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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

AND 'THE SCHOOLGIRL'



"THE WORST BOY AT THE
CO-ED SCHOOL"

Detective June's STRANGEST CASE



A STARTLING STATEMENT

JUNE GAYNOR, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous detective, went to lonely Knoll Castle under an assumed name, Carolyn Stuart. She had been asked to go there by Ronald Garth, an author whose story about the legendary Green Archer was to be filmed there. He believed that a mysterious figure dressed as the Green Archer was threatening the film.

June received a terrific shock when she found that a man was staying at the castle under the name of Noel Raymond! She was convinced that the impostor was the mysterious Green Archer.

June caught the impostor in the forbidden West Wing and challenged him. Without warning he set fire to a number of film costumes and film gear, and before June could raise the alarm he had made his escape, and June was forced to do the same.

When she arrived back in the apartment again with a crowd of film-makers, the bogus Noel Raymond told Theodore Cronberg, the producer, that he had found a clue to the identity of the person who had started the fire, and he looked mockingly across at June.

THE impostor's audacity made June Gaynor gasp.

He himself had been responsible for the destructive fire in the West Wing, yet here he was, calmly claiming that before another day was out he would have unmasked the culprit!

Of course, in his role as detective it was essential that the bogus Noel Raymond should pretend he was making progress in solving the mystery. It was possible, therefore, that he was just putting on an astute bluff. But—

June shook her head.

She found it difficult to believe that the impostor was simply bluffing. She recalled the mocking way he had looked at her when he had spoken, and she had the uneasy feeling that in some way this unexpected development was directed against herself.

The rest of the film-makers, however, found nothing strange about the bogus Noel Raymond's statement. They hailed it with relief, and it was thankfully they regarded him.

"What you've told us is simply wonderful!" exclaimed Cecilia Selwyn, and radiant was the smile the glamorous film star flashed at the impostor. "This wretched business is getting us all down. Indeed, unless it's brought to an end I doubt if we'll be able to carry on."

"I'm sure we shan't," declared Phyllis Burley, one of the featured players. "Our nerves are absolutely worn to shreds. We can't stand any more of these alarms."

There came a murmur of agreement from most of the other

actresses, and it was obvious that even some of the men were beginning to feel the strain.

The fake detective looked sympathetically around.

"I know just how you feel, ladies, but you need have no fears. By this time to-morrow the culprit will be caught. I stake my reputation on it."

Soothing and confident was his manner, but in his grey eyes was a mocking gleam, and he smiled as he saw the puzzled and uneasy way June was regarding him.

The film-makers gave a sigh of relief. Some of them even applauded. But Theodore Cronberg, the excitable little producer, grunted and chewed on the end of his cigar.

"I only hope you're right," he growled. "It's about time you started earning your money. But what makes you so confident? What's this discovery you say you've made?"

The impostor smiled at the producer.

"If you will come downstairs with me, I'll show you," he said. "This way, ladies."

And, gallantly taking Cecilia by the arm, he escorted her to the narrow stone staircase leading to the ground floor of the disused wing of the castle.

One by one the others followed. Theodore Cronberg still glowering and chewing doubtfully on his cigar. June descended last of all, and her sense of uneasiness deepened as the bogus Noel Raymond stepped into the room from which she had escaped barely half an hour ago.

Hands stuck in his coat pockets, the film producer frowned around, and then aggressively he turned to the impostor.

"Well, what's this discovery you've been bragging about?" he demanded. "I can't see anything unusual."

The fake detective smiled.

"That is because you are not a trained observer, Mr. Cronberg. If you were, you'd have noticed several things. First of all, footprints in the dust. They show that someone has been in here recently, and the way they have been made suggests that the person was running. But that is not all. There is a decided draught. It comes from that win-

Incredible Though It Seemed, The Bogus Noel Raymond Was Planning To Denounce June As The Green Archer's Confederate!

By PETER LANGLEY

dow over there. It has been forced open."

As he spoke, the impostor flashed the powerful torch he had brought with him, first on the dusty floor, then across at the high window in the far wall.

"Clearly the person who caused the fire fled down here and escaped through the window," he declared.

There came a murmur of admiration, and the false Noel Raymond smiled with satisfaction. He obviously enjoyed being in the limelight like this.

But Theodore Cronberg continued to frown.

"Don't see that that gets us very far," he snorted. "By now the scoundrel will be miles away, so what does it matter how he escaped? Suffering mackerel, but if that's all you've found out—"

"But it isn't," the impostor assured him. "I have also discovered how the fire-raiser gained entrance into the locked-up wing. All unwittingly the baggage men carried the rascal in with the film props and gear. You see, after the rehearsal the culprit hid in one of the costume baskets."

There came a startled gasp from all around, while June's heart gave an apprehensive leap. At last she was beginning to realise the purpose of all this play-acting.

"Hid in one of the costume baskets!" roared Theodore Cronberg, and he seemed to swell before their eyes. "But no outsider could ever get near those baskets—"

Breaking off, he gave another stentorian bellow. "Suffering mackerel, Raymond, are you trying to tell me that the Green Archer actually lives here in this castle?"

The fake detective shook his head. "Not the Green Archer," he said softly. "His confederate."

"His what?" roared the astounded producer.

"His confederate. For it was not the Green Archer who set fire to the film costumes. My investigations have proved conclusively that there is a traitor in the castle, and it was this traitor who tried to burn down the castle just now."

For a moment or two there was a stunned silence. The film-makers regarded one another a little suspiciously, as if wondering whether his or her neighbour might be the traitor.

As for June, she was torn between anger and dismay. The audacious impudence of the impostor made her furious, but inwardly she knew a terrible anxiety. Her premonition that this cleverly contrived development was really directed against herself was being borne out, and apprehensively she awaited the next move. Theodore Cronberg was the first to

speaking. Throwing down his cigar, he gestured furiously.

"A traitor in the castle!" he roared. "Suffering mackerel, but who is he? What's his name?"

Again that mocking glint crept into the bogus Noel Raymond's eyes.

"It's not a 'him'—it's a girl," he declared.

"What!"

There was another amazed gasp, and June's heart gave a startled leap.

Coolly the impostor nodded. "Yes—a girl," he repeated. "The footprints on the floor were plainly made by a girl's shoes, and if that is not enough—well, this ought to convince you."

And from the rusty iron bar which guarded the window he pulled a few frayed threads of material.

"Only a tiny clue—but it's one which will enable me to track down the culprit very quickly," he declared.

Wonderingly everyone gazed at the cotton threads the fake detective was holding up, then Vera March, who all this time had been gazing up at the open window in frowning thought, gave a sudden shout.

"Mr. Raymond, have you any idea as to what time it was when the traitor escaped through the window?" she asked.

The impostor pursed his lips. "Yes—I think so," he said. "It must have been about twenty past seven."

"Twenty past seven!" Vera gave an excited cry. "Then perhaps Carolyn will be able to help you."

"Carolyn?" repeated the impostor softly.

Vera nodded. "Yes—Carolyn Stuart. She was standing outside the window just about that time. So she may actually have seen the traitor."

Instantly everyone turned to look at June, who on coming to the castle had assumed the name of Carolyn Stuart. But the girl detective was only conscious of one pair of eyes—those belonging to the bogus Noel Raymond. Now there was more than mockery in them—a gleam of triumph as well.

"So you were outside the window at the crucial time," the impostor remarked. "That is very interesting—very significant. Well, Miss—er—Stuart, what have you to say?"

And maliciously, almost challengingly, he regarded her.

THE SECRET OF THE BISCUITS

JUNE'S eyes blazed with anger. It was bad enough to be forced to stand silently by while this audacious rogue masqueraded as her beloved uncle. But to be forced to answer his questions—to submit to his mocking cross-examination—that was the last straw.

In her anger she was sorely tempted to reveal the truth—to denounce him here and now as an impostor.

But she forced back the burning denunciation which rose to her lips.

It would be folly to make public what she knew. No one would believe her. She would be laughed to scorn, and her position—already difficult enough—would be made ten times worse.

No—she must restrain herself; must patiently bide her time.

"Well, we're waiting, Miss Stuart," the fake detective's voice, a little reproachful and surprised, cut into her whirling thoughts. "What have you to tell me?"

Stormily June faced him.

"Nothing," she declared.

"Nothing?" The impostor looked shocked. "Come, come, Miss Stuart, you must have some information to give."

June shook her head.

"Sorry, but I haven't," she retorted, finding it hard to control her temper.

"But you don't deny that you were outside the window at the crucial time?" he asked.

She shook her head again.

"Then surely you must have seen something. If not the traitor climb-

ing out of the window, then running away."

June gave a little gulp. That sarcastic voice was getting on her nerves. She had the feeling that the impostor was deliberately playing with her, like a cat does with a mouse.

What was his game?

If he intended to accuse her of having caused the fire, why didn't he do so? Anything would be better than this awful suspense.

"I saw nothing, I tell you!" she cried. "Nothing at all!"

The impostor raised his eyebrows. "It's strange—very strange, indeed. Even you must see that, Miss Stuart."

"I see that you're only wasting time," retorted June. "I have already told you that I can give you no information, and, therefore, I don't see the point of all this cross-examination."

"Hear, hear!" Unexpectedly it was Bob Staines who spoke, and indignantly he looked across at the so-called detective. "I think it's a bit thick, going for Carolyn like this," he declared.

"Same here," put in Dick March. "You almost sound as if you suspect her of having caused the fire herself."



June whirled in alarm as the door was flung open. It was to see Theodore Cronberg and the bogus Noel Raymond stride angrily into the office.

If you do, then why don't you jolly well say so?"

June flashed the two boys a grateful glance. It was grand of them to spring to her defence like this. Nevertheless, it was on tenter-hooks that she waited for the impostor's reply.

Calmly he faced the two flushed, indignant boys.

"A detective never accuses anyone unless he can prove his case," he declared. "Therefore, at the moment I am bringing no charge against Miss—er—Stuart, or against any other member of the film unit."

Theodore Cronberg's expressive face registered his disappointment.

"Meaning you're not certain who the traitor is?" he barked.

The bogus Noel Raymond shook his head.

"No. I am positive of her identity," he said. "It is only that my evidence is not complete. But by tomorrow she will be unmasked. That I promise you."

Impressive was the confident way he spoke, and June's sense of uneasiness and puzzlement grew.

What crafty game was the impostor playing? Why didn't he accuse her right away? What fresh evidence did he hope to produce against her?

She did not know, but suddenly she realised that it was a desperate race between them—a race as to which of them should act first.

Either she must denounce the impostor or he would denounce her!

But before she dare accuse him she must secure proof—gilt-edged evi-

dence which would convict him not only of being the Green Archer, but also of being a rascally masquerader.

How could she possibly find that evidence in the few short hours left her?

She had no time to answer that question, for the fake detective was speaking again, and it was the producer he was addressing.

"It is most undesirable that people should be allowed to wander around until I have completed my investigations," he stated. "There may be footprints outside which can only be checked when it's light. There may be other evidence which the culprit may wish to tamper with. I suggest, therefore, that everyone retires for the night immediately after supper and is instructed not to leave his or her room until morning."

Theodore Cronberg frowned, puffed at his cigar, then gave a curt nod.

"O.K. It seems a wise precaution," he agreed. "You hear, folks? It's straight to bed for all of us as soon as supper's over."

At that moment there came the boom of a distant gong, so the producer led the way back through the West Wing to the dining-hall in the main part of the castle.

Never had June eaten a more uncomfortable meal. Bob, Dick and the rest of the Tweenies treated her as if nothing had happened, but she could not help noticing the suspicious, almost hostile way some of the company were regarding her. Clear it was that many of them believed that she was the mystery traitor.

The moment the meal was over, the impostor pushed back his chair and rose to his feet.

"I don't want to hurry you, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "but you remember what Mr. Cronberg's orders were."

A little resentfully the members of the film unit filed out of the room and made their way upstairs. There was a thoughtful frown on June's face as she followed.

Why was the bogus Noel Raymond so anxious to get them to their rooms?

With a start she remembered that conversation about the two mystery green boxes she had overheard between the Green Archer and his three confederates.

Was it possible that he intended to deliver the boxes to-night? Was that why he wanted to make certain no one was roosting about?

June's heart leapt. "That's it—I'll bet it is!" she exclaimed. "Golly, if only I could catch him red-handed doing it—"

She finished with an excited gasp, for, thrusting her hand into her pocket, her fingers had suddenly closed on a tiny object which lay there.

Eagerly she pulled it out, then her eyes lit up.

A small cheese biscuit!

The one she had taken from one of the green boxes and which she had been about to test earlier in the evening. On hurrying off to investigate the suspicious sound she had heard in the other room, she must all unknowingly have thrust it into her pocket.

Outside the door of the dormitory she shared with five other girls, she paused and looked quickly around.

No one was in sight, so excitedly she put the biscuit into her mouth and bit on it.

But even her strong teeth failed to break it in half. Under the biscuit was something unusually hard. She sucked and chewed at the biscuit covering, and when it had all gone she removed the object that remained. As she took it from her mouth, it flashed and sparkled green in the light.

With wide, astonished eyes June regarded it.

"Why, it's a jewel!" she gasped. "An emerald, and—golly, but it must be worth pounds and pounds!"

VITAL EVIDENCE

SO that was the secret of the green tin boxes!

The biscuits which had been packed in them were only a blind. The real contents were—valuable jewels! For June felt sure that all the other biscuits contained similar unsuspected booty.

But who did the jewels really belong to? And in what way were they connected with the Green Archer's feud against the film company and his audacious masquerade?

Those were the questions which June could not answer, but her latest sensational discovery made her more determined than ever to keep watch to-night.

If the impostor did intend to hand over those green boxes, then she meant to be there.

Suddenly she felt all her doubts and worries slipping away. There was yet a good chance of turning the tables on the bogus Noel Raymond.

If she caught him red-handed with the tin boxes she might be able to obtain the proof she wanted. And to-morrow there would be a letter from Parker, the real Noel's manservant in London—a letter containing a specimen of her uncle's fingerprints. That would also help her to unmask the impostor.

"Hallo, Miss Stuart, what are you up to? Reflecting on what is going to happen to-morrow?"

That soft, mocking voice made the girl detective swing round, the emerald hidden in one clenched fist.

It was to find herself confronted by the very rascal she was planning to expose. Fiercely she regarded his handsome, smiling face.

"As a matter of fact I was," she declared. "I've got the feeling that it's going to be a day of surprises—not only for the film unit, but for someone else as well!"

His smile vanished instantly. An angry gleam flashed into his grey eyes.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, his voice harsh.

But it was June's turn to laugh.

"Ah, that would be telling," she mocked, and, leaving him standing there, scowling and uneasy, she slipped into the dormitory where Vera March and the other girls were already undressing.

Quickly June followed their example, but, though she got between the sheets, she had no intention of going to sleep. When the light had been switched off, she lay there silently, watching and waiting.

Fortunately, the sensational events of the day had tired out the Tweenies and it was not long before they were asleep.

Throwing back the bedclothes, June felt for her slippers. She put them on, donned a dressing-gown, then tiptoed to the door.

Now to start her watch on the impostor!

But when she pulled at the knob she received an unpleasant shock. The door refused to open. It was locked.

"So that's why the rascal was in the corridor," she told herself angrily. "He suspected that I might investigate, so he took no chances."

Desperately she crossed to the nearest window, only to discover that that also had been locked. She fumbled with the catch of the second one, but it also failed to open.

Whether she liked it or not, she was a prisoner until the morning. All hope of trailing the bogus Noel Raymond had gone. Once again he had been too clever for her. Now he would carry out his plans undisturbed. But the most alarming fact of all was the realisation that she might never be allowed another chance to investigate.

At any moment he chose next day the impostor could keep his threat—could accuse her of being the Green Archer's confederate!

For a few moments despair seized her and then, as she remembered Parker's promise to post his employer's fingerprints at once, a slim ray of hope returned.

"Those fingerprints will enable me to unmask the rogue," June told herself. "He's been smart, but not smart enough."

Next morning she was up before any of the other girls in the dormitory were awake, and when she went to the door she found it unlocked.

Making her way downstairs, she called to Bromley, the grey-haired butler, who was busy laying the breakfast table.

"Has the post arrived?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Yes, miss. It came not ten minutes ago."

"And is there anything for me?"

Eagerly she regarded him, but to her dismay he shook his head.

"No, miss. I'm afraid not. Were you expecting something?"

"I was, Bromley. A most important letter from London. Oh, what can have become of it? Surely—" She broke off as an idea occurred to her. Perhaps Parker had registered the letter. "Does the registered post come with the ordinary mail?" she asked.

The butler shook his head.

"No, miss. It always comes a little later. As a matter of fact, I am expecting the registered mail any minute now."

June gave a gulp of relief.

"Well, if there should be a letter for me, please let me have it the moment it arrives. It's terribly important."

"Certainly, miss. I'll be only too happy to oblige. Was there anything else?"

"No, I don't think so. At least—" June broke off as a sudden thought came to her.

Suppose, after all, the impostor had not delivered the green boxes last night. In that case, they were likely to be hidden in his office. And, even if he had handed them over, his room might contain some other unsuspected evidence. In any event, it might pay her to conduct a secret search. In view of the way things were boiling to a climax, it would be wise to secure all the proof she could.

"Have you seen Mr. Raymond this morning?" she asked.

Bromley nodded.

"Yes, miss. A remarkably early riser is Mr. Raymond. He was out just before six, and now he's in his office. He informed me that he was not to be disturbed. It seems he has some very private business to transact."

June's eyes gleamed. This sounded promising.

"Private business?" she echoed.

"Yes, miss. Mr. Raymond seemed very annoyed when unwittingly I disturbed him just now. Possibly he's working on this Green Archer business. I certainly hope so. Last night's wretched affair has caused more upset. Another of the maids

has packed up and left, and I hear several of the young ladies in the film are thinking of going. It is all very—ahem!"

The butler finished with a cough, and June, turning, saw a tall, athletic figure standing in the doorway.

The bogus Noel Raymond!

How long had he been standing there? she wondered. How much had he overheard?

The impostor ignored the girl detective. He looked across at Bromley.

"Is there any mail for me?" he asked.

The butler shook his head.

"Fraid not, sir."

"Very well."

Still without a glance at June, the impostor turned and walked away, but he did not make for his office.

Instead, he opened the door giving access to Theodore Cronberg's private sitting-room and disappeared inside.

June's heart leapt as an idea entered her head.

Now was her chance to search for evidence!

With a smile at Bromley, she hurried along the corridor. Once in the room the fake detective used as office, she gazed about her speculatively.

"Now, let me see!" she murmured thoughtfully, her keen eyes roving the room, taking in every detail.

"Where is the best place to begin? Ah!" She nodded. "I'll start over there."

To the right of the fireplace was a tall cupboard. Darting across to it, she opened the door, but the cupboard was empty. Next she turned her attention to a bureau. It also afforded nothing of interest. She crossed to the desk and began to search the drawers, but she failed to find the green boxes, or anything which would help her to unmask the impostor.

She frowned with disappointment.

Was she on a wild goose chase?

Was there nothing to—

"Golly!"

June gave a sudden cry of excitement. The next drawer down refused to pull open. It was locked. But why should the bogus Noel Raymond have locked that particular drawer? Surely because there was something of importance stored away in it!

"Perhaps it's the boxes," she told herself, and thrilled at the mere thought.

Eagerly June thrust her hand into her pocket, to withdraw a set of skeleton keys. With them she got to work. The lock did not resist her skilled attention for long. There was a click and the drawer slid open. Her heart pounding, she peered down into it, then caught in her breath at what she saw.

The green-painted tin boxes were not there, but something just as exciting, just as vital, met her gleaming gaze.

A bulky bundle of green cloth. A costume—the Green Archer's costume!

"Got him at last!" June exclaimed. "Even that rogue will find it difficult to explain what this is doing in his desk!"

She made to pull out the incriminating costume, but the sound of approaching footsteps halted her. She straightened up and whirled, and as she did so the door was pushed open and two men entered the office.

First came the broad figure of Theodore Cronberg, chewing at the inevitable cigar; close behind him was the rogue Noel Raymond.

The producer stared at the girl detective in angry astonishment, but the impostor did not seem either surprised or perturbed. It was almost mockingly that he regarded June.

"Well, well, if it isn't Miss—er—Stuart," he said softly, a dangerous edge to his voice. "And pray what are you doing here?"

Will June be able to make use of the vital evidence she has found? Or will the Green Archer spring his threatened trap? More exciting chapters in next week's GIRLS' CRYSTAL—on sale Wednesday because of Easter.



Sheila's MYSTERY BIRTHDAY PRESENT

By JANE PRESTON

THE STRANGE MEDALLION

"IT'S lovely! It's the most wonderful birthday present I've ever had, Aunt Jane."

Sheila Fenn's eyes glowed with excitement as she held the colourful dress against her and then spread out the flared skirt to its full extent. Every colour of the rainbow seemed to have been woven into it.

"It's going to be my best birthday yet," Sheila enthused. "Just fancy—my birthday and the Carnival of Flowers on the same day! When I walk into Santancas this afternoon everybody will turn to stare at the senorita in the lovely dress. Thank you, Aunt Jane!"

She hugged her aunt and kissed her. And it was then her eyes clouded for a moment.

"If only daddy were here to see me wearing it," she said in a more sober voice. "That would have made everything absolutely perfect."

Once again she held up the dress. It was certainly never intended for ordinary wear—it was much too colourful. It was a special dress—a carnival dress.

"Dave will like me in it!" Sheila exclaimed and all her excitement was back again.

Dave was her cousin, and they were both taking part in the carnival.

Sheila had spent most of her life in Mexico. Her father, Roger Fenn, was a professor at the University in Mexico City, and he was an expert on the old Aztec civilisation. Some few weeks before he had left the St. Paula Hacienda—Sheila's home—on a rather mysterious journey into the interior. Nobody knew exactly where he had gone, and no word had since come from him.

"He's probably exploring some old Aztec ruin or the other," Aunt Jane had declared. "And he's probably so far out in the wilds there's no chance of his getting in touch with us."

At that moment old Amalita, the cook, came waddling into the long and cool dining-room. She was the only servant left at the hacienda, for all the others had left early that morning for Santancas in order not to miss a moment of the Flower Carnival.

"Postman just left this parcel for you, Senorita Sheila," she announced. "No stamps on it so I had to pay."

It was a very small and a very grubby parcel that she held out.

Aunt Jane smiled at her.

"I'll let you have the postage, Amalita," she said. "Thank you for taking it in."

"It must be another birthday present!" Sheila excitedly exclaimed as she took the parcel.

Yet it did not seem much like a birthday present. It was tied with what appeared to be an old and frayed bootlace, and the paper itself was crumpled and greasy. It had been addressed in pencil, and the writing was so faint Sheila could scarcely read it.

She opened out the parcel, and her puzzled frown grew more pronounced.

"Would you believe it!" she gasped.

"It's something wrapped up in grass. Grass—of all things!" Then next moment her eyes had widened with delight.

"O—oh!" she breathed.

"But it's lovely!"

She held up what appeared to be a solid gold medallion to which a thin gold chain was attached. On both sides of it strange figures and diagrams had been drawn.

"I'm sure it's gold!" Sheila went on. "It's so heavy."

Aunt Jane had been staring at the medallion with equal interest. Then she glanced again at the crumpled paper and the dry, brittle grass in which the medallion had been packed.

"One of the servants must have sent it you, Sheila," she decided. "I don't suppose it is gold for a moment, and I believe it's a copy of an Aztec lucky charm. I think I've seen some of the servants wearing similar charms."

Sheila turned the medallion over in her fingers.

"A lucky charm," she echoed. "And it's been sent me on my birthday. I must wear it to-day otherwise the luck may turn from good to bad."

She slipped the thin gold chain about her neck. Then old Amalita came waddling into the room again, and there was a note of excitement in her voice now.

"Visitor coming towards hacienda," she announced. "He seems to be carrying young senorita in arms. Perhaps there has been accident."

Both Sheila and her aunt hurried out to the veranda. They saw a tall, white-haired man coming slowly to-

wards them, and they saw the slim form of the young girl in his arms. They saw, too, that her right ankle was heavily bandaged.

"There has been an accident!" Aunt Jane exclaimed.

Sheila went running to meet the stranger. As she approached he inclined his head.

"I seek hospitality, Miss Fenn," he said in a cultured voice. "I must trespass on your kindness. My daughter and I were travelling to Santancas when I had a tyre burst and my car skidded off the road and overturned. My daughter has not been badly hurt, though she cannot walk at the moment. It is the shock that has upset her most, and it is necessary she should lie quietly and undisturbed for several hours."

The injured girl turned her head to look at Sheila, and her dark eyes seemed to be shadowed with pain.

"It was dreadful," she said with only a faint trace of accent in her voice. "I cannot yet believe I am still alive."

Sheila's face was all concern. "Of course you may rest here," she cried impulsively. "You may stay as long as you like."

Then she smiled at the white-haired man.

"You knew my name," she went on. "You must be a friend of my father's?"

Just for the moment he looked taken aback—as though the mention of Sheila's name had been a slip of the tongue. Yet almost at once he was smiling again.

"But, of course!" he answered. "Professor Fenn and myself have been friends for many years. I am Dr. Diego Albanez, and this is my daughter, Meptita."

Aunt Jane was on the scene then, and she lost no time in taking charge. The injured girl was taken to a room on the shady side of the house and made comfortable on a settee.

"I beg of you that you will not put yourselves out too much," Dr.

.....
**What A Strange Gift It Was Which Sheila Received—
 And What Exciting Adventures It Was To Lead Her
 Into!**

Albarez said. "I have bandaged the injured ankle, and the bandage must not be touched until my return. All I ask is that Mepita be left lying quietly here—she needs absolute rest."

He shrugged his shoulders. "As for me," he said, "my business in Santancas is important. As you are not on the telephone I must seek a horse from the nearest farm—on this day of the Santancas Carnival it is not likely there will be a single car on the road to give me a lift."

Sheila told him that her cousin would be arriving with a car early that afternoon, but he shook his head.

"It will be too late for me, Miss Fenn," he answered. "If I hurry now a fast horse will get me to Santancas just in time."

He stooped to pat his daughter's cheek.

"I shall be back for you this evening, little one," he promised.

Sheila directed him to the nearest farm, and then the door was closed on the injured girl. Sheila went back to examine her birthday presents again and to lay out her carnival dress on her bed. She would put it on as soon as lunch was over.

"Poor Mepita!" she thought. "When she gets over her shock she'll probably be so upset at having to miss the carnival."

At lunch Sheila was far too excited to eat, though she had to make a pretence because of Aunt Jane's eagle eye. Then, going up to her room again, she was half way to the bed when she suddenly paused. Somehow the room wasn't quite the same as when she had left it before lunch.

It was the carnival dress that first aroused Sheila's suspicions. She had laid it out so carefully, but now many of the pleats in the full skirt were lying out of place. Somebody must have handled it during her absence. And the trinkets on her dressing table—surely they had been moved? And someone had upset the tin of powder that had been one of her presents. Some of it had even spilled on to the floor.

Apart from her aunt and herself, Amalita, the cook, was the only other person in the building. And Amalita had been in the kitchen all the time. Sheila was sure of that. There was Mepita Albarez, of course, but she could not put her feet to the ground. Had some unknown entered the hacienda during lunch?

Quickly Sheila opened every cupboard and every drawer. Nothing at all had been taken.

"I'm imagining things," she convinced herself at last. "It's all the excitement of the carnival. I must have spilled the powder myself without noticing it."

And now to get dressed for the carnival. How wonderful to pull the colourful frock over her head, and then to watch herself in the mirror as she twirled and the full skirt flared out. Exciting, too, to pin a bright flower in her fair hair.

Only at the very last moment did she think of the heavy gold medallion. Yes, she must wear her lucky charm. She slid the thin chain about her neck, and then let the medallion lie in full view against the bodice of her dress.

She looked at her watch. At any moment now Dave would be coming for her. And she remembered her injured guest. She couldn't leave without a friendly word with her.

She found Mepita lying on the settee with her eyes wide open. Sheila started to explain that she would be leaving for the carnival within a few minutes, but suddenly realised that Mepita was not listening—that she was staring wide-eyed at the medallion.

"That is a most unusual charm," she said in her low, husky voice. "May I please examine it?"

Sheila unclipped the chain. Mepita took the medallion and turned it over in her fingers. Next moment a scornful laugh escaped her!

"It ces not gold at all!" she exclaimed, her accent becoming more

pronounced. "It ces but a cheap copy of an old Aztec charm. Only to people of Aztec blood can it bring good luck. If others wear it then it only bring bad luck—ver' bad luck."

Her fingers seemed to close more tightly over the medallion.

"I am of Aztec blood," she went on. "To me ze medallion bring much good fortune. But you—you crazy ever to wear it again."

It was a hint that Sheila should make her a present of the medallion. But Sheila reached out to take possession of it again. It had been sent to her as a birthday present.

"I don't think it will bring me ill-luck—," Sheila began, then suddenly caught her breath.

Mepita's shoes had been placed beside the settee, and now Sheila saw that powder had been spilled over one of them. In a flash she remembered that spilled powder in her bedroom—and the conviction that someone had disturbed her belongings.

Surely this Mexican girl could not have been the intruder? Her ankle was injured and she was unable to walk. Yet the powder could only have been picked up in the bedroom. In that case Mepita wasn't injured at all—she had entered the house under false pretences. But why?

Sheila remembered the intent way in which Mepita had stared at the medallion. She remembered, too, that that medallion was a mystery present—it had come packed in grass, wrapped in crumpled, greasy paper, and the parcel had been tied with a shoe-lace.

It was indeed a strange way to send a valuable present for, despite Mepita's statement to the contrary, Sheila was still convinced it was gold.

Was there a mystery about the medallion? And was this dark-eyed Mexican girl concerned in it?

ROBBED AT THE CARNIVAL

THE blare of a motor-horn saved the situation for Sheila. Another moment and Mepita would have begun to wonder at her silence. And Sheila knew she dare not voice her suspicions—some other cause might be responsible for the powder on Mepita's shoe.

"That'll be Dave!" Sheila exclaimed. "I must run—Dave always hates to be kept hanging about."

She saw the eyes of the Mexican girl change—just for a moment they were both furious and baffled. Then Mepita smiled.

"I must not keep you," she said. "It ces too bad I must miss ze carnival, but I will try to sleep and then I shall not mind so much. Now you go and enjoy yourself—and Mepita thanks you for letting her stay here."

"We—we were only too glad to be able to help," Sheila found herself saying. "I hope your ankle will soon be better."

She ran out of the hacienda, and there was Dave standing beside a car, the back of which was piled high with lovely exotic flowers. He was dressed as a torador and, at sight of Sheila, he lifted his three-cornered hat with a flourish.

"You look stunning, senorita," he greeted her. "Positively stunning. But you don't look as if you're bubbling over with the carnival spirit. What's on your mind?"

Sheila undid her medallion and held it out.

"This," she said. "My mystery birthday present."

Dave regarded the medallion curiously, and quietly Sheila told him of its arrival in the strange parcel.

"Wasn't there a note with it?" he demanded.

Sheila shook her head, and went on to tell of the unexpected arrival of Dr. Diego Albarez and his daughter, finishing up by describing how startled she had been to see the powder on Mepita's shoe.

Dave stared again at the medallion.

"She was probably right about that charm," he said. "I seem to remember having seen Felicito, your father's servant, wearing one like it. It's probably quite valueless, so I don't suppose for a moment this doctor

chap and his daughter are interested in it at all. You've let your imagination run away with you, Sheila."

That was what she began to think herself. She boarded the car, and soon they were driving out towards the town.

"In any case," Dave grinned suddenly, "we're not going to bother our heads with mysteries to-day. This is the great day of the year—this is carnival time, and we're going to enjoy ourselves. Shall we take the car into the town and join one of the processions there, or shall we walk in on foot and mingle with the crowds?"

Sheila knew no hesitation whatsoever.

"Mingle with the crowds, of course," she answered, her eyes shining.

"Just what I was hoping you'd say," Dave grinned. "Well park the car at the first garage we come to. And we'd better put on our masks."

Laughingly Sheila donned her mask—which she must now keep on until the bells rang that night. Only then were people allowed to unmask. And Sheila found herself wondering what lovely, exciting things were due to happen before the hour of unmasking.

Their arms were full of flowers when they left the garage. They joined in a gaily dressed and masked crowd hurrying towards the centre of the town, and soon it was difficult to get along, and all about them was the sound of laughter.

On the way they passed several miniature battles of flowers, but Dave refused to take any part in them.

"We want to wait for the processions to come along," he explained. "That's when the fun starts."

They were near the great square when Sheila saw another flower battle start up among a group of gaily-dressed youths. Strangely, within a few minutes, all were sneezing.

Sheila found herself wondering if the scent and pollen of the flowers had brought on some kind of hay fever. One of the sneezing youths, not seeing where he was going, blundered into her and Sheila lost half her flowers.

"Pardon, senorita," he gasped.

A little farther along they saw a barrow piled high with bouquets of flowers. The street trader, two truly enormous bouquets in his hands, stepped directly in Sheila's path.

"Flowers for the pretty senorita?" he wheedled. "Have fun with my flowers, senorita."

Sheila remembered she had lost half her flowers and these were indeed lovely bunches. She was reaching for her handbag when Dave caught her arm and pulled her away.

"But they were so lovely," Sheila protested. "And I need some more flowers—"

"Not those flowers," Dave said firmly. "I wonder he dares to sell them in the open street. If the police get hold of him they'll run him in."

"But why?" asked Sheila in surprise.

"Because those flowers have started all this sneezing. There are small boxes of pepper hidden away in the bunches," Dave explained. "Every time the flowers are waved in somebody's face out flies the pepper and immediately they start to sneeze. It's a dangerous joke, too, for pepper can be very painful if it gets in your eyes."

"I'm glad you stopped me buying," Sheila smiled. "That isn't my idea of a joke at all."

The great square of Santancas was a seething mass of masked figures, and already the air was thick with flying flowers. Moving slowly across the square was a procession of cars, whose occupants had started the flower battle.

One long American car was piled high with flowers. A masked driver sat behind the wheel, and the only other occupant was a masked girl in a bright red frock, who appeared to be seated on a throne of flowers. When Sheila first saw her the girl had been seated and taking no part in the battle, but Sheila formed the

impression she was looking for someone.

It might have been her imagination, but Sheila thought the girl in the car looked full at her for a moment. She saw the girl lean forward and say something to the driver, and he also looked in her direction. Immediately the car nosed out of the procession, heading towards Sheila and Dave.

The bystanders pelted it with flowers, but the girl still sat quietly. Then the car was abreast of Sheila and Dave, and the girl stood up, gathering armfuls of flowers as she did so.

"Ah!" she exclaimed in a throaty, husky voice. "El Caballero Rojo—the Red Cavalier. I would exchange compliments with you, El Caballero!"

She flung a handful of flowers at Dave, who grinned and immediately accepted the challenge.

"This is where the fun starts," he joyously exclaimed. "We're two to one, but she's got the most ammunition. Let it rip, Sheila!"

All in a flash the fun was fast and furious. The air became thick with flowers, and Sheila's stock was soon exhausted. So was Dave's, and for a while they were content to catch the flowers thrown at them and to return them. But that wasn't good enough for Dave. Jumping to the running-board of the car, he seized a handful of flowers.

"Help yourself, Sheila!" he called. "We're not going to be beaten."

Sheila, full of the excitement of it all, also jumped to the running-board. She gathered up a huge armful of flowers, leaning over the side of the car to do so.

Just as she was straightening herself she felt a sharp tug at her neck. At the same time she heard the girl in the car give a sharp command to the driver.

The car moved forward with a jerk

and, if Sheila had not quickly jumped back, she would have fallen from the running-board. At the same moment she let her flowers fall, and her hands flew to her neck.

The gold medallion was missing! It had been snatched from her neck while she was leaning forward for the flowers—and the thief had been the girl in the car!

TRICKSTERS REVEALED

THAT thought rioted through Sheila's mind even as she strove to keep her balance after her jump. She saw that Dave was still clinging to the car—for the moment she thought he was clinging to the masked girl.

Sheila saw her start back and, at the same time, she saw the mask slip away from her face. The girl caught it at once and hastily moved it back into position.

But she had not been quite quick enough, and now Sheila was staring in wide-eyed amazement.

The girl in the car was Mepita Albanez—the girl she had left lying at the hacienda with an injured ankle—the girl whose father had declared she was unable to walk.

Sheila's thoughts raced anew at this startling discovery. Then Mepita Albanez had been playing a part—she had never been injured. It had been a trick to get her inside the hacienda. It must have been Mepita who had entered her bedroom—seeking the medallion. And she must have left the hacienda almost immediately after Dave had driven away—she could not be taking part in the carnival otherwise.

Many people were shouting in anger now—a very strange sound to hear on Carnival Day. The shouts were directed at the driver of the car, for he was driving on and scattering the crowd.

Sheila saw Dave fall from the car, and then he was pushing his way back to her. As he came near she saw that underneath his mask his face was flushed and excited.

And Sheila, with a quick intake of breath, saw he was holding the gold medallion.

"I don't get it!" he gasped as soon as he reached her. "The moment you leaned in the car she snatched the medallion and told the driver to drive on. You're lucky I spotted her, for I grabbed at the medallion at once and a rare old tussle I had to get it away from her."

Sheila's excitement matched his own.

"She's Mepita Albanez," she cried. "The girl I left at the hacienda. She only pretended to be injured—she was after the gold medallion all the time."

Taking it from Dave, she dropped it into her handbag.

"I'm sorry now I laughed at your suspicions," Dave apologised. "I wish I knew why she's so anxious to get the medallion."

Sheila was still looking after the car.

"The medallion must mean something," she said. "We ought to try and find out about it. If we tried to follow that car maybe—"

In a flash Dave's fingers closed over her arm.

"What are we wasting time for?" he cried excitedly. "Of course we must follow it. And it can't move very fast in this surging mob. Come on."

They pushed their way forward. People got in their way—many pelted them with flowers—but doggedly they kept on. And Sheila was glad that Mepita Albanez was dressed all in red—even in that motley coloured crowd she was a distinctive figure.

They saw the car swing into a side turning.



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"Come on!" Dave gasped again. "If we lose sight of it now we'll be sunk."

They reached the corner just as the girl in red stepped out of the still moving car, and they saw her turn quickly down another narrow street. The car went on, gathering speed with every second.

"A dodge to put us off the scent," Dave decided, "but she left it a little too late. We won't lose sight of her now."

Even the side streets were filled with people, but the press was not so bad as in the city square. They sighted the figure in red and followed it through half a dozen streets. They came then to a residential quarter where the houses of well-to-do citizens stood in their own colourful gardens surrounded by high brick walls.

It was a gateway set in one of these walls that Mepita Albanez passed through. Running hard, Sheila and Dave reached the gate and, peering through the ornamental iron-work, they saw Mepita crossing a lawn towards a large open window. Even as they watched a tall, white-haired man appeared in the window.

"Dr. Diego Albanez!" Sheila whispered.

His excited voice carried clearly to them.

"You have succeeded, my child?" They did not hear Mepita's answer, but they saw the way her father's face changed, and he was scowling as she joined him in the room.

Dave lifted the catch of the gate and it began to swing open.

"I'm going to take a chance," he whispered excitedly. "If I creep along that line of bushes I ought to be able to get quite close to that window without being seen. I'd very much like to know what's being said in that room."

Sheila's excitement and determination was equal to his own.

"I'm coming with you." They slipped through the gateway and darted for the bushes. Slowly they began to creep along, and Sheila was just beginning to congratulate herself that they had succeeded when their luck gave out.

Another man turned a corner of the house, and they were in full view of him.

"What are you doing here?" he shouted. "Stop—stop—"

But Sheila and Dave were already running. Out of the gates they tore and back towards the centre of the town. Only when they were once more among the carnival crowds did they slow down.

"What rotten luck!" Dave gasped breathlessly. "We're right back where we started. And—and we daren't go back to that house now—they're bound to be on the look out for us."

Sheila fought down her disappointment. As they had crept along the line of bushes her hopes had been high that the mystery would be soon explained.

They may make another attempt to get the medallion," Dave said quietly. "You see, they know exactly how you are dressed. That's something we've got to try and guard against."

His brows furrowed beneath his mask.

"I've got it," he went on. "As we don't want to miss the carnival we'll go back to the square. But from now onwards I'll stay a little way behind you and keep watch."

So when Sheila walked back into the town square she was seemingly alone. She found that the excitement was mounting, and that dancing had already started in the centre of the square. She found herself wishing that the medallion had never been sent to her. Because of it her fun was being spoiled. She couldn't enter wholeheartedly into the excitement when the thought was always present at the back of her mind that another attempt might be made to steal the medallion.

Even so she was forced to take part in several battles of flowers, and once she found herself whirled into

a dance. She quickly realised that Dave was dancing nearby.

An hour went by and Sheila had almost forgotten about the medallion. Then, without warning, fingers closed over her arm. She turned quickly, expecting to see Dave. Instead she saw a very familiar, swarthy face.

"Why, Felicito!" she exclaimed. And almost in the same breath: "Has daddy returned?"

For Felicito was her father's most trusted servant, and he had left with Professor Fenn when the latter had started on his mysterious journey.

Felicito shook his head. "Senor Fenn has not returned," he answered, "and it is my fear he will be very angry with me."

He drew Sheila to one side. "I arrived at the hacienda soon after you had left," he said quickly. "Senora Fenn described your dress to me, and for hours I have sought to find you in this square."

Sheila knew a quick feeling of alarm. "But what is wrong?" she wanted to know. "Has anything happened? Is daddy—?"

Quickly he re-assured her. "Senor Fenn is well," he interrupted. "It is because of my accident and my carelessness that I have had to seek you. You see, senorita, I was sent from your father's camp with two small parcels—one for you, a birthday present, and the other intended for the University Museum. On my way here I was thrown from my horse. All night I lay unconscious, and wild animals tore my parcels to pieces. Knowing that I must rest, I made up the parcels again as best I could and I managed to get to a trail-side post-box. There I posted your parcel, for I knew it was intended for your birthday and I wanted you to receive it on the day."

He gave a dismal shrug of the shoulders. "Then I discovered the mistake I had made," he went on. "I directed the parcels wrongly. Your birthday present went to the museum, and the gift to the museum came to you. And—and that gift is very valuable. Senora Fenn tells me you have it with you, and my fear has been you would have it stolen from you. I ask that you give it to me, senorita, so that I may take it to the museum with speed. Your real birthday present will reach you to-morrow."

So that was the explanation of the medallion. It was a valuable ancient relic intended for a museum. No wonder an attempt had been made to steal it—Dr. Albanez must know of its value. The sooner it was safe in Felicito's keeping the better.

Quickly she took it from her handbag, and Felicito almost snatched it from her.

"I must hurry," he gasped. "There is no time to waste. Adios, senorita, and thank you." In a few moments he was lost to sight among the crowd.

And now, Sheila smiled. "I've nothing to do but enjoy myself." She looked about her for Dave and, at first, she failed to find him. Then she saw him fighting his way towards her and, despite his mask, she realised how excited and worried he was.

"Sheila!" he exclaimed as he came up. "I got cut off from you—I had to take part in another dance. But what did Felicito want—what did you give him?"

Quickly Sheila told her story, and her heart sank as she saw the quick alarm that jumped into Dave's eyes as she finished.

"Felicito is a traitor!" he gasped. "He must have turned against your father. Only a few moments ago I saw him meet Dr. Albanez. I saw him hand something over, and then they hurried off together!"

FOILED BY FLOWERS

SHEILA could only stare at her cousin. Felicito was her father's most trusted servant. And he had explained why the medallion had come in such a crude, unstamped parcel.

Yet if Felicito had handed the medallion to Dr. Diego Albanez, then he must indeed be a traitor!

"We must do something!" Sheila said desperately. "We could go back to that house. If we could only find out the real meaning of the medallion, its loss might not matter."

"We'll risk it!" Dave nodded, a determined glint in his eyes.

He caught her arm, and once again they forced a passage through the surging crowds. Through the side streets they raced, but they saw no sign of Felicito or of Dr. Diego Albanez.

Again they came to the iron gate and, peering through it, they saw Dr. Albanez and Felicito walking into the house. A figure moved inside, and they caught a glimpse of Mepita.

"We've got to risk it," Dave said grimly. "Come on!"

They crept along under cover of the line of bushes. And then from behind the last bush they were peering right into the room. They saw Dr. Albanez and his daughter, and there could be no mistaking their excitement. But never had Sheila seen a man look so downcast as Felicito looked.

They saw the inner door open, and another man entered the room—the same man who had seen them hiding behind the bushes on their first visit. He was evidently in a very bad temper.

"Must we waste any more time here?" he wanted to know. "Even now the treasure may have been found. You may trust our men, but I do not. Once they glimpse that treasure, if we are not there to control them, it will vanish in the space of a few hours."

Dr. Diego Albanez twisted Sheila's medallion in his fingers.

"You do not know the full story, Juan," he said. "I feared to tell it you on my arrival lest you should panic and want to leave. But I can tell it you now."

He looked at the cringing Felicito, and his voice became ugly.

"It was you who told us of Professor Fenn's treasure hunt, Juan," he said; "that he had found some Aztec picture writing that explained the hiding place of a treasure. Well, we followed him and we waited until he had found the treasure passage in the ruins. It was easy to make the professor and his few labourers prisoners, and we took over the digging."

"Then," Dr. Albanez went on, "this man, Felicito, escaped. Luckily we found out about it almost at once, and Mepita and myself went after him on horseback. We knew he was headed for the nearest town or village so that he could inform the police."

Every word came clearly to the two excited listeners. They learned how Albanez and his daughter had come upon Felicito limping so badly he could scarcely walk. At first they had thought the danger over, and then Mepita had noticed that the medallion—which he had always wore—was missing from his neck. They wouldn't believe him when he said he had lost it. They had then tied him to one of the horses and hurried him secretly into Santanzas.

Sheila shuddered then, for she heard Albanez describe how Felicito's small son had been kidnapped.

"He talked willingly enough then," Albanez went on grimly. "Having injured himself and knowing we were on his track, he crawled to a trail post-box and there he had posted his medallion to Fenn's daughter. We knew then we had to get the medallion at all costs. Unfortunately the postman had already delivered it before we arrived at the Fenn hacienda."

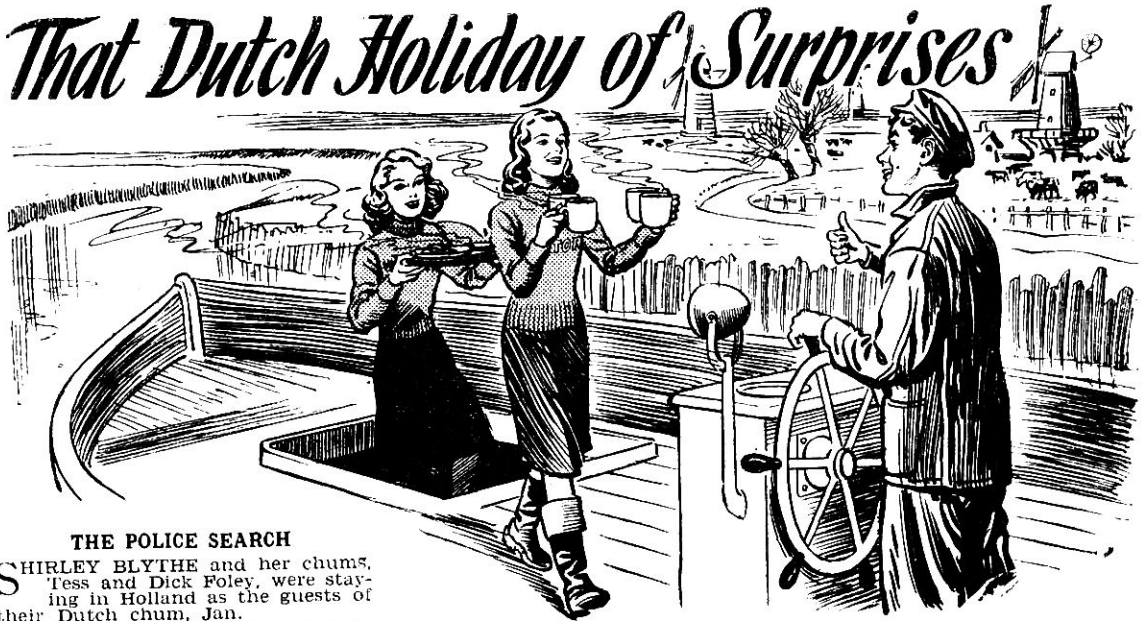
He placed the medallion upon the table.

"I will show you now why it is so important," he said.

Standing the medallion on edge, he rapped it sharply against the table-top. Instantly the medallion fell apart and a slip of paper fell out.

Please turn to the back page.

That Dutch Holiday of Surprises



THE POLICE SEARCH

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

They were helping Zella van Deen ward of a wealthy bulb grower, Mr. van Hagel, to solve a cryptic message they had found hidden in a clop-shaped tulip bowl.

The chums learnt that Zella had been sent to Winsum, in the North of Holland. They themselves were framed for a robbery by Mr. van Hagel, and forced to become fugitives aboard a barge which Jan had hired.

Disguised as Dutch bargees, they set off for Winsum to see Zella. But just as they started out they were held up by the police.

"HEAVE TO! We're coming aboard!" That sharp command was in Dutch, but its meaning was ominously clear to the chums.

They stood, frozen with dismay, on the deck of the barge as the police launch grated against its bows.

"Leave the talking to Jan! If they hear our English voices, we're done for!" Shirley whispered feverishly to Tess and Dick.

A rope ladder was flung up to her. With icy fingers she caught it, hitched it to the deck-rail in the glaring beam of the police searchlight.

That searchlight glared mercilessly upon Shirley and Tess in their bargee skirts and sea-boots and jumpers; Dick in his borrowed bell-bottoms and jersey. The name of the barge—Viktor—was blazoned across their chests.

Was their disguise useless, their attempted flight a hopeless mockery? Why had the canal police so unerringly descended upon the barge Viktor?

Two burly officers came swinging up the ladder on to the barge deck. Their blue uniforms and gleaming, forbidding police badges sent a shiver through the chums. The taller of the two wore epaulettes and was obviously the captain.

"I want the skipper. Are you the skipper?" he rapped at Jan.

"Aye, aye, sir! At your service!" Jan's smiling coolness, as he stepped from the wheel, made the chums marvel at his courage.

His peril was as great as theirs. He was harbouring the chums in their flight from the police. Aiding and abetting three young foreigners, English fugitives in disguise, who were wanted in connection with the Schipol diamond robbery.

"Who have you aboard?" the officer demanded.

"Myself, and a crew of three!" Jan waved towards the chums.

"What passengers?"

"No passengers."

"We shall see." We are going to search!" the police captain said decisively. "Where are you bound for?"

"North!" Jan replied calmly. He did not name their destination, that far-distant Winsum where they hoped so desperately to find Zella. "Trading as far north as the Friesland," he added.

"What cargo are you carrying?" the officer rapped out.

"Grain!" answered Jan—and the chums thanked their lucky stars for those sacks of grain from Jan's farm, still lying in the hold where they had loaded them for their interrupted work-and-holiday cruise. "Grain," said Jan cheerfully, "from Bootendorp!"

"Anything else?" The police captain paused. "Anything from Schipol? Valuables? Diamonds?" he fired quickly.

Shirley gulped. This was it; this was what she had feared, known! The police were here to pursue investigations concerning the museum robbery! The robbery which had made hunted suspects of them all—framed by the cunning of Mr. van Hagel, Zella's guardian.

"Diamonds?" Jan chuckled. "If you can find any diamonds aboard, I would like to help you. Kommi!"

"We're not looking only for diamonds," the captain said dryly, striding to the hatchway. "We're looking also for the young foreigners who stole them!"

"Foreigners?" echoed Jan with interest, as they all followed the two officers below.

"Three young English people—a boy and two girls," the captain said crisply. "We have their descriptions. They are quite unmistakable. If you've seen any such strangers, my lad, you'd better say so!"

"What are they like?" inquired Jan.

"You couldn't mistake them—you'd know them by the two girls!" snapped the officer. "Both were in ordinary cycling shorts and wore jumpers. One girl was fair; the other dark. They might have stowed aboard

By ELISE PROBYN

without your seeing them—but we'll soon know!" And he switched on a powerful torch.

Shirley's heart was hammering. Those clothes were lying now in the little cabin where they had changed. They were lying loosely in the locker. They were not even concealed, nor was there any place in that cabin to conceal them.

"Let's have a look in the hold first. That's where they might have stowed themselves," the captain was saying to the other officer.

Shirley edged behind them and sidled away, to vanish into the little cabin where they had changed.

"What's Shirley after?" Dick whispered, sensing disaster.

"Our jumpers—they're in the locker!" whispered Tess faintly. "If she drops them through the port into the water, the other policeman out there in the launch will see her. And—and there's nowhere else she can hide them!"

"Then I guess we're beaten!" Dick groaned.

Jan, too, had realised that, although he did not show it. He was making a pretence of helping the police search the hold. He was delaying the discovery as long as he could. And then Shirley stole out of the small cabin aft. Not a moment too soon, for hardly had she joined the chums than the police officers returned to the large cabin.

They made a brisk search there. Dick's sports coat and shorts were bundled in the corner, but they were no different from those worn by lots of Dutch youths. The officers passed on. And, inevitably, they came to the small cabin aft.

"That is the deck-girls' quarters." Jan explained in a rather quivery voice.

"Pardon!" the captain said curtly to Shirley and Tess—and strode straight into the little cabin.

Tess, Dick and Jan gazed from the doorway, waiting for the exposure. They watched the police gazing under the banks and prodding the blankets to make sure that no one was hiding there.

Then the captain went to the locker. Tess closed her eyes. Dick and Jan waited in painful suspense.

The captain raised the lid of the locker. It revealed drab ropes and an old fishing-net. Nothing else. He closed the lid again; switched off his torch. Had he not done so he must surely have seen the stupefied relief on those watching faces.

**It Was Fun Living Aboard
A Dutch Barge. If Only
Shirley & Co. Had Not
Been Fugitives!**

"Any more cabins or cubby-holes anywhere?" he asked.

But he sounded quite affable now. He knew every inch of barges like the Viktor, and he knew there was no other place where one stowaway could hide, let alone three.

"You have seen everything," said Jan, his brain awhirl.

The police captain gave him a friendly clap on the shoulder.

"It was just a check-up, my lad. You won't be the only one. My own belief is that the youngsters'll stow aboard a channel boat for England. You can pull off now. Good-night!"

Both officers vanished up the hatchway and jumped into their own waiting launch—and next moment they were streaking away in the night, to intercept the next craft that happened along.

Below deck, in the barge, three youthful faces were gaping, astounded, at Shirley.

"Shirley!" gasped Tess. "Where did you hide our jumpers?"

Shirley lifted the edge of her jersey, and its drabness was offset by a flash of bright blue and flaming red. "I put them on," she said.

"Oh!"

With one accord the chums burst out laughing.

"Only a girl would have thought of that!" grinned Dick. "Shirley, you saved us!"

"Such resource!" Jan chuckled. "With your wits and dis barge, mine Shirley, we shall get t'rough to Winsum yet!"

He led a joyful rush back to the deck. While the chums seized the huge barge-pole and pushed off from the bank, Jan bent again to the engine. There was a splutter and a roar. Then it died to a steady hum as the barge got under way again.

They were off, forging out on their course into the blackness of the night.

Dick moved quietly across to the wheel.

"You're skipper, Jan, and you're not going to do all the work!" he said. "I've got to learn how to handle this craft, so's we can take turn and turn about throughout the night."

"Okay! I shall need all your help, Dick," nodded Jan.

"What about us, Jan?" asked Shirley, echoed, by Tess. "We're going to work, too."

"On a barge it is the girls who work harder than the lads," Jan chuckled. "Housework! Cooking, scrubbing, washing, and then—plenty more cooking! To-night you turn in and sleep, mine Shirley and Tess. To-morrow you will see!"

It was a welcome prospect to Shirley and Tess. They lay in their bunks that night, listening to the soft throb of the engine, lulled by the gentle rocking motion of the barge. It all seemed strangely peaceful.

But they were not deceived. They were thankful that there would be work in plenty to keep them occupied. They were fugitives now, hunted by the police, and every moment of this trip would be fraught with danger—the threatening, ever-present danger of detection, and arrest!

THE NEWSPAPER HEADLINE

"SHOW a leg there, Dick!"

"Brekker's ready! We're taking it up on deck, to join Jan!"

Dick sat up, sleepy-eyed, on his bunk in the main cabin. He saw Tess filling steaming hot mugs on the lid of the locker, and Shirley at the stove tending a sizzling frying pan. There was a delicious smell of coffee and fried bread and bacon in the cabin.

"Gee, did you girls say—breakfast?" And Dick gasped. "Is it morning?"

"A glorious morning!" Shirley told him. "There's some water in the bucket to wash in. Dick—only don't be long, or the grub'll get cold!"

And leaving Dick to carry on, she followed Tess up on deck. Jan at the wheel, was blowing into his hands to keep them warm. It was brilliant, sunny morning, but icy cold. The water was frozen into little beads

where it lapped the canal banks, and the flat meadows stretched away on either side in a silver sheen of frost.

"Mine Shirley und Tess, you are goot sailors, but better still," said Jan warmly, "you are goot cooks."

Shirley dragged forth an empty cheese-crate to serve as a table.

"You tuck in, skipper! You must be cold, as well as starved."

"It wasn't the cold that matters," Jan said, looking serious for a moment. "But ve cannot take the quiet little backwaters that I would vish for our safety—because so many are frozen up. Here is vun now."

Shirley saw a narrow waterway branching off the main canal—but a boom was slung across its entrance, closing it to all craft. A notice was erected there: "Diversion." An arrow pointed inexorably to the main canal.

"It means we can't dodge the crowd, so to speak," said Dick.

"It means ve haf to be careful every minute—but especially when we go t'rough the locks," Jan said earnestly. "Tese big main locks—they are always filled up with craft, and they haf very strict rules."

"Then it won't do for us to make any mistakes," Dick nodded. "We know how to take a punt through our little river locks at home, Jan—but we don't know how to take a barge through. Don't even know how to hitch it up while we're waiting to get through. You'd better give us some drill."

"Ja! I put you up to the ropes," nodded Jan. "But I will be at the wheel, and I will take the lock-keeper's orders. You will not haf to vorry."

He gave the chums some brief instructions as soon as breakfast was finished. All listened intently. They could see an endless procession of vessels following in their wake, and they knew they would be watched by many eyes—experienced eyes—when those duties had to be performed.

Shirley and Tess were washing the breakfast things, a little later, when Dick shouted down to them:

"All hands on deck! We're coming into a lock!"

The girls ran up alertly to their stations. Shirley to the for'ard rope on the prow; Tess to the aft rope in the stern. Dick stood amidships, balancing the pole. Jan slowed down his engine and steered steadily for the lock.

The gates were open; a dozen craft were already in the huge basin. Lock officials were shouting brisk orders, directing them to their berths.

Jan nosed the barge deeper and deeper into the basin. Orders were shouted to him and he understood them, though the chums did not. Shirley stood waiting tensely in the prow, the coiled rope in her hands. The barge crept forward into the narrow gap between two others.

A girl on one of those other barges shouted something to Shirley. The Dutch words were unfamiliar, but their meaning was clear.

Shirley flung out her rope, and the Dutch girl hitched it to her own craft. Then with practised skill she flung a rope across to Shirley. Shirley seized it and made it fast to the binnacle of the barge. Then anxiously she looked to see how Tess and Dick were faring.

Tess and Dick had safely carried out their own allotted tasks, and Shirley breathed a sigh of relief.

"So far so good," she murmured to herself.

A brisk lock official now came aboard to collect the toll that had to be paid.

The chums thanked their lucky stars for Jan's presence.

He had to answer a volley of questions in quickfire Dutch before a pass-ticket was given to him. Then the official clambered over to the next vessel. Soon the water-level began to sink as the sluices emptied.

Shirley & Co. remembered Jan's instructions and played out their ropes with desperate care. Their inexperience would give them away if the barges collided. Then the consequences might be far-reaching—

leading to their detection as the young English fugitives!

They managed somehow without mishap—but it was a merciful relief to Shirley when at last she threw back the Dutch girl's rope, retrieved her own, and watched that other barge pull away.

There were more shouts then, and a bewildering mass of orders, as the for'ard gates opened and the barges were directed out of the lock one by one.

"Gee, am I glad that's over!" Tess puffed. "I felt that every eye in the world was watching me!"

"You vos fine!" applauded Jan, who had not turned a hair throughout the ordeal. "You vos all fine, goot sailors—and dot is half the battle to get us safely to Winsum—and Zella!"

"Jan, did your postman friend find out any more news?" Shirley asked quickly. "Any clue to where Zella is in Winsum—the exact house or place where van Hagel has hidden her?"

"To-morrow he vill perhaps haf news for me," Jan told her. "I am to call at a post office we shall pass on our course. A message vill be waiting for me there."

The chums' excitement leapt. "That message may turn our luck!" breathed Dick. "If only we can find Zella before they find us—we win!"

It fired a new spirit in them all. It was the first time their suspense had relaxed, even for a moment. The first time they could give their minds to less anxious matters.

"Which reminds me," Shirley said now. "I'll soon have to go ashore myself to do some shopping."

"Vot for?" Jan asked with quick caution.

"Milk, for one thing. And bread. Also," said Shirley, "we need such things as toothbrushes, toothpaste and towels and so on. We haven't a thing but what we stand up in, Jan. We left everything behind us in our rooms—luggage, clothes, even our passports and tickets."

"Better not go ashore till to-morrow," murmured Jan. "Ve shall be farther out then—it vill be safer for you."

"Aye, aye, skipper!" agreed Shirley. Jan's word was law aboard the Viktor.

That day brought its inevitable crop of scares as they passed in and out of the busy locks. But it was Jan at the helm who saved the chums and diverted attention from them in moments of crisis. Dick vigilantly obeyed his orders. Shirley and Tess kept themselves busy till nightfall—cooking, swabbing decks, and cooking again.

Early next morning—before breakfast—Shirley seized the empty milk-pail and went up on deck, watching there with Tess until she spotted a secluded-looking farmhouse on the outskirts of a passing village.

"This'll do fine! Nice sleepy-looking little place," she said eagerly, as Jan pulled in to the bank. "Are you coming with us, Dick?"

"Skipper says no," chuckled Dick. "It is safer if you do not all three go together," said Jan wisely.

"Right-ho!" Lightheartedly Shirley and Tess scrambled ashore and went alone to the farmhouse.

The friendly dairymaid was far too busy to exchange more than a cheery "Good-morning!" with them. But she half-filled their pail with beautiful, creamy milk and sold them a dozen big new-laid eggs.

"Now for the village shop—the winkel," said Tess. "I hope you know the Dutch for hair slide, Shirley, because I simply must get one."

"I've written it down with the other things. Hope I can pronounce 'em," said Shirley.

The village "winkel" was a tiny general store, and seemed to sell everything. A rosy-cheeked young Dutch girl, of school age, came out from the back parlour as the chums entered. She asked with smiling friendliness what they wished for. And then her smile looked puzzled as Shirley pronounced the words toothbrush and toothpaste.

"Pardon?" she queried. Shirley repeated her request brightly. But she was uneasy. Her accent was obviously foreign, and this sharp-witted schoolgirl was looking at her with very wide-awake eyes. She served Shirley with her purchases, then moved back into the parlour on the excuse to get change.

"Did you see the funny way she looked at us, Shirley?" Tess whispered apprehensively. "Look, she's talking about us now!"

Shirley was painfully aware of it. She saw the girl whisper something to her father, who was sitting by the parlour stove reading a newspaper. He turned his head sharply and gazed at Tess and herself through the half-open door.

In the same instant the shop-bell tinkled and a hefty young bargee strode in—the name Klara blazoned on his jersey.

He called out cheerily and rapped a coin on the counter.

Then, with the ease of a regular customer, he leaned over and extracted a newspaper from a pile under the shelf. Nodding genially to Shirley and Tess, he spread the paper on the counter and began to read.

Shirley's heart suddenly seemed to freeze; Tess whitened under the piercing gaze of the shopgirl and her father.

Staring up at them from that newspaper, under the caption—"English Suspects in Jewel Robbery!"—they could see their own photographs and Dick's! The police had published their passport photographs!

Did that watchful shopgirl suspect who they were? Did she recognise them from their photos?

THE CHUMS ON THEIR OWN

"YOUR change, dank u!" Shirley almost jumped out of her skin as the girl came back to her, bringing her change.

"Dank u well!" Shirley picked up the coins, grabbed the milk-pail and fairly ran with Tess to the door.

But sheer nervousness forced her to glance back. She saw the girl still staring at her puzzledly. And that young bargee was still waiting at the counter to be served. Shirley's heart hammered as she hurried with Tess out of the shop.

"D'you think she recognised us, Shirley—from those newspaper photos?" Tess asked anxiously.

"I daren't think about it. I—I'm sure she's suspicious!" Shirley gasped. "The danger is—she'll probably talk about it to that boy in the shop, even if she talks to no one else. And he's a bargee! Let's hope he's not going anywhere in our direction."

But it was a forlorn hope. The first thing she saw when she reached the canal bank was another barge moored only a few yards from their own, its squat nose pointed on the same northerly course. It was the barge Klara.

Dick and Jan tried to be reassuring when they heard what had happened, but the girls could see that both were perturbed.

"It's a good thing I wasn't with you, Jan was right!" Dick muttered. "The three of us together would have given the show away for certain."

Jan cast off hurriedly and made away at full speed—hoping to keep a wide berth of the Klara, in case of any suspicious aboard.

"You'd better not go ashore again, mine kamarades," he said tensely. "Your danger is too great now dot your photos is published."

"What about that message from your postman friend, Jan—about Zella?" Shirley reminded him anxiously. "We've got to have that—it's our only hope of finding out where Zella is. It's to be picked up to-day, you said?"

"Ja! At the post office at Vendam. I will pick it up—I will go ashore at Vendam," Jan said, with a rapid glance at his chart. "Dick will take the barge on alone till I join you, but it will be easy there. Vendam has many backwaters."

While Dick studied the chart with

him, Shirley and Tess cooked breakfast, and then set to the endless task of peeling vegetables for the next meal. The scare of the morning gradually faded. Excitement took its place as the chums speculated on the vital information that Jan might find awaiting him at Vendam.

It was midday—very cold, but brightly sunny—when the barge rounded the canal bend near Vendam. Shirley and Tess were sitting on deck, on the upturned cheese-crate, slicing carrots. They thrilled when Jan stepped down from the wheel.

"Okay, skipper!" said Dick, taking over. "I follow the next bend, where it forks west, and then wait for you."

"You will not have to wait. I shall be there as quick as you—I can cut off a big corner across land," chuckled Jan. "Keep going and then ve lose no time. I hope to bring you big news—about Zella!"

The girls waved to him breathlessly as he sprang ashore.

"Good luck, Jan!"

"We're banking on you, skipper!" Shirley called with a smile.

Then Jan's plump figure vanished across the meadows towards the town. What message would he bring? Their own safety, their own victory over van Hagel, depended on their locat-

ing!" Dick said hoarsely. "Gosh, they're talking in Dutch!"

The chums' knowledge of the Dutch language was limited.

Many expressions of everyday use they knew; but not instructions for handling a barge in a lock.

"What am I to do?" Dick panted in growing panic.

Desperately Shirley tried to get a glimmering of what the lock officials were saying.

"Telling me where to berth, I expect," said Dick. "But where?"

"Keep your nerve, Dick. I think they want you between those two front barges. We'll tie her up!" gasped Shirley, while she and Tess rushed to the ropes.

But now a roar came from the lockmen. Shirley realised in panic that she had guessed their orders wrongly. But what was the right thing? What was it they were yelling?

Dick, at the wheel, was white with anxiety. Those Dutch officials were roaring torrents of words at him—but not one word did he understand. He only knew that he was not to berth between the two barges in front of him.

Desperately he reversed his engine.



Uneasily Shirley stood there. Would the Dutch customer suspect that she and her chums were the fugitives mentioned in the newspaper report?

ing Zella swiftly and without delay.

Excitement ran too high for Shirley and Tess to sit tamely cutting up carrots. They jumped up and joined Dick at the wheel. The barge cruised on for another quarter of a mile towards the next bend. Raptly they watched for that westerly fork in the canal where Jan was to join them—

"Oh! It's closed!" came a gasp of dismay from Shirley.

A boom blocked the entrance. "Diversion," said a notice, and pointed its arrow to the main waterway.

"That's bad luck," muttered Dick, swinging his wheel over. "I suppose Jan'll soon catch up with us—but we can't moor here and wait for him."

He drifted on, as slowly as he dared, through the big main canal. But now other vessels behind him were hooting him to hurry. A bend loomed up. Dick navigated the bend. Then a startling shock met the trio.

"A lock! We're running into a lock!" Tess cried.

Shirley trembled for Dick's sake. For all their sakes. A huge lock yawned before them, a score of vessels already berthed there. From the bridge above it uniformed officials were shouting orders through megaphones.

"Viktor!" They had sighted the chums' barge. They were shouting orders to Dick now.

"I don't know what they're say-

Desperately he backed the barge before Shirley could cry out a frantic warning.

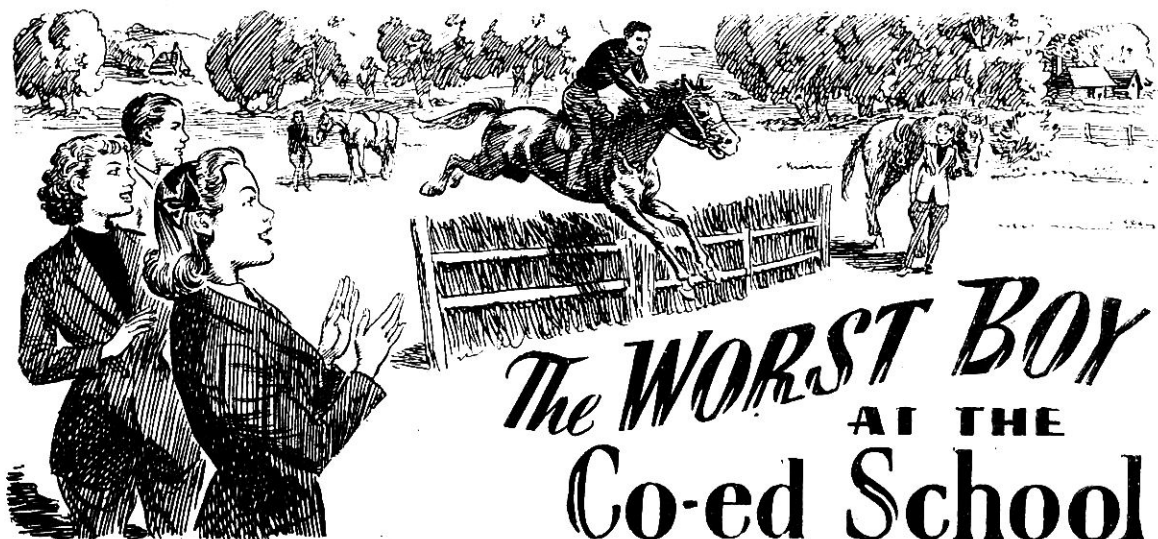
Crash!

The stern of the Viktor crashed full-tilt into the barge behind it. It was the Klara. There was a howl of rury from the youth at the wheel. He yelled to the officials, who yelled back. Crowds seemed to spring up from everywhere in the lockside, all shouting together.

Shirley went faint as she saw the officials gesticulating angrily, rushing across the decks to board the Viktor. The infuriated youth from the Klara was already aboard, roaring fierce accusations at Dick. What he was saying Shirley did not know, but she recognised him, as Tess did, in stunned panic. He was the youth they had met in the shop this morning.

He had seen their photos in the newspaper. Did he suspect who they were? Was he denouncing them now as the young English fugitives—wanted by the police in connection with the jewel robbery?

Now there seems no way in which Shirley and Co. can avoid discovery and arrest! This story becomes more and more exciting. Make sure you don't miss next week's enthralling chapters in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** on sale **WEDNESDAY**, owing to the Easter holidays.



The WORST BOY AT THE Co-ed School

By DOROTHY PAGE

TROUBLE AT THE RIDING PRACTICE

PADDY DARE, leader of the riding team at Mallington Co-ed College, befriended Vincent Conrad, known to the rest of the school as the Outsider. She was convinced that Vincent was not the rascal he was reputed to be, and she promised him a place in the riding team.

She found a riding crop which she believed belonged to a secret enemy who was responsible for Vincent's unpopularity.

She took the crop with her to the riding practice at Mallington Park, determined to discover the identity of its owner. But when she went to show it to Jo Winter, her best chum, it had disappeared. But Jo, however, recognised the whip from Paddy's description, and in suspense Paddy waited for her to tell her the name of its owner.

"**JO**—tell me! It's important! Who owns that riding crop I described to you?"

Paddy asked that question with eager excitement as she and Jo stood under the trees of Mallington Park, with the sunlit practice ground stretching pleasantly green before them.

Jo's sweet face looked rather puzzled.

"Why, Ron Bullton, Paddy," she told her in some bewilderment.

Paddy caught her breath.

"Ron! Jo, you—you're sure?"

"Of course, Paddy! But why do you want to know?"

"Gosh!" Paddy muttered. "I never dreamt—"

She stopped and was silent, strangely shocked. Whatever name she had heard she would have been shocked.

Ron Bullton owned that crop!

She raised her head, and stared away towards the top of the practice stretch. She could see burly Ron Bullton up there, standing by the gate jump.

Ron Bullton—deadly secret enemy of Vincent?

Her gaze drifted nearer to Vincent Conrad, the boy known as the Outsider. He had his position, cool and composed, by the wall jump.

"Paddy dear, what is it? You look so strange?"

Jo's query brought Paddy back to earth with a start. She summoned a smile for her dark-haired chum. She did not mean to speak of her startling suspicions yet. She must be sure first.

"Don't look so solemn, Jo," she said lightly. "Just—just something I was wondering about. Look, Isabella's impatient to start! Take the brushwood jump, there's an angel, and judge her over that. O.K.?"

Jo hesitated, nodded, then crossed to the brushwood jump.

Paddy stared after her fondly.

"Mustn't worry Jo," she murmured. "She's anxious enough as it is that I'm not mistaken about Vincent!"

Paddy believed in Vincent. Oh, he was reckless, embittered, and cynical perhaps, but he was not the Outsider so many thought him—she was sure of that. And if only she could prove he had a secret enemy!

"But to think it may be Ron!" she breathed.

It staggered her. Ron was aggressive; Ron was tactless; Ron was sometimes a grumbler—and Ron certainly disliked Vincent intensely. But Ron as a cunning, treacherous, underhand plotter—

"It doesn't seem to fit him!" she muttered. "And the whispering voice I heard didn't seem like Ron's. But then it didn't seem like anyone else's I know, either!"

She frowned.

"Is—is it Ron? Ron who wrecked the library this afternoon to try to get Vincent blamed? Ron who indirectly was the cause of my getting into trouble with Mr. Voster? And Ron who—"

She paused. And Ron who had secretly removed the riding crop from under her jacket a little while ago?

"But how could Ron have known it was there?" she wondered. "And what chance did he have to take it? Gosh, this is tricky!"

With thoughts racing, still shaken and uncertain, Paddy realised that Isabella Rocco had started to take her grey mare, Sancho, over the jumps.

Paddy pulled herself together. Her discovery was startling. She meant to follow it up, but she had to remember this important team practice. She watched Isabella.

The South American girl rode well in a flashy way, and her grey was good. She made a superb jump at the stile, where Jimmy Court stood with his quiet friend, Max Milden. Max, no rider, was there taking photographs.

Isabella did a good round, even though the high jumps were not up, and at the finish she trotted in towards Paddy with obvious self-satisfaction. Other boys and girls

who had been acting as judges walked in from the nearby jumps.

Paddy noted that Ron Bullton did not come in; but then Ron, with Dot Nelson and Bette Grindle, was at the far end of the practice ground.

"Well done, Isabella!" Paddy applauded. "I faulted you only twice—once at the pole jump and once at the wall, where you dislodged a brick. And now, Vincent!" she called, as Isabella opened her mouth to argue; for the South American girl disliked any form of criticism, helpful or otherwise.

The red-haired, wiry boy strolled over. If he noticed some hostile and uncertain glances shot at him he did not show it.

"Yes, Paddy?" he inquired. "Vincent, do a round on Whitey, will you?" Paddy asked with a smile. "We'd like to see how you shape!"

"Glad to," he drawled. He glanced up the course. Paddy was certain she saw a curious, dangerous flicker in his grey-green eyes. What was passing in this strange boy's mind? "Just what I wanted, in fact!"

He stroiled back to his magnificent black, Whitey.

The others, looking very expectant, moved to their posts at different jumps. But Paddy, on a sudden impulse, beckoned Jimmy Court to stay behind.

Next to Jo, fair-haired, freckled, cheery Jimmy was her closest chum. Perhaps Jimmy might be able to give her vital information about Ron Bullton's movements that afternoon—whether or no Ron could have slipped back into school and caused that trouble in the library.

"Jimmy, just a sec," she whispered. "First let me tell you that Vincent couldn't help being late this afternoon!"

Jimmy looked surprised, a trifle doubtful.

"Gee, are you sure, Paddy? I thought—"

"Dead sure, Jimmy," interrupted Paddy. "But leave that a moment, please. There's something else I want to ask you—something awfully important about— Oh dash!" she broke off; for Isabella Rocco, who had dismounted, came strolling up.

Isabella's darkly beautiful face showed displeasure.

"For an Outsider, this Vincent Conrad thinks much of himself—yes?" she purred. "It is a pity, Paddy, that you cannot see through him—like Ron and I and some others!"

Jimmy answered that before Paddy could. Jimmy was Paddy's friend, whatever he thought about Vincent—and Jimmy had no great liking for the South American girl. She was too subtly crafty for Jimmy!

**"Unless The Outsider
Leaves The Riding Team,
We Resign!"—
This Week's Ultimatum
To Paddy**

"Blow it, Isabella, you can't complain Vincent's behaviour at the moment!" he pointed out. "And—Gee, look at that!" he added with spontaneous admiration. "He certainly can ride!"

Vincent had taken Whitey over the stile jump in a manner absolutely faultless and full of easy grace. Paddy glowed, momentarily forgetting the clue of the riding crop—forgetting its mysterious disappearance.

The pole jump, the first brushwood, swept back effortlessly under Whitey. Isabella's dark eyes flashed.

"Perhaps he can ride," she said. "But he is a trouble-maker, that boy. He cannot be trusted—no!"

Before Paddy could voice the spirited reply that sprang to her lips the amazing thing happened.

Vincent on Whitey was approaching the top gate jump which was near a small copse and where Ron Bullton stood.

Suddenly Vincent swerved and slowed. He bent from the saddle. His outstretched hand caught Ron Bullton's arm, and before nearly a score of startled eyes, he carried on at a trot into the copse, forcing Bullton to walk beside him!

They vanished in the trees. There was a stunned silence. It was broken by Dot Nelson. That plump-faced girl was at the next jump. She stared towards the copse, then came running down the course.

"Paddy—all of you—quick!" she shouted. "That Outsider's done it again! He's dragged Ron into the copse and is going for him with a riding crop!"

RON'S ULTIMATUM

DOT'S voice carried clearly over the practice stretch, causing a hum of consternation.

"Ah, did I not warn you, Paddy!" exclaimed Isabella. "He tries to wreck the practice. He goes for Ron, because he does not like Ron!"

"It—it can't be!" stammered Paddy. She started forward, meeting Dot as that girl ran up. "Dot, you're mistaken. Vincent wasn't even carrying a riding crop!"

"He's got one now—a silver-mounted one!" panted Dot. "Quick!"

But Paddy had already broken into a run. Dot's last sentence had told her a lot. A silver-mounted riding crop!

That was Ron Bullton's crop—the one that had vanished!

Then—it must have been Vincent who had recognised and removed the crop from under her jacket; Vincent who had all along suspected where she had found that crop.

He had said no word—but obviously he had been waiting his chance to have it out with Ron, without any careful checking of facts as Paddy had intended.

"Oh gosh!" Paddy breathed, and fairly raced along.

She neared the copse, well ahead of anyone else. She heard Ron Bullton's voice, upraised and spluttering in fury.

"Yes, it is my riding crop! But if you think I'm going to let a rotten Outsider like you question me—Here, take your hands off my arm!"

"Not until you've answered my question!" came Vincent's voice, drawing and contemptuously cool. "Did you drop that crop in the boys' library?"

Paddy put on a spurt, swerved through the trees, and came into a little clearing.

Vincent had dismounted from Whitey, who stood some distance away. He was holding the riding crop outstretched on the palm of his left hand. His right held the shoulder of a furious, red-faced Ron Bullton.

In a flash, and with relief, Paddy realised that Dot had exaggerated. Vincent was not threatening Bullton with the crop, but was demanding that Bullton admitted its ownership. And Vincent, wonderfully controlled for him, was speaking now.

"I don't care a jot for any rotten tricks you play on me!" he said contemptuously. "I'm used to having everyone against me! But this was

different. It got Paddy into trouble. Now, out with the truth, Bullton! Were you in the library this afternoon after I left?"

Ron, rather ugly with wrath, savagely wrenched his arm free.

"Don't know what you're talking about—and don't care!" he shouted. "I suppose this is just another of your underhand games to make trouble, eh? Well, here's my answer, you Outsider!"

Without warning, Ron hurled himself forward. He was far bigger and heavier built than Vincent. His right fist swung round.

Vincent was unprepared, but instinctively he ducked. Nevertheless, Ron's fist caught him a glancing blow on the forehead.

"Ron, stop it!" Paddy cried. "Vincent, please don't fight!"

Vincent seemed to check himself. "I don't want to scrap in front of Paddy, Bullton," he bit out. "But I want an answer to my question!"

"Coward!" jeered Bullton in rage. "Coward and cad, eh? Trying to shelter behind Paddy! You'd like to

steps, she heard the roll of hoofbeats as he cantered away.

"Dash!" she muttered. "Oh dash!"

She turned. The others were clustered round Ron Bullton. Max Milden helped him to his feet. Sympathy was plainly all with Ron. "That—that cad!" he stormed, standing upright. "I'll—"

Paddy stepped impulsively forward. "Just a moment, gang!" she cried. "Let's be fair about about this!" She looked directly at Ron, who was angrily caressing his chin. "Ron, be honest! You struck twice at Vincent before he attempted to defend himself, didn't you?"

A pause. Gazes turned to Ron. His angry flush deepened.

"Well, what if I did?" he growled sullenly. "Think I'm going to let an Outsider like that question me?"

Paddy drew a deep breath, eyes asparkle, and came to a rapid decision. She stooped and picked up the riding crop Vincent had dropped.

"I think he had a good excuse," she said quietly. "And I'll tell you all why. This afternoon Vincent was



"You're to report to the headmistress immediately," the senior sports captain announced. Paddy gave a startled gasp. What was the reason for this unexpected summons?

be able to bluff me as you bluff her, eh? Well, take that, you Outsider!"

He struck suddenly again. Vincent sidestepped like a cat.

"You've asked for it!" he gritted—and sent Ron Bullton reeling to the ground with a hard, deft blow to the chin.

Bullton stayed there. Silence fell on the clearing, and then, from behind Paddy burst out excited voices.

The others, some on horseback, some on foot, had arrived in time to see that last blow.

"What the dickens is the game, Vincent?" demanded Jimmy angrily.

"Is it not clear?" cried Isabella.

"He is behaving as one who knows him would expect him to behave—yes? Ah, poor Ron!"

"What a beastly thing to do!" exclaimed Dot, her plump face flushed. "Going for Ron like that without cause!"

"Just a moment, everyone!" Paddy had started quickly, when Vincent turned. He met a half-circle of accusing stares. Twistedly, cynically, he smiled, then shrugged.

"Thanks for the remarks," he said. "The Outside: couldn't expect anything else, I suppose!"

He stopped, looking at Paddy. His expression changed.

"Sorry, Paddy Dare," he said. "Seems I've made a mess of things again. Better if I get out of this!"

"Vincent, just a moment!" Paddy blurted.

But he had turned. With swift steps he went through the trees to where he had left Whitey. Before Paddy could take more than a few

detailed by Mr. Voster. That was the reason for Vincent's lateness here.

She paused, watching Ron Bullton intently, and continued to explain about the task Vincent had been given in the library and how she had gone there to find him.

"I found the library wrecked!" continued Paddy evenly. "Someone had wrecked it after Vincent left to get him blamed! And that someone accidentally left this riding crop behind!"

She held it up. A hush fell. Startled glances were exchanged. Jo looked quickly at Paddy. She was seeing now the reason for Paddy's questions earlier on.

Paddy turned to Ron Bullton and held out the riding crop.

"You don't deny that this belongs to you, do you?" she asked.

He seemed staggered by the question.

"Of course not!" he growled. "But what are you getting at?"

"I'm just pointing out that Vincent had a good reason for asking you questions," said Paddy steadily. "I'm not accusing you!"

"I should jolly well think not!" Ron Bullton blazed. "That's my crop—yes, but I mislaid it yesterday; haven't seen it since."

He paused, very truculent and aggressive.

"Pretty clear what happened!" he growled. "Vincent found my crop, messed up the library, and left my crop there to give himself an alibi!"

"Oh, that's not fair!" cried Paddy. Surprisingly, it was Bette Grindie,

the pig-tailed, rather deaf girl, who spoke then. She had been listening hard.

"There's something I ought to say, you know!" she put in excitedly, stammering a little. "Whatever happened in the library cu-couldn't have concerned Ron, because he was the first here with me!"

They all looked at Bette's earnest face.

"Oh!" whispered Paddy, startled. Bette could not be doubted—which meant that Ron, despite the riding crop clue, could not possibly be the Whisperer! Then who—

"There you are!" snorted Ron triumphantly. "It's pretty plain that Paddy's been fooled by that outsider from start to finish and that he'll keep on with his underhand tricks. And therefore—"

He stared aggressively at Paddy. "Either you sling him out of the team, Paddy," he said, "or I resign! That's flat! I'll give you until tomorrow morning to decide which!"

He turned and stamped out of the clearing.

"And that," murmured Isabella Rocco, "is what comes of having Vincent Conrad in the team!"

A NOTE FROM THE WHISPERER

THE trees cast long, cool shadows over the Mallington Park practice ground. The jumps had been neatly stacked away. The field was deserted.

Paddy and Jo were standing together by the gateway. The practice was over, and they were the last to leave, except for Max Mildren, who had mislaid his precious camera and was searching for it.

"What an afternoon, Jo!" said Paddy, with something like a sigh. "Gosh, after that upset I thought the practice was going to flop!"

"I think it would have—but for you," said Jo quietly. "The way you rallied everyone and got things going again was really wonderful!"

Paddy smiled at her affectionately. "Old modest!" she said. "I wouldn't have stood an earthily if you and Jimmy hadn't backed me up so well! But—"

She paused, thinking back with a grimace to that very awkward moment after the stormy departure of Ron Bullton.

That had been tricky! Everyone, naturally, had been affected, and Paddy had had great difficulty in smoothing over excited discussion.

The team had been rather split-minded. On Paddy's evidence it seemed that Vincent had had some excuse for tackling Ron Bullton. On the other hand, Vincent was not liked or trusted, and Ron's suggestion that Vincent himself had deliberately left the riding crop in the library as an alibi had not fallen on deaf ears.

Paddy just could not credit that. But if Ron was completely innocent—as Bette Grindle had surely proved—then who had dropped the riding crop?

Who, in short, was the unknown Whisperer?

More urgently vital still, what of Ron Bullton's ultimatum?

Jo was thinking of that, too. She paused, preparatory to swinging up on her horse.

"Paddy," she said hesitantly, "what are you going to do about Ron? And about—Vincent? It's awfully important! Ron's a good rider, and if—if he went, Isabella might, too, and some of the others!"

Paddy knew it. She looked at her chum and suddenly answered Jo's question with one of her own.

"Jo, tell me! Do you think, as Ron suggested, that Vincent dropped that riding crop himself as an alibi?" Jo gave it serious thought; she knew how Paddy felt.

"I don't know, Paddy," she said. "In a way, it seems that Vincent behaved quite well in that upset with Ron. Ron really is awfully quick-tempered, rather a bully, and unfair sometimes; but, even so, I just can't believe he'd play such an underhand trick."

"I know," said Paddy slowly. "It doesn't seem to fit Ron!"

"Then if Ron didn't, and—and you don't think Vincent did," said Jo, "who did? Who would?"

Paddy shook her head helplessly. That was something she had asked herself a dozen times.

"What are you going to do about Ron? Paddy, you just can't have trouble in the team—a split team!" Jo's voice was anxious.

"I'll have to think about it, Jo—hard. It'll probably mean a meeting of the gang," Paddy frowned slightly. "Dash it, Jo! Ron lost his temper badly, and it seems so beastly unfair if I kick Vincent out because Ron's sort of holding a pistol to my head!"

Jo toyed with the bridle of the chestnut, and looked at Paddy with a touch of appeal.

"I know how you feel, Paddy. I like you for wanting to give Vincent a chance," she said. "But do remember what the riding team means to you. Is it worth risking trouble with the others when—when you may be proved wrong about Vincent, after all?"

Blue eyes met brown, and the blue were very steady.

"Yes, Jo," said Paddy simply. "Call me an ass, but I think it is. And I don't think I'll be proved wrong about Vincent."

Jo said no more; she knew Paddy. She just nodded and swung gracefully into the saddle.

"I'll take the horses back to Mallington stables, Paddy," she said. "You'll walk to coll?"

"Yes, Jo. I want to think a spot, anyway. See you later."

Jo trotted off, leading the chestnut. Paddy watched her a moment, admiring her horsemanship, thinking what a dear, understanding friend Jo was. Then she turned and strolled down the lane, thinking deeply.

Things were certainly reaching a head in the team. Ron had delivered an ultimatum. He or Vincent! And others might follow Ron's lead.

A little, anxious frown puckered Paddy's brow.

"Blow!" she muttered. "This wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for this unknown Whisperer! Who is it? Who?"

Here was food for thought indeed. It couldn't be Ron apparently. Then why had Ron's riding crop been dropped in the library? That seemed so pointless.

"I wonder!" Paddy stopped in mid-stride, eyes wide. "Was it so pointless, or really jolly cunning? Consider the plot! If that crop isn't found, then Vincent gets it in the neck, anyway! But if the crop is found—as it was by me—then the chances of Vincent accusing Ron are pretty good. And the Whisperer, knowing Ron's temper, could guess at the result—more trouble for Vincent! Gosh!"

Paddy was a little shaken. Here, she felt, was evidence of a very clever and unscrupulous mind indeed!

It strengthened her theory that Vincent's troubles in the past had been increased because of the Whisperer's secret activities. Vincent himself, embittered and cynical, had obviously not thought of one deadly enemy.

But Paddy had—and did! She felt she knew. She felt that more than ever now she wanted to stand by the Outsider!

She plunged her hands deep into her jacket pockets and strode on along the lane, thinking hard. How could she get on the track of the Whisperer? And, far more urgent, how could she settle satisfactorily this upset in the team?

Two vital points. They held her mind until the college gates hove in sight. It was only then that she became conscious that she had been toying with a slip of paper in her pocket.

She took it out wonderingly; for, prior to her arriving at the practice, that pocket had contained only a handkerchief.

Her discovery was a small piece of thin paper, torn from a pad. It held a short message. No names were mentioned. It was printed neatly

Paddy stopped dead, staring at the words:

"SO YOU STILL STICK BY HIM! YOU FOOL! WON'T YOU EVER LEARN? I WARNED YOU, YOU HAVEN'T LISTENED! YOU HELPED HIM THIS AFTERNOON NOW YOU CAN REAP THE CONSEQUENCES!"

Paddy re-read that note. Scarlet anger flashed in her cheeks.

"O—of all the rotten things—!" She paused, amazed. "This note from the unknown Whisperer must have been slipped into her jacket that very afternoon!"

"What a nerve! Then it is one of the team definitely!" she breathed. "And really threatening me now! Well, we'll jolly well see about this!"

Paddy was angry and determined. She was not going to be frightened by a warning message—far from it!

"Perhaps this note—the actual paper—may give me a clue!" she muttered excitedly, ramming it into her pocket. "Perhaps I can track it to its owner. Whizzo—yes! Right, secret enemy, do your worst! You can't scare me into turning against Vincent!"

In that rather fierce mood, she hurried towards the school gates, and almost ran into a tall, strongly-built senior standing there.

"Ah, Paddy, I've been waiting for you!"

Paddy was a little surprised to see May Garrick, senior sports captain of the college. She liked May, a blunt-speaking girl who was rather interested in riding.

"Hallo, May! Want to see me—about riding?"

May shook her head. She eyed Paddy with a frown.

"Look here, Paddy," she demanded bluntly, "why the dickens do you want to stick up for a fellow like Vincent Conrad? You might have had the sense to realise it might cause trouble for you!"

Paddy started. "Really, May, I don't quite understand—"

"All right," cut in the prefect, "let it go. All I know is that you've hit that trouble."

Paddy stared at her blankly. "May, please, what on earth do you mean? I've hit no trouble!"

The prefect shrugged. "You're to report to the headmistress immediately. That's why I've been waiting here."

Paddy stiffened. The colour went from her cheeks a little. Personal interviews with Miss Bridgett were very rare indeed—almost as rare as those with Dr. Heron Ames, Head of the whole college.

"For goodness' sake, May," she blurted. "Why does Miss Bridgett want to see me? What's happened? I haven't done anything!"

May shrugged again.

"All I know is that the headmistress received an anonymous phone call. Then she got in touch with Mr. Voster of Boys' Side. He's with her now."

"An—an anonymous phone call!" Paddy breathed. "May, from whom? What about?"

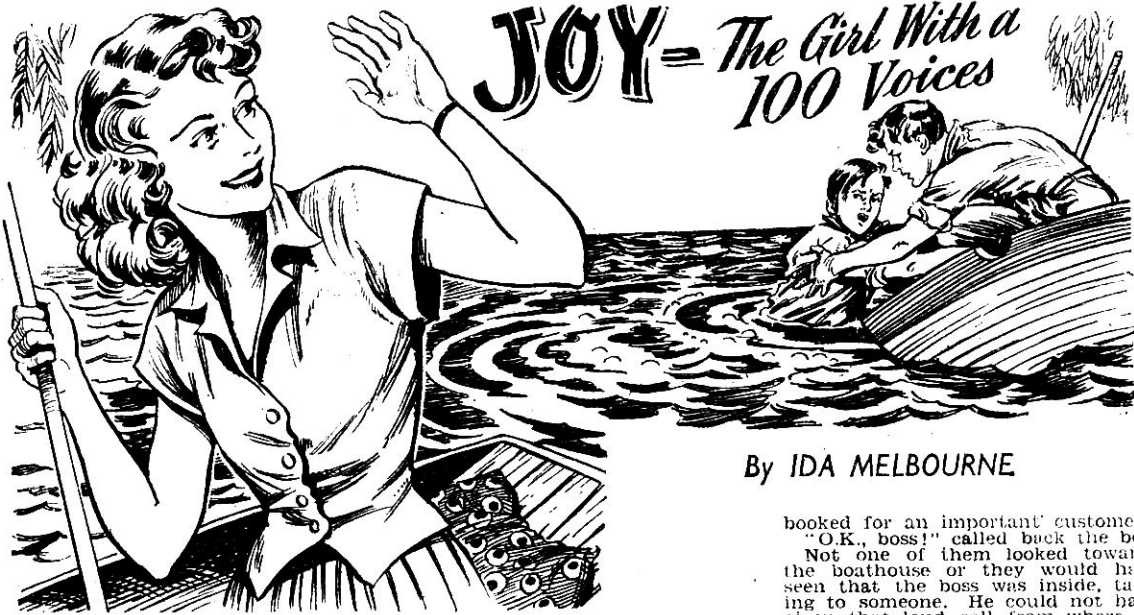
"How should I know, kid?" asked May. "But when I was called to the Head I overheard a bit. Mr. Voster was looking pretty grim; the Head looked very serious. Mr. Voster was saying something about this being the consequences of your foolish friendship with Vincent Conrad and that it merited severe punishment!"

Paddy drew a shaky breath. Her hand, in her pocket, suddenly clenched sharply on the note from the unknown Whisperer.

It was the Whisperer who had phoned Miss Bridgett! She sensed it; knew it. The Whisperer had struck, as warned, and in some way that was extremely serious.

What awaits Paddy when she faces the headmistress? There will be further exciting developments in the next instalment. Don't forget that owing to the Easter holidays the next **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale Wednesday instead of Friday.

JOY—The Girl With a 100 Voices



By IDA MELBOURNE

A DAY ON THE RIVER

"Oh, it's going to be grand!" chirped Joy Oliver. "A day on the river in this glorious sunshine."

Joy had a haversack with lunch in it, a cushion under either arm, a large sun-hat, and her bathing suit and towel round her neck.

She stood on the lawn of her Aunt Jemima's cottage, where she was staying, and waited patiently for Aunt and her Cousin Hypatia.

"Have you ordered the punt, Joy?" called Aunt Jemima. "I refuse to go on the river in any other craft."

"Yes, aunt, I've picked a beauty," said Joy. "Freshly varnished, lovely cushions, dry and sleek. Oh, it'll be grand! Are we taking the gramophone?"

"No, the portable radio will be enough, Joy."

"Oh, well, Hypatia's coming with us, and she's as good as a gramophone," said Joy gaily.

"I beg your pardon," said Hypatia sharply from the cottage, emerging at that moment.

"Granted," returned Joy with a bow.

She could never resist twitting solemn, learned Hypatia, who was as full of quotations as "Hamlet."

"I should like to make absolutely sure of the punt, Joy. I shan't go unless we have a sound craft," insisted Aunt Jemima.

"Very well, aunt, I'll go ahead," said Joy.

They were all due to go by taxi to the boathouse, although there was a bus that went near by, for the amount of equipment they carried made travelling by bus difficult. However, Joy could manage her own little load, so off she went as a bus was due, and ten minutes later she was strolling along the towpath of the shining river towards the boathouse.

It was early—only nine o'clock—but already boats were on the river, and it was a case of first come, first served. Joy had been there once already and booked the punt; now, because Aunt Jemima was jittery, she was anxious to make sure that everything was all in order. No punt—no river picnic!

The boatman was down at the water's edge, pushing a boat off, when Joy arrived.

Just came to make sure the punt's all right. That's mine—the Ermyntude!" said Joy, pointing to it. "I've paid the deposit. I see it's the last punt."

"O.K.," said the boatman with a nod, and he went back to the boat-

house. "That's certainly the last punt."

Joy picked up her things with the idea of taking them down to the water's edge, when she nearly collided with two supercilious young men in college blazers.

"Hey, steady!" said one to Joy. "Look where you're going, my girl!"

He gave her a bump that knocked her cushions down and laughed.

"And you mind that dog," said Joy sharply, as she picked up the cushion.

She didn't like being bumped into, and decided that the young man needed teaching a lesson for his rudeness. There wasn't a dog in sight, but Joy the ventriloquist soon made it seem that there was. As the young man turned she let out a growling bark that seemed to come from just behind him.

The young man skipped into the air.

"Hey—keep—off—keep—off!" he yelled, and charged into his friend, who reeled and dropped a parcel.

"Grrrr!" growled Joy's imaginary dog as she went on ventriloquising.

She rushed forward, swinging a cushion, making shushing noises, and then produced a doggy yelp that faded away.

"Yowp-yowp-yowp!" "That's all right," she said to the two young men. "You're safe now—no need to huddle together any more!"

"We're not huddling!" Then they marched up to the youth, who was employed as an assistant at the boathouse.

"We want a punt. That one will do—the Ermyntude," said the young man in the red-and-gold blazer.

"Yes, rather. Bring it along here," said his companion.

Joy swung round. Her punt! And they were thinking of sneaking it—the only one there. Not so likely!

The boatman's gruff voice was heard.

"You can't have that. That's

The Boys Who Took Joy's Punt Were In For A Shock. They Didn't Realise They Were Up Against A Girl Ventriloquist!

booked for an important customer."

"O.K., boss!" called back the boy. Not one of them looked towards the boathouse or they would have seen that the boss was inside, talking to someone. He could not have given that loud call from where he stood.

Of course he hadn't given it. Joy had done that, ventriloquising again, and she chuckled when she saw the young men's scowls.

Not even Aunt Jemima and Cousin Hypatia knew that Joy was such a clever ventriloquist and mimic—a girl with a hundred voices—as she liked to think of herself if ever she achieved her ambition and got a chance to appear on the radio or the stage.

Cnuckling to herself, Joy watched the young men shuffle aside to a rather ancient rowing-boat. Then she dumped her things in the punt, and nodded to them casually.

"Turned out nice again," she observed.

They regarded her from a lofty, contemptuous height, but she did not expect good manners from people who knocked other people's cushions from their hands and didn't pick them up or even express an apology.

Joy left them to their inferior craft, and then hurried back to meet her aunt and cousin. She met the car just as it came to the tow-path, and she was in time to give a hand unloading the stuff.

"Now you're really sure about the punt, Joy?" asked Aunt Jemima.

"Yes, yes, aunt. It's ready for us now."

"I think I should have dealt with the matter," frowned Hypatia. "If I had not overslept, owing to working past midnight at my Greek, I could have done it."

"Very few of these boatmen know Greek," said Joy humorously. "It wasn't worth sitting up for. A sly shilling in the hand and a wink gets more than any quotation from Homer."

Hypatia put down her things to explain that she had not stayed up swotting Greek in order to speak to boatmen—but Joy walked on with Aunt Jemima, so Hypatia had to pick up her things and follow.

"Here we are," said Joy, when they reached the jetty. "And there is the Ermyntude! The smartest, niftiest punt—" Her voice trailed away, and she gasped.

The Ermyntude was not at its moorings. There wasn't a punt of any kind in sight.

But there was something else on the river bank that Joy recognised at a glance. They were the things she had left in the punt—her cushions, her bathing suit and towel, her haversack.

"My golly! But the—the Ermyntude!" she gasped in horror. Hypatia answered her. She pointed to mid-stream

"Look, Joy! If you are seeking for a punt with the name of Ermytrude—there it goes with two young men in it. I think they know someone on the bank here. They appear to be blowing kisses!"

Joy did not speak. She could not. Hypatia was right!

The Ermytrude was going up-river with the two young men aboard. One lounged back on the cushions with his arms akimbo; the other punted in leisurely manner. "And they were both laughing—at Joy.

JOY GETS BUSY

"SO!" said Aunt Jemima in fury five minutes later. "You didn't book the punt, Joy! We have wasted our time. We cannot go on the river after all. I told you it was a punt or nothing!"

"I did book it, aunt," insisted Joy, and quivered with indignation. "Where's that boatboy? Where's that boatman?"

Neither was in sight. Joy hurried in and out of the boathouse; she looked here and there with no result. But they had known the punt was hers, so obviously those two objectionable young men must have taken it in some underhanded way.

"Oh, this is awful!" she groaned. "But I'll get that punt back if—it's my last deed!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Joy!" snapped Aunt Jemima. "How can you get it back?"

Joy could not answer that without confessing the truth about her ventriloquism. But, in any case, it was no time for argument. Action was required.

Joy had no doubt as to her ability to get back the punt by using her ventriloquism; but the immediate problem was to keep Aunt Jemima and Hypatia on the spot. If they went off home Joy could not remain—they would see that she went with them. And she had been so looking forward to this trip on the river. It was a perfect day for it.

But already Aunt Jemima was picking up her things, resolved to go. Joy thought desperately; but even with the aid of ventriloquism, what could she do? She couldn't order her aunt to stay—she couldn't think of any voice that could give Aunt Jemima such an order.

A ruse was needed—what? Joy's brain did not fail her in this moment of need. Not a dozen yards away was a mound of boat cushions. They were mostly old ones needing repair; but there were some new ones, too.

"Hark!" said Joy suddenly, pointing to the cushions.

She walked towards them, and as she did so she threw her voice artfully. A strangled cry seemed to come from under the pile of cushions.

"Oh, help—let me out, let me out! I'll suffocate!"

Aunt Jemima hurried forward. She and Hypatia had both heard that cry, and they now approached the mound of boat cushions.

"Did you hear that, Hypatia?" Aunt Jemima quavered.

"A voice—from under those cushions, mama."

"Quite so. But how could someone get buried by cushions?"

The strangled voice answered them furiously.

"Never mind how I got here—get me out! What does it matter how I got here?"

The gasping sounds were most realistic, and Aunt Jemima sprang to action.

"Hypatia—follow me," she said. "Hurl these cushions aside."

Aunt Jemima had thrown no more than three cushions when the boatman saw her. His cushions—being tossed about like that!

"Hey!" he shouted angrily.

He rushed to the scene just in time to stop a red plush seat cushion with his face.

His boy assistant came hurrying forward, too, and to him it seemed

that Aunt Jemima was attacking his boss with a seat cushion. He at once took action.

Seizing a cushion that Hypatia had flung aside, he swiped her with it and sent her spinning sideways.

"Come on, boss!" he yelled. "Sock 'em!"

He had not left school long, and the idea of a cushion fight thrilled him.

It didn't thrill the boss, however. "Stop!" he yelled, just as Hypatia staggered back and hurled a cushion at the boy. She missed him and sent up a fountain of water instead, for the cushion landed in the river.

Aunt Jemima turned to the boss as he caught at her arm.

"Hurl aside these cushions!" she cried. "You leave the cushions alone," he howled. "What's the idea of a grown woman of your age playing pillow-fights?"

Aunt Jemima coloured in wrath. "Pillow fights? Do you suppose I am engaged in pillow-fighting?"

"You hit me in the face with a cushion, didn't you?"

Aunt Jemima gave a start of surprise. "If I did, I am sorry. I was merely trying to free this unfortunate prisoner."

"What prisoner?"

"Under these cushions," said Aunt Jemima, and she whipped cushions left and right until the boss yelled with rage and stopped her.

"There's nobody under those cushions," he shouted.

"My dear sir, you are gravely in error!" snapped Aunt Jemima. "Very gravely in error. My daughter here heard the voice, and so did my niece—"

She looked around for Joy. "Where is Joy, Hypatia?" she ended in surprise.

Hypatia was bending her glasses straight, and in the meantime could not see clearly.

"I do not know, mother, but I am convinced that someone is buried under that pile of cushions!"

Aunt Jemima looked vaguely for Joy, without seeing her—and then gave her attention to the boatman. Joy saw Aunt Jemima and chuckled.

Joy was afloat, rowing down the river—and with any kind of luck she reckoned to recapture the punt and return with it before Aunt Jemima and Hypatia had left the scene.

TEACHING THEM A LESSON

"WELL, Claude, we've got the punt after all. Nasty shock for that girl, what?"

Teach her a lesson, old boy. I'd like to see her face," said Claude.

He could have had his wish merely by looking behind. But he did not even think of looking. He lounged with legs crossed and arms akimbo. The other youth punted in an elegant and leisurely manner.

BOOKS YOU MUST NOT MISS

You will enjoy both of the March volumes of the

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No. 83.—"Her Thrilling Continental Tour," by Elise Probyn.

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On sale at all newsagents.

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Neither noticed Joy, even when she rowed up dead astern.

"Hey, there, you in the punt—you two!" roared a man's voice. "Keep out of the middle unless you want to be drowned. It's hard gravel at the side—much safer!"

The voice came from Joy, who was using her ventriloquism once again. She had ducked her head so that they should not see her face if they chanced to look in her direction.

It was not a girl but a man they looked for, however, and the only man they saw was on the towpath.

"Mind your own business," one shouted to him.

He seemed surprised. But now Joy was near enough to them to hear what they said. They were taking the advice seriously.

"Better go to the near-side, old boy, if it's gravel," said the lounge. "Don't want to fall off the punt, as you might if it gets deep."

"Poof! I can swim," said the fellow punting.

That settled it for Joy. She had hatched a plan but had hesitated because she wasn't sure if they could swim. She now heard that they both could—and that was enough. If they could, they should!

She eased back as the punt went to the near-side, and then waited.

Joy knew what the river was like, because she had been on the river before. She knew, therefore that far from being gravely the river-bed at the near-side was muddy—and that meant that the punt pole, being driven in, would stay in.

Joy waited breathlessly. Sure enough, the young man elegantly punting dropped the pole through his fingers into the water and heaved.

The expression on his face when he tried to haul the pole up was comically startled. The punt sped on, but—alas!—the punter remained with the pole!

"Hi!" he yelled, clinging desperately to the sinking pole.

His friend, who had been dozing, looked up and saw him like a monkey on a stick balanced on the slowly sinking pole.

The business end of the pole was embedded in sticky mud, but not firmly enough for the whole pole to be kept upright.

"Oh, watch him do the swallow dive!" chanted Joy.

The other fellow in the punt scrambled up and waved to her.

"Help!" he called.

He went to the end of the punt and held out a paddle—but too late. Before his pal could grab hold of it the pole toppled over and he went into the water with a loud splash.

Meanwhile, Joy was responding to that call for help and rowing to the rescue; but she didn't seem to be looking where she was going, a fact which the one in the punt tried to point out to her.

However, at the last moment she looked round and, by giving a flick of the oar, saved a head-on crash. But her bow lifted the end of the punt.

Crash! Splash!

The second man went into the water.

In leisurely manner then, Joy transferred herself to the drifting punt, and the young man's things from the punt to her skiff.

In the water the two young men swam about gasping and grunting, and Joy took pity on them; she hauled them an oar.

"Fetch it, Fido!" she called.

When the sound of a savage dog came from behind them the two men set up a new swimming record over short distances in their efforts to reach the skiff.

Joy, aboard the punt, paddled towards the pole and retrieved it.

"You—you dangerous idiot!" raved Claude, who had now managed to climb into the skiff and was trying to haul his pal out of the water.

"It's that girl!" yelled the second youth. "Get out of our punt!"

(Please turn to the back page.)



The MERRYMAKERS' Island College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

HE COULDN'T RESIST A "DARE"

"WHY the crowd?" asked Sally Warner. "Somebody holding a meeting?"

"Could be a fight," suggested Johnny Briggs hopefully.

"If it is, it's only a pillow-fight," smiled fair-haired Fay Manners. "Everybody's yelling with laughter—not with anger!"

"Maybe it's just that they all wanted to stand on the same spot at the same time," grinned Don Weston, the fourth member of the little group known as the Merry-makers. "Anyway, I've got a wizard idea."

"What?" asked his chums simultaneously.

"Let's go and see—then we'll know what's happening," chuckled Don.

"Chump!" laughed Sally. "Come on!"

Intrigued, they made their way across the campus to the drive leading to the International College on Waloorie Island, Australia, where they were students. And as they approached the milling crowd of laughing students their eyes opened wide in astonishment. Then they, too, broke into peals of laughter.

Among other statues lining the main drive to the college was one of a giant kangaroo, disrespectfully referred to as Wally. But Wally was no longer an object of beautifully carved white stone. Perched at a rakish angle between his sharp ears was a mortar-board, and draped around his shoulders was a black gown. And on a large card attached to him were the words "MR. GRULEY."

"Oh golly!" chuckled Sally.

"I never before realised what a pompous expression Wally had until I saw him in a cap and gown," laughed Don.

"Old Gruley would be hopping mad if he could see that," grinned Johnny. "He doesn't like practical jokes, especially when they're against himself."

"That was true! Horace Gruley, the peppery, rather corpulent science master, keenly interested in geology, was notorious for his lack of humour. Sally nodded, a look of anxiety crossing her face.

"I just hate to spoil a joke," she said slowly, "but unless some duffer wants to get into a really first-class row, it seems to me we'd better get Wally back to his original form. Supposing Gruley—"

As if the mention of his name had conjured him to the scene, a voice, explosive with wrath, boomed out a few inches from Sally's ear.

"What—what is the meaning of this—this outrage?" bellowed Mr. Gruley, glaring up at the disguised kangaroo. "Who has perpetrated this insult—this vandalism?"

His glittering grey eyes darted from one startled face to the other, finally coming to rest upon the still palpitating Sally.

"Miss Warner, you seem to be well in the forefront of this—this gang. Have you any knowledge of the author of this insult?"

Sally gazed up at the irate master. "No, Mr. Gruley," she replied firmly. "I have no idea at all!"

"H'm!" Mr. Gruley glared. "This matter will not be allowed to rest here, and if I discover who has done this you may be sure I shall not err on the side of leniency. Weston! Briggs! Remove those articles from that statue and bring them to my study. The rest of you disperse!"

With smothered grins, the students strolled away, while Mr. Gruley strode off, still bristling with anger.

"Sure now," said a soft voice with a lilting Irish brogue, "'tis apologising you should be for saying I wouldn't do it!"

Sally swung round, her eyes widening as she saw Michael Finney, the blue-eyed Irish boy standing there, smiling impishly at Jerry Cantell.

"Mike!" she exclaimed. "You! You did it!"

"Why, Sally mavourneen," said Mike meltingly, turning to her. "sure and didn't I have to do it when this fellow dared me?"

"Dared you!" roared Johnny. "Why, you ass! Didn't we tell you to keep out of mischief for a while? Have you forgotten the broadcast to-night?"

In utter exasperation the four chums glared at the Irish boy. Much as they liked Mike, he certainly could be annoying at times. Always into mischief, never able to resist a dare—that was Michael Finney.

Usually it did not matter, but to-day it mattered very much!

To-day was very important! To start with, Mr. Giles Pembroke, one of the school governors, was arriving this afternoon to unveil a bronze statue in the library. And he was staying on until evening for a radio broadcast of a play produced by Sally, in which Mike was leading man.

Mike was perfect for the part, and he was wildly enthusiastic about it. Two good reasons, it seemed, why he should try to control his high spirits and keep out of trouble at least for one day.

"Sure now," he said coaxingly. "'Twas just a bit of fun, and nothing to worry about. Would you have me refuse a dare, now?"

Before Sally & Co. could answer, Jerry Cantell broke in.

"Shucks! You don't call that anything, do you? That was easy—"

"Sure now, and was it?" asked Mike, bristling. "It's caught I could have been—"

"Well, it's caught you weren't—not a chance!" sniffed Jerry Cantell. "I call a real dare something like—like climbing the clock-tower and altering the hands of the clock," continued Cantell. "Yes, that's it! I dare you to do it, Finney! But, gee, I know you'd funk it!"

"Mike, don't listen to him, please," begged Sally, a feeling of alarm gripping her as she saw the reckless light in Mike's eyes.

"Well, well! So the mighty Mike is scared!" scoffed Cantell.

Sally flung round on him, her eyes flashing.

"Are you trying to make him run into trouble?" she asked bitingly. "Do go away! And, Mike," she added pleadingly, "if you won't think of your own safety, at least think of the broadcast."

Mike's eyes softened as he looked at Sally's troubled face.

"There now, there's not a thing to worry about," he said gently. "Faith, I wouldn't let you down—"

"That's a good get-out!" sniffed Cantell. "I'd never have thought—"

The clanging of the bell for first lecture drowned his words, but as Sally gave Mike's arm a tug she saw, with a feeling of alarm, the reckless light in his eyes. Surely he was not really going to take up that dare?

She almost dragged Mike into college, followed by Don, Johnny and Fay. A still-fuming Mr. Gruley was awaiting them in No. 1 Lecture Room, and he made some cutting remarks about punctuality as they scurried to their seats.

The chums hardly heard it. They were far too concerned about Mike. But as the lecture drew to an end Sally felt much easier in her mind.

Mike's face wore its usual expression of bland innocence; his smile was disarming as he turned to her when he collected up his notes.

Before Sally could speak to him, however, several other students

This Week's Grand Story Features Mike Finney,
The Practical Joker Who Could Never Refuse
A "Dare"

gathered around her, questioning her about the rehearsal which was due to be held after lectures. It was almost ten minutes before she got away and joined her chums.

Just time for a quick iced pineapple squash," said Sally. "then we must dash straight off to the rehearsal-room. I told Mike about it; I expect he'll be waiting."

"They had their drink, then hurried back from the tuckshop. But as they crossed the campus Sally almost unthinkingly raised her eyes to the tall clock-tower.

"That's queer!" she said puzzledly. "The clock's wrong—half an hour fast—"

"Eh? Are you seeing things?" asked Don. "You ought to know by now that our clock is never wrong! It— By gosh! It is, too!" he announced, glancing at his wrist-watch perplexedly. "But how—"

And then, catching Sally's horrified glance, his eyes widened with alarm.

"Look!" gasped Sally. "Oh, look!" She pointed upwards to a fluttering object caught in the carving just below the clock-face.

"It's a scarf!" blurted Fay. "A green scarf!"

"A green silk scarf!" said Sally agitatedly. "Exactly like the one Mike Finney was wearing! Oh goodness! That's why the clock's fast! Don't you see—the reckless idiot has taken up Jerry Cantell's dare! He's climbed the clock-tower and altered the clock—"

"And without knowing it," said Don worriedly, "he's left his green scarf behind! If anyone in authority sees that it'll be good-bye to Mike's chance of appearing in the broadcast to-night!"

JOHNNY TO THE RESCUE

FOR a moment the chums stood staring in dismay at the fluttering scarf near the clock-face.

At any other time, apart from their concern for the safety of the reckless Irish boy, they would have been amused at this jape and its confusing consequences, for the janitor rang the bell for lectures and so on strictly according to the college clock.

But right now they were not amused.

The culprit could not hope to evade discovery since he had, inadvertently of course, advertised his identity with that scarf.

The least punishment Mike would receive would be a ban on his appearance in the radio play that night.

"Pity we can't get the scarf somehow and put the clock right," said Fay despondently. "But that's out of the question."

"Not at all," replied Don calmly. "What's been done once can be done again—"

"By me!" put in Johnny firmly. "Now, now, laddie!" he added as Don began to protest indignantly. "You've got a bigger part in the play than I have, and if I get caught it won't matter so much."

"But, Johnny," cried Fay in alarm, "you might fall—"

"Fall!" Johnny waved his hand airily. "Didn't you know my middle name's limpet?" And without waiting for further objections he darted across to the clock-tower and commenced the tricky climb.

Despite Johnny's assurance, Sally, Fay, and Don watched with great trepidation as their boy chum began to ascend the tower.

Up he went, then a delighted cry came from the lips of his watching chums as they saw his hand reach out and grab the incriminating scarf. A few more inches and he had reached the clock-face, had grabbed the big bronze minute hand and given it a tug. And then he was climbing quickly down again. With a final leap and a loud whoop, he landed on the ground, turning a red, damp, but jubilant face towards his chums.

"Well, I did it!" he announced jauntily. "No trouble at all. Here's the scarf all safe and sound, and there's the clock right again. And no one will ever know it's been tampered with."

Sally, Don, and Fay exchanged glances.

"Except for one thing," put in Sally in a troubled voice. "Oh, Johnny, it was marvellous of you to do that climb and get that scarf so that Mike shouldn't be found out. And it was wonderful of you to risk altering the clock again, but—but you altered it the wrong way. Instead of putting it back half an hour, you put it another half an hour forward!"

"What?"

Johnny stared unbelievably at his chums, from them to the clock-tower, from the clock-tower to his watch.

Then gradually a twinkle appeared in his eye. It changed to a grin, and the grin to a sudden shout of mirth.

Next moment the four chums were laughing uproariously.

A sharp voice ended their mirth.

"Is it necessary for you four students to make so much noise?" It was Mr. Gruley, glaring at the mirthful quartet. "Perhaps you are unaware that the bell for next lecture has just rung—obviously you did not hear it. Pull yourselves together at once and hurry along! I myself was so engrossed in preparing for the second period of my lecture I did not realise the time had passed so quickly."

The chums did not need to be told to pull themselves together. The realisation that they would be attending Mr. Gruley's lecture an hour earlier than necessary acted like a douche of icy water.

Maybe this clock business was not so funny, after all!

They straightened up and began to move off. Then once again there came an exclamation from Mr. Gruley.

"Briggs, how did you get yourself into such a disgusting state? And how dare you contemplate attending lecture in such a condition!"

The chums stopped, staring at Johnny in bewilderment. Then their eyes widened in alarm. Goodness, they had not given a thought to it before, but Johnny certainly had not emerged from his climb unscathed!

His white shirt, his white flannels, were grimy and smeared all down the front where he had pressed against the clock-tower; the toes of his shoes were scuffed where he had pressed them into the niches to find footholds.

"I—I—" he blurted uncomfortably.

"Go and clean yourself up at once, boy!" rapped Gruley. "And don't be too long about it. You others—come along!"

With a sympathetic smile at Johnny, the three chums hurried off after Mr. Gruley, linking up with other students who, with bewildered faces and indignant grumbles, were hurrying towards the lecture-room.

"Say, don't we see enough of Gruley without being forced to come back an hour early?" demanded Linda Powell aggrievedly.

"I'd just settled down to a nice little snack," grouched fat Tubby Winwood.

The annoyed students did not bother to lower their voices as they entered the lecture-room, and Mr. Gruley blinked in surprise at the number of dagger-like glares cast at him.

Sally & Co. glared, too, but not at Mr. Gruley. They were looking at Mike Finney, who sat at his desk with a look of angelic innocence on his handsome face, ignoring the covert glances of Jerry Cantell.

The murmuring grew louder; there was a pointed flourishing of watches. Mr. Gruley could ignore it no longer.

"Would someone explain—" he began.

He was interrupted by an agitated rap on the door, and in response to his call the janitor, looking very hot and bothered, walked in, whispered hurriedly to Mr. Gruley, then withdrew.

His face black as a thundercloud, Mr. Gruley glared at the students.

"I am informed," he said, "that the school clock has suddenly and mysteriously gained one hour. The janitor has also received information

that one of the boy students attached to this college was responsible for the outrage!"

Horace Gruley stopped, drew a deep breath, and glared round.

"Perhaps the culprit would care to own up—unless he desires all his fellow-students to share the punishment he so richly deserves!"

Sally's heart gave a lurch. Trust Gruley to think of a way of forcing the guilty one to admit his guilt.

She saw the triumphant expression on Jerry Cantell's face as he glanced towards Mike, saw Mike's face whiten a little as he suddenly realised the trouble his recklessness had led him into. She felt a sinking sensation as Mike slowly began to rise to his feet. But before he could speak a voice sounded from the doorway.

"I am responsible, sir! That was how I got my clothes so messy!"

It was Johnny. He cast a warning glance at the chums as he advanced towards Mr. Gruley, and Sally felt a lump rise in her throat.

Dear old Johnny! Ready to shoulder the blame just because he knew he could be better spared from the play than Mike.

"But, sir—" cried Mike, jumping to his feet.

Sally reached forward, dragged him back as Mr. Gruley waved an impatient hand. The master was too engrossed in his pithy lecture to Johnny to heed any interruptions. And he ended, as Sally had known he would, by banning Johnny from the play that evening.

"Now you realise what trouble your idiotic pride has led to, perhaps you'll behave sensibly in future," said Sally severely to a very woebegone Mike when they were dismissed a few minutes later.

"Sure I realise, Sally, me darlin'," said Mike unhappily. "But, faith, I don't want Johnny to suffer for me! I can take my punishment—"

"Not when it means punishing Sally as well," put in Johnny gruffly. "Anyway, I guess it's a pretty good punishment for you to know you've got me barred from the play. Now, no more fool tricks. Promise!"

"Tis hard when anyone challenges me to resist a dare," said Mike heavily, "but you can trust me. I promise."

The chums smiled as he wandered unhappily away.

He looked very downcast during next period, though Sally could not help feeling uneasy at the sly grin on Jerry Cantell's face. He was the cause of all the trouble and Mike was such a hothead that it was quite possible he would find it difficult to keep his promise if Cantell began to taunt him.

She determined to have a word with that youth.

So, lectures over, she and her chums made their way to Jerry Cantell's chalet. Quietly they approached, and as they reached it that boy's excited voice sounded through the open window.

"Can you imagine it? When the statue in the library's unveiled they'll find it painted bright green! I've made sure Finney gets the blame. And if he doesn't get chucked out of the play for that I'll eat my hat! And that's where you step in."

The chums hardly heard the murmured reply.

In frozen horror, they stared at each other. So Mike had already broken his promise to them! Despite the sacrifice Johnny had made for him, he had allowed himself to be taunted into another dare. And this time, it seemed, nothing could save him!

A SURPRISE FOR JERRY

QUIETLY the chums withdrew. Even allowing for Mike's hot-headedness, they could not understand his breaking his promise to them.

"I vote we go round and see him—tell him just what we think of him," said Johnny, his face grim and angry.

"Maybe he hasn't done it, after all," said Sally with forlorn hope.

But that hope disappeared with

sickening finality when they reached Mike's chalet, saw him emerge with a paint-pot and brush, and saw the splodges of green paint spattered about his person.

"So much for your promises!" said Sally unhappily. "Oh, Mike—"

"Sure I don't know what you're talking about at all," spluttered Mike, who seemed to be beside himself with rage. "But, faith, I'd like to get my hands on the spalpeen who dumped this in the middle of my chalet floor. Will you look at the state of me now—"

"No doubt you got a little carried away with your decorating job just now. Is that it?" asked Fay coldly.

Bewilderment mingled with the anger in Mike's face.

"Is it riddles ye're asking me?" he asked shortly. "The only decorating I've done is on meself when I stubbed my toe against the tin and the paint splashed up—"

There was such honest anger in his voice that a strange feeling of excitement began to well up in Sally. She grabbed Johnny's arm as he was about to speak, motioned him to silence.

"Mike," she said earnestly. "listen! This is important! Will you swear that you haven't used that paint this afternoon? That the first you saw of it was when you found it on your chalet floor?"

Mike looked at her, puzzled. Then he nodded.

"Sure I swear that is right!" he said sincerely. "Though," he added, with a grin, "I may have flicked a drop or two out at the Tops when they saw me in this state and began to sing 'The Wearin' o' the Green.' But they deserved it! Though I nearly hit Cliff Anders, and he wasn't pleased at all!"

"Poor old Mike!" said Sally briskly. "Better get rid of that paint-pot and go and see Slick Kaplin. Maybe he'll have something that will remove the paint from your clothes."

And, with a smile, she motioned her chums away from Mike's chalet. But once out of his sight the smile disappeared.

"Of all the low-down, mean, and beastly tricks!" she murmured.

"You mean you don't believe Mike, after all?" asked Fay incredulously.

"Of course I believe him," said Sally firmly. "And I could kick myself for not having tumbled to this little plot before. We knew Cantell was getting Mike into scrapes, but we didn't realise he had any particular reason for doing so."

"Well, had he?" asked Johnny bewilderedly.

"Listen!" continued Sally. "When we heard him talking, he didn't say Mike had damaged the statue—he said he'd made sure Finney would get the blame."

"Why, yes, that's right!" agreed Fay quickly.

"And he said Mike would get thrown out of the play—" mused Don. "Gosh! Is that what he was after? But why? Cantell isn't in the play!"

Sally smiled grimly.

"But the person he was talking to," she said slowly. "I heard him say, 'Thanks, Jerry! If you really have pulled this off I'll see you get your reward.' And the person who said that was George Frogatt, Mike's understudy! Now do you see?"

Don, Fay and Johnny stared at each other, the light of understanding beginning to blaze in their eyes.

"So that's it!" said Johnny, his fists clenching. "A put-up job between those rotters! Playing on old Mike's weakness to get him into a row so that he'd be banned from the play."

"And when it didn't come off, thanks to Johnny, that horrid Cantell has done something himself and made sure that Mike will be blamed!" said Fay indignantly.

There was silence for a moment, while the chums stared worriedly at each other.

"Can't we do something?" asked Johnny at last.

"Yes," said Sally slowly. "Yes, I believe we can. Now, let me see. The unveiling will be in about half an

hour. With a bit of luck," she added, with a mischievous smile. "I think we might be able to arrange for the culprit to be caught red-handed!"

THERE was a breathless crush in the library. As many of the students as possible had crowded in, and now every eye was fixed on the tall, immaculate figure of Mr. Giles Pembroke as he stood in front of the white-shrouded statue.

"And now," he finished, drawing to the end of his short and witty speech. "I take pleasure in unveiling this statue—"

He tugged the thick red silk tassel as he spoke. The white covering hung motionless for a moment, then crumpled and sank to the ground. As it did, so a gasp rose from the assembled crowd—a gasp of utter horror and dismay. For the beautiful bronze statue was daubed from head to foot with green paint.

Mr. Giles Pembroke's voice trailed away helplessly. Professor Willard's face turned white; a cry of wrath came from Mr. Gruley.

And then came Mike Finney's voice, shocked and:

George Frogatt gazed. "I don't know what you're talking about!" he cried. "I didn't send you any note, and if you'd had any sense you'd have remembered that you brought your paint-brush back with you—"

He stopped then, suddenly aware of the silence that had fallen. He realised that he and Cantell had completely given themselves away.

Professor Willard, who had been standing by, flabbergasted, now stepped forward and after a few sharp words the two boys were led out.

"Well, well," murmured Sally. "That worked beautifully."

Sally had reason to be pleased, for it was she who had written the note to Cantell, and not Frogatt, as he had thought. She and her chums had entered the library just after Cantell, guessing that he would take refuge under the linen cover until the coast was clear. But instead of that happening, more and more people had arrived, and Cantell had been trapped.

It was certainly a just punishment



"Mike—please don't listen to him!" urged Sally. At all costs she must stop the Irish boy from accepting Jerry Cantell's malicious challenge.

"Faith, will ye look at that now!"

Then, remembering his paint-daubed clothes, aware of the meaning glances being cast at his green-stained hands, Mike suddenly turned a vivid red—a red which drained away leaving him white and drawn.

"Finney—" said Cliff Anders grimly.

"Sally!" gasped Fay, clutching her chum's arm. "Sally, what's gone wrong? Oh goodness—"

But even as Sally stared towards the statue, wondering, with a leaden-like heart, what could have gone wrong with her plan, there came another shout from Mr. Gruley.

He dived into the heap of white linen on the floor, then emerged, dragging by the arm a white-faced, cringing figure.

The figure of Jerry Cantell!

"It's his fault!" Cantell cried wildly, pointing a shaking finger towards George Frogatt. "He got me to do it because he wanted Finney blamed. He wanted his part in the play—"

"Quiet, you fool!" hissed Frogatt.

"I won't be quiet," yelled Cantell.

"Why should I? You sent me a note saying I'd left my paint-brush behind—that you'd seen it through the window, but you couldn't get in because the library was locked. You knew I'd borrowed the spare key so that I could get in—but you didn't tell me the opening was put forward half an hour. You didn't tell me I'd

been caught!"

For his scheming, she thought, especially for what he had tried to do to Mike. She shot a reassuring smile at that boy as Professor Willard stepped forward, and in a slightly trembling voice began to speak. "I must apologise, Mr. Pembroke, most deeply and sincerely for what has happened here this afternoon. The boys concerned will be dealt with severely, of course. Meantime," he added, "I can only express the hope that the excellence of our radio broadcast to-night will dispel from your mind all memories of this distasteful scene!"

There was applause at that—and even greater applause that evening when Sally & Co., with Mike acting splendidly, performed their play. A play in which to their great delight, Johnny took his part.

For Mike insisted on telling the Head the truth about the clock incident and, in view of Cantell's plotting, he had been let off with a severe reprimand.

But of one thing Mike was insistent. Never again, he said, would he take any notice of challenges!

At which remark Sally & Co. smiled doubtfully.

(End of this week's story.)

There will be another entertaining story featuring the Merry-makers in next week's GIRLS' CRYSTAL, which, owing to the Easter holidays, will be on sale two days earlier than usual—on Wednesday instead of Friday.

SHEILA'S MYSTERY BIRTHDAY PRESENT

(Continued from page 508.)

Dr. Albanez grabbed at it. Felicitio got the medallion for us in the end," he said. "Fenn's daughter gave it him. You see he had to tell her a plausible story, for I had warned him his son would die if he returned without the medallion."

"What is on that paper?" the other man demanded.

"It gives the site of the treasure," replied Albanez, "and states that the professor is a prisoner. It also says that the police must be informed without loss of time."

Deliberately he set fire to the slip of paper and coolly watched it burn away.

"And now we waste no more time," he rapped. "We go back at once to the treasure site, and Felicitio travels with us. When the treasure is safe in our possession he can return here to free his son."

He pushed Felicitio out of the room, and Mepita paused only to snatch up the medallion.

"I will keep it as a souvenir," she stated.

And then Sheila was staring at Dave in dismay.

"They're leaving!" she gasped. "And we still don't know where the treasure has been found. And daddy is a prisoner there—"

"We've got to stop them," Dave broke in desperately. "I—I don't know how we'll do it—"

The noise of a car starting up interrupted him. Round the house they raced, just in time to see the long, flower-bedecked American car start away. Down a short drive it roared and into another street, heading for the centre of the town.

"After it!" Dave gasped. "The crowds will slow it down—we're bound to catch up with it. And somehow we'll make people listen to our story—"

They almost caught up with the car as it reached the city square. Dave shouted "Stop that car!" but nobody took any notice.

It was then a familiar figure moved in front of Sheila.

"Flowers for a pretty senorita," intoned a wheedling voice. "Have fun with my flowers."

It was the street vendor with the joke bouquets.

"Dave! Dave!" Sheila called. "Buy all you can! It's our only chance!"

Dave pulled a few dollar bills from his pocket and the delighted flower-seller pressed bouquet after bouquet upon them. Then Dave fairly charged a way through the crowd, Sheila following close behind him. They reached the slow-moving car and, one on either side, they climbed the running-boards.

"Hurray for the carnival!" Sheila shouted. She saw Mepita's alarmed face, and shook the flowers.

Dave was dealing with the two men in the car. He shouted at the top of his voice as if it was all part of the fun, and clouds of pepper rose up out of the bouquets.

The car swerved as Dr. Albanez began sneezing, but Dave quickly applied the brake, bringing the vehicle to a stop.

The three occupants were helpless. Tears were running down their faces, and they were sneezing as though they never intended to leave off. It was Dave who dragged Felicitio out of the car.

"Come on!" he gasped. "The police station!"

Sheila ran alongside and her eyes were full of triumph. For she was carrying the gold medallion—having snatched it from Mepita's neck at the last moment.

"You have restored my self-respect, Imigos," Felicitio gasped. "I shall soon be able to face the professor again."

Quite soon they reached the police station.

Felicitio told his story, and within an amazingly short period of time police cars were screaming out of the town. Sheila, Dave and Felicitio travelling in one of them.

Sheila's father was found safe and unharmed, and Albanez and all his men had been rounded up.

The news of the finding of the treasure proved to be a nine-days' wonder. And Sheila received a real birthday gift from her father—the original gold medallion found among the treasure, and of which Felicitio's and all the others had been copies.

THE END.

Another exciting long complete story next week entitled: "Linda and the Phantom Ball." And make a note that, owing to Easter, the next issue of **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale Wednesday instead of Friday.

JOY—THE GIRL WITH A 100 VOICES

(Continued from page 516.)

But Joy stayed in it, and then started ventriloquising.

"It's your fault, Claude!" one of the young men seemed to say.

"Oh, yes?" retorted Claude. "I may say it was your idea."

"Mine? I like that—"

Now and again Joy threw in a remark they hadn't thought of and much more cutting than their own; and when she glanced back they did not appear to be on speaking terms.

At her best speed, she went back to the boathouse in confident mood, elated and triumphant.

But alas! Joy's light-hearted prank had taken a wrong turning.

Aunt Jemima, pale with rage, was shaking her parasol at the boatman.

"You have as good as called me a liar," cried Aunt Jemima.

The boatman snorted in wrath.

"I said that if you claimed to hear a voice from under those cushions you must be nuts!"

Aunt Jemima did not reply.

"I'm a bit nuts myself," added the boatman.

He did not really say that—but Joy, being present, had added it for him in exactly his own voice.

"Hah! That is indeed a confession," said Aunt Jemima.

But further argument was stopped by the plea of the strangled voice from under the cushions.

"Let me out—let me out, you silly pair of wranglers. There, now, I've squeezed out—under this old boat!"

Behind the cushions was a large boat, and someone could have got under it, for it was raised on trestles. The amazed boatman went to see.

"He's free now," said Joy brightly.

"So, provided the boatman apologises, aunt, we've nothing to lose! I've got the punt. Look! Isn't it a beauty?"

"Silence, Joy. I am determined to have an explanation and apology," said Aunt Jemima.

The puzzled boatman came back frowning and stroking his chin.

"Must ha' been some kid," he muttered. "Seems as if you were right, ma'am. I'm sorry. Can't think now he got there."

Aunt Jemima froze him with a look.

"I am not in the habit of lying," she said. "I expect to be believed. However, as you have apologised, I will overlook the matter."

"Th-thank you," said the boatman. "I—er—George!" he added to the boy. "Get the lady some of the best cushions. And bring that hamper—and the awning, too."

Aunt Jemima almost purred, and Joy's eyes sparkled.

"We've got the punt, aunt," she said. "And now for a happy day."

By the time Aunt Jemima was ready and the punt fully prepared, the young men were in sight, rowing their skiff and drenched to the skin; but Joy managed to get away before they berthed.

"Dear me," was Aunt Jemima's comment when she saw them shaking their fists and heard their angry comments. "Who are these hoodlums? What are they saying?"

As what the young men said was inaudible, Joy said something for them in a voice that seemed to come across the water.

"Thanks very much for a much-needed lesson."

"What lesson was that?" asked Aunt Jemima, surprised.

"Oh, just a lesson in manners I taught them," said Joy, sending the punt out into midstream. "Golly, isn't this going to be fun?"

And it certainly was!

Joy the Ventriloquist will be having more fun in another entertaining story next week.

AUTOGRAPHS FOR YOUR FREE FILM STAR ALBUM

This week's autographs are those of Robert Donat, Ann Todd, John Mills, James Stewart, Spencer Tracy, Bette Davis, Bing Crosby and Richard Todd. Another eight next week.

Robert Donat

John Todd

John Mills

James Stewart

Spencer Tracy

Bette Davis

Bing Crosby

Richard Todd