



By
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None of the girl students realised that their new Art Master was really Noel Raymond, the famous young detective

CHAPTER I

THE PHANTOM ENEMY

"D'you think I'll fit the part?" enquired Noel Raymond, the famous detective.

Brian Harvard's worried face momentarily relaxed in a smile as he eyed his friend admiringly. Noel's good-looking, boyish features had been changed by a few deftly-pencilled lines and a mortarboard, slightly tilted, lent a finishing touch to the transformation.

"You'll do!" declared Brian, grinning broadly. "If the girls don't fall for you, I'll be surprised. Can you put over the lecture stuff?"

"I'll have a jolly good shot at it," said the young detective coolly. "I'm no artist—but I've done a bit of hurried swotting since I got your letter, and I ought to be safe enough if I stick to talking. Remember—my job's supposed to be a sort of general adviser."

Brian nodded, serious once more as he gripped his friend's arm.

"I'll remember. It's jolly decent of you to have gone to all this trouble, old

man—but you know what it means to me. When I bought the art school a few months ago, I sunk all I had into it. But these scares are undermining the goodwill—and if something isn't done quickly, I'll be ruined!"

Noel nodded sympathetically.

"I understand," he said. "Now suppose you show me the classroom for a start. By the way, what time do the students arrive?"

"Six o'clock," said Brian, glancing at his watch. "I've had to discontinue day-classes since the scares started, but I've kept the evening school going. We'll just about have time to look round before they turn up."

He led the way from his private office, and along a stone passage to a massive oak door. As he fumbled for the key, Noel stared round thoughtfully. Directly opposite the door was a cloak-room, and farther down the corridor was another class-room, obviously disused.

The walls of the passage and staircase were decorated with plaster casts, and frescoes painted by the students.

"This the only entrance to the studio?" enquired Noel.

"There was another," replied Brian, "but it's not been used in my time, and the key's lost. Here you are!"

He threw open the door as he spoke, ushering Noel into a spacious studio lit by a skylight high in the oak-beamed ceiling. There was another window set above the rostrum overlooking the garden.

"You see," said Brian, "it's quite impossible for anyone to get in here after I've locked up for the night. Yet the students' drawings have been tampered with and destroyed—to say nothing of valuable models belonging to the school."

"Has any particular student suffered?" Noel asked.

"Yes—that's the trouble," rejoined his friend wryly. "It's always the brightest students who've been the enemy's victims. I've lost three of 'em this term, owing to the scares—and now the unknown enemy is attacking my star pupil—Lesley Deane—who's in for the County Art Scholarship. I tell you, Noel, it's positively uncanny the way these things have happened—"

He broke off with a warning glance, as there came a sound of lively voices and footsteps in the corridor.

The door burst open to admit a small crowd of students—some half dozen girls in their teens, with a sprinkling of youths of about the same age.

As they caught sight of Noel, there was a sudden hush—and an attractive girl with unruly chestnut hair and merry brown eyes started forward impulsively.

"Oh, Mr. Harvard, is—is this—"

Noel grinned as he encountered her frankly interested glance. He saved his friend the trouble of replying.

"You're quite right," he said gravely, holding out his hand. "I'm your new art-master, and I've been hearing some flattering things about my class."

The girl laughed, shaking her head.

"Not about me, I'm afraid! I'm Dorothy—Dorothy Weyland, and I'm only a beginner. But I want you to meet my friends, Mr. —"

"Noel," replied the young detective, smiling. "Ralph Noel."

He took an immediate liking to this girl with her frank, merry eyes, her total lack of self-consciousness. She turned to beckon one of her companions—a tall, graceful girl whose expressive face was of almost classical beauty, spoiled only by her petulant lips and the restless gleam in her blue eyes.

"This is Lesley Deane—our star artist!" declared Dorothy. "Wait till you see her drawings, Mr. Noel!"

The girl artist smiled a shade intolerantly as she shook hands.

"Dorrie always exaggerates, Mr. Noel," she declared. "I'm not as good as all that—but I'd like your opinion of my work. I've had some trouble with it recently, because of—" she hesitated, darting a swift glance at the young detective. "Of something that's been happening. Did Mr. Harvard tell you—"

Noel nodded, his keen eyes scanning the youthful faces.

"I've heard all about that," he declared, "and I shall certainly look into the matter! There's probably some simple explanation—"

"Spooks!" hissed a freckled-faced boy, with humorous grey eyes. "There's nothing else to account for it, if you ask me."

"No one's asking you, Teddy Graham!" put in Dorothy, with a little frown. "And it's not a joking matter. Don't listen to him, Mr. Noel. We've all been terribly worried about these hateful scares, and sorry for Lesley—haven't we, Sharon?"

She slipped her hand affectionately through the arm of a girl who was standing close to her—a dark-haired girl whose face had been averted till now. But as she looked up, encountering Noel's shrewd gaze, the young detective was startled to see the expression in her eyes.

It was a strange, defensive look—almost akin to fear.

"This is my other chum, Sharon Varnay," Dorothy went on. "She's in for the Art Scholarship, with Lesley. And now, please give your verdict on our work, Mr. Noel—and don't be too cruel!"

Smiling, she hurried to her desk and proceeded to unlock it, the others following her example. All except Lesley, who had

come over to see Dorothy's drawings—and Sharon, who lingered in the back-ground.

Noel glanced appraisingly at Dorothy's work—bold, pleasing drawings, reflecting her own temperament.

"Not at all bad!" he declared. "Aren't you in for the exam?"

"Not me!" rejoined Dorothy. "I'd never make the grade. But, Lesley, now—show him your latest masterpiece, Lesley!"

The young artist smiled faintly as she took a key from her purse and crossed to her desk. Noel's friend joined him.

"I made a rule that all students were to lock up their drawings before leaving the school," he murmured. "An extra precaution."

Noel nodded, as he followed the girl artist over to her desk, the others crowding round.

Lesley's hand trembled slightly as she turned the key.

"It's stupid of me, Mr. Noel," she breathed, "but ever since my last set of drawings disappeared, my nerves have been on edge. We've been doing model drawing, and our entries should be sent in this week—"

She broke off with a sudden horrified cry as she raised the lid of her desk.

Noel started forward, his eyes narrowed as he bent over her. There were some half dozen drawings in the desk on stout parchment paper—but each had been ripped into several pieces by a malicious hand!

"Again!" choked Lesley, a note of anguish in her voice. "What does it mean—what have I done to deserve—"

Dorothy sprang to her friend's side. "Lesley—it's too bad!" she exclaimed, her brown eyes flashing indignantly. "It's the work of that hateful unknown enemy!"

An angry murmur went up from the students. Their expressions were bewildered—uneasy. Noel encountered his friend's glance as the young art-master pushed his way to the front.

Brian's face was white and strained. "Noel, this is worse than ever!" he said huskily. "Those were Lesley's finished drawings, and I intended to send

them up tomorrow with Sharon's. How could it have happened? I locked up the studio myself as soon as the last pupil had gone, and I was in my office during the remainder of the evening. I swear that no one could have got into the school—"

"Yet someone got at the drawings," commented Noel dryly, as he carefully picked up the torn sheets. "Someone who knew the lay of the land—and who had a duplicate key to Miss Deane's desk. That lock hasn't been tampered with."

Lesley looked up, her face flushed, her lips trembling.

"I put my best work into those drawings, Mr. Noel," she declared. "I'll never—never be able to do them again in time."

Noel was attempting to fit the drawings together. From what he could see of them they had been brilliantly executed, but several of the pieces were missing, and they were now completely useless.

His eyes narrowed as he examined the serrated edges more closely. A strange, almost fantastic theory had crossed his mind.

"When have the results to be sent in, Brian?" he asked.

"On Wednesday—at the latest," replied the owner of the art school. "I've already written for an extension, owing to the— the recent scares. The examiners won't take any more excuses!"

"It's a spiteful trick!" exclaimed Dorothy hotly. "Someone who's jealous of Lesley's work—"

"That's all very well," put in Teddy Graham, "but how did the person get into the room, and unlock Lesley's desk? The whole thing's pretty spooky—don't you think so, Mr. Noel?"

Noel smiled grimly as he stared round the room. For a moment his glance rested on Sharon Varnay. Her hands were tightly clenched, and she was gazing at the open desk.

"Somehow I don't think a ghost was responsible for this," he said dryly. "Brian—can I have a sheet of plain parchment-paper, similar to the paper on which Miss Deane did these drawings?"

His friend looked surprised, but he fetched a sheet of stout parchment-paper



Lesley gave a horrified gasp as she saw the torn-up drawings in her desk. The unknown enemy had struck again!

from a locker. While the students stared curiously, Noel tore it in half with a swift jerk of his hand.

One of the halves he held out to Dorothy Weyland.

"Miss Weyland—please tear this for me," he said.

Dorothy's eyes widened, but she obeyed, ripping the paper across with an impetuous gesture.

"There!" she said. "And I only wish it was the secret enemy!"

"Perhaps," murmured Noel, with a dry smile, "you may have your wish before long. Miss Varnay, would you oblige?"

He held out the other sheet of paper, meeting Sharon's startled, almost hostile glance.

"Why—why should I?" she asked defensively.

"To help my little experiment," said Noel pleasantly. "Thank you," as the girl hastily tore the sheet, her hands a trifle unsteady—"that's splendid!"

"I say, Noel—what's the idea?" demanded Brian, staring.

"I just wanted to test a little theory of mine," said the young detective coolly. "In my experience as"—he checked a faint smile—"as an art-master, I've found that no two students tear paper in exactly the same way. A lot depends on their emotions—when they're annoyed or agitated, for instance. But these"—he held up Lesley's drawings—"were torn with cold deliberation, by a trickster who had everything planned!"

Noel smiled as he encountered the startled glances of his listeners.

"But we're wasting time," he said briskly. "We must get on with the lesson, in spite of what has happened. In fact, it's even more important. Miss Deane"—he rested a hand gently on the young artist's shoulder—"do you feel up to having another shot at your drawings?"

Lesley hesitated, then nodded.

"All right," she conceded, "I'll try—once more."

As she took out her drawing materials, Noel stepped briskly on to the rostrum.

"Now—where's the model?" he asked calmly.

"I keep it locked up," said Brian, as he opened a cupboard and took out a magnificent bust of Shakespeare. "Too many things have been broken recently—and I just can't afford to replace them with my pupils leaving me, and rumours getting round. Are you sure everything will be all right—"

"Don't worry, old man," put in Noel, in a low voice. "Just leave everything to me. I'm getting interested in this job!"

With a grateful smile, Brian left the room, switching on the lights as he went, for the daylight was fading swiftly.

Noel busied himself in arranging the model on a pedestal partly draped by curtains. Then, after a brief friendly talk on the subject in hand, he took his seat on the rostrum—apparently immersed in a book, but actually watching the students keenly.

Lesley was working with the slickadroitness of an expert, her hand flying over the page as she stole a glance every now and then at the model. Dorothy was drawing patiently, pausing frequently to rub out her lines—while Sharon, seated nearest the door, was staring broodingly at her paper.

Noel rose to his feet and commenced to stroll round the class, halting here and there with a word of criticism or approval. But as he moved towards Sharon's desk, he drew in his breath sharply.

For the desk was vacant, and the door of the classroom stood ajar. Sharon must have slipped out while his back was turned—unseen and unheard.

Vaguely uneasy, he looked at her unfinished drawing, and his eyes narrowed suddenly. For Sharon had not been copying the model. Apparently doodling, she had drawn a clever, unmistakable likeness of Lesley Deane!

Instinctively he glanced towards that young artist—and as he did so Lesley

started to her feet, her pencil falling with a clatter as she pointed a shaking finger. "The face!" she cried brokenly. "The face at the window!"

For a fraction of a second Noel caught a glimpse of a white face pressed against the bars of the window above the rostrum. Then, without warning, the lights in the class-room were suddenly extinguished.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERY OF THE LOCKED STUDIO

INSTANTLY all was pandemonium—but the clamour was broken by the detective's cool, unflustered voice.

"Quiet, everyone! There's no need for alarm. Possibly it was a practical joker. Will you all please gather up your drawings and file into the empty class-room."

His calm tones instantly quelled the commotion and the students obediently gathered up their work. Noel crossed quickly over to Lesley, who had fallen across her desk.

Dorothy had darted to her friend's side. "Mr. Noel—she's fainted!" she exclaimed brokenly. "Lesley always was highly-strung, and these hateful scares—"

Noel bent over the white-faced girl, swiftly applying a restorative from a tiny bottle that he took from his wallet.

"She'll come round in a minute," he said quietly. "Take her outside, Dorothy, and give her some water. Try to reassure her. I must see about the lights—"

He hurried from the room, almost colliding with his friend in the corridor.

"Noel, what on earth has happened?" demanded Brian unsteadily.

"I'm not sure—yet," rejoined the young detective grimly. "You'd better get someone to see to the lights, Brian—and keep an eye on the students. They're in the vacant class-room. I don't want any of 'em to return to the studio till I'm ready."

"Where are you going?" asked Brian.

"To search the grounds," rejoined Noel.

He hurried down the stairs, and as he reached the door leading to the grounds he heard a footstep on the stairs behind him. He turned swiftly, his hand closing on someone's arm.

"Ah, young Graham!" he rapped. "What's the idea?"

The boy grinned, a trifle self-consciously, but he encountered Noel's shrewd stare without flinching.

"I didn't want to be left out of the fun, sir. If there's to be a ghost-hunt——"

"There isn't," interposed Noel. "But if you want to help, watch these stairs. Make certain that no one enters the school from the grounds. I'll be back in a minute."

The boy nodded and Noel, making his way through the shrubbery, halted beneath the window of the darkened studio.

He took out his fountain pen and a bright beam of light stabbed the shadows from a bulb concealed in the top.

Swiftly he examined the flower bed under the window, and the thick creeper that covered the wall.

A puzzled gleam crept into his eyes, for he could find no trace of footprints either on the mould or the soft gravel path—neither did the creeper show any signs of being bruised.

Thoughtfully he glanced up at the overhanging boughs of a tree, and the garden wall beyond. He drew in his breath sharply.

There was something white caught up among the foliage, just beyond his reach.

In a moment Noel had shinned up the trunk of the tree, and clinging to a bough with one hand, he reached for the white object. Dropping to the ground, he examined his find by the light of his torch.

A soft whistle escaped his lips. It was a girl's white kid glove—with a curious rusty stain across the palm.

He thrust the glove quickly into his pocket as he heard footsteps on the path. They belonged to Teddy Graham who had grown tired of his vigil.

"Found anything, sir?" asked the boy eagerly.

"Nothing of importance," rejoined Noel carelessly. "Have you seen anyone in the grounds?"

"Not a soul," replied the boy, as he followed the young detective into the house. "You know, it's jolly queer about these scares——"

"What do you mean?" put in Noel, sharply.

The boy hesitated.

"Well, there may be nothing to it, of course—but a few months ago, just before Mr. Harvard took over the school, there were some similar scares at the local art gallery, where my uncle's curator. A priceless Van Dyke was stolen——"

"I heard about it," said Noel, glancing at the boy keenly.

"But an assistant was dismissed for the theft—a young man named Curtis."

"I knew him," declared Teddy. "A jolly nice chap. I'll swear he was innocent. It was a spooky affair—just like this."

Noel's eyes glinted thoughtfully.

"Thanks for the tip," he said. "But keep quiet about this, young fellow—we don't want any more rumours spreading."

"Rely on me!" said Teddy, grinning.

"But if there's any excitement going——"

"You'll be in it," promised Noel, as he parted from the boy in the corridor and hurried to find his friend.

Brian was waiting for him anxiously outside the studio. He explained that he had locked it after Noel and the last of the students had left.

"I wasn't taking any more chances," he declared. "Something's going on here that I don't understand, Noel. There was nothing wrong with the lights—except that the main switch had been pulled. But the students are all het-up, and I'm afraid that more of them will back out after this——"

"Where are they now?" asked Noel.

"In the spare classroom. I've been giving them a little pep talk—trying to explain things away."

"And Miss Deane?"

"Lesley?" Brian smiled wryly. "She's taken it badly, I'm afraid. She's threatened to pack up without finishing her exam. Dorothy's doing her best to dissuade her. She's a good kid—the one pupil I can really rely on."

Noel nodded, as the other unlocked the door, switching on the light.

"What ever happens, Brian," he said, "we must try to get them back to work again—as though nothing was amiss. It's

vital, if I'm to solve this mystery. I'll tell them that what Lesley imagined she saw was a trick of the shadows—"

He broke off, as there came a horrified ejaculation from his friend.

"Noel—look, man! The Shakespeare bust!"

Noel caught in his breath, his face paling as he stared across the room. The valuable bust lay shattered in fragments at the base of its pedestal!

Yet the studio had been locked by Brian himself—and no stranger could possibly have entered the school, unseen.

The young detective's eyes were narrowed incredulously as he sprang towards the dais, and bent over the scattered fragments.

The phantom enemy had struck again—with apparently senseless fury—and under seemingly impossible conditions.

"This finishes it!" groaned Brian, his face pallid. "When the students learn what's happened—"

"They mustn't know," snapped the young detective. "We'll get this litter cleared away, Brian—before we call them in. Wait a minute, though—"

He bent to examine one of the fragments under his magnifying-glass.

"Who ever did this was no novice at his job," he added tersely. "It was broken by a skilful blow where the cast is joined. What I can't understand is why no one heard anything—"

"They were making such a clamour out there, you couldn't hear yourself speak," said Brian shortly. "But what on earth does it mean, Noel? First Lesley's drawings—and now this—"

"Both done with the same motive," said Noel, his eyes glinting as he rose to his feet. "And it's something more sinister than spite or jealousy. I've got a rather wild theory, but I've got to put it to the test. What baffles me is how the thing was done."

He broke off, staring sharply at his friend. "Didn't you say there was another entrance to the studio?"

"There was," said Brian, with a shrug, "but it can't be used. It's here—behind the costume cupboard."

He jerked open a door at the back of the rostrum, and Noel stepped forward quickly, flashing his torch into a cupboard littered with old-world costumes, lifelike wax models and other art-school paraphernalia.

At the far end of the cupboard was another door—a heavy oak door, thick with dust and cobwebs.

"Umph," commented Noel, as he examined the lock keenly. "You're right, Brian—this door hasn't been opened for years. But where does it lead?"

"Out into the shrubbery," replied his friend. "But we're wasting time. The students will be clamouring to know what's happened."

He commenced to clear away the broken bust, as Noel took a final glance round. The young detective pounced suddenly on a rusty iron hammer that lay near the door. He glanced swiftly at the stain of rust that marked his fingers, and a soft whistle escaped his lips as he pulled a crumpled kid glove from his pocket.

"I've got it!" he breathed.

Brian stared at him as he dumped the remains of the broken bust into the cupboard.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"A clue," jerked Noel, a glitter of excitement in his eyes. "The clue! Tell 'em to come in, Brian—I'm going to take the class!"

A few minutes later the students were assembled, still chattering excitably. Stepping on to the dais, Noel held up his hand.

"I'm afraid you've all had rather a scare," he said pleasantly, "but it was nothing more than a defect in the lighting—coupled with a natural anxiety on your part."

He smiled at Lesley as he spoke.

"We'll continue the lesson where we left off," he added. "But instead of the bust we'll have a more interesting subject."

He swung the glove negligently in his hand as he glanced round the class.

"I want one of you girls to pose for a cover illustration," he said cheerfully. "A gloved hand, nailing a horseshoe over the caption—"Good Luck." It'll be a little test in commercial drawing. But the pose must be correct. Who'll volunteer?"

There was a little buzz of interest and two girls rose rather hesitantly.

"Not enough," said Noel briskly. "I want several of you to choose from. Miss Weyland—Miss Varnay—and you other two. Please step up here."

Dorothy hurried up with an obviously pleased smile—but Noel saw the almost hostile look in Sharon's dark eyes as she followed reluctantly.

Noel posed the other two girls first, trying the rust-stained glove in turn on their hands. With a comment that they were not quite tall enough, he turned to Sharon.

"Now, Miss Varnay," he said pleasantly, "if you would oblige."

Sharon's lips were tightly set, and she was breathing quickly as Noel posed her. The young detective could see that she was staring at the hammer on the table.

He picked up the kid glove. This would prove—or disprove—his strange theory. He took the girl's hand and felt it tremble in his grasp. Then an involuntary sigh of relief escaped his lips.

The glove did not fit: it was a size too large for Sharon's slender, artistic hand!

He was convinced now that Sharon was not the culprit—in spite of her strange manner. Yet she knew something about the mysterious affair—more than she would admit.

It was Dorothy's turn next and without waiting for Noel to pose her she gaily snatched up the glove and slipped it on to her broad, capable hand.

"Give me the hammer!" she said laughingly. "This is more in my line than drawing!"

Noel's eyes narrowed as he saw the businesslike way in which she swung the hammer. And the glove fitted almost to

perfection. Yet it was incredible that gay-hearted Dorothy Weyland could be the secret enemy!

"This ought to inspire Lesley!" she declared, laughing down at her friend.

The young artist nodded smilingly, as she pulled her drawing-board towards her and set to work with new enthusiasm, the other students following her example.

Brian looked gratefully at Noel. "Good for you, old man!" he breathed. "It'll be a first-rate subject for Lesley's



Noel held out the sheet of parchment paper to Dorothy Weyland. "Please tear this up," he asked. What was the reason for the detective's surprising request?

exam. I'll send the results in tomorrow, before any harm comes to them. If the enemy doesn't strike again tonight—"

"I'll take care of that!" returned Noel reassuringly.

But for the next two hours, though his easy manner gave no hint of it, he was in the grip of suspense. He patrolled the class-room, glancing at the students' work, and keeping a wary eye on the door and window.

He paid particular attention to Lesley's drawing and Sharon's—the two that were

to be sent in for the exam. Lesley's was the more brilliantly executed—but Sharon's showed an unsuspected talent, a hint of latent power.

At length eight o'clock struck, and Noel rang the bell to terminate the lesson. There was an eager scramble, as most of the students jumped to their feet.

"Just a minute!" said Noel. "Everyone will pay particular attention to locking away their drawings safely. We can't afford any more mishaps. Miss Deane, I think I had better wrap yours up—and yours, too, Miss Varnay."

Lesley and Sharon handed up their drawings, and Noel wrapped each in brown paper, returning them to their owners. Each girl locked her work in her desk, and Noel himself took charge of the keys.

"No harm will come to them this time!" he declared with a smile.

"Trust Mr. Noel!" laughed Dorothy, as she joined the group. "I suggest we have a little celebration for the last evening before the results are sent in. As I was the model, the treat's on me!"

"What kind of celebration?" enquired Noel, his eyes twinkling.

"We'll slip into the cafe next door and fetch up coffee and cakes," declared Dorothy gaily. "We'll need all hands. Come on, Lesley—and you, too, Sharon."

"I—I'm sorry, Dorothy, but I promised to meet someone," said Sharon hastily.

A disappointed expression crossed Dorothy's attractive face, but it passed swiftly.

"Never mind! You can join us another time. Coming, you girls?"

"I'll keep an eye on the class-room while you're away," said Noel, smiling. "I think I'll lock the door—for safety."

He followed them out of the room, switching off the light and turning the key in the lock.

But as soon as the merry crowd had gone he opened the door swiftly and stepped back into the room, re-locking it behind him.

The young detective hardly anticipated that the phantom enemy would make another attempt so soon, but he intended to take every precaution. Swiftly he

secured a piece of adhesive tape across the door and another length over the window. Then he stepped into the costume cupboard, partly closing the door behind him and waited patiently.

Ten minutes went by, then Noel thought he heard stealthy rustlings—cautious footsteps. But, on listening more intently, he decided it was his fancy.

Then, suddenly breaking the silence, came a strange, eerie cry—like the screech of an owl.

It seemed to come from beyond the locked door that led into the grounds!

Noel leaped to the door, flashing on his torch. But the cobweb-clustered door was tightly shut, and there was no way of opening it.

Even as he tugged at it furiously he heard a loud hammering on the door of the studio behind him.

Noel raced across the room, switching on the light. The adhesive plaster was still in place. He ripped it off and unlocked the door, throwing it open.

A merry group stood in the corridor, carrying trays of steaming coffee, sandwiches and cakes.

"Here we are!" laughed Dorothy. "Sorry we've been so long, but we had to wait for the coffee. Lesley's got the jitters. She was afraid something might happen to her drawings—but I told her you'd be keeping watch."

Noel glanced quickly at the young artist, noting her pale face and the anxious gleam in her blue eyes.

"You needn't worry, Miss Deane," he said. "I haven't left the room. But to reassure you, you may see for yourself."

While the others laid out the refreshments, Noel crossed to Lesley's desk and opened it smilingly.

There was a faint scream and a splintering crash as someone dropped a tray of coffee.

Lesley was staring with wide, horrified eyes into her desk—and Noel gave an incredulous ejaculation as he snatched the drawing from her desk, still wrapped in brown paper.

It was a dripping, soaking mass of black indelible ink—ruined beyond any hope.

Impossible though it seemed, the phantom enemy had struck again!

CHAPTER III THE LAST ATTEMPT

PALE and stern, Noel straightened himself—to meet Lesley's despairing glance, Dorothy's horrified stare.

"Mr. Noel—how could it have happened?" Dorothy gasped. "Poor Lesley! There's only another day before the exam—"

"I can't go through with it!" breathed Lesley brokenly. "There's no more time—"

"Just a minute," put in Noel gently. "It isn't quite as bad as it appears, Miss Deane. This package is ruined, admittedly—but it doesn't contain your drawing!"

Lesley's blue eyes widened, and there came a gasp from Dorothy.

"Why—what do you mean?"

Noel smiled faintly as he crossed to a cupboard and took out two identical flat packets.

"I took the precaution of substituting yours and Sharon's drawings for blank paper before they were locked up," he explained. "Here's your drawing—unharmful. But"—his eyes glinted—"the fact remains that the trickster made another attempt, and nearly got away with it."

"What does it mean?" burst out Dorothy. "How could anyone have got at Lesley's desk? I'm almost beginning to believe that Teddy was right—that there's something ghostly about the whole affair—"

She broke off as there came a sound of footsteps in the corridor—and Teddy Graham's voice raised excitedly.

"I caught her outside the locked door, sir—she wouldn't say what she was doing. After what's been happening, I thought it best to let you know—"



Noel frowned as the key fell from Sharon's hand. It looked as if the girl student was the mystery enemy.

Noel started to the door, as his friend appeared with Teddy Graham. Brian, his expression stern, was holding by the arm a shrinking, white-faced figure.

"Sharon!" exclaimed Dorothy, her eyes wide with distress. "You!"

Sharon's hands were tightly clenched, and her dark eyes stared almost defiantly round the group.

"What do you want with me?" she breathed. "I've done nothing to be ashamed of!"

"Why were you hiding in the grounds?" asked Brian sternly. "And—what is that in your hand?"

"Nothing—" began Sharon; but with a quick movement, Brian jerked the crumpled handkerchief from her fingers, and something fell with a clatter to the ground.

Noel pounced on it, raising his eyebrows as he held up a large, rusty key.

"It's the key to the garden door!" exclaimed Brian, as he examined it. "That settles it, Noel. This girl is the culprit. It was jealousy—spite against Lesley. If it wasn't for the scandal, I'd call in the police. In any case, it means expulsion—"

"No!" exclaimed Sharon brokenly. "Mr. Harvard, I swear I'm innocent. I must enter that exam—"

"You ought to have thought of that before," burst out Lesley, her attractive face white with anger. "You tried to ruin my chances—to prevent me from passing the exam. It's only fair that you should go—"

"Just a minute!" put in Noel, breaking his silence for the first time since the dramatic interruption. He had picked up Sharon's handkerchief, and was looking at it with a curious gleam in his eyes. "Please let me handle this, Brian. Miss Sharon isn't the culprit—"

"Isn't?" demanded Brian, staring. "But the key, man—and her actions—"

"Are suspicious," agreed Noel dryly; "they're no proof. The real enemy, Brian, has no need to unlock doors or open windows."

"You mean—a spook?" gasped Teddy.

Noel smiled grimly at the incredulous murmur that arose.

"I shall lay the 'ghost' to-night," he promised. "You need have no fear of any further trouble. I suggest, Brian, that Miss Sharon waits in your study till I return. For her own sake."

"I'll see to it!" said Brian grimly. "What are you going to do?"

Noel lit a cigarette, glancing round the tense, excited group.

"I'm going to carry out a little experiment," he said, "and I want Miss Deane and Miss Weyland to help me."

Lesley stared at him, and Dorothy's eyes shone with excitement.

"What do you want us to do?" she gasped.

"I want you two girls to stay behind after the others have gone," said Noel quietly, "to act as a decoy for the mystery enemy!"

Dorothy paled, and Lesley drew in her breath sharply.

"But, Noel"—began Brian protestingly. "I can't allow—"

"It's all right," said Noel, "I promise you there's no danger. I suggest you dismiss the others—with the exception of young Graham. I'll have a word with him, later."

Brian ushered the excited students out of the room, and returned a few minutes later.

"I've locked Miss Varney in my study, and young Graham is keeping guard outside the door," he explained. "Now—what is this plan of yours, Noel?"

Swiftly the young detective explained, while the two girls listened breathlessly, Lesley was to continue her drawing, as though working late for the exam. Dorothy was to keep her company. Noel himself proposed to patrol the grounds, with Teddy Graham.

At Noel's suggestion, Brian set out a model on the dais—a Grecian urn, with a cloaked and hooded waxwork figure, full life-size, kneeling beside it. This was an actual grouping from the examination syllabus, and would help to make the preparations appear genuine.

"You girls may have a long vigil," he warned them, "but it's for the good of the cause! I suggest you get yourselves

some more refreshments—and the others were spoilt—and return in ten minutes or so. Meanwhile, I'll make certain that the coast is clear."

When the two girls returned, carrying a jug of steaming coffee and a fresh supply of sandwiches and cakes, they found Teddy Graham in sole occupation of the studio.

"Mr. Noel has gone to search the grounds," he explained cheekily. "I bet you girls are feeling nervous!"

"Speak for yourself, Teddy Graham!" flashed Dorothy. "Don't listen to him, Lesley. He's just trying to scare us."

Teddy grinned.

"Well, I'm going out to help Mr. Noel," he added importantly. "He promised that if there was any excitement, I'd be in it. Mr. Harvard wants you to report to his study before you start, Dorothy. He's got some special instructions."

And whistling cheekily, he strolled out of the room.

"Boys!" commented Dorothy, scathingly, as she assisted her friend to arrange her drawing materials. "Will you be all right if I leave you for a minute, Lesley?"

The young artist nodded, smiling a little unsteadily.

"Of course! I'm not nervous—really. I'll—I'll be studying the model while you've gone."

Dorothy hurried from the room—and Lesley commenced to make a hurried sketch of the dimly-lit group on the dais. But her hand was unsteady as she glanced quickly round the room at the lurking shadows.

After a moment she picked up her pencil and portfolio and rose quickly, crossing to the platform. The distant slamming of a door made her start violently but no other sound broke the eerie silence.

She bent over the Grecian urn, touching it with her slender, artistic fingers. Her hand groped in her portfolio—then a choking, terrified scream was torn from her lips.

For the cloaked model kneeling by the urn came suddenly to life; it turned swiftly, seizing her arm.

"The game's up, young lady!" rapped

Noel Raymond's voice, as the muffling cloak slid to the ground to reveal the schoolmaster detective, a stern glint in his eyes.

At the same instant the door burst open, to admit Brian Harvard, accompanied by Dorothy, her arm round Sharon Varnay. Teddy Graham brought up the rear.

With a swift movement Noel twisted the hammer out of Lesley's hand. The girl artist's face was pale as death, and convulsed with baffled anger—and fear.

"Great Scott, Noel—then you were right!" gasped Brian. "Lesley was the secret enemy! But what does it mean? Why should she spoil her own chances?"

The young detective smiled grimly.

"She was not spoiling her chances—she was improving them! Lesley Deane may be a slick young artist—but she had no time to waste on exams. That was merely a cover for her real purpose. She came here on behalf of her guardian, an unscrupulous art-dealer, well-known to the police. Her job was to recover a priceless Van Dyke—stolen some months ago—and hidden here by the thief, who was employed at the school as caretaker."

Brian whistled.

"I remember now! The man left mysteriously, just before I took over—"

"And Frank Curtis, the assistant curator, was blamed for the theft!" cut in Teddy indignantly.

"Sharon's brother," remarked Noel, smiling across at that girl. "He's been in hiding near here ever since. Sharon was terribly keen to pass this exam., to obtain the money prize that would enable her to help her brother. That's why she came here under a false name."

"And to think that I was sorry for Lesley!" exclaimed Dorothy, her blue eyes flashing indignantly. "But—how did she do it, Mr. Noel?"

"Raymond," corrected Teddy, with a grin. "Noel Raymond, the famous detective! I thought his face was familiar."

Noel smiled grimly.

"Lesley was just a little too clever," he said quietly. "To divert attention from the damage caused by her search,

she made it appear that the 'enemy' was hitting against the students' work—her own included.

"It was a simple matter to tear up her own drawings *before* locking them away—or to drench them with ink from a fountain-pen filler. She banked on the fact that no one would suspect the supposed enemy's victim—herself!"

"But how did she get into the room this evening—to break the bust?" demanded Brian. "After I'd locked it?"

"She didn't get into the room," replied Noel coolly. "The bust was broken before she left the room. You remember, Brian, that she and Dorothy were the last to leave the studio after the scare—a scare cunningly engineered by her guardian."

"Lesley asked Dorothy to fetch her some water. She was alone in the darkened studio for several minutes—enough for her purpose. With a hammer, muffled by a glove, she broke the bust and searched for the painting—but was unable to find it. She tossed the glove out of the window, and returned to her seat as Dorothy came back with the water."

"The room was in partial darkness, and

Dorothy was far too agitated to notice anything except her supposedly fainting chum. After they had left the room you locked the door."

"What a cunning trick!" exclaimed Teddy. "But—what about that key that Sharon found?"

"Lesley's guardian intended to use it, as a last resource," exclaimed Noel, "but he dropped it in the grounds as he was making his escape—and Sharon picked it up when she slipped out to meet her brother."

"But where is the stolen Van Dyke painting hidden?" asked Brian.

"Here," returned Noel, and smashing the Grecian vase, he pulled out a small roll of canvas.

A WEEK later, Noel received a letter from Dorothy, to say that Sharon had passed the drawing exam. with flying colours—and inviting the young detective to a special celebration tea at the art school.

Noel accepted gladly, and the cheery evening that followed was unmarred by any lurking shadow of the phantom enemy.

ANSWERS TO "CATCH OUT YOUR CHUMS"

1. Only 12, of course. (Though probably your chums, thinking vaguely of a shilling, will say 24.)

2. If you write down 19 in Roman numerals—XIX, and remove the I, there you have 20 left.

3. Two examples for finding a number thought of:

Number thought of	4	Number thought of	15
Multiplied by 3	12	Multiplied by 3	45
Add 1	13	Add 1	46
Multiplied by 3	39	Multiplied by 3	138
Add number thought of	4	Add number thought of	15
	<u>43</u>		<u>153</u>

You see? Rejecting the units, we have 4 left in one case, and 15 in the other.

4. W I T. (Use four of the matches to make

the letter "W," one to make the "I" and two to make the "T.")

5. I see you are a deceiver.

6. Brighton. Milton.

7. WHEAT, Cheat, cheaP, cheEp, cReep, creED, Breed, BREAD.

8. LAND, lEnd, leAd, leaS, SEAS.

9. It spells potato if GH is P, as in hiccough; OUGH is O as in dough; PHTH is T as in phtthis; EIGH is A as in weigh; TT is T as in button; EW is O as in sew.

10. (a) Only one—the p at the beginning; (b) A cat has its claws at the end of its paws, and a comma has its pause at the end of its clause; (c) With neither, please. A spoon is better. (d) Because they are always longer in bed.