you, Karen, to find Mr. Forrest—warn him that Crabby's come back, and keep him talking. Whatever happens, you mustn't let him come to the study!"

"But, Vicky!"

"Please—please do as I say! Every minute's precious now. I promise you I won't take any needless chances. Merle, will you wait at the foot of the stairs near the dining-hall? If you see anyone coming, knock accidentally against the gong!"

Merle nodded.

"Good luck, Vicky!" breathed Karen, touching her chum's hand.

"And we'll meet you—"

"In the vault, as we arranged!" Vicky whispered. "Now—hurry!"

The chums parted, Karen and Merle hurrying to carry out their respective tasks, while Vicky made her way quickly to the porter's small room at the corner of the passage.

To her relief, he was absent on his duties, and the keys hung in orderly rows on the board inside.

A moment sufficed for Vicky to find

### Their Secret Rehearsal Room Discovered By Miss Appleby!

the duplicate key of Study 9—Miss Appleby's room.

Her heart thumping, she returned to the study.

All was quiet. At that hour in the evening most of the mistresses were either out or engaged on their various tasks in the school.

Her hand trembling slightly, Vicky unlocked the study door and entered.

The moon had risen, and its pale light shone through the window, revealing Miss Appleby's specklessly tidy desk—and her gown and mortar-board hanging on a peg, looking for all the world as though the senior mistress herself was standing there, motionless and watchful in the gloom.

Vicky gulped, gripped by a sudden panicky sense of guilt. Impatiently she fought against the feeling.

She had come here, not as a thief, but to obtain proof of a dastardly plot aimed at herself and her chums.

Defiantly she stared at the slightly swaying gown, and gently closed and locked the door.

Now—to work!

Every second was vital. The moonlight gave her all the light she needed for her search, for to use a torch would have been far too risky.

The desk, first. But a rapid search among the orderly pile of papers and exercise books revealed no trace of an oblong package with green seals.

The drawers in the desk were unlocked, and, banishing her scruples, Vicky inspected them in turn. But they contained nothing except stationery and writing materials.

Vicky's anxiety increased.

Time was flying, and at any moment Miss Appleby might return to her study. Thank goodness, Merle was on the look-out by the stairs. The warning gong would allow at least a few precious seconds in which to escape.

Vicky stared round her. Supposing Mr. Forrest had been mistaken about that package? Or supposing Miss Appleby had taken it to her bedroom?

Impatiently Vicky dismissed the thought. The young master had been certain that the packet was here—and it was up to her to find it!

There still remained the bookshelves—and a small cupboard set above the coat-pegs near the door.

The cupboard seemed a likely place. It was well out of reach, and hardly noticeable behind the door. Vicky pulled up a chair and climbed on it. The cupboard was fastened, but the key had been left in the lock.

Vicky turned it, and opened the cupboard door.

The pale light of the moon threw the interior into shadow, but Vicky glimpsed several bundles of papers obviously stowed away there for safety. She pulled them out one by



one-faded letters and old newspapers that seemed to have no connection with her question.

Her hopes were sinking when, moving a pile of dusty books, she saw the corner of a package protruding—a package bearing a green seal.

The next moment Vicky was holding the vital packet in her hands, her pulses racing with excitement.

She could see that it was addressed to Miss Appleby, but she had no qualms about taking it. If Colin Forrest was right, its contents would reveal the cause of the senior mistress' enmity—and clear up the mystery that for so long had threatened the girls' happiness and the success of their all-important play.

Eagerly, Vicky held up the package in the moonlight; then her blood seemed to freeze.

Outside the door she heard footsteps pause, and the rattle of a bunch of keys!

For an instant her mind felt numbed. There had been no warning—and Merle, she knew, would not have let her down.

Then, with a stifled groan, she remembered that there was another way into the staff corridor—from the private entrance opening into the headmistress' garden.

Miss Appleby, instead of going straight to her room, as usual, must have paid a visit to the headmistress before making her way to the study.

And Vicky realised that she was trapped!

The key turned in the lock, even as she made to leap to the floor. The door swung open, thudding back against the chair. She heard Miss Appleby's stifled ejaculation as the mistress groped for the electric-light switch.

In that split second Vicky's paralysed thoughts became suddenly clear; and she acted with a swiftness born of desperation.

Almost without thinking, she snatched Miss Appleby's gown from the peg behind her and flung it over the mistress' head before the other's fingers could discover the switch.

Taken completely off her guard, Miss Appleby gave a startled, muffled cry, attempting to snatch the enveloping material from her face. Fortunately, the gown had become entangled about her figure, and in those precious seconds Vicky darted to the casement window, flung it open and climbed out on to the sill.

She heard Miss Appleby's shout, and saw the light blaze up suddenly as the mistress found the switch.

"Stop—thief!" Vicky, heedless of the angry cry, took a desperate flying leap into the shrubbery, sprawling to her hands and knees.

Shaken, but unhurt, she groped for the precious packet that had fallen to the ground, and finally grasped it. She knew that Miss Appleby would see the open cupboard, and probably guess what had been taken.

But would she raise the alarm? Vicky was not left long in doubt. Even as she rose unsteadily to her feet, sheltered by the dense bushes, she heard the clatter of the window

as it was thrown wide; then a scrambling sound, and a thud on the flower-bed.

The mistress intended to catch the intruder herself!

Vicky ducked down, and commenced to run along the grass verge, keeping in the shadows. But she knew that Miss Appleby must have heard her, and surely enough the mistress' footsteps were coming in pursuit, hurrying along the path.

It was plain that Miss Appleby had no intention of raising the alarm, for fear that the vital package might fall into the wrong hands. Suspecting that she had a schoolgirl to deal with, she intended to regain the packet by force.

She would then be at liberty to tell any story she wished, in order to have the daring girl punished.

Vicky's heart was pounding as she quickened her steps, heading towards the gate-tower. If only she could gain the secret vault, she would be able to take refuge till Colin Forrest and the other girls arrived.

With the contents of the packet in the young master's hands, Miss Appleby would be cornered—and finally beaten!

Pausing for breath, Vicky listened. But now she could not hear any sounds of pursuit. She breathed more freely, hoping that she had thrown the mistress off the track.

Emboldened, she stepped out from the shrubbery—and then her heart gave a sickening jump.

For she heard Miss Appleby's footsteps again—coming towards her. The mistress had made a detour to cut off her retreat.

Desperately, Vicky turned, plunging back into the bushes—running blindly now without any attempt at stealth. And then her foot caught in a trailing creeper. She tried to regain her balance, but fell heavily, a despairing sob torn from her lips.

Behind her she heard Miss Appleby's triumphant ejaculation as the mistress quickened her steps. And at the same instant Vicky felt her arm caught in a powerful grip, and she was dragged down into the undergrowth.

A hand closed swiftly over her mouth, stifling her cry of alarm.

#### AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

"NOT a sound, Vicky!" whispered a voice close to her ear. "Lie still. I'll deal with this!"

Vicky's heart gave an incredulous bound. There could be no mistaking that voice. She could not see its owner, but she was aware of Colin Forrest's reassuring presence.

The young master, warned by Karen of Vicky's purpose, had arrived on the scene in the nick of time.

He held her firmly, though gently, as though afraid she might betray herself by an unwary movement. Miss Appleby's footsteps came closer, and the light of a torch shone among the bushes.

Then, apparently baffled by the complete silence, the mistress hurried on, her footsteps receding.

Vicky gave a choking gulp of relief and gratitude as the young master removed his hand. She could hardly make out his broad-shouldered figure in the darkness, but she heard his boyish chuckle.

"A near thing, Vicky! I say, that was a jolly plucky act of yours." His tone changed. "If you'd been caught in Miss Appleby's study, it would have been pretty serious for you."

"No more serious than if you'd been caught, Mr. Forrest," retorted Vicky. "We"—her voice shook slightly—"we can't afford to lose our best friend!"

The young master was silent for an instant.

"Thanks, Vicky," he said gruffly. "I appreciate that—more than you can guess. You girls have been sports, and it's been a pleasure to help you. But matters are coming to a head now. Miss Appleby knows that I'm on the track of her secret—and she's terrified that you girls may learn the truth before to-morrow's opening of the Drama Festival. She'll do anything to recover that package—by the way, you've got it safely?" he added, a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Rather!" Vicky nodded, clutching the precious packet. "What—what exactly is in it, Mr. Forrest? You didn't tell me."

The young master appeared to be listening, his head partly turned. It was not till Vicky repeated her question that he replied.

"Papers and letters concerning the mysterious Hester Wayne—and her connection with you, Vicky!" he breathed. "They came by accident into Miss Appleby's hands—and there may be enough evidence there to prove how she hoped to gain by wrecking your play, and getting you into disgrace. I suggest we meet the other girls at the vault, and examine the papers together—"

He broke off, his hand tightening warningly on her arm.

Miss Appleby's footsteps were returning. She was approaching more stealthily, the gleam from her torch probing the bushes.

Vicky's rising hopes were suddenly chilled. Her hand tightened on Mr. Forrest's arm in mute dismay.

"All right," whispered the young master. "Stay where you are till the coast is clear—and then cut along to the vault. I'll join you later."

He pressed her shoulder reassuringly; and suddenly Vicky became aware that he was no longer with her. He had departed in almost uncanny silence. She waited in cold suspense, watching Miss Appleby's approach.

The mistress flashed her torch on the bush behind which Vicky was crouching.

Then suddenly there came a crashing in the shrubbery, and Miss Appleby turned with a cry as a tall figure sprang into view, seizing her by the arm.

"Thank goodness I'm in time!" gasped Mr. Forrest. "I was afraid I might be too late!"

Vicky held her breath, and Miss Appleby gasped as she attempted to shake off the young master's hold.

"Mr. Forrest, have you—have you taken leave of your senses?" she exclaimed.

"Rather not," declared Colin breathlessly. "I was returning from a walk when I heard your cry for help. I'd never have forgiven myself if any harm had come to you."

"What are you talking about?" demanded the mistress, recovering from

### PIP THE PUP





her first surprise, her voice taking on a sharp edge. "I did not call for help—"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Forrest. "We've had our little differences, Miss Appleby, but I have never doubted your courage. From the distance I heard your cry of 'Stop, thief!'—and I caught a glimpse of you as you climbed boldly from your study window. Some miscreant had evidently broken into your room—and you were giving chase."

Miss Appleby gulped, eyeing the young master with venomous suspicion.

"No doubt, Mr. Forrest, you are aware of—of the miscreant's purpose?"

"I?" echoed Mr. Forrest. "How should I know, Miss Appleby, what private treasures you keep in your room? But now that I am here, you must permit me to escort you. You take the torch, and I will arm myself—so!"

He snatched a stick from the undergrowth, and waved it as though engaging an unseen assailant. But Vicky, watching breathlessly, realised that he was signalling to her to beat an instant retreat!

"Mr. Forrest, I believe this is a subterfuge!" snapped Miss Appleby. "A ruse to distract my attention. Once I might have been taken in by such a trick—but now I am able to see you in your true colours. Kindly let me go—"

"If you insist, of course," said the young master gallantly. "Should I catch the miscreant, and discover the stolen object, I will take it to my aunt—"

"No! No!" rejoined the mistress hastily. "On second thoughts, Mr. Forrest, we will go together."

"Come, then," said Mr. Forrest. "Those footprints on the fallen leaves suggest that our quarry went this way!"

And he led Miss Appleby off towards the trees, and as he went he looked back and grinned at the bush behind which Vicky was crouching.

Vicky gave a little gulp of relief, her eyes brimming with mingled admiration and laughter. Even though under a cloud himself, the young master could still handle a dangerous situation with unsurpassed gaiety and sureness of touch.

But there was no time to lose. Her first care was to safeguard the vital packet—the packet for which she knew Miss Appleby would risk so much.

Making her way quickly across the moonlit grounds, Vicky reached the secret vault and rolled back the stone that guarded the entrance.

The other girls had not yet arrived, but the costumes were laid out in readiness for their final rehearsal. Mr. Forrest had left nothing to chance.

Vicky thrust the precious packet under the costumes, and went back to the entrance to the vault to watch for her chums. Ten minutes passed—a quarter of an hour—and she began to grow anxious. Could anything have happened to upset their arrangements?

Rolling the stone back into place, she set out in search of her chums. She had nearly reached the school when she saw Merle and Karen running towards her, out of breath and obviously excited.

"Vicky—thank goodness you're all right!" gasped Merle, catching her by the arm. "We heard the commotion in Crabby's study, and we were afraid—"

Swiftly Vicky reassured them, explaining what had happened.

"The packet is safe," she declared, "and Mr. Forrest is going to join us later in the vault, to make final arrangements. But what's happened to the other girls?"

"They've been detained by one of the prefects—on Miss Appleby's instructions," said Karen grimly.

"There's something in the wind, Vicky! Crabby came back with Mr. Forrest, and she was in a flaring temper. Then the headmistress sent

for him—and Crabby went out again, on her own, after leaving orders that the juniors were to be kept at their prep. Merle and I managed to slip out to look for you."

Vicky's face had turned rather pale.

"It sounds as though our plans are suspected!" she murmured. "We know that Crabby's been spying on us—and now that she's lost that packet she'll be more determined than ever to discover what we're up to."

"But what can we do?" Merle asked. "You say Mr. Forrest promised to meet us at the vault."

"And he'll keep his promise as soon as he can get away!" nodded Vicky with conviction. "We can't let him down, girls. Everything depends on our plans to-night. The three of us will join him, and if those papers prove what he imagines, we'll be able to snap our fingers at Crabby—and have the ban lifted from our play in time to enter for the Drama Festival to-morrow."

Vicky's determination revived her chums' enthusiasm. Together they hurried back to their secret place of rehearsal, keeping in the shadows for fear of attracting attention.

The little clearing behind the gatehouse was silent and deserted in the moonlight. Vicky gave a sigh of

There was a silence, in which the speechless chums could hear the pounding of their own hearts.

"Not that it matters," went on the mistress, her voice hardening.

"Whether you found it—or your audacious helper—the fact remains that you have flagrantly defied the headmistress' orders, and rehearsed here in secret. I suppose you realise"—she spoke with a triumph in her tone—there could be no mistaking—that this may mean expulsion!"

"Then Vicky found her voice, a growling anger mastering the chill of fear that gripped her heart at the other's words."

"What if we have rehearsed in secret?" she exclaimed unsteadily. "For weeks past you've tried to ruin our play—and we know why? You discovered a secret connected with Hester Wayne, who wrote the play—and you've got the proof with you now—the proof of your plot!"

The mistress' face changed colour. An unpleasant expression crept into her eyes.

Her fingers closed on the handbag she carried slung over one shoulder.

"Vicky Marlow, have you taken leave of your senses?" she demanded harshly. "Your wild charges will merely make matters worse for you—"



Petrified, the chums stared at the mistress and Miss Appleby stared back, her lips parted in a malicious smile. "I've been waiting for you girls," she said.

relief, and rolled back the stone from the entrance to the secret vault.

Followed by her chums, she descended the narrow stairs, and opened the massive door.

Then her heart chilled. She and her chums stood rigid with horror.

The vaulted room was lit by a flickering yellow glow. And standing by the pile of costumes, lantern in hand, a gleam of vindictive triumph in her eyes—was Miss Appleby!

#### A LAST BID

**P**ETRIFIED, the chums stared at the mistress—and Miss Appleby stared back, her lips parted in a malicious smile.

"I've been waiting for you girls!" she said.

Vicky tried to speak, but no words came. She felt as though she were in a dreadful nightmare, brought on by the fears and excitements of the past eventful weeks.

But this was no dream. Miss Appleby, their enemy, had discovered their secret—at the eleventh hour!

And not only that. By the disarrayed costumes, Vicky realised that the mistress had removed the vital package she had hidden there—the packet containing the only proof that could have helped them now.

"I've been waiting for you girls," she repeated raspingly. "A most intriguing little hiding-place you've found here—or was it you who discovered it?"

But Vicky had seen that quick, almost apprehensive movement; she knew now that in the handbag was the vital package. A reckless gleam flashed into her eyes.

"Girls, are we going to let her get away with this?" she exclaimed. "We're three against one—and everything's at stake!"

Her chums stared at her, momentarily aghast at her daring. Then Karen stepped quickly to Vicky's side, and Merle joined her.

Miss Appleby's face had turned white.

"Stop!" she exclaimed. "I warn you, girls—"

And she sprang towards the scheming mistress who had made their lives a misery for so long, seizing her by the arm.

"The handbag, girls—but quickly!" she gasped.

Merle and Karen darted to her aid as Miss Appleby attempted to fling her off.

And at that instant a scandalised voice spoke from the doorway of the vault.

"Girls! What—what is the meaning of this?"

On the threshold, her face pale with horrified amazement, stood Miss Vernon, the headmistress.

This popular story reaches an exciting climax next week. Be sure to read the concluding chapters—and look for details of a new school serial by Dorothy Page.



# THAT DUTCH HOLIDAY of SURPRISES

By ELISE PROBYN

## THE CLOG-SHAPED TULIP-BOWL

SHIRLEY BLYTHE and her chums, Tess and Dick Foley, were staying in Bootendorp, in Holland, as the guests of their Dutch chum, Jan.

They were intrigued by a mysterious girl named Zella van Deen, the ward of a wealthy bulb grower.

Zella asked the chums to find a tulip-bowl, shaped like a clog, which was of vital importance to her.

The Dutch girl was afraid of her guardian, Mr. van Hagel, and the chums learnt that for some mysterious reason he was also after the tulip-bowl.

They found the bowl, and paid a secret visit to Zella's house, where they found her confined in a school-room. Shirley handed her the bowl with a smile.

"Now, Zella, what's the secret of this tulip-bowl?" she asked.

"SHIRLEY! You have found it for me! The tulip-bowl!"

Zella's eyes shone, her hands were trembling with excitement as she held that quaint little glass bowl in the light of the desk-lamp. Shaped like a clog with upturned toe, it lent a homely touch to this austere, shuttered room and the schoolbooks spread open on the desk.

"What does it mean, Zella? What is the secret of the tulip-bowl?" Shirley asked again, while Tess, Dick and Jan waited with bated breath.

Zella was examining the bowl, inside and out, with feverish intensity. All watched her in thrilled suspense. Why didn't she speak? Why had her guardian dogged them so persistently in their quest for the bowl, even trying to steal it from them to-day?

And then Zella answered at last in a baffled little whisper:

"I do not know."

"You don't know?" Dick echoed faintly.

"I do not know the secret—yet. That is why I so much need your help!" Zella pleaded, as mystified as themselves. "It was my brother Anton who bade me search for this bowl. He left me a note before he ran away to England. Just a note scribbled in great haste; but with it, Shirley, were those six windmill postcards I gave to you on the boat. You have them still?"

"Yes; but—but what did the note say, Zella?"

"Only that I must seek at all costs for this tulip-bowl," Zella went on. "It would mean everything for me, my brother said. Everything for my happiness!"

"Did your guardian—did Mr. van Hagel see that note, Zella?" Shirley asked.

"Yes—but not the postcards. I hid them from him just in time. You see, he was very bitter to me.

very distrustful, after my brother had gone," Zella whispered shakily. "He came spying up here in my room."

"Just as he came spying after us, ever since we started searching for the bowl. Gee!" Dick said excitedly. "There must be some secret in it, if only we could find it."

"Dick's right!" exclaimed Shirley. "Let me have a look at it." She thrust her hand into the toe of the bowl, examining it minutely, groping for some slot or mark which might reveal a hidden cavity in the metal. But there was nothing.

Despairingly she gazed at the rust and tarnish which had collected on it while it lay in the loft of the wind-mill. Then, thoughtfully, she reached for a penknife on Zella's desk, and began scraping away the rust on the inner side.

"Gee! Isn't that like a girl! She's giving it a clean up!" Dick gasped. "There isn't time for that now, Shirley!"

But Shirley was still scraping away—and suddenly she started.

"I say! There's something scratched here—under the rust. I can see a word that looks like—like 'Kasteel.'" Shirley held the bowl breathlessly under the light. "After that it says 'Amsterdam.' Yes—it's an address. There's another word in front 'B-L-O-E—'"

"Bloemen Kasteel, Amsterdam!" Zella burst out excitedly.

"Is it an address? A place that you know, Zella?" the chums asked in one breath.

"Yes. It is what you would call in English the Castle of Flowers. But"—Zella's voice shook—"but why does my brother direct me there? It is impossible. I cannot go into the Kasteel!"

"You mean your guardian won't let you? Never mind, Zella! We'll go there for you," Shirley offered.

But Zella was shaking her head tragically.

"You do not understand, Shirley. The Kasteel is the tulip-growers' club, their headquarters in Amsterdam. It is not open to the public. No one can go in there—only the bulb-growers and merchants!"

The chums stared aghast. Had they hit upon the clue of the tulip-bowl, only to find the way barred to them?

It Was Vital Zella Should Attend The Exclusive Fancy Dress Ball — But How Could Shirley & Co. Secure A Ticket For Her ?

"Wait!" It was their Dutch chum Jan who spoke. His eyes were eager. "There are times, joost now and again, when the Kasteel is open to the public—"

"When, Jan?"

"There is the annual ball—the big fancy dress ball given by the tulip-growers. It is this week, on Friday. There is joost a chance we could get tickets—"

Jan suddenly stopped, swinging round towards the shuttered window. Wheels sounded in the drive below. The purr of a car pulling up at the front door.

"My guardian! He is back!" Zella whispered. "If he finds you here—"

"He won't! Leave it to us, Zella!" Shirley's hand flew to the tulip bowl on the desk. "He won't find this little joker anyway!"

Dick whisked the bowl from her, wrapped it up in paper, and thrust it deep into his pocket. Jan drew the door open an inch and stood there, listening. Shirley and Tess sped noiselessly to the window, peering down through the slats of the shutters.

There was no hope of escape that way—no creeper, no pipes, nothing but the smooth brickwork reaching sheer to the ground three storeys below. What were they to do? Shirley's heart beat painfully fast. They were intruders in Mr. van Hagel's house. They had stolen into his house, meeting Zella in defiance of his wishes after already tricking him once to-day—and now they were trapped here!

Down below she could see Mr. van Hagel stepping out of his car, carrying a carefully wrapped brown-paper parcel.

"You know what that is, Shirley?" whispered Tess.

"Yes, but he doesn't! It's that pishish I packed up for him, and he thinks it's the tulip-bowl!"

Sheer nervousness, in their present plight, made both girls giggle painfully.

Then Mr. van Hagel vanished from their vision, and they heard his voice in the hall, speaking to the maid.

"I shall not be wanting dinner yet, Anna, I shall be busy. You may take some soup up to Zella, and some chocolate cake as a special treat, if she has finished her lessons."

"He sounds in good humour to-day!" breathed Zella in surprise.

"Yes, but I don't think it'll last long!" murmured Shirley apprehensively.

Then the chums heard Mr. van Hagel hurry into the front room, closing the door after him.

"Now's our chance—off we go!" whispered Dick.

Saying good-bye to Zella, the



chums crept from the room, Tess leading the way on tiptoe down the stairs, Shirley following, then Jan and Dick.

The beautiful Dutch-Indian carpet was as soft as thistledown under their feet. Not a sound did they make. So complete was their silence that they could hear every movement from the front room as Mr. van Hagel struck a match for his cigar, reached for scissors, cut the string of his parcel, and then, with audible excitement, began unwrapping the paper.

By that time the chums had reached the hall.

Tess crept past Mr. van Hagel's room to the front door, opened it noiselessly, and stole out. She held the door open while Shirley followed her, then Jan Dick, in the rear, was half-way across the hall when suddenly—

Crash! A shattering din came from Mr. van Hagel's room.

It sounded like a plectish being hurled into the grate.

Dick bounded forward violently, and in doing so he overbalanced. His hand struck a Dutch gong hanging in the hall.

Boom! It sounded all over the house, as if in mocking echo of the crashed plectish.

There was a roar from the room, and Mr. van Hagel came storming out.

"Who's that? Who is it? Who—"

Dick dived out through the door and joined his chums in a hectic rush to the gate.

#### A VISIT FROM VAN HAGEL

"BAD luck, Dick! Did he see you?" Tess panted.

"He heard me, anyway!" gasped Dick.

"He's at the door now, but he needs cat's eyes to see us in the dark," breathed Jan. "Come—we scoot across Poppa's field!"

He led a swift sprint through the path of the bulb-fields, offsetting any danger of Mr. van Hagel pursuing them by car and their being spotted in the headlights.

It was a cheerful scene that met them in the farmhouse kitchen. Jan's father sat smoking his pipe by the cosy Dutch stove. Jan's mother was chopping vegetables into an enormous earthenware bowl for the evening hot-pot. Both looked surprised when Jan and the chums came in, flushed and out of breath.

"Mine gootness, why you hurry so fast? Dinner is not ready yet," smiled Mrs. de Voort.

Farmer de Voort was gazing closely at the chums.

"You look like you have big adventure, ja?"

"I'll say we have—ja!" Shirley laughed, but she had a premonition that the adventure hadn't yet ended. "Can't we do some of these vegetables for you, Mrs. de Voort? Do let's help!"

Off came their coats. Quickly Tess put on an apron. Dick and Jan rolled up their sleeves. All four presented a most innocent picture, peeling potatoes and dicing carrots, when a heavy knock sounded at the front door.

"Come in!" called Jan's mother brightly.

Next moment a tall, dark shadow loomed in the kitchen doorway. The chums knew without looking that it was Mr. van Hagel. And they knew, even before he spoke, that he wasn't deceived.

He ignored the polite greeting from Jan's parents, and said stiffly, in English:

"Mrs. de Voort, even I, your own landlord, do not enter your house without bidding. I expect these young English visitors of yours to observe the same courtesy before entering my house!"

"We meant no discourtesy, Mr. van Hagel," Shirley said quickly realising that any denial was useless. "You were out when we called."

"Is that any reason for stealing into my house like thieves?" he rapped back.

"If you're going to talk about thieving, sir," Dick said, his eyes glinting, "we were robbed ourselves to-day—of a parcel."

Mr. van Hagel bit his lip furiously, a muscle twitching in his lean face.

"I thought, when you apologised to me this morning, that you were young people of honour," he blustered, trying to recover his dignity. "I thought you would respect my wishes when I told you, clearly, that I did not wish you to associate with Zella. But it is not so. Mrs. de Voort, I must insist that your English visitors have nothing further to do with Zella. I demand it, because I regard them as the worst kind of influence for my ward!"

"Mr. van Hagel—"

Both Jan's parents started up in shocked protest.

"Then it's our influence you object to?" flashed Tess.

"We thought it was the other way about!" challenged Dick.

"What's the real reason, Mr. van Hagel?" Shirley asked him steadily. "What have we done? What has Zella done—that you should object to our meeting her?"

needs brighter company than his, poor lamb!"

Jan's father stood up, biting heavily on his pipe.

"If I vos Shirley or Dick or Tess, I would say to him—"

He broke off with a groan. "But vot can I say? He is Mr. van Hagel, he is my landlord!"

And he stamped out into the yard, and the chums heard him chopping wood—hard.

They looked at each other in troubled concern. It was as though Mr. van Hagel's visit had suddenly destroyed the cheerfulness of this kindly home, and they felt themselves to blame for it.

"We're sorry this happened, Mrs. de Voort. Sorry he came here upsetting you—" Shirley began contritely.

"Van Hagel is a hard man," Jan's mother said. "He has no fondness for anyone but himself." Then, as she reached again for the vegetable-peeler, she asked curiously: "Why did you go into his house, Shirley?"

"To give something to Zella—something that he tried to steal from us!" Shirley answered, her tone so



Angrily van Hagel glared around. "Mrs. de Voort," he said, "I must insist that your English visitors have nothing further to do with Zella."

His lean face gave her a look that reminded her of a wolf, and she noticed that he did not answer her questions; he was not to be trapped into any admissions. He ignored her and her chums, too. But, very deliberately, he addressed himself to Jan's parents instead.

"Zella is like her brother—idle, pleasure-loving, crazy on money and a good time. You know the worry he caused me, you know there are limits to my patience!" He paused—and during that pause Shirley detected a queer gleam in his eyes, almost like a threat, an unspoken threat, to Jan's parents.

"These young English visitors of yours—they are here to enjoy a holiday, to find pleasure," he went on. "Very good. No one would wish to interfere with their pleasures. Nor must they interfere with Zella—who has serious tasks to do, and many amends to make to me for the disgrace that she shares with her brother. I hope that in future your young strangers will respect my wishes, Farmer and Mrs. de Voort, otherwise—he paused again sombrely—"I may have to take sterner measures. That is all!"

There was an uneasy silence in the room when he was gone.

Then Jan, who had not once spoken, suddenly burst out:

"He is a beast—a bully! And wicked!"

"I am sorry he would break your friendship with Zella, mine children," Mrs. de Voort said shakily. "She

impressive that Jan's mother dropped the peeler.

"Steal from you?" She gazed incredulously from one to the other, but even Jan for once was serious. "Vot vos it?" she gasped, while Shirley went to the door and opened it, in case van Hagel should be loitering outside.

Dick's hand went to his pocket. While Jan's mother watched in excited curiosity, he unwrapped the clog-like bowl and dramatically held it out.

"It was this tulip-bowl he was after," he declared.

Jan's mother gazed at it in astonishment, then laughed.

"So solemn you look, I did not think you vos joking—"

"But we're not joking, Mrs. de Voort," Shirley assured her earnestly. "There's a mystery about this tulip-bowl—a secret that's frantically important to Zella. That's why Mr. van Hagel's trying to keep us away from her. He's been foxing us every day, spying on us, ever since we started searching for it!"

And then, echoed by Tess and Dick, she poured out the whole story, beginning with their fleeting encounter with Zella on the boat, the sly attempt of Mr. van Hagel to steal the windmill postcards from them, and then the sinister behaviour yesterday of Mr. van Hagel when he had shadowed them on the river in their quest for the tulip-bowl.

Jan's mother listened in astonishment, interrupting from time to

time, but she was vastly intrigued. Her eyes were bright, and she was as thrilled and as excited as the mystery-loving chums.

"You are sure it was Mr. van Hagel following you yesterday, spying from the launch? A white launch, you say? Yes, dot is his! But even so"—she gazed incredulously at the tulip-bowl—"why do you think he wanted this funny little clog?"

"Because he gave himself away today—he followed us to Edam, and he snooped into the restaurant where we'd taken the bowl!" And breathlessly Shirley described the dummy parcel she had prepared. "The next thing we knew—he'd sneaked off with the parcel!"

"And vot he found in it vos a piederish!" Jan's mother sat back in her chair, her plump sides shaking with laughter.

"We've won the first round, anyhow. We've got the bowl!" grinned Dick, and put it back in his pocket.

"But vot can its secret be?" Mrs. de Voort asked. "I wish so mooch to know, Shirley. I puzzle mine head till you find out."

"Our next clue's somewhere in Amsterdam, at the tulip-growers' chateau—the Kasteel," Shirley began thoughtfully, "but we've got to find a way of getting in there."

Jan's mother jumped up, beaming. "The Kasteel? You are coming there on Friday?" she asked. "We are all coming. I have tickets for the fancy dress ball." And she bustled happily from the room to fetch the tickets.

Shirley & Co. executed a dance there and then on the kitchen floor. Only one thing was needed to make their luck complete.

"Jan," said Shirley, "not a word to anyone, but—can't we bring Zella? We'll smuggle her along somehow—we'll fix her up in fancy dress so that no one will know her. The thing is—can we get her a ticket?"

The audacity of the plan thrilled Jan; but the ticket was the problem. "The tickets cannot be bought. They are invitations. So many are given to each village, and the mayor distributes them," he murmured, his wits working eagerly. "Here in Bootendorp all the invitations will now have been sent, that is why Momma has ours. But there is one chance—"

He paused, his eyes suddenly glistening.

"What is it, Jan?" breathed the chums.

"In Breukelen, where my school is, the mayor has offered tickets to those who are his best helpers. Our boys and girls, they go and work for him in the Town Hall before school begins. You are on holiday, you have all day to help, and if you come with me to-morrow—"

"Jan! Will it make any difference, our being English?" Shirley burst in.

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no—but to-morrow you will not be English," Jan said, laughing. "I will lend you clothes and pass you off with my schoolmates—and you will be Dutch the same as vot we are!"

"Gee! We're on!" laughed Shirley. "I don't care if we're double-Dutch as long as we can get that ticket for Zella!"

### WORKING FOR THE MAYOR

"TURN round from that glass and let's look at you, Tess!"

"Talk about a Dutch gretchen, Shirley—you look as if you were born here!"

Both girls stood in their room next morning, surveying each other. Their Dutch garbs, borrowed from the dairymaids on the farm, were complete in every detail—puffy-sleeved blue smocks, wide pleated skirts that reached almost down to their yellow clogs, and white fan-shaped, headdresses, immaculately starched, with tinkling brass curlicues peeping beneath them.

Then a thump sounded at the door, and in came Dick, wearing Jan's

baggiest trousers, short jacket, large clogs, and a little round cap.

"O.K.! You'll do, girls!" he approved. "How do I look?"

"Like a Dutch cheese," laughed Tess, ducking out of his reach.

"What I want to know is, how can we cycle in these clogs?" puzzled Shirley.

"Clogs is best for cycling," said Jan, quite seriously. "Me, even when I am racing, I always wear clogs."

The chums were willing to try anything once—but their hazards began when they mounted their bikes. What with the high saddles, the frosty road, and the unaccustomed clogs, they felt as if they were riding on the edge of a glacier, without control of either feet or pedals.

A car tooted impatiently behind them. All three wobbled precariously. Dick crashed into the hedge, and Tess and Shirley went piling on top of him.

The car went snorting by, but not before Shirley had recognised it and recognised Mr. van Hagel glaring back sharply from the wheel.

"Did you see how he gaped when he saw us in these togs?" Tess said, shaking with mirth as she extricated herself from the hedge.

Shirley's smile was slightly uneasy. She had observed the look of sharp suspicion on Mr. van Hagel's face.

"It's a pity he saw us," she muttered. "He could be a nuisance if he should suspect we're after a ticket for Zella—"

"How could he suspect? Never mind old Hagel. He's gone now!" And Dick mirthfully helped her to mount again, and off they went to catch up with Jan.

It was surprising how soon they learnt the knack of riding in clogs. Once they were off the Bootendorp road, on the cycle track to Breukelen, all was plain sailing. They rode triumphantly into the village square, just as the cafés were opening and the early-morning housewives cleaning their steps.

They parked their bikes in the market enclosure, then Jan led the way across to a clock-towered building, pretty as a doll's house, which was plainly the pride of the square.

"This is where we help the mayor. It is vot we call the civic hall," Jan said with a touch of awe. "Come, we see if my school friends are here yet before we go in."

The chums followed him a little cautiously, and peeped in through the main door, then the side door. It seemed that the civic hall was also the village fire-station, the law court, and everything else. But there was no sign of anyone else here at the moment.

Jan led them round the side of the building, and they peered surreptitiously through the windows.

"It is no goot unless we join my school party," he whispered. "They will not give away that you are strangers. They will help us get a ticket for Zella, but—where are they all?"

"Here they come!" breathed Dick, and drew back eagerly from the window.

A column of Dutch schoolboys and girls came clogging along the cobbles, carrying forms and chairs and other pieces of school furniture which were obviously being loaned to his worship the mayor.

"Goot! We help! You come to my school with me!" beamed Jan.

It was just at that moment, as they hurried out along the pavement, that Shirley saw eyes watching her from a café window.

"Gee! We're being spied on!" she gasped. "Van Hagel's here!"

"Where?"

"In that café! Don't look—don't let on that you know."

"Perhaps he thinks we're here on a clue connected with the tulip bowl," suggested Dick.

"That's our only hope—as long as he sticks where he is," muttered Shirley. "But if he comes in and gives us away to the mayor, we're sunk, and we won't get that ticket for Zella!"

"I will get it for you somehow, you leave it to me!" vowed Jan.

They followed him into his school, into the classroom that was being denuded of its furniture, and Jan introduced them to his astonished school chums. There was no need to plead for their co-operation. Those jolly Dutch boys and girls were thrilled to meet Shirley & Co., and they "adopted" them into the party with the greatest glee.

Tess and Shirley carried bowls of flowers. Dick shouldered a couple of chairs. And they followed Jan and his chums in crocodile to the village square. They couldn't help feeling uncomfortably self-conscious as they passed the café window, under the sharp scrutiny of those eyes peering through the curtains. It was a thankful relief to escape into the civic hall.

"Jan, can you get us a special job to do? We don't care what it is, as long as we earn that ticket," breathed Shirley, as they carried their burdens through the hall.

The mayor himself was now there—a plump, jovial gentleman, wearing the red robes and large porkpie hat of his office. He was keeping his young helpers busy and finding plenty for them all to do. Jan spoke to him and came back, beaming.

"We have to polish the firemen's helmets. It is very important; it is a very special day for the village firemen," he told the chums. "Come—we have four pair of hands, we win one ticket easily!"

Shirley & Co. scampered with him through a passage into the miniature fire-station. The fire-engine looked no bigger than a toy. But on the wall hung seven brass helmets, the largest they had ever seen.

"Gee, they're the size of coal-scuttles!" gasped Dick.

During the next half-hour Jan and the chums polished away at those helmets as if their lives depended on it. From time to time Shirley took a furtive peep through the window. She could see the café, and she could plainly see Mr. van Hagel's tall, seated figure behind the net curtain. His gaze was fixed towards the civic hall.

"We will finish this polishing," said Jan, perspiring with exertion. "Then I will get the ticket before go to school, ja!"

The chums redoubled their energies. Those enormous helmets had hung for many years on their hooks—ornaments of State, worn only by their proud owners on civic occasions such as to-day.

They had grown somewhat tarnished since their last public appearance. But they were gleaming now like burnished gold, when there came sounds of Jan's schoolmates departing.

"I speak to the mayor now!" exclaimed Jan.

"Bring him here, Jan," suggested Shirley. "Let him see the polish we've put on those helmets. Tell him it's only one ticket we want."

Jan went hurrying across the hall. Shirley followed him to the end of the passage, waiting there breathlessly, while Jan's school chums went crowding past her out into the street.

She had only a few moments to wait. Then out burst Jan—alone—his eyes gleaming excitedly.

"Shirley, I've got it!" he cried, and she felt the crinkle of a ticket as he pressed it into her hand.

There was a swift step at her side, and then a tall figure swept between them, flinging Jan aside.

"What is it you have got? Give it to me, Shirley!" a voice said softly.

In wild dismay she gazed up into the face of Mr. van Hagel. He thought he had pounced on a vital clue—but it would be disaster to their plan if he discovered that it was merely a ticket for the fancy dress ball.

He would know that it could only be for Zella! What could she do—how could she outwit him?

More exciting chapters of this intriguing story in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.





### A TASK FOR MOLLIE

"YES, granddad, Mollie has been as good as gold."

Helen Hurst spoke with a ring of enthusiasm in her voice, for she was proud to be able to report to her grandfather that Mollie, her pet chimp, had been so well behaved.

Helen and her pets—including Jinx, the pup, and Popsy, the parrot—were away on holiday, staying with Helen's cousin, Mrs. Johnson, at the seaside.

Granddad had been left in charge of the Honeydew Cafe in their absence, but he had now come to visit them.

"I'm glad to hear it, Helen," he said, and beamed his relief. "I'll admit I've been worried. I know what tricks that chimp can get up to—"

"Mollie's absolutely on her best behaviour," Helen assured him. "She'll be awfully pleased to see you, granddad. Why, here she is!"

Helen knew the sound of Mollie's rather snuffling steps, and she was right. Sure enough, round the corner of the seaside house came the chimpanzee, dressed in her sun top and blue beach trousers.

"Wow!" said granddad, starting back in sudden alarm.

"Gug-good gracious!" exclaimed Helen.

Chattering amiably, Mollie came forward, swinging an axe.

"Keep her off!" gasped granddad. Helen let out a merry laugh.

"Oh, granddad," she said, "just as if Mollie would hit you with an axe! I dare say Billy gave it to her." But I'll soon get it away from her."

Billy was Mrs. Johnson's six-year-old son, and he and Mollie were great pals. He had given the chimp the axe, and Mollie, reluctant to part with it, scuttled back round the house as she saw Helen approaching.

Granddad, smiling faintly and stroking his chin, was about to hurry after them when he heard a step on the gravel drive behind him. Turning, he stiffened with amazement when he found himself confronted by a policeman.

"Good-morning, sir!" said the policeman sternly.

"Er—gig-good-morning!" answered granddad, wondering if he had parked his car wrongly, shot past a traffic light, or exceeded the speed limit.

"I've come about a chimpanzee. Does one live here?" asked the policeman.

Granddad's heart skipped a beat with anxiety.

"Oh dear! A—a chimp, eh? Yes, there is a chimp here. I've only just arrived. Don't tell me it's done any damage?"

The policeman smiled grimly. "Damage! It's broken three windows, torn up some rose-bushes, and scared an old lady!"

Granddad groaned. And then Helen came back into view with

Mollie, who looked as though ice cream couldn't melt in her mouth. Helen had heard what the policeman had said, and she hurried forward agitatedly.

"Granddad, there must be some mistake!" she gasped.

The policeman was staring at Mollie in surprise.

"Why, miss, how did the chimp get back?" he asked. "Or—or have you two?"

"Two? No, this is the only one," said Helen quickly. "And she's been here all the time."

The policeman smiled and gave granddad a reassuring look.

"Breathe again, sir," he said. "I knew there was a chimp kept here, and I came to see the owner. But, obviously, it isn't your chimp doing all the damage. There's another one. I left it on a roof only a few minutes ago, throwing tiles at the inspector!"

Just then another police car drew up, and an inspector—sporting a large bruise on his forehead—strode past the constable without even seeing the salute he gave.

"Miss Hurst," he said, "do you think you could help us? We feared it was Mollie at large, and I sent the constable to make sure. As it isn't, I think we could use her as a decoy."

Helen took a quick breath and looked at granddad.

"You think the other chimp might pal up to her?" she asked.

"Well, it's our only hope. This creature seems wild, and we can't trace its owner. It's got to be captured."

"We'll come, inspector," decided Helen. "Give me five minutes, and I'll join you. Come on, granddad," she added, a twinkle in her eye.

"You know how you've lectured Mollie to lead a useful, noble life. Well, now's the chance for her to be on the side of law and order."

### HUNT THE CHIMP

A LARGE crowd had gathered outside the house where the chimp was at bay. There were photographers, news reporters, mere on-lookers, police, a fire-engine, and a television camera was on its way.

Owing to the presence of near-by trees, the chimp had been able to swing briskly away from any would-be capturers. Finally, it had taken refuge on the roof of a house, bombarding anybody who approached with tiles and bricks.

Mollie, dressed in a bright red-and-gold jacket, with a pill-box hat, cut

### Mollie Changes Clothes With Her Fellow Chimp—With Unexpected Results

By IDA MELBOURNE

a dashing and romantic figure, and there was little doubt that the other chimp would want to find out who her tailor was and where she got that hat.

In addition, as a lure, Mollie carried three bananas. One she could eat; the other two were bait, one being tied behind her back where her relation could see it.

At first Mollie was startled by the crowd. Then she saw her relation on the roof and strained at her harness.

"Goodness knows whose chimp it is!" said Helen. "I'm most surprised the owner hasn't missed it, though. It's really rather a dear."

"Dear? I should call it fabulously expensive," said granddad. "Or will be when the owner has to pay for all the damage done!"

A ladder had been erected against the house for Mollie to mount, and the renegade chimp was looking over the parapet of the house curiously, but ready to evade any would-be captors.

Mollie swarmed up the ladder excitedly, but the other chimp moved back. She was wary and a little suspicious.

On the roof-top, in view of the crowd, Mollie and her new friend met. What exchanged between them no one knew, but there was evidently a short chat.

Mollie, somewhat critical of the other chimps, rather took to this one, complete stranger though she was. The other chimp wore a police-inspector's cap she had borrowed, and as a show of friendliness the two exchanged hats.

Then, out of sight of the madding crowd, Mollie offered her red-and-gold jacket in exchange for an apple, and after that the other chimp showed her a few interesting tricks. Putting bricks down a chimney was amusing, and so was swinging on telegraph wires.

The plan was for Mollie to lure the other chimp into a trap, which she would do by answering a food call. There would be no one in sight, a space having been cleared, and both chimps would rush for the food, Mollie imparting her confidence to her friend.

Probably the plan would have worked but for the unforeseen fact that Mollie would swap clothes—and the arrival of Professor Foskings, owner of the truant chimp.

The other chimp knew that the professor had arrived, for she heard him call her name:

"Sonia!"  
Sonia retired discreetly. But Mollie, too, heard the human voice quite near, and she waddled forward, surprised to see a man clad in a dark cloak, bearded, and with a banana held out enticingly.

It was an unusual banana. When Mollie pulled it a bell rang.

Mollie went nearer to investigate, and then was suddenly seized. A rope went over her head and upper arms, imprisoning them, and she was swung across the garden, the other end of the rope having been flung over a tree-branch.

It all happened too quickly for Mollie to understand. Within two minutes she was in a sack inside a car which drove quickly away from the scene.

"Got you, Sonia!" said a soft voice. "A nice bill I should have had to pay if I'd let them know you were mine! When I let you escape did I say you could cause danger?" No. It was a scientific experiment. You were to come home at feeding-time. But you did not."

Unaware that he had got the wrong chimp, the professor drove on; and when at last Mollie was freed from the sack she found herself in a large, white-painted room fitted with all manner of gadgets.

A man in white overalls stood there talking to the professor.

"Yes, I got her back by a ruse," said the professor triumphantly. "She's unreliable, I'm afraid. The experiment failed. However, test her, Jenkins, and see how many of her tricks she remembers. No food until she does."

The door closed, and Mollie blinked at Jenkins suspiciously.

"H'm! Changed a bit," he frowned. "Had a nice, expensive lark, eh?"

Mollie was sniffing round the room. She recognised Sonia's scent and knew that this was the other chimp's den.

She pulled a lever—and a rubber ball hit her on the back of the head.

"Forgotten, eh?" said Jenkins sharply. "That won't do."

Mollie lashed out at the rubber ball, which swung round in a circle and hit her on the back of the head.

Jenkins guffawed. Mollie hit the ball again, harder than ever; but this time she dodged back, and the swinging ball caught the grinning Jenkins full in the face.

The attendant was no longer amused. With a scowl, he led Mollie across to a cabinet on which were a number of levers and buttons.

Mollie examined it with interest. Inside the cabinet, as she could see, was food—chocolates, pears, apples.

"Now feel these two buttons," said Jenkins. "One is warm and the other cold. If you push the cold one, a jet of water will spray out. If you push the warm one, a tray will swing out with chocolate on it."

He stood back to watch, and Mollie blinked at the cabinet.

This was indeed an intelligence test. Sonia, carefully trained by the professor, had learned the trick, and could push the warm button instead of the cold one, even when they were changed round as regards position.

But Mollie, of course, knew nothing about this. All she knew was that she could see some food. The food was in the cabinet; the cabinet was on the wall. Hah!

As Mollie prepared to act, the door of the room opened and the professor entered, followed by a sleek and shiny man, dapper in appearance and quite excited.

"There she is," said the professor. "There is my wonder chimp. You are paying a high price for her, but she is worth every penny, as you'll see."

He nodded across to Jenkins.

"She will now press the right button to get her food," said the attendant, turning Mollie so that she faced the cabinet.

"Now," said the professor.

Mollie sprang. She took the cabinet in her paws, put one foot against the wall, and heaved. Away from the wall came the cabinet, and a shrewd blow from one of Mollie's paws soon burst it open.

A jet of water from a fractured pipe shot out at the professor, and a cloud of black smoke showed where some electric wiring had fused. But Mollie could not be bothered with technical hitches.

From the South American buyer came a hoot of laughter. He was delighted.

"Ah, but she is wonderful, this Sonia!" she said. "I take her. I give you cheque. My car is outside. I have tickets. We can catch the plane that leaves in an hour's time."

The professor heaved a sigh.

"Thank goodness I got her back in time!" he breathed. "Sonia," he said aloud, "get ready for South America!"

Mollie, eating a pear and with chocolate clutched in her paws, gave him a cheery nod. Life was good.

### HELEN IN A HURRY

"TRUST Mollie to let us down!" muttered granddad. "She's chased that other chimp away completely."

It really did seem as though Mollie had failed utterly. There was only one chimp in sight on the roof now, and no one could get near her. Every now and then her gay outfit was seen, and not even Helen suspected that it was worn by Sonia and not Mollie. Helen couldn't get near enough to see.

The crowd was enjoying every moment; but although the photographers and newsmen were sharing the enjoyment, the police were becoming rattled.

"Your Mollie is as bad as the other," said the inspector crossly. "I'd rather you got her back; she's doing no good."

Granddad did not say that that was what they had been trying to do. For the last few minutes he had been calling Jinx, the pup, to help. But even Jinx had disappeared.

"Jinx! Fetch Mollie! Jinx!" called Helen a moment later. "Oh dear! Where is he, granddad?"

"Goodness knows! These animals are plumb stupid, that's my belief!" granddad answered crossly.

But Jinx was anything but stupid. He knew that the chimp they were all hunting was not Mollie. He had a dog's good sense. The reason why Jinx was not there was because he had followed Mollie's trail.

When Mollie had been snatched by the professor, Jinx had been a spectator. There was nothing he could do, because it had happened too quickly, but he had followed the trail.

The professor lived a mile from the scene of excitement, and because the lease of his house prevented his keeping animals, he had carefully guarded the secret that Sonia was there. But the secret could not be kept from Jinx.

Jinx reached the professor's house and hurried up the short drive. He saw a car standing there, and a group of figures. One of those figures was Mollie. He knew that, even though she was disguised for the benefit of the neighbours.

Mollie now wore a too-large duffle coat with hood as she climbed into the rear of the car.

"Good as gold!" said the South American.

He handed the professor a cheque as he spoke, but he referred to Mollie. Mollie was good only because she thought that she was homeward bound, and that happy feeling was suddenly encouraged by the glad sight of Jinx.

Yowp! Yowp! barked Jinx. "Keep away!" snapped the professor. "Get a stick and keep the dog off, Jenkins."

"Come on, Sonia!" said the South American to Mollie. "Look, here are your air-travel tickets! Nice?"

Mollie looked at the tickets, and then, as the man turned aside to say something to his chauffeur, she sneaked one. It didn't taste nice, however, so she tossed it out of the car window.

Then she chattered to Jinx, urging him to come into the car.

"Stand away!" cried the professor. A moment later the car door was slammed, and, while Jinx was held by his collar, away the car went, with Mollie lounging back and still chattering excitedly.

Mollie was thrilled. Soon she would see Helen and granddad. A car had

taken her away; the car would take her back.

The journey seemed quite a long one to Mollie, and she dozed off. When she woke up it was to find herself at an airfield, and then she was being led into a building.

Strange roaring noises reached her ears from somewhere outside, and Mollie was not at all sure that she liked it. It was with growing reluctance that she let her new master lead her to the reception desk.

And now Mollie began to drag behind. She was looking around for Helen. Where was she? Why wasn't Helen here?

Meanwhile, her new master was having an argument about the tickets. An official was telling him there wasn't one for the chimp.

"There was, and it had 'Chimp' marked on it," said the South American.

"Well, it's not here now," said the man. "Hallo! What's she getting excited about?"

Mollie was dancing with excitement.

"I don't know. But no matter about ticket. I get another," said the South American. "Hurry, please! We are late."

Then, as Mollie continued to dance and chatter, on to the scene rushed Jinx, barking wildly.

Dogs were prohibited, but Jinx did not know that. He had found Mollie again.

"Keep that dog away!" shouted an attendant.

But through the barrier came Helen, breathless and gasping.

"Stop!" she cried wildly. "That's my chimp! Stop!"

The South American wheeled. Mollie rushed to Helen and clung to her.

"Your chimp? Impossible! I've just bought her from Professor Poskings. She's Sonia—"

"She's Mollie, and she's mine!" panted Helen.

"Rubbish! I'm just taking her to South America—"

Ow—ow! howled the man, as Jinx nipped his leg.

Taking advantage of the diversion, Helen clung to Mollie's paw and began hurrying away. After them, watched by the astounded airfield staff, went the South American, shouting frenziedly.

"If you want Sonia," gasped Helen, "she's in the police station. I caught her, thinking she was Mollie—then I found out the truth."

The South American looked dazed, then gazed inquiringly at Helen.

"But if this is so, how did you know I was here?"

"Because," said Helen, giving him a wet, screwed-up piece of paper, "here is your aircraft ticket marked 'Chimp.' Jinx brought it to me. Either Mollie gave it to him or he found it. But thank goodness I was in time to save Mollie being whisked away to South America!"

The South American set his jaw.

"I'll go and see that professor right now. He must have known it wasn't his chimp."

Helen, however, was not concerned with that. She had Mollie back, that was what mattered, and she shared her pats and petting between Mollie and Jinx.

"And granddad thinks you're stupid," she said. "But he couldn't have found you, Mollie, and he argued that that other chimp was you. But I knew it wasn't, and Jinx knew it wasn't."

"Huh!" snorted granddad, when they rejoined him.

But he was delighted to have Mollie back all the same; and because she knew it, Mollie offered him a piece of chocolate she had been holding tightly for over an hour. And, as he was driving and couldn't take it himself, she scraped it off her paw and put it on his lips. It was a generous impulse—but that wasn't what granddad called it!

(End of this week's story.)

Read about Helen and her amusing pets in another delightful story next week.



# The MERRYMAKERS' Island College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

## THE DAMAGED PAINTINGS

"WE'LL fix the large mural up this afternoon," said Sally Warner brightly. "Then the clubhouse will be ready, except for the flowers and other decorations."

"It's going to look lovely," enthused Fay Manners, her fair-haired friend. "I'm getting wildly excited."

"I'm feeling rather that way myself," admitted Don Weston, smiling at the two dancing-eyed girls. "Our very own club having an official opening, a fancy-dress dance and a cabaret is enough to make anyone feel on top of the world."

"You don't want to get all worked up," said Johnny Briggs, the fourth member of the little group known as the Merry-makers. "You want to keep cool and calm like me, otherwise you'll only go messing things up and forgetting things and—"

He broke off, groping in his trousers pocket with one hand, while a peculiarly sheepish expression crept across his tanned face.

Sally, sensing that something had gone amiss, winked at her chums.

"Yes, Johnny?" she asked sweetly.

"You were saying—"

Johnny flushed slightly, swallowed hard.

"I—I've forgotten the key of the club-room," he admitted guiltily.

There was a loud laugh from his three chums.

"The cool and calm one's slipped up," chuckled Don. "Looks as if you'll have to run back to college at the double, my lad, and get that key."

Johnny groaned. It was quite a walk back to the International College, where he and his chums were students, from the riverside bungalow which had been lent to them indefinitely for use as a clubhouse. A hot walk, too, for on Waloorie Island, in Australia, where the college was situated, it was the height of summer.

But since he had been in charge of the key, there was no help for it. Back he would have to go.

"Tell Linda and Tubby and the others to buck-up when you get back," said Don. "We'll need some more help with that mural. And—I say, wait!" he called, as Johnny began to turn away. "Johnny, the door's open. There's somebody in the club-room already."

Surprised, the chums ascended the steps to the veranda, which ran all round the clubhouse, and peered in at the open door. Then their eyes opened even wider.

For standing on a chair, pressing firmly against Sally's large painting of an Australian scene, which had been

fixed to the panelled wall and edged round with narrow wooden beading, stood a slight, fair-haired figure, in the smart green-and-white uniform of the International College staff.

"Why, Muriel!" cried Sally in a puzzled voice. "What ever are you doing?"

Muriel Bennett, a fairly recent newcomer to the college staff, gave a startled gasp and swung round so violently that she almost lost her footing and fell.

"Oh, Miss Sally!" she panted. "I—I didn't hear you come in. Oh, goodness, how you startled me!"

"Sorry, Muriel," said Sally, "but"—she was looking towards the painting but couldn't see it because her eyes were still dazzled from the strong sunshine outside—"is anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" For a second panic showed in Muriel's eyes, then she gave a rather forced little laugh.

"Oh—oh no!" she said hastily. "I—I just noticed that the beading had come loose round your painting, and—and you wouldn't like it to fall off the wall, would you?"

"Definitely not," agreed Don. "Especially if it happened to-morrow evening, when Mr. Miles Lambert, one of our school governors, will be officially opening the club. Glad you noticed it, Muriel, though it's queer that it should have come loose," he added reflectively. "It was well and truly fixed when we left it."

"Probably only a nail come out of the corner," said Sally, still screwing up her eyes in an effort to see the painting. Then she smiled. "But never mind that for the moment. Did you want to see us about anything, Muriel?" she asked pleasantly.

"S—see you—" began Muriel, still rather agitated. Then suddenly her face cleared. She turned, indicating a bowl on one of the small tables which had been arranged round the sides of the room. A bowl filled with a mass of breathtakingly beautiful flowers. "I—I heard you saying you wanted some flowers," she said, "so I brought some along for you, Miss Sally."

"Muriel!" The painting was forgotten as Sally, her eyes sparkling

with joy and delight, stared entranced at the glowing cluster. "Oh, Muriel, how sweet of you!"

Though Muriel was a newcomer to the college staff, her unassuming ways, her eagerness to be of help—especially in the preparation of the clubhouse—had already won her a firm place in the hearts of Sally and her friends.

"Yes, jolly good of you, Muriel," said Johnny. "But how the dickens did you get in here? I mean, how did you open the door?"

For a moment the girl stood rigid, only her eyes moving as she looked with peculiar wariness at the chums.

"I—I didn't open the door," she replied almost in a whisper. "It—it was already open when I came over here."

"Open?" ejaculated Johnny blankly, and glanced towards the open door, through which several more club members were already entering the clubhouse. "That's queer. I know I pulled the door shut after we left this morning. Gosh! I even came back and pushed it hard to make sure that the snap lock had clicked home properly."

He gave Muriel a penetrating look, and the maid started towards the door.

"I—I must go! I have work to do." Muriel gave a nervous, fluttering smile around. But as her eyes came to rest on Sally's face it seemed to that girl that in their brown depths lurked bitter unhappiness, a queerly anguished appeal.

Only for a second was it there, so fleetingly that Sally wondered whether she had imagined the look. Next moment Muriel was hurrying out of the clubhouse.

"I still think it's jolly queer!" expostulated Johnny. "I did lock the door—you others saw me do it! And, anyway, if Muriel just found the door open and walked in in the usual way, why did she look so agitated when we came in?"

"And when she went out," said Tubby Winwood, significantly.

For a moment Sally felt the strangest little quail shoot through her. Muriel had been startled, agitated—no doubt about that. And

Sally & Co. Worked Hard To Make The Official Opening Of Their Clubhouse A Success—But A Series Of Mysterious Occurrences Threatened All Their Efforts

that queer look in her eyes— Then she shrugged.

"Of course she was startled," she said, with a laugh. "Who wouldn't be when they imagine themselves alone and suddenly find four people staring at them? We'll have to be quite sure about the door in future, of course—can't have any odd bods walking in. But since it was only Muriel, well at least we know no harm's been done. So let's forget the whole thing, and just take a look at that beading—"

With a smile, Sally turned once again towards the painting before which Muriel had been standing when the chums had come upon her so unexpectedly. But as she stared upwards, the smile froze on her lips, she gave a gasp of dismay.

For it was not just a corner of the beading which had come loose as she had imagined. The beading at the bottom and half-way up each side of the painting had been levered away, not too carefully, and the wrinkled look of the canvas indicated that it had been pulled roughly away from the panelling behind it. Moreover, part of the painting was scratched and torn.

A feeling of resentment filled Sally. She had put a great deal of work into that painting, wishing to please Mr. Lambert and to impress upon him that the Merrymakers' Club had a cultural as well as a social side. Don and Johnny had fixed it with such care, painting the beading and arranging it so that it formed a frame for the picture.

And now this! That the damage had been done deliberately was obvious—and done by some person who had no right to be in the clubhouse. Though for what purpose, other than senseless spite, Sally could not imagine.

"Oh, my gosh!" Linda Powell's voice broke in on Sally's bewildered thoughts. "You think that's bad? Just take a look at this!"

In an alcove farther down the room had been arranged another picture—a beautifully executed line drawing by Kitty Reid of the International College—framed in the same way as Sally's. But that picture had been slit ruthlessly across and across from corner to corner and the panelling behind it damaged.

"It's ruined!" cried Fay angrily. "Who could have done it?"

"None of us, that's for sure," said Linda. "And as far as I know, there's only been one other person in here. And that person was messing about with your picture when you came in—remember, Sally?"

Sally swung round, staring incredulously at Linda.

"Oh, no!" she gasped. "You can't think that—that Muriel—"

"Can't we?" asked Johnny rather unhappily. "Well, what about this?"

And from the narrow ledge which ran around the wall just beneath Kitty's picture, he picked up a familiar object. A pair of red-handled utility scissors. The kind of scissors which Muriel always carried in her apron pocket. And, as was obvious from the tiny broken threads adhering to the tip, those scissors had been used to slash Kitty's drawing!

### MURIEL IS BLAMED

FOR a moment Sally stared aghast! Was Muriel responsible for this vandalism? Could she be the perpetrator of this spiteful act?

Next moment Sally shook her head in vigorous denial of her unspoken question. She liked Muriel, trusted her. Muriel had taken such pleasure in helping the chums; she had delighted in any task, no matter how hard or unpleasant, merely it seemed, for the pleasure of being in their gay company.

Then suddenly a wave of relief flooded over Sally.

"Why, of course!" she cried. "That was what Muriel meant when she said the beading had come loose around the painting. She must have found it like this when she came in!"

"And the scissors?" asked Tubby sceptically.

"Maybe she was using them to try to get the beading back in place," suggested Fay. "Or she may have left them behind and the real culprit used them. But who," she added puzzledly, "could that possibly be?"

"The same person who mysteriously opened the door!" said Don.

"Then who was that?" demanded Johnny. "It certainly doesn't seem like Muriel to do such a spiteful thing. But somehow I can't help remembering how startled she seemed when we came in and caught her. Oh, I don't know what to think," he finished bewilderedly.

That seemed to be the state of mind of most of the club members.

"The only thing I can think is that in trying to be helpful she made a mess of things," said Linda at length. "And she was too scared to tell us what happened."

There was a murmur of assent at that.

"But," continued Linda, her pleasant face looking unusually stern, if it's happened once it could happen again. And we don't want anything to go amiss with the mural we're aiming to fix up this afternoon—"

"Oh, my goodness, no!" said Fay in quick alarm.

But the huge mural, over which the club members had spent so many long and painstaking hours, was still perfect.

It had been worked in raised papier-mache, depicting an Australian bush scene, and it was to hang in a place of honour over the huge old-fashioned fireplace at the end of the clubhouse—a fireplace put in for effect, not for use.

"So, in the circumstances," continued Linda firmly, "I guess you'll all agree with me that it would be better if we refuse to allow anyone but members to enter the clubhouse! O.K.?"

Sally started.

"You—you mean Muriel mustn't come to the clubhouse any more?" she asked. And then, as the American girl nodded: "But, Linda, you know how she's loved coming. You know how helpful she's been—and those lovely flowers—"

"Gee, I know all that, Sally," admitted Linda unhappily, "but I still think my suggestion is the right one. Anyway, let's put it to the vote!"

They did, and by a majority of four it was decided that Muriel and every other non-club member should be banned from the clubhouse.

Sally's pretty face looked troubled, though she made no attempt to argue further with the decision that had been made.

"If you don't mind," she said quietly, "I think I'd like to tell Muriel myself."

There were willing nods at that. And, hating the job she had to do, yet feeling she would rather do it than leave it to someone else, Sally slowly made her way back to college.

Muriel was just coming out of the housekeeper's room as Sally reached the staff quarters, and her face lit up in a smile of delight as she saw that girl.

"Oh, Miss Sally!" she cried. "You're just the person I wanted to see! I've managed to borrow some lovely vases for you. I'll bring them over straight away, and perhaps you'll let me help arrange the flowers?" she finished with eager appeal.

Sally flushed uncomfortably, hating herself for having to quench the light in those warm brown eyes.

"It—it's very nice of you, Muriel," she said haltingly. "But—but we mustn't take up any more of your time. I'll take the vases over myself."

"It's no trouble—really it isn't," Muriel said eagerly. "I love helping you. You don't know what it means to me. She paused, becoming aware of Sally's troubled expression. "Miss Sally," she went on in a low voice, "is—is something wrong?"

Sally reached out a hand and gave the girl's arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Not really, Muriel," she said. "It—it's just that some damage has been done in the clubhouse, and so it's been decided to ban all but members

entering it. I'm awfully sorry, Muriel, but I must abide by the wish of the majority—"

She broke off, startled by the effect of her words on the maid. Muriel's face had drained of colour, her lips quivered, and she looked as if she had received some awful shock.

"They—they think I caused that damage—but I didn't! Really I didn't, Miss Sally." A frantic note crept into her voice. "Oh, you don't understand. I must go to the clubhouse—"

She stopped abruptly, catching Sally's surprised and puzzled stare.

But once again Sally had become aware of a flashing glimpse of that unhappiness, that bitterness in the maid's eyes.

"Muriel, is there something wrong?" she asked quickly. "Can I help—"

"Wrong?" For just a second Muriel hesitated. She took a step towards Sally, as if about to blurt out something to her. Then, hearing approaching footsteps, she forced a smile to her lips. "No, of course not," she said in rather a choked voice. "It—it's only that I—I'm disappointed and rather hurt. But I'll get over it!"

She turned and walked off, leaving Sally to make her way back to the clubhouse where the others were impatiently awaiting her.

But somehow, for Sally at any rate, a lot of the joy and excitement at decorating the clubhouse had evaporated. Even when fixing the mural she could still see Muriel's pretty, stricken face; could still hear the frantic note in her voice. And the more Sally thought, the more puzzled she became.

Was there some special reason, other than wanting to help the chums, which had made Muriel so anxious to enter the clubhouse? Her reaction on learning that she had been banned from it had surely been more than one of mere disappointment!

Still wondering, and rather silent, Sally watched as Johnny locked up for the night, heard Tubby suggest, half in jest, that someone ought to stay on guard to make sure no more mischief was done.

And then, with her chums, she went along to the dining-hall for supper. Muriel was among the maids on duty, and though still rather pale, the smile she gave the Merrymakers bore no trace of animosity.

She disappeared with rather surprising suddenness, however, before the chums had finished their meal, and though Sally hung back, looking around for her, Muriel did not reappear.

Still feeling vaguely troubled, Sally agreed to Don's suggestion that they should make up a table-tennis four-some in the recreation-room. But before they could do so, Tubby Winwood, his plump face scarlet with exertion and excitement, came puffing up to them.

"You've got to come down to the clubhouse straight away," he panted. "There's something fishy going on. Quickly!"

Sally & Co. needed no urging. They dashed across the moon-bathed grounds towards the clubhouse. And on the way Tubby told them how he and Linda and Slick Kaplan had gone along to the clubhouse after supper to make sure everything was all right.

From some distance away they had heard the crash of breaking glass, and, sending Tubby back for the chums, Linda and Slick had crept closer to the clubhouse to see what was happening.

Startled as she was at the news, Sally realised that here was a chance, with Linda and Slick keeping watch, of discovering the identity of the mysterious intruder.

They were in sight of the clubhouse now, and there on the veranda they saw three struggling figures; saw, too, a broken window swinging wide.

"Hang on!" yelled Don. "We're coming!"

They raced up to the veranda and then Sally gave a cry of incredulous dismay.

For the figure struggling in the grip of Linda and Slick was none other



than Muriel! Johnny had gone charging into the clubhouse to switch on the lights, and now his head appeared through the broken window. "Two of your stunning white vases have been smashed, Sally!" he reported, with an angry glare at the maid. "Flowers and water trampled all over the floor—"

"Please listen!" cried Muriel frantically. "I haven't been in the clubhouse—"

"What's more," added Johnny, "there's no sign of anyone else in the clubhouse, and no one could have sneaked out or Linda and Slick would have seen them. Sorry, Sally, but there's no doubt that Muriel is the one who messed up your painting; she's the one who broke the window to get into the clubhouse to-night, and she's the one who's broken your vases."

"Then in that case," said the coldly disapproving voice of Mr. Manston, the college bursar, who had been attracted to the scene by the outcry, "I suggest that you, Muriel, return to your apartment immediately. I shall ask the housekeeper to see that you remain there. To-morrow we will go into this matter fully, and if you really have caused this damage, then I'm afraid we shall have to ask you to leave the college. Come!"

And taking hold of the half-dazed, sobbing girl's arm, he led her firmly away.

### THE SECRET OF THE CLUBHOUSE

"MURIEL!" Sally, gazing cautiously up and down the passage in the staff quarters, tapped softly but urgently on the door in front of her. "Muriel!"

The sound of muffled sobs from beyond the door increased. And, hearing them, Sally's heart felt a pang of pity.

Despite all the evidence, despite all she had seen and heard, still Sally could not feel completely convinced that Muriel was to blame. And now she had come to try to find out what lay behind the girl's mysterious behaviour, and help her if she possibly could.

With compassion in her blue eyes, she entered the room. With an exclamation of pity she had crossed to the chair in which Muriel lay huddled, had put a comforting arm around the shaking shoulders.

"Muriel—Muriel, dear," she said softly. "Don't cry like that—please! You'll make yourself ill!"

"Miss Sally! Oh, Miss Sally!" Muriel raised a tear-ravaged face, groped around for a handkerchief. With a little smile, Sally produced a clean one from her own pocket, thrust it into the girl's hand.

"There!" she said, with an attempt at gaiety. "Let's have some mopping-up operations. And after that, supposing you tell me what really happened this evening? I might be able to help you, you know!"

"You—you mean you don't think I caused that damage?" asked Muriel, hope springing into her unhappy eyes. "Oh, Miss Sally, you're right! I didn't—really I didn't! I found that window smashed to-night when I went over to the clubhouse. I was climbing in, not out, when Miss Linda caught me. The damage had already been done—by someone else!"

There was such bitterness in her voice as she uttered that last statement that Sally could not fail to notice it. But she merely gave a little nod; and Muriel, as if encouraged, suddenly straightened up.

"Miss Sally, I know I can trust you. You see, I have a reason for wanting to go over to the clubhouse. A very special reason." Her eyes clouded with pain. "It's to do with my brother."

She drew in her breath as there came a loud rap on the door. It was Sally who opened it, to stare with surprise into the rather hard face of Jenson, the head page-boy.

"Sorry, miss," he said curtly. "No one is allowed to see Muriel to-night—housekeeper's orders!"

"But—" began Sally. "Sorry!" said Jenson, and stood by the open door, waiting for Sally to leave.

Fuming, but realising she would only cause further trouble for Muriel if she resisted, Sally turned to go, resolving, if at all possible, to return later on to hear what Muriel had been about to tell her. Something to do with her brother! But how could her brother link up with the new Merry-makers' Club?

The more Sally thought about it, the more puzzled she became. And the more annoyed she felt with Jenson for having interfered. Then, as she was crossing the campus, an idea suddenly came into her mind. She turned back towards the staff quarters, knocked on a door just inside the entrance.

In a few moments she was out again, a strangely puzzled look on her face, an excited gleam in her eyes. She turned to go down the passage, but before she could do so there was a shout from outside.

"Sally!" It was her chums calling and beckoning to her.

"Have you been over to the clubhouse and left a light on, Sally?" asked Johnny.

house—and then they all pulled up, cries of anger on their lips.

The only illumination was the bright moonlight streaming in through the shutters and an electric cycle lamp on one of the tables. But it was more than enough to show them that scene of destruction.

The mural—the showpiece of which they were so proud—had been ripped from the wall and lay crushed and scattered on the floor. And in the panelling beside the fireplace was a jagged hole, revealing a small cavity beneath.

But it was not that wanton damage at which the students stared so much as at the white-faced, frightened girl who stood close to the fireplace.

"Muriel!" gasped Sally.

"You've done this!" declared Don. "No!" panted Muriel. "No, no!" I swear I haven't! Oh, I know it looks bad, but I found Miss Sally's key and I—I had to come back here. I heard a noise in here. When I unlocked the door and came in I found this already done—"

"Oh, yeah?" Linda sounded frankly disbelieving. "The shutters are all fastened from the outside, so nobody came in that way. You say yourself you unlocked the door, so how could anybody else have got in here?"



"Muriel!" gasped Sally, staring in consternation at the young maid. It looked as if the girl she had befriended had been responsible for the damage in the clubhouse.

"No, of course not! But what—" "Then someone has! Come on—in case there's some more damage being done!" said Don firmly.

"Well, it can't be Muriel. I left her in her room only about ten minutes ago," said Sally, running alongside her chums. "Besides, there's something else—"

"Save it," advised Linda Powell, who, with Tubby Winwood and a number of other students, had now joined in the dash across to the clubhouse. "Have you got the key, Sally?"

Sally put a hand in her pocket and then gave a start. The key had been there, but now it had gone. Then she remembered pulling a handkerchief out of her pocket to give to Muriel. She must have pulled out the key at the same time. Muriel might have found it, but surely she would not have entered the clubhouse again! "I haven't got it with me—" Sally began.

"It doesn't matter—no time to go back for it," puffed Johnny. "Anyway, the clubhouse must be open for someone to be in there—and we're going to find out who it is!"

They reached the clubhouse, through the shutters of which still shone a glow of light. Even as Sally raced up the veranda steps she noticed a key in the lock of the door, which stood slightly ajar.

The students rushed into the club-

Muriel stood there trembling. "I can't blame you for what you think—I can't prove I'm innocent," she said dully. "But I tell you someone had been here before me. I was too late to find out who. And, what is worse," she added on a note of despair, "I was too late to help my brother—"

"Listen!" broke in Sally suddenly. They all heard it—a slight scrambling sound. Then a tiny shower of brick-dust fell into the fireplace.

Sally's eyes gleamed excitedly, and next moment she had grabbed up the bicycle torch, had leapt across to the fireplace, and was shining the torch up the wide, old-fashioned chimney. Then, with a triumphant cry, she shot an arm upwards, grabbed at something, and pulled.

There was a startled yell, followed by a scuffling sound. Even as Don and Johnny sprang forward in amazement, a struggling, squirming figure landed in the hearth—a figure clutching a large envelope in one hand.

"Jenson!" cried Muriel. "Then he's the rascal behind all this. And he's got them—he's got the bonds."

Swiftly she caught hold of the envelope, clapping it to her. Then, her face flushed now with happiness, she turned to Sally & Co.

"This is what I've been looking for," she said radiantly. "This envelope means more to me than anything else

in the world and, thanks to you, Sally, it means the freedom of an innocent man!"

IT was later, after Jenson had been handed over to the proper authority, that Muriel told her story to the chums.

Her brother was a junior partner in a bank. Some securities had been missed; he had been accused of theft. But from a conversation Muriel had overheard after his arrest, she realised that the janitor of the bank was the guilty one.

He had hidden the securities in what he thought was an empty bungalow by the lake—now the Merry-makers' clubhouse. When he realised it had become occupied, he had contacted his brother—Jenson, the head page.

"Though I didn't know his brother," Muriel explained, "I did know that he worked at the International College. That's why I took a job here as a maid—to try to find that brother and, through him, the securities."

"I suppose Jenson knew they were hidden behind a panel, but didn't

know which one," said Don thoughtfully. "That's why our paintings and the mural have been damaged—and, of course, it suited his purpose for Muriel to be blamed. But, I say, Sally," he added, "what made you so sure to-night that Muriel wasn't responsible?"

Sally gave a little laugh. "Simply because I was annoyed when Jenson said Muriel was not allowed visitors. So I went along to see the housekeeper, to try to wheedle her into letting me talk to Muriel, and she told me she had given no such orders." Sally smiled a little grimly.

"I realised then that Jenson had been lying—that he hadn't wanted Muriel to tell me why she was really at the college."

"But what," asked Johnny wonderingly, "made you think he was hiding up the chimney?"

Sally's eyes twinkled happily.

"If I believed in Muriel's innocence, then I'd got to think of some way for a person to enter and leave the clubhouse without using either the door or windows. It seemed impossible—until I heard that scrambling noise, a little brick-dust fell into the hearth.

"I saw it all then," went on Sally. "That wide chimney; the big gum-tree outside with the branch overhanging the roof. Simple! So simple that I think, in future, I'll come in that way instead of by the door! Now—bed, everyone! We've got a big day to-morrow, and a lot of apologising to do to Mr. Lambert!"

"I'm sure he'll understand," said Muriel softly, fixing her grateful gaze on Sally and the chums. "Your paintings—your mural—they were wonderful, but they can be done again. And you could never again bring such happiness to my brother and myself as you have brought us to-night."

A sentiment with which Mr. Miles Lambert, when he heard the whole story the following day, heartily agreed.

The opening ceremony was a great success, as were also the entertainment and dance which followed. And, needless to say, Muriel and her brother were both present.

(End of this week's story.)

Another grand story featuring Sally Warner and the Merry-makers next week.

## THE SECRET OF THE HARLEQUIN TEAPOT

(Continued from page 368.)

She broke off, for her brother was grinning broadly.

"Fiddlesticks to their order!" he said. "I've got it!"

"Got what?" asked Cherry. "The teapot, fathead!" replied Phil, with brotherly politeness, and pointed to the boat.

Cherry's heart leaped, while Leila gave a little gasp of delight.

There in the bows, carefully wrapped in Phil's scarf, was the Harlequin teapot!

"But—but how—" Cherry gulped, her mind in a whirl.

"Tell you about it on the way," jerked Phil. "Into the boat—quickly—before they find out that it's gone!"

Eagerly the girls scrambled into the boat, Cherry taking charge of the precious teapot. Phil seized the oars, pushing away from the bank. Travelling downstream was child's play compared with their previous desperate chase, though Cherry kept an anxious eye on the fast receding bungalow.

As he rowed, Phil breathlessly explained how he had seen Basil coming out of the garage. He had investigated as soon as the lanky boy was out of sight—and had found the teapot in the dicky seat at the back of the car.

Once again excitement gripped the three of them. And how thrilled Maureen would be! But suddenly Cherry gave a gasp of alarm.

"They've found out—they after us!" she exclaimed.

Phil and Leila followed the direction of her glance. The lanky Basil, followed by his father, were racing along the bank, waving their arms and shouting angrily.

"Quickly, Phil!" gasped Cherry.

"Can't go any quicker," panted Phil, rowing like a Trojan. "But they won't catch up with us—even if they get out the skiff."

The girls breathed more freely, as the pursuers were hidden from them by a bend in the stream. But their relief was short-lived.

"Listen!" faltered Leila suddenly. They all listened, and Cherry's heart missed a beat. Unmistakably to their ears came an ominous chugging sound.

"A motor-boat!" groaned Phil. "Gosh, that's torn it!"

He commenced to row again, the perspiration streaming from his face. The current aided them, but the motor-boat was coming nearer and nearer.

Cherry, clutching the precious teapot felt her heart sink lower. However hard they rowed, they would be overtaken long before they reached the landing-stage. And the man and youth—an unscrupulous pair of scoundrels and desperate to get possession of the teapot, would not hesitate to wrench their treasure from them by force.

If the matter came to the ears of the police, they would declare that the chums had tried to rob them.

Just then, glancing desperately towards the bank, Cherry had a brain-wave.

"Phil, the castle lies over there," she gasped, pointing eagerly. "And there's a bridge we passed a little way back. Let's pull in at the opposite bank and moor the boat there—to decoy them. Then we'll double back and cross the bridge."

A grin of hope crossed Phil's tense, perspiring face.

"Good for you, Cherry!" he panted admiringly. "We'll do it!"

The desperate little manoeuvre was completed in the nick of time. Even as the chums moored their boat and dived among the bushes, the pursuing motor-boat swung round the bend. Mr. Foster was at the helm, and the lanky Basil crouched in the bows, boathook in hand.

The breathless trio raced back along the tow-path, crossing the rustic bridge and setting off over a ploughed field towards the distant castle.

They were almost at their last gasp when they reached it—to find Maureen waiting for them, pale and tearful with anxiety.

A broken cry of delight escaped her lips as Cherry, unable to speak, held out the Harlequin Teapot.

Eagerly she examined it, while the chums gathered round.

"It—it's the right one!" she gulped. "Oh, I don't know—I can't think how to thank you—"

"Forget it!" cut in Phil tersely. "What about the secret?"

"It's here—in this pattern under the spout," breathed Maureen, her voice shaking. "From the postscript in granddad's letter there should be some identical figures carved on the walls of the castle. There may be a movable block of stone or—or something like that!"

Excitedly the chums aided her in her search. Every minute was precious. The pursuers would be bound to discover the trick that had been played on them, and would probably trace them to the castle.

It was Cherry's sharp eyes that spotted the quaint carvings on a slab in the ruined walls, almost hidden by the moss and lichen. Phil scraped

the moss away with his knife, and they set to work trying to prise loose the massive stone.

Just then they heard a shout—a sound of running footsteps. Leila, peering through an embrasure in the wall, gave a horrified gasp.

"It's them—that man and the boy!" she gasped. "And they've got someone with them—looks like a keeper of the castle."

"Keep trying, girls," jerked Phil desperately.

At that moment Cherry gave a triumphant cry.

"The stone—it's moving!"

Surely enough, the massive stone was swinging out from the wall, revealing a dark cavity. Maureen thrust a trembling hand into the opening and brought into view a black-japanned box.

There was no key, but Phil forced the lid with his clasp-knife. The chums gasped. The cash-box was filled with quaint old jewellery—obviously of considerable worth—and a letter addressed to Maureen, containing a codicil to her grandfather's will, bequeathing the jewels to her, and denouncing Mr. Foster and his son as a pair of scheming rogues.

Phil was reading this aloud with considerable relish, as the two scoundrels burst on to the scene, accompanied by the custodian of the castle.

Mr. Foster blustered and threatened, but in the face of the evidence his blustering was of little use.

The keeper had known Maureen's grandfather—an eccentric, harmless old gentleman who had spent much of his time in exploring the ruins.

The Fosters departed at length, in a rage, and the chums excitedly examined the treasure with their new friend. Maureen insisted that as soon as the jewellery could be sold they must have their twelve pounds refunded and receive a share of the fortune.

Though they warmly refused her generous offer, they consented at length to accept a small present each as a memento.

"What will you do with your little windfall, Cherry?" Phil asked, grinning.

Cherry's blue eyes twinkled. "Let's go to an auction sale, dear," she said. "There's no telling—we might pick up another bargain!"

THE END.

"Mystery Message-Writer of the Fourth"—that is the title of next week's magnificent long complete story. Make sure of reading it by ordering your copy of the GIRLS' CRYSTAL now.