

ALL SCHOOLGIRLS WILL LOVE THE 6 GRAND STORIES INSIDE

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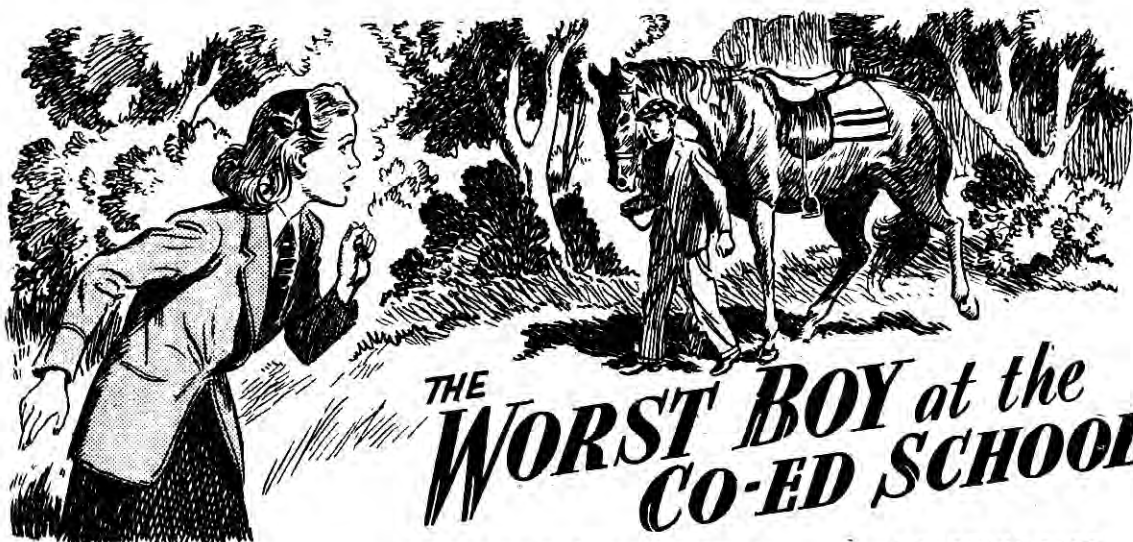
Week Ending May 6th, 1950.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



"GHOST RIDER OF
THE MOOR"



THE WORST BOY at the CO-ED SCHOOL

JO'S CONFESSION

THOUGH the rest of the riding team at Mallington Co-Ed College believed Vincent Conrad to be an Outsider, Paddy Dare, their captain, trusted him. She was certain that Vincent had an unknown enemy in the school working against him, and declared that if Vincent did anything to prove she was wrong to trust him she would resign her captaincy.

When it appeared that Vincent had been to a local bookmaker, Paddy challenged him. He arranged to meet her in Balton Woods, which were out of bounds, and explain.

Vincent was caught out of bounds, and believed that Paddy had sneaked on him. Paddy was convinced that her chum, Jo Winter, could help her identify Vincent's unknown enemy, for she had been told that Jo had been to the letter-rack when Paddy had been expecting a note from Vincent. But to Paddy's horror, when she questioned her chum, Jo admitted that it was she who had taken the note.

"JO, you don't mean it—you can't!" breathed Paddy, aghast. "You couldn't have taken that note Vincent left for me!"

But Jo, rather pale, just nodded. "I'm sorry, Paddy, but—I did take it!"

"Jo!" Paddy felt a sick dismay. "Then—then you are—"

She faltered and stopped. She just could not go on. She could not think of her dear, sweet-natured friend as Vincent's secret enemy—the Whisperer!

"Oh, Jo," she groaned, "how could you!"

A flush crept into Jo's cheeks; but her chin was up, brown eyes steady, and she showed no trace of shame.

"I was afraid you'd be upset," she said, "but, please—you must believe I did it for your sake!"

"For my sake?" repeated Paddy incredulously. "How can you say that?"

"I can and do, Paddy!" Jo nodded firmly. "If you had received that note and met Vincent as he wanted you'd have been caught out of bounds, too!"

"I wouldn't!"

"Paddy, you know you would!" said Jo quickly. "Why, that's proved by the fact that Vincent was caught. The headmistress warned you of serious punishment if you were involved in any further trouble concerning him. And, please, dear," she added appealingly, "I did tell you that I'd do anything to prevent you hitting that trouble, didn't I?"

"So—so that's why you took the note?"

"Yes, Paddy. You told me he was sending it, so to save you I got it

first. I—I didn't think you'd take it so badly."

Jo stopped. She looked so upset, so appealing, that Paddy felt out of her depth. Again she found it impossible to think of her chum as the cunning Whisperer, and yet—

"But, Jo, Vincent wouldn't have been caught; there wouldn't have been any danger of my being caught if you hadn't"—she gulped, but had to go on—"if you hadn't given him away to Mr. Voster!"

Jo started. A look of horror flashed across her face.

"Paddy, you don't think that I— Oh, no!" she cried. "Why, I thought he was caught out of bounds accidentally. Oh, Paddy, please—this is awful—"

Impulsively she caught Paddy's hands. Paddy was startled herself by the utter dismay on her chum's features. It sent a ray of deep hope shooting through her.

"But, Jo," she breathed, "you took the note! What else was I to think? No one else knew anything about it!"

Jo was very white and agitated.

"Oh, my goodness!" she muttered. "I didn't realise! Paddy dear, on my honour I only took the note to stop you meeting Vincent. I don't like him, but I wouldn't sneak on him! Why?"

She paused and fumbled in her riding jacket pocket.

"Why, I didn't even open the note!" she rushed on. "I just slipped it into my pocket!"

Paddy watched her chum searching almost feverishly, and a great load came off her heart. Jo had not sneaked! And the awful dread that Jo might possibly be the Whisperer was banished for ever!

A shaky smile came to her lips.

"Jo!" she muttered. "Oh, Jo, I'm so glad—so jolly, jolly glad!"

But Jo, still searching, did not respond. Quite white, she removed her hands from her pockets.

"It isn't there!" she exclaimed, stricken. "Paddy, but it was there—honestly! I can't understand how it's vanished—"

"I do!" That came from Paddy like a flash. "It's clear enough," she said. "And thank goodness it is! Jo, Vincent's secret enemy took that note from your pocket, read it—and sneaked to Mr. Voster!"

"What! S-secret enemy!"

By DOROTHY PAGE

Jo gaped, out of her depth. Not so Paddy.

"Yes! Secret enemy!" she flashed. "Jo, sit down! You're going to listen to me! I need your help!"

With sudden enthusiasm and energy she grabbed Jo and gently pushed her back into the armchair. Jo sank back, staring bewilderedly.

Concise Paddy told her about the mysterious Whisperer; how she had proof that it was a member of the riding team; how she had had suspicions of different people.

She told how she had been locked up that afternoon, and of the page of the letter she had found, proving to her that the Whisperer, for some reason, was aiming at Vincent's expulsion.

She passed the page for Jo to read. Jo took it and stared at it like a girl in a trance.

"You see how vital it is to bowl out this awful Whisperer, Jo?" Paddy ended fiercely. "With Vincent in his present mood, thinking I sneaked on him, thinking everyone's against him, barred from riding again this term—his horse to be sent away soon—why, he'll do something crazy and reckless and get expelled. Which is just what this awful, unknown person is after!"

Jo stared up at her, her sweet face a study.

"Paddy," she gasped, "it's incredible! Are you sure you're not making a terrific mistake? I mean, this page isn't real proof. No names are mentioned, and this—this whispering person might just be playing a rather spiteful joke."

Paddy shook her head instantly.

"No!" she cried. "I know it sounds wild, but it's a fact! Dash it, Jo, you're not suggesting that Vincent stole his own note back from you and sent the information in it to Mr. Voster to get himself trapped, are you?"

Jo ran a hand over her brow. "That does seem absurd," she murmured. "And yet, Vincent's such a strange boy. You never know why he does things. You must admit, Paddy, that most of the things you think 'his Whisperer has done could have been done by Vincent himself!'"

"Could—but weren't!" Paddy said decidedly. "I know Vincent—I believe in him." She paused in front of Jo, looking down at her steadily. "Look, Jo, I can't make you like Vincent, but if I bowl out this Whisperer, you and everyone else must see he's had a pretty raw deal here at Mallington."

Jo slowly nodded.

"Yes, Paddy, that's true enough, but—"

"No—buts, Jo! Now, this is where you can help me." Paddy began to

Only By Unmasking The Mysterious Whisperer Could Paddy Defeat The Plot To Get Vincent Expelled

pace the study, frowning deeply. "Because there wasn't much time in which to act, it's pretty obvious that that note was bagged from your pocket before you left for Mallington Park this afternoon."

"Well, yes—
"And as the Whisperer is one of the riding team," continued Paddy, "it was almost certainly bagged when you were in the stables. Right? Now, Jo, when were you last certain of having the note in your pocket? And who was with you in the stables after that time?"

Jo bit her lip rather unhappily. "Paddy, I hate to think that any of the team—"

"I know! I felt that, too! But this is serious—for Vincent. Please trust my theory for a while, Jo."

"Well," said Jo, "all the gang had left the stables except Jimmy, Max, Dot, Ron, and Bette. Isabella had gone. She must have released you from the pavilion on her way out."

Paddy nodded, feeling mounting excitement. She was on the trail!

"So that clears Isabella completely," she muttered. "I know it can't be Ron or Bette because they had alibis for each other over that riding-crop affair. It can't be Max, 'cos he's no rider, and we know the Whisperer stole his camera to get that snap of Vincent."

She stopped. Her eyes, widening, met Jo's.

They were thinking the same startling thought. The only two names left were Dot Nelson's and Jimmy Court's.

"No!" cried Jo. "Impossible, Paddy! Not Jimmy, of all people! Why, he's one of your best friends! He's awfully fond of you. It couldn't be Jimmy. Oh, Paddy, you must be wrong about all this Whisperer business, because—"

"Unless," said Paddy slowly, shaken by the alternative offered, "it's—it's old Dot!"

"Dot!" repeated Jo. Her voice showed incredulity.

"Dot," said Paddy again. "Gosh, it seems fantastic—"

The study door opened suddenly.

"And who," demanded an excited voice, "taketh my name in vain, mes enfants? And why?"

The chums' heads turned swiftly, almost guiltily.

Dot Nelson herself stood in the doorway.

A MEETING IN THE WOOD

DOT NELSON had obviously been running. She was breathing hard, and her plump, cheerful face was flushed.

Her appearance, after the recent discussion, not unnaturally rather startled both Paddy and Jo. They stared at her, silent.

Dot stared back with interest.

"No charge for looking," she said, with a grin. "My beauty is there for all to behold! But what's—doing, pets? Have I a smut on nose?"

Paddy hastily collected herself.

"We—we were just talking about members of the riding team, Dot," she said quickly. "You rather startled us, barging in like that!"

"As if I don't always barge in!" Dot chuckled. "But this time there is a bigish reason—and how! Things are going to hum, kids—betcha!"

She plomped herself on the edge of the table, showing every evidence of excitement. Paddy stared at her. She felt then—as probably Jo did—how fantastic it was to think of this bright, cheery girl as a treacherous schemer, a deadly enemy.

"What's going to hum, Dot?" asked Jo.

"Trouble!" Dot nodded. "Trouble for the Outsider. He's gone the whole hog! It'll be expulsion for him now!"

Paddy caught her breath.

"Dot, tell me!" The words jerked out; momentarily she forgot her vague suspicions of Dot. "What's happened? Quick!"

The plump-faced girl raised her eyebrows.

"Whoa, give a lass a chance," she remonstrated. "But it's big all right. Listen! We'd all left the stables and

had gone up to change when I found I'd dropped one of my new riding gloves. I went back to the stables to look for it, and spotted that Whitey's stall was empty!"

"Oh!" Paddy gasped. "Dot, you're sure?"

"Absolutely! More than that, Paddy, when I left the stables I happened to glance across towards the playing fields, and I caught a glimpse of Conrad leading Whitey towards that gap in the hedge!"

"My goodness!" muttered Jo. "He—he must be crazy!"

For a moment Paddy did not speak; she felt too utterly dismayed. The thing she had feared had happened. Vincent had deliberately flouted the strict order given to him not an hour ago. If the fact came out that he had disobeyed Mr. Voster it would certainly be the end for Vincent at Mallington!

"How long ago was this?" Paddy flashed.

"Why, about ten minutes—"

Paddy jumped to the door. There for a second she paused.

"Not a word of this to anyone else!" she cried. "I'm going after him! I've got to get him back!"



"Jimmy, what's happened?" asked Paddy. Jimmy grimaced. "The Head's called a general assembly of the whole school," he replied. "Something awful's happened—at Mallington Park!"

"Wh-a-at!" Dot stuttered. "Paddy, you ass—"

"Jo, you understand!" cut in Paddy. She shot an intent stare at Dot Nelson, who gaped back. "Dot," she said, "you've got to promise, too—just in case. Jo, make Dot promise!"

With that she was gone, banging the door behind her.

It was a forlorn, desperate hope that sent Paddy hurrying down through Girls' Side, fair hair flying; the hope that she might be able to trace Vincent, stop him, bring him back—before the blow could fall.

She shot into the quadrangle. It was deserted. Practically the whole school was at tea. She sprinted towards the playing fields.

Passing Boys' Side, a junior on the steps called to her. It was Max Milden, Jimmy Court's quiet chum.

"Hey, Paddy, just a sec!" he shouted, and waved aloft a long cardboard roll. "I've got some enlargements of the riding snaps. They're tops! You must see—"

"Sorry, can't stop, Max! Later!" Paddy gasped back, and sprinted on.

She crossed the fringe of the playing fields, dodging through the trees and bushes there, and came to a side entrance to the school grounds. A rapid glance at the turf near by showed clearly the imprints of a horse's hoofs—Whitey's, she guessed.

She ran into the lane, looking right and left. It was deserted. But in the soft turf of the wooded slope on the

far side of the lane she saw traces of hoofs again.

"He rode up through the woods! He wouldn't go fast amongst the trees. I might catch him!"

Paddy crossed the lane, still running, and cut up through the trees. It was hard going up the slope. She paused for a breather and heard the muffled roll of distant hoofs.

She exclaimed in relief and hope.

"Oh whizzo! Not far away!"

And Paddy forced herself on again.

The hoofbeats grew nearer, slowed, stopped. Staring ahead, Paddy caught a glimpse of a horse through the trees. The sheen of a dark, satiny coat showed it to be Whitey. Vincent's black vanished into a small clearing.

Paddy was triumphant. She dodged through the bushes; ducked under a low bough.

"Vin—"

The name died on her lips. She stopped dead, staring amazedly round a big bush.

Before her was the clearing, shadowy under the thick leaves.

On the far side stood Whitey. His rider had dismounted and now stood by the horse's head, back to Paddy.

But that rider, in grey flannels,

The boy was about her own age, but shorter. His freckled face was not unpleasant, but he was obviously ill-at-ease.

"What are you doing with that horse?" Paddy flashed.

"I've a right to him!" he said defiantly, after a pause.

Paddy's lips parted in amazement. "A right!" she repeated. "Of all the nerve! Look here," she added grimly, "it's no good trying to tell me fibs, because I know that horse. I'm Paddy Dare from the college and I know its owner. You'd better tell me the truth, whoever you are!"

A curious change came over the youth's face.

"So you're Miss Dare, are you?" "Yes, I am! And I'm a friend of Vincent Conrad, the owner of—"

Paddy stopped. Into the other's face had come a look of unspeakable scorn and contempt.

"You!" he blurted. "You—Master Vincent's friend! You're not his friend! You're the one what let him down this afternoon! You're as bad as the rest of them at the college, you are!"

His voice rose angrily. "None of you're fit to black his boots! He's the best feller ever was! Friend! Why—why"—he choked a little with real feeling—"I reckon I'm the only friend Master Vincent's got!"

JIMMY'S DISMAYING NEWS

PADDY could hardly believe her ears. Yet the boy meant it, deeply and sincerely—that was obvious.

"Look here, who on earth are you?" she gasped.

Wariness replaced the boy's anger. "That don't matter," he muttered.

But Paddy suddenly guessed! It came to her in a flash.

"You say I let Vincent down this afternoon," she said swiftly. "In that case I think I know who you are! You're the friend Vincent wanted me to meet to explain this bookmaker business!"

He looked away, jerking at the peak of his cap.

"Well, s'pose I am!" he said. "What of it?"

Paddy was conscious of growing excitement.

"Look here," she said. "I didn't let Vincent down! I really am his friend—on my honour. I've been trying to find him to tell him—and warn him, too."

The youth eyed her doubtfully, yet anxiously.

"Warn him?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I was afraid Vincent was out riding Whitey himself," said Paddy. "And after his punishment that would mean expulsion."

"Expulsion!" The boy's jaw dropped. "You mean he'd be kicked out? Sacked from the college? He never told me. Here, is this on the level?"

The real worry on his freckled face touched Paddy.

"Honestly," she said quietly. "Look, do explain what you're doing with Whitey and so on, and then I'll explain how tricky things are for Vincent."

He stared at her intently, shrewdly. He seemed to be satisfied, for, after a slight hesitation, he said:

"My name's Dinny Preston, miss. My uncle is—the local bookmaker. Maybe you've heard of him."

Paddy started. Considering the bookmaker's unsavoury reputation, considering that Vincent was suspected of betting with him, she certainly had! She nodded, waiting.

"Well, miss," said Dinny, kicking at the ground with his boot, "my uncle looks after me, and he don't like me much. Perhaps you might say he—he ain't a very nice sort of uncle."

"I think I understand, Dinny," said Paddy quietly. "Go on, though. Where does Vincent come into this?"

The lad's face brightened.

"I first met him when he was riding Whitey here at the start of your term," he said. "I sort of admired Whitey, and we got talking. You see miss," he went on with deep

enthusiasm, "my big ambition is to be a steeplechase jockey. But my uncle won't hear of it—not him! Says I'm only fit to be an errand-boy," he added bitterly. "Well, Master Vincent reckoned I ought to have a chance, and he made me an offer."

He told of that offer. Vincent had promised to let the village lad ride Whitey and practice with him whenever it could be arranged.

"Of course, if uncle knew"—Dinny shivered—"he'd've belted the hide off me. So Master Vincent promised to keep it a secret. Sometimes he'd visit me when uncle was out."

"I see," Paddy breathed. "Gosh, there's a lot I see now!"

This explained so much. This explained those supposedly "shady" visits of Vincent's to the bookmaker's house in Birdham Lane.

Vincent had been giving up his time, lending his beloved Whitey, to help an ill-treated, thwarted boy.

"Dinny, I'm jolly glad!" she exclaimed. "It's whizzo! It's fine!"

But there was anxiety in the boy's eyes.

"You said he was in trouble, miss," he said. "Expulsion, you said!"

Paddy hesitated. She could not tell Dinny everything.

"It's pretty bad, Dinny. He's been forbidden to ride. He's jolly bitter, and I'm scared he'll do something really reckless and get expelled." Her thoughts switched suddenly. "But tell me, how did you get Whitey this evening?"

"Why, miss, Master Vincent promised me earlier that I could have a practice, and he brought Whitey to the school wall and I took over."

Paddy knew relief. Then Vincent had not deliberately flouted Mr. Voster's grim order! Even at the height of his angry mood he had unselfishly thought of his promise to Dinny.

"Where is he now?" she asked quickly. "Do you know?"

"He went off for a walk—towards Mallington Park," said Dinny. "He arranged to pick up Whitey at the school in about an hour."

Paddy nodded, thinking fast.

"O.K., Dinny! Now, look! You may see him before I do," she said. "Tell him, won't you, that I didn't sneak on him—that I can explain when I see him. Tell him to go carefully, for goodness' sake. Tell him there's a really vital reason why he mustn't hit further trouble!"

Dinny, frowning, nodded seriously.

"It's vital," insisted Paddy. "Tell him to think of the blow to his parents—anything, so long as he goes carefully."

Dinny looked at her rather strangely.

"He hasn't got any parents, miss—only a guardian," he said. "He told me once. They got killed in the London blitz."

"Oh!" Paddy felt shocked. She gulped. Poor Vincent. How lonely he must be—doubly so in this school

that did not want him. "I—I didn't know that, Dinny. He never said. How awful for him."

"It's tough all right, miss."

"Dinny," said Paddy suddenly, "do your very best when you meet him. I'll see him soon, too. He mustn't hit any more trouble—just mustn't!"

"You bet not," said the lad earnestly. "Trust me. And I'll tell him all you said."

"Thanks, Dinny!" Paddy smiled, and turned away.

She heard the roll of hoofs as the lad rode Whitey off again. She wanted to think. She sat under a huge oak and her thoughts were a mixture of happiness and concern.

"Good old Vincent!" she muttered. "Oh gosh, I'm glad that bookie affair has been cleared up! How whizzo of him to help Dinny like that!"

Her warm heart went out to Vincent Conrad. How terrible to have lost his parents! A boy suffering under that blow—wanted friends at school, good friends. Instead, he was an outcast, with the threat of expulsion looming close above him.

And who was mainly to blame for all this?

"The Whisperer!" Paddy gritted. "The Whisperer wants him expelled! Why? That's a mystery. But somehow I'll find out—and unmask the Whisperer, too! Vincent's not going to be expelled! After I've spoken to him he'll know what he's up against. He'll go steady. He'll help me to unmask the Whisperer—and what a difference that'll make!"

Her lifting hopes were checked by the baffling question: Who was the Whisperer? She had narrowed down the search leaving only two.

"Dot—or Jimmy?"

Paddy winced from the thought of either, and yet—who else?

That puzzle was still in her mind when, some time later, she wandered down the wooded slopes to the lane by the college, meaning to wait there until Vincent showed up.

And the first person she saw was Jimmy Court. The fair-haired Fourth Former came hurrying along the lane, calling eagerly as he saw her.

"Paddy! Gee—been looking for you everywhere! We've had most of the riding team out searching for you!" he panted. "We wanted to hold a meeting about the team captaincy. Jo forgot to tell you."

The captaincy! It had slipped Paddy's mind.

"Oh, Jimmy! I'm sorry. I didn't know—"

"We can't hold it now, anyway," cut in Jimmy rather grimly. "Paddy, the Head himself has called a general assembly of the whole college in Central Hall. Something's awful happened—at Mallington Park!"

Paddy started. Mallington Park! That was where, according to Dinny Preston, Vincent had been walking.

"Head's assembly—gosh!" she exclaimed. "Jimmy, what's happened?"

Jimmy grimaced.

"It's bad—really bad! A little while ago Mr. Brown, Mr. Milroy's agent, arrived to see the Head. Paddy, someone has deliberately smashed up the practice jumps Mr. Milroy gave us permission to use! Deliberately smashed!"

"Jimmy!" Paddy said, aghast. "Oh, no!"

"Fraid it's a fact! And—it seems that Mr. Brown actually saw the person at a distance in the act!"

Paddy chilled. This meant expulsion for—someone.

"Who—who was it, Jimmy?"

"We don't really know—yet. But there's going to be a general assembly in Central Hall, and Mr. Brown is sure, apparently, that he can pick out the guilty person."

He paused, watching Paddy rather doubtfully.

"I don't want to sound mean, Paddy, but—well, Vincent Conrad's been reported out, and the rumour is flying round that it was Vincent that Mr. Brown saw smashing up the jumps!"

Further enthralling chapters of this grand serial will be found in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

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GHOST RIDER OF THE MOOR



By RENEE FRAZER

MERLE'S AUDACIOUS ROLE

HARK! He's—he's coming this way! The Ghost Rider!" The little group of boys and girls standing round the glowing bonfire exchanged glances in which excitement and apprehension were mingled. Through the mist that hung like a shroud beyond the circle of firelight came the muffled sound of hoofs.

"He's coming from the west—and heading for the marsh!" A tall boy with reddish hair and dare-devil blue eyes snatched up a lantern. "That's the way he always rides. With any luck we may be able to catch a glimpse of him. Who's game for trying to head him off?"

"You can't—you can't stop a ghost, Rodney!" exclaimed Gwen Curtis, with a shiver.

"You can try!" cut in her brother Frank, thrusting out his chin. "I'm with you, Rod, old man!"

Rodney Forbes grinned; then his expression became serious.

"You girls had better stay round the fire. The Bleakmoor ghost always avoids the light—so Merle said. We don't want anyone straying across the horseman's path, and being found hours later in a dead faint—like that servant from the Manor—"

"Merle hasn't come back yet!" interjected Diane Layton, her voice rather high-pitched. "She went to fetch coffee for us, though Gwen and I tried to persuade her not to go."

Rodney whistled anxiously, staring into the fog.

"Merle isn't afraid of anything!" Gwen declared, her own voice a little unsteady. "She's lived in the district all her life—and she swears that the ghostly rider never harmed anyone. It's her belief that the servant at the Manor was scared by a burglar who broke into the house that night—and she imagined that she'd been attacked by the Ghost Rider—"

Gwen's voice trailed away, for the sound of muffled hoofs was approaching unpleasantly close.

"Come on, Frank!" exclaimed Rodney. "Bring your torch, and—"

There came a sudden, piercing scream from Diane.

"Look! Look! There it goes!"

"Where?" gasped Gwen, paling.

"Gosh—I see it!" Frank shouted.

"Look, Rod—over there—by the withered oak!"

A gasp went up, for they could all see the spectral rider now. A slim, almost boyish figure muffled in a swirling cloak, with a plumed hat,

and mounted on a great black horse that galloped wildly through the mist towards a clump of low-lying bushes and stunted trees.

"Stay here, you girls," jerked Rodney. Come on Frank—we'll head him off, if we look sharp, and see whether he's solid or just our fancy!"

He sprinted out into the fog, with Frank at his heels, while the two girls ventured outside the firelight circle, watching with straining eyes, their breath bated.

Rodney, the first to reach the withered oak, saw the phantom horseman draw rein at the sight of the glowing fire and the swinging lanterns. It raised its arm in a gesture of mingled defiance and stern warning—a gesture that plainly ordered the boys to go back.

Then, swerving its horse suddenly, it galloped away into the mist.

"After it, Frank!" bellowed Rodney, disregarding all caution in his excitement.

"Rod—look out!" came Frank's anxious yell. "The quagmire! It's just ahead of you—"

Rodney halted suddenly, with a sharp intake of breath, as he felt the ground squelching under his feet. He held up his lantern, and the next moment Frank had joined him with the torch.

Together they stared at the treacherous green grass, with mud and water lying in glistening pools—and at the hoof-prints of a horse that ended abruptly only a few paces away, leaving no trace beyond.

"Phew!" Rodney mopped his forehead, his boyish face rather pale as he looked at his friend. "Frank, old chap," he said huskily, "either we're both crazy, or there's more in this ghost rider legend than we supposed! I could have sworn that the rider was human and the horse was real—yet no live horseman could have crossed that marsh—"

"And he tried to warn us!" interjected Frank, his voice unsteady.

The other boy nodded, biting his lips.

"It was a near thing, Frank! I laughed at Merle when she first told

us the legend, but I'm dashed if I feel like laughing now. There was something about the rider's figure that made me think—Hullo!"

He broke off with an excited ejaculation, as he bent to snatch up something that lay among the coarse grass.

"What is it, Rod?" demanded Frank curiously.

"A clue—or I'm a Dutchman!" declared Rodney, flourishing a scrap of paper. "It looks like a rough sketch-map, and—golly!" He sniffed. "The paper's got a—kind of scent about it."

"Come off it, Rod! Who ever heard of a ghostly horseman carrying scent?"

"That," said Rodney, a thoughtful frown in his blue eyes, "makes it all the more interesting. I say, we'd better hurry back to the girls, or they'll be getting the wind up."

The two girls were waiting anxiously in the glow of the firelight. The mist had prevented their seeing exactly what had happened, and they plied the boys with anxious questions.

Gwen shivered as Frank described their narrow escape—and the disappearance of the spectral horseman.

"It—it's uncanny!" she whispered. "Oh, I do wish Merle would come. I'm afraid something may have happened to her—"

"She ought to have been back ages ago," put in Diane sharply. "Her cottage is only half a mile from here, and she knows every inch of the moor."

"What about giving her a call?" suggested Rodney. "All together!"

Their youthful voices rang out through the encircling mist.

Gwen and Frank were staying with their guardian at the Moorland Guest House near by. Rodney, Frank's chum, had joined them for the holidays; and with Diane Layton, whose father was manager of the guest house, they had formed a little party to "lay" the Bleakmoor Ghost, as it was called—the spectral rider who, from time to time, was seen galloping across the barren plain after dark.

Rodney prided himself on being a bit of a sleuth; but it was Gwen who had first discovered the details of the old legend—from attractive Merle Evesham, the girl who called daily at the guest house with flowers and vegetables from her smallholding.

"Merle! Coo-ee! Merle!"

The voices rang out through the mist, as the chums groped their way in search of their new friend. Nearly an hour ago they had encountered Merle in her pony-trap on her way from market; and, learning of their daring project, she had offered to

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As The Phantom Highwayman

fetch some coffee and sandwiches to warm them during their vigil.

But she had not returned, and Gwen was beginning to feel really anxious, when they heard the clatter of hoofs on the moorland road and the familiar rattle of the wheels of a trap.

Next moment the trap loomed in sight, drawn by a sturdy moorland pony. A slim, dark-haired girl sprang from the driving-seat. From the trap she took a flask and a parcel of sandwiches.

"I'm sorry I'm so late," she apologised breathlessly. "When I got back I found a message waiting for me, and I had to take out an urgent order—"

"That's all right, Merle!" Gwen cut in, smiling. "It was jolly nice of you to go to all this trouble for us—and, thank goodness, you're safe!"

"Hear, hear!" added Frank.

The girl looked quickly from one to the other.

"Why?" she asked, and her glance met Rodney's. "Has anything happened?"

Rodney nodded, tersely describing their baffling experience.

Merle busied herself in pouring out the steaming coffee into the plastic cups she had bought for the chums.

"It always vanishes near there," she explained softly at length. "That's where Claude Martel, the highwayman, disappeared two hundred years ago—after risking his safety to warn the driver of the mail-coach about the flooded roads."

"Not a bad chap, eh?" murmured Rodney thoughtfully. "I suppose—"

He broke off with a shrug, his serious expression giving place to a grin. "That reminds me! I've got a clue here. I'd like to know what you think of it!"

In the glow of the bonfire, while the chums sipped their coffee, Rodney handed round the crumpled sketch-map.

"It doesn't look very old," said Gwen. "It's more like a tracing."

She handed the sketch to Merle, and that girl bent over the fire in order to examine it.

"Let me see!" Diane cried, and stepped eagerly forward, stretching out her hand.

Merle, her back turned, straightened up, then seemed to slip. Next moment a chorus of dismayed cries rang out as the intriguing scrap of paper fluttered from her hands into the flames, to be instantly consumed.

"You clumsy thing!" cried Diane angrily.

"I—I'm sorry," Merle said, her dark eyes remorseful. "I didn't mean—"

"Never mind!" laughed Rodney. "It probably wasn't of any value, anyway. Now that I've actually seen the ghost, I mean to have a shot at grabbing it—clue or no clue!"

Merle bent to poke at the fire.

"Father's offering a reward for its capture," Diane declared importantly. "He believes the so-called Ghost Rider is probably a clever trickster who's mixed up in the recent burglaries in the district—and he's afraid the scoundrel may try to break into the guest-house."

Gwen clutched nervously at her brother's arm.

"If he doesn't," chuckled Rodney, "I'm going to have a go for that reward. Well, I suppose we ought to be getting back, or they'll be sending a search party out for us!"

Gwen turned anxiously to Merle.

"Shall we see you back to your cottage first?" she asked.

"Please don't worry!" Merle pressed the other's hand gratefully. "I've lived so long on Bleakmoor, and I know all its legends. Good-night, and please don't take any risks!"

Her expression became suddenly serious as her glance met Rodney's. "The boy's blue eyes held a laughing challenge."

"I'll tell you what, Merle," he said. "Before the week's out I'll make you a present. The plume from the phantom highwayman's hat—in return for a flower for my button-hole! Is it a bargain?"

Merle shook her head as she climbed into her trap.

"I'll give you the flower, anyway, Rodney—but I'd forget about the plume, if I were you!"

She waved her hand to the chums, and the pony and trap clattered away into the mist.

Soon the friendly glow of the fire and the winking lanterns became mere specks—to vanish completely. Merle drove on past her cottage, turning the trap into a small, dark copse. Drawing rein, she sprang out and approached an old stone stable, almost hidden by the trees. There she tethered the pony-trap, and unlocked the door, lighting the lantern that hung just inside.

A whinny of pleasure greeted her, and the great black horse in the stall reached out its silky-maned head, stamping its hoofs that were still caked with wet mud.

"I've not had time to groom you yet, Beauty!" Merle breathed. "And we'll have to wait now—for there's another errand for us to-night!"

As she spoke she took down from a peg a flowing cloak and a black, plumed hat! Swiftly she donned them over her riding-kit, the broad brim of the hat shadowing her pale, tense face.

The black horse whinnied with excitement as she led it out of the stable and mounted swiftly. A moment later horse and rider were cantering through the fog—heading towards the lonely marsh.

The sound of a car approaching cautiously along the moorland road caused Merle's heart to quicken anxiously. Her fingers loosened on the rein as she urged her horse to a sudden gallop.

The car pulled up at a bend in the road, and the driver—a burly, thick-set man—sprang out, drawing a pistol from his coat pocket. The glare of the headlights picked out the galloping figure a second before it was swallowed in the fog.

A baffled ejaculation escaped the man's lips as he lowered the pistol that he had aimed at the horse.

"That's twice you've escaped me!" he muttered. "But next time—whoever or whatever you are—I'll put a stop to your meddling game!"

RODNEY TAKES A CHANCE

"FASTER, Beauty—faster!"

Her cloak billowing shoulder-high, the plume of her hat tossed above her wayward curls, Merle Eversham—the Ghost Rider of the moor—urged her horse on its reckless gallop.

She did not guess how near peril had been at that moment, though she knew she had ruthless enemies who would stop at nothing to learn her identity.

The legend of the ghostly highwayman, dormant for nearly a century, had been revived by Merle for a desperate purpose of her own.

She had ridden the moors from childhood; her father had owned a prosperous hacking-stable before the crash came that ruined him. It was after his death that Merle and her brother, Ken, had moved to this part of Bleakmoor, and bought a small holding in an attempt to make a living.

And now Ken, injured by a recent accident, had been forced to leave home. Certain malicious rumours, coupling his name with the recent outbreak of burglaries, had made his absence essential.

Merle had told everyone that he had gone abroad; but that was an innocent deception. Ken was here—concealed on the moor—though no one but herself could ever find his hiding-place.

Merle rode on through the darkness, the sound of the horse's hoofs muffled by the blanket of fog. Only the fact that she knew every yard of the desolate moor prevented her from being lost completely.

And now the firm thud of hoofs gave place to an ominous squelching. Merle tensed her fingers tightening on the reins as she bent forward—her eyes straining in search of a familiar landmark.

A fitful gleam of moonlight, pene-

trating the mist, revealed the withered oak tree to her right. Merle pulled the reins in the nick of time. For a heart-palpitating moment Beauty floundered in the treacherous quagmire—and then once more his hoofs struck firm ground—the one narrow track of rock amid an ocean of mud.

Merle had discovered the trail weeks ago. It led straight across the marsh—with one dangerous gap that had to be jumped!

Beauty was ready for that daring leap, and as Merle's hand came down on his flank, the gallant animal rose, his hoofs flailing—to land among the tangled bushes and trees on a natural island in the centre of the quagmire.

A little lump of relief in her throat Merle slid from the saddle. She knew only too well the risk she was running each time she made the leap—the consequences of a momentary error of judgment, a single false step on Beauty's part.

But it was imperative that she should come here—and always after dark.

Tethering Beauty to a stunted tree, Merle parted the bushes, to reveal a tumbled mound of rocks—and an opening from which came the dim glow of a concealed lantern.

"Who's that?" came a startled, husky voice.

"All right, Ken—it's only me!"

"Merle! Why have you come back?"

The haggard young man, lying on a bed of straw in the dimly-lit cave, raised himself on his elbow, staring at Merle in mingled relief and bewilderment.

Beside him lay the provisions that Merle had brought earlier that evening, on her unfailing nightly visit.

Merle smiled excitedly as she threw off her plumed hat, and dropped to her knees beside him.

"I had to come back, Ken. I've got good news!"

"News?" echoed her brother, as he struggled up, a gleam of hope in his eyes. "You mean—"

Merle nodded, fumbling in her pocket.

"The map!" she said breathlessly. "I found it, Ken—at least—it was picked up by one of the boys from the guest-house, but I got it back by a trick!"

From her pocket she pulled the crumpled sheet of paper which the chums supposed had been consumed by the flames.

Unsteadily she explained how when her back was turned she had pocketed it, contriving to drop an old envelope into the fire in its stead.

"Good for you, Merle!" said Ken, with an admiring glance at his daring young sister. "It was a blow your losing it in the marsh, after the trouble you'd taken to trace it. You say you found the original in the Moorsdale Public Library?"

Merle nodded eagerly.

"Yes—it's a very old and rare map of the district, showing the moor and the few houses that were built around here two hundred years ago. And someone else had been tracing it, Ken—I found the marks of the pencil!"

Her brother's hand shook as he examined the neat tracing.

"Merle, you've discovered more than you imagine! These old houses you've marked—they were there in Claude Martel's days, and a few of them are still standing. The Manor is one, and Moorland Lodge is another."

"Ken! Those are the houses that have been burgled recently! What does it mean?"

They stared at each other in the dim lantern-light.

"I don't know," said Ken slowly. "But whoever is breaking into these houses is no ordinary burglar. He's working on a system—something he's discovered about the Highwayman legend."

"But who—who could it be?" asked Merle. "And why is he spreading those rumours about you?"

Ken frowned.

"Dad once had a collection of

Claude Martel relics—including his old diary. It was missing when our home was sold up, and we could never discover who got hold of it. It's my belief that it came into the hands of some scoundrel who's making use of it."

"I remember the diary!" Merle declared. "I've still got a torn page from it among my things, covered in quaint old writing. Do you suppose it could have been hidden in a drawer of daddy's bureau and have been sold at the auction?"

"I say!" Ken cried. "You've got something there, Merle! That would explain a lot. If only we could discover where that bureau went—the auctioneers might be able to help, if it's still in their books."

Merle started to her feet, her eyes shining.

"I'll find out, Ken!" she promised. "I feel that we're on the track at last—that this dreadful mystery will soon be cleared up for good!"

"If it is, it'll be thanks to you, sis," rejoined Ken gruffly. "You've been a little brick! But I can't let you go on taking all these risks. My ankle's practically better, and it's my job to—"

Merle caught at his arm as he made to stand up.

"Ken, dear, don't you dare!" Her voice shook slightly, and her eyes were tender. "You're not properly fit yet—and the police are still on the look-out for you. I'm not sure if they believe my story that you've gone abroad—and I'm not taking any chances. It won't be for long, now! If I can get that proof the Ghost Rider may not need to ride again after to-night! And now I must go, in case anyone calls at the cottage. Look after yourself, Ken. To-morrow I may bring the best news of all!"

With a light-hearted kiss, Merle parted from her brother, and hurried back to the waiting horse. Once more they took that daring gallop across the marsh, made that blood-chilling leap! Then firm ground was reached, and Beauty strained at the rein in his eagerness to reach the stable.

"Halt!"

A challenging voice rang suddenly through the mist, startling Merle out of her thoughts. A mounted figure appeared from the shadow of a clump of trees, heading across the moorland path with the obvious intention of barring her way.

"Halt, my fine highwayman—spook—whatever you are! This time you're not getting away so easily!"

That boyish voice with a hint of laughter behind its challenge; that upright figure mounted on a grey hack from the local stables—there could be no mistaking it!

"Rodney!" Merle whispered, a catch in her voice, as she drew rein suddenly, swerving from the path.

"Scared—eh?" Rodney exclaimed. "Afraid to meet a human face to face? All right, my elusive spectre, if you insist on a chase, then I'm your man!"

Merle, her heart pounding now, urged her mount to a gallop. She had no fear that Rodney could overtake her—for she was by far the more skilful rider, and mounted on a horse that had no rival on the moors.

Desperately she strode on, Rodney pursuing with a gay "Tally ho!"

On they galloped, Merle gradually increasing the distance between them. The path grew steeper as they left the marsh far behind. Here the fog was less thick, and, glancing quickly over her shoulder, Merle could see the boy riding doggedly in pursuit, some hundred yards away.

Determined to outwit him, Merle drew rein, bringing her horse round into the shadow of an overhanging rock. She would let the boy gallop past, and then double on her own tracks.

Motionless as a statue, Merle sat there—horse and rider seeming part of the rock itself.

The clatter of hoofs came nearer, and she heard Rodney's breathless voice addressing his mount:

"Get a move on, old boy! We can't

let that phantom get the laugh of us this time! Gee-hup! We were close on its heels just now—Ah!"

Merle stiffened as she heard a distant, muffled report—the whine of a bullet as it cut through the fog. Rodney's startled shout reached her ears as his horse reared suddenly, its hoofs flailing the air.

The next moment the boy was flung from the saddle, his head striking the stones. With a little groan he lay motionless beside the plunging horse.

THE VITAL CLUE

ONLY for a second Merle sat as though frozen in the saddle; then, with a broken cry, she slid to the ground and ran across to the fallen boy. For the moment all thought of her own safety was banished. The dastardly shot that had brought about his accident had been intended for her own mount; but Merle, as yet, only dimly suspected foul play.

Pulling him away from his frightened horse, she dropped to her knees beside him, to give a gulp of relief as she realised that he was merely stunned.



Hurriedly Merle screened her face as she found her way barred. "Halt, my fine highwayman," came Rodney's voice. "This time you're not getting away so easily."

Darting to the side of the track, where a spring welled from under the rock, she dipped her handkerchief into the icy water and bathed the ugly graze on the boy's head.

Rodney groaned, half-opening his eyes.

"I say," he whispered dazedly, "am I—am I dreaming?"

Merle remained silent. And at that moment there came a sound of distant shouts and running footsteps.

"They came this way!" It was Frank's breathless voice. "Rodney was chasing the highwayman—I followed on foot. I thought I heard a shot—"

"Father and I heard it, too!" came Diane's high-pitched tones. "We were driving back to the guest-house, after I'd met him at the station. On—look!" Her voice rose shrilly. "There's a horse over there, and someone lying in the road."

"Rodney!" shouted Frank, a break in his voice. "Rodney, are you all right?"

Merle's heart turned cold as she started to her feet. Rodney struggled up, catching her by the hand—but she wrenched herself away, leaving her wet, crumpled handkerchief in his grasp.

She mustn't be found here! Frantically she made a dive for her horse, as there came another shout—in a man's harsh voice.

"Stop, you scoundrel! You can't escape—"

Merle vaulted into the saddle and rode out across the misty path.

A man's burly figure sprang towards her, but Merle's whip cracked snake-like through the air, causing him to draw back.

The whip brushed lightly against Beauty's flank, and the great horse sprang forward, plunging into the enveloping fog.

The shouts grew more distant as Merle rode on, her heart pounding, the blood throbbing wildly in her temples.

She knew that the "ghost" hunt would be intensified after this; but what had happened made it more vital than ever that she should press on with her daring task.

But what about Rodney? How much did he suspect? Had her disguise been sufficient to deceive him?

The nagging doubt kept Merle awake that night, turning restlessly in her bed in the lonely cottage on the moor. But the morning sunlight, dispelling the mist, helped to banish her fears.

She was up early as usual, gathering fresh vegetables and flowers for

her daily round of the neighbouring houses. But first she drove into the town to pay a visit to the auctioneers who had handled her father's estate.

To her bitter disappointment, they could not help her. Her father's old mahogany bureau had been sold to a London agent, acting for an unknown client. It might be anywhere in England now—or even abroad.

Shaking off her despondency, Merle set out in her trap for the Moorland Guest House. She was anxious to hear news of Rodney—and to find out what they were saying about the Ghost Rider.

Merle realised the necessity for caution, for she was not supposed to know anything about the boy's accident.

As she drove her trap down to the drive to the house, she heard running footsteps. The next moment Gwen burst into view, accompanied by Frank, while Diane Layton followed more leisurely.

From three breathless, disjointed stories Merle heard the news she expected—the news of Rodney's accident. Her anxious expression was not assumed as she climbed from the trap.

"Is—Is Rodney badly injured?" she managed to gulp.

"No—thank goodness," Frank retorted. "Just bruised and a bit shaken, but it might have been

serious. Just let me get at the so-called Ghost Rider, that's all!" he added bunched his fists.

"By the way, Merle," put in Diane curiously, "were you out last night? There was no light in your cottage when father and I drove past from the station."

"I must have been grooming the pony," Merle said, with a steady glance.

She was saved from further questions by a cheery hail.

"Why—if it's not the young lady with my buttonhole!" called Rodney, as he appeared just then at the conservatory door.

The boy's head was bandaged, but his eyes held a roguish gleam.

"But you've not kept your part of the bargain yet!" Merle challenged, handing him a sprig of freshly-gathered violets.

"You mean—the phantom's plume?" asked Rodney. "I will, Merle—never you fear! We held a little council of war here this morning, and the phantom's goin' to get a hot reception if it shows up again. 'Nuff said! By the way—his grave expression gave place to a quizzical smile—"I haven't thanked you for the flowers. Just in time for the party Diane's giving us this evening. Are you coming?"

"I—I haven't been invited—" Merle smiled, and just then her attention was diverted by an opening door.

Mr. Layton, Diane's father, had come out of his study adjoining the conservatory. He barely glanced at Merle, as he stepped on to the drive to speak to his daughter.

"Too bad!" Rodney declared. "I'll have a word with Diane—"

"No, Rodney—please!" Merle's heart was pounding, and her dark eyes held a gleam of almost incredulous excitement. "I—I'd rather you didn't. I shall be much too busy to come, anyway."

Rodney eyed her curiously, but at that moment they were joined by Frank and Gwen, and the conversation became general.

But Merle's gaze wandered again towards the inner door—to the comfortably-furnished study, and the carved oak bureau in the corner.

Unless her eyes were playing tricks—unless two pieces of old furniture could bear an almost unbelievable resemblance—that had been her father's bureau.

Just then Mr. Layton hurried back into his study, closing the door, and Merle made an effort to join in her companions' lively conversation.

But her eyes and her thoughts were equally busy; and a few minutes later, when she left the chums to take her basket of garden produce round to the kitchen, there was something lying hidden at the bottom of the basket.

And the spare key of the conservatory, usually kept on a nail behind the door, was not there now!

LOWERING banks of cloud hid the face of the moon that night, and the darkness was accentuated by the fog that crept up from the marsh.

The slender, cloaked figure leading her horse among the scattered bushes was alert for the slightest sound or movement.

If her suspicions were correct—if this last, daring project succeeded—Merle would be able to fling aside the cloak and plumed hat that had served her reckless purpose.

But to-night she must take a final chance. It was the only way she could confirm her belief. She dared not openly challenge the respected manager of the guest-house, for she might be wrong. The oak bureau might be a replica of her father's. And even if it were, the identical bureau it might never have contained the old diary.

She was risking everything on one slender hope. There had been a secret drawer in her father's bureau in which he had kept the highwayman relics, including the diary. If it had been discovered its present owner

would probably continue to make use of the hidden compartment—to keep his secret from possible prying servants—or the police!

Merle's pulses quickened at the thought, as she tethered her horse among the bushes and made her way on foot towards the house. The front of the house was lit up, for the party was in progress, but the windows at the back—including those of Mr. Layton's study—were in darkness.

Swiftly Merle approached the house by way of the shrubbery. Fumbling under her cloak, she took out the key of the conservatory, turning it gently in the lock.

The door creaked open, and Merle stepped into the darkened room. From under her cloak she took a small torch, allowing a tiny beam of light to flicker round the room, till finally it rested on the carved oak bureau.

Her footsteps noiseless on the thick carpet, Merle crossed to the bureau and examined it eagerly. It was her father's bureau—she knew it by a chip in the corner, and an ink-stain that had never been removed.

The bureau was locked, but Merle had no intention of trying to open it. What she had come to find would not be kept in an obvious place. Instead, she knelt down, running her fingers along the beading at the side. To her delight, there was a click and the hidden door shot out—disclosing a tattered book volume bound in vellum.

Claude Martel's diary!

Next moment the precious book was clutched in Merle's hand, but at that moment a curtain screening the window alcove parted softly, and a hand closed like a vice on her wrist.

"So, my fair Ghost Rider," remarked a cool voice—a voice with a hint of banter behind its sternness—"I've caught you at last! And, as you're a girl, I strongly advise you not to scream, or you might startle the household!"

MERLE RIDES INTO A TRAP

WHILE to the lips, Merle stared into Rodney's mocking, blue eyes.

"Y'know," said the boy, "I had my suspicions from the first that you weren't a reckless he-man—any more than you were a spook! And when I found that dainty hanky of yours, it clinched matters. Nice of you to take the trouble to bathe my head, after shooting my horse—"

"But—I didn't shoot!" Merle gasped unthinkingly. "I— She checked herself hastily, struggling to free herself from the boy's grasp.

"Ah!" said Rodney. "Glad to hear that. It rather confirms my own belief. But, to make certain, I'd like a glimpse of your face. You owe that to me for not raising the alarm. Come—hand me that torch, and remove your charming hat! Or shall I remove it for you?"

Merle shrank back, her heart pounding. Despite the boy's bantering tone, his manner was grimly determined. For some reason he had expected her visit—possibly he had noticed the absence of the conservatory key. And he had caught her red-handed, apparently in the act of robbery!

As Merle struggled to get free there came a sound of loud voices and hurrying footsteps in the passage. "I saw a light flashing through a window at the back of the house, sir! I thought I'd better warn you—as there's been another daring burglary to-night. Some valuable jewellery was stolen from the Grange—"

"Great Scott, constable!" exclaimed Mr. Layton's agitated tones. "None of us are safe from that cloaked scoundrel! I've only just arrived back from town. In the house, but we'd better make a search."

"You're for it now, my daring phantom!" Rodney muttered. "A pity, because I admire your pluck—and somehow I can't believe you're such a desperate character! Perhaps I'll take a chance and set you— Yes! Get behind that curtain—

quickly! I'll have a word with you later."

Merle felt the boy's grip relax on her arm. Next moment she was thrust into the curtained alcove.

She heard the door burst open, and saw the lights blaze up beyond the curtain.

"Rodney!" exclaimed Mr. Layton in amazement. "What are you doing here?"

"Thought I heard a noise, sir," explained Rodney coolly, "but it must have come from the basement. Could anyone have broken in?"

"We'll soon find out!" rapped Mr. Layton. "This way, constable!"

The footsteps pounded from the room; but Merle did not wait. The precious diary was in her grasp, and she dared not face questioning by Rodney, grateful though she was to the boy.

Swiftly she unlatched a window at the back of the deep alcove. Climbing over the sill, she dropped down into the shrubbery.

"Hi!" came Rodney's terse, urgent call from behind her. "Stop! There's danger—"

But Merle, unheeding, sped desperately across the grounds. Close at hand she heard Beauty's welcoming neigh. Next moment she was in the saddle, and riding out from among the trees. She gained the open moor, then her heart gave a jump. Beauty had stumbled over a concealed wire. There was a twanging sound—and a sudden brilliant glare cut through the fog, as a whole battery of powerful searchlights lit up the moor, turning night into day!

Wildly Merle stared round her as there came a sound of shouting and running footsteps.

"There he goes!"

"Close in—don't let him escape!"

The blood drained from Merle's face as she realised that she had run into a trap—the danger against which Rodney had tried to warn her!

She urged Beauty into a frantic gallop, but more lights showed ahead, and she could hear the siren of an approaching car on the moorland road.

With a choking sob, she reined in her horse. To attempt to break through that determined cordon would be hopeless. If she were caught in the highwayman's attire it would mean certain arrest and questioning. Worse still, the vital diary would be confiscated—handed back to its supposed owner.

Despairingly, Merle slid from the saddle. Though for a moment she was hidden by the fog, the lights were coming nearer—footsteps were pounding among the bushes. Only one frail chance remained!

A riderless horse might be allowed to escape in the general hue-and-cry—if the searchers were concentrating on finding its owner!

And Beauty was well able to find his own way across the moor.

Her hands shaking, Merle dragged off her disguise, strapping it to Beauty's saddle. The precious diary she thrust into the saddle-bag. Then, securing the reins, she patted the horse's glossy neck and whispered in his ear, giving the rein a gentle tug.

The intelligent animal understood her whispered command. With an excited neigh, it broke into a trot—a trot that changed to a gallop as the sounds of the pursuit came closer.

Merle waited, her heart pounding. She heard a sudden, triumphant shout.

"There he goes again—after him!" "No—wait! That's only the horse! The scoundrel's dismounted—it's a trick!"

White-faced and desperate, Merle groped her way through the fog.

A CAR drew up on the moorland road, its glaring headlights piercing the mist.

"The fellow was riding this way, sir!" declared a gruff voice. "He was dazzled by our lights, but he dismounted and gave us the slip."

(Please turn to the back page.)



HER DANCING DAYS in Mexico

FOILING THE BANDIT

LESLEY BRAILSFORD arrived in Mexico to stay with her father's old friend, Don Ramon. She intended to organise a dancing school for the Mexicans.

She expected to meet her brother, Jim, who was ranch foreman for Don Ramon, but, to her horror, learnt from Kirk Denby, Don Ramon's nephew, that Jim was now an outlaw—a rustler!

Lesley, however, did not believe this, and suspected that Kirk was against her brother.

Don Ramon gave Lesley a valuable tiara to wear during a dance. Half way through the evening a masked figure entered the hall and held the dancers up with his guns. And the intruder's appearance was that of Lesley's brother!

"It can't be Jim. It can't be!"

Lesley stared at the grim figure in the doorway, her eyes wide with horror. He looked, spoke so like her brother, but she was sure—convinced—it was not Jim.

Already, at the outlaw's command, the startled dancers had lifted their hands. Only Lesley herself, very pale and with gaze never leaving the outlaw, remained with her arms to her sides.

"You, too, Lesley—get them up! It's not wise to overstrain my brotherly affection."

The quiet, bitter voice held more menace than the harshest of orders, and the masked figure slowly advanced.

Lesley commenced to obey, then halted suddenly. Her eyes flashed.

All at once she had realised his intention, knew the one reason behind the planned hold-up. It was the tiara—the jewelled comb—the outlaw was after. She recalled Kirk's mocking warning about it.

"The tiara!" he had said. "It means everything in the world to Don Ramon—it's a memory."

Lesley's determination, her courage, conquered any fear she might have had. She knew the tiara was held dear by the kindly Don Ramon; there was no time to consider anything else.

As she checked her movement there were sharp intakes of breath from those near her. The masked figure tensed.

"Lesley, don't be foolish!" Don Ramon burst out.

The unexpected moment of drama spurred others to think of resistance, and the hand of a rider slid to the gun at his hip. The outlaw whirled tigerishly, his own six-guns making an arc.

No words were spoken, but the man who had made the move froze where he was. His face went white under its tan.

"You were nearly unlucky," the outlaw said mirthlessly, and turned towards Lesley again. "Don't worry. I've raised my hands," Lesley smiled. "I've taken it for granted you'd be brave enough to shoot."

Her smile, a remarkably steady one, showed a deeper contempt than the words. But none of this caused the outlaw's exclamation.

"I—" He broke off and stared disbelievingly.

Lesley, both her hands raised, stood with the lights shining down on her and tinting her hair—hair that was no longer crowned by any glittering comb. The tiara had vanished completely!

"Sapristi!" someone gasped in astonishment.

Lesley's hands were empty, yet in that split second the tiara appeared to have been spirited away. She had neither dropped it nor hidden it in her dress—and to have passed it to someone was out of the question. But the tiara had gone!

Lesley could almost picture what the masked figure was thinking; his shocked bewilderment and then indecision. Even his icy nerve had been shaken.

Checking in his walk towards her, the outlaw stopped abruptly and began backing away. He feared a trap; taut nerves were on edge. Again the doors were immediately behind him and he was out into the darkness in a flash.

The doors slammed. Another gust of air swayed the suspended baskets of flowers from the ceiling. Grim-faced riders whirled into action.

"After him—don't let him escape!"

From outside came a wild clatter of hooves, the sound of a shot. Kirk Denby's voice rang from the darkness.

"This way—after me!" Kirk called out.

Lesley was suddenly aware of Don Ramon's arm round her shoulders, of other riders sprinting for the doors. Horses whinnied as men sprang in the saddle—the chase was on.

By DENISE COWAN

"My dear, you were wonderful," the rancher was saying. "Lesley, I can't tell you how sorry I am about this. To have to know your own brother would—"

He shrugged sadly. The colour came back to Lesley's cheeks, for a feeling of triumph made her want to cry out for joy. Of course, it was not her brother—but it was no use telling Don Ramon that.

She had saved the tiara. She had beaten the outlaw—whichever he was!

"Please don't worry, Senor Ramon," Lesley said. "I—I'm all right. Oh, and there's something I'd like to show you."

Her voice faltered as her affection went out to him. How she longed for the power to convince Don Ramon of the truth! Eyes sparkling, Lesley reached up for one of the suspended baskets of flowers.

"The tiara, Senor Ramon," she smiled.

From amidst the gay, colourful blooms she withdrew something and held it out. Again the precious, gemmed comb blazed like living fire in the lamplight.

"So eet was there you hide eet Lesley!" an admiring senorita exclaimed. "I had thought eet was magic."

Excited girls crowded round Lesley, everyone laughing and talking at once; the earlier tension had snapped.

"When I put up my hands I lifted the tiara with them," Lesley explained. "Golly, but it was lucky I didn't fumble," she added. "The basket was right overhead, and I was just able to tip the tiara inside."

"Thank you, my dear," Don Ramon said rather huskily. "I can't tell you how proud of you I feel. I once told you that—"

He paused and then drew himself up.

"Forgive me, this won't do at all," he laughed; "but we Mexicans are an emotional people. This is more a time for celebration than sentiment. A pity the dancing must wait until the other riders return."

Lesley nodded, her excited thoughts already elsewhere. Who was the outlaw? she wondered. Who was playing the part of her brother?

"Kirk was outside," she murmured. "He wasn't in the hall when the bandit arrived. We only heard him shout afterwards."

Lesley caught her breath. She recalled the green bandana—the mask—she had found at Bare Pine. It had fitted Kirk; he had given himself away over that. And the bandana

The Dancers Thought It Was Jim Brailsford Who Staged The Hold-up In The Ballroom. Only Lesley Knew The Amazing Truth

was identical with that worn by her brother.

What else had been concealed at Bare Pine? What were the other things Kirk had removed from there?

And then her eyes widened. "Clothes!" she murmured. "Clothes like Jim's!" She paused, and now her heart was pounding fast. "It's Kirk—Kirk who impersonated my brother," she told herself. "He's been impersonating Jim all along. He could easily have slipped from the dance and changed into the outlaw dress. That stray lock of blonde hair would be easy enough to obtain. The colour of his eyes would be concealed by the shadow of the stetson."

The cunning, the treachery of the scheme made Lesley's hands clench at her sides. But was she right—or had she jumped to conclusions? She dare not make any mistake.

"I shall know by the way Kirk acts when he returns. He may fool the others, but not me."

Lesley's anger cooled to a remorseless sense of purpose. In spite of Kirk she would do her utmost to prove Jim's innocence.

It seemed an age till the dusty, rather dispirited riders trooped back in the hall, Kirk Denby bringing up the rear. They shook their heads ruefully in response to the questions that besieged them.

Kirk, his embroidered bolero jacket dishevelled, boyishly tossed his sombrero on to a chair. His tousled, brown curls were streaked with perspiration and dust.

"The posse returns, uncle," he grinned. "We've been outmanoeuvred, outmatched, and outridden. I give Braila— He stopped meaningfully and corrected himself. "I give that hombre full marks for horsemanship."

"Forget it, Kirk; I know you must have done wonders," Don Ramon answered. "Thanks to Lesley, we have something to celebrate. Amigos, let us dance!" he announced with a gay laugh.

Kirk was still smiling when he turned to meet Lesley's gaze. They regarded each other, and the smile died from his lips.

"He's furious with me—furious over losing the tiara," Lesley decided, and her heart missed a beat.

"Kirk, aren't you going to ask me to dance with you?" she asked lightly.

The young rider stiffened, though he smiled gallantly.

"Charmed, senorita," he bowed.

The returned band struck up with a tango, and this time it was Lesley who learned. Kirk, his muscles taut under the silk shirt and bolero, led her faultlessly, for the dance was in Mexican style.

"You must feel very proud you tricked your brother?" he whispered. His glance flickered to the glittering tiara.

"The outlaw, you mean?" she corrected. "Oh, I am, Kirk—you don't know how glad."

Even Lesley chilled when she saw the ruthless tightening of his lips. For a split second Kirk's eyes seemed to blaze.

She had had her answer—the outlaw was Kirk! But there was something else, too. His silk shirt and bolero jacket were wet; not the sticky dampness of perspiration, but water.

Lesley glanced down to hide her sudden excitement.

If Kirk had played the role of her brother he would have had to change back to his ordinary clothes. And somewhere—somehow—he had eluded his pursuers to do it. Then where had Kirk changed? And why were his clothes so damp now?

By a supreme effort Lesley stopped herself trembling. For the first time she saw the possibility, no matter how slight, of clearing her brother and proving Kirk's treachery to Don Ramon.

Supposing she could find that hiding-place where Kirk had changed? There was the chance his "outlaw" clothes would still be there, perhaps other evidence, too!

A SURPRISE UNDER THE FALLS

"OH, Rosa, what a beautiful morning. Don't I wish I could go for a swim!"

It was the following day, and warm sunlight streamed across the ranch-house and buildings. Lesley, bursting into the kitchen, found the motherly Rosa washing-up breakfast things.

"Lesley, mia!" the old lady exclaimed.

She turned laughingly to find Lesley more practically wiping up for her.

"Don't argue—we'll share," Lesley sparkled. "I'm an expert when it comes to a tea-cloth."

She loved helping Rosa, but on this occasion she had a dual purpose; the affair at the dance was still fresh in her mind. Her smile faded when she thought of her brother.

"That water on Kirk's clothes," Lesley pondered; "it was almost as if he'd been sprayed. Yes, I think I can help Jim at last."

She finished off the last of the breakfast-things, sighed, and pushed the window wide open.

"Mmmm, what wouldn't I do for a swim!" she repeated. "Rosa, I suppose there isn't a river or something near by?"

"Si, the Rio Senos—but perhaps Senior Ramon not like you to go there alone. There ees a falls, too," Rosa said doubtfully.

"A falls?"

Lesley tried to conceal her excitement. The rising spray from tumbling waters was exactly what she had in her mind; Kirk must have ridden near a falls.

"Oh, Rosa, I must go for a swim," she said pleadingly. "Surely you could give me permission? If I asked very nicely," she teased.

Rosa shifted uncomfortably and became the picture of good-natured indecision. All at once a relieved smile lit up her face.

"I have eet! I get Dolores take you swimming. Dolores my niece," she explained. "Ah, old Rosa find a way out for everytheng. But eet will have to be afternoon, I'm afraid."

"You darling!" Lesley hated to deceive the old housekeeper, but she dared not risk arousing Kirk's suspicions, for the young rider would be doubly alert. He was the last person she wished to know of her project.

"Rosa, I'll be ready when your niece is," she cried happily.

At long last Lesley and Dolores, a pretty, dark-haired, Mexican girl, were picking their way over the undulating grasslands of the ranch.

"We go to the falls, then, senorita," Dolores said gaily. "Eet is very beautiful at this time of the year."

"Call me Lesley. How far have we to go?" Lesley asked.

Her excitement grew when she learned that the nearest point of the Rio Senos was barely a mile from the ranch-house. It ran through a rocky valley unsuitable for the grazing of cattle; there was little chance of meeting Don Ramon's riders.

"Look, Lesley, there is the falls!"

Lesley drew a deep breath when Dolores called merrily. They reached the top of a rocky, grass slope and gazed down at blue, tempting waters.

PRIZES AWARDED

YOUR Editor was very pleased to receive so many entries for the recent "Best Story" Competition, for, now that he knows your preferences, it will be easier to plan future story programmes. He has read all the post-cards with great interest, and after careful consideration has decided to make the following awards:

1st PRIZE: Ann P. Beardsley, 10, Styring Street, Beeston, Nottingham.

5 Consolation Prizes of 5s. each: Deborah Cohen, 16, Alba Gardens, Golders Green, London, N.W. 11; Valerie Cook, 6, The Willows, Street Lane West, Leeds 7; Stella Dawson, 35, Storths Road, Birkley, Huddersfield; Jennifer Francis, 10, Bassett Road, Parkstone, Dorset; and Brenda Miles, 186 Hunters Hall Road, Dagenham, Essex.

From over the rock-face above tumbled a silvery torrent, which cascaded to the lower level of the Senos; the sound of the fall was unbelievably restful and musical.

"It's wonderful," Lesley said softly, and stood entranced by the sheer magic of the scene. It was with an effort she remembered her mission.

"Come on, Dolores!" she cried. A laughing race as to who could change first took place in the cool shadow of the rocks. Then they raced to the river itself; the sound of two splashes rang out.

"I ween, Lesley, I have won!" Dolores called, bobbing back to the surface.

Lesley did not answer, for at the moment of plunging she had noticed something about the soil near the bank. A line of hoof-prints scored the baked earth; marks made by a solitary rider.

"So Kirk did come this way!" she decided.

Lesley came up beside the laughing Dolores, ducked her excitedly, and struck out for the falls. Her heart was pounding, and every nerve thrilled; at least she was certain Kirk had ridden to the falls.

Yet where was his hiding-place?

"And why should he have got wet?" Lesley asked herself. "I can't understand why—"

Her thoughts ended in a gasp of dismay; she found herself swirling in the grip of the current. It happened so swiftly that Dolores, who had made for the opposite bank, never even saw Lesley go.

All Lesley knew was that invisible hands suddenly seemed to snatch her away; the waters, friendly no longer, boiled around her and rushed with her under the falls. She sank under the surface when that beating cascade from above descended on her, forcing her down. The silvery waters stung, battered her—then the apparent miracle happened.

Lesley, breathless and frightened, came up again to find the falls had seemingly vanished; the torrent no longer pressed down on her. The current had died away, too.

"Phew!" she smiled shakily, and drank in the cool, welcome air.

For the first time she took a good look about her, and an excited cry left her lips. She was behind the falls—had passed through them like she might have a curtain! She was in a wide, natural cavern, which Nature had hollowed from the very rock-face itself. She could stand up, for the water covered a floor of firm rock.

"Kirk's hiding-place, a cave behind the falls," Lesley gasped. "So this is it! But I expect he enters by a much easier way."

She thrilled to a wild exhilaration; it was hard to breathe, hard to think clearly. Wide banks of rock bordered the pool she was in, and on one of these she climbed.

"And there are the clothes!" she burst out.

She darted forward to where a familiar cream stetson, shirt and complete riding kit lay piled in one corner of the cave: the identical clothes to those normally worn by her brother. Kirk Denby's "outlaw" disguise!

There was something else, too—an iron-bound box with rusted padlock and clasps. It was suspiciously heavy, but not too heavy to lift.

"I wonder what's inside?" Lesley breathed. "If only it contains something to prove Kirk's treachery right to the hilt."

Her pulses raced, for already this evidence against Kirk would take a great deal of explaining away. Inside the cream stetson were one or two curly, brown hairs.

Lesley picked up a piece of rock and prepared to smash the rusted padlock from position, but before she could do so an anxious call from Dolores came to her ears.

"Lesley! Lesley! Where are you?"

The pretty Mexican girl had obviously missed her, and was now growing alarmed. Even the dull roar of the falls was unable to drown that shrill note of anxiety.

Lesley realised she she dare not stay any longer; she did not want to explain about the cave to Dolores. Swiftly dropping the rock, Lesley plunged back into the pool and braved the buffeting of the falls once again. She broke the surface of the river to see the tense figure of Dolores gazing from the bank in alarm.

"Dolores, cooeeeeee! I—I've been hiding."

"Oh, Lesley, you're safe!" At last Dolores was reaching down to help Lesley out, her dark eyes losing their frightened expression. It returned, however, as a light footfall came from behind them.

Lesley paused in the act of draping a towel round her shoulders. A shadow fell across the blue waters, and she turned with a start of dismay.

Kirk, his curls ruffled by the breeze and sombrero on the back of his head, stood there with hands on his hips.

How much had the young rider seen? Did he suspect Lesley's discovery?

LESLEY IS BAULKED

"SWIMMING, Lesley? It sure is a wonderful day for it."

The mocking dimple showed in Kirk's chin, and he idly kicked a stone in the river. But his lithe body had a tenseness about it; his careless attitude was a shade too deliberate.

"Dolores took me," Lesley said swiftly. She shivered, but not solely on account of the cold. "We want to get changed, Kirk," she smiled.

"A thousand pardons. I'll wait here. I—er—must accompany you safely back to the ranch."

Kirk bowed laughingly and raised his brows in amusement. But the hazel eyes showed no hint of expression.

Dolores blushed as she and Lesley ran to the cover of the rocks.

"Oh, Lesley, don't you like him?" breathed the Mexican girl. "He's so charming, so—oh, I don't know," she finished confusedly.

"Mysterious?" Lesley tried to say gaily.

The sun was warm, but she found herself shivering; she only spoke because Dolores expected it. Every thought was centred on the cavern at the rear of the falls.

Did Kirk suspect? Had he guessed his secret had been stumbled upon? Would he, she wondered, remove the evidence?

Lesley started, aware that Dolores was regarding her puzzledly. She finished changing and straightened up slowly.

"Why mysterious?" Dolores asked, frowning.

"I meant to say, boyish," Lesley said.

Then they were both laughing again and running out to where Kirk stood.

"You know, I'm going to be awfully unsporting," he said. "I'm afraid, Lesley, you won't be able to go swimming again."

"What?" Lesley's glance jerked towards him, a sudden feeling of foreboding overwhelming her.

"Senor Kirk!" Dolores smiled pleadingly.

"I'm an awful feller, I know," Kirk grinned, "but I don't want to see two nice girls drowned." He flicked Dolores' dark curls. "There's a dangerous current up near the falls. I guess I shall have to tell uncle to let you go only when there are one or two strong swimmers around."

Lesley caught her breath, and the young rider's gaze met her own. Kirk meant to prevent her return!

"Lesley tends to be headstrong," he drawled. "You'll be doing her a great kindness, Dolores, if you'll make sure she doesn't run into danger again. And you'll be helping me, too," he added softly.

"Of course, senor!" Dolores blushed prettily, and Kirk's boyish chuckle held a suspicion of triumph.

"We must take care of our guest," he went on. "Mustn't we, Lesley?"

Lesley's cheeks burned. So Kirk by the unscrupulous use of his charm,

was making Dolores an unwitting spy; the moment was bitter. The young rider was taking no chances.

"But he won't get away with it," Lesley breathed. "I'm not letting him trick me again."

A fierce determination made her lift her head higher; Kirk's antagonism drove her to recklessness. She would come back here and collect those "outlaw" clothes and the box. She would take them to Don Ramon and tell him everything she had found out!

Lesley's excitement mounted. Whatever happened, she must return to the cave before Kirk could plan his next move; she would have time before the dancing lesson that evening.

She was silent for a while as they made their way back to the ranch, hardly hearing the lighthearted conversation between Dolores and Kirk.

The young rider himself, though he laughed back at Dolores, kept casting curious glances at Lesley.

Lesley's plan had now become clear in her mind, and with a sudden lifting of her heart she turned to the other two and joined in the chatter.

She noted the little frown on Kirk's face at her change of manner, and could not help smiling.

"Oh, well," she said gaily to the Mexican girl, "if Senor Kirk will not allow us to bathe there, then we'll



"I'm afraid, Lesley, you won't be able to go swimming again," said Kirk. Lesley gave a gasp of dismay, for she realised that the young rider was determined to prevent her returning to the waterfall.

just have to find a place that does suit him, won't we?"

"Oh, yes, Lesley. It would be lovely!" breathed Dolores, her eyes sparkling.

"But let's forget it now," Lesley went on, "and talk of the dancing!" They arrived back at the ranch, Lesley gay and smiling, and aware more than once that Kirk was glancing at her thoughtfully.

Lesley turned to Dolores. "Thanks for a wonderful time, Dolores," she smiled. "And don't forget, I expect you at my dancing class to-night."

Joyously, Lesley entered the ranch-house and all but bumped into Don Ramon. The rancher regarded her, a mischievous twinkle in his clear eyes.

"Lesley, do you think you could endure quite a lot of dancing to-night?"

"Endure it—I'd love it!" Lesley hugged his arm—and let go as quickly when she realised how her enthusiasm had swept her away. "Oh, I'm sorry," she laughed, colouring up.

"Why sorry?" Don Ramon asked seriously. "My dear, it is nothing to be ashamed of to be happy. But now I'm lecturing," he smiled. "It's a rather bad habit of mine. Lesley, I have a surprise for you."

"Another surprise!" Lesley whispered, eyes shining.

"A celebration—for what you did yesterday. I've been keeping it a secret, my dear," the rancher chuckled. "To-night we're going to hold a real dance. I've sent riders to all haciendas, and the hall is being prepared at this moment. We are holding it in traditional Mexican style."

"A traditional dance!" Lesley whispered.

She hardly knew what to say, for the sheer delight the surprise brought overwhelmed her. She was totally unprepared for what occurred next.

"So you'd better start getting ready now," smiled Don Ramon. "There'll be a lot for you to do, I'm afraid. Our hostess will have to supervise her own preparations."

Lesley tried to conceal her dismay, but her heart sank when she recalled the desperate urgency of her mission—the return to the cave.

"It seems you'll be busy, Lesley." The amused tones of Kirk spoke from over her shoulder. "If I were you I'd get along to the hall."

"No time to waste," Don Ramon laughed.

Still Lesley remained where she

was; she had a nightmare feeling she was caught in a trap. The evidence—the vital evidence in the cave! Kirk would never leave it there long.

The young rider sauntered across to the door.

"Well, I guess you won't need me any further, uncle. If you don't mind, I'll be getting along. There—er—are one or two things to attend to."

In a wave of horror Lesley guessed his intention; knew as surely as if he had spoken aloud. Kirk, who had once seen her near to the falls, was running no risk of exposure.

"He's going back—going now!" She felt the colour go from her cheeks. "He means to take the evidence away. Oh, what can I do?"

What could she do, indeed? How could she possibly prevent it?

Lesley's one hope of clearing her brother was to take the evidence to Don Ramon himself. And to do that she had to race Kirk.

With a feeling of despair she watched the young rider swing through the door. How could she prevent Kirk from leaving?

Will Lesley be able to return to the cave and secure the vital evidence she needs to prove her brother's innocence? This serial becomes more exciting than ever next week.



Detective June's STRANGEST CASE

A SURPRISE FOR JUNE

UNDER the name of Carolyn Stuart, June Gaynor, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous detective, joined a film company at lonely Knoll Castle. She was secretly investigating the activities of a figure known as the Green Archer.

She learnt that a man staying at the castle, impersonating her Uncle Noel, was really the Green Archer.

As a result of the Green Archer's scheming, June was forced to become a fugitive. But she was joined by Noel, who had escaped from the Green Archer's clutches. Together they discovered that the Green Archer and his confederates intended making copies of the famous Van Dyke curios in a secret room beneath the castle.

June and Noel were caught there by the Green Archer. June managed to get away, but before she could get far she was caught by one of the Green Archer's men, and led back towards the secret room.

THE fight in the secret room was over.

June Gaynor realised that as soon as she came in sight of the doorway.

One of the combatants lay stretched out on the floor; the other stood over him, brushing the dust off his clothes. So alike were the two men that it was impossible to tell them apart; only by their clothes could they be identified.

The real Noel had worn a dark sports jacket, and—

A cry of distress broke from June's lips.

It was the limp, unconscious figure on the floor which wore the Harris tweed coat—not the one now dabbing at a cut on his cheek.

Then it was her uncle who had been knocked out!

"Nunky!" she gulped, and, breaking free from Captain Kummel's grip, she darted forward, to drop to her knees beside the limp figure, pillowing his head in her lap. He groaned, but did not stir, while his triumphant rival glared across at Captain Kummel and the men from the tramp steamer.

"So you've turned up at last, have you?" he snapped. "And about time, too! Your negligence in letting Raymond escape nearly ruined all our plans. If I hadn't managed to get the better of him, we'd have been snuppered!"

The rebuke brought a hot, resentful flush to Captain Kummel's weather-beaten face.

"Do not dare to blame me!" he roared. "I left Raymond tied up and well guarded. If the fool I left in charge had been vigilant—" Breaking off, he scowled down at the man June was trying to restore to consciousness. "Ach, but what happened?" he demanded. "How did Raymond manage to gain entrance to the secret room? It seems to me.

Green Archer, that you also have been careless!"

"Careless my foot!" was the irate retort. "Raymond himself couldn't have taken more precautions than I did. But that girl—he glowered at June—"Is as artful as a cartload of monkeys! It's uncanny the way she discovered all our secrets, and if she had escaped—"

He drew in a grim breath, then abruptly his frown faded and he smiled, looking very much the calm, confident impostor whom June had come to know so well.

"But there is no need to worry now," he declared. "They are both in our power, and so there is no danger of our plans leaking out!"

Captain Kummel also became amiable. He beamed at the man he had addressed as Green Archer.

"Ja, ja! That is so, my friend—and this time neither of them shall escape. I will see to that. You can leave them safely with me!"

But the other shook his head. "No! I'll see them aboard the steamer myself. I'm taking no more risks—especially with that girl! She's the chief danger!"

"But, my friend, you have work to do in the castle. There is a bonfire to light!"

"That can wait. I'm not going to put our plan into operation until I've made certain that Raymond and his niece are safely locked up. You and your men can handle Raymond. I'll take the girl over myself!"

And roughly he seized June by the arm and dragged her to her feet.

"Come on!" he ordered.

Defiantly June faced him, though her heart was pounding.

"I won't go with you!" she panted.

"I won't—" She finished with a muffled scream, for, clapping a hand over her mouth, her captor had swung her up into his arms. Next moment he was carrying her, kicking and struggling, back down the underground passage.

Stinging tears rose to June's eyes. She knew herself to be helpless, and despair engulfed her. Nothing could save her uncle and herself now. They were doomed to be imprisoned on the tramp steamer anchored out in the bay, and there they would stay until the Green Archer and his men had completed their stupendous coup.

She quivered with impotent fury as she thought of the impostor's plans.

First he intended to destroy all the valuable film gear and costumes stored in the West Wing, thus making certain that Theodore Cronberg would have to abandon his film.

Then, when the film unit had been driven out of the castle, he and his gang would finish manufacturing the worthless replicas that they intended to substitute for the priceless Van Dyke curios which the impostor, still posing as the real Noel, was to travel to New York to collect.

Sooner or later, of course, the substitution was bound to be discovered, but—

June groaned.

Then it would be too late. The Green Archer would have vanished with his booty, and no one would ever believe Noel's story about a double. It would be thought that he himself was the thief.

Never had the girl detective felt so wretched or more hopeless. She ceased her futile struggles and allowed herself to be carried through Rainbow Cave and down the beach.

As the water's edge was neared two motor-boats could be seen moored in the shallows, and suddenly there came a challenging shout:

"Who goes there?"

June's captor glared impatiently at the burly seaman who had emerged from behind a rock and now barred the way with a levelled rifle.

"The Green Archer, you fool!" he snapped. "Stand aside. We've captured this confounded girl and her uncle. You'd better go along and help Kummel and the others with Raymond. He's a tricky customer!"

Lowering his rifle, the seaman nodded and started walking slowly up the beach, while June's captor waded into the salty water. Next moment the girl detective found herself dumped into the stern of one of the motor-boats.

Realising that this was her last chance to escape, she struggled to her feet, but before she could make a desperate leap for liberty there came an urgent hiss.

"Stay where you are, my dear!"

June was so astounded that she stood as if petrified, staring incredulously at her captor.

While with one hand he freed the painter, with the other he gestured reassuringly.

"It's all right—it's me—the real Noel," he whispered.

With a gasp June sank down on to the stern seat, hardly able to believe her own ears.

"But—" she began.

The man who claimed to be her uncle gave another warning gesture, then scrambled into the boat and bent over the engine. There was a broad grin on his face.

"Sorry I had to be a bit rough, my dear, but I didn't dare let any of those rogues suspect the truth—that it was I who won the fight, not that impostor!"

June's heart gave a wild bound of delight, for her last doubt had gone. This really was her detective uncle whom she admired and adored. Nevertheless, there was bewilderment in her blue eyes.

Concluding Chapters Of
PETER LANGLEY'S
Grand Mystery Serial

"But your coat, Nunky!" she gasped. "It was you who wore the sports coat!"

Noel chuckled as he started up the engine.

"I know I did, my dear, but I switched over jackets just before you and Kummel arrived on the scene. Hearing your voices, I realised that there was only one hope for us—that was for me to pose as the impostor!"

June gasped again, and never had she felt so proud of her uncle. Brilliant in its simplicity had been his plan—and it had succeeded! Already the motor-boat was carrying them away from their enemies.

"Oh, but you were simply wizard, Nunky!" she exclaimed, and, crossing to his side, she gave him a fond hug. "You had me completely fooled, as well as those rascals! But what's the next move?"

The detective, busy steering the boat around the great headland on which Knoll Castle stood, gave a grim smile.

"We must get to Lerwick as quickly as we can," he replied. "It won't be long before that impostor recovers consciousness, and once those gangsters realise how they've been tricked—"

He broke off, and they both tensed as they saw three or four burly figures emerge from Rainbow Cave and come plunging down the beach. "Oh golly, Nunky, it looks as if they have learnt the truth!" she gulped.

Noel took one quick look, then he opened the throttle wide. Only too obvious it was that June was right. Already the gangsters were launching the second motor-boat, and their furious yells, echoing across the moonlit water, made the position crystal clear.

The pursuit had been taken up, and it swiftly became plain that the boat behind was much the faster of the two. At alarming speed it came cleaving through the still water. Nearer and nearer it drew, and June knew despair.

Was her uncle's daring and ingenuity to be in vain after all? Were Noel and herself doomed to capture?

NOEL RAYMOND'S DESPERATE BID

"THEY'RE gaining hand over fist! Can't you go any faster, Nunky?"

The detective shook his head in answer to his niece's urgent plea, and his own eyes grew grim as he turned and peered at the oncoming boat.

"My double's not aboard!" he muttered. "That means he's stopped behind in order to carry out his original plan. Thunder, but he must be prevented from destroying those costumes and that film gear!"

He took another look at the pursuing boat, now less than fifty yards away, then he turned to the white-faced June.

"There's only one thing for it, my dear," he declared quietly. "You must jump overboard!"

Wild-eyed, June regarded him. "Jump—jump overboard, Nunky?" she gasped.

"Yes! Swim ashore! Try and secure help!"

"But what about you, Nunky?"

"Never mind about me, my dear! I can take care of myself!" He gave her arm a soothing squeeze, but though he smiled his eyes remained grim. "I have a double job to do! First, to stop those scoundrels chasing after you, then to prevent my double from carrying out his rascally plan! You're a good swimmer, so you can easily make the shore. Quickly! There's no time to waste!"

And, as if to emphasise the urgency, at that moment there came a whip-like crack and a bullet came screaming through the air.

June shivered. A feeling of dread gripped her. But it was not the long swim ashore which scared her, nor the fact that Captain Kummel & Co. had begun to shoot. All her fear was for her uncle.

How could he possibly get the

better of the armed, ruthless men in the pursuing motor-boat?

She shook her head helplessly, and it was with reluctance that she scrambled to her feet. The thought of deserting Noel—of leaving him to tackle the peril single-handed—was almost unbearable. Seeing her hesitate, the detective cried out with unusual brusqueness:

"Come on, off you go, my dear!"

June took one last look at his stern, commanding features, then up went her hands above her head and obediently she dived.

When she rose to the surface she was surprised to see that her uncle had thrown over the tiller—had sent his boat skidding round in a great half-circle.

What was the idea?

She swiftly knew; so did the rascals in the other motor-boat. For before they could get over the shock of seeing June leap into the water, they received an even more startling surprise.

At top speed the detective charged down on them. Realising his desperate intention, Captain Kummel swung over the steering-wheel, but—Too late! With a thunderous crash the two motor-boats collided, the bows of one splintering the side of the other. There was a pandemonium of yells;



June gave a gasp of alarm as she looked back at the pursuing motor-boat. Their enemies were fast gaining upon them!

then June, looking back, gave a delighted whoop, for three or four spluttering figures were splashing about in the water.

Captain Kummel's boat, struck broadside on, had tilted up, shooting its furious occupants into the sea. But Noel had managed to right his craft, and already he was speeding away, heading back towards the rocky cove where Rainbow Cave was situated.

"Well done, Nunky!" June called, and then settled down for the long swim to the shore.

Long before she reached it her uncle had rounded the headland and vanished from sight. Reaching the cove, he beached the boat, and, jumping out, went plunging into the cave and into the secret tunnel that led up to the castle.

But June had not explained how the secret door at the other end operated. It took the detective five minutes of probing and pressing before there came a telltale click and a section of the panelling swung inward.

Cautiously Noel stepped through the opening. The room was in darkness and he had not a torch, but from the doorway which gave access to the large apartment where the film gear and costumes were stored there came the yellow glow of a lantern.

On tiptoe he stole forward, and the sight which met his eyes brought a hiss to his breath.

Standing beside a great pile of beautiful film dresses was his double, and with greedy satisfaction the impostor was surveying the contents of a plush-lined case he had picked up from one of the hampers.

The castle heirlooms which had been loaned for use in the film!

The bogus Noel chuckled. "It will be bad enough to lose the film gear," he said aloud, "but when that fool Cronberg finds this necklace gone it'll be the last straw!"

With another chuckle he pocketed the jewels, threw the empty case on top of the great heap of shimmering silk and satin, then extracted a cigarette-lighter.

"Now for it!" he murmured. "It won't take long for this—"

He broke off, stiffening. A sudden creak had sounded behind him. It was a loose board giving under the real Noel's weight, as he stepped into the room. Round whirled the impostor, then he went rigid with surprise.

For a few moments the two Noels stood there, silently surveying one another, then the impostor's hand whipped round to his hip pocket.

"So it's you again, is it?" he snapped. "Well, this time I'll settle with you for good!"

And out flashed a revolver.

But the detective had expected such a move and he was ready for it. Even as the gun came into sight, he hurled himself forward and his out-flung hand seized the Green Archer's wrist.

"No you don't!" he gritted.

A quick twist of the wrist, a howl of pain, and the revolver clattered to the floor. Then Noel's right came up in a sizzling uppercut. His impostor howled again as it caught him under the chin. Back he tottered, but quickly he recovered, and, his handsome features now a mask of hate, he flung himself at his double.

Next moment, the two men were at grips, fighting grimly for the mastery. Noel's long period of imprisonment had weakened him, but there was a look of determination on his face.

Suddenly breaking free from the impostor's furious grip, his clenched fist came up in another uppercut. It took the Green Archer on the point of the jaw. He shouted out with pain, waved wildly with his arms in a desperate effort to preserve his balance, then crashed flat on his back.

Grimly Noel looked down at the groaning figure.

"That will pay you for all you've done to June," he said. "I can forgive you for posing as me, but when it comes to trying to disgrace my niece—"

His voice came to an abrupt end. A sudden gleam in the impostor's

eyes warned him of fresh danger. Slowly he turned, and then even his stout heart nearly failed him. For standing grouped in the doorway to the inner room were four glaring, water-dripping figures.

Captain Kummel and his three companions from the overturned motor-boat!

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

AFTER a struggle the quartet had managed to right the boat. Clambering back aboard, they had reached the cave and made their way along the secret tunnel.

It was the grimmest moment of Noel's life. Fists clenched, body tensed, he stood there, hopelessly outnumbered.

The Green Archer, clambering to his feet, laughed, once more very self-assured and confident.

"I rather fancy that I win after all, Mr. Raymond!" he said mockingly. "Okay, boys! Grab him!"

The four seamen closed in on the detective. There could be no escape for Noel. All he could do was to stand and fight. This he did, and with keen enjoyment his double stood there, watching. A minute or two and it was all over. Exhausted, battered, the detective was knocked off his feet, and over him stood Captain Kummel and the others, panting and bruised themselves.

Calmly, almost leisurely, the impostor picked up his cigarette-lighter which had fallen to the boards.

"Now you shall see Guy Fawkes at work!" he said with a chuckle. "I can promise you something, really super in the way of bonfires!" And he nodded to the great pile of shimmering costumes.

Angrily Noel glared up at him. "No, you scoundrel—you shan't!" he gasped, and painfully got to his feet.

But instantly he was seized and, despite his desperate struggles, held back.

With another mocking laugh, the impostor's thumb pressed down on the lighter. A tiny yellow flame flared into being, and, still chuckling, he applied it to one of the dresses.

The silk caught alight instantly, and in a few moments several other costumes were set on fire.

Frantically Noel strove to tear himself free, but his captors held him in a grip of iron.

Sardonically his double regarded him.

"This will give you something to think about when you're imprisoned on Kummel's steamer!" he remarked.

"But the best joke's still to be played. Wait until I get to New York! Wait until I collect the Van Dyke curios! It will be fine fun posing as you, and—"

His amused, bantering voice trailed away, while there came growls of alarm from the four members of his gang. For from outside the room, along the corridor, came the sudden sound of hurrying feet.

"Himmel, but who is that?" muttered Captain Kummel.

The impostor did not waste time replying. He darted across to the outer door, whipping a key from his pocket. His intention was to lock the door—make certain that they suffered no interruption.

But too late!

Even as he gained the door it was swept open, so violently that he was almost knocked down, and a crowd of excited, youthful figures loomed into sight, carrying fire extinguishers.

The Tweenies—and at their head a slim, slender girl who was greeted by a shout of delight from Noel.

"June! Oh, my dear, thank goodness!"

And June Gaynor it was. On reaching the shore, she had been fortunate enough to encounter Bob Staines, Dick March and the rest of the band of young film players, out for an after-supper stroll.

And here they were, recklessly rushing to the rescue. But at sight of the flaring hampers and costumes they pulled up in horror. Their consternation gave the impostor time in

which to recover. With a furious gasp he snatched up his revolver.

"You young fools, you shall pay for this interference!" he cried.

"You shall—"

But that was as far as he got, for, even as he made to level the gun, June pressed down the nozzle of the big, red fire extinguisher she had snatched up on the way to the West Wing.

A powerful stream of pungent chemicals shot out, catching the impostor full in the face. With a howl he dropped his gun and went reeling back, his hands flying to his dripping cheeks.

Bob Staines gave an admiring whoop.

"Good for you, Carolyn!" he called, using the name the girl detective had assumed when she had joined the film unit. "Come on, lads and lasses, into battle!"

And as Captain Kummel & Co. released Noel and came plunging forward, half a dozen fire extinguishers went into action. From every side jets of pungent liquid squirted out. As if caught by a tidal wave, the crooks were sent tottering back, spluttering, gasping, howling.

The impostor made another grab at his gun, but Noel, hurling himself forward, flung his arms around the rascal. As for June, she and the rest of the girls busied themselves now with putting out the fire. Many of the costumes and some of the film gear had been destroyed, but they were in time to save most of it.

The strange battle was at its height when there came the clatter of more feet and a whole crowd of startled, bewildered men and women arrived on the scene. The commotion had attracted the attention of the whole castle.

"Suffering mackerel, but what's going on here?" Theodore Cronberg, chewing in angry alarm on his inevitable cigar, peered in amazement through the curtain of smoke and fumes. "Who the thump are all these hoodlums, and who—"

He ended with a stentorian roar as he saw the man he believed to be the famous detective hurled flat.

"Noel Raymond!" he gasped, then his cigar fell to the floor and with bulging eyes he stared at the dishevelled, panting figure who had knocked down the impostor. "Suffering mackerel, but there are two or them!" he bellowed.

At that moment Captain Kummel & Co., drenched and despairing, made to escape, but from Bob Staines there came a quick, urgent shout:

"Quick—grab them! Don't let them get away!"

As he spoke, he let fly with his empty fire extinguisher. Dick Staines and the others followed his example. Then there was an excited rush forward, in which even the rest of the bewildered film actors joined. The gangsters were grabbed, overwhelmed, and held tight.

Theodore Cronberg dazedly surveyed the scene again, then his pent-up emotions found vent in another stentorian roar.

"Suffering mackerel, but what's it all mean?" he demanded.

June, black smuts on her face, her frock and coat dripping wet, turned and smiled.

"It means the end of the Green

Archer," she replied, and happily she pointed to the groaning, now sullen impostor who lay outstretched at the real Noel's feet.

NO one at Knoll Castle got to bed until the early hours. There was so much to see—so much to explain—so much to do.

First of all, the gangsters had to be tied up. Then the authorities had to be warned to see that those still aboard the tramp steamer did not escape. Next, June—and Noel, too, of course—had to relate all that had happened.

The film unit listened in both amazement and admiration, especially Bob Staines and the rest of the Tweenies. Enthralled, not one of them attempted to interrupt. Even the fat, excitable film producer was reduced to silence. Only when June led the way down through the underground passage and displayed the strange wonders of the secret room did Mr. Cronberg speak, then he sucked in an awe-stricken breath.

"What a story! What a story!" he muttered. "Suffering mackerel, but this beats the band! This—"

Breaking off, he turned and went rushing excitedly from the room. Used as they were to his temperamental ways, everyone gaped.

"Hey, Mr. Cronberg, where are you going?" gasped James Weatherly, the usually stolid business manager.

The film producer, a thrilled gleam in his eyes, threw up his hands in a wild gesture.

"I'm going to tear up that darn film script!" he roared. "The story we've just been told will beat it to a frazzle, and first thing to-morrow it's going to be written!"

And Theodore Cronberg was as good as his word.

The original theme was scrapped, and in its place appeared the amazing adventures which had gone to make up what had been Detective June's strangest case.

Of course, both June and Noel were featured in it, and never had they enjoyed themselves so much. But the most exciting time of all came on the day before they were to sail to America to collect the famous Van Dyke curios. Then, in company with Theodore Cronberg and the other members of the film unit, they attended a pre-view of the Green Archer film.

With absorbed interest June watched herself reacting those thrilling days at Knoll Castle, and when it was all over she gave a happy sigh and turned to the plump film producer.

"Well, what did you think of it?" she asked.

Theodore Cronberg beamed. "It'll be a riot!" he declared. "You put up a superb performance, my dear!"

June's eyes sparkled.

"You really think I'm a success as a film actress, then?" she said.

The film producer coughed and chewed at his inevitable cigar.

"You did extremely well, my dear, but it wasn't your acting ability I was thinking about. It was your detective work. That was brilliant!"

"Hear, hear!" put in Noel Raymond, and proudly he gazed at his niece. "If ever they awarded an Oscar for mystery-solving, June, you would win it!"

Theodore Cronberg beamed his agreement, then with podgy fingers he fished a little leather case out of his breast pocket.

"And that reminds me," he said. "I have something for you, my dear. Not an Oscar, but a little memento of your adventures at the castle, subscribed for by everyone there."

And he put the little case in June's hand. Wonderingly she opened it, then she caught in her breath in thrilled delight. For reposing there, in a soft, white plush bed, was a brooch made in the shape of a medieval bowman—a miniature Green Archer picked out in glittering, shimmering emeralds.

THE END.

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JOY-

The Girl With a 100 Voices



By IDA MELBOURNE

UNLUCKY JOY

"OF course you cannot come to the reception, Joy. You have lost your ticket, and must take the consequences."

Joy's Aunt Jemima spoke sternly, and in a tone of finality.

"It will teach you a lesson," added Joy's Cousin Hypatia loftily. "You should not have been so careless!"

Joy sighed and fumed. It was frightful. She had looked forward to this reception. Myrtruda Myng, the film star, was paying a visit to the nearby town, and a great reception, with brass band and a procession and luncheon, had been planned.

Aunt Jemima had managed to obtain a ticket, and tickets for Hypatia and Joy, too; but owing to a piece of bad luck, Joy's had been mislaid.

"But, Aunt," she said, "I had a ticket, so surely I can get in. We can explain—"

"Enough, Joy. I refuse to explain. You will have to stay at home," said Aunt Jemima severely. "The taxi has arrived, and we must go. We'll tell you all about it afterwards."

Down the path went Aunt Jemima and Hypatia in garden-party clothes, gay and delightful. Joy, too, wore her prettiest summer frock and hat; but like Cinderella, she was doomed to stay at home.

"Oh, if only I could get there—just get there," she fumed. "I know I could jolly well get inside the barrier without a ticket. But if Aunt won't take me in the car with them—"

She could not get there in time except by car, for the station was some miles away.

If she could borrow their car; if she could delay them—

She could easily send the car back for them from the station. But how to detain them?

Joy hurried down to the gate, and saw Hypatia glance round at the back of her frock. And at once Joy knew the way to victory.

Standing just behind her cousin as she passed through the gateway, Joy used her wonderful gifts of ventriloquism and mimicry. She made a most realistic imitation of rending material.

Zzzzzzzik!

Hypatia put a hand to her heart and, with goggling eyes, wheeled. The sound had come from behind her.

"I've torn my frock," she wailed. Joy jumped to the rescue.

"My goodness—fling this round you," she said and, hurrying past Aunt Jemima, she wrapped the car rug round Hypatia protectingly.

"Hypatia, you'll have to wear your

blue," said Aunt Jemima. "Quick—hurry! Oh dear, what a nuisance! You must have caught it on the gate."

Hypatia turned, and her voice came back as she moved away—at least, it seemed to come back. It was, in fact, Joy who spoke, still ventriloquising and imitating her cousin's voice.

"Mother—come, too, please."

"Very well, Hypatia!" agreed Aunt Jemima, and hurried into the house.

Joy could have skipped with glee. Of course, when they got upstairs they would know that no damage had been done to the frock—but by then Joy would be on her way in the taxi.

"Aunt—I'll go on and tell them to hold up the reception till you get there," Joy shouted up the stairs.

Then she hurried to the taxi, to find the driver reading a book.

"Oh, driver, please take my niece to the reception and then come back for me," Aunt Jemima's voice seemed to say. "Hurry!"

Joy's ventriloquism deceived the driver, who without looking back threw down his book as he heard the door open and shut. He started his engine just as Aunt Jemima came hurrying from the cottage.

Before Aunt Jemima reached the gate, however, the car was going off down the road.

"Oh, the stupid girl!" she cried furiously. "Fancy Joy thinking they would hold up the reception for us!"

That wasn't what Joy had thought at all; but she had had to give her aunt some reason for her going off in the taxi, apart from sheer open defiance.

Joy had taken the passenger's seat beside the driver, and now she smiled at him.

"It'll be a grand do," she said. "Yes—this Myrtruda Myng certainly is popular," he agreed. "I've seen her a good many times, and heard her, too, on the radio."

"So have I," smiled Joy. "I suppose you know her voice as well as mine?"

"Better."

"If we turned on the radio we might hear her," said Joy, eyes twinkling as she decided to try out her ventriloquism and mimicry on the taxi-driver.

He switched on the car radio set, and Joy, as she stooped to tune it, gave her imitation of Myrtruda's voice.

"I am delighted to be in this country again," she said. "The policemen are so wonderful but the taxi-drivers are even more wonderful. I think they're adorable—so polite—so gallant!"

Joy looked up at the driver and saw his pleased smirk.

"That was Myrtruda, was it?" asked Joy, switching over to another station.

"Of course. A nice girl. She's got the right ideas," said the taximan.

Joy smiled, pleased at the success of her little act.

Then the car arrived at the station yard, already thronged with people awaiting the arrival of Myrtruda Myng.

Out stepped Joy. So far so good, but now—how to get past the barrier without a ticket. She had told Aunt Jemima she could do it. But could she?

A young policeman stood on guard at the barrier.

"No ticket—no entry!" he was saying firmly. "The only person who can come in without a ticket is Myrtruda Myng. Of course, you are that lady travelling incognito?"

There was a chorus of mirth from the onlookers, for the person seeking entry was a portly man. But Joy, instead of laughing, drew up as though she had had an electric shock.

An idea—a startling, reckless idea—had just come to her.

Dare she do it? Could she make it work?

Joy braced herself, and then stepped boldly up to the policeman.

TOO CLEVER

JOY had determined that no one was going to prevent her being present when Myrtruda Myng received her official welcome—not even the lack of a ticket, not even the presence of Aunt Jemima and Cousin Hypatia.

Holding her hanky up to her face—since although she might sound like the film star she did not look like her—Joy tipped her wide-brimmed summer hat sideways and took the chance of a lifetime.

"Officer, would you know Myrtruda Myng's voice if you heard it?" she whispered confidentially to the young constable.

He smiled, and twitched at his moustache.

"I've heard it often enough," he said. "A charming voice—"

Then his expression changed and his eyes

**The Kidnappers Got More
Than They Bargained For
When They Captured
Ventriloquist Joy**

rounded. Suddenly he realised that that very voice had addressed him now.

As she met his astonished gaze Joy put her handkerchief up to her face as though dabbing something from her left eye—thereby obscuring her features.

"Sssh! This must be kept most secret," Joy said in Myrtruda's honey voice. "You do understand?" The young constable was thrilled—and thought he did understand.

"Well—I—you've come to the right chap, miss," he said softly. "Has something gone wrong?"

"Sssh! I cannot explain," said Joy in an appealing tone. "But I simply must get through this throng with absolutely nobody even guessing who I am!"

"Leave it to me, miss," said the constable.

With no suspicion or doubt, he opened the barrier and marched through with Joy behind him. At least, he thought she was behind him; but no sooner had he gone a few yards than Joy quickly slipped aside and mingled with the throng inside the barrier.

So far so good—she was in! "Goody goody!" she chortled. But just when Joy thought she had lost herself in the crowd someone touched her arm.

"Miss Myng," said a soft voice. Joy gave a jump, hastily put her hanky to her face, and turned to see a man with down-turned hat-brim standing beside her.

"Be a sport, Miss Myng—let me have your photograph," he said.

Joy was in a quandary. What on earth should she do? People were listening. However good her voice was as an imitation, her face was her own and not Myrtruda's! There would be a shout of "Impostor!"—the policeman would come back, and—wow!

But luck was with her. For now, through the crowd, two stockily-built men shouldered their way.

"All right, Miss Myng, we'll take care of this," said one, pushing the photographer aside.

Joy did not know who the men were, but she preferred them to the photographer. Now she would be able to dodge away. But then she became aware that the men were on either side of her, that they had a gentle yet firm hold on her arms—and that they were making for the barrier.

She was on her way out again! Suddenly Joy saw their objective: they were making for a waiting car drawn up at the kerb; for a man standing there beside it had waved to them.

"Oh, golly!" groaned Joy in alarm. They were taking her off by car! Her part as Myrtruda had been played too well—and she was being rescued by a kind of bodyguard who evidently had been told to keep an eye on the film star.

That was how it seemed to Joy, and she was in a mental whirl as she stepped into the car. She had no choice. One man went into the back seat first, and almost pulled her in; the other followed and practically pushed.

"Keep your face covered, Miss Myrtruda," said the man on the right, as the car moved clear of the crowds. "And now think fast, act fast. The pearls!"

"Pup—pearls?" stuttered Joy. "Quit kidding. The pearls!" repeated the man, rustling fingers and thumbs at her. "We know you've got 'em. All we want are the pearls, and then we'll drop you anywhere along the road to walk back to the reception. But we want those pearls here and now!"

KIDDING THE KIDNAPPERS

Of course, it was all Joy's fault. She knew that. She had been a jolly slight too clever.

With the hanky up at her face, as requested by the men so that no one in the crowd nor the police would recognise her, Joy had allowed herself to be smuggled away—kidnapped!

But suppose she just said she hadn't the pearls, and wasn't Myrtruda, and it was all a bit of fun? There was something in the expressions on the men's faces that deterred her.

"Well—come on—the pearls!" said one of the men impatiently.

Joy thought desperately—and once again made use of her ventriloquism and mimicry. Suddenly a most realistic buzzing sound came from inside the car.

"Look out—a bee!" gasped Joy. "Mind it doesn't sting you!"

The man on her right dodged. No one likes a bee at large in a car. And, presently, both men beside her were ducking and dodging.

Joy now turned her attention to the driver.

"There it is!" cried Joy and, slipping a pin from her scarf, she pricked the driver's neck with it slightly to the accompaniment of a fierce buzz.

The driver yelled; the car swerved right and left, and then pulled up with a screech of brakes.

"I've been stung!" yelled the driver, putting a hand to the back of his neck.

Joy was waiting for a chance to get out of the car. If she could give the men the slip, she could still get back to the reception in time to see the film star—and put Myrtruda wise to this attempt on her pearls. What was more, it would be a good excuse for speaking to the film star personally—if she could get her startling story believed! But first—she must escape.

There was confusion in the car, and Joy took a chance. She could make her voice deep and gruff, and she could imitate the voice of the man on her right perfectly.

"Get out of the car—all of you—quick!" she yelled in his voice.

The man on her left scrambled out, and Joy scrambled out, too.

Once out, she ran like a hare for the line of cottages at the roadside, darted through the first little gate, way, and then halted as she heard thudding footsteps behind her. The men were chasing her—but Joy knew how to delay them.

Grrrrr! It was the snarl of a ferocious dog; and Joy nearly spoiled the trick by a chuckle as the first man pulled up sharply at the gate.

"Hey—there's a savage dog," he called back to his companion.

By this time Joy, on all fours, was creeping along a hedge, hoping to get down the garden to the cottage without being seen.

Unfortunately her bobbing hat was spotted through the hedge, and when she reached the end of it she was suddenly confronted by a man who jumped over a fence in front of her.

"Got you!" he cried, grabbing her arm. Then he gave a startled cry. "You're not Myrtruda Myng!"

The other men came hurrying up at once, and there was a shocked and angry consultation, the sound of which Joy didn't like at all.

"An impostor, eh?" said the tallest man sternly to Joy. "You're coming with us. We'll make you wish you'd never interfered. Get back into the car."

But Joy had had time to think, and into her quick mind had come an idea.

"Can you drop me at a cottage for a minute?" she asked innocently.

"What! And let you phone the police—or bolt?" sneered one of the men.

"Oh, no—only to—to give someone something. You see, I've fooled you all along the line." Then Joy giggled to make them think she was a bit simple. "I'm just a small-time mimic, but I was good enough to diddle you, and now the pearls are safe where you'll never find them."

"Where are they? Come on—out with it!"

"Oh, no, I'm not telling," said Joy. "As soon as we knew you were after them they were taken to Myrtruda's aged aunt near here—". Then Joy put her hand up to her mouth in dismay. "Oh, what have I said?" she gasped in pretended dismay.

The men hustled her to the car again.

"This cottage—where is it?"

"You won't let them know I gave it away?"

"No," grinned one of the men.

"Where is it?"

Joy got back into the car, and in her high-pitched giggly voice directed the driver.

"Turn right here," she said suddenly. "And everyone look right, or we'll miss it. Myrtle Cottage—".

They all looked right, and suddenly Joy cried "Stop!" The car was slowed, and she pointed to a cottage. "But that says Tudor Cottage," frowned the tall man.

"It's at the back of this one," said Joy glibly. "Who'll come with me?"

The tall man said he would, and he opened the door of the car and stepped out. As Joy followed him, a faint yelping sound was heard—as if a dog had been hurt. Joy was using her ventriloquism again!

"Oh, you must have run over a dog!" she gasped, and rushed to the front of the car, looking under the wheels.

The driver got out—and did not see Joy put her hand into the car and sneak the ignition key, without which the car engine could not be started.

She rushed across the road and let out a wild scream—a real pip of a scream.

And then—only then—the three men saw that they had pulled up opposite a police station, a fact hidden from them by their having obeyed Joy's instructions to look right.

They rushed back to their car. No ignition key!

Out from the police station came a sergeant, then two constables, attracted by Joy's scream. The game was up.

The three grim, scared and furious men faced Joy inside the police station a few minutes later. She made light of her trick, and especially of her mimicry—she made it seem that they had foolishly guessed she was Myrtruda. But the police were filled with admiration.

"Take the young lady back to the railway station at once," said the sergeant to a plain-clothes man. "And explain to Miss Myng there's no further need to worry."

The next thing Joy knew she was being whisked off by police car to the station, where the crowds still thronged, waiting for the reception. The film star was just due to arrive, having travelled by a later train after being forewarned of danger.

AUNT Jemima and Cousin Hypatia stood at the edge of the crowd on tiptoe and stared at the station exit as the band struck up. This was the great moment—Myrtruda Myng would appear at any moment now!

"Joy would have given her eyes to see this," cried Hypatia.

"Yes, I hope she is working. She was too sulky to answer when I called to her as we left," said Aunt Jemima. "However, I will describe it to her."

At that moment a roar of warm applause came from the crowd, and Myrtruda Myng came through the exit accompanied by the mayor and a small group of people. But Aunt Jemima and Cousin Hypatia fixed their gaze on a girl to whom the film star turned with a friendly laugh.

"It's Joy!" cried Hypatia incredulously.

The film star came through the throng to the car that was waiting to take her to the luncheon, and Aunt Jemima and Cousin Hypatia stood with goggling eyes as they saw not only the film star and the mayor but also Joy get into it.

"It can't be Joy!" said Hypatia in a gurgling sort of voice.

"How can it be Joy?" Aunt Jemima wanted to know with a gasp. "We left her at home."

They looked again.

(Please turn to the back page.)

THE MERRYMAKERS' Island College



SLICK'S LATEST INVENTION

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

"A TRICK box—" "Slick's latest gadget!" "And it shoots out a shower of flour when it's opened!" "Gee, this is going to be fun!" Sally Warner & Co. laughed merrily. The four chums—Sally herself, Fay Manners, Don Weston, and Johnny Briggs—were standing on the steps outside Main Hall at the International College, situated on Waloorie Island, Australia. With them was Samuel Leander Kaplin—otherwise known as Slick, the American boy inventor. "What's the wheeze?" asked Johnny, with an eager grin.

"I've put the box in Burt's desk," Slick whispered. "He played that trick on me yesterday, so I guess I'm entitled to play one on him."

Sally & Co. nodded and laughed anew. Alec Burt, the sneak of the college, was one of the least liked students there, and it was a fact that he had played a particularly mean trick on the American boy that had got him into trouble with Mr. Horace Gruley, the irascible West House-master.

If anyone deserved to be the first victim of Slick's trick-box it was certainly the unpleasant Burt.

"Jolly good!" chorried Don. "Gee, what a surprise packet for Burt. Come on, let's get along to the lecture-room. We must be on the scene when he opens it!"

"Rather!" But even as he made to go into Main Hall, en route for the lecture-room where the morning's work was soon due to commence, Sally suddenly gave a little start.

"Golly, I've just remembered something, Slick," she said, becoming serious. "You'd better be careful. Maybe you ought not to be playing this jape on Burt—"

"Why not?" Slick blinked at her in surprise through his horn-rimmed spectacles. "He's messed up my chances of going to that Youth Conference in Brisbane this week-end, hasn't he? Gruley will never give me permission after what happened yesterday—"

"That's just the point," broke in Sally. "I happened to hear the Head telling Mr. Gruley this morning that you can go—providing your behaviour is satisfactory between now and the week-end."

"Um! I see what you mean," said Slick, with a frown. "Reckon I didn't know that. Thanks for the tip, Sally. Perhaps you're right, and I should hold up the jape until after the trip—"

"Too late, Slick Kaplin!" said a jeering voice, and a snigger accompanied the words. "You won't be going on that trip!"

The chums swung round, to see a weedy figure stepping from behind one of the big granite columns sup-

porting the facade of the building. It was the figure of Alec Burt.

"What do you mean, Burt?" demanded Slick, with an uneasy blink.

"What I say. I saw you preparing that trick box. Thought you were being clever—but I've been cleverer." Burt grinned maliciously. "I've put it on Gruley's desk. He'll be the one to get smothered with flour, not me!"

And Burt, having delivered that bombshell, walked away whistling.

"Help!" Slick groaned. "Gruley will think I meant the jape for him. There's a note inside the box, telling Burt what I think of him, but as I didn't put Burt's name it can apply to anybody, and Gruley will recognise my writing. Suffering snakes, I've got to get that box back!"

And Slick went charging off. "Come on, let's go after him. We might be of help!" urged Sally.

Her chums nodded and rushed after the American boy. When they reached Mr. Gruley's lecture-room Slick was already inside, having climbed in through the window, and was in the act of picking up a square-shaped box from the master's desk.

"O.K.," he grinned, seeing Sally & Co. watching him through the window. This is it—unopened. Phew, what a relief—"

But Slick spoke too soon. Footsteps sounded along the corridor and then a familiar voice.

"Gruley!" gulped Slick, his panic returning.

"Give the box to us!" hissed Sally quickly.

Even as Slick made to pass the package through the window, however, the door opened and in strode Mr. Gruley, Alec Burt just behind him.

"What is going on here?" demanded Horace Gruley. "What have those students just given you, Kaplin?"

"Er—er—I was g-giving it to them, sir," stammered Slick.

"Don't quibble! What is it?"

"A box, sir—"

"I can see it's a box. What's inside it?"

"N-nothing much, sir. N-nothing important—"

"Then in that case I will confiscate it!" rapped Mr. Gruley. "Only articles appertaining to lectures should be brought in here. Give it to me."

"B-but—" Mr. Gruley did not argue. He took the box from Slick's trembling hand. Slick and the chums held their breath. If he opened it—

But they were spared that disaster. The master placed it in the top drawer of his desk, and then glared at Slick again.

"Are you not supposed to be with Mr. Blackett for botany this morning, Kaplin?" he asked. "I thought so. Then go immediately or you will be late. And you four students—do not stand gaping outside. Lectures are due to begin. You should show the same enthusiasm as Burt, who is first here."

Sally & Co. glared across at the sneak. He had not had the satisfaction of witnessing Mr. Gruley fall a victim to Slick's ill-fated box; but the danger still remained—and would remain as long as it lay confiscated in the master's desk.

That box had to be retrieved before Gruley opened it.

There was no opportunity to do so before break. Then Mr. Gruley went hurrying away, and Sally looked triumphantly at her chums.

"Now—" she began, then broke off, her smile fading as she saw Burt still seated at his desk.

"Got ideas about getting back that package, eh?" he taunted. "I'll see that you don't."

Fumingly the chums regarded him. They went out, knowing that Burt would probably follow them, and then hoping that they would be able to dodge him. Burt did follow; but he hung on to them like a leech. The bell rang for lectures to be resumed, and Mr. Gruley was already back in the room when the chums returned.

They were beginning to get desperate now. Mr. Gruley seemed to have forgotten all about the package he had confiscated; but that was no guarantee he would go on forgetting it.

"You will be interested to hear," the master was saying, "that the Head had arranged for a special lecture to be given this afternoon. The subject will be lepidopterology."

Most of the students looked vague. "The study of butterflies," said Mr. Gruley. "I am sure there must be many students interested in this most fascinating subject. Now there is a beautiful specimen."

A butterfly had just fluttered in

What A Shock For The Chums When Slick's Trick Box Was Confiscated By Mr. Gruley. At All Costs They Must Prevent Him Opening It

through one of the windows. Sally's blue eyes suddenly gleamed, and she shot a swift glance at her chums.

"Oh, it is a beauty!" she exclaimed. "May I try to catch it, Mr. Gruley, so that I can bring it along to the lecture?"

And Sally, tremendously enthusiastic all at once, leapt up from her desk and went chasing after the butterfly, waving her arms and sending it to the rear of the room.

Don and Johnny promptly followed suit, dodging between the desks. Everybody turned to stare, grinning and ready to enjoy this diversion from lectures. Other students started to join in the hunt.

Mr. Gruley, who had been prepared to wax eloquent on the fascination of butterflies, regretted the impulse. Angriily he strode forward—and as he did so neither he nor anybody else saw Fay suddenly dart across to the master's desk.

In a flash she had opened the drawer and extracted the package inside it. A moment later that parcel was reposing in her own desk.

"Cease!" cried Mr. Gruley furiously. "This is no time to chase butterflies. Disgraceful. Back to your seats at once!"

Order was restored. Sally darted a glance at Fay, and then smiled contentedly as her fair-haired chum nodded.

All was well; the situation was saved!

Lectures came to an end, and triumphantly the chums made tracks for Slick's chalet, the trick-box carefully wrapped inside Fay's scarf.

"Not here," said Sally, as they went into the chalet and found it untenanted.

A few moments later, however, footsteps were heard, and then Slick himself came hustling in.

"I say—" he began.

"It's O.K., Slick!" beamed Johnny. "Yes, we've got the box back for you."

"The b-box—gig-got it b-back for me?" stuttered Slick, looking startled instead of excited. "Say, what do you mean? Here's the box of tricks—I've got it back myself."

And he held up a package at the same time as Fay held up the one she had taken from the drawer of Mr. Gruley's desk.

WHICH IS WHICH?

"GOLLY!" exclaimed Sally, her blue eyes wide with surprise as she stared at the two packages. "But we've got it, Slick!"

"No; I've got it, Sally!"

"Then you've got the wrong one," said Fay.

"Reckon it's you who's got the wrong one," Slick insisted. "Gee, there's been a mix-up!"

Obviously there had been. By an extraordinary coincidence, both boxes were identical in size and shape and colour.

"But this must be the right one," said Fay. "I got it from the drawer where Mr. Gruley put your box. And it was the only one there—"

"No; I know I've got back my own box," Slick told the chums. "I saw Gruley during break when he was on his way to the Head. I was still mighty scared, you can bet, and I asked him if I could have my package back. For once he was in an amiable mood, and he told me to take it. So I did, pronto. Then I scouted round for you during break, but couldn't find you."

"And Fay didn't get this box until after break," Sally murmured, still looking startled. "Then—then whose is it and—what is it?"

"Better put it back, hadn't we?" Don began, then broke off as he heard footsteps crunch on the gravel outside, and gave a sudden start as through the window he saw a familiar figure loom in sight.

"Corks—it's Gruley!" he hissed. "Coming here!"

Hastily Slick placed his box on a ledge behind him. That box still contained a bag of flour waiting to

be showered over anyone who opened the lid.

Johnny hurriedly took the other box from Fay and did likewise. Then, somewhat guiltily, the five students stood in front of those packages to hide them from view.

Mr. Gruley strode into the chalet with a swish of his gown. He looked worried, and he was breathing heavily as if he had been hurrying.

The chums guiped. Mr. Gruley puffed out his cheeks agitatedly.

"Kaplin, did you take the right box from my desk?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," Slick replied.

"When did you take it?"

"Immediately after I saw you and you gave me permission, sir."

"There was no other package in the drawer at the time?"

"No, sir."

"No, there wouldn't have been," murmured Mr. Gruley, almost to himself. "I brought along Professor Landvig's specimens after I had seen the Head. Most mysterious—most worrying. Someone," rumbled

Horace Gruley, his voice growing stern, "has taken the professor's unique collection of butterfly specimens with which he intended to illustrate his special lecture this afternoon."

The chums jumped and hastily backed nearer to that box lying on the ledge behind them. Obviously, that was the package containing the butterfly specimens. And they had taken it from Mr. Gruley's desk without permission, mistaking it for Slick's trick-box.

"This is a most serious matter," murmured Mr. Gruley. "Those specimens were placed in my charge and are therefore my responsibility. They must be found before Professor Landvig arrives for his lecture this afternoon."

He strode worriedly out of the chalet. The students inside waited for the sound of his footsteps to die away and then:

"Help! Crikey! We've got to smuggle the package back into Mr. Gruley's desk!" Johnny declared. "Tell you what, I'll slip across to the lecture-room during lunch when no one's about. This is the box—"

"No, that's mine," broke in Slick hastily as Johnny picked up one of the packages.

"No, it's not. This is the one with the specimens," said Johnny decisively. "Look!" he urged, and produced his penknife and cut the string. "I'll prove it—Urrrrrh! Splurrrrrf!"

For no sooner had he opened the lid of the box than a stream of flour shot out from a small bellows-like contraption which had been operated by a series of springs, and showered all over Johnny's head and shoulders.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Good old Johnny! He's proved which box is which!"

Spluttering and coughing, Johnny shook himself while his chums and Slick rallied round with brushes and hopped handkerchiefs.

"Say, I'm sure sorry you had to be the victim, Johnny," grinned Slick. "That was meant for Burt. But I'm sure glad the old trick-box has been opened. Guess I'll put it away out of harm's way. You've all been swell, getting me out of a jam and I'm grateful!"

"We know how keen you are to go to that conference," smiled Sally. "And I've got an idea, Slick. We won't smuggle the specimens back into the desk. What about if you return them to Mr. Gruley just as this professor arrives? Gruley will be so pleased that he'll grant you anything—and that will be the time to ask for permission to go to Brisbane!"

"Attagirl, Sally!" beamed Slick. "But wait a moment. Isn't he going to wonder how I got them—"

"Just say you found them—anywhere you like," chuckled Sally. "Here's the box. We know it's the right one, and just to make doubly sure we'll mark it with a cross. O.K., Slick?"

"O.K., Sally! You're pals, all of you. I'll leave the box in the drawer of this table, out of sight, and then hustle along with it as soon as this professor arrives. And now what about grubbins?"

Happily the five of them went off to lunch, after which they hung around the college gates until they saw Professor Landvig arrive. Mr. Gruley joined him, and that was the signal for Sally & Co. and Slick to act.

They all dashed across to Slick's chalet. Slick opened the table drawer and drew out the package.

"Here it is—marked with the cross," he beamed. "O.K., I'm on my way." And off went Slick with the parcel, making his way towards Mr. Gruley and the visiting professor.

Sally, smiling gaily, made to close the drawer of the table, then suddenly paused, peering down and sniffing.

"Hallo, what's this?" she murmured stirring a little pile of black powdery stuff with her finger. "I didn't notice it in the drawer before. Smells like soot—"

"He, he, he!"

That sniggering sound came from the direction of the window. The chums spun round, to see a pasty face framed there.

"Burt!" snorted Johnny. "Buzz off!"

"He, he, he! Sally's right. It is soot!" grinned Burt. "Slick Kaplin's got the wrong package. He's taken his gadget-box—full of soot this time!"

"What? You rotter, you've worked this trick—"

"Somehow, I don't think Kaplin will be going on that trip to Brisbane," smirked Burt. "I'll be going, instead—it'll be a nice trip, with all expenses paid!"

A BIG BLUFF

SLICK had got the wrong box! Horror filled the chums.

One quick glance Sally shot at the shelf where she had seen Slick place the gadget-box after Johnny had been smothered with the flour.

It was not there. Burt was not bluffing. He must have been spying on them when they had been talking earlier on in the chalet. He must have the professor's butterfly specimens.

"Grab the rotter!" yelled Don furiously.

Burt took to his heels. Don and Johnny made to chase him, but Sally raced ahead of them.

"Don't worry about him for the moment!" she cried urgently.

"We've got to warn Slick! We've got to stop him handing over that package to the professor!"

"Gosh—yes!"

But even as they rushed across the campus towards the main steps of the college building, they saw Slick passing over the ill-fated box.

They were too late!

Professor Landvig was smiling. Mr. Gruley, beside him, was positively beaming and actually patting Slick on the shoulder.

Then Slick saw the running chums and came to meet them.

"It was a wow of a wheeze, Sally!" he grinned. "I've got permission. I'm going on that trip—"

"You won't be!" panted Sally—and told the American boy the news.

"Sus-soot in it!" Slick wailed. "Suffering cats! This'll get me expelled! Blb-but the specimens—Where's that box?"

"Obviously, Burt has got them," Fay said, a quiver of anger in her usually mild voice. "He's going to produce them at the right moment, and be the little hero, and get per-

mission to go to Brisbane instead of you, Slick. He'll wait until the professor is smothered with soot, and you've been blamed."

Slick groaned. They all groaned.

"He mustn't open the box!" Sally gasped. "We've got to get hold of it somehow."

She rushed on towards Professor Landvig and Mr. Gruley, who were now ascending the steps to go into Main Hall, where the lecture was being held. Her eyes gleamed with the glimmering of an idea.

"Good-afternoon, Professor Landvig!" she exclaimed, hiding her consternation and putting on a glad smile. "Oh, I've always wanted to meet you, professor. I'm so interested in lepi-lepidopterology. Please do let me carry that parcel for you. I'll be so proud to!"

The professor, a studious-looking, grey-haired gentleman, was somewhat overwhelmed by Sally's effusiveness. Mr. Gruley stared at Sally in some surprise.

"I can manage, thank you," smiled Professor Landvig. "It is not heavy. Just a few of my best specimens—"

"Specimens!" exclaimed Sally excitedly. "Oh, wonderful! You must let me carry them for you, professor!"

And she almost snatched the package out of his hands.

"Very well," said the professor. "But please be careful with them—"

"Oh, I will! Some of your best specimens! May I show them to my friends? I'll take great care of them and let you have them back!"

And Sally, hoping desperately that rush tactics would win the day, made to hurry off without waiting for an answer. She had the box. What she was going to do with it Sally did not quite know—except make sure that it was not returned to the professor.

"Wait, young lady," said the professor, mildly amused.

"Wait!" said Mr. Gruley. Sally went rushing on, as if she had not heard.

There were more shouts. "No, please come back," said Professor Landvig.

"Come back!" commanded Mr. Gruley. "Sally, come back—at once!"

There could be no ignoring that stern command. Sally knew she would have to obey. Her idea was not working according to plan.

Slowly she retraced her steps. Impossible to do anything with the box; impossible to pass it to her watching chums in full view of the two men on the steps.

Professor Landvig was smiling again.

"Such enthusiasm!" he exclaimed. "But you and your friends will see the specimens during my lecture, young lady. Come, bring the box with you, my dear. Now, my dear sir, if you will kindly tell me what arrangements have been made—"

Sally had to walk beside them as they entered Main Hall. Her chums hovered in the rear, but any opportunity to smuggle the box out of sight was still impossible.

Already students were assembling for the lecture. Mr. Gruley led the way to the dais.

"Thank you, my dear," smiled Professor Landvig. "Kindly place it on the table."

"And then take your place with the rest of the students, Sally," said Mr. Gruley.

But Sally remained where she was, staring with fascinated horror as first the professor slowly put on a pair of spectacles, then peered down at the package.

"My dear sir, have you a knife?" he asked Mr. Gruley. "I seem to have tied this knot tightly. I will just arrange the specimens in their right order and then commence the lecture."

"Very good, professor. A knife? Yes, here is one."

Professor Landvig took the knife and picked up the parcel. In the front row of the assembled students, Slick, standing beside Fay and Don and Johnny, closed his eyes.

On the dais, Sally stood as if petrified. She felt helpless, and was helpless. In a few seconds now he would have cut the string and would be ready to open that box. But now she could not let him open it, could

not allow him to be smothered with soot!

She would have to speak out. There was absolutely no alternative. And that was going to be the beginning of trouble certainly for Slick, and probably for herself and her chums, because they were all involved.

"Professor—" she cried in a choked voice.

"Yes, my dear?" He paused, knife poised over the string.

Then came another diversion. Sally stiffened. Stepping up to the dais, unable to contain his excitement any longer, was Alec Burt, package in hand. A package that was identical to the one in the professor's hand, even to the pencilled cross marked on the lid.

"Professor Landvig, I think there has been a mistake," said Burt, a note of gloating satisfaction in his voice. "I have your specimens—here in this package!"

"You have?" exclaimed the professor in surprise. "But you cannot have, my boy. They are in this box."

"Given you by a chap named Kaplin, wasn't it?" sneered Burt. "He's always getting up to tricks—him and his crowd. I have the

saw the smile on her face. He had been so sure that he had picked up the right package; but now—

"You did switch 'em!" he cried. "But you've given yourself away! I'll have that other package, Sally Warner!"

Sally gave a startled gasp as she found the package she was holding snatched out of her hand.

"And you can jolly well have this one!" went on Burt, as he thrust the other box into her arms, and then swung round on Professor Landvig and Mr. Gruley. "I'll show you that I found the missing specimens!" he rushed on. "And then you can see for yourselves what is in the other box!"

He grabbed up the penknife and slashed at the string around the box he held. He jerked up the lid—

Swoooooosh!

Alec Burt's gloating face suddenly vanished amid a shower of blackness that enveloped his head. There he stood, gurgling and spluttering and howling furiously.

From the assembled students, after one moment of dumbfounded silence, went up a roar of laughter.

"Burt!" It was Mr. Gruley's thunderous voice. "I shall want a full explanation of this disgraceful



"We've got the box back for you," Sally said with a smile, then she and her chums stared, for the boy inventor was also holding up a box. "Say, what do you mean?" he asked. "I got it back myself."

specimens, sir. They're not in the box you're holding!"

"Burt, what are you saying?" demanded Mr. Gruley, staring from one box to the other.

Burt made no reply, but just grinned maliciously. He was not stopping the professor from opening the trick-box—not Burt. He wanted him to open it—and suffer the results. He knew, after what he had said, that the professor would open it—

In that moment Sally appeared to stumble. She knocked against Professor Landvig, causing him to drop the box he was holding. At the same time she also cannoned into Burt, so that the other package slipped from his hands.

Quick as a flash Sally swooped downwards, catching that second box—the one with the specimens in it—before it could hit the floor and the fragile contents suffer any damage. And in the same moment she caught hold of the other box with her other hand. Her arms moved very quickly.

"No, you don't, Sally Warner!" Furious, full of suspicion, Burt also made a downward swoop. "Trying to switch 'em, eh? But I was watching. This was the parcel I dropped."

He made a grab at it. He began straightening up, then suddenly tensed.

In that moment Burt saw the triumphant gleam that flashed momentarily into Sally's blue eyes;

episode. Clean yourself up and then report to my study. I shall be waiting there for you!"

"But—but—" wailed a bewildered, baffled, besooted Burt.

"Go!"

"Hem!" Sally coughed innocently. "You look a little shaken, Professor Landvig. Let me open your box of specimens for you."

Five seconds later Sally had opened the box she was holding, displaying inside the cards of beautiful specimens of the professor's treasured butterfly collection.

"Splendid!" he beamed. "Thank you, my dear. And now, if you will join the rest of the students, I will commence my lecture."

Smilingly Sally took her place with Fay and Don and Johnny and Slick.

"Say, that was swell of you, Sally!" whispered Slick jubilantly. "The way you switched those boxes—"

"I didn't switch them—that's what's so funny!" whispered back Sally, her eyes twinkling. "There wasn't time. But I pretended to—and Burt fell for my bluff! I'm afraid he's going to have a lot of explaining to do—and Gruley will get the truth out of him. I should say you're O.K. for that trip to Brisbane, Slick!"

(End of this week's story.)

The Merry-makers will appear in another grand complete story in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Order your copy early.

GHOST RIDER OF THE MOOR

(Continued from page 88.)

"Confound it!" exclaimed Mr Layton sharply. "Do you think he's escaped?"

"Impossible, sir! We've got our men on watch, with searchlights, for half a mile around. He'll never get clear—"

There came a laugh from Diane, who sat in the back of the car with Frank and Gwen.

"You mean—she'll never get clear! The Ghost Rider is a girl!"

"What!" exclaimed Frank incredulously; while there came an amazed gasp from Gwen.

"I caught sight of her from the window, as she galloped into those searchlights," declared Diane. "And, what's more, I recognised her. I've suspected all along that she was up to no good. She's Merle Eversham!"

Mr Layton stared sharply at his daughter.

"You may be right, Diane! We know that her brother's mixed up in these burglaries, and the girl is doubtlessly hand-in-glove with him—"

He broke off as there came a shout from the searchers. "The brilliant, probing lights had picked out a girlish figure limping through the bushes. It was Merle, and ruefully she hurried to confront the men who were closing in on her.

"Arrest that girl, constable!" exclaimed Mr Layton, as he hurried forward. "You heard what my daughter said. Merle Eversham is the daring trickster who has been masquerading as the Ghost Rider—terrifying innocent folk, while helping her brother to commit these audacious robberies."

The constable's hand fell on Merle's shoulder.

"You've heard the charge, miss!" he said gruffly. "Have you anything to say?"

Helplessly, Merle stared at the accusing ring of faces.

"She's got nothing to say!" shrieked Diane, pointing accusingly. "She is the so-called Ghost Rider. She doesn't deny it—"

There came a sudden clop-clop of hoofs in the surrounding mist.

"So!" exclaimed a stern, hollow voice. "Who dares to take my name in vain? Who accuses an innocent girl of being the Ghost Rider of the moor?"

Diane gave a sudden shriek, cling-

ing to her father, as a horseman loomed in the fog—a spectral figure in cloak and plumed hat, mounted on a great black horse!

For a moment Merle was almost as terrified with astonishment as the other watchers. Then her heart gave a bound as she recognised Beauty; though, even so, the identity of the rider was a complete mystery.

"It—it's a trick!" gasped Mr Layton.

"A trick—yes!" thundered the spectral figure, pointing sternly. "A dastardly trick on your part, you scoundrel, to throw the blame for your misdeeds on to an innocent girl and her brother! From an old diary, dishonestly come by, you learned of a treasure hidden centuries ago by Claude Martel, the highwayman. You broke into the houses where you suspected that treasure might be hidden, robbing as you went—"

"It's a lie!" shouted the man, his face convulsed. "Who—who are you? By what right—"

"Ha—you question my word!" thundered the other. "But your daughter knows the truth. Diane Layton—come forward! Take the hand of Claude Martel, and swear that your father is innocent!"

The spectral figure bent down, holding out a gloved hand.

"No!" screamed Diane, clinging to her father in terror. "Father, don't let him touch me! He's telling the truth! He's come—he's come—"

"He's come to show up a low-down trickster for the cowardly rotter that he is!" exclaimed the spectre in a changed voice, as he vaulted suddenly from the saddle and hurled himself at the white-faced manager.

There was a fierce struggle, and the spectre's plumed hat fell off, revealing the grim, boyish face of Rodney Forbes!

Before the astounded watchers could intervene Mr Layton was sent sprawling into the mud.

"That's one I owe you for the shot you fired at my horse!" snapped Rodney. "All right, constable—he's your man. Catch hold of this!"

Merle, hurrying forward in bewildered relief, saw the boy toss a weighty leather pouch to the amazed policeman.

"The proceeds of the Grange robbery, I fancy," grinned the boy, as he took Merle's arm. "I found it in that secret drawer you left open. Merle—stuffed away at the back. I began to put two and two together, and I hurried into in search of you."

"And—you found Beauty, with the cloak and hat," whispered Merle, her eyes alight with gratitude.

"And the old diary," Rodney nodded. "Layton's notes in the margin confirmed my suspicions—but I still had no real proof. I decided on a bold bluff to surprise the truth out of Diane—and, as it happened, I turned up in the nick of time."

LATER that evening, in her cottage, Merle explained to Gwen and Frank all that had led to her reckless masquerade; the strange secret left by her father, of which she had only a slender clue—a page torn from the highwayman's diary.

"But what happened to the real treasure?" demanded Frank. "Did Layton manage to lay his hands on it, after all?"

It was Rodney who intervened with a grin.

Judging from his notes, he failed completely—and contented himself by stealing whatever he could pick up. It's Merle's belief—and mine—that the treasure's still hidden on the moor—and the clue may be contained in that torn page Merle's been treasuring all these years!"

As it turned out, Rodney's prediction was right. Claude Martel's treasure was found buried under a pile of stones, not far from Ken's secret hiding-place; and Merle and Ken both insisted that the three chums should have their share.

The cloak and plumed hat Merle presented to Rodney as a keepsake.

"Have you forgotten our little bargain?" she asked, her eyes twinkling as she met his glance. "You may hand me a feather from the plume now, Rodney—just to make things square!"

THE END.

"Hetty's South Seas Home of Peril" is the title of next week's exciting mystery-adventure story. Be sure to read it.

JOY—THE GIRL WITH A 100 VOICES

(Continued from page 96.)

"It—it must be her double," decided Hypatia, staring as if hypnotised at the girl in the car.

"Yes, yes! That, Hypatia, is the explanation," agreed Aunt Jemima. "Good gracious, such an extraordinary likeness—"

But at that moment, Joy looked from the car window and waved.

"See you later, Hypp!" she called. Then, leaving her relations utterly dazed and green with envy, Joy settled down beside the smiling film actress.

"Shssssh!" warned Joy. "Not a word about my mimicry, please. I'll tell you why later."

"Just as you like," said smiling Myrtruda. "But, believe me, you've got a great future, if only you can persuade your people to let you have a go."

"I'll find a way," winked Joy. "If ever you need help come to me," said Myrtruda. "You've done me a wonderful turn to-day, Joy. A thousand thanks; and I'll see that you feel like a guest of honour at this luncheon yourself."

And so Joy did—but at her own request, and with Myrtruda's compliance, the part she had played in the capture of the crooks was played down, at least as regards the mimicry.

As for Aunt Jemima and Hypatia, Joy tamed them by giving them a special introduction to Myrtruda, who was so charming and gracious that she put Aunt Jemima and Hypatia in such a good humour that they were grateful to Joy.

(End of this week's story.)

More fun with Joy in another amusing story next week.

FILM STAR AUTOGRAPHS FOR YOUR ALBUM

Kathryn Grayson

Robert Taylor

Lois Sturges

Glynis Johns

Peter Lawford

Hedy Lamarr

Kip Douglas

Ginger Rogers