

"JUNE AND THE MASKED JESTER"

And 5 Other Exciting
Stories For Schoolgirls

No. 770. Vol. 30.

EVERY FRIDAY.

Week Ending July 22nd, 1950.

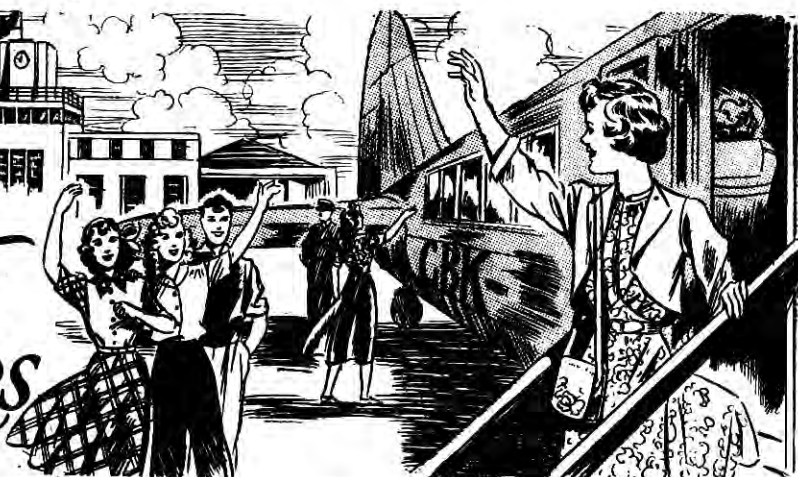
GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



**"THE RETURN OF
COLIN FORREST"**

The HOLIDAY- CAMP REVELLERS



THE LAST SEAT SOLD

JULIE DELMAR received an invitation to spend a holiday at Haley Holiday Camp with a Miss Paget. But when she arrived at the camp she learnt that no booking had been made for her, and Miss Paget had not arrived. It was only thanks to the generosity of her chums—Wendy Rayland and Kay and Gerry Briscoe, that she was able to remain at the camp.

She discovered that a mysterious man and his unknown girl confederate in the holiday camp were after the secret of a fan which Miss Paget had sent her.

By putting together the fragments of a torn letter, Julie & Co. learned that Miss Paget had gone to St. Malo, in France.

The chums discovered that there was to be an air trip to St. Malo, and hoping that they might be able to find Miss Paget there, they went along to the excursion office to book up. But they were told that the last seats had just been sold.

IN consternation the chums stared at the booking clerk, all their excited delight immediately frozen. Not for one moment had it occurred to any of them that the five places available in the excursion aeroplane would have been sold so quickly.

"But—but you were only announcing them five minutes ago!" Julie blurted.

It had been her most urgent desire to visit St. Malo, there to trace her mysterious benefactress, Miss Paget, and discover at last the mystery in which she was so bewilderingly involved. Until five minutes ago that had been a mere wishful dream, because she had had no money.

It seemed that Fortune had come to her aid, however, when she had discovered the unexpected five pound note in the evening bag which Miss Paget had left her. She did not guess, of course, that the note had been lovingly "planted" for her to find by Wendy and Kay, so she had taken it as the happiest omen. But now—

"No, no! You can't mean it!" she burst out.

The booking clerk looked extremely apologetic.

"I'm sorry—but there it is," he replied. "The seats have been booked as a block. I'll admit I was rather taken by surprise, as the bookings have been very slow coming in this week. It is rather a remarkable happening—but one, of course, very gratifying to us."

"I'll say!" Kay said. She was looking at Wendy, who was now suddenly very thoughtful indeed. "And you say the same girl booked the whole block?"

"Yes. Five minutes ago." "Coincidence!" Wendy murmured. "Or is it? Odd, that about the same time we made up our minds to go to St. Malo this girl suddenly found

four friends to accompany her." She glanced at the dismayed Julie; and Julie, even though weighed down with disappointment, very plainly read the thought that was running in her mind. "Who is the girl?" she threw out quickly.

"I am sorry, but that is information we are not allowed to divulge—without permission," the clerk replied with a shake of the head.

"But surely," Julie protested, "you could book us up in another plane. There must be some occasions when you have to run the trip in duplicate!"

The clerk sighed. "True enough," he said. "But the trip is only duplicated when the bookings demand it. We could only run a second plane if we had a minimum of twelve seats for it. If, perhaps, you could find eight friends to make the trip with you—" he suggested hopefully.

But Wendy turned away. Julie sighed wretchedly, biting her lip. That, of course, was completely out of the question.

"Or, perhaps," the clerk helpfully went on, "you could postpone it until next week?"

"We couldn't—at least, I couldn't, because I shan't be here next week!" Julie told him bitterly.

There was a pause. Julie was feeling almost frantic now. They must get to St. Malo! Friday was the only possible day, seeing that she was due to leave the camp on Saturday. Surely there must be SOME way out.

Then Wendy gave a little exclamation.

For suddenly another figure had stepped into the excursion office. It was the figure of the young man in the white uniform to whom she had spoken the other day. She looked quickly at the clerk.

"Who's Mr. Whitesuit? Has he any influence here?"

"He certainly has," The clerk smiled. "That's Mr. Mason, the under-manager. But—"

Wendy, however, was already approaching the newcomer, determined now on charm tactics.

"Mr. Mason—how fortunate," she smiled at him. "You have arrived just at the right moment. You remember me, of course—"

"My dear young lady, how could I forget you?" the under-manager returned warmly. "Of course I remember you. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, please!" Wendy smiled again. "And I'm sure you will," she added

Little Did Julie Suspect
When She Set Off To Fly
To St. Malo What Thrills
Awaited Her There.

By ELISE PROBYN

confidently. "especially after telling me to make sure to see you if I ever wanted to go to St. Malo. Well—" Wendy nodded. "I do want to go to St. Malo—it's awfully urgent. And I want my chums here to go with me. On Friday—"

"Oh!" He looked taken aback. "I'm sorry—"

"Oh, please! I am relying on you!" Wendy pleaded. "Don't say you're going to let me down after being so nice."

He paused, plainly uncomfortable. He tried to explain that the plane was full up, that they had not enough bookings to run another.

"Oh, golly! Isn't there some way, Mr. Mason?" Wendy groaned. "It really is important—desperately."

Mr. Mason looked rather helplessly at the clerk, who gave back a feeble sort of grin which rather suggested that all his sympathies were on the side of the chums.

"Must you all go?" he asked suddenly. "Supposing I could find just one seat in the plane?"

They brightened. Instinctively they looked at Julie, who felt a jump of sudden hope. If there was to be one seat made available then, great as would be their own disappointment, the immediate and loyal decision was that Julie should have it.

"Yes, yes, we could manage," Wendy said rapidly. "But how—"

He smiled.

"I was to have gone on that trip myself," he said. "But—" He shrugged. "Well, I cannot stand up to the suggestion of having let down a charming young lady. So—if you cannot postpone your trip I'll postpone mine. I am in no hurry. One of you shall take my place."

"You sport!" cried Wendy, her face radiant. "Golly, if only you knew what it means to us! Can we have the ticket now?" she added hastily.

"Certainly," Mr. Mason smiled, and crossed to the booking clerk who was looking almost as happy as the chums themselves. After a few minutes he came back with the ticket. Enthusiastically Wendy and the chums thanked him, adding that he could book their names for the second plane just in case it was decided to run it.

In great joy they hurried outside, shepherding Julie, who was now almost speechless with delight. The loudspeakers were blaring vociferously, announcing that tea was now being served in the pavilion.

"Gosh, and don't I need some!" Kay whooped. "Press on, troupers."

"No—wait a minute!" Julie put a rather unsteady hand on the other's arm. "Wendy, I—I haven't thanked you yet. It was wonderful the way you melted the under-manager and, believe me, I am grateful—grateful to all of you. Of course, it won't be the same as we can't all go—"

"You're telling us!" Gerry said

grimacing. "But anyway it's most important you should go, Julie. Gee, won't it be great if you do find Miss Paget. We shall be just aching until you come back."

"Unless," Wendy cut in, "the other plane runs. And then—oh, golly, you won't see us for cloud-dust! But what about this tea?"

"That," Julie said, "is what I was coming to. I've got a suggestion. We can't talk in the pavilion, but we can down at the Smugglers' Cafe. And now," as I've got some money for once

She missed the blush that suffused the faces of Kay and Wendy.

"Now," Julie finished eagerly, "let me stand treat for a change. Let's all go to the Smugglers' Cafe!"

"We're on!" whooped Gerry. And off they went down the rambling path that led to the beach below. In a quiet corner of the veranda which overlooked that strange old cave-riddled island with its tower known as Peter's Folly, they seated themselves. And over tea, with Julie happily pleased to be the hostess for a change, they discussed the possibility of finding Julie's mysterious benefactress, Miss Paget, at last. Would the mystery of the fan and the unknown villain who had made so many desperate attempts to steal it at last be revealed to her?

"But watch out," Wendy cautioned. "I still can't help feeling that those five seats weren't booked by accident. The mystery girl—whoever she is—will be on the plane, and by the look of it she'll have several pals with her. Apart from that," she added seriously, "we know that the man is getting desperate. Goodness knows what he mightn't get up to next. Do be careful, Julie."

Julie promised that she would. Also, she privately resolved she would take a good look at the passengers when she got on board the plane. The mystery girl was bound to be among them, and once she had spotted her she would know from what direction danger was likely to come.

They talked over the details of the trip. Julie, of course, must take the fan, but that must wait until the last possible moment before being recovered from the bank—just in case of accidents.

Then they went back to the Information Office to make a rough plan of the St. Malo streets for Julie to take with her. After that came the tango dancing in the big ballroom in which Kay, partnered by Gerry, won the second prize—a lovely belt with a diamante fastening for Kay and a new ball-tipped pen for Gerry. To the delight of the Hill-Billies the first prize was won by Larry Curtis and Audrey.

There was, of course, much good-natured wrangling and tagging on that account, but for once Julie had no part in it. Her mind was on her St. Malo venture. She was almost bursting with eagerness now. Tomorrow—Thursday—came—with all the usual fun and games at the camp—and Julie was almost tense with excitement. And on Friday morning

Julie and her chums were up early. Immediately after breakfast they all hurried to the camp bank where Julie withdrew her precious fan and tucked it well down into the depths of the shoulder-bag which Kay had lent her and which was her only luggage. Then they set off for the nearby airfield, where the plane was already waiting. They said goodbye to her on the tarmac, and waved as she boarded the plane.

"Good luck, Julie!" called Wendy. "Bring back news. We'll be thinking of you!"

Julie, with a little smile and nod, waved back, then turned and stepped into the plane. She found her seat and sat down, knowing a tense feeling inside her. The great adventure had begun.

Where would it lead her? What would she find out before the plane returned this evening?

THE QUEST IN ST. MALO

HER mind was a confusion of emotion as she saw the other passengers boarding. She scanned each face wonderingly.

Now that she had finally said goodbye to the chums she was conscious of a rather poignant feeling of loneliness; conscious, too, of a suddenly sharpened sense of possible danger. If only those dear stalwarts could have been with her.

"And now who is the girl?" she breathed.

She twisted round. There were, of course, several laughing Haleyites on board. Among them were three or four girls—but not one of them did Julie know. Other passengers arrived, were courteously conducted to their seats, but still there was no familiar face among them. Was the girl a stranger, after all?

But how could she be when she had known so much about Julie? When her every action in the past had proved that she was in close contact with Julie?

Julie found herself wondering. Then, from the observation tower, the clock struck eleven. There were

She fell back in her seat. She felt acutely disappointed that her chums could not accompany her, but had some solace in the fact that the secret enemy was not present, either.

Julie peered eagerly through the windows as they swept upwards.

It was a thrill to realise that at last she was airborne, but greater was the thrill to feel that very soon she would be at grips with the mystery which had so overshadowed her happy holiday at Haley Camp.

Who was Miss Paget? she wondered. Why had she invited her to Haley and then, after arranging to meet her there, rushed off to St. Malo? What story lay behind that mysterious incident?

The plane glided on. Like a living map of green and brown the earth spread out beneath it. Presently the sea, glinting, silvery, came into view.

Julie watched, fascinated, as they sped over it. And then, with leaping excitement, she saw the coast of France in the distance. In an incredibly short space of time they were crossing it, were flying past a big town to their left—St. Malo!

Then they were zooming down to—



"Come on, get out," the bogus taxi-driver told Julie. "And bring that hand-bag with you. Guess there's something in it I want."

cries from outside. Suddenly the big plane began to throb and quiver. Then the steward, looking worried and anxious, came in.

"Miss Bland here?" he asked.

There was no reply.

"Who," Julie asked, "is Miss Bland?"

"Miss Bland is a girl who booked a block of five tickets the day before yesterday at the camp," the steward said.

"And—and she's not shown up?"

"No. None of the five has shown up," the steward answered.

Julie sat quite still. She guessed the truth then. Guessed, too, if all she suspected was right, that they never would show up. For Miss Bland—that sounded a false name—had obviously taken those seats with one idea—to squeeze the chums out.

As far as Julie was concerned she had failed. She must have discovered Julie had booked in spite of her scheme and, afraid of being recognised, had abandoned the trip. But what a shocking waste of money!

That was Julie's first reaction. Her second came suddenly. She rose to her feet. If the other five had not turned up, then surely her chums could take their place. She was about to rush for the door, when it was suddenly slammed shut, the engines began to rev up, and she was conscious of a faint jerk.

With a cry of dismay she turned towards the window, to see the runway moving fast beneath her. Then, with a suddenness which made her feel a little giddy, the ground seemed to be falling away from them. They were rising into the air.

wards the level green of the air-field. Without a jolt the plane taxied to a smooth stop. Doors were thrown open and, chattering and laughing, the passengers stepped out.

"At last!" Julie breathed, and instinctively her hand closed tightly about the bag slung from her shoulder.

It was a thrill to feel that she was stepping on to French soil. A pleasure to hand the forward half of the ticket to the bowing, gold-braided attendant. With the rest she passed through the Customs, shaking her head when a smiling Excise official asked if she had anything to declare.

"Non, non!" she replied, summoning up her best French.

There was a French coach waiting to take the travellers into the town. Julie clambered into it. Boisterous and carefree now that the air-journey was over, her fellow passengers kept up a running fire of comment. But no one spoke to Julie; and Julie, in a way, was glad. For now that her quest in St. Malo had begun she found herself concentratedly occupied with her own plans.

The coach rolled on through marshy flats. Presently the sea was in view, with St. Malo, dominated by its great cathedral, making a majestic picture against its shining background. Then they were passing through the Sillon, the great causeway which connects the town with the mainland.

It was all very fascinating; thrilling. How Julie wished again that Wendy & Co. were here with her! She gazed in awe as they passed the great castle and rumbled on to the railway station. There they all alighted.

"Return, six o'clock sharp," their driver announced. "Ze plane—he go at six hour half."

It was then eleven o'clock, Julie saw, by the clock above the station. Seven hours in which to pursue her quest!

Consulting her map she found her bearings. The Rue de Valenciennes seemed to be the nearest objective and, crossing the square, she made an eager way towards it. Her heart was beating fast now. High expectation spurred her steps.

Guided by her map she went on, crossing several of St. Malo's small squares until, with a little thrill, she saw the name, Rue de Valenciennes, staring at her from the corner of a wall.

"Now to find No. 26!" murmured Julie.

She tramped on up the street, eagerly scrutinising the houses. At last, with a sense of intense expectation, she halted before the green door of a tall, granite bricked building. Almost holding her breath she reached up and pulled the bell rope. Now what did Fate hold in store?

THE RECKLESS RIDE

AT once she heard footsteps. The door opened. A shiny-faced woman dressed soberly in black stared out at her.

"Bon jour, mademoiselle. Que demandez-vous?"

"I—I came—" Julie stuttered, groping in her mind for the right French. But the woman broke in with a beaming smile.

"Ah, you are English, yes? You come on ze visite—yes? I, too, spik English," she added proudly. "What is it zat I may do for you?"

Julie smiled thankfully.

"I—I came to ask—does a Miss Jennifer Paget live here?"

"Paget? Paget?" The woman frowned, then shook her head.

"Mademoiselle, non," she said. "No M'selle Paget do I know—or ever known. Je regrette, mademoiselle."

Julie thanked her, and turned away. Well, that was the first Rue off the list, she reflected—and perhaps it would have been remarkable if she had hit the bullseye first time. Taking heart from that reflection she crossed the square and found the Rue de Valance.

Again she drew a blank. For the Rue de Valance was mainly composed of brick walls. There were only four houses in it.

"Hum! Better try the Rue de Valois," she murmured.

She was beginning to feel a little anxious now. Hungry, too! A glance at her map showed her that the Rue de Valois was quite a distance away, but she felt she dare not relax until she had carried her mission to its successful conclusion.

Wondering which way to take she stood, hesitating at the narrow street corner. She hardly saw the car which drew up until it had stopped dead opposite her. Then she started as she heard the driver's voice.

"You English, mademoiselle? You see ze sights? Bien! You hire my taxi?"

She looked up. The man, a blue peaked cap pulled over his eyes and heavy moustaches drooping down each side of his chin, regarded her with twinkling eyes.

"I charge you not much," he added coaxingly.

Julie hesitated. Could she afford the taxi? Some sort of conveyance certainly would help at this juncture and she was so desperately eager to get going. She looked at him.

"Just two fifty franc for ze hour—take you where you go," he said quaintly. "You like, mademoiselle?"

Two hundred and fifty francs—that was just about five shillings in English money, Julie reflected, and without more ado made up her mind. With a nod she stepped into the vehicle.

"Thank you. I'll take it," she said. "Please drive me first to No. 26, the Rue de Valois."

The driver grinned. Sharply he banged the door. While Julie sank

back he climbed into his seat and with a clank and a clatter started up. Like a bullet the taxi shot away.

Julie, pitched forward, almost hit her head on the glass dividing her from the driver. Too late she remembered all the stories she had heard of French cab drivers and half regretted in that moment that she had accepted the cabbie's offer. With a breathless laugh she sank back, only next minute to go reeling sideways as the car skimmed round a corner.

"Golly!" she gasped, clutching her seat, as the taxi swerved on, round one corner and then another.

And suddenly, bewildered and startled, she glanced through the window. The driver was crossing the Sillon again. He was taking her out of St. Malo into the open country beyond.

"Driver, driver!" she cried.

The car pelted on.

"Driver!" Julie shouted again, and leaned forward, to pummel frantically at the window. "Driver—"

He did not turn. The car hurtled on. They were in the country now, skimming along the road down which, an hour ago, she had travelled in the excursion motor coach.

For the first time Julie realised that something was wrong.

On the car pelted, now throwing her into a corner as it whizzed into a narrow, rutted lane. She sprang to the door.

"Let me out! Let me out!" she cried frenziedly. She grasped the handle. Frantically, fiercely she tugged at it. It was locked.

She knew then the hideous truth. "Trapped!" she cried.

On, on the car rushed, lurching, bumping, jumping. In panic Julie caught at the window strap. With a crash she let the window down.

"Driver, stop, stop, I tell you—"

For the first time she did turn. As he did so the taxi sped over a lump in the lane. Julie's head hit the roof and so did the driver's. Momentarily he was lifted in the air; with a crash came down. As he did so—

"Oh!" Julie cried, and for an instant her senses seemed to swim.

For that jolt had done something. It had dislodged the driver's drooping moustaches! And there, driving on at a speed which would have meant utter disaster if they encountered anything in their path was—

The mystery man!

The mystery man was kidnapping her!

For just one instant Julie felt stupefied, hardly able to believe her own eyes.

Then she thought frantically of the fan in her bag strapped to her shoulder. She knew now that escape from the speeding car was impossible; that she must get rid of that fan. Whatever happened this villain must never recover possession of it.

Hardly thinking what she did, she opened her bag, and took the fan out. With one wary eye on the driver she watched the road—watched: until they bumped over a little bridge which spanned a stream with rushes growing on either side. And with a heave she hurled the fan through the window and saw it, a dark streak against the light, disappear towards the rushes.

"Thank goodness!" she breathed.

With a gasp she dropped back. Oh, if only Wendy, Kay and Gerry were here! What a fool she had been to have allowed herself to be so simply decoyed.

What a ghastly end to that fine mission on which she had so determinedly embarked. Now she had lost the fan in all truth—but in losing it she had kept it from the clutches of this scoundrel. Would she be able to find it again?

"I can—and I will," she thought, remembering the little bridge. "But when will the chance come?"

It was a disquieting thought. She wondered now what the mystery man intended to do with her. The car still raced on, jolting and bumping through the quiet, deserted country lanes. And then, ahead, she saw a great creeper-clad tower rising like a

monument from out of the surrounding countryside and fantastically reminding her for a moment of Peter's folly on the island near the holiday camp.

Dimly, from her map study, she remembered it. A keep of some kind—a keep that remained though the old-time castle of which it had once been a part had long since crumbled to ruin. Abbot's Keep! That was the name.

"And he's going to stop there," Julie thought desperately.

For the car was slowing now, and at last it did stop outside the towering building. The mystery man, minus his false moustache, climbed out of the seat and went towards the keep's stout door. With a key he unfasted it and threw it open. Then with a glint in his eyes he came back and flung open the car door.

"So, Julie—we meet again," he said. "You are surprised, are you not? You did not guess, perhaps, that I should be awaiting you in St. Malo. Come on, get out," he added. "And bring that handbag with you. Guess there's something in it I want."

Julie drew back, recklessly defiant.

"Don't be a fool, girl!" snapped the man. "Get out, I say!" And he reached out a hand and clutched her arm.

"Let go! Let me go, you—you scoundrel!" Julie cried, pulling back, but with a tug, she found herself stumbling out on to the lane.

"Now!" The mystery man swivelled her round to face the tower. "Get going!" he commanded.

But Julie, with a wild idea of escape, gave a furious wriggle.

Before the mystery man could realise it, she was away, running down the lane.

Fortune, however, was not on her side. In her panic she was hardly aware of where she was going, and a moment later she had tripped in a deep cart rut.

Almost sobbing now, she felt herself pulled to her feet, and despite her struggles, the mystery man was tying her hands behind her back.

"You may walk—or you may be carried," he said grimly. "Which is it to be, Julie?"

"Thank you. I—I'll walk!" Julie said between her teeth.

He nodded. Still keeping a grip on her arm, he led her into the great stone keep. Then he closed the door.

"Up those stairs," he commanded.

Julie glanced at him helplessly. Oh, if only her chums were with her! But there was nothing for it but to obey.

She slowly climbed the flight of steps which he indicated, the dust stirring beneath her feet as she went.

They reached a small landing, beyond which was another flight of stairs. After that another, till finally they reached a small door.

Swiftly he unlocked it and thrust her in. Then savagely he snatched at the bag, opened it and turned its contents on to the floor.

His face was furious as he looked at her.

"So you cheated me!" he cried.

"Where is the fan?"

"I haven't got it—it's somewhere where you'll never find it!" Julie retorted.

His eyes blazed, then suddenly he grinned.

"You're not so clever as you think, young lady," he sneered. "Of course, I remember now. You threw it away after my disguise dropped off—just when you opened the window—somewhere, perhaps, near Monks Bridge," he added shrewdly, and his eyes glittered again as he saw her start. "So be it. I go. I recover it," he added rapidly. "You stop here."

"No! No!" cried Julie desperately.

"No—"

But even as she cried out he had sped to the door. Tottering she took a step towards it. Then, with a crash, the door had closed. Even as Julie reached it there came the scrape of the key in the lock!

There will be another fine instalment of this grand serial in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.



JEAN BUYS A DOLL

"BETTER not!" said Jean Temple, her good-natured face crinkling into a frown. "You know what Uncle Henry says—that if there's any more trouble he'll cancel our climb up the Grimbewald to-morrow. And that—"

"Will be nothing less than a tragedy," sighed her sister Pam, shaking her curly head. "We've looked forward to climbing that mountain all through term at school—ever since Uncle Henry promised us this holiday in Switzerland."

"But we can't stand Lydia any longer," protested Cousin Anne. "She's caused us nothing but trouble since we met her in Lucerne three days ago. Anyway, I vote we jolly well give her the slip and dodge off now on our own. I shall tell dad—"

"I'm game, anyway," said Pam, with a chuckle.

"But—"

Jean paused, frowning again. Actually she disliked Lydia Wimwood as much as the other two. But Anne's father had asked them particularly to be nice and friendly with Lydia. This holiday in Switzerland was also a business trip for Mr. Temple. In Lucerne he had met Lydia's father, who had professed to have important business contacts in Switzerland. And so Mr. Temple was only too anxious to deepen the friendship between them.

But Lydia had proved anything but a jolly holiday friend; she was rude and ill-natured, and her inclusion in the party looked like spoiling what had promised to be a thrilling and joyous holiday.

"Oh, well—perhaps you're right, Pam." And Jean grinned as she made her decision. "We'll dodge down the back staircase, and out through—"

Oh!

The door of the hotel bedroom had opened, and a tall, rather flabbily dressed girl had entered. She had dark eyes and wavy hair, but the sulky, disagreeable expression on her features quite spoiled her obvious prettiness. It was Lydia Wimwood, and she gave the three chums a rather patronising nod.

"Waiting for me?" she drawled lazily. "You needn't bother; I'm going out with poppa this afternoon. Sorry, my dears, an' all that, but when pop says go I have to go. So-long."

She sailed out again, banging the door after her.

"Oh!" gasped Jean. "And we've spent a full half-hour arguing as to whether to take her or not. And—gosh!—I do believe she thinks she's struck us a mortal blow by not coming."

To stifle her laughter Jean crammed a handkerchief into her

mouth, while the irrepressible Anne pretended to weep into her hanky.

"She—she's broken our hearts! Pam, hand me my smelling-salts!"

"Let's get off before she changes her mind," whooped Pam.

Laughing gaily, the trio hurriedly donned hats and blazers, and snatched up handbags. Then they left the hotel and walked into the sunlit street of the picturesque town of Grimbewald, nestling in the heart of the Swiss mountains.

The girls had only arrived there that morning, after a fascinating trip from Lucerne, partly by smooth-gliding electric railway, partly in Mr. Temple's car; and all the way through glorious mountain scenery.

Now their lips parted excitedly as they looked about the quaint cobbled streets, and saw the shops with enticing displays of luxury goods.

The chums made several purchases, and then they stopped before a small shop, the window of which was full of cheap jewellery, fancy leather goods, toys, and picture postcards.

"Here we are," cried Anne. "Picture postcards of Grimbewald mountain! Gee! Aren't I just looking forward to the climb to-morrow!"

The three girls marched gaily into the shop, and were served by a young Swiss girl of about their own age. She had a sweet, rather appealing face, and Jean was struck by her sad expression. She was puzzled also—puzzled and intrigued by the fact that all the time the girl was serving them she scarcely kept her eyes off a man at the far end of the counter.

He was evidently the proprietor, and he was holding a low-voiced conversation with two customers, a man and a girl. And as she recognised the two, Jean suddenly jumped.

The two customers were Mr. Wimwood and his daughter, Lydia!

Anne and Pam were deeply engrossed in choosing postcards, and Jean said nothing. Then next moment she sighted something that brought a sparkle of interest to her blue eyes.

It was a row of small, quaint dolls, beautifully dressed in Swiss costume, that stood on a shelf behind the counter, just above a half-emptied packing-case.

"Golly! Look at those dinky Swiss dolls, girls," she said. "I must buy one of those for little Doris."

By SHEILA AUSTIN

"They're lovely," chimed in both Anne and Pam.

Eagerly Jean asked the shopgirl how much they were, and was startled by the scared look that suddenly came to her face.

"I—I do not know, fraulein," she almost whispered. "The dolls, they have only come to-day. I will ask Herr Zetter."

She moved along the counter and approached the proprietor, who gave Jean and her chums a sharp glance as he answered the girl's query. Neither Mr. Wimwood nor his daughter glanced towards them.

"Fifty francs, fraulein," whispered the girl. "They—they are very pretty, are they not? You will take one, fraulein?"

"Yes, rather—please," smiled Jean. "I'll take it with me as my mascot when I climb Grimbewald to-morrow, girls," she added with a gay chuckle.

The girls paid for their purchases, and Jean led them rather hastily from the shop.

"Why the sudden exit, Jean?" grinned Anne.

"Didn't you spot who it was at the back of the shop talking to the proprietor?" breathed Jean. "It was Lydia and her father. I thought we'd better make ourselves scarce before Lydia spotted us and started anything. And now—what? I vote for cakes and strawberry ices."

"Whoopee!" cried Anne. "Trust Jean for bright ideas, Pam. Cakes and ices it is."

They moved on down the street, laughing and talking merrily. But Jean could not help thinking about the girl in the shop. Her sad, frightened face had intrigued her. And why had she never taken her eyes for a moment off the proprietor, Herr Zetter, and his two customers, Lydia and her father?

They had just sighted a café farther along the street, when a sudden commotion sounded behind them. Then came a furious, angry shout:

"Achtung! Look out! Stop that girl!"

Wheeling, the startled chums were amazed to see a young girl racing towards them, her face white and

Mystery And Adventure Amid The Alpine Peaks Of Summer-time Switzerland Are Featured In This Week's Grand Long Complete Story.

strained. Instantly they recognised her as the shopgirl who had served them in the fancy-goods shop.

They drew back into an opening, and next moment the girl came along with a rush of footsteps. Abruptly she pulled up alongside them.

"Help me, frauleins—please! Hide me—oh, hide me!"

The girl's voice broke, and the look of terror on her distraught face went to Jean's warm heart. She acted swiftly, on impulse, as she usually did.

"Back up, girls! Quick! Your glasses, Pam! Here!"

She whipped off her school blazer as she spoke, and helped the frightened fugitive into it. Then she snatched off Anne's hat, and took Pam's spectacles. In another moment the Swiss girl was wearing Jean's blazer, Anne's school hat, and Pam's rather heavy-rimmed spectacles.

Only just in time! Another moment and Herr Zetter came running up, thin face red with rage, and behind him a straggling crowd who had joined in the chase.

He pulled up, glanced swiftly over the four girls, and then, to Jean's relief, went on again, vanishing round a corner farther along. And the other pursuers went after him in a yelling swarm.

"Oh!" gasped the Swiss girl huskily. "Frauleins, you are good to me, and I thank you so much indeed!"

Her eyes swimming with tears of gratitude, she slipped off the blazer, the hat and spectacles, handing them back to their owners. Then after another frightened glance round, she darted down a narrow entry a few yards away and vanished from sight.

She had scarcely gone when another girl came running along, face flushed and angry. It was Lydia, and she pulled up and stared at the trio suspiciously.

"You?" she exclaimed. Then, angrily: "Where is that girl—you must have seen her? She disappeared somewhere here—"

She was interrupted just then as Herr Zetter came hurrying back. He stopped as he sighted the three girls with Lydia. For a moment he stared suspiciously, and then he gave a furious cry.

"Ach! So I was tricked! You were four frauleins, and now—only three," he cried, pointing at Jean, Anne and Pam. "You have no hat on then, and you have no coat, and you not wear spectacles then," he went on, staring at the startled chums one by one. "You have tricked me—have helped a thief!"

"T-thief?" stuttered Pam.

"Yes—thief!" snapped Lydia Wimwood. "And you have helped her to escape! She snatched my father's watch and ran off with it. I—I'll tell your uncle, and so will my father. It caused him to fall in the shop, and he's hurt. You—you wait!"

And fairly quivering with anger, Lydia marched away, Herr Zetter following her, after a sharp glance along the street. Strangely enough he made no attempt to attract the attention of a gendarme who stood some little distance away. The crowd dispersed, and the three English girls looked at each other.

"That's done it!" groaned Anne. "We said that whether Lydia came with us or not she'd make trouble for us. Trust her for that! But, Jean, ought—ought we to have helped that girl as we did? If she is a thief—"

"I don't believe she could be a thief," said Jean stoutly, as if trying to convince herself. "I'm not sorry, anyway. Why, that's funny."

"What is, Jean?"

"This is," said Jean, staring at her parcel which contained the Swiss doll she had bought. "Don't you remember—that girl at the shop wrapped it up for me in white tissue-paper—and now it's wrapped in brown paper."

"My goodness! You—you're right, Jean," breathed Anne. "What a queer thing!"

"Well, bother the doll, anyway," put in Pam dismally. "For goodness'

sake let's go and fortify ourselves with cake and ices before we meet Uncle Henry. Lydia's bound to make a fuss, not to mention her father; and—we're for it! If we get the chance to climb that mountain to-morrow we'll be lucky—jolly lucky!"

THE INTRUDER

AND Pam was right—Lydia and her father did make a fuss!

On arrival at the hotel—after tea in a charming Swiss café—the chums found Anne's father and Mr. Wimwood and Lydia on the balcony awaiting their return. Mr. Wimwood's face was scowling, while Mr. Temple's usually kindly face wore an angry frown.

"What is this I hear, Anne?" demanded Uncle Henry; and though he addressed Anne they knew he included them all. "Mr. Wimwood reports to me that you actually helped a thief to escape this afternoon; indeed, the whole hotel knows about it. I am amazed. Mr. Wimwood was slightly hurt during the affair, and the thief got clear away with his wallet."

"His wallet?" echoed Jean. "Oh, I—I thought it was Mr. Wimwood's watch that was stolen."

"Watch—nonsense!" snapped Lydia's father testily. "It was my—my wallet! It was lying on the counter, and this wretched girl-thief snatched it and bolted."

"Yes; I—I made a mistake," gasped Lydia hurriedly. "I—I was confused—it was all done so quickly, and I thought poppa said it was his watch."

"It does not matter what it was," said Mr. Wimwood. "I do not want the police brought into it—I do not want to charge the wretched girl. But she must be found as I must have my wallet back. I hold you three girls entirely responsible for the fact that she escaped."

"It was a very foolish thing to do," said Uncle Henry, frowning grimly at the trio. "I am strongly inclined to punish you by cancelling our proposed climb up the mountain to-morrow. However, I will give you one more chance, but if there is any further trouble I most certainly will cancel the whole expedition."

He waved his hand in angry dismissal, and Jean and her chums went indoors and up to their bedroom. All felt as if a great weight had been suddenly lifted from their hearts. They had expected the worst—the cancelling of their so-long-cherished dream, the climbing of the Grimbeld.

"Gosh, wasn't daddy waxy," said Anne, with a feeble grin. "But it might have been worse. Oh, goody, goody—our expedition isn't cancelled after all. Whoopee!"

Jean said nothing. She was not thinking of mountain-climbing now. She was puzzled—bewildered.

There was some mystery here, she felt certain. Why had that shopgirl behaved so strangely in the shop? And why didn't Mr. Wimwood—and, apparently Herr Zetter also—want to bring the police into the matter?

And why had Lydia lied when she had said her father's watch had been stolen—for Jean was quite certain she had lied. And she believed also—though she did not say so even to her chums—that Lydia's father had also lied. He had lost neither his wrist-watch nor his wallet, in Jean's opinion!

And there was the mystery of the Swiss doll. Jean was certain that the shopgirl had wrapped the doll in white tissue, so how had it come to be in brown paper afterwards?

Her chums seemed to have forgotten that mysterious happening, but she had not. It puzzled and intrigued her—almost as much as did the mystery Swiss girl herself.

"I'm afraid it was all my fault," admitted Jean now, seating herself on the side of her bed. "I should never have forgiven myself if we had lost our mountain climb. It wouldn't have been fair on you two, either. I'm sorry it happened—"

"Well, it did, and it's all jolly well serene now, Jean, so why worry?"

cried Anne merrily. "I was as ready as you were to help that poor kid, and I'm sure Pam was, too. Anyway, let's start getting ready for the dance to-night. I've got some sewing to do to my frock—unless one of you would care to do it for me?"

But Pam and Jean grinningly declined the honour—they had plenty to do for themselves—and with a chuckle, Anne got out her own sewing basket and became busy.

Gaily discussing the gala dance that was being held in the hotel ball-room that evening, the three girls had been at work for some twenty minutes when suddenly from outside the bedroom they heard a commotion—shouts and faint, running footsteps.

"What on earth's happening?" gasped Jean.

She hurried to the door and looked out.

Racing along the carpeted corridor towards her was a slim, white-faced girl with plaited hair. Jean caught the tense, frightened look on her face, and gasped aloud:

"Oh, golly! It—it's that shopgirl again! What on earth—"

"Stop that girl! Stop thief!"

Now she heard the shouts clearly—caught a glimpse of the hotel manager, with other hotel servants behind him—all chasing the mystery girl.

She came rushing up, half-halted as she drew abreast of Jean. And then—again Jean acted impulsively.

"In here—quick!"

She grabbed the Swiss girl's arm, and fairly hauled her into the bedroom. She closed the door, her own heart thumping a little.

"Quick—out on the balcony there," said Jean.

To her chums' utter amazement Jean fairly pushed the mystery girl across the bedroom carpet, and through the half-opened door leading out on to the sunny balcony.

She closed the curtained door—and only just in time. Next moment a sharp knocking came on the outer door. Swiftly Jean crossed and opened it.

She met the crowd outside with a surprised, innocent expression.

"What is the matter? Why, is anything wrong, monsieur?"

The hotel manager, a stout, rather impressive individual, waved his hands excitedly.

"It is ze thief, fraulein—ze intruder," he cried. "A girl—she race along here and she disappear into one of ze bedrooms."

Jean held wide the door, and the manager's gaze swept the bedroom and its three occupants. Then satisfied, he hurried on, the little crowd following him. Jean watched them knocking on doors along the corridor, and she closed her own door and went inside again, unable to restrain a slight chuckle as she did so.

Let her face sobered as she met her chums' startled, wondering glances. Her heart told her to help the fugitive, but—was she doing right? If the girl really was a thief—

Well, now was her chance to speak to the girl—to get an explanation from her.

But even as she made to cross the bedroom the door she had just closed was flung open again and another girl strode into the room.

It was Lydia Wimwood.

"Where is she?" she demanded, glaring at Jean. "Where is that wretched girl—that thief? I know she came in here—I'm sure of it. You—you're hiding her. Where is she?"

She began looking under the beds and into the wardrobes. She was about to stride for the curtained balcony doors when Jean, her own face flushed and angry now, barred her path.

"Look here, Lydia, this is our bedroom," she pointed out sharply. "You can't come in here doing just as you like."

But Lydia—obviously certain that the girl was hidden there—rudely pushed Jean aside, and tore at the curtains to grasp the door handle.

She was a trifle too violent over it. The vicious tug not only tore the

curtain aside, but it dragged down the curtain pole as well.

There was a cry of warning from Jean and her chums, but too late. The curtain pole caught Lydia a glancing blow on the forehead, sending her sprawling to the floor, almost wrapped up like a parcel in the curtains.

The shriek Lydia gave was enough to rouse the whole hotel. At all events it brought not only the manager hurrying back, but Lydia's father—and Anne's father, Mr. Temple.

Through the open doorway the startled crowd stared at Lydia as she struggled in the folds of the curtains. Between them, Jean, Anne, and Pam released her, and she rose, crimson-faced and panting.

"I'm sorry, Lydia—" Jean was beginning, when Lydia's father interrupted.

"What does this mean, Lydia?" he cried. "Are you hurt?"

"Yes, whatever has happened?" chimed in Mr. Temple, his face stern.

Instead of answering, Lydia tore herself free, grasped the handle of the french window, and darted on to the balcony.

Jean caught her breath.

The fugitive was caught now—caught indeed! But to her amazement Lydia darted back again, baffled fury in her eyes.

"I knew it," she shouted. "They were hiding her! She was on the balcony—and they must have known it. She climbed down the creeper outside. I was just in time to see her run across the grounds into the trees."

"Lydia, you are certain of that?" demanded her father, glancing angrily at Jean, Anne and Pam. "You say these girls were hiding her—and now she's escaped again?"

"Of course! And Jean here tried to stop my going on to the balcony after her. That—that's how I came to pull down the curtain on top of me. It's all their fault—they've helped that girl to escape again."

There was a silence. The hotel staff were staring in some bewilderment from the doorway. Mr. Temple, with a brief word and a nod to the manager, closed the corridor door.

His face was very stern indeed as he came and faced the girls.

"Is that true?" he demanded sharply, speaking to Anne. "Did you girls help that fugitive to escape again?"

Anne did not reply, and Jean came forward, her face flushed.

"Anne and Pam had nothing to do with it, uncle," she cried. "It was I who helped the girl—I told her to hide on the balcony. She must have climbed down the creeper as Lydia says."

"But why, Jean—why did you help her to escape at all?" demanded her uncle angrily. "You know she has already robbed Mr. Wimwood, and no doubt, she was here in the hotel for the same reason—"

"It was a monstrous thing to do, Temple," almost shouted Lydia's father, and the girls were astonished at his frantic expression. "I—I demand that these girls be severely punished this time. It was vitally important that the wretched thief be caught—"

"And they shall be punished," declared Mr. Temple angrily. "I forbid them to attend the fancy dress carnival to-night."

THE BLOW FALLS

THE faces of Jean, Pam and Anne were pictures of dismay. They knew, only too well, that Mr. Temple meant every word he said.

Yet Jean, at least, felt no little relief, despite the blow this would be to the trio. They had looked forward to the dance.

But the punishment might have been far worse. Actually she had feared her uncle was going to say that the climb up the Grimbeld Mountain would be forbidden.

The fact remained, however, that it was unjust to blame Pam and Anne in any way.

"Oh, uncle—but please listen," Jean cried as Uncle Henry was turning away. "Anne and Pam had nothing whatever to do with it. It isn't fair to punish them. Please—"

Anne's father raised his hand. "Enough, Jean! Anne and Pam must have known the girl was in hiding here, so you are all to blame and must share the punishment. You are forbidden even to watch the dancing to-night."

He went out, followed by the dark-faced, scowling Mr. Wimwood. Lydia went last, and she gave the chums a triumphant glance as she followed the two men. The door closed behind them, and the chums looked dismayed at each other.

"That's done it," said Anne, grinning faintly. "It—it's quite spoilt the joy of seeing Lydia wrapped up in the curtains!"

"I—I'm terribly sorry, Anne," said Jean, unable to restrain a faint grin herself. "It—it's jolly decent of you to make a joke of it, anyway. I'll see uncle again and try to make him change his mind—"

"No good," said Anne, shaking her dark curls emphatically. "I know

wonderful inside, and you just don't know what you're missing—"

She broke off, suddenly struck by the look on Anne's face.

Jill was staring upwards in amazed alarm—staring up at the upper windows of the hotel. And as Lydia's gaze followed her startled look, she gave a shrill, excited shout:

"It's that girl again—that shopgirl thief!" she cried. "Quick!"

She raced away, and vanished through the open door of the ballroom.

"Gosh! She's right," gasped Anne. "It is the girl—look! She's reached our bedroom window. Well, the daring of it!"

But Jean and Pam had already seen that daring figure just climbing over the balcony outside their bedroom, and they were startled, astounded.

"She'll be caught this time," gasped Anne, almost regretfully. "Come on—let's see what happens."

She pelted off indoors, followed by the excited Pam. But Jean, on a sudden impulse, set off along the terrace, halting below her own bedroom window—and waited.

It was almost dark here, the moon-



"T-thief?" stuttered Pam, staring in dismay. "Yes—thief!" snapped Lydia Wimwood. "And thanks to you she has escaped!"

daddy. In any case, you know that both Pam and I would have backed you up, so what's the odds, old thing? I say, now the dance is off, let's go out for a walk."

Jean and Pam agreed, and rather dismally they put away their party frocks. Then they got handbags and hats and went downstairs. As they passed the ballroom they heard the orchestra tuning up, and glimpsed the gleaming ball room with its brilliant lights and colours.

It did not make them feel any happier, but the trio cheered up on reaching the street. The golden sun was just setting over the snow-capped mountains, and this glimpse of an Alpine sunset almost took their breath away.

The chums went for a walk, and the carnival was in full swing when they returned. Instead of entering the hotel itself, the girls went into the grounds which were illuminated by coloured lights, making it seem a scene out of fairyland. Through the windows of the ballroom they could glimpse the dancers, and hear the strains of the orchestra.

"Never mind," sighed Jean. "It's only one night—and we've got heaps and heaps more ahead of us. Hallo, there's Lydia!"

Lydia, dressed in the costume of a gipsy-girl, strolled over to the chums. "Awful luck, your uncle banning the dance," she drawled, obviously out to taunt them. "It's simply

light and illuminations not reaching this spot under the wall of the buildings. She heard shouts up above—a sudden rustling. Then a girlish form appeared over the balcony rail and began climbing down the creeper that grew against the wall—taking risks in her desperate haste that made Jean tremble for her safety.

She reached the ground—and cried out in fear as Jean's grasp closed upon her arm.

"Oh! Let me go—please, please let me go!" she panted.

"In a minute," said Jean softly. "Don't be afraid—I am a friend. I will let you go, but first you must tell me why you come here like this. What is it you are after? Why—"

"I—I— Oh!" The girl recognised Jean, and she ceased to struggle. "I—I will tell you—I wanted to see you, fraulein! I came to see you—to ask for the doll."

"The—the doll?" gasped Jean blankly.

"Ja—ja— Yes! I must have it," cried the girl frantically. "The Swiss doll! I make the mistake. When I am chased down the street I put parcel containing doll beside your parcel. Then when I go I take the wrong doll—I take the parcel in white paper that I sell you."

"Oh! I—I see," breathed Jean. "But why—what does it mean?" "I will tell you—but please get it for me," broke in the strange girl agitatedly. "Herr Klaus must not

get it; he is a bad man—what you call him—crook! His daughter, Fraulein Klaus, she also is a crook. Please—oh, please get me the doll back—the one in the brown paper parcel. Yours I will return to you later."

"Listen," said Jean urgently. "We are climbing Grimbeld to-morrow. Try to be at the café at the foot of the mountain—you know it? I will look out for you, and—quick! Someone coming. You'd better run."

The girl had also heard running footsteps from the terrace. She gasped, and turned to fly, but it was too late. Even as she turned away she almost collided with someone who came racing up just then.

"Got you this time!" came Lydia Wimwood's voice.

There followed a sharp cry of pain as Lydia swung the mystery girl round viciously. Jean's eyes blazed and she sprang forward. Her grasp closed on Lydia's shoulder, and it was Lydia's turn to be swung round.

"Help!" shrieked Lydia at the top of her voice.

She struggled furiously to retain her grip on the squirming fugitive, and to shake off Jean. A desperate wrench and the Swiss girl was free, racing away into the darkness of the trees.

"She—she's getting away," raged Lydia. "Let me go, Jean Temple! I—I— Oh!"

She suddenly tripped and went headlong, dragging Jean down with her. And now people were racing along the terrace—Lydia's father and Mr. Temple, Anne and Pam, and a swarm of excited guests, most in fancy costumes.

"What has happened?" cried Jean's uncle. "Jean—"

"She's helped that thief to get away again!" cried Lydia, scrambling to her feet. "I'd caught her but Jean Temple forced me to let her go. She held me back—fought me while the girl escaped."

"Jean, is that the truth?" demanded Uncle Henry, his voice quivering with indignation. "After—after what I have said you have dared to help that girl again? Answer me at once!"

Jean hesitated, then her eyes gleamed fiercely and she nodded.

"Yes, uncle," she answered quietly. "I did help that girl to escape—"

"That is enough, Jean. I am ashamed of you. You have disgraced yourself and us."

"Is—is that all you have to say to her?" shouted Mr. Wimwood, red in the face with fury. "She—she has helped that girl to escape again. I—I—"

In his fury, Lydia's father grasped Jean, and shook her. Uncle Henry's eyes gleamed angrily, and he stepped swiftly forward.

"That will do, Wimwood—please," he snapped. "Kindly take your hands off my niece. I will punish her myself."

There was an icy sting in Uncle Henry's voice, and Lydia's father released Jean.

"Go indoors at once, all of you," cried Uncle Henry, indicating Jean, Anne and Pam. "Go to your bedroom and stay there. The climb for to-morrow is cancelled, and I shall consider whether or not to cancel the whole holiday and send you home to England. Go!"

THE SWISS DOLL

DISMALLY the unhappy trio went indoors and up to their bedroom without a word. But though Anne and Pam said nothing, Jean knew that, despite their loyalty, they must both be feeling hurt and bitterly disappointed with her.

Jean clenched her hands. It was unfair that Anne and Pam should suffer when they had done nothing wrong. Perhaps she deserved it, but they did not. She must do something—she must make a desperate effort to cause Uncle Henry to reconsider his decision.

Without speaking to her chums, Jean went swiftly out of the bedroom again. She had heard Mr. Temple go

into his room and close the door. She knocked and entered.

Uncle Henry was seated in an easy-chair, just filling his pipe and Jean was surprised at his mild expression as he regarded her.

"Well, Jean?" he said quietly.

"Please—please, uncle, won't you change your mind about to-morrow?" she cried earnestly. "I'm not asking for myself—I suppose I deserve punishment. But Anne and Pam have done absolutely nothing—they were not even there. It isn't fair to punish them, Uncle Henry."

She told all that had happened, only keeping back what had been said between the Swiss girl and herself. Uncle Henry nodded slowly at last.

As a matter of fact Mr. Temple was already regretting his hasty decision. He could not help but admire Jean for her courageous defence of the Swiss girl fugitive.

He did not understand the affair at all, but he was, secretly, inclined to share Jean's belief that Mr. Wimwood had never lost his wallet at all.

Lydia's father claimed to have big business connections, and to be a power in Swiss business circles, but Uncle Henry was beginning to suspect that he was just a boaster.

His action in shaking Jean so roughly to-night had not improved Uncle Henry's opinion of him. It had indeed filled Uncle Henry with seething anger, and a strong desire to end the acquaintance.

"Very well, Jean," he said at last, and Jean was astonished at his kindly tone. "To be frank, I was already reconsidering the matter. I do so because I know you were impelled to act as you did by your warm-hearted compassion for that girl. You were ready to sacrifice everything—your holiday itself even—to befriend her. In the circumstances—yes, I think we will forget it all. Be at the hotel entrance with your climbing kit at nine o'clock in the morning—and please tell Anne to make a special effort to be in good time, for once."

He ended with a smile, and with a cry of joy Jean hugged and kissed him.

"You're just a darling, nunky," she cried gratefully.

And she raced from the room, eyes shining, to break the glad news to Pam and Anne.

"WHOOPEE! All aboard!" cried Anne gaily, as she tumbled into the car. "Next—stop—the summit of Grimbeld!"

"All aboard, eh?" laughed Pam. "And we've been sitting here waiting for you nearly five minutes, you slacker!"

"Only time she's never late is at mealtimes," sighed Mr. Temple.

"Well, all ready? Off we go, then."

He let in the clutch, and the big car glided away from the hotel entrance. But it did not get far. Suddenly Uncle Henry slowed down with a rueful exclamation.

"Left my tobacco pouch and pipe behind," he said, "and I was looking forward to a smoke on reaching the summit. I'll have to go back for them."

"I'll go," cried Jean eagerly. "Wait here, nunky."

She slipped from the car and raced back to the hotel. She hurried upstairs and along to Uncle Henry's bedroom, her shoes making little sound on the thick, corridor carpet. She found pipe and tobacco on a side-table, and left the bedroom. It was just as she was passing her own room that she halted, startled.

From behind the closed door had sounded a sudden snap, followed next moment by another. She heard the mutter of voices. Quietly she grasped the door-knob and twisted it, pushing the door open a trifle. Then she caught her breath.

Inside were Mr. Wimwood and Lydia. They were both leaning over Jean's suitcase, which was wide-open—and Jean knew she had locked it!

"She must have it, poppa—she must!" Jean heard Lydia say. "Else why would that girl Trudy Bergman

come here like she did? She was after the doll! Maybe she gave it to Jean Temple to take care of—I don't know. But I'm certain Jean must have it. Maybe she's got it with her now—"

Jean didn't stay to hear more.

She hurried away, her mind racing, her eyes gleaming. Her first impulse had been to rush in and confront the pair. But caution swiftly intervened. She was remembering what the Swiss girl—she now knew her name was Trudy Bergman—had said. She had spoken of a Herr Klaus and his daughter being crooks. Did she mean Mr. Wimwood and Lydia?

Suddenly the whole affair seemed to have a sinister aspect to Jean. She had a sudden fear of the hard-faced Mr. Wimwood. The Swiss doll—the one wrapped in brown paper—the one Trudy Bergman was so anxious to have—was safe in the knapsack, strapped to her back.

She felt a grim certainty that it would not be safe there for long if she had entered that bedroom then!

She must tell Uncle Henry all about it—later on! Meanwhile, she must keep her promise to hand the mysterious doll over to the mystery girl.

Back in the car, Jean joined in the merry chatter and laughter, but inwardly she was seething with eager excitement. Would the girl—Trudy Bergman—be waiting at the café?

It was only a short ride to the café at the foot of the mountain. But though she kept a keen look-out, Jean saw nothing of the mystery girl. At the café the girls had a single peach ice each, and then, after parking the car, the little party made for the starting point, eyeing with awe and some little trepidation the dizzy slopes, and the mist-enshrouded summit.

Reaching a higher ridge they found their guide waiting for them in front of a low stone hut. He was a slim, youthful man with a pleasant smiling face. After greetings, the climb up the mountain began.

Upwards they toiled amid chatter and laughter, but Jean was feeling keen disappointment. So far she had seen nothing of Trudy Bergman, the mystery girl. She wasn't likely to see her now—

Jean's thoughts ended with a jerk as the sudden rattle of a displaced stone lower down the trail reached her ears. She glanced downwards, and her eyes gleamed excitedly.

It was the little Swiss girl, Jean caught a swift glimpse of her as her slim figure vanished behind a projecting rock. Jean glanced at the others, walking ahead in single file, led by the guide. Then she hung behind and waited. In another minute the Swiss girl appeared and hurried up to her, her face alight with eager excitement.

"Ah, fraulein, you do not fall me?" she panted. "I see you at the café, but I dare not speak because of monsieur. You—you have ze doll?"

"Yes," Jean smiled as she swung off her knapsack. She took out the doll, and the Swiss girl cried joyfully as she grasped it. "Now tell me, Trudy—that is your name, isn't it?—what does all this mystery mean?"

"Ja, I will tell you, fraulein," breathed the girl, her eyes shining with gratitude. "You have been so good to me—so kind and helpful. Ah, now you will see."

Swiftly, with trembling hands, she unwrapped the doll, the tiny brass ornaments on its clothing tinkling merrily. She twisted the doll's head with fingers and thumb. The head came away. Her finger groped inside, bringing out something small, wrapped in cottonwool. It was revealed at last—a small object that glittered and scintillated in the sunlight with a thousand pin-points of light.

"Ja—yes, a diamond!" she whispered tensely. "It is worth much money, fraulein—a fortune. For this my brother, Hans Bergman, was arrested and put in prison."

"It belongs to a diamond merchant

(Please turn to the back page.)



The Return of Colin Forrest



By RENEE FRAZER

GWYNNE'S STARTLING DISCOVERY

GWYNNE ARNOLD and her chums of Riversdale Co-ed School were keen on entering a team for the local regatta.

Mr. Kestrel, the senior master, did not approve of the idea, however. But with the help of Colin Forrest, a surprising new master, they were able to persuade the Head, Dr. Roxford, to allow them to enter.

Later, they discovered that some mysterious person was plotting against them.

Gwynne found the unknown plotter about to damage the regatta boats. She raised the alarm, but he ran off.

A little later, when Mr. Kestrel had arrived on the scene, Gwynne was shocked to see a smear of white paint on his coat, for it seemed to prove that he was the person she had encountered in the boathouse!

MR. KESTREL—the mystery enemy! For an instant Gwynne's mind felt numbed by the almost incredible discovery.

The senior master stood waiting for her at the entrance of the private garden. His face, pale under his mortar-board, was turned towards her as with a swift movement he drew his gown to cover the tell-tale paint mark on his jacket.

"Come, Gwynne!" he said sharply. "Why are you loitering, girl?"

With an effort Gwynne forced herself to walk towards him as though nothing were amiss, though her heart was pounding madly. Her racing thoughts were piecing together certain recent incidents—occasions when the unknown enemy had been at work—when Mr. Kestrel had appeared a few minutes later.

His cynical opposition to the regatta now appeared in a very different light, his excuse that it would interfere with their class-work might cover a more sinister purpose. All this was wild surmise, Gwynne knew—but with every step she took towards the master, the conviction grew on her.

"Is anything wrong, Gwynne?" Gwynne's heart missed a beat. Mr. Kestrel's voice had lost something of its rasping tone—had become almost kindly as he bent towards her. "You look quite startled," he added.

Gwynne gulped, forcing herself to meet the master's searching gaze. Whatever happened, he must not guess her suspicions!

"I—I expect I'm still thinking about that—that hateful person I discovered in the boathouse," she declared slowly.

Mr. Kestrel shook his head, with an attempt at a tolerant smile, though his eyes were narrowed.

"Probably quite harmless," he de-

clared. "You have an excitable imagination," he told her, "and the darkness probably gave this person the—er—terrifying aspect. You should be in bed, instead of wandering on the river towpath at this hour. I must speak seriously to Miss Primley. Come!"

Reluctantly Gwynne followed him as he led the way towards the house. She had always disliked Mr. Kestrel for his harshness—his biting sarcasm. But now, for a moment, she felt afraid.

Behind the master's would-be suave tones she was conscious of a ruthless purpose. If for a moment he should suspect that she had tumbled to his secret—

Hastily Gwynne dismissed the thought as they reached the house. She hurried indoors and straight up to the dormitory, while Mr. Kestrel remained to have a word with Miss Primley, the House-mistress.

The girls were clustered anxiously at the windows, peering out into the dusk, for the distant commotion from the towpath had come just as they were retiring for the night. When Gwynne entered, an excited rush was made towards her.

"Gwynne—where have you been?" "What ever has been happening down by the river?"

Gwynne described the incident, and Mr. Forrest's timely arrival on the scene.

The girls were loud in their praise of the young master who, despite his recent disgrace with the Head, was more popular with the juniors than ever.

"But who—who was the dreadful person in the boathouse, Gwynne?" demanded Jean Carter, the Form captain. "Did you see his face?"

Gwynne shook her head: she could not tell anyone—not even Maureen, her best chum—about her seemingly fantastic suspicion. She would have to find more certain proof before she dared to speak.

The excited whispers were suddenly stilled as the girls heard Miss Primley making her rounds. When

With Horrified Eyes Gwynne Gazed At The Paint Mark On Mr. Kestrel's Coat. For It Seemed To Prove That The Senior Master Was The Person Who Was Plotting Against The Co-eds' Pageant Plans.

the mistress opened the door, everyone was in bed and all eyes closed.

Miss Primley, her kindly face rather grave, crossed to Gwynne's cubicle, and glanced for a moment at the apparently sleeping girl. Then, with a worried shake of her head, she turned out the light and left the room.

Next morning Gwynne felt tired after a night of troubled dreams. When she entered the class-room for the first period she was greeted by a shout from the boys.

"Here she is, chaps—the girl who scared the enemy with a klaxon!"

"Good old Gwynne!"

"Let's have the story again—all of it!"

Gwynne was forced to repeat her adventure once more for the sake of those who had missed the excitement.

"Peter and I arrived a few minutes too late," explained Derek. "The chap had gone—but Mr. Forrest was on his trail."

"Did he catch him?"

"No—worse luck! The fellow must have been pretty slippery. I bet he was a rival of some kind, out to mess up our newly-painted boats. Would you recognise him again, Gwynne?"

Gwynne clenched her hands, her expression rather tense.

"I—I couldn't be certain," she replied guardedly.

"You suspect someone?" Peter caught her up swiftly.

"Well—in a way—" Gwynne admitted, then broke off. She had heard that hardly noticeable click of the door, as though someone had opened and closed it again stealthily.

"Come on, Gwynne!" ordered Derek, with mock sternness. "Out with it! This is a pretty serious business, y'know."

Gwynne drew a quick breath, shaking her head.

"I haven't any real proof, Derek—I didn't actually see his face. And it's no use guessing. But if I meet the enemy again," she added a little grimly, "I'm going to hold on to him—and not let go!"

"Bravo!" Peter exclaimed, amid a general laugh. "Cheers for Gwynne!"

"We must all be on our guard against him, now," added Derek seriously. "It's plain that he means business, whoever he is! One thing—Gwynne surprised him last night before he could do any harm; and he wouldn't dare strike at our pageant rehearsal this afternoon, in broad daylight. By the way, Gwynne—have you got the script ready? We'll probably need some prompting!"

Gwynne nodded and opened her

desk, taking out several sheets of paper, clipped together, and covered in her own neat writing.

"I copied out all the details from Mr. Forrest's lecture on the Viking invasion," she explained, then sighed. "It's a shame that he won't be allowed to take charge. He'd have made a wonderful coach! But thanks to—Mr. Kestrel!"

She trailed away, her feelings too deep for words.

At that moment the door was thrown open, to admit Lester Wayne, the day-boy.

He looked towards Gwynne, a hint of malice in his shifty eyes. His jealousy of her popularity in the school rowing club was well known.

"Oh, Gwynne," he said, in his usual affected way, "the Head sent me with a message. He wants to see you in his study at once!"

A sudden silence fell on the room. "The—Head?" Gwynne echoed. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," rejoined Lester. "It's something to do with that fiasco last night. You'd better get cracking!"

Gwynne glanced at the others, a little frown on her face.

"Tell him exactly what happened," said Derek. "He can't blame you!"

But Gwynne's face was rather pale when she knocked at the headmaster's door, and entered. Then her heart quickened.

Standing behind the Head was Mr. Kestrel! And there was a hypocritical smile on that master's lips.

"Ah—come in, Gwynne," said the Head, in grave though not unkindly tones. "Mr. Kestrel has just made his report on last night's strange affair. I understand that you discovered an interloper—a tramp, in fact—hiding in the school boat-house?"

Gwynne did not dare to meet Mr. Kestrel's gaze.

"There was someone in the boat-house, Dr. Roxford," she replied in a low voice, but—but I'm certain he wasn't a tramp!"

She heard Mr. Kestrel's intake of breath; his quick step forward. The Headmaster raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed, Gwynne? And why are you so certain?"

Gwynne's hesitation was not lost on Mr. Kestrel.

"I think I can explain, Head!" he intervened with a pitying smile. "Gwynne has some amazing theory that a mysterious enemy is trying to ruin their pageant! I have tried in vain to reason with her—but she insists on spreading these fantastic rumours, unnerving herself as well as her companions."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the headmaster, frowning. "Surely, Gwynne, you are not serious in your allegation?"

"But I am, Dr. Roxford!" Gwynne burst out, throwing caution aside and looking defiantly at Mr. Kestrel. "I've suspected it for a long time. That drifting log that nearly upset the boys' boat—that wasn't an accident! And neither was the damaged armour in the museum. And last night—last night I surprised him at work—"

Gwynne kindly remember that you are speaking to the headmaster!" put in Mr. Kestrel sharply. Then, in more reasoning tones, as though talking to a small child, he added: "You are naturally upset and excited by what happened, but these wild statements will not do any good." He turned apologetically to Dr. Roxford. "Have I your permission, sir, to ask Gwynne a few questions?"

"Certainly!" replied the headmaster, regarding Gwynne's flushed face in some puzzlement.

Mr. Kestrel smiled, his long fingers caressing his gown.

"Is it not a fact, Gwynne," he asked, "that I particularly requested the boys to search the boat-house—and that they reported they could find no damage?"

Gwynne stared at him. She realised that Mr. Kestrel was trying to make her out to be a fibber—but with the headmaster watching her, she was obliged to answer.

"Y-yes," she whispered.

"And," persisted Mr. Kestrel, "were you not the only person who actually saw this—er—vagrant? And even you, I believe, did not actually see his face?"

Gwynne was compelled to admit the fact, though now she was inwardly seething.

"And yet"—Mr. Kestrel stabbed a finger towards her—"on this slender basis, you invent a fictitious and supposedly malignant enemy. You even hint to your companions that you are aware of his identity! Sir—with an expressive gesture he turned to the headmaster—"it is quite plain to me that the excitement of this pageant has been too much for Gwynne's imagination. There is no telling what amazing statement she will be making next."

"Oh," burst out Gwynne, her eyes blazing, "how can you say that? Everything I said was the truth! You—you're trying to twist my words—"

"Gwynne!" exclaimed the Head, stern reproof in his tone.

Mr. Kestrel spread out his hands.

"You see how it is, Head, Gwynne. I'm afraid, is not responsible for her remarks. Who is this mysterious enemy—and where is he at this moment—"

Surprisingly a voice interrupted—a cheerful voice that came from the far side of the room.

"Right here, Kestrel, old man!" it said. "Take a look behind you!"

MR. KESTREL SCHEMES

Gwynne jumped, and Mr. Kestrel whirled on his heel.

For an instant the senior master found himself glaring into the large mirror over the study mantelpiece—a mirror that reflected his own furious face! Then, shifting his gaze, he saw what Gwynne had already spotted.

The french windows opening on to the terrace were standing ajar, for the day was gloriously fine. And standing there, hands in pockets, his mortar-board tilted at its customary negligent angle, was Mr. Colin Forrest!

"Beg pardon, sir," said Colin, addressing the startled headmaster as he stepped briskly into the room. "Just my little joke! I believe you sent for me?"

Dr. Roxford's momentary frown of annoyance cleared slightly as he adjusted his pince-nez. It was difficult to be angry in the face of the young master's frank, cheerful smile—though he permitted himself a mild remonstrance.

"Quite so, Forrest—but I wish you would enter my room in a more orthodox manner! I sent for you!" he cleared his throat—"as I believe you were concerned in this strange affair at the boat-house, last night?"

"Oh, rather, sir," Colin agreed. "The affair of the jolly old secret enemy—"

"So you've got hold of that ridiculous story, Forrest!" Kestrel snapped. Colin raised his eyebrows.

"Well—the chappie was acting pretty furtively, wasn't he, Kestrel? I mean to say—hiding in the boat-house, and leaping out at Gwynne when she surprised him. Hardly cricket—what?"

"We're not discussing cricket," rejoined Mr. Kestrel, coldly.

"Quite!" agreed Colin, blandly. "But it was foul play, for all that—and I only wish I'd arrived in time to bowl the fellow out."

"I understand you—er—pursued the miscreant, Forrest?" put in the headmaster. "Did you actually catch a glimpse of him?"

Colin smiled, and Mr. Kestrel seemed to stiffen slightly, while Gwynne waited tensely.

"Not exactly, sir," admitted the young master. "I was about a second too late. I heard the bushes rustle, and dived into action. But I picked up the fellow's footprints. Size eights, pointed toes, brand new, almost—most unusual for a tramp. What do you say, Kestrel?"

His glance rested reflectively on the latter's shoes.

Gwynne was watching Mr. Kestrel, but only by the faintest narrowing of his dark eyes did that master betray any feeling.

"I've no doubt, Forrest," he said sarcastically, "you were in your element—trailing footprints in the spinney, and neglecting your school duties! Thanks to your absence I had to ask Mr. Holmes to take call-over, and the senior French exam papers are still uncorrected." He turned abruptly to the headmaster.

"I'm afraid, sir, that Forrest's intervention did more harm than good," he added bitingly.

The headmaster's expression was troubled.

"I shall inquire further into this matter later, Kestrel," he said. "Meanwhile I feel that certain precautions should be taken to prevent this scare from spreading among the juniors—"

"You may leave that to me, Head!" put in Mr. Kestrel quickly. "There is a certain suggestion I should like to make—" He broke off, glancing towards Colin. "But I do not think it necessary to detain Mr. Forrest any longer from his duties," he added pointedly.

"Er—you may go, Forrest," said the headmaster, and Gwynne's heart sank as the young master moved to the door. But on the threshold he paused.

"Pardon, sir," he said pleasantly, "as there will be no classes this afternoon, I thought I might lend Mr. Kestrel a hand with the pageant—if you've no objections?"

Gwynne's face lit up: but her hope was short-lived.

"That will be out of the question, Head!" Mr. Kestrel interrupted hastily. "It is essential for the French exam papers to be corrected in time for me to make up the lists—and owing to his preoccupation with the juniors' affairs, Forrest is very much in arrears with his work! I must really ask him to put in a little extra time this afternoon."

Gwynne saw Mr. Forrest's lips tighten, and his glance turn inquiringly to the headmaster.

"I'm sorry, Forrest," said the Head gravely, "but this is a matter for Mr. Kestrel to decide."

He nodded briefly in dismissal, and Colin backed slowly out of the room. But before he closed the door, Gwynne met his glance—and felt almost certain that he gave her a cheery, reassuring wink!

She was still gazing at the closed door when Mr. Kestrel's suave tones brought her back to earth.

"And now, Head," he said, "with regard to this afternoon! I have spoken to the girls' Housemistress and she feels, as I do, that a temporary rest from excitement would help to allay these nervous fancies of Gwynne's—and prevent their spreading to the other girls. Miss Primley suggests that a quiet afternoon spent in the grounds with a book or—er—sewing—"

Gwynne whirled, a gasp of protest on her lips.

"But—but, Dr. Roxford—the pageant rehearsal—" she gulped.

The headmaster held up his hand with a grave, not unkindly gesture.

"Allow Mr. Kestrel to continue, Gwynne," he said. "What about this rehearsal, Kestrel?"

Mr. Kestrel smiled. "I have the arrangements well in hand, sir. Gwynne's absence on this occasion will make very little difference. She was, I believe, to act as pageant mistress—but it does not require two people to direct. I can do the necessary prompting, and if the boys and girls taking part will—er—co-operate with me, everything should go smoothly—"

"But, Dr. Roxford, that's not fair!" Gwynne exclaimed, her voice shaking with angry dismay. "We're all working as a team, and—my part in the first rehearsal is important—"

"Not as important as your health, Gwynne!" put in Mr. Kestrel gently, with a hypocritical concern in his tone that made Gwynne seethe.

If only she dared blurt out her wild

suspicious in front of the Head: that Mr. Kestrel was trying to get rid of her for reasons of his own—because he thought she might be a danger to his scoundrelly plans!

Though as yet he could not be sure that she suspected him, he knew that after last night she would be more wary than ever: and he meant to take no risks!

But the reckless accusation that rose to her lips faltered and died as she encountered the headmaster's grave scrutiny.

No one would believe her wild, unproved statement—it would only make matters a hundred times worse.

"Mr. Kestrel is right, Gwynne!" said the headmaster gravely. "Your well-being is more important than this rehearsal. You may safely leave all arrangements in Mr. Kestrel's hands, and enjoy a pleasant afternoon with Miss Primley. You will report to her immediately after lunch."

With a kindly, rather abstracted smile, he dismissed her.

Almost choked with helpless indignation—smarting tears welling into her eyes—Gwynne groped her way from the Head's study, walking back to the class-room as though in a dream.

A SURPRISE FOR GWYNNE

AN excited crowd surrounded her as she entered the room.

"Well, Gwynne—what happened?" demanded Derek eagerly.

Falteringly Gwynne explained what had happened, and when she finished there came a chorus of dismayed, sympathetic gasps.

"Gosh—tough luck, Gwynne!" Derek exclaimed.

"Trust Hawk-eye to go poking his nose into our affairs!" said Peter hotly. "He's no right to penalise you because of that enemy chap. If only we could discover who the blighter was—"

Gwynne's heart beat more quickly as she made a reckless resolve. With a quick glance round the room, she drew Derek, Peter and Maureen aside.

"Listen," she whispered. "You were asking about the enemy just now. I think I think I can tell you something. He'll be there this afternoon, at the rehearsal!"

"What?" gasped Peter, while the other two stared at her incredulously.

"How on earth do you know?"

"Never mind," Gwynne shook her head quickly. "I can't—I daren't say more now. But whatever happens, don't take any risks! Stick to the action as we planned it in my script, and—"

"Gwynne!" interrupted a cold, smooth voice from the doorway. "I'm afraid you are over-exciting yourself!"

Gwynne whirled, and a sudden silence descended on the class as Mr. Kestrel walked slowly across the room towards her, his gown fluttering.

"Remember the headmaster's orders, Gwynne!" he said, frowning reprovingly. "You are looking very flushed. What is going on?" he added, more sharply, with a searching stare at the two boys.

"We—were just discussing this afternoon's rehearsal, sir," Derek replied.

"Ah!" said Mr. Kestrel. "And that reminds me. There is a script, I believe, Gwynne, outlining the suggested action of the pageant. As you will not be present at the first rehearsal, perhaps you would let me have the script?"

Gwynne drew back, her fingers closing instinctively on the precious script in her pocket. She felt certain that Mr. Kestrel did not want it simply for reference! Her suspicions were fully aroused.

"It—it's not really complete yet. Mr. Kestrel," she gulped, seeking desperately for an excuse.

"Kindly hand me the script, Gwynne!" interrupted Mr. Kestrel, his tone suddenly menacing, despite his thin smile.

Gwynne's eyes flashed. A reckless refusal rose to her lips—but just then a slight sound caused her to glance over Mr. Kestrel's shoulder.

With an effort she bit back a gasp.

Outside the window stood a boyish figure, a mortar-board perched at a rakish angle on its head.

Colin Forrest!

A warning finger to his lips, he was holding out a sheet of cardboard on which were boldly printed the words:

"OBEY ORDERS! LEAVE THE REST TO ME!"

Gwynne caught in her breath and pulled the script out of her pocket. Mr. Kestrel snatched it from her—just as Colin Forrest vanished from the window.

Mr. Kestrel smiled thinly.

"You may rely on me, Gwynne," he said, "to conduct the rehearsal and make any—ah—alterations that are necessary! And now, as you are plainly not feeling up to strenuous work, you will sit at the back of the class and read your history book until it is time for you to report to Miss Primley."

Gwynne, followed by sympathetic glances, took her place at the back of the class. She was convinced that this was a ruse on Mr. Kestrel's part to prevent her from conferring secretly with her chums!

At any moment that laughter might be changed to cries of fear!

Gwynne clenched her hands, looking up from the book that she had been pretending to read. Then her heart missed a beat, her eyes lighting with sudden hope.

For Miss Primley was nodding over her sewing—fast asleep!

Gwynne rose cautiously to her feet, listening to the mistress' even breathing. Then, a gleam of resolve in her eyes, she stole across the lawn, breaking into a run as she reached the shelter of the bushes.

She would contact Mr. Forrest—tell him of her fears—and try to make some plan for foiling the enemy!

Breathlessly she ran towards School House, keeping in the shadow of the trees, making her way across the terrace to the window of the young master's study.

Thank goodness, there was no one about. The entire school, including most of the staff, had gone down to the river to witness the rehearsal of the Viking pageant.

Gwynne peeped through the french



"But, Dr. Roxford, that's not fair!" gulped Gwynne, staring in consternation at the Head. Thanks to Mr. Kestrel, she had been forbidden to take part in the pageant rehearsal.

Gwynne did very little reading that morning. Conscious all the time of Mr. Kestrel's watchful eyes, she was thinking of Colin Forrest—and the vital rehearsal that meant so much to her chums and herself.

She decided she must see him at the first possible moment.

But she found that it was not going to be easy to speak to Colin. Immediately after lunch, while the others were busily preparing for the rehearsal, their excitement rather clouded by Gwynne's absence, Mr. Kestrel personally escorted her across to Girls' Side, and handed her over to Miss Primley.

Miss Primley was a kindly if rather old-fashioned mistress—and a firm believer in rest and quiet for young people.

She brought out two deck-chairs on to the lawn, ensconcing Gwynne in one of them with a book, and herself in the other with her sewing.

It was clear from her well-meaning, if rather obvious efforts to distract Gwynne's thoughts from the river pageant, that she was acting on definite instructions!

It was a glorious afternoon. Gwynne thought of the river sparkling in the sunshine—of the boats painted and gilded to resemble Viking craft. In the distance she imagined she could hear the laughing, excited voices of the rival crews—and her heart sank as she remembered the ever-present threat of the secret enemy.

Her pulses quickened. Mr. Forrest's familiar figure was seated at the desk, surrounded by papers, his back towards her. His mortar-board was slightly askew, and his head was supported on his hand as though in thought.

The young master looked very tired, and his shoulders drooped dejectedly. Gwynne's heart went out to him.

Then, remembering her errand and her secret fears, Gwynne tapped gently on the window.

Mr. Forrest did not move.

She tried the window—and to her surprise found it unfastened. Pushing it open, she stepped into the room.

"Mr.—Mr. Forrest!" she breathed.

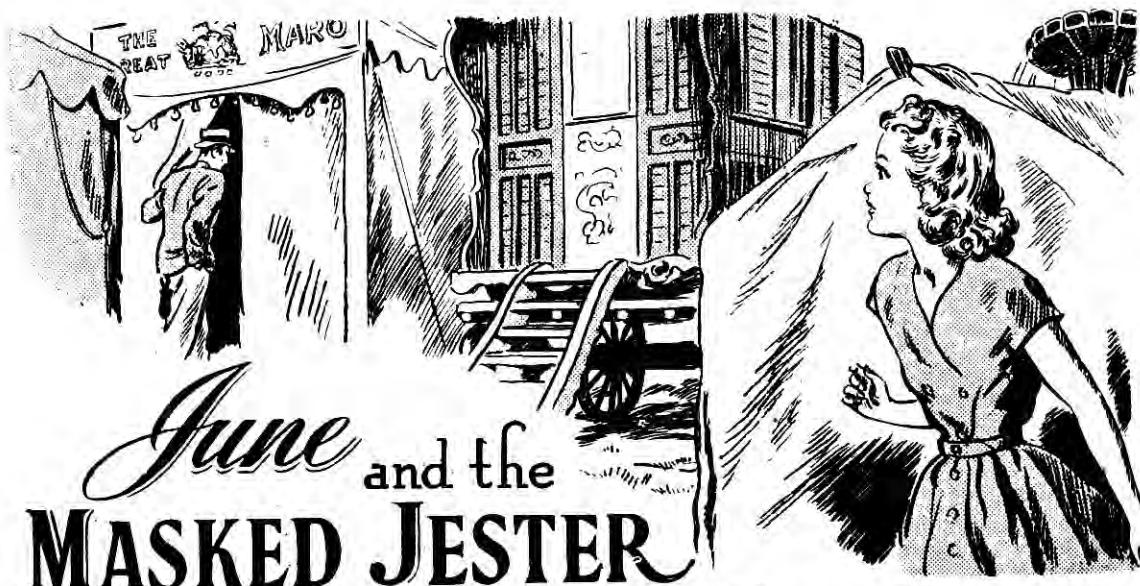
There was no answer, and Gwynne felt her heart contract a little. Could anything be wrong? She hurried forward, dropping her hand gently on the other's shoulder.

Her words trailed away in a startled cry—for the tired-looking figure crumpled up suddenly, pitching to the floor at her feet.

Dazedly she stared at it, almost stunned as the bewildering truth burst on her.

Mr. Forrest was not there. The dejected figure in the young master's cap and gown was a skillfully-made dummy!

What a startling discovery this is for Gwynne! And where is the young master? See next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** for the next instalment of this intriguing serial.



June and the MASKED JESTER

By PETER LANGLEY

THE LETTER FROM ALONA'S UNCLE

JUNE GAYNOR, the girl detective, and her famous uncle, Noel Raymond, were out to track down the Masked Jester, a mystery man who had kidnapped Stephen Kerr, the uncle of one of June's old school friends, Alona Simms.

The Masked Jester had also kidnapped four other men, all of whom were interested in Egyptology, and had possessed scarabs shaped like a cat's head.

One evening the Masked Jester stole a letter which had just arrived for Noel, but the detective managed to get a portion of it back. As he and his niece read what was written there, June gave an excited cry.

"WELL, if this doesn't beat the band!" exclaimed June

Gaynor.

Noel Raymond smiled at her startled air of surprise.

"It certainly is unexpected," he agreed.

The famous detective and his niece were bending over the table, looking at the sheet of notepaper which lay there. It was part of a letter addressed to Noel that the Masked Jester had dropped in his flight from the riverside cottage.

Excitedly June scanned the opening sentences which had so startled her:

"Dear Mr. Raymond—I am writing to seek your help, for I have an uneasy feeling that I may be going into danger. It is possible that the telegram I received may be a decoy sent by a master-crook known as the Masked Jester. But before I explain further I had better introduce myself.

"My name is Stephen Kerr, and—"

June gave another amazed gasp.

"How extraordinary that we should get a letter from Alona's uncle—just when we have started to investigate his disappearance!" she ejaculated.

"I suppose he must have written this before he set out for London."

Noel nodded, his handsome face unusually grim.

"Yes—and I very much fear that his premonition of danger was justified," he said quietly. "I'm more certain than ever now that he has been kidnapped. But let's read what else he says, my dear."

Eagerly they bent once more over the crumpled sheet of paper:

"— I live at Palm Bay Hotel, Riversea. I have in my possession a cat-headed scarab, and I suspect that the Masked Jester will stop at nothing to secure it. That is why, before leaving the hotel this

morning, I took the scarab out of my safe and hid it."

Her heart thudding, her cheeks flushed, June straightened up.

"Then the Masked Jester had all his trouble for nothing, Nunky!" she cried. "He didn't get the scarab after all! Oh, three cheers for Mr. Kerr! We outwitted the rascal for once, but where exactly did Alona's uncle put the scarab?"

Almost breathless with excitement, she again bent over the table, to read the last few sentences aloud:

"I believe the Masked Jester already has four of the Six Scarabs of Ka, but it is vital he should not secure the others. Should I fail to return, please take charge of mine. You will find it hidden under the Sphinx if you go to—"

And there, tantalisingly, infuriatingly, the letter came to a full stop.

In bitter disappointment June and Noel surveyed one another.

This Week Detective June Makes A Tremendous Discovery — Thanks To The Secret Meeting In The Fortune-teller's Tent.

"No wonder the Masked Jester planned to steal this letter," commented Noel. "And it's bad luck that he should have got away with the most vital part of it."

June gave her curls an exasperated shake.

"Bad luck, Nunky!" she gasped.

"That's an understatement. It's positively maddening. To think that that crook will be able to steal Mr. Kerr's scarab after all! To think—"

She broke off, a feeling of wonderment replacing her indignation as her gaze was attracted by one intriguing phrase in the letter. In a voice hushed with thrilled curiosity, she read it out.

"The Six Scarabs of Ka! Golly, but that sounds exciting! Why is the Masked Jester so desperately anxious to get hold of them? And who can own the sixth?"

Her uncle shook his head.

"That's what we've got to try to find out, my dear," he said, then his brows furrowed into a baffled frown as he glanced at the piece of notepaper once more. "Hidden under

the Sphinx," he murmured. "Where can this Sphinx be? Somewhere near Riversea, obviously, but I've never heard of any Sphinx in this part of the country."

June gave a heavy sigh. The knowledge that the Masked Jester possessed the vital clue depressed her.

"Fraid it wouldn't do much good even if we did know where the Sphinx was," she declared. "Long before we can get there that rascal will have grabbed the scarab."

But that was where the girl detective was wrong, although how wrong she did not suspect until next day.

She and Noel spent the night at the Palm Bay Hotel, and next afternoon June saw Alona off at the station. Her ex-school chum was feeling much better, but she had been a little reluctant to return home, and as she boarded the train she regarded June a little doubtfully.

"Do you think it best for me to go?" she asked.

June nodded.

Certain of it, dear, Uncle's been in touch with Mr. Kerr, and he agrees that after your frightening experience it wouldn't be wise for you to stay at Riversea."

The girl detective hated deceiving her chum, but it just had to be done. Alona had received too many shocks already; it might be disastrous if she received another, so out of kindness of heart June had decided to hide the fact that really Stephen Kerr had been kidnapped.

"Did uncle give Mr. Raymond any address where I could write him?" was Alona's next question.

June bit her lip. How she disliked the role she had assumed, yet for Alona's sake she must continue it!

"No, dear. You—you see, Mr. Kerr may be travelling about, so letters won't reach him easily. But don't worry. He will get in touch with you before long. Give my love to your mother, and take care of yourself."

She gave the girl a fond hug, then stood waving to her as the train began to move out of the station. It was as she turned away and made for the barrier that Fate stepped in and set her on a course of action which was to lead to startling developments.

Just emerging from the station yard, walking purposefully down a side street, was a tall, burly man wearing a grey suit and a Homburg hat with a down-turned brim. There could be no mistaking him.

"It's the Masked Jester's confederate!" June told herself with an excited gasp. "The rascal I encountered by the slot machine yesterday."

Instantly she knew what she must do—shadow the man. By trailing him she might discover who he was and where he lived. There was even a possibility that he might lead her to the master-crook himself.

The prospect set her pulses racing, and, hurriedly giving up her platform ticket, June slipped through the barrier and set off down the narrow street. It was deserted, and she was fearful lest her quarry should look round. If he did, he must see her and be warned. But to her relief he did not turn his head, but strode on briskly, as if anxious to get to his destination as quickly as possible.

June's eyes began to gleam more excitedly than ever. There was something about the man's manner which convinced her that he was on some mission of great importance.

"Golly, but I believe this is going to be my lucky day!" she told herself, as she broke into a run and raced for the corner round which her quarry had disappeared. "I'm certain that rascal's up to no good. If you ask me—"

On reaching the corner she broke off, staring in mingled dismay and surprise.

Before her was a large piece of waste land on which a fun fair had been set up. There were roundabouts; a helter-skelter which towered up to the sky; and side-shows and stalls of every description.

But of the Masked Jester's confederate there was no sign.

Despite the fact that it was near tea-time, the fair was thronged with holiday-makers, and June's heart sank as she surveyed them. In such a busy spot as this it would not be easy to pick up the trail again.

Hurrying forward, she began to squeeze her way through the jostling crowds, looking eagerly about her, first this way, then that. She failed to see her quarry, but she suddenly noticed someone else—someone who made her pull up in astonishment.

Standing in front of a hoop-la stall, rather scornfully watching the efforts of a bunch of day-trippers throwing rings over a china dog, was a short, broad-shouldered man.

Instantly June recognised him.

It was Philip Manners—the hotel guest Mr. Streiner had accused of taking the key which the Masked Jester had used when robbing Stephen Kerr's suite.

If what Julius Streiner had said was true, then it was probable that Manners himself was the master-crook. And if that was so—

June caught in her breath.

Was it just coincidence that the Masked Jester's confederate and Philip Manners had both decided to visit the fun-fair, or was it possible that they had come here in order to meet one another?

At that moment the watcher by the hoop-la stall, his grim, sombre face looking more unpleasant than ever, turned away and went striding across the fairground.

Deciding it would be wiser to follow him than trying to look for her first quarry, the girl detective hurried forward. A crowd of laughing boys and girls, emerging from a side-show, barred her way. Precious moments were lost while she strove to push her way past, but at last the stalls and roundabouts were left behind and she found herself on a deserted section of the wasteland, far from the noise and bustle.

Philip Manners was still striding on, and June saw him dive into a narrow alleyway formed by a double row of caravans and empty lorries.

She darted eagerly forward, but when she reached the mouth of the alleyway she was dismayed to find that her quarry was no longer in sight.

It wasn't her lucky day after all, but—wait!

Suddenly her eyes gleamed, for between two caravans stood a tent, and just entering it was—not Philip Manners but another familiar figure.

Her first quarry! The man she knew positively to be the Masked Jester's confederate!

Had Philip Manners also entered

the tent? Had the pair planned a secret meeting?

Convinced that she was on the verge of some sensational discovery, June stole forward, but as she reached the entrance of the tent someone abruptly emerged and barred the way.

"Entrance is forbidden!" cried a gruff voice. "The Great Maro is engaged."

And confronting her, a hostile gleam in his dark eyes, was a turbaned man in Eastern costume.

SUCCESS—AND THEN DISASTER

THERE was something so menacing about the bearded man in the turban that involuntarily June stepped back.

"The—the Great Maro?" she faltered.

"Assuredly. The Royal Sooth-sayer!"

And with a dramatic wave of a brown hand the man pointed to a poster pasted above the canvas doorway.



"So! It is as I expected!" cried the Eastern attendant, glaring at the girl detective. "You came here, not to have your fortune told, but to spy!"

June, glancing up at it, felt her heart give a startled bound.

The picture showed a figure in flowing robes seated at a table. The pointed hat he wore looked like a jester's cap; in fact, his whole appearance resembled the Masked Jester as the girl detective had seen him when he had paid his surprise visit to the riverside cottage.

In one hand the Great Maro held a pack of cards. He was pictured dealing them, as if to tell someone's fortune, and—

June caught in her breath.

The card he was in the act of turning up was—the Joker! The trademark of the Masked Jester!

Instantly she knew a burning eagerness to enter the tent and discover what was going on in there. But the bearded attendant was regarding her suspiciously, so she forced a careless smile to her lips.

"It doesn't matter," she murmured. "I only wanted my fortune told."

This excuse, instead of allaying the man's suspicions, only seemed to deepen them. Balefully he glared at her.

"Fortune!" he said harshly. "Who told you that the Great Maro was to be found here?"

"Oh, only—a friend. But it doesn't matter," stammered June. "I can easily come back another time."

She made a hasty retreat. But once out of sight she plunged between two great trucks and crept round to the back of the fortune-teller's tent.

A shaft of sunlight, shining through the canvas, threw two shadows on to the wall.

One was unmistakably the Masked Jester's confederate whom she had trailed from the station.

But who was that hunched-up, shadowy figure which faced him?

It looked like the garish portrait on the poster, and June's heart began to thump more excitedly than ever.

Was the Great Maro the Masked Jester? Even more intriguing, was that hunched-up figure really Philip Manners in disguise?

Creeping forward on tiptoe, the girl detective pressed an ear to the canvas. Faintly the murmur of voices came to her, but that was all. Desperately she stared around.

"I've just got to learn what they're discussing," she told herself. "It's bound to be something important, otherwise they wouldn't have fixed up a secret meeting like this."

Her heart gave another leap as she remembered the letter the Masked

Jester had stolen; remembered, too, that the part the master-crook had got away with gave instructions where to search for the mystery scarab which Alona's uncle had hidden.

Suppose the two conspirators were planning to find and steal that intriguing Egyptian curio?

Feeling utterly reckless, June cast another quick look over her shoulder. No one was in sight, so, dropping to her knees, she lifted up the bottom of the tent. Another moment and she had wriggled under the loose canvas.

It was a terribly risky thing to do. The Masked Jester had already kidnapped five men, so if he discovered her here he was not likely to show any mercy.

An icy shiver ran down June's spine as she thrust her head and shoulders into the tent. In imagination she already felt ruthless hands clutching her, heard angry shouts in her ears.

But nothing happened at all. The two conspirators seemed oblivious of her presence, and she quickly saw why.

Between her and the table at which the men sat, facing each other, was a pile of empty hampers. They completely hid her. Breathing her relief, June crawled on a little, then cautiously peeped around the baskets.

Almost instantly her attention was attracted by something which lay on the table beside the Great Maro's elbow. A sheet of notepaper. There

was something very familiar about it, and June nearly shouted out as she realised what it was, so intense was her excitement.

The second half of the letter Stephen Kerr had written to Noel Raymond! The part which gave the all-important information about the hidden scarab!

It was so near that by stretching out her hand June could have snatched it. It took all her control to resist the temptation. Instead, she crouched down, listening eagerly.

It was the Masked Confederate who was speaking, and he sounded angry.

"It's no use blaming me," he declared. "I've done my best, but I can't find it anywhere. The trouble is, half the letter's missing. If only I had that—"

June caught in her breath.

She realised the crook was talking about the cat-headed scarab. Not having the first page of the letter to help him, he had failed to discover exactly where the curio was hidden.

The bearded figure in the jester's cap glared.

"It's no good harping on that!" he exclaimed. "That confounded detective's got the other part of the letter, and that's that. We'll have to manage without it. You'd better get back and start searching again."

"But—" began the other man.

"No arguments," broke in the bearded fortune-teller. "When the Masked Jester gives an order he expects it to be obeyed. You fool, don't you realise the value of that scarab? We already have four, but it's essential we should have the whole set before we can act. Get back at once and resume your search."

He emphasised his words by banging on the table, causing the sheet of notepaper to flutter to the ground, but in his exasperation the robed figure June now knew definitely to be the Masked Jester did not notice it. She felt her pulses race.

The letter had fallen just beyond the piled-up hampers. If only she could seize it—

Her eyes gleamed.

Then she would know the whole of Stephen Kerr's secret—would have all the information she needed to find the mystery scarab!

Hardly daring to breathe, June stretched out her hand and recklessly snatched at the crumpled piece of paper. Another moment and it was between her fingers.

Hardly able to restrain her feeling of triumph, she crawled to the back of the tent. The two conspirators were still glaring at each other, arguing angrily. They did not hear the rustling sound as the stiff canvas was lifted up.

Excitingly June backed through the opening, the vital letter still clutched in one hand.

"Done it!" she told herself. "Oh golly, but won't Nunky be thrilled when—"

That was as far as she got. For suddenly she saw something which made her feel sick with horror.

A pair of out-sized boots!

They were planted in the grass right beside her. With a great effort of will, she forced herself to look above them.

A pair of baggy, ornamental trousers now met her dilated eyes, and then, even as she guessed the truth, a hand like a vice reached down and bit into her arm.

"So! It is as I expected! You came here, not to have your fortune told, but to spy!"

And as June was dragged forcibly to her feet, she found herself staring into a pair of blazing black eyes.

She had been caught red-handed by the Eastern attendant of the tent!

AN IMPORTANT CLUE

THE girl detective was too petrified to speak. Limp and helpless, she stood there, overwhelmed by this unexpected disaster. And now her captor saw the sheet of notepaper she still desperately clasped in her right hand.

"What is this?" he roared. "So it is a thief as well as a spy you are!"

And, suddenly releasing her, he grabbed at the letter. Frantically she clung to it. There was a tearing sound, and the man in the turban went staggering back, part of the letter in his grasp.

Behind him stretched one of the guy-ropes of the tent, and swiftly June seized her opportunity.

Darting forward, she gave the bearded attendant a violent push. Over he went with a howl—just as startled shouts from within the tent told that the noise had been heard by the Masked Jester and his confederate.

Panting, June pocketed her part of the letter. She must be content with that. Another moment and her enemies would be in full hue and cry.

Wildly she looked around, noting with dismay how deserted and isolated was this section of the wasteland. Then she darted between two great trucks and took to her heels.

From behind came furious, bull-like roars, as the attendant scrambled to his feet, while from out of the tent rushed the Masked Jester and the third man. At sight of the girl detective, they shouted angrily.

"It's Noel Raymond's niece!"

"She must have been spying!"

"Quick—stop her!"

And down the narrow alleyway came the thud of pursuing feet. Desperately June sprinted on. To be caught now would be disastrous. The yells grew nearer, and suddenly something went whizzing over her shoulder, to dig itself into the ground just ahead.

A dagger! The Eastern attendant had flung it. June's blood curdled as she saw it quivering there.

"Oh golly!" she gulped, and she plunged between two caravans.

Reaching the other side, she gave a gasp of heartfelt relief. Just ahead was a street, with people walking along the pavement.

"Saved!" she panted, and she again looked back as breathlessly she gained the safety of the road.

It was to see that her three pursuers had pulled up and were now glowering in baffled fury. Then, as she rounded a corner, they vanished from sight.

One or two of the passers-by looked a little curiously at the white-faced, dishevelled girl who had come racing so wildly into the street. Feeling a little self-conscious, June slackened to a walk, and mopped her hot, moist face, but her eyes were gleaming.

For not only had she escaped from the Masked Jester, but she had made an important discovery. The master-crook, she now knew definitely, was out to steal the Six Scarabs of Ka. He had managed to gain possession of four of them, but—

June chuckled gleefully as she remembered what she had overheard.

"He hasn't succeeded in finding the one hidden by Alona's uncle," she reminded herself. "And I'll take jolly good care that he doesn't discover it. If only I can track down that Sphinx—"

Her heart began to thud as she thought of the piece of torn letter in her pocket. That might contain just the clue she needed.

Resisting the temptation to stop and examine the torn notepaper immediately, she turned into the promenade and went striding down it, making for the Palm Bay Hotel. She was eager to report all the exciting events of the afternoon to Noel Raymond.

When she went up to Stephen Kerr's suite, which she and her uncle had taken over, she was disappointed to find it empty, but on the lounge table was a note from the famous detective.

It seemed that, having failed to discover anything about either Philip Manners or Julius Streiner locally, he had gone to London to pursue his inquiries there, and intimated that he would not be back before eight o'clock.

Having read the note, June sat

down, and with quivering fingers took the piece of torn notepaper out of her pocket.

To her dismay, the part of the sheet she had managed to secure was very small. Evidently the bearded attendant had succeeded in grabbing most of it.

Anxiously she smoothed it out and read the few words written on it, then her eyes lit up and she gave a whoop.

"I knew this was going to be my lucky day!" she cried. "Though I only got the smaller bit, I got the bit which matters."

And excitedly she scanned again the fragment of paper. Only seven words were written on it, but what thrilling words they were:

"The ruins of Monk's Isle.
Remove the—"

So that's where the mysterious Sphinx was! On the rocky island beyond the river mouth—she was sure of it!

Jumping to her feet, June stepped through the open french windows on to the balcony, and gazed out to sea. There, barely a mile from the shore, rose the rocky island, its ancient ruins and picturesque clock tower clearly to be seen.

The girl detective felt a burning impatience to cross the white-flecked water and investigate. She would know no peace until she had found the Sphinx and retrieved the hidden Egyptian scarab.

"I can't possibly wait until Nunky returns," she told herself. "After all, there will be no danger, so—"

Breaking off, she dashed into her bedroom, had a hurried wash, then donned a warm coat over her summer frock.

She would hire a boat and row across to Monk's Isle without delay.

She smiled excitedly as she took the lift down to the ground floor.

As she stepped out into the foyer, she saw that the guests had begun to gather there in readiness for dinner, and she gave a start as she saw Philip Manners sitting in an alcove, not far from where Julius Streiner stood beside Mr. Wentworth's invalid chair, chatting to its crippled owner.

Responding with a smile to Mr. Wentworth's "Good-evening, my dear!" the girl detective hurried across the foyer and down the steps. As she gained the promenade, she was glad she had stopped to don a warm coat, for with the approach of evening a coldish breeze had sprung up.

Not far from the hotel, boats for hire were drawn up on the sands. A sun-tanned fisherman with grizzled hair showing under his peaked cap was in charge, and he looked a little doubtful when June asked for a boat.

"Dunno as I ought to let you have one, miss," he said. "Seems as if it's blowin' up for a bit o' a storm. It may be no picnic out there before long."

June cast a look at the white-topped waves and smiled.

"Oh it's all right! I've had plenty of experience with boats, and a choppy sea doesn't worry me," she said.

"Very well, miss."

Dragging one of the boats down to the water's edge, he launched it, then helped the girl detective aboard.

Seating herself, she unshipped the oars and vigorously began to pull on them, setting course for Monk's Isle.

In the gathering dusk it rose blackly out of the sea, a grim, forbidding shape. Very lonely it looked; indeed, to June, casting a glance over her shoulder, there seemed something vaguely sinister about it.

"There's nothing to be scared of," she told herself, and again pulled on the oars, heading resolutely for that black mass which rose starkly out of the water.

What awaited her there? What discoveries were in store for her?

Will June find the missing Scarab of Ka on Monk's Isle? Next week's chapters of this grand detective story are packed with thrills and surprises.



JOY = The Girl With a 100 Voices

By
IDA MELBOURNE

JOY'S LITTLE SECRET

"JOY, you are wanted urgently to speak to a parrot," said Joy Oliver's Aunt Jemima crossly. "It seems the most absurd request I have ever heard; but the person on the telephone says you alone can make it speak fluently."

Joy, who had just been setting out for a spin on her cycle, turned back from the garden path of the seaside house where she was staying with relations. The message did not surprise her as much as it did Aunt Jemima.

"The lovely parrot in the avenue?" she exclaimed.

"I have no idea where the creature is," returned Aunt Jemima shortly. "I am not acquainted with your animal or bird friends."

"A Mrs. Simms, aunt?"

"Yes, I think that was the name," confessed Aunt Jemima.

Joy knew that her aunt did not like being out of things, and that was why she had adopted this lofty and aloof manner. So she explained matters.

"It's nothing mysterious, aunt," she said. "But cycling along the avenue near here one day, I happened to hear a parrot speak, and stopped to chat with it. After that, we've chatted several times. Mrs. Simms says the parrot speaks to me more than to anyone."

Aunt Jemima sniffed disdainfully. "I can imagine, from the way you chatter, that you have doubtless much in common; but I was unaware that a parrot could carry on a conversation."

Joy was chuckling as she rode down the path a moment later.

"Good for Boxy," she murmured.

Chatterbox—Boxy for short—was an amiable bird, and seemed to be a fluent talker—but there was a reason for that: a secret reason.

The simple truth was that Joy was a clever ventriloquist. In fact, the parrot could say little, unaided, but with Joy's ventriloquial aid, it was truly a chatterbox.

Joy had not meant to fool the kindly owner, Mrs. Simms, but she had once been chatting to the parrot and making it chat back when the owner had unexpectedly appeared. Joy had not wanted to admit to her ventriloquism, which she kept a secret, so she had had to let Boxy take the credit.

Joy, wondering why Mrs. Simms wanted to see her, and how much

she dared let the parrot speak, hurried to the house in the leafy avenue.

As soon as Joy entered by the gate, she saw the parrot in its cage at the window. Then Mrs. Simms appeared, white-haired, and her face rather pale.

"Oh, there you are, Joy! I'm so glad you have come," she said.

"Hallo! Hallo! Nice day! Good old Boxy! Good old Joy!" said Boxy—with assistance from Joy as she drew near.

"There! The first words he has said this morning," said Mrs. Simms quite excitedly. "Just what I told the detective would happen—"

"Detective?" cut in Joy sharply.

"Yes—detective," said Mrs. Simms, and then added dramatically: "My house was burgled last night."

"Goodness! I hope they didn't take anything much!" exclaimed Joy in sympathetic dismay.

"They did. My little jewellery and my fur coat. Of course it's insured. But what a nuisance—and what a shock! However, even so," said Mrs. Simms, sighing, "there's a hope we may catch the rascals—through Boxy!"

"Through Boxy?" asked Joy, surprised.

"Yes. Boxy was near and heard them. He said something in a strange voice about someone called Bert—and then wouldn't say it again. But if we can get him to speak, he may give a valuable clue, and I thought you could do it."

Joy gave a little gasp of dismay. Ventriloquism wouldn't help in this case!

"I—I'll do my best," she said briskly. "But it may—ahem!—be something that Boxy would rather keep quiet about, and we can't explain to him. He doesn't understand."

"Well, anyway, you try," urged

Mrs. Simms. "Come in, dear, though I'm afraid I must rush down to the shops. You won't mind being in charge of Boxy while I'm gone, Joy?"

"Good gracious, of course not!" Joy said readily. "A pleasure!"

Off went Mrs. Simms, and Joy for the next quarter of an hour tried to make Boxy speak. But she tried in vain, even though apparently the parrot was talking freely.

"So you won't talk, eh?" frowned Joy.

"Wait till I see those crooks again—I'll talk!" said Boxy. But, alas, it was only Joy ventriloquising!

As Joy wondered if there were some way of making Boxy really speak, there came a sudden soft murmur from outside the window.

"Hear that, Alf?" muttered a hoarse voice. "I told you that parrot would be the end of us!"

Joy could hardly believe her ears: for the voice came from just outside the window.

But Joy gave proof that he had heard, too. His feathers became ruffled; he flashed his beak on his perch as though sharpening it.

"Help!" he shouted.

He shouted that of his own accord.

"That settles it," came the voice.

"We've got to snatch that bird quick. Keep a watch on the gate, Alf!"

Joy drew back. These must be the two men who had burgled the house last night. And they had come back to "kidnap" Boxy because they were afraid the parrot would betray them.

Swift action was needed.

"Hey! Touch me and I'll call our maid," seemed to say Boxy—though really, of course, Joy was using her ventriloquism.

"Wassat?" asked the man outside the window. "Maid? Didn't know there was one—thought the old lady was alone. Here, Alf, someone's in the house!"

Joy made Boxy give a shout for "Maud."

"Here I am, Boxy," called Joy; and she appeared at the window.

There, just outside, she saw two men. But her appearance didn't frighten them away as she had hoped; and now she realised she was at a disadvantage. Single-handed, she could not hope to capture them—or to save Boxy if they were really determined to steal the parrot.

And then into her mind leaped an idea. There was a way out. Thanks to ventriloquism, she could bluff them. She could send them off content that they had Boxy with them—and yet Boxy could remain safely at home.

Joy almost chortled with glee as the idea struck her; but instead she calmed herself, and spoke in a natural, casual voice.

"Come on, Boxy," she said. "These must be the men from the Pets' Shop come to take you away again."

**The Covered Bird Cage
Was Empty, But The
Crooks Did Not Suspect
That. Thanks To Ventrilo-
quist Joy, It Appeared To
Contain A Very Talkative
Bird!**

BOXY PROVIDES A SHOCK

IF Joy was pleased with her idea, the men were delighted, too. This girl had made a mistake—or so they thought—giving them just the excuse they needed to get away with the parrot.

"That's right, Maudie, we're from the Pets' Shop," said the man Alf. "Sized us up in one, Bert."

"Ah, the parrot 'ud know our voices," said Bert. "Help!" shrieked Boxy. He did know them!

He was really alarmed, fluttering with excitement as he hopped about on his perch.

"We'll get away with this lot, Alf!" squawked Boxy—without any ventriloquial aid from Joy. "Okay, Bert! Okay, Bert! Pretty Boxy!"

He was repeating what he had heard the men say the previous night when they had burgled the house.

Their expressions changed again; their cheeks paled. This was the kind of talk they were anxious to stop. They did not want detectives to hear it.

"Come on, Boxy," urged Joy, in her guise as the maid Maudie. "Nothing for you to get excited about. I'll put your cover on."

Then Joy turned to the men. "Boxy has to have a cover over him, or he keeps chattering," she explained.

Joy's manner was so natural that the men were unsuspicious, and waited casually enough. Swiftly, Joy set to work. She took Boxy to the dining-room and there let him out of his cage. He would be safe there until Mrs. Simms returned from her shopping.

That done, Joy flung a heavy cloth over the cage, and then went to get a dog's lead she had seen in the hall. Returning to the dining-room, she tied the lead round the cage, so that the men could not easily lift the cloth and peep in.

"Hi, Maudie," came an impatient shout from Alf, "what's going on?"

"Coming," called Joy. But when she reached the door, and stepping out swinging the cage, Alf and Bert frowned at her.

"Here, just a minute," said Alf darkly. "How do we know the parrot is really there? Wouldn't try to trick us, would you, throwing a cloth over an empty cage?"

Joy's heart jumped. Then once again her ventriloquism came to her aid.

"Get on with it," croaked Boxy's voice, seeming to come from the cage. "Okay, Bert! Okay, Bert!"

The men's faces cleared. "That's the parrot all right!" said Bert. "Come on—off to the Pets' Shop!"

He held out his hand for the cage, but Joy drew back. It wouldn't do to give them a chance to look under that cloth. And that was the first thing they would do if left alone with Boxy—especially when nothing but silence came from the cage!

"Just a minute! I must come, too!" said Joy.

"Oh, yes?" asked Bert nastily. "Yes," came from Boxy. "Okay, Bert, okay!"

Bert scowled. "All right. You'd better come some of the way," he said grudgingly.

They went along to a waiting car, and Joy, carrying the cage, hurried along with them to it. She was confident Mrs. Simms would find Boxy quickly enough in the dining-room, although naturally she would be puzzled to know why he was there, and why Joy had deserted her post. All explanations could be made later.

But Joy meant to do more than merely fool these crooks. She meant to hand them over to the police if she could only trick them into a trap with her ventriloquism.

The two men sat in front, and Joy went into the back seat.

"A car, eh? Lucky Boxy!" The squawking voice seemed to come from the cage as Joy started ventriloquising once more.

"Lucky Boxy," agreed Joy in her own voice.

"Okay, Bert. This is our fourteenth burglary!"

Bert turned round in wrath. "That's a lie—"

"Okay, Bert," came Boxy's voice. Bert seemed to realise that he was giving himself away, for he flashed a false smile at Joy to reassure her.

"Some parrots talk a lot of piffle," he said. "We get a lot of them at our Pets' Store."

And then he frowned anxiously and began muttering to Alf, who was driving.

Presently the car swung off the main road and round one turning after another until Joy suddenly realised that she was in a part of the local countryside that was unfamiliar. The car came to a stop.

"Hop out, miss," said Alf curtly. "This is as far as we're taking you."

There was a dangerous note in his voice, and when he made a grab at the parrot cage Joy realised it would be folly to attempt to argue.

The men were going to strand her here; and frustrated though she was in her plan to trap them, she wasn't really sorry to lose their company.

She had a description of them for the police, and she had taken the number of their car.

"Good-bye, Boxy," she said, still keeping up her bluff.

"Good-bye! Remember me to ma!" said a squawking voice which seemed to come from the cage.

What happened next took the smile from Joy's face.

"Help!"

It was Boxy's voice—not Joy ventriloquising—and it came from inside the cage.

"I'll give you help!" snarled Bert. He pulled off the cover; and then Joy sprang forward with a cry of dismay.

For as she saw that the cage was not empty. The little door was open, and in the cage—feathers fluttering, eyes blinking brightly left and right—was Boxy!

JOY'S ARRESTING IDEA

WHEN Joy saw Boxy in the cage she felt as she did when she watched a brilliant feat of illusion or conjuring.

How had Boxy got into the cage? Too late, she realised what must have happened. While she had gone to get the lead, Boxy had returned to his cage; the door had been open and he had hopped in, remaining out of sight under the cloth.

The lane, the car, and trees for a moment seemed to whirl about her. "Boxy!" she gasped.

But the car was being driven off. The men had got away with Mrs. Simms' pet parrot—and goodness knows what fate was in store for it!

Once again the dismayed Joy brought her ventriloquism and mimicry into action. A doggy yelp rang out, and automatically Alf slowed the car.

In a flash Joy sprang forward, seized the fastener of the luggage boot, and, opening it, scrambled inside.

"Okay, Alf!" yelled Bert. "Can't see any sign of a dog. Get moving!"

Alf drove on again. The men had got Boxy—but, unknown to them, they had got Joy, too.

Crouched in the luggage boot, the lid held slightly ajar, she realised with growing excitement that the car was being driven towards the town. It swung into a side street, and then had to pull up owing to the traffic lights.

What should she do now? Joy wondered. If she could find a policeman—

"Help!" came a muffled squawk from Boxy inside the car.

A keen-eyed man in a grey suit, standing on the corner of the road, gave a start and looked at the men in the car. Then the lights changed and, before Joy could jump out, Alf was driving on again at a furious speed. Once more the car came to a halt, and Joy was surprised to see that it had pulled up outside a Pets' Shop.

"Alf, we've got to look slippery."

said Bert as he stepped quickly out of the car. "That chap on the corner back there looked like a 'tec to me, and he heard this blamed parrot. He may trail us, so the sooner we get rid of this bird the better."

"Sure," agreed Alf. "That's why we've stopped outside this Pets' Shop. I'll go in and pretend to buy a dog. You follow me in, and while I keep the old boy busy you dump the parrot. Then we'll make a quick getaway!"

The men hurried across the pavement. Joy, her heart thumping, scrambled out of the luggage boot and went rushing back down the road, almost bumping into the keen-eyed man in the grey suit as he came running round a corner.

In a moment Joy had learned that he was indeed a plain-clothes detective, and quickly she told her story.

"Ha!" said the detective. "Yes, I was suspicious of those two characters. Stolen a parrot, have they?"

"Mrs. Simms' parrot. And they're the two burglars you want," Joy told him.

"That's got to be proved yet. But stealing the parrot is good enough for the moment," said the plain-clothes man crisply. "Come on—and I shall want you as a witness."

He strode into the shop just as the two men were about to emerge.

The detective quickly barred their way.

"Just a moment," he said. "I want to see you."

"We're in a hurry," said Bert. "Another time—"

"Now," said the detective firmly. "Where's that parrot you had?"

"Parrot?" echoed Alf vaguely. "What parrot? We haven't had a parrot," replied Bert.

"Here I am!" squawked a voice. Joy, out of sight, was once again helping matters along with her ventriloquism, giving a perfect imitation of Boxy.

The two men wheeled, goggle-eyed, their gaze going to a shelf on which stood a number of cages housing parrots and canaries and other birds—the shelf where, of course, they had dumped Boxy.

"Hey, that parrot wasn't there ten minutes ago!" gasped the proprietor of the Pets' Shop.

"Of course I wasn't," Boxy seemed to say. "Those two crooks brought me in. Arrest 'em! They burgled Mrs. Simms' house!"

"It's a lie!" muttered Bert, white-faced.

Then Alf, at his side, seemed to speak.

"May as well give ourselves up, Bert. It's a fair cop!"

"Shut up, you fool!" yelled Bert. "I didn't say anything," gasped Alf. "Come on."

They made a dash for it. But Joy was standing in the doorway now. Out went her foot, tripping up Bert, and over he went, and over him sprawled Alf. In a moment the detective had pounced, and both men were grabbed.

Some half an hour later a triumphant Joy took Boxy back home, where Mrs. Simms, having returned from her shopping, was agitatedly wondering what had happened to Joy and the parrot.

Smilingly Joy recounted her exciting adventure, adding a message from the police assuring Mrs. Simms that her stolen property would be returned in due course.

"Oh, thank you, Joy," beamed Mrs. Simms. "You've been most clever!"

"Clever Boxy, too! Pretty Boxy! Okay! Okay!" came from the parrot—partly with Joy's ventriloquial assistance.

"Oh, isn't he cute?" smiled Mrs. Simms. "But it's so strange that he only says some of these things when you're here, Joy!"

Joy winked at Boxy and then happily took her departure.

(End of this week's story.)

More fun with Ventriloquist Joy in another amusing story next week.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL—22-7-50



The Merrymakers' Island College

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

AN ENCOUNTER WITH BURT

"WE'VE filled two bags already, Sally!"

That's quick picking, Fay. Keep it up, everybody.

"Johnny's doing a spot of quick eating, too. We're picking the apples, not eating them, Johnny, old man."

"Testing them for ripeness, Don, old chap!"

And Johnny Briggs, munching a rosy red apple with relish, grinned at his chums, Sally Warner, Fay Manners and Don Weston.

Sally & Co.—known as the Merrymakers—were fruit picking. Also so were a number of other students from the International College, situated on Waloorie Island, Australia.

An appeal for volunteer pickers had come from Mr. Lancing, owner of the largest orchard on the island.

The students, eager to earn extra pocket money, had come forward in such large numbers that the college authorities had decided to give the fruit picking official backing and had organised it on systematic lines.

Mr. Horace Gruley, the pompous West Housemaster, had been put in charge of operations, and he had divided the students into small parties.

Naturally, there was tremendous rivalry between the various parties, and Mr. Lancing, as an extra incentive, had announced that he would pay a cash bonus to the party picking the most fruit.

And so it was a busy scene in the extensive Lancing orchard. Students stood perched on ladders amid the branches of the heavily laden trees, filling their canvas bags as fast as they could.

The loaded bags were then being passed down to other students, who were tipping the apples into large hampers which would be collected on lorries and taken along to the weighing-shed. Each party had its own code number, printed on a card affixed to the big baskets, so that at weighing time the checker would know to which party to credit the amount of fruit picked.

"Say, here's another bagful!" sang out Linda Powell, the American girl, who was working in Sally's party.

"Golly, that makes three!" said Sally jubilantly. "We're doing fine and—"

"Have another think, Merrymakers!" came a cheery hail from a boy working on a near-by tree. "We've filled four. Tops always on top—Wow! Help! Ouch!"

And Tim Topham, leader of the Tops—old rivals of the Merrymakers—gave a yell and a groan as, showing his exuberance too energetically and forgetting he was perched on a ladder, slipped and landed on the ground with a bump.

"Who says Tops are on top now?" chortled Johnny. "Looks to me as if Topham's right at the bottom of the ladder!"

Sally & Co. laughed merrily, while Tex Trevor and the Terry twins, Tibbs and Tess, pink-faced, stared down at their fallen leader.

"I don't know what you Merrymakers and Tops are crowing about," came another voice just then. "Our party's picked six bags and we'll soon have seven!"

The speaker was Alec Burt, the weedy, unpleasant sneak of the island college. He was another rival of the Merrymakers; but whereas the rivalry between them and the Tops was always carried on in a friendly spirit, Burt was spiteful and ready to take any unfair advantage. Sally & Co. liked the Tops, but they did not like Alec Burt.

Sally, in the act of climbing a ladder with an empty bag, ready for another spell of picking, stared down disbelievingly.

"Six?" she repeated. "Putting it on a bit, aren't you, Burt?"

She had been watching Burt's party, who were led by Carmenita Pascall, the Mexican Wildcat. The haughty Carmenita was never one to exert herself, and here was Burt sauntering around as if he had nothing to do but jibe at his rivals.

"You'll see," Burt jeered. "We're going to scoop that bonus money. You won't stand a chance against us—"

"Crown him!" grinned Don, and did so, neatly dropping a bag over Burt's head.

The Merrymakers laughed, while Burt wriggled and yelled furiously.

"All right, you wait!" he vowed. "We will," smiled fair-haired Fay.

"Anyway, we're not at full strength yet. Where's Slick got to, Sally?"

For Slick Kaplin, the American boy inventor, was the sixth member of their party; and Slick had been missing for the past half-hour.

"Looking for me, buddies?" sang out a nasal voice, and Slick himself hustled on to the scene.

"Golly, what's that you're carrying, Slick?" asked Sally. "Looks like a folded camp bed. You're here to pick apples, not to have a nap—"

"Bed?" snorted Slick indignantly. "This isn't a bed. It's my latest invention—the fruit chute for slick picking!"

"The whatter?" "You watch," beamed the boy inventor, and proceeded to unravel the strange-looking object he was carrying.

It opened out into an enormous canvas funnel, which he fixed to the lower branches of the tree the chums were working on, and from the funnel extended two tube-like arms, also made of canvas. It was one of the weirdest-looking gadgets Sally & Co. had ever seen, and they stared at it somewhat goggle-eyed.

"See the idea?" asked Slick proudly. "The fruit chute saves time. No filling bags and then emptying them into the hampers. The chute conveys the apples direct from tree to hamper—two hampers, in fact—and the canvas prevents bruising. Cute, eh?" "Golly!" gasped Sally. "It certainly sounds all right, Slick. Let's try it out."

And the Merrymakers' party, now unhindered by bags, swarmed up ladders into the tree. Apples began to rain down into the yielding canvas funnel and rolled along the tubes into the baskets, which rapidly began to fill. Undoubtedly Slick's gadget had speeded up picking operations.

"Jumping snakes, those Merrymakers have got something there!" yelled Topham, flabbergasted. "They're catching up on us—"

"Overtaken you, you mean!" retorted Don. "Merrymakers lead the way!"

For once the Tops had no answer. But Alec Burt, still standing there, hands thrust into pockets, was not so silent.

"It's unfair!" he protested loudly, so that everybody in the vicinity could hear. "It's not fair on the other parties."

"Rats!" sang out Topham. "Don't try to make trouble, Burt. I expect you're like us—kicking ourselves for not having thought of a gadget like that first. The Tops can take it, if you can't. We'll get a gadget of our own, and we're still going to do our best to win!"

"Good old Tops!" shouted Johnny. "You're sports. Buzz off, Burt. Better do some work, hadn't you? Not so cocksure about winning now, are you?"

"Oh, yes, I am!" Burt said, a crafty light in his eyes. "But if Topham is a mug, I'm not!"

And grinning maliciously, he suddenly wrenched at the chute. There was a ripping sound, and apples poured through the hole in the canvas, thudding to the ground.

"Goshsakes, he's torn it!" howled Slick furiously. "Burt, you rotter, you—"

But with a jeering laugh Burt was already scuttling away, leaving the

Sally & Co. Thought The Apple-picking Contest Was Great Fun—Until One Of The Competitors Began To Cheat!

dismayed and fuming Merry-makers staring at the damaged fruit chute.

"Back to filling bags!" sighed Fay. "Never mind," smiled Sally. "Carry on in the old way, Merry-makers!"

And they became busy again, working all through the afternoon save for a short break for tea and cakes in the canteen which had been fixed up in the orchard. At intervals the lories came round, collecting the filled hampers to be transported to the weighing shed.

Merry-makers joined Tops, all of them bronzed by the sun, happy if a little weary.

"Seven hampers us," grinned Topham. "How's that, Merry-makers?"

"Not good enough," chuckled Sally. "Eight us!"

"Let's get along to the weighing shed!" laughingly suggested Fay.

All the students were congregating there, waiting to receive chits which would show how much they had earned.

The checkers were working at top speed. The shed was filled with the loaded baskets, which were weighed and then taken off to an adjoining shed for packing into boxes.

"T one—Tim Topham," said the checker, holding out a chit.

"That's us—that's our code number," nodded Topham. "Seven hampers—"

"Six," corrected the man. "Here's your chit."

"But—but we counted seven—"

"Then you counted one too many, kiddo. W two—Sally Warner. Here's your chit, miss. Four—"

"Four?" echoed Sally, dumb-founded, and stared at the man. "But we filled eight—"

"Four only," repeated the man. "Say, don't they teach you youngsters counting at your college? Four only, and your party's the lowest. Haven't got the knack yet, eh—like that chap Burt, for instance. His party lead with ten, and at this rate they'll sure scoop the bonus!"

A PLAN THAT WENT WRONG

FOR a moment Sally stood there speechlessly, unable to believe that she had heard aright.

Her party credited with only four—when she knew they had filled eight of the hampers. And Burt & Co. credited with ten! There was something wrong somewhere!

"Just a moment—please," she cried. "There has been a mistake—"

"Gee, I'll say there has!" supported Johnny indignantly. "We know there were eight—"

"It's a big difference," agreed the checker with a frown. "Mind you, the four credited to you were of the maximum weight. Some of you youngsters have been turning in baskets only half-filled—that might account for the discrepancy. Hey, Jeff!" he bellowed. "Check W two. And you youngsters go and look for yourselves. There's no mistake as far as we're concerned, I'm pretty sure of that."

And there was not. A careful examination of all the hampers revealed four only marked with the code card of Sally's party; while lined up in the packing shed were ten bearing the mark B two—Burt's.

The checkers were satisfied; but Sally & Co. were far from being so.

"We've been tricked," Don said angrily. "Our hampers were filled to the top when they left the orchard. Somebody's swapped the code cards—and I don't think it's very hard to guess who."

"Burt!" chorused the rest of the party.

"Calling me?" And Alec Burt swaggered up to the Merry-makers, a gloating grin on his pasty face. "Still think you're going to win that bonus?" he jeered. "You'll have to pull your socks up—Ow! Hands off, Briggs!"

Johnny had grabbed the sneak by his shirt front.

"You and your gang didn't pick ten hampers!" he said wrathfully. "You've been messing around with the code cards—"

"Lay off! Don't you talk to me like that, Briggs, or I—I—I—I—"

"You'll what?" demanded Johnny, dragging him closer and glaring into his face.

"I'll tell Gruley! I'm not letting you accuse me of cheating. You know as well as I do that no students are allowed in the weighing shed until all the checking's been done. You've all been slacking and now you're trying to blame me!" cried Burt. "You're jealous because we're beating you. Let me go, Briggs, or I'll shout for Gruley—"

"Yes, let him go, Johnny," broke in Sally hastily. "We've no proof, and we don't want to create a scene."

Burt, free now, smoothed down his rumpled sports shirt and walked off.

But Sally did not miss the crafty glitter in his eyes, and became convinced that the sneak had tricked her and her chums. But how had he managed to alter the code cards? As Burt had said, students were not allowed in the weighing shed until after the checking. That surely meant that the cards must have been changed whilst the hampers were being transported to the shed.

"Well, we're not letting it happen again," declared Sally. "We'll keep our eyes on Burt to-morrow."

And that the chums did when fruit picking operations were resumed the following morning.

Burt, cock-a-hoop, gave them a mocking wave as they walked past on their way to the group of trees which had been allocated to them.

"Goodness," he hardly seems to do any picking!" exclaimed Fay, some half an hour later. "He spends most of his time eating the apples—"

"Hope he gets tummy-ache!" growled Don.

The chums themselves were working their hardest. They were bottom of the list—and, unfair though it was, they were determined to try to beat all records to-day.

By the time tea-break came in the middle of the morning, the Merry-makers had filled four hampers— which was what they had scheduled to do. The Tops were only a little behind that; but, glancing across at Burt & Co., Sally saw that they had barely filled two baskets.

"Don't let him out of our sight," she said. "We've got to be ready for him if he has any ideas of repeating yesterday's trick!"

The filled hampers, each bearing its distinguishing code mark, were now being collected. The chums watched their own being loaded on to one of the lories.

And then suddenly Johnny tensed. Watching Burt, he had seen that boy begin to stroll off in the direction of the weighing shed.

"Gosh, I wonder if he jumps on to the lorry and changes the cards before

it gets to the shed?" he hissed excitedly.

"He must do," murmured Sally. "And he must have some fake cards, too—all with his own mark."

"Then I've got an idea," said Johnny. "I'm going to hide in one of our empty hampers—they've got lids—and you load me on to the lorry as if I'm full of apples—I mean the hamper is!"

And then you'll see if Burt gets up to any trickery with our code card—is that the idea?" asked Fay eagerly.

"It is! Quickly—now's our chance!"

Johnny scuttled across to one of the hampers, and in a twinkling had jumped inside, while hastily Don slammed down the lid.

"We'll give you a hand!" he called across to the driver. "Hoist it up, girls!"

The basket swung through the air on to the lorry, and there came a faint "Ouch!" from inside as it thudded down.

Then the lorry was being driven on towards the weighing shed, and the watching chums saw Johnny cautiously raise the lid of the hamper and peer out.

Johnny's had a brainwave for once! chuckled Don. "If Burt gets up to any tricks he'll be nabbed."

They had lost sight of Burt; but Johnny had not. Peering out from under the lid, which wobbled on top of his head, he saw Burt lurking among some trees.

The lorry came to a stop to pick up more hampers. And then Johnny tingled as he saw Burt saunter towards the vehicle. Gosh, his idea had been the right one, Johnny thought excitedly. But Burt was taking a risk. There were a number of students in sight, and approaching along an avenue between the trees were Mr. Gruley, the Housemaster, and Mr. Lancing.

Burt stopped beside the lorry. Johnny had dropped out of sight, but inside the hamper he was ready and waiting, fists clenched. As soon as he heard Burt crouched around with the code card on the side of the hamper—then the sneak was going to get an unpleasant shock and be caught in the act!

Johnny tensed. He heard the scrape of finger-nails against the wicker-work; and then, even as he prepared for action—

It was Johnny who received the shock. For suddenly he found himself upside down in the confines of the hamper, which had been abruptly pushed over on to its side.

Over it rolled, Johnny with it. The lid came off, and his kicking, whirling legs were revealed. Johnny and hamper rolled on, just as the lorry-driver was in the act of hoisting up a heavy load of apples.

Next moment, as the rolling hamper bumped against the back of his legs, he was sent sprawling. With a yell he crashed over, dropping his burden—and a shower of apples cascaded down on to the ground.

"Oh, crikey!" gulped Johnny, his head spinning. "What happened—ow!"

The basket, with him still inside it, had rolled off the lorry. He descended amid the apples—and then another shower of apples rained down on him as yet another hamper was dislodged from the lorry, knocked over by the falling, shouting driver.

"Briggs!" thundered Horace Gruley, hurrying on to the scene accompanied by an angry-looking Mr. Lancing.

Johnny sat up, apples under him, over him and all around him. He was still giddy from rolling round and round, and the apples thudding down on to his head had further dazed him. "Briggs, what is the meaning of this?" roared Mr. Gruley.

"Yes, what were you doing in that hamper, my boy?" asked Mr. Lancing, his face red with anger. "This is no time for skylarking around. And look at all those apples—wasted! They'll be too bruised for packing. So far I've been very pleased with you youngsters, but this—"

"This is disgraceful—I thoroughly agree!" rapped Mr. Gruley. "You are

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here to work, Briggs, not to act the fool. What have you to say? And stand up, boy—stand up when we are addressing you!

Johnny struggled to his feet, slithering on the apples. He saw Alec Burt standing near by—Burt with a sneering grin on his face. In that moment Johnny realised what had happened.

Burt must have seen him conceal himself in the hamper; and deliberately he had pushed it over, causing this disaster.

"I—I—" mumbled Johnny, his cheeks scarlet with humiliation and wrath. But he was no sneak—he left that to the likes of Burt; and he had no direct proof that Burt had been responsible for this—or for the changing of the code cards.

"So you have no explanation!" snapped Mr. Gruley. "You were just larking around, and this is the result. Very well! There will be no more fruit-picking for you, Briggs. Instead, you will return to the college—at once!"

BURT DOES IT AGAIN

"WHERE'S that rotter, Burt?"

"Golly, he's putting it across us every time!"

"He's cheated us out of some of our fruit-picking money, and now he's caused Johnny to be sent back to college in disgrace. Poor old Johnny!"

Sally, Fay and Don seethed with indignation. They had just managed to get in a few words with Johnny before Mr. Gruley had sent him away, and had heard what had happened.

Now Johnny, looking very sorry for himself, had gone. And his chums, ready to go on the warpath after Burt, were unable to find that unpleasant youth.

Burt, fearing vengeance, had obviously made himself scarce. But undoubtedly he was winning all along the line, and for once he was getting the better of the Merry-makers.

"Yes, poor old Johnny!" Sally echoed Fay's sentiment. "But there's one thing. Burt wasn't able to change the code cards on that last lot of hampers. We checked up on them as they went into the weighing shed. And we'll settle scores with him for what he's done to Johnny as soon as we get the chance."

"We will!" vowed Don grimly. In the meantime, there was work to be done. Break was over, and once again the fruit-pickers became busy. Sally's party worked harder than ever, if that was possible. They were one short now; but they had filled four of the hampers before break, and they wanted to double that number by lunch-time.

Burt showed up at last, and Johnny's chums were sorely tempted to have it out with him there and then. But that would mean only a delay in the fruit picking; and, anyway, Mr. Gruley was now keeping a closer watch on operations.

"Nearly time for lunch!" said Sally at last. Phew! My fingers ache and my face feels like a lobster after being out in the hot sun all this time. Fourth hamper nearly filled," she added, as she carefully emptied the apples out of the bag at her waist.

"Then call it filled, Sallykins!" grinned Don, adding his own quota. "Filled to the brim!" smiled Fay, as she and Linda and Slick rolled yet more apples into the big basket.

"Nice work," Sally said with satisfaction. "We're right up to schedule. And here comes the lorry to collect—" She broke off, her blue eyes suddenly keen and alert. "Burt's snooping off again. I suggest we ask the driver if we can ride on the lorry to the weighing shed. We're not letting these hampers out of our sight."

At once the chums were on their guard. The driver raised no objections to their having a lift on his vehicle, especially as they offered to lend him a hand with all the hampers. And so they arrived at the weighing shed; they saw their hampers being taken in, the code cards—W two—firmly affixed. The weighers and checkers were already at their midday

meal; they would return to work while the pickers were at lunch, so that the results of the morning's picking could be announced before operations were resumed in the orchard that afternoon.

Sally & Co. saw no sign of Burt; but they hung around until all the baskets were unloaded into the shed and the doors then closed and locked.

"Well, that's that," said Don with satisfaction. "Burt can't possibly have got up to any tricky dodges this time!"

And off the chums went to lunch with the rest of the students, with everybody excitedly discussing how much fruit they had picked during the morning, and how now their party would stand in the contest.

"Tops leading the way, I expect," said Topham with his usual airy confidence. "We'll be adding seven to our score—"

"Same as us!" exclaimed Erikson Thorgen, the Norwegian boy, who was leader of a party of Scandinavian students.

"Then, we're one up on you!" chortled Don. "Eight for the Merry-makers, and that sounds the highest from what I can hear—"

"You'd better wash your ears!" sneered Jerry Cantell, who belonged to Alec Burt's party. "Burt's the boy for picking. We've sent in eleven baskets—"

"What? Goodness, but that's impossible!" protested Fay. "You hadn't filled two at break."



"Burt never picked the fruit in this hamper," declared Don, pointing to the tell-tale crosses. "He must have changed over the code cards!"

"That's what you think," grinned Cantell. "Nothing to prevent us tucking some of our baskets out of sight to fool people like you, is there?"

"I still say it's impossible—" Fay began, then broke off as she felt Sally tugging at her arm, saw her beckoning Don away from the table as he came up with a loaded tray from the serving counter.

Quickly Sally drew her two chums aside.

"Noticed anything?" she asked. "Burt's not there. He's missing, and there's Cantell boasting that they've filled eleven baskets. We're pretty sure they can't have done, yet that's obviously the result they're expecting to be announced. We know Burt hadn't tampered with our last four baskets up to the time they went into the shed, but where is he now? Why hasn't he come in to lunch?"

Fay and Don looked startled.

"You mean—but the shed's locked, Sally," Don pointed out.

"I know. It's only a suspicion," Sally whispered, "but I mean to make sure. Burt's capable of anything, and we're not letting him cheat us any more. We've got to bowl him out if he's up to any tricky game—and it'll help Johnny, too. Come on—let's scout round."

Unobtrusively they made their way out of the canteen and headed in the direction of the weighing shed.

It was a large wooden erection, standing on short concrete piles and tucked close against a limestone cliff

which bordered this part of the orchard and formed a natural wind-break.

"The doors are still locked—" Sally was saying, and then gave a little gasp. For from inside the shed she had heard a quick, scuffling sound. "Someone's in there."

She rushed round to a window at the side of the shed. Excitedly she and her chums peered in; and then they were looking at each other rather blankly. There was no sign of anyone inside.

"Hiding behind the baskets!" exclaimed Don. "Come on—the window's open and we're going in!"

Quickly he dragged a bench under the window; and then he was clambering in, followed by Sally and Fay. Was it Alec Burt they had heard in the shed?

The loaded hampers were stacked around all four sides of the building, sending out a pungent odour. Swiftly but methodically the chums searched; and then they congregated by the big weighing machines, baffled, dumb-founded.

"No one in here!" Sally gasped. "But I'm sure I heard movements when we were outside—"

She suddenly started forward, staring at the big baskets filled to capacity with shiny apples—staring at the

code cards on the row in front of her. "All B two—Burt's card!" she said. "Eleven of them. I just can't believe it—"

"Burt never picked the fruit in this hamper," cried Don, striding indignantly across to one of the hampers. "He must have been in here—changing over the code cards. See those scratches on the hamper? Well, I put them there! That proves that this was one of our hampers."

"But when did he do it?" gasped Fay in bewilderment. "How's he able to do it?"

She was pulling off one of the code cards as she spoke. Angriily Don had wrenched at the one on the hamper which he had marked with the crosses.

"This is going to be ours—not Burt's!" he said fiercely. "Where's one of our cards—"

"Weston!"

The three chums jumped violently as they heard that thunderous voice. Round they spun, horrified, to see two grim faces at the window. Outside stood Mr. Horace Gruley, and Mr. Lancing, the orchard owner.

"This is terrible!" Mr. Gruley puffed out his cheeks, that had gone purple with wrath. "To think that three of my students should stoop to this—this cheating!"

The faces disappeared from the window. There was the rattle of a key in a padlock, and then the doors were flung open and the two men strode in grimly.

"Mr. Gruley," panted Sally, "you don't understand."
 "Don't dare to argue, Sally!" cried the Housemaster. "I saw what you were doing—Mr. Lancing also saw you. You were tampering with the code cards!"

"Oh, golly! But—"
 "It was reported to me yesterday that you students had complained about the checking. That is why Mr. Lancing and I decided to look round this morning to see that every precaution had been taken. And what do we find—"

"Mr. Gruley, you must listen—"
 "We find," raged the master heedlessly, "that you—the very students who complained—are the guilty ones!"

"It isn't true! There has been some cheating, but we—"
 "You will return with me at once to the college, and your headmaster will be informed of what has happened, and I have no doubt at all that he will be as shocked as I am—What was that?"

Mr. Gruley suddenly broke off. All had heard that scuffling sound; all heard the muffled yells that followed. They seemed to come from under

the floor. And then, amazingly, a section of the floor itself moved. Even as the group in the shed stared with goggling eyes, part of the floor heaved upwards. A head emerged into view. "Johnny!" shrieked Sally and Fay. "Briggs!" roared Mr. Gruley. "What are you doing here? I sent you back to the college! What is the meaning of this?"

Johnny hauled himself up through that trapdoor in the floor. And with him he dragged a trembling, cowed figure with a pair of puffy eyes that were already blackening.

"Burt!" yelled Don.
 "Yes, Burt," nodded Johnny grimly. "He's been doing the tampering with the code cards, sir," he added, addressing Mr. Gruley. "He's been getting into the shed through this trapdoor. And for proof, you'll find a pile of cards—all marked with his own code—in his pocket. Look, here they are!"

He pulled out the incriminating cards, while Burt cowed back, too frightened even to struggle.

"Oh, Johnny, you marvel!" exclaimed Fay, looking admiringly at her boy chum. "But how did you find out? Where have you been—"

"I came back here to watch points," grinned Johnny. "And when I saw Burt hanging around the shed; I concealed myself among those bushes at the top of the cliff outside. I saw Burt crawl under the shed. I saw you go in, Fay, with Sally and Don—and then I heard Mr. Gruley's accusation and I thought it was about time I acted. And I did! I've given Burt a couple of black eyes and bowled him out!"

And Johnny had indeed done that. Burt, questioned by Mr. Gruley, admitted his guilt, and so it was he who accompanied the Housemaster back to the college, where a very unpleasant and painful interview followed with Professor Willard, and he was lucky to escape the ignominy of expulsion.

And Johnny rejoined his chums when fruit-picking operations were resumed; and went on to help them win the contest—and the bonus money.

(End of this week's story.)

There will be another fine complete story in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**, featuring the ever popular Merrymakers.

THE SECRET OF THE SWISS DOLL

(Continued from page 308.)

in Amsterdam, for whom my brother works," she went on quickly. "The diamond, it is stolen and vanish, and my brother is to blame. But he hear something—he tell me. He knows of jewel smugglers who specialise in stolen jewels. He hears that this diamond is being smuggled from the country in a consignment of dolls—in the head of a small Swiss doll, marked on the forehead with a tiny cross."

She showed the excited Jean a tiny cross marked on the forehead of the doll's head, and went on swiftly:

"I am desperate to save Hans. I come to this town, and I am lucky. I get a job with Herr Zetter. I know he is also crook—what you call him, fence. I watch and wait for the dolls to come. Yesterday they come, and are just being unpacked when Herr Klaus and his daughter, Lydia, come. I know they come for doll and I watch. Then you English frauleins come in."

"So—so that's it," breathed Jean. "And then—"

"I see my chance. Just as Herr Zetter hand over doll to Herr Klaus I leap forward—I snatch it. I race from shop. They follow, and I meet you. You save me, and then I make that mix-up with the parcels, containing the dolls. But now—"

"Now you'll hand that doll over to me!" came a harsh, rasping voice. There came a quick rattling of stones, the scraping of feet on the rock, and suddenly a man and a girl were before them. It was Mr. Wimwood and Lydia, their faces blazed with excited triumph.

It was no great shock to Jean; she had had the fear at the back of her mind that the two plotters might follow her even up the mountain. But it was a terrible shock to the little Swiss girl. She gave a cry of fright, turned abruptly and rushed to escape.

"Stop! Oh, be careful, Trudy—careful!" Jean's voice rose to a frightened shriek, but her warning was too late.

She saw the Swiss girl reach the bend in the trail—try desperately to pull up—slip and fall—and then she rolled over.

Jean shrieked as she glimpsed the girl clawing desperately at the rocky pathway, and then she was over the edge, striving frantically to save herself.

For a terrible moment Jean thought she was gone—had vanished

over the edge of the precipice. But then she saw the Swiss girl's clawing fingers had caught a grip on the rocky ledge. Only her arms and face showed above the edge of the chasm.

"Hold on!" screamed Jean. "Help! Help me, Mr. Wimwood. Uncle—Anne—Pam—come quickly! Help!"

Her shrill scream rang and echoed on the still, mountain air. She leaned forward, flung herself flat on the rocky ledge. Her hands took the grip on the Swiss girl's wrists. She cried desperately over her shoulder:

"Mr. Wimwood—Lydia! Hold me—help me, quickly!"

The man Trudy Bergman had called Herr Klaus stepped forward.

"The doll," he gritted. "Hand me that doll first, my girl. If you don't—"

There was a rush of feet from the trail above—started shouts, and then the young guide appeared, Mr. Temple, Anne and Pam at his heels. They had missed Jean, and now—

Without a word the guide rushed past Herr Klaus. His strong arms reached over Jean—took firm grip of Trudy's arms.

"I have her, fraulein," he said coolly. "All is well now."

Mr. Temple helped him, and the two men easily lifted the Swiss girl to safety. Herr Klaus stepped towards the girl as she lay panting, his face cruel, his eyes glittering. But Jean gave a shout, pointing to him.

"Stop him! He refused to help me! He is a crook—a scoundrel! It is he who is the thief! He—he would have let this girl fall! Stop him!"

She herself, exhausted and spent as she was, scrambled to her feet and leaped to protect the Swiss girl. But it was Uncle Henry who stopped Klaus, his own features set and stern.

"You'll not touch that girl, Wimwood," he snapped. "I saw you from above—you refused to help, you heartless scoundrel! Stand back!"

Herr Klaus snarled, and suddenly he whipped a revolver from his pocket.

"So that's your tune, is it, Temple?" he gritted. "Stand aside. Now, you interfering, thieving little minx," he added, turning upon the Swiss girl, "hand over that doll—that diamond! If you don't—"

His attention was off Jean, and she acted swiftly, impulsive as ever. Her hand closed on a rock, and she flung it with all her might.

The aim was swift, but it was sure. It struck Klaus' wrist, sending the revolver spinning from his grasp. Then the guide sprang upon him and, helped by the amazed Mr. Temple, Klaus was soon bound with a rope.

Lydia, her face white with rage and

fright, stood still, her back to the rocks, her eyes staring. But nobody took any notice of her. They helped the Swiss girl to her feet. They looked from her to Jean. There was a clamour of questions from the startled, dumbfounded mountain climbers.

Jean, her heart thudding with relief and gratitude, placed an arm tenderly round the quivering shoulders of the little Swiss girl.

"It—it's all right now, Trudy," she whispered. "You're safe—and the doll is safe. You've nothing to fear now. Uncle will help you—he will make everything right with the police. Your troubles are over."

AND Uncle Henry did help! It was he, with Jean, who took Trudy to the police—who handed over the precious diamond and explained. Actually Mr. Temple had felt more than a trifle doubtful as to the result, but he need not have worried.

For as it turned out the police had long suspected Herr Zetter of being a member of an international gang of jewel thieves and smugglers, and they had been watching him for some time. Now—they had the proof they wanted; and that same day Herr Zetter joined Herr Klaus behind bars in the local gaol.

The climb for that day was definitely "off," of course, but the next day after a gruelling but glorious climb, the schoolgirl mountaineers climbed the Grimbeld to the very summit; and Trudy Bergman, who had done a great deal of mountain-climbing, went with them, radiantly happy.

Indeed it was she who found the first sprig of edelweiss—that lovely and rare Alpine flower—and when the happy trio of schoolgirls returned at new term to St. Winifred's, they each had a bunch of edelweiss to prove they had, indeed, climbed the Grimbeld.

But to Jean Temple, even that triumph did not bring so much true happiness as the joy she felt when she received a parcel from the little Swiss girl, Trudy Bergman.

In it was a lovely Swiss doll, and also a letter full of glowing hope and gratitude, and telling her that her brother was cleared, and had been reinstated with his firm, and that her own courageous quest had ended in complete success and happiness.

Coming next week: "The Rival Reporters on the Riviera"—an exciting long, complete story featuring these two popular characters, Julie Wilson and Barry Doyle.