

Six Splendid Stories for Schoolgirls Inside

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GIRLS' CRYSTAL^{2D}

Incorporating
The SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY



THE CHUMS' STARTLING DISCOVERY

See the exciting chapters of
"Daphne's Feud with the Phantom
Four"—inside.



A JAPE ON JOHNNY!

"HERE he comes, girls!" Sally Warner, standing on the sun-drenched deck of the s.s. Dorian, bound for Australia, spoke in a spluttering sort of voice.

Sally was the life and soul of the "Cruising Merrymakers," the jolly crowd of boys and girls on the luxury liner, and was always full of fun and life. Though she was travelling alone, she had soon made friends on board, thanks to her carefree nature. There was always fun to be had when Sally was about!

Now her two friends, Fay Manners and Muriel Dean, grinned with eager anticipation.

"Look at Johnny's face!" Fay gurgled. "What a jape—"

"S-s-sh!" Sally breathed warningly. "Don't give the game away yet—hem! Hallo, Johnny!"

Johnny Briggs came to a halt, his face as fiery as the red blazer he was wearing with his immaculate cream flannels and sports shirt.

"Can you see anything funny?" he demanded.

"Well, I can see you, of course," Sally said brightly, her blue eyes dancing mischievously.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Fay and Muriel pealed.

But Johnny glared.

"Sufferin' starfish, what is the joke?" he hooted. "Has everybody on this blinking boat gone crazy?"

"Why, Johnny, what's the matter?"

But that was what Johnny himself wanted to know. He revelled in the limelight, but this morning he was getting too much of it. Everybody was staring at him—and then, having stared, grinning broadly.

"Must be the effect of your blazer," Sally said innocently.

"What's wrong with it? It's a jolly good blazer," Johnny said indignantly.

"Turn round and let's have a look at you!"

Johnny turned. Whereupon Sally & Co., unable to repress their laughter any longer, burst forth into shrieks of merriment. For pinned on the back of the blazer was a square of white cardboard, on which was written in bold, black capital letters:

"DON'T I LOOK FUNNY?
LAUGH AT ME."

Not that Sally hadn't known it would be there, for she herself had put it there.

"Anything to oblige, Johnny!" Sally spluttered, and broke into a fresh peal of laughter, which was echoed by her friends and by the other passengers who were watching the scene.

Johnny looked wrathful and anxious at the same time.

"I say, if it's split—"

"No; but we're splitting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then what—?" And Johnny, suddenly suspicious, wrenched off his blazer. Next moment his eyes boggled as he saw the card. "Who did this?" he bellowed.

"Ask Father Neptune—"

"It was you!" Johnny glared wrathfully at Sally. "Why, you—you—"

"Don't say it!" Sally chortled, holding her sides. "Tit for tat, you know. You japed me with that egg at brekker—sticking an empty shell upside down in my egg-cup. Boys will be boys, you said. Well, girls can be girls, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Johnny!"

Johnny looked grim.

"Huh!" he said with a sniff. "Think you've scored over me—"

"Well, we're quits!" Sally chuckled.

"That's what you think. Boys are better than girls any time—"

"Sez you!"

"And it'll be my turn next—"

"If you get the chance!"

"Rats!" And Johnny, with a threatening look on his face, but a merry twinkle in his eyes, strode off along the deck, followed by a chorus of laughs from Sally & Co.

"Have to be on our guard," Sally chuckled. "Open warfare between us now—but it all adds to the fun of the

cruise. And now, my merry ones, what's next on the programme?"

"Well, we'll soon be docking at Lisbon," Fay said.

"Whoopee!" Sally exclaimed. "Then ashore for our picnic. Come on, let's start getting the things ready!"

The Dorian was due at her next port of call—Lisbon, in sunny Portugal—in less than an hour's time. Already land was in sight as the big liner steamed towards the mouth of the River Tagus.

With five hours to spend ashore, Sally & Co. had decided to see some of the sights in the city, and then to picnic out in the country.

"The hamper's nearly packed," Sally said gaily as they paused outside her cabin. "Just one or two more things to get from the shop. A tin of fruit salad, some biscuits—and, yes, cream!"

"We'll go along and get them now," Fay smiled. "But, I say, what about drinks?"

"I've made some tea and put it in a flask."

"Oh, good idea! Nothing like tea when you're parched—better than fizzy drinks!"

Fay and Muriel went off to the liner's shop, while Sally fetched the picnic basket from out of her cabin and then sat down in a near-by deckchair, awaiting her friends' return.

"A tin-opener for the fruit salad!" Sally suddenly exclaimed. "Mustn't forget that. I've got one in my case."

Leaving the hamper on the chair, she hurried into her cabin once more. Two minutes later, emerging again, she stared in surprise.

She had left the lid of the picnic basket closed. But now it was open, and bending over it was a fair-haired girl of about eighteen. Sally had noticed her once or twice among the passengers, but had never spoken to her.

"Here, I say—" Sally began, hurrying forward.

The girl looked up, gave a start, and her pretty face flushed with guilt. Next moment, however, without a word, she quickly closed the lid and then walked agitatedly away, to vanish from sight down a companion-way.

"Well, of all the cheek!" Sally exclaimed. "What the dickens was she doing—"

A hasty examination of the picnic

Gaily Sally and her chums went ashore to enjoy their picnic in the mountains—little guessing what the mystery girl had hidden in their hamper.

basket revealed that nothing had been taken. The flask of tea was still in the same position, and packed around it were the cups and saucers and plates, the cutlery, the tissue-wrapped packages of sandwiches, cakes, and other things.

Sally's sunny smile faded into a frown. What had the girl been up to? There was no missing the guilty start she had given, no mistaking the furtiveness of her actions.

Sally shook her head. Then she forgot the incident as Fay and Muriel came rushing along with the fruit salad and the cream and biscuits, and the news that Lisbon could be seen across the river.

All was excitement and bustle then. The throb of the Dorian's engines died away as she anchored some distance offshore; tenders came out to meet her.

"Got everything?" Fay cried excitedly. "Let me take the hamper, Sally."

"Your turn later, Fay. Come on, let's be in the first party."

They scrambled down the ladder into the bobbing tender with a bunch of other passengers. Then they were being taken across the sparkling blue river to the quay, with Lisbon rising beyond in a series of hills, and glimpses of verdant country in the distance.

They passed all sorts of craft, big and small. They saw the fishing fleet, saw a Portuguese man-o-war in the naval harbour. Then they were at the Customs House, were met by a small army of voluble officials who pointed to boards on which were written, in Portuguese, the list of items which were subject to duty and must be declared.

"Can't make head or tail of the lingo, but we're all right," Sally said cheerfully. "Have a good look, Pedro—just grub, tuck, food, if you understand me."

The official didn't, but one look in the hamper satisfied him, and with a wide grin he waved the girls on.

"That's that!" Sally exclaimed. "So this is Lisbon! Phew, but it's hot—mighty hot! Can't somebody turn on a breeze?"

The heat was indeed terrific, and the chums were thankful that they had put on their thinnest frocks.

"Let's see, we want to make our way to the Rocio Square," said Sally, who had studied a guide book in the Dorian's library. "This way, lassies! Follow your Aunt Sally!"

But even as they started off a swarthy-faced man approached them. He raised his Panama hat.

"Pardon, but you wish to see the sights?" he said.

He was obviously a native of Lisbon, but he spoke almost perfect English.

"Well, that is the idea—" Sally began.

"Then I take you," the man said at once. "Juan Mendrez at your service. I carry basket for you—"

"But we can manage, thank you—"

"I take basket!"

The man's eyes gloamed queerly, and he grabbed at the picnic hamper.

"No, thank you," said Sally, instinctively disliking the man, and holding on to the basket.

But Juan refused to leave go. Again his eyes flashed.

"I show you everything," he said.

"I take you to lovely place where you—what you say?—picnic."

And insistently he tugged at the hamper.

Sally tugged back and looked annoyed.

"I've told you we don't want a guide," she said. "And please leave go."

The man scowled; a balled look came into his swarthy face.

"I only try to help you—"

But Sally didn't bandy words any further. There was something about the man that made her distrust him, and with a nod to Fay and Muriel she strode on. Juan stood looking after them, his scowl deepening. He made to follow, but at that moment a couple of taxis bowled along the quay and slithered to a halt beside the three girls.

Johnny Briggs leaned through the open window of the first cab.

"Hey there, girls! Come for a joy-ride!"

"Plenty of room!" yelled one of his pals from the second taxi.

Sally laughed.

"Thought we were rivals, Johnny—"

"So we are, you old japer. But come and join the party. I'll show you the sights—know Lisbon like I know my hand," Johnny said. "Going for a picnic, aren't you? Then we'll take you as far as the country."

"Suits us!" Sally grinned. "Come on, girls!"

So into the taxis they jumped. Sally in the first one with Johnny and three more boys, Fay and Muriel into the other. Then they were speeding into the heart of Lisbon.

They fell to discussing each other's plans, and it seemed the boys were going to do some climbing in the hills at a spot quite near where the girls had decided to hold their picnic.

"Bo seeing you, perhaps," Johnny grinned, as at last they all clambered out of the two taxis. "Now, come on, into that cafe over there, and we'll treat you to a drink before we go."

So into the little cafe they all trooped, where cooling drinks were welcome after the hot ride. Then, with cheery farewells, Johnny and his pals took their departure.

"He's a boasting bounder and thinks girls can't do anything, but I like him!" Sally chuckled. "Well, come on, we'll be getting on our way, too!"

"Got the picnic basket?" Fay asked.

"Rather, here it is!" Sally replied, picking it up from the corner of the cafe where she had left it.

Outside into the heat they went.

Ahead of them stretched a narrow, bumpy road, flanked by sub-tropical vegetation. They started off down the road, keeping in the shade as much as possible.

Perhaps five hundred yards they had gone, when behind them came the sound of an approaching car. Sally turned. It came bumping towards them, a girl in the driving-seat.

And then Sally started. For it was the same girl whom she had seen bending over the picnic basket on board the Dorian—the same girl who had acted so guiltily.

Now she waved her hand, sent the car bumping towards the group of girls.

"Stop!" she cried. "I want to see you."

"What the dickens—" Fay began in bewilderment.

Then the car slithered to a halt; the girl jumped out and ran over to Sally & Co. Her gaze was fixed on the picnic basket which Sally carried.

"Let me have it—please!" the girl cried urgently. "I just want the flask."

"Flask?" Sally repeated, and then drew back as the girl made to open the basket. "Here," she said indignantly, "what's the giddy idea?"

The girl looked at her with desperate pleading.

"Don't you see—I've hidden something in the flask!" she exclaimed. "Now I must get it back."

Sally & Co. stared in amazement. But next moment from the girl came a gasp of consternation. She had the lid of the picnic basket open now, was looking inside with eyes that had suddenly filled with horror.

"The flask—it's not here!" she cried.

"Oh, where is it? You must tell me—you must!"

THE SECRET OF THE TEA FLASK

SALLY'S brain was awl. What was this girl saying—that she had hidden something in the flask of tea? Was that what she had been doing back on the Dorian? But the whole thing sounded so extraordinary—

"Here, let's go this straight—" she began.



"Let me have it, please!" the girl cried urgently. Sally drew back. Why should this stranger want their picnic hamper?

"The flask—where is it?" broke in the newcomer agitatedly. "Oh, what has happened? Is this the right basket? There are only stones and lumps of grass in it—"

"What?"

In a moment Sally was staring into the basket, and her eyes widened. What the girl had said was only too true. The flask wasn't there, nor were the sandwiches, the biscuits, the fruit salad, the cream, and all the other good things which had been going to make up the picnic.

All that met her gaze were clods of grass between which stones had been carefully packed—and a little slip of paper on which was some writing. One look Sally took at it and she knew the worst.

"Johnny!" she gasped. "He's done this! Oh, the awful bounder!"

"My turn now," Johnny had written. "If you want grub you'll have to come and join us on that island I told you about. Who wins now—boys or girls? Be seeing you, and dare you to come and hear our laughter! Poor old Sally!"

"A jape!" Fay cried, as she read the note over Sally's shoulder. "Oh, my hat, this is a bit too steep! But when did he do it—"

"When we were in that cafe!" Muriel exclaimed indignantly.

"That's about it!" Sally looked rueful. "Girls, we sing small this time—"

She broke off as she felt her arm suddenly seized. The girl who had arrived in the car was gazing at her with a frantic light in her eyes.

"We must get the flask back!" she cried. "Oh, don't you see, I've hidden something in it—precious plans that mean so much to my father. He must have them—"

Sally blinked incredulously. "You're done what?" she gasped. "Hidden plans—in a flask of tea?"

"Yes. I put them in a little waterproof bag. I did it because I knew there was a man on the Dorian who wanted to steal them from me."

A little tingling thrill of excitement shot through Sally as understanding began to dawn on her.

"My hat! So that was what you had been doing when I saw you acting so queerly this morning!"

The girl nodded. "I should have told you then, I suppose," she said. "But I was afraid you might not understand—that you might not agree to help me."

"Go on," Sally said softly. "By the way, my name's Sally Warner. These are my friends, Fay Manners and Muriel Dean."

"And my name's Mavis Trent. Perhaps I had better tell you the whole story. My father has just made a discovery which will make him famous. His brother—my Uncle Charles—promised to give him the necessary backing. Uncle Charles is in Lisbon at the moment, and wanted the plans of this invention. As father is ill at the moment, I said I would deliver them."

And then, at Southampton, an attempt had been made to steal those plans. Realising a further attempt would be made when she reached Lisbon, Mavis had had to find some way of outwitting the rascal who threatened her father's career.

She had hit on the idea of hiding the plans in the chums' flask, intending to meet her uncle and hand him an envelope containing blank sheets of paper so that the crook, if he were watching, would thus be tricked. A few whispered words of explanation to her uncle,

and then she would have followed Sally & Co. and retrieved the real plans.

"But I'm afraid my idea hasn't worked out," Mavis went on bitterly. "In the first place, my father's enemy must have seen me hide the plans in that flask. He planted something in my case, so that I was detained at the Customs. I couldn't follow you straight away—although I knew where you were going, because I heard you discussing your trip. Has anyone tried to get the flask?" she added anxiously.

Sally gave a start. "My hat! There was that guide chap on the quay. He was jolly persistent, and tried to grab hold of the basket. Said his name was Juan Mendrez—a Portuguese."

Mavis shook her head worriedly. "No, that wouldn't be the man. But he might be an accomplice. Sally, we must get the flask back!"

"I'll say we must!" Sally exclaimed. "My hat, how one can get a wrong impression! When I saw you this morning, Mavis, I thought you were up to something fishy, but now—well, now I understand, and I want to help. Come on; we've got to go to this island and find the boys!"

"You know the way, Sally?"

"You bet!"

"Then jump in the car. We haven't too much time. I'm due to meet Uncle Charles in two hours' time, when he's leaving Lisbon to go to Spain. If he doesn't get the plans then, the whole scheme may fall through."

"We can do it!" Sally cried. "We've got to!"

They all jumped into the car; then, with Mavis driving, they were bumping along the narrow road.

For half an hour they travelled, with the country growing more picturesquely wild, with the road becoming more bumpily uncomfortable. Then suddenly it dwindled away into a rough track, with the trees and shrubs hemming it in so that further progress in the car was impossible.

"Have to abandon it," Sally said. "And I can't say I'm sorry. Talk about a stormy passage across the Bay of Biscay—why, it was a feather-bed journey compared with what we've just come over! Oh, my poor old bones! But don't worry, Mavis. This path leads to the island, and I should reckon it's about two miles farther on."

Leaving the car there, they set forth on foot. No sooner had they vanished from view than there were sudden movements at the back of the vehicle.

The lid of the big luggage carrier opened, and a swarthy face appeared. It was the face of Juan Mendrez. He clambered out of the carrier, stretched his cramped limbs, and then stared along the narrow path. A cunning light came into his eyes.

"So they go to the island that way," he muttered. "They know not of the shorter way through the forest. And those boys have the flask. It was indeed a stroke of luck that I should be concealed in those bushes when the girl arrived in this car! They do not know I heard everything! They do not know that I have followed them. It is well. I reach the island first, and then I get the plans from the black flask. It is money easily earned!"

And with another triumphant, crafty smile, he plunged among the trees and was soon lost to sight in the depths of the forest.

"HOW much farther, Sally?" Mavis asked the question anxiously as they toiled along the narrow path.

"About another half-mile, I should say. We must have come well over a mile," Sally replied.

She looked sympathetically at the elder girl, realising how anxious she must be feeling.

They pressed on, almost at a run. Overhead the sun blazed down, but fortunately there was plenty of shade from the trees on either side of them.

"Hallo, what's this ahead of us?" Fay cried.

There was a clearing some few yards farther on, and a weird-looking contraption on two enormous wheels suddenly appeared, drawn by a slowly moving ox.

"Ye old ox-cart!" Muriel exclaimed. "Whoops, look at it jolting along. Wouldn't like to go for a ride in that."

"Not my dream of comfort, agreed, but it's an idea," Sally put in cheerfully.

"What's an idea?"

"Well, to ask the Johnny in it to take us to the island! If he can only tickle up the old ox we'll get there quicker. Trouble is, not being able to speak the lingo, how to ask him?"

"I can manage that," Mavis said eagerly. "Come on, this is a stroke of luck."

They hurried forward, and Mavis hailed the peasant in the ox-cart in faltering Portuguese. But he understood, and broke into a torrent of words, accompanied by many gestures.

"Golly, what's all that mean?" Sally asked.

"He says he can take us near the island, and we're welcome," Mavis interpreted. "Pile in, girls!"

They piled in, clutching at the side of the cart as it tipped alarmingly under their extra weight. But then they were off again, jolting up and down over the rough ground.

"Oh, don't we see life!" Sally cried.

"Owp! Can you hear my bones rattling. I thought that car was bad enough, but at least it had springs. I say, Mr. Driver, is this the best the beast can do? There's no speed limit here!"

The old peasant didn't understand a word, but he grinned amiably and flicked the animal with a stick. Flapping its ears, it plodded on stolidly.

"Quicker than we could have walked it, though," Sally grinned.

And thus it was that the girls reached the island quicker than Juan Mendrez had expected them to.

The peasant wasn't able to take them all the way, but, bringing his cart to a lumbering stop, he pointed through a belt of trees, and beyond they could see the sparkle of water.

"We're here!" Sally cried. "Thanks, old-timer! You deserve a tip for this."

But it was Mavis who produced some Portuguese money from her handbag, and the peasant's wrinkled face broke into an expansive beam as he took it with voluble thanks.

Then the girls were clambering down. The peasant doffed his battered old hat and went off.

"Come on!" Sally said eagerly. "Wonder if the boys are there—Why, talk of the bounders and there they are!"

For at that moment a number of figures burst through the trees, and, with cheery hails, came running towards the girls.

"Hallo, Bill! What cheer, Ted!" Sally greeted. "But where's Johnny?"

Bill Dexter regarded her grinningly. "He's getting grub ready! Feel hungry—and thirsty?" And he broke into a roar of laughter. "Who said we wouldn't put one over on you girls?"

"We'll discuss that later," Sally said crisply. And then her eyes gleamed with swift excitement as she saw something protruding from the haversack

Bill Dexter had slung over his shoulder. "Mavis, here it is!" she exclaimed. "That is our flask, isn't it, Bill? Come on, let's have it—"

But Bill shook his head.

"Hands off. That's ours—we brought it with us. Yours is over on the island. But who's your friend? Haven't seen her before."

Sally grinned.

"Full introductions when we've got our flask," she said. "If you chumps only realised what your idiotic jape has done—"

"It was a jolly good jape. Johnny's awfully proud of himself."

"He would be. But just wait until I tell him a thing or two."

And then smilingly Mavis herself was explaining the situation to the startled boys as they all made their way through the belt of trees towards the island.

There was a look of relief on Mavis' pretty face. Soon now the plans would be safely in her hands.

But suddenly Sally uttered a cry of consternation. Her gaze became transfixed.

"Oh golly! Look!"

They had come in sight of the island. It was quite small, thickly wooded, and set picturesquely in the middle of a wide, swiftly flowing river. A flimsy rope-bridge gave access to it from the mainland.

And crossing that bridge was a figure Sally recognised instantly. The figure of Juan Mendrez! While beyond, on the island, Johnny Briggs was just in the act of opening the black flask which Sally knew contained the plans that meant so much to Mavis and her father.

JOHNNY TO THE RESCUE

"SALLY, what's the matter?" Mavis Trent's voice was apprehensive as she saw the look of utter consternation on the other girl's face.

"That's Juan—the man I told you about!" Sally gasped. "He'll get the plans!"

"Not with all of us here to stop him!" Bill Dexter said grimly. "He won't stand a chance. Come on, chaps! Look out, Johnny! You girls keep back—"

"Rabbits!"

They all went racing across the flimsy, swaying bridge. On the island Johnny Briggs looked up, with a start, and laid aside the flask. He saw Juan bearing down on him, saw the crowd racing over the bridge.

Juan swung round, a dark scowl spreading over his face. A desperate glitter came into his eyes. Next moment he was plunging a hand into the pocket of his coat.

"Keep back!" he cried menacingly.

"Rats! Collar him, Johnny—"

"Keep back!" Juan snarled again. And suddenly his hand darted forward and became rigid. Gripped in it was a small automatic pistol. "Stand still, or it'll be the worse for you!" he said harshly.

"Oh, my hat!" Sally's eyes were wide. "You wouldn't dare—"

"I dare anything!" Juan cried. "Do not move another inch, any of you!"

Boys and girls stood stock-still, startled, helpless in the face of that threat.

"Here, what's the game, you rotter?" Johnny Briggs snorted, unaware as were the others of Juan's purpose.

"I want a black flask, my friend," Juan said. And momentarily his glittering gaze flickered to the ground. There, beside the cloth on which Johnny had already spread out the

picnic fare, was the flask he had laid there.

Mavis, an agonised expression on her face, gave a low groan. Sally, standing next to her, felt her heart thudding wildly.

Juan held the whip hand. He would get the plans, for Sally knew that that flask on the ground was her own and the one that contained them.

Her hands clenched. Juan was surely bluffing. He wouldn't dare use the pistol. Recklessly she toyed with the idea of making one swift rush; but no, that was a risk that would be the height of folly.



"Girls' Crystal" Office,
The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street,
London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR READERS,—I think most of us like to try to catch our friends out at times, don't you?

And certainly I was nearly taken in the other day.

Mr. Peter Langley came strolling into the office to see me. (We were going to discuss his Noel Raymond stories, as a matter of fact.)

But first, of course, we chatted about this and that. He grumbled because cigarettes had gone up in price; I grumbled because my tobacco was dearer.

Then suddenly he looked at me, and said:

"If you were going across a field and you saw a burrow, how could you tell whether it had been made by a rabbit or by a hare?"

I thought for a moment, wondering whether it was something to do with the difference in size of the two animals. And then it dawned on me.

"It would be a rabbit burrow, for hares don't make them," I replied.

Which was right. But it was a close shave, all the same.

You try it on your chums at school some time. Quite a lot of them will say "Give up," I expect.

SIX FINE TALES

Now I must tell you that Peter Langley has written us a particularly good story for next Friday, featuring that daring and fascinating character, Rosina Fontaine, about whom you all like reading so much, as well as Noel Raymond, of course.

"Rosina's Surprising Birthday Gift!" is the title; a really baffling and intriguing story you'll find it.

You'll be reading another complete tale, featuring cheery Judy Jordan, entitled "Judy's Secret Competition Entry!" and another adventure of those cheery "Cruising Merry-makers."

Further chapters of our three splendid serials will also appear, completing a delightful six-story programme.

Be certain to order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** in advance, won't you?

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR

Desperately she looked around her. Wasn't there some way of tricking him, distracting his attention so that they could all fall upon the scoundrel?

Suddenly she stiffened. Her gaze had fallen on the flask protruding from Bill Dexter's haversack. A black flask—exactly similar to her own.

Her brain raced. A startling idea came to her. If she could bluff him—

"Hide it! Don't let him see it, Bill!" she whispered tensely.

But it was a whisper which she deliberately made loud enough for Juan to hear. At the same moment she quickly thrust the haversack out of sight behind Bill's back—but not too quickly so that Juan wouldn't see the movement!

"Here, what are you doing—" Bill began in surprise.

"So!" Juan, a smile on his swarthy face, came striding forward. "You think to trick me—yes? You think I do not see? Ah, a black flask! Bring it to me!"

"But this one—" Bill gasped, still not comprehending.

"It's no good!" Sally cut in swiftly. "We're helpless. He'll have to have it. Sorry, Mavis!"

But as Sally turned, and with apparent reluctance took the flask from out of Bill's haversack, she quickly winked. Bill saw the wink; Mavis saw it, too.

In silence they stood as Sally marched forward with the flask. Eagerly Juan took it.

"I look just to make sure," he said.

Again Sally's heart thudded within her. So far her bluff had worked. But once he opened the flask—

Recklessly her eyes gleamed. "Help, help!" she cried. "It's all right, Mavis! Someone's coming!"

Juan's lips opened in a snarl. Steadily the pistol still covered them all as, out of the corner of his eye, he looked about him.

"It is a poor trick!" he sneered. "I see no one—"

Sally appeared to be tremendously excited.

"Your mistake! Don't worry, Mavis. He won't be able to get away with the plans!" she cried. "He's got them now, but—"

"And I keep them!" Suddenly Juan began backing towards the bridge. "Stand where you are!"

Sally felt a thrill run through her. Her desperate ruse was working. He was going, believing that someone was coming—believing that he had the flask containing the plans.

Now he had reached the other end of the bridge.

"Help!" Sally cried again.

But Juan laughed.

"Whoever it is, they will be too late. Nor will you be able to follow me until I have made good my escape. See!"

And now in his other hand was a knife. With two quick movements he had cut the ropes which supported the bridge. There was a splash as it fell into the water, curving away in the strong current.

"Farewell, my young friends!" And looking about him cautiously, Juan Mendrez disappeared through the belt of trees.

Mavis gripped Sally's arms.

"Oh, Sally, that was clever of you. We still have the plans—"

But Sally cut her short. There was no look of triumph in Sally's eyes—only dismay and consternation.

"Yes, we've got the plans. But it's now three o'clock, and we're trapped on this island. If we don't escape, you'll never meet your uncle in time—"

and we shan't get back to the harbour before the Dorian sails!"

"GOSH, Sally's right!" Bill Dexter's voice was startled. In dismay they were all looking at each other.

There in the river swirled the bridge, rendered useless now that Juan had cut it away from the opposite bank.

"And there's no other way off the island!" Sally groaned. "No one could swim across—not through those currents. They'd be swept away, and by the sound of it, there are some rapids not far away! Oh, golly, what can we do?"

Johnny Briggs, standing on the bank, staring down grimly at the racing water, suddenly turned.

"I could swim across!" he said.

Sally sighed.

"Johnny, this is not the time for boasting—"

"I'm not boasting. I'm going to swim across!"

Sally gave a gasp.

"You couldn't do it, Johnny. You know very well you'd be swept away!"

"Not if I had a rope tied round me and you kept hold of it. It's our only chance, Sally. You saved the plans, and now I'm going to save all of us! Bill, where's that rope we used for the climbing?"

Sally looked at him admiringly.

"Johnny, if you can do it—"

"I am going to do it, Sally!"

There was no stopping him. As he had said, there would be no danger of his being swept away if they held a rope which had been tied around his waist. And Sally knew that Johnny was a powerful swimmer. If anyone could cross that river and reach the mainland, it was Johnny.

Two minutes later he stood on the bank, the rope tied securely around him, Sally and the others holding the other end.

"The hope of the side—that's me!" Johnny grinned irrepressibly. "Hang on to the rope—we're going to need it when I get across! We'll soon fix it around a couple of trees, and then you'll all be able to swing across—if you girls have got the nerve!"

"It's like your nerve to stand there talking such twaddle!" Sally reproved him.

"But good luck, Johnny!"

"Thanks, Sally! Off we go!"

The grin faded from his face. Then, drawing a deep breath, he had plunged into the water.

Anxiously they watched him—watched him battling his way against the powerful currents.

This way and that they swept, and Johnny was swept with them. Tightly his friends held on to the rope, cheered as they saw him slowly but surely making headway.

"He'll do it!" Sally cried.

"Good old Johnny! Stick to it, lad!" Bill shouted.

And then—

"He's done it!"

A tremendous cheer went up. On the mainland, Johnny gleefully shook hands with himself and then waved. He scrambled up the steep bank, and then he was scouting round for the nearest tree, unfastening the rope from around his waist as he did so.

On the island, Bill and Sally were securing their end of the rope round another tree. In a matter of seconds it stretched across the river—and the way of escape from the island on which it had seemed they would be trapped was open to them.

"O.K.! Come on, shipmates!"

Johnny shouted "And make it snappy!"

One by one, girls first, then boys, they swung hand over hand along the rope, with the foaming river below them. But without a single mishap they all accomplished the crossing. At last they stood bunched together on the mainland.

"Talk about thrills!" Sally gasped. "You all right, Johnny?"

"Course I am! A bit wet, but I'll soon dry in this heat. Who said I couldn't do it? We'll catch the Dorian all right now!"

"Yes. But what about Mavis? What time must you meet your uncle?"

Sally asked anxiously.

"Four o'clock."

"Golly! That gives us just about thirty-five minutes. Come on, everybody! We've got to reach the car, and then full speed ahead for Lisbon!" Sally exclaimed, breaking into a run.

COULD they do it?

It was a wild race against time that started then—a race, on the result of which depended Mavis' own and her father's future.

"Step on it!" Sally cried.

They had reached the car which she had abandoned earlier on. They all piled in, and then, with a reckless disregard for the car itself, Mavis started off at top speed along the road that was little more than a cart track.

"Never mind the bumps and bruises!" Johnny shouted excitedly.

Faster and faster Mavis drove as the road improved. They reached the little cafe where Johnny had japed the girls, and then they were scorching through the streets towards the heart of Lisbon.

"Where are you meeting your uncle?" Sally asked tensely.

"In the Rocio Square," Mavis replied. "How much longer—"

"Five minutes."

"Oh, we'll never do it!"

"You must! Blow this traffic!"

"Hey, out of the way there!"

"Can't we pretend to be a fire-engine?"

On at a reckless speed they went, with a disregard for all the city's traffic regulations, with Portuguese policemen gesticulating and shouting protests that went unheeded.

"Four o'clock!" Sally announced. "It's just round this corner, isn't it?"

"Yes."

They went round that corner on two wheels, incurring the wrath of other drivers who howled their indignation. Before them stretched the imposing Rocio Square, with its two fountains and a statue in the centre.

"Can you see your uncle?" Sally asked.

Mavis looked around her with desperate eyes.

"No! Oh, we're too late!" she groaned. "He's gone!" And then she gave a sudden shout of excitement. "Look, there he is—just going into the station! Oh, thank goodness! Uncle—uncle!"

The car skidded to a standstill as she applied the brakes. Next moment she was scrambling out—was racing towards a tall gentleman who was striding in the direction of Lisbon's principal railway station.

"Uncle!" Mavis called again, as she flew on; and Sally & Co. streamed after her.

The man turned, stared in surprise, and then a relieved smile spread over his sunburnt face.

"Mavis!" he cried delightedly. "I'd given you up! I waited as long as I dared. My train goes in two minutes. Have you got the plans?"

"Yes, yes! Here they are, Uncle Charles!" Mavis said excitedly. "But I wouldn't have them if it hadn't been for all these splendid friends!" she added, smiling at the chums. "Uncle, haven't you time to meet them? They're from the Dorian. They've been wonderful!"

Uncle Charles laughed and looked at his watch.

"Seems to me I shall miss the train, anyway," he said. "But there's another in three hours' time. Now you tell me the whole story."

And when he had heard the tale, he insisted on shaking each of them by the hand.

"You've missed your picnic, I'm afraid, for the Dorian is due to sail in three hours' time," he said. "But if you're all agreeable, I'll be delighted to show you round the city. Meanwhile, we're going to have a meal at the finest restaurant in Lisbon. Come along, youngsters!"

And so the chums had the time of their lives with Mavis and her Uncle Charles. Sally & Co. and Johnny & Co. decided to call the score between them quits—at any rate, for the time being!

All too quickly they found themselves back in the tender, waving farewells to Mavis and her uncle, as they stood smiling on the quay. Mavis was staying there, but the Cruising Merry-makers were sailing on in search of new fun, and new adventures!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

You'll enjoy next Friday's story about the Cruising Merry-makers just as much as you've enjoyed this one. Make sure of getting your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**, by ordering your copy to-day.

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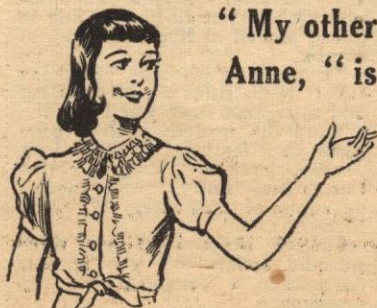
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DAPHNE'S FEUD with the PHANTOM FOUR



THE FIGURE IN STUDY NO. 7

DAPHNE MORETON was made sports leader on her very first day at Seacliffe College. Her uncle was delighted, and hinted that her new position might mean more to her than she dreamed.

Then Daphne discovered that there was a mysterious secret society, known as the Phantom Four, who were plotting against her and trying to prevent sporting rivalry between Seacliffe and a neighbouring school—St. Chad's.

Daphne and her chum, Betty Carr, believed that the Phantom Four were to meet in Study No. 7 at St. Chad's. They broke bounds, and went to the school.

A ladder was reared against the window of Study No. 7, and Daphne climbed up. She could hardly believe her eyes when she saw what the hooded figure inside the study was doing.

"WHAT can you see, Daphne?"

Daphne did not reply to her chum's question. Perched on the top of the long ladder, she was staring through the open window in fascinated horror.

She had expected to find the Phantom Four gathered there, but the study had only one occupant—a grey-robed, hooded figure that was engaged in pasting a large notice above the mantelpiece. But Daphne had no eyes for the notice. In startled amazement she was gazing around the room.

It was a wreck!

Tables and chairs had been overturned. The contents of a bureau had been tumbled out on to the floor. In one corner, books, papers, and sports gear had been piled up, and red ink had been splashed around with a ruthless hand.

"Great S-scott!"

Daphne drew in a sharp breath. She realised now that the entry in the Phantom Four's notebook had not referred to a meeting of the secret society. It referred to their next scheme to widen the breach between Seacliffe College and St. Chad's School.

Then, as she stood there, too astonished to move, there came a clatter of footsteps from below, and next moment her chum joined her.

"What's up?" asked Betty again. **"What—"** She broke off as she looked into the study and recognised it. **"Why, it's Rosalie's!"** she exclaimed. **"Rosalie's!"**

Daphne gave a gasp on learning that this study belonged to the haughty captain of the Fourth Form at St. Chad's. Then again her eyes dilated with horror as her gaze turned to the notice

that the unknown member of the Phantom Four was pasting on the wall. In black ink a vindictive message had been printed on it:

"THIS IS OUR REVENGE!
You tried to wreck our boat, so we're returning the compliment!"

Daphne's grey eyes glowed with anger. As for her chum, she gave a gulp of indignation.

"So they mean us to be blamed for this! It's a trick to turn Rosalie against us. But"—fiercely she looked around—**"where's the rest of the gang?"**

Daphne shook her head.

"Don't know; but we'll soon settle accounts with this one. Come on—grab her!"

As she spoke, she swung her legs over the window-sill and dropped down into the room. The hooded figure turned, to stare in dismay as she saw the Fourth Formers come leaping through the window. Desperately she made a dash for the door, but quickly Daphne ran forward.

"No, you don't!" she snapped, and shot out a grim hand.

Her fingers closed on the mystery girl's grey robes—just as she opened the door and made to escape. There was a ripping sound, and under the sudden strain the garment came undone. Instantly its owner wriggled out of it, and, taken by surprise, Daphne went reeling back, still clutching at the torn robes.

"Careful!" came Betty's agitated voice; then there came a yell, followed by two heavy bumping thuds.

Daphne and Betty were horrified when they saw the havoc the secret society had created. They were even more horrified when they realised that the Phantom Four meant the Seacliffe Fourth Formers to be blamed for the damage!

By GAIL WESTERN

The chums had collided, tripped over the debris on the floor, and crashed into the pile of books and sports gear.

They caught one glimpse of the secret society girl, but they never got a chance to identify her, for like a flash of lightning she was out in the corridor, and the door banged behind her.

"Quick—after her!" gasped Daphne, scrambling to her feet.

She plunged forward, but even as her hand seized the door knob there came a telltale click. The fugitive had turned the key, and the door refused to open.

"Locked in!" Daphne glared. **"But we'll get her yet. Come on—back through the window!"**

They both turned, but at that moment there came a scraping noise, and to their alarm they saw the top of the long ladder vanish below the sill. The rest of the Phantom Four had sneaked up, and now they were racing off with the ladder. The Seacliffe girls were trapped in the wrecked study!

"Oh golly!" gasped Betty. **"Now we're for it! If Rosalie and her crowd come back and find us in here they'll think we've done all the damage."**

Grimly Daphne nodded. She knew that the rival Fourth Form captain, none too friendly already, would be in no mood to listen to explanations.

For perhaps a minute they stood there by the window, helplessly watching the Phantom Four disappear amongst the trees with the ladder. Then Daphne turned and surveyed the overturned furniture.

"There's only one thing for it," she declared. **"We must clear up the mess. It'll be awful if Rosalie thinks we're responsible for it."**

"Too true," agreed Betty, with a groan. **"It would just about put the tin-hat on all our sporting activities!"**

The thought made them both go pale. It had been difficult enough to persuade Miss Bebb, their headmistress, to allow them to enter for the gold cup, but if she ever learnt of this escapade—

"She'd go up like a balloon!" Betty asserted, as she helped Daphne to tear down the malicious notice pasted on the wall.

They burnt the paper in the grate, but before they could begin to put the room to rights, voices and footsteps

were heard out in the corridor. They both straightened up in alarm.

"It's Rosalie & Co.!" whispered Betty. "They've just finished supper."

Even as she spoke the doorknob rattled, then Rosalie's surprised voice could be heard exclaiming:

"Hallo! Who's locked us out?"

There came other voices, the door knob rattled again, then once more the St. Chad's captain spoke, and now her voice was shrill with indignation.

"Who's in there? Open this door at once! Come on! I heard you moving about!"

In silent dismay Daphne and Betty stared at each other. It looked as if they were cornered. But discovery would be disastrous. In their present mood the rival Fourth Formers would never believe in their innocence.

"They'll report us to Miss Bebb, and then we shall be in for a good old wiggling!" gulped Betty. "Don't forget we broke bounds in order to get here."

Daphne said nothing, but her heart was pounding with anger—anger against the Phantom Four. That mysterious secret society was the cause of all their troubles.

"Just let them wait!" Daphne told herself. "They shall pay for this. Just let them—"

Her thoughts snapped off, for from along the corridor had come a triumphant shout:

"It's all right, Rosalie! I've managed to find the spare key. Now we'll be able to see who's there!"

Daphne grabbed frantically at her elum's arm. Not a second must be wasted if they were not to be caught.

"Down the ivy—it's our only hope!" she breathed.

For a moment Betty drew back. It was a long way down to the quad. Suppose the ivy snapped under their weight? But, encouraged by Daphne's example, she scroved up her courage and gamely followed her over the window-sill.

Their hearts in their mouths, they clutched at the ancient ivy and slowly clambered down the wall. Daphne still had the grey robe she had snatched from the fugitive slung over her shoulder; at all costs she meant to hang on to it. It might prove a valuable clue to its owner's identity.

From above came the sound of angry voices. Rosalie & Co. had opened the door and were now gazing around at the overturned furniture, at the ink splashes, at all the other damage, in furious surprise. Then a dash was made for the window.

"They can't have got far!" exclaimed the St. Chad's skipper.

At that moment there came a snapping sound. The ivy, under the double burden, had torn away from the wall. Down tumbled Daphne and Betty in a heap, and from above came excited shouts:

"There they are!"

"Great Scott, and they're Seacliffe girls by the look of their blazers! Hey, come back!"

But that was the last thing the chums intended doing. Covering their faces with their bent arms so as to escape recognition, they bolted madly across the deserted quad. Not until they had gained the river and scrambled into their boat did either of them dare look round, then Betty gave an anxious gasp.

"D'you—d'you think they guessed who we are?" she asked.

Daphne shook her head.

"Pretty certain they didn't," she

replied. "But—come on! They'll be along here in a jiffy. The sooner we get clear the better!"

With desperate haste they rowed across the river, and to their relief they gained the shelter of their own boat-house without the pursuit being taken up.

When they had put away their boat, Daphne rolled up the grey robe, tucked it under her blazer, then cautiously looked across at the garden seat by the steps. But Miss Wagstaffe had returned indoors. There was no danger of being seen. So thankfully they returned to school.

Once in the privacy of their own study, Betty flopped down in a chair and mopped her moist face with a hanky.

"Phew! That was a narrow squeak, if you like," she exclaimed. "But Rosalie & Co. are bound to kick up a dust about their study. I say"—anxiously she looked across at Daphne—"you don't think they'll try to blame anyone at Seacliffe, do you?"

"Of course not!" Daphne laughed, though more to relieve her chum's mind, than anything else. "We managed to destroy that notice, and there's nothing else to connect us with the damage. Stop worrying, old scout, and let's write that letter about the swimming gala."

The swimming gala was an annual event in the district, and both St. Chad's and Seacliffe Fourth Formers always entered for it. This year it would be of unusual importance to both schools, for success at the gala would mean valuable points earned in the competition for the gold cup that Mr. Griffiths had offered for the school that did best on the river.

Never one to dwell on her troubles, Betty eagerly began to discuss what events their Form should enter, then she drew up her chair and wrote to the organising secretary.

While the Form captain was thus engaged, Daphne picked up the long, monk-like robe she had captured and carefully examined it. To her disappointment it contained no name tag, nothing which could in any way identify its owner.

"But I'll run her to earth sooner or later," Daphne vowed. "And the rest of the secret society. It's no longer a joke—it's deadly serious!"

And fiercely her eyes flashed as she hid the grey robe behind the book-case.

THE SNEAK BRINGS NEWS!

"OH, well done, Betty! Now let's see you, Amy!"

It was Monday morning, and having risen early, the Fourth Form had gone down to the river for a before-breakfast bathe. But it was no lazy, idle bathe they were indulging in—Daphne, their new sports leader, saw to that! Standing on the edge of the landing-stage, she was watching them dive.

One of the most important events at the forthcoming gala would be the diving competition, and Daphne was eager for Seacliffe to win it.

Several girls had already displayed their prowess, and a laugh arose as Amy Tucker, the fattest girl in the school, waddled along the high diving board.

"Now for the big splash!" said Norah Tomkins.

"Big splash!" said one of the other Fourth Formers with a chuckle. "When Amy thunderbolts in, I reckon we'll all be drowned! Look out there—mind the tidal wave!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There came another chuckle, and in mock alarm the girls all scurried away from the bank. Amy, however, continued to stand there serenely. It took a lot to ruffle her.

Daphne raised her hand.

"Right—i—oh, jump to it," she instructed.

Looking like a miniature dirigible in her red bathing costume, the fat girl raised her hands above her head, poised herself on her toes, then went shooting off the edge of the diving-board.

With an expert eye Daphne watched her. The smile on her lips faded and instead came a look of approval, for, despite her plumpness, there was nothing clumsy about the way Amy dived, and nothing clumsy about the way she hit the water. With hardly a ripple, she cleaved through it, vanishing swiftly below the surface.

"Oh, splendid!" cried Daphne. "The laugh's with you, Amy! A topping dive. Just try to keep your head well tucked in, that's all."

Puffing like a grampus, the fat girl's head broke water, and eagerly she surveyed the sports leader.

"You—you're not kidding, are you?" she asked.

"Of course not. You're nearly as good as Betty. Keep practising and your name'll go down in my notebook."

Amy gave a gurgle of joy.

"You really mean there's a chance of me being in the team?" she gasped.

Daphne nodded.

"Every chance. But come on, all you other slackers. Let's see how some of you can do the breast stroke. Tell you what! We'll race one another across to that buoy and back!"

"That's a bet!"

"Come on, everybody!"

Enthusiastically the suggestion was taken up, and throwing off her wrap, Daphne joined them on the bank.

"Ready?" she looked smilingly around. "O.K. then! One—two—three—go!"

One after the other, the Fourth Formers dived into the water. Purposely Daphne hung back for a moment or two, then, jumping in herself, she went after them.

"My hat, just look at her!" Betty Carr, a poor swimmer, though an expert diver, trod water in order to gaze in open-mouthed admiration at their sports leader. "Why, she's—she's like a giddy torpedo!" she exclaimed.

And the simile was apt. Despite her late start, Daphne was already in the lead. With effortless sweeps of her sturdy young arms, she went cleaving through the water. Faster and faster! Jean Hunter was the only one who managed to keep anywhere near her. The others were left hopelessly behind.

Reaching the buoy, Daphne touched it with one outflung hand, then, with a kick of the legs, she turned.

"Come on, you slow-coaches—come on!" she cried.

Valiantly the Fourth Formers obeyed—all but Betty. She continued to stare in astonished delight.

"Why, she swims as well as she rows!" she declared. "In Daphne we've found a real trump card. At this rate we'll just walk off with the cup!"

That was what everyone else was thinking, and when Daphne reached the landing-stage an easy winner they crowded round her admiringly.

"St. Chad's'll sing small again!" declared Betty. "Good old Daphne! Thanks to you, we'll scoop up all the honours at the gala next week!"

But Daphne shook her head.

"Don't be too sure. By all accounts, there'll be some jolly good teams

competing. If we want to win"—seriously she looked around—"then we've all got to practise. I suggest we come down here night and morning. What do you say?"

"O.K. by me!"

"You lead, Daphne, we'll follow!"

"Rather!"

There came an enthusiastic response and Daphne's grey eyes glowed with happiness. What a fine lot of girls these were, and how proud she was that they so readily accepted her leadership.

For a moment her mind went back to what her uncle had said when he had brought her here to Seacliffe. He had hinted that there was some secret reason why it was essential that she should make a success of her job as sports leader.

What could that reason be? She couldn't even guess. But, whatever it was, she meant to win success. Indeed, she could hardly fail, considering what a fine lot of chums she had. Unless—Her smile faded. Unless the Phantom Four kept their threat—unless they managed to bring to an end the Fourth Form's sporting activities.

"But the Phantom Four can't do anything—I won't let them!" Daphne muttered fiercely, then, forcing away her fears, she surveyed the waiting Fourth Formers again. "That's enough for one morning," she said. "Buck up and get dressed—and don't forget to have a good rub down. We can't afford to have anyone laid up, you know."

Laughing and joking, they all repaired to the long line of cubicles beyond the boathouse, but as they dressed they heard footsteps on the gravel topath, and a malicious voice hailed them:

"So that's where you're all hiding!"

Looking out Daphne saw a pert, freckle-faced Third Former standing there, her hands clasped behind her back. It was Emily Clark, a girl who had the reputation of being a bit of a sneak.

"Hiding—what do you mean?" demanded Daphne, while the rest of the Form popped their heads round the various doors.

Emily looked surprised.

"Mean to say you haven't heard the news?" she countered.

"No; what is it?"

The Third Former gave a sly chuckle. "Ah, that 'ud be telling, but there's a fine old row brewing. If you ask me—"

Daphne gave an exasperated gasp.

"What are you babbling about?"

"Yes, come on—whose keyhole have you been listening-in at this time?" demanded Betty Carr, buttoning up her blazer.

Emily Clarke flushed and tossed her head.

"For that, I won't tell you anything," she declared.

"Oh, yes you will!" snorted Betty, and, leaping forward, she grabbed the sneak by the arm. "Come on, spill the beans, or we'll spill you—right into the river!"

With a wink at Daphne, the Form captain pretended to drag the struggling Third Former to the edge of the path. The sneak gave a squeal.

"Don't you dare!"

"Then don't be such an aggravating little chump. What's all this news about?"

"It's about St. Chad's. Miss Flint has just rung up old Bebb!"

"Wh-aaa-t?"

In blank amazement most of the Fourth Formers stared. Miss Flint was the stern headmistress of the rival school. But how could she create a

row? Only Daphne and Betty could guess, and they exchanged uneasy glances. Was it possible that, after all, they were suspected of doing the damage to Rosalie's study?

"It's impossible!" Betty snorted, and grimly she shook the wriggling sneak. "Look here, if you're trying to scare us—"

"I'm not! She has phoned old Bebb up. I heard her myself; and what she said made old Bebb go red with rage. She's stalking about her study like a war-horse! I dunno what it's all about, but it concerns the Fourth, and— With a sudden twist the Third Former broke loose, and as she scampered away she sniggered maliciously. "I hope you all get it in the neck—that's what I hope!" she shouted.

Wonderingly, the Fourth Formers gazed after her, then impulsively they turned to Daphne and Betty, their acknowledged leaders.

"D'you think there's anything in it?" asked Jean Hunter.

Betty shook her head, while Daphne forced a laugh.

mean," she cried, looking dramatically around the room. "Stella's just told me. It was Miss Flint who phoned, and she's coming over to see old Bebb almost directly."

"Coming over to see the Head!"

An apprehensive chorus arose, and blankly the Fourth Formers sat there, staring.

"What about?" asked Daphne.

But Norah shook her head.

"Stella wouldn't say. But she hinted it was jolly serious, and what's more, she—"

But at that moment the door opened and Miss Wagstaffe entered the classroom. She was in one of her most disagreeable moods.

"Norah, why are you not in your place?" she demanded. "Seat yourself at once, and the rest of you—get out your history books. Because I have been delayed, that is no reason why you should not be getting on with your work."

Moodily Daphne & Co. settled down to work. They were supposed to be studying the French Revolution, but



"Here she comes, Betty!" whispered Daphne. Not realising that Miss Wagstaffe was glowering at them, she and her chum stared through the window. From the car had descended the visitor they dreaded—the headmistress of the rival school!

"Of course not! You all know what a rumour-monger Emily is!"

Nevertheless, it was worriedly that she finished dressing. Suppose Miss Flint had been telephoning about the study?

"But it's impossible!" Daphne told herself. "She couldn't possibly suspect us! There's no evidence—" Then she broke off and grinned as she saw Betty struggling into a brand-new blazer. "My! Aren't we smart this morning!" she exclaimed.

"Had to put on my Sunday best," her chum explained. "Lost a button off my other one. But come on—the brekker bell went long ago."

"Yes, let's run for it!" urged fat Amy. "I'm starving!"

In the bustle of getting to breakfast they forgot all about Emily Clarke's disturbing rumour, but afterwards, when they were filing into the classroom for lessons, they got another shock. Norah Tomkins who had gone to see the school captain about a parcel she expected, came in looking shocked and startled.

"It's true—what Emily said, I

never had they found it harder to concentrate. Most of them were filled with excited speculation, wondering what the rival headmistress could possibly want at Seacliffe. Only Daphne and Betty had a glimmering of the possible truth, and again and again their gaze wandered to the window.

When would Miss Flint arrive? What would she have to say?

Betty gave her chum a worried nudge. "I say—" she began; but from the rostrum came an irate voice:

"Take fifty lines, Betty Carr. I will not have this inattention."

In confusion Betty bent over her book again. It was Daphne who offended next time. She was also peering out of the window when the Form-mistress' eagle eye spotted her.

"Would it be indiscreet to inquire what it is outside that attracts your attention?" she asked icily.

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Daphne. "Then kindly keep your gaze fixed on your book, and to make certain you will remember, you also will do me fifty lines!"

Valiantly the chums tried to forget

their fears, but at length Daphne risked another sideways peep, and suddenly she gave a startled gasp.

For, descending from a car by the gateway, was a short, stout woman, dressed in sternly cut tweeds. Miss Flint!

"Here she comes, Betty," she whispered. "Here's—"

Then she broke off in confusion, conscious that Miss Wagstaffe was angrily watching her.

"Your lines are doubled, Daphne!" snapped the Form-mistress, "and as you and Betty seem unable to concentrate on your work, you will both sit here for the rest of the lesson." She indicated the long desk on the rostrum. "Bring your books with you," she ordered.

Red-faced, the chums marched across the room, and, feeling horribly embarrassed, they sat down on either side of the glowering Form-mistress. But, though they both appeared to be reading their history books, their minds were far away.

Even if Miss Flint had come to complain about the wrecked study, surely she could not accuse them! Yet—suddenly Daphne went white—suppose they were asked point blank if they had broken bounds on Saturday night?

"We'd have to own up then," she told herself glumly. "And that would look as if we were guilty. No one would ever believe—"

She broke off, for there had come a knock at the door.

"Come in!" bade Miss Wagstaffe.

The door opened, and in walked Stella Watkins, the captain of the school. Her pleasant face looked unusually grim, and Daphne and Betty caught in their breath. So did the rest of the Form.

"Well, Stella, what do you want?" asked Miss Wagstaffe.

The school captain made an agitated gesture.

"Miss Bebb asked me to come to see you," she replied. "She wishes the Fourth Form to assemble in the Hall—at once!"

Miss Wagstaffe and most of the Fourth Formers looked surprised. The request, to say the least of it, was unusual. They wondered what could be the reason for it.

"My hat! There must be something pretty serious in the wind!" declared Jean Hunter to the girl at the next desk.

"You bet!" The other girl nodded. "If you ask me—"

She broke off in confusion as she realised that the Form-mistress' eagle eyes were fixed on her.

"Stop that talking! How many more times have I to tell you?" snapped Miss Wagstaffe. Then she turned to the captain of the school. "Very well, Stella," she said. "I will see that the Form assembles at once."

The captain departed, and again the Fourth Formers began to speculate as to what was to happen. But Daphne and Betty had no need to speculate. They knew that their worst fears had been confirmed.

MISS FLINT'S ACCUSATION

WHEN the Fourth Formers filed into the Assembly Hall they found their headmistress already awaiting them. And with her was the Head of St. Chad's.

Miss Bebb wasted no time in coming to the point.

"I have summoned you here," she said, "because of the very serious accusation that has been levelled against two of your number. To put it bluntly, Miss Flint—with one hand she indi-

cated the stern woman at her side—"accuses two of you girls of having deliberately entered her school with the object of engaging in a vindictive bout of destruction."

Some of the Fourth Formers gasped. All of them looked indignant. Indeed, Miss Bebb herself looked indignant also.

"I can hardly credit that any Seaclyffe girl would do such a mean, wicked act," she declared, "nevertheless, in fairness to Miss Flint, I must make a thorough investigation into the matter. First of all, did any of you visit St. Chad's on Saturday evening for any purpose whatever?"

There was a general shaking of heads. Only Daphne and Betty did not move. Pale and fearful, they waited developments.

Gravely Miss Bebb surveyed them all. "If the culprits are gathered here," she said, "I entreat them to step forward and confess their guilt. Other wise I shall have to take extreme measures. Once again I ask, did any of you visit St. Chad's on Saturday evening?"

No one spoke. Again there was a general shaking of heads. Miss Bebb looked relieved, but the other headmistress frowned and angrily she stepped forward.

"It is useless your denying all knowledge of this disgraceful happening," she said harshly. "I know that the two girls responsible for wrecking Rosalie Standing's study belong to this school. And, further, Rosalie tells me she is certain they were members of this Form."

Fiercely she glowered around, and for a moment no one moved, then, to everyone's consternation, Daphne left the front rank. Betty, thinking her chum meant to own up, went deathly white. As for Miss Bebb, she gazed at the approaching girl in something like horror.

"Surely—surely you did not take part in this—in this terrible episode!" she gasped.

Daphne shook her head. "No, Miss Bebb—nor did anyone else in the Fourth. The culprits were the Phantom Four!"

"The—the Phantom Four?" In blank amazement Miss Bebb stood there, while Miss Flint clucked impatiently.

"What nonsense is this?" she snapped. "The—the Phantom Four! Who are they?"

"A secret society," Daphne replied quietly.

Again her words created a sensation, and Miss Bebb, recovering her voice with an effort, surveyed her in bewilderment.

"I think you had better explain exactly what you mean, Daphne," she said.

"Very good, Miss Bebb," answered Daphne, and as quickly as she could she related all she knew about the mysterious secret society, although, of course, she made no mention of the fact that she and Betty had actually seen one of their number at work on Saturday evening. "If anyone wrecked Rosalie's study," she concluded, "then I am certain that it must have been the Phantom Four."

Despite herself, Miss Bebb was impressed by her quiet sincerity.

"And have you any idea as to the identity of the members of this secret society?" she asked.

Daphne shook her head, but Betty, never very discreet, replied eagerly:

"We think they belong to St. Chad's, Miss Bebb! We think they are annoyed because we have entered for the gold cup!"

"What!" It was Miss Flint who uttered the interjection. In scandalised astonishment, she gazed at Betty. "How dare you, girl!" she gasped. "To suggest that anyone at my school would start a secret society, would vindictively wreck one of their own colleagues' studies—why, the idea is preposterous!" Angrily she turned on the Seaclyffe Head. "Surely, Miss Bebb, you do not credit this suggestion for one moment?"

Miss Bebb hesitated. "It certainly does sound fantastic," she agreed, "yet I am not inclined to rule it out entirely. It is possible that some foolish girls may have banded themselves together in secret."

"If so, then they belong to your school!" snapped Miss Flint.

Miss Bebb flushed.

"Really, I cannot permit you to make such an accusation," she protested.

"There is no evidence—"

"There is plenty of evidence," was the heated reply. "One of the persons who entered Rosalie Standing's study on Saturday evening left this behind her."

As she spoke, Miss Flint dived a hand into the pocket of her tweed pocket and produced something that glittered. Grimly she held it out, and from the assembled Fourth-Formers came a horrified gasp. For the object that lay on the rival headmistress' palm was a brass button—a button that could only have come off a blazer belonging to one of themselves!

Instinctively Daphne's hand flew to her own blazer, but to her relief all her buttons were intact. Then, as she glanced covertly across at Betty and saw how pale and strained her chum had gone, with difficulty she suppressed a gasp. For she remembered how during bathing parade Betty had excused herself for wearing her best blazer by explaining that she had lost a button off her old one.

Suppose that button had come off on Saturday night! Suppose the one that Miss Flint was now holding out belonged to the Form captain!

Daphne got no time to get over this shock, for grimly Miss Flint was addressing her companion.

"I see that these girls are wearing their blazers," she said. "Perhaps you will permit me to examine their buttons?"

Stiffly Miss Bebb inclined her head. "Certainly."

So the other headmistress strode forward, her narrowed eyes going from blazer to blazer. At last she stopped before Betty. That girl held her breath. She felt sick with anxiety, but, of course, all the buttons on the blazer she was now wearing were intact, and at length Miss Flint passed on.

"Well?" asked Miss Bebb, when the tour of inspection had ended. "I trust that you are satisfied now, Miss Flint?"

But the other woman shook her head.

"No doubt your girls are supplied with more than one blazer," she said curtly. "I should like to inspect their spare garments."

Betty felt as if she must faint, and even Daphne's cheeks went as white as paper. For if their spare blazers were inspected, then Betty would most certainly be questioned. And if she gave herself away, then Daphne also would have to admit having broken bounds.

"Oh golly!" groaned the Form captain under her breath, then fearfully she and Daphne waited—waited for their own headmistress to reply.

Will Miss Bebb discover that Betty and Daphne were at St. Chad's School at the vital time? On no account miss next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL, in which you'll read further chapters of this splendid serial.

The FALSE CONFESSIONS



By
PETER
LANGLEY

THE VANISHED CURIOS

HOPE old Professor James hasn't forgotten the invitation he sent me! He's so absent-minded, he probably won't even recognise me!"

Noel Raymond grinned as he walked up the drive of Ilam Lodge, the home of Professor James, the well-known historian.

The young detective had had a standing invitation for some time to come down and inspect the professor's priceless collection of historical relics and curios gathered from all parts of the world. Business had brought the young detective to the country town near by, and so he was taking the opportunity of calling on the professor.

He pressed the bell-push as he reached the porch. The door was opened after a moment by a maid—a pretty, rather pale-faced girl in trim uniform.

"Is Professor James at home, please?" Noel asked smilingly.

"I'm afraid not, sir," the girl replied. "He is away for a few weeks—I understand he's gone abroad. But Dr. Sanders is here, looking after his affairs."

Noel hesitated. "Perhaps you'd better take my card in to him, then," he said.

The girl stood aside for him to enter, and Noel waited in the tastefully furnished hall.

The doctor appeared a moment later—an elderly, grey-moustached man, the typical country doctor. He smiled affably at Noel.

"Good-day, Mr. Raymond," he said. "Of course, I've heard of you—who hasn't? I understand you wanted to see Professor James?"

"Well, I wanted to see his curios," Noel explained. "I've an invitation to do so. I didn't know he was away, but this is the only chance I may have for some time of calling in. If you don't mind my looking over them—"

"Of course not," broke in the doctor, beaming. "I'm in charge while the professor—an old friend—is away, and I'll be glad to show you round."

He turned to lead the way through the far door. Noel handed his hat to

the young maid. And as he did so, he saw that she had turned as white as paper. She was staring at him in what seemed almost pitiful appeal.

Noel looked at her in amazement, and opened his mouth to ask if she were feeling all right. But at that moment she took his hat, and left him with a polite: "Thank you, sir!"

Noel stared after her, that haunting look of fear still in his mind. But the girl vanished through a door without glancing round.

With a shrug, Noel followed Dr. Sanders along the corridor to the room on the first floor where the curios were kept. The doctor unlocked the door with a key he took from his pocket, and they went in.

The room was like an overcrowded museum. There were curios everywhere, in cases, on stands, tables, and shelves—even on the floor. Vases were there, and statuettes, pots, knives, carved boxes, pewter-ware, swords, trays, medallions—everything from examples of primitive carving to the most beautiful ancient silverware.

Noel wandered around, examining the objects with keen interest, while Dr. Sanders stood in the doorway, jangling his keys.

Suddenly the young detective turned, a puzzled frown on his face.

"Some of the curios appear to have been removed," he said. "And I see that one thing—a statuette, I should imagine—has been taken, none too gently, from its wooden base."

The doctor stiffened, his smile fading. "Well, Mr. Raymond, the fact is, one

Two people confessed to being guilty of the theft of the professor's valuable curios. Yet Noel felt certain that neither of them was guilty. And that made him all the more determined to discover the real thief.

or two of the curios are missing. It's really something in your line."

"You mean they have been stolen?" said Noel quietly.

"Exactly, Mr. Raymond. They have vanished from this room, when it has been locked, without anyone here knowing about it—or so they say.

"As you can see," he added, "the window is too small to allow a man to get through, and has strong iron bars on the outside. There is no ventilator, and the chimney is too small to allow anyone to climb down it. There cannot be any secret passages—the walls are too thin. And there's no trapdoor in the floor, I know."

Noel was staring at him in amazement.

"Yet the curios have vanished?" he said. "Did they all disappear together?"

"No; there were several thefts. Each time, three or four objects disappeared. I came up to see if everything was all right, unlocked the door—there's only this one key, which I always keep—and found something had been taken! The lock has never been tampered with, either. Yet the professor's curios have been vanishing. What he will say when he returns, I dare not think. You see, he left the collection in my charge."

"Do you suspect anyone at all?" Noel asked.

"I'm afraid I've more than suspicion against one person," the doctor said slowly. "That silver statuette that was wrenched from its base—it was found in the room of Janet Mitchell, the maid who opened the door to you."

Noel started. "I thought there was something queer about her manner," he remarked.

"I've already had a word with her," nodded the doctor gravely. "I asked all the staff to tell me what they knew, but they didn't give much information. It was the butler who found the statuette hidden in the girl's room. I'd asked him to look there, to make sure there was nothing hidden. She denied all knowledge of the thefts, but I was so dissatisfied with her manner that I decided I must give her notice. She is the only person who could have smuggled the curios out—for she has always swept and dusted the room. I know it must be someone in the house, for whenever the thefts have occurred there has been no disturbance. The watchdog we keep in the grounds has never made a sound."

Noel thought quickly for a moment. "This interest me," he said musingly. "I'd like to have a word with all the household, if you don't mind, doctor."

They were quickly assembled in the

hall. Apart from the frightened young maid, there were only two men—Willings, the elderly butler, and Hurst, the chauffeur, a nervous little man.

Noel questioned the pale-faced young maid first.

"What do you know about these thefts, Janet?" he asked gently.

"Nothing at all, Mr. Raymond," she replied, in a low but steady voice. "I know the doctor thinks I stole the curios—but I'm innocent—I swear it!"

"Thank you, Miss Mitchell!" Noel said gravely, betraying nothing of his thoughts. He passed on to Willings, the butler.

"What do you know about this business?" he asked.

Willings shuffled his feet uneasily, looking at the floor.

"I—I don't know anything, sir!" he muttered gruffly.

Noel raised his eyebrows; then, without comment, passed on to Hurst. But the chauffeur could offer no help.

"I live in a cottage next to the garage, sir," he explained; "so it isn't often I'm up here at the house."

Seeing that there was nothing further to be learnt from them, Noel dismissed the three, and found himself alone with Dr. Sanders.

"Y'know, I've seen both Hurst and Willings before, and recently," he muttered, frowning. "Can't place them for the moment, though. By the way, Sanders, when did the last robbery actually take place?"

"To-day," replied the doctor. "It must have been an hour or so before you arrived. I went up to the curio-room, and found that two vases had vanished."

"I see!" said Noel thoughtfully. "I wonder if you could put me up for the night?" he added. "I'd like to get to the bottom of this, for the sake of Professor James."

"I can put you up, certainly," Sanders replied. "But I'm afraid that Janet Mitchell, the maid, is undoubtedly the culprit."

"We'll have to find out," said Noel. He waited while the doctor rang for the butler to take his bag up to the room he was to occupy.

Willings seemed to have something on his mind. Noel noticed his side glances more than once as they ascended the stairs, and felt more certain than ever that he had seen the man somewhere quite recently.

It was as they entered the bright and cheerful room Noel was to have that he remembered.

It was that afternoon, in the country town, when Noel had noticed a saloon car pass him. He had stepped into the roadway to avoid an obstruction when the car had swept by, sounding its horn. He had glanced at the two men inside. The driver had been Hurst, the chauffeur; the other man was Willings.

Noel grinned as this simple solution became clear. No doubt the butler had gone into town on some errand, and Hurst had picked him up and brought him back to Ilam Lodge, passing Noel on the way.

At that moment he saw that the butler, having deposited the suitcase, was staring at him uncertainly, apparently wanting to say something.

"Yes, Willings; what is it?" asked Noel encouragingly.

"It's about—about these robberies, sir!" the butler muttered. "I've heard of you, and how you always solve your cases; so I might as well tell you everything."

"What do you mean?" asked Noel sharply.

"I—I want to confess, sir. I was the

thief. I've been stealing the professor's curios!"

Noel stared at him for a moment, completely at a loss for words.

"You were the thief, Willings?" he said then. "But why did you do it? Why didn't you confess just now to Dr. Sanders?"

"I thought I'd get away with it," the butler replied, hanging his head. "Now I realise what a fool I've been. I had a duplicate of the key made, and slipped into the room when nobody was about. To—to avoid suspicion, I planted that statuette in Janet Mitchell's room to get her blamed. Last time I went in the curio-room was this afternoon—about an hour before you arrived, Mr. Raymond. Oh, I must have been mad to—"

"Mr. Willings!"

The horrified cry came from the doorway.

Noel and the butler spun round, startled. Janet, the young maid, stood there, her face white, a look of incredulous horror in her wide eyes.

"Mr. Willings!" she cried again. "It's impossible! You can't be the thief! What—what does it all mean?"

The butler's drawn face had turned greyer.

"Janet—Janet dear, I didn't want you to know!" he said huskily. "I didn't want you to—to hear that! But it's true! I stole those curios!"

"I'll never believe it!" the girl sobbed, clinging to him. "You—you couldn't possibly do anything so mean. Why, you've been our friend—daddy's and mine—ever since I can remember! Mr. Raymond, he didn't do it! It's all some ghastly mistake!"

Noel was perturbed and shaken, his mind whirling. What could he say? The man himself was insisting that he was the thief.

The young detective was saved from making a reply by a new interruption. Into the room strode Dr. Sanders, looking bewildered.

"What's the matter in here?" he demanded, gazing from one to the other.

The butler turned to him, patting the sobbing girl's arm.

"Dr. Sanders," he said tensely, "I—I've just told Mr. Raymond the truth about the thefts. I am the thief! I've been stealing the curios!"

The doctor was thunderstruck. He gazed at Willings as though he could hardly believe his ears. Then he suddenly recovered his voice.

"You—you scoundrel!" he spluttered, almost choking. "So you—you are the thief? You've been stealing Professor James' curios? Yet you have the—the audacity to stand there and face me! Get out of the house at once before I send for the police! Never let me see you near here again!"

"Very well, sir," the butler said in a flat voice.

"Doctor, no, no! Don't do that! Willings is innocent! He didn't do it!" Janet was almost frantic now in her distress.

Noel gently drew her away from the butler, endeavouring to soothe her.

"You'd better go, Willings," he said quietly, with a significant glance towards the doctor, who was glaring through the window now, as though anxious to have nothing more to do with the butler.

Willings gulped, and then, without another word, left the room.

The doctor turned back from the window. Janet looked up at him, piteously trying to restrain her emotion.

"Dr. Sanders, he never stole the

curios," she said earnestly. "I'm certain he's absolutely innocent."

"Bah!" snapped the doctor. "The man had the brazenness to confess it, frightened to face the thought of being caught out by Mr. Raymond! And you'd better watch your step, my girl! I'm not so sure you aren't mixed up in this! I haven't forgotten the statuette found in your room! You've been very friendly with that—thief! One more sign of trouble, and out you go!"

He swung on his heel and strode heavily out of the room.

"Mr. Raymond, you must do something," said Janet urgently, turning to Noel. "I don't know why Willings confessed to stealing those curios, but I'll never believe he was the thief. He's the finest, kindest man I know!"

Noel looked at her steadily.

"Miss Mitchell, I shan't rest until I've cleared up this mystery completely. I don't believe Willings was the thief, either. Don't take too much notice of what the doctor said. He's naturally upset. And you mustn't worry any more!"

The girl smiled gratefully, and she, too, left the room.

But Noel, lighting a cigarette, felt utterly baffled.

Willings had confessed to being the thief. But at the actual time of the last theft Noel himself had seen the man in the car, miles away from Ilam Lodge. Willings had confessed to a crime he couldn't possibly have committed!

THE SECOND CONFESSION

NOEL strove to grasp the meaning of this unexpected development.

He was certain that it was Willings he had seen in the car at the time the last robbery had taken place. And his belief that the man's "confession" was false was strengthened by Janet's spirited defence of his character.

Who, then, could the thief be? Noel still felt certain it was an "inside job." It suddenly occurred to him that if Willings was ruled out, then Hurst must be, too. For the chauffeur had been with Willings in the car!

Which left only Janet Mitchell, the young maid!

Could she be the real thief, after all? All the evidence seemed to point towards her. Her distress when Willings was dismissed just now might have been a clever pretence to throw suspicion from herself.

Yet Noel could not believe the girl was anything but honest. Her manner convinced him—and his judgment rarely let him down.

His troubled thoughts were interrupted dramatically.

The door of his room opened suddenly, to admit a panting figure. Dr. Sanders rushed into the room, gripping the key of the curio-room.

"Raymond, quickly!" he gasped. "There's been another robbery!"

"What's that?" snapped Noel, spinning round. "When?"

"Must have been a few minutes ago. I went into the curio-room just now to take in a pair of candlesticks from the study. I found that two jewelled swords had vanished from a case on the wall. That—that scoundrel Willings has—"

"Wait!" broke in Noel. "How could it have been Willings? In that time he was in here, talking to me! And then you came in and saw him yourself."

"Must have been an accomplice," replied the doctor, "or Willings must

have dashed in when he left the room after I'd dismissed him?"

"Let me have a look at the room," said Noel grimly.

He raced along to the curio-room, the door of which now stood open. Immediately he saw that a glass case on the wall had been forced open and the two ornate ceremonial swords inside—ancient Turkish weapons—had been taken from their mountings.

Swiftly, but methodically, Noel set to work to search the room. His efforts, however, were in vain. Not one clue had the mysterious thief left behind. All that he could find was something almost too insignificant to be considered—a scrap of straw, a couple of inches long, withered and dirty. It was lying on the carpet. Noel put it in his pocket before rising to his feet.

"Nothing much here," he said, rising to his feet. "But I'm not at all sure Willings could have carried out this robbery. Even if he did come along here when you dismissed him, he must have spent some time in opening the door, forcing this case, and getting away after relocking the door. And, remember, you left my room only a few moments after him!"

"Then it's that girl!" said the doctor furiously. "She must have entered this room after she left you, while I was downstairs, and robbed it—probably an act of spite. I warned her what I'd do if there was any more trouble, and I shan't let this pass, I'll fire her!"

Noel ignored this outburst. "Don't you think we'd better question the girl and Hurst, the chauffeur, too, about their movements during the last few minutes?" he asked.

"We may as well," replied the doctor. "But I'm not taking any more chances. The girl goes!"

He pressed the bell and, in answer to his summons, Janet and the chauffeur presented themselves.

"There's been another robbery in the curio-room—and within the last few minutes," said Noel, coming to the point. "Now, Miss Mitchell, will you tell me what you have been doing since you left me ten or fifteen minutes ago?"

The girl met his eyes bravely.

"I've been sweeping out the spare room next to the curio-room, and when I'd finished I went downstairs. I was in the servants' quarters when Dr. Sanders rang just now," she replied, in a low tone.

"You didn't see anyone enter the curio-room or hear any signs of people moving about?" asked Noel keenly.

"I heard nothing at all," said Janet. "And I'm quite sure nobody came along the corridor to the curio-room. Mr. Raymond"—there was a sudden break in her voice—"you do believe me?"

"I do," said Noel gravely, resting his hand on her shoulder.

"But I don't!" broke in Dr. Sanders angrily. "I've had enough of this! Janet, you'll clear out right away!"

Noel's eyes glinted.

"One moment, doctor," he interposed. "I think you're being rather drastic; you've still very little direct evidence against Miss Mitchell. Look here, I'm confident I can clear up this mystery soon. Let Miss Mitchell stay here for at least another twenty-four hours. I'll make myself responsible for her!"

The doctor hesitated, stroking his chin.

"Very well, Raymond," he said finally. "I'll give her another twenty-four hours. If it hasn't been proved that someone else is the thief by then, then I must dismiss her!"

"Thanks!" said Noel, with an encouraging smile at the girl. "And now,

Hurst, what about you? Where have you been during the last few minutes?"

"I was in the house, sir," replied the startled chauffeur, fidgeting nervously with his drooping grey moustache. "I came into the servants' quarters to get a can of oil I'd left there."

"You heard nothing suspicious?" questioned Noel.

"Not a thing, sir," said the little man emphatically. "Oh, I did see Willings leave the house some minutes ago. I saw him go down the drive, carrying his bag. But that's all, sir."

Noel bit his lip.

"Very well," he said. "I see you can't tell us any more."

He turned to the doctor as the others made their way downstairs again.

"I'd like to look at that glass case again for finger-prints," he said.

They re-entered the curio-room, and Noel examined the case carefully. His eyes glinted as he turned away.

"There may be prints there," he announced, "but I'll have to take off

It was as he was emerging from a clump of thick bushes that he saw that someone else was in the grounds. A furtive, indistinct figure was moving silently past the wall of the house, only a few yards away.

The young detective's blue eyes glinted. With a stealthy tread he made his way towards the prowler.

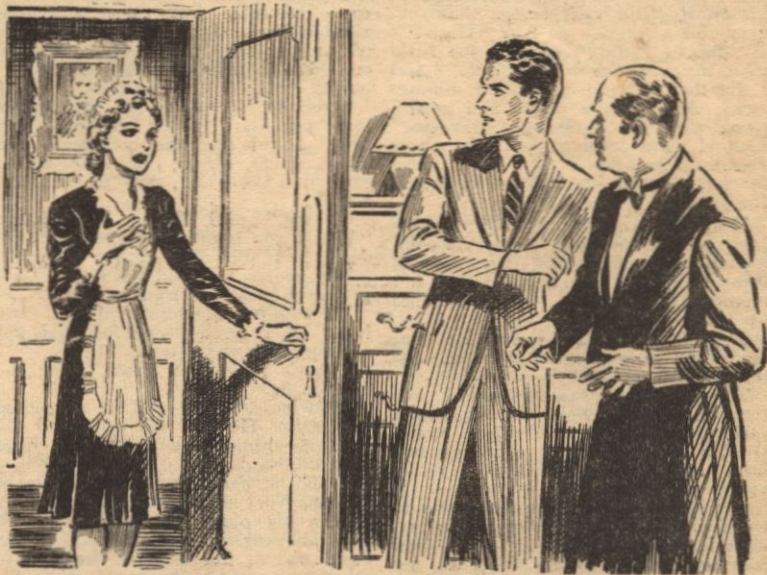
The figure seemed to be moving with a rather surprising lack of caution, despite its furtiveness. Once the person nearly tripped over a tree-root, and then stopped near a window, looking around.

Now Noel was near enough to see that the man had a large haversack over his shoulder.

The young detective tensed, and then sprang forward, grabbing at the man's shoulder.

"Let's see who you are," he muttered.

The man whirled round, apparently startled; and Noel gasped aloud, his



Noel and the butler spun round as a horrified cry came from the doorway. "Mr. Willings!" cried Janet. "It's impossible! You can't be the thief!"

this hinged glass front and keep it for the present, so as not to lose the impressions. Have you a screwdriver?"

"Hurst is bound to have one," the doctor replied. "I'll ask the maid to go across to his cottage and get one."

"Don't bother," cut in the young detective swiftly, as Dr. Sanders moved towards the bell. "I'll slip over there myself. Won't be a minute!"

He left the house, making through the grounds towards the chauffeur's little cottage next to the garage. Daylight had given place to dusk now, and the stars were already showing.

Noel reached the little cottage and rapped on the door. But there came no reply. Nor was there any light showing. It seemed that Hurst was not at home.

Noel paused for a moment, and then decided to go into the garage. There was probably a screwdriver in there.

The doors were unlocked, and the large saloon-car was parked inside. Evidently Hurst had not left the grounds. Noel discovered a suitable screwdriver on a shelf and left the garage, closing the doors behind him.

He began making his way back across the grounds towards the house, picking his way carefully in the gathering darkness.

hand dropping limply from the other's shoulder.

It was Hurst, the chauffeur, who stood there. He was wearing his dark blue driving overcoat, and the stiff peaked cap, pulled down well over his face, shading it. But there could be no mistaking the drooping, grey moustache, or the nervous action as the chauffeur put his hand up to pull at it.

"M-Mr. Raymond!" he stuttered, almost trembling, staring at the young detective.

"What have you got in that bag?" demanded Noel tersely, taking a pace nearer.

"Really, I don't see that that has anything to do with you," retorted the little man, recovering some of his presence of mind. "Just a few—er—tools."

"I'd like to make sure of that," said Noel tersely. And, without ceremony, he grabbed at the haversack.

Hurst seized it, trying desperately to wrench it from the young detective's grasp. In a moment the two were struggling for the haversack, swaying backwards and forwards in the attempt.

Hurst, apparently frenzied, made a sudden snatch at the strap, only to miss it, and make a gash in Noel's forearm.

Noel winced at the sudden pain, but he did not relax his grip. With an unexpected twist he wrenched the haversack from the struggling chauffeur, and tipped the contents on to the ground.

A silver jewel-box, an ebony statuette, a couple of gold bangles, and a silver candlestick lay there on the muddy ground.

Noel looked up at the chauffeur, who was standing, breathing heavily, by him, all the fight gone out of him.

"So you were the thief, after all?" said Noel grimly.

"Well, what if I was?" snapped the man sullenly. "Suppose I did? You haven't caught me yet, Mr. Clever Detective! Put your hands up!"

He whipped out a revolver as he spoke, levelling it at Noel.

Taken unawares, the young detective had to obey. But his eyes were puzzled as he saw the man stuff the stolen curios back into the haversack.

"Hurst," he said, a curious tone in his voice, "did you commit that robbery this afternoon at four o'clock?"

"Course I did!" sneered the little man, his nervousness gone now. "And I did that last job only a few minutes ago. And, what's more, I'm gettin' away with the stuff right now—see? Listen! I'm leaving you here where I can see you for a bit. Don't move for ten minutes, or it'll be the worse for you!"

Noel's lips tightened grimly; but he had perforce to stand there, still holding up his hands, whilst Hurst backed away into the darkness. In a few moments the man had disappeared into the shadows.

The young detective waited for what he judged to be the ten minutes. His mind was in a whirl.

The chauffeur was, it seemed, the mysterious thief. Noel had caught him red-handed, only to lose him again. On his own admission, the man had been robbing the professor's curio-room.

Yet Noel had seen him in the car at the time when the robbery that afternoon had been carried out. And how had he managed to rob the place, not half an hour ago, when Noel was in his room near by, when the door of the curio-room was locked—when Hurst himself had been down in the servants' quarters, seemingly?

Amazing though it appeared, the young detective felt certain that Hurst was not the thief. That he, like the butler, Willings, had confessed to the robberies, which he had never committed.

THE REAL THIEF

"HANG it all, this is getting fantastic! It's impossible, incredible!"

Noel was frowning in perplexity. He walked up towards the door of the house, risking being shot at from the darkness by his late adversary. Nothing happened, however, and he reached the door in safety.

In the curio-room Dr. Sanders was still waiting for him, frowning worriedly.

"I say, Raymond," he said abruptly, as Noel entered the room, "I've just been thinking about what the chauffeur, Hurst, told us just now. He said he was downstairs when the latest robbery occurred, fetching a can of oil he'd left there. Yet I've just remembered that the back door to the servants' quarters was locked. If he came in he would have had to knock on the door, for Janet Mitchell to open.

I've just questioned Janet, and she denies having opened the door for him. One or other of 'em hasn't told us the truth. Which?"

"Which?" repeated Noel slowly. "That's the point."

Then he told the doctor what had been happening out in the grounds. Dr. Sanders' face darkened as he listened.

"So it's Hurst, after all!" he shouted. "I'll set the police on him, the scoundrel! I'll ring them up straight away!"

He whirled towards the door, only to stop short.

"Dash it!" he said. "I've just remembered the phone's out of order. The only way we could reach the town to-night, and get in touch with the police, would be by car; and Hurst will have the ignition key of the saloon, so we shan't be able to use the car."

"And the chap's got away for the present," said Noel grimly. "I think I'd better keep watch on the curio-room to-night, just in case there's another theft. I say," he added, gazing at the floor thoughtfully, "did anyone come in here while I was out just now?"

"Nobody," replied the doctor, in some surprise. "I was here the whole time. I did ring the bell once, and Janet came along; but she didn't come into the room; only to the doorway."

"I see," said Noel. He added: "Would you mind bandaging my arm, doctor? It's hurting rather a lot."

"Of course," smiled his host. "I'll get some bandages from my bag."

He wrapped the scratched arm carefully, after having cleansed and put antiseptic on the wound.

"How's that?" he asked, tying the final knot.

"It's loose," Noel replied, somewhat dubiously. He bent his arm, and the bandage slipped down. "Better have another shot," he smiled.

With the bandage tied to his satisfaction, Noel began to discuss with the doctor his plans for keeping watch over the curios that night. As his room was in the corridor that led to the treasure-room, he could leave his door open, and keep watch on the passage. Thus no one would be able to go by without being seen by Noel.

After supper Noel retired to his room to keep watch on the passage. Dr. Sanders was to come along later to relieve him.

The young detective settled down in an armchair facing the open doorway, his revolver within easy reach.

An hour went by, and Noel began to feel somewhat cramped and shifted his position; there was a draught, too, from the open doorway. But he did not relax his vigilance. For now Noel believed he had a clue; indeed, a definite theory was building up in his mind.

There was one point that eluded him still, however—one part of the mystery that he could not solve.

And then, when his watch showed that it was a few minutes to twelve, in a sudden flash of inspiration Noel hit on the link he was searching for.

"Got it!" he muttered triumphantly. "Birds'-nests!"

And even as he uttered the cryptic remark he heard a footstep in the dark corridor outside.

Noel snatched at his gun, his nerves alert.

But it was Dr. Sanders who looked round the doorway, clad in dressing-gown and slippers.

"Heard anything?" he asked; then, seeing Noel shake his head, he added:

"I'll just go along to see if everything's all right, anyway."

He moved on along the corridor; and Noel, getting up and stretching himself, heard his host turning the key in the lock of the curio-room door.

There was a few moments' pause, and then with startling suddenness a loud shout.

"Raymond, come here quickly!"

Noel raced along the corridor and into the room. The doctor had switched on the light, and was standing petrified in the doorway.

"Look!" he choked, pointing.

From a table in the centre of the room a complete set of beautiful Chinese vases had vanished. The polished table was bare.

"Just as I expected," Noel muttered, then he stiffened. "What's that?"

His keen ears had detected a faint scraping from somewhere within the room. The doctor stared round him, startled.

"That cupboard—over there in the corner!" snapped Noel.

He crossed the room to where a large cupboard stood. The young detective tugged at the handle. The door was not locked, but in swinging to it had apparently jammed.

He pulled again with all his force; with a sudden creak the door opened, almost flinging Noel to the ground.

The doctor and Noel simultaneously gasped at what they saw inside.

Crouched in the empty cupboard was the young maid, Janet Mitchell, pale and trembling.

"You!" cried the doctor. "What are you doing in there, Miss Mitchell?"

"I—I've been hiding in the cupboard, hoping to catch the thief red-handed," faltered the girl. "Only—the cupboard door slammed, and I couldn't get out."

"You didn't see or hear anything while you were in there?" asked Noel quickly.

"Not until Dr. Sanders came in," Janet replied; "then I heard him shout for you."

"I don't believe a word of it!" broke in the doctor, red with anger. "It's you we've caught red-handed, Janet Mitchell, and I'm going to hand you over to the police first thing in the morning! You and that precious butler—Willings—were the thieves all the time. And probably that other scoundrel—Hurst—was in the plot, too."

"It's not true!" Janet gasped. "It's not true!"

"One moment, Miss Mitchell!" interposed Noel, his eyes glinting sternly. "We must do as Dr. Sanders suggests; we must get in touch with the police first thing in the morning. I know now who the culprit is."

"You do?" The doctor stared at him. "Of course, it's obvious. This girl and her friends are all in the plot."

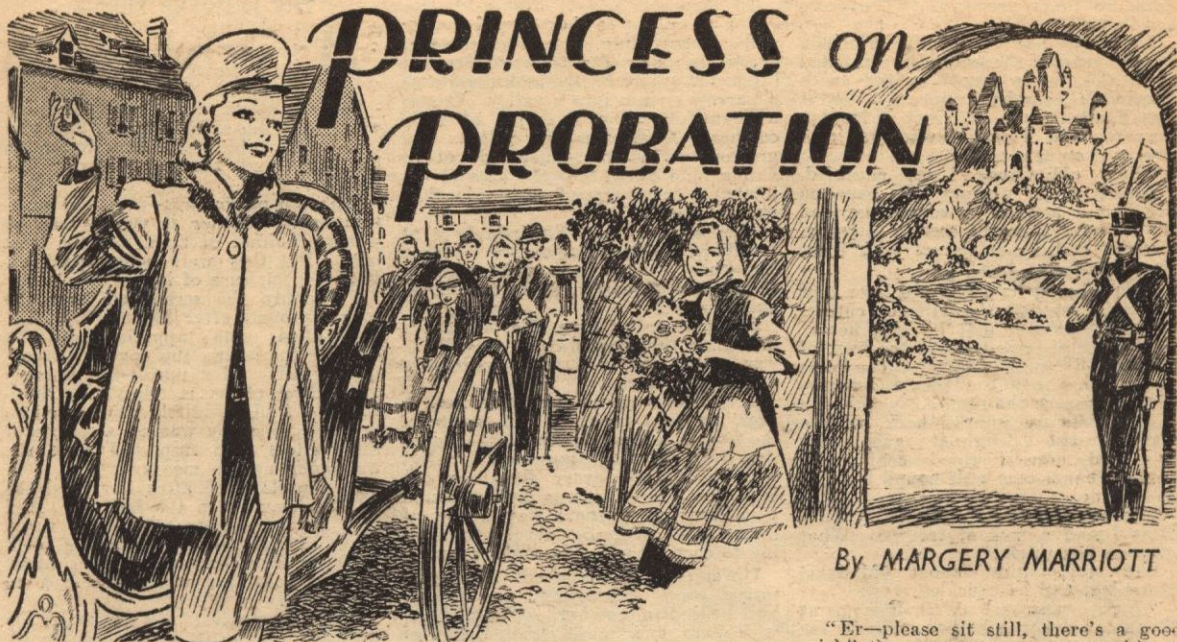
"Perhaps," Noel replied cryptically. "But, doctor, will you kindly hold out your hands for one moment?"

Unthinkingly the doctor did so. Next moment there was a click—and a pair of glittering handcuffs had snapped shut over his wrists!

"Yes, I've found the thief," went on Noel, a new note in his voice. "And it's you! You scoundrel, you've been stealing the professor's curios!"

"You must be mad, man!" shouted Dr. Sanders, struggling frantically with the handcuffs. "Release me at once, Raymond, you lunatic! There's that girl—that thief—standing there, while you—you—"

(Please turn to the back page.)



PRINCESS on PROBATION

By MARGERY MARRIOTT

WHO WAS THE SPY?

WHEN Princess Florinda returned to the little country of Stolzburg, she was horrified to learn that her brother Prince Peter had been outlawed for treason. Her stern uncle, Baron Hermann, forbade her to mention his name, and said that Florinda would become queen at the end of a year—during which time she would be “on probation.”

But in spite of her uncle's ban, Florinda determined to prove her brother's innocence. She had a wonderful friend in Bernhard, a boy from the mountains, who was hiding her brother.

Bernhard and Florinda found a secret room in the castle, which was obviously the headquarters of the plotters who had been responsible for the charge against Peter.

Florinda planned a picnic one day, meaning to meet Bernhard and go to see Peter at his secret hiding-place. Just as she was setting off, her uncle appeared, and said she must take her governess, Madame Karenina, with her.

“Oh, yes, uncle. I—I shall be delighted to take Madame Karenina with me,” said the Princess Florinda.

Fortunately, neither her uncle, Baron Hermann, nor the fussy, bird-like little governess, who was nervily arranging rugs across her lap at Florinda's side in the resplendent black carriage, with its snow-white horse, noticed her faltering tone.

The baron, caressing his thick black beard, smiled approvingly. Madame Karenina settled herself comfortably and slipped an arm through Florinda's. “There,” she twittered. “Just the two of us—together!”

Florinda, drawing a deep breath, seized the reins.

There was no escape. Utterly dismaying though the governess' presence was, she could do nothing about it now, in full view of the baron, several of the castle servants, and alert, keen-eyed Civic Guards.

But Florinda was fiercely resolved that somehow, in some way, she would even yet keep her secret rendezvous with Bernhard, show him the significant book she had discovered, and—most

thrilling of all—visit her fugitive brother.

Amid much bowing and curtsying, the carriage moved forward. The baron wished them a pleasant picnic; the guards on the first drawbridge saluted, and Florinda and her very unwelcome attendant passed out of the castle courtyard.

There were three drawbridges in all, and at each of them the royal carriage was greeted with salutes and the presentation of arms. Then, lightly holding the reins, Florinda began the drive down the narrow, winding road, flanked on the one side by towering, pine-clad rock, and on the other by an almost sheer drop to the capital city, lying five hundred feet below.

Madame Karenina kept up a constant stream of chatter.

But Florinda was not listening, for she was racking her brains for a way of getting out of this startling predicament.

She was to meet Bernhard at the village. They would arrive there within five minutes. What ever could she do? She must get rid of Madame Karenina somehow.

“Why, Florinda,” the governess exclaimed, frowning disapprovingly, “you are restless, child.”

“Am—am I?” said Florinda vaguely.

It was not surprising, for a hairpin bend in the path had brought Florinda a brief glimpse of the village, with its church and inn and clustering cottages. And she had seen a familiar figure standing before the inn, a dog at his side—Bernhard!

Excitedly, yet cautiously, Princess Florinda made her way to her brother's secret hiding place in the mountains. It was vital that no one should know where she was going. But in spite of her precautions—she was being followed!

“Er—please sit still, there's a good girl,” the governess went on, with an air of hesitant authority. “It's much more decorous. That's better—much better.” Smiling in satisfaction, she patted Florinda's hand. “And now, my dear, I am going to read,” she finished surprisingly, and, producing a small volume entitled “Poems,” turned over the well-thumbed pages.

But when a sudden lurch flung her sideways, almost sending the book flying from her grasp, Madame Karenina decided to deliver a warning:

“And please do not drive so recklessly, Florinda!” she admonished. “The path is bumpy enough as it is, and if, by any chance, I were to lose this book—”

She left the dread consequences to Florinda's imagination, implying by a rapid blink that it would be a terrible catastrophe.

“Oh, I'll be careful, Madame Karenina,” Florinda promised earnestly.

But she had to turn quickly away to hide the sparkle in her eyes. For at last she had seen a way out of her dilemma!

Waiting until the next bend, she deliberately tugged on one rein. The horse swerved, and Florinda and the governess were thrown together. Quite a mix-up, it was—Florinda saw to that!—during which the precious volume was knocked from Madame Karenina's grasp, clean out of the carriage.

With a little scream of horror the governess scrambled up.

“My poems!” she wailed. “Stop, Florinda! Oh, you careless child! Stop!”

Naturally, Florinda stopped, as that was the very thing she had planned. And as Madame Karenina, in a terrible flutter, climbed out of the carriage, she made a great show of hauling on the reins.

“Hurry—quickly!” she cried. “I can't hold him much longer. He wants his head. He'll be all right if we let him go, but if we— Oh, help, help!”

With a pawing of hoofs, the beautiful white horse charged forward. Startled, Madame Karenina, the poems in her hand, twisted round. She was just in time to see Florinda and the carriage disappearing around another bend, and then—she was alone.

“Good gracious!” she murmured, too

dazed to think properly. "The horse has bolted!"

But if she had been beside Florinda at that moment she would have realised that the horse was bolting with Florinda's complete approval, for it was Florinda who had sent it leaping forward, and Florinda who was now urging it on at a canter.

"Poor old Carrie!" she chuckled. "Rather mean, playing that jape on her, but I had to do something, and she isn't far from the castle. Anyway, she can soothe her nerves with those poems. Gee-up, boy!"

It was barely two minutes later that Florinda reached the village, cutting down a side-path that brought her to the shelter of some trees at the back of the inn. There, she tethered the horse and, lifting out the picnic hamper, turned towards the square.

And then she jumped back, with a startled but delighted gasp, for Bernhard himself stood confronting her, his handsome wolf hound Spartan at his side.

"Sorry I'm late," Florinda said, "but I had a spot of trouble. What ever do you think?"

She told him about Madame Karenina, and he chuckled.

"A governess, eh? Well, it seems as though you've taught her more so far than she's taught you. And—that! Let me have it." He took the hamper into his arms. "Phew! Heavy!" he remarked. "For Peter?"

"Yes," said Florinda, her eyes shining. "How is he, Bernhard?"

"Bearing up, you know. He's certainly got grit. And wasn't he bucked when I said you were coming to see him!"

Florinda's heart glowed. Oh, it would be gorgeous seeing Peter again after all this time! And he'd cheer up even more when he knew how she and Bernhard were fighting to clear his name.

"Bernhard—look!" she said, her voice shaking with excitement. "I found it in the secret room this morning. It's full of names."

From a pocket of her coat, she drew out the little notebook Bernhard, face lighting up, took it eagerly.

"And you think one of the names may be that of the traitor in the castle?" he said tensely. "If only you're right, Florinda! But, I say, we'd better not stay here," he added, tucking the book into the hip pocket of his velvet shorts. "The sooner we're safe in my hideout, away from prying eyes, the better. We can run through those names with Peter. And that reminds me—you can't go mountaineering in those clothes, young lady."

"Well," Florinda chuckled, looking down at herself, "what's to do about it?"

"You stay here," Bernhard said, his eyes twinkling.

He disappeared inside the inn; but was back within a few minutes, arms laden with a heap of clothing—breeches, heavy, studded boots, thick sweater, stockings, and gloves. Then he led her through the trees to a tiny, two-roomed cottage.

"You can change in there," he said. "It's never used. I'll put the carriage where it can't be seen."

He dumped the clothing into Florinda's arms, and, with Spartan loping at his side, strode away. Five minutes later they were ready to start.

"Now you look something like it," was Bernhard's jesting comment on Florinda's appearance.

"And I jolly well feel like it, too!" Florinda retorted. "Come on, I'll show you!"

Off they set.

For a mile or so they forged deeper and deeper into the trees, cutting across the edge of a forest of firs and birch. A quaint bridge took them over a narrow stream into a valley. It was a beautiful valley, a carpet of vivid colouring—rich blues and yellows and greens—and on the other side of it, half a mile away, was the base of the towering, snow-capped mountain they were to climb.

Thrilled by it all, Florinda kept at Bernhard's side, occasionally fondling Spartan's ear as the wolfhound in friendly fashion rubbed his head against her leg.

But even more than the adventure of scaling this rugged mass of rock she was anticipating the meeting with her fugitive brother.

The ascent of the mountain was a slow, tortuous task. It was so steep, the trees and shrubs so thick, that often the way seemed impassable. But Bernhard knew every foot; so did Spartan. Indeed, it was the wolfhound who, keeping a short way ahead of them, acted as guide, never once failing to choose the less-hazardous route.

Up and up they climbed. The vegetation grew sparse, and finally was left behind altogether. Bare rock, with here and there great drifts of snow, rose all about them. And behind—

"Steady, old thing!" Bernhard warned, as Florinda, clinging to a boulder, looked back, and in the nick of time he seized her. "I shouldn't do that, you know."

"Thank—thanks, Bernhard!" she gasped. "I certainly won't."

She grasped his downflung hand and scrambled up. It was easier going from that point onwards; for they came to a thin, zigzagging path, and, keeping to that, winding over the face of the mountain, soon reached the snowy region.

There they paused for a rest, sitting on one of the boulders that was scattered over the mountain at this point.

Hands clasped round her knees, Florinda gazed fascinatedly about her. She could see for miles, a great expanse of country stretching out like a map far below.

"How beautifully warm it is here—even though there is snow!" said Florinda dreamily.

Then suddenly she became alert as she heard faintly the eeriest of sounds, a musical:

"Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" "I say, what ever's that, Bernhard?" she said. "Sounds like fairy bells, or something."

"Pretty funny fairies!" Bernhard grinned, and pointed to the valley.

"I'm going a-milking, sir," she said, he quoted.

"Cows!" Florinda cried, her eyes lighting up. "Yes, I can see them now. Goodness! And we can hear their bells up here!"

It was a phenomenon of the mountains and valleys which Florinda had forgotten during her long absence from Stolzberg. Sound travelled enormous distances—voices, shepherds' horns, even footsteps.

"My goodness! Bernhard—" she began, and then broke off, as another sound smote their ears—the sound of a rock clattering down the mountainside.

Together they turned, staring in that direction; and together they sprang up as something moved at the side of a boulder several hundred yards below them.

It was a figure—a figure on hands and knees—which, seeing them staring, bobbed back out of sight.

THE PRISONER PRINCE

"BERNHARD, we've been followed!" Florinda burst out in utter dismay. "Quick! After him!"

But Bernhard was already leaping away from her side, snapping an order to Spartan which sent the wolfhound bounding and hurtling towards the boulder.

Who the person was—even the question as to whether it was a man or woman—neither of them had the least idea. But they were being spied on, Florinda felt sure of it.

Feverishly she scrambled over the rough ground after Bernhard. She was filled with apprehension and alarm. Supposing the spy had recognised her? Her uncle—the baron—might hear of her meeting with Bernhard. And, infinitely more serious, supposing the spy was an associate of the traitors, and suspected what she was doing up the mountain?

As she clattered after Bernhard she saw Spartan reach the boulder. And then she gave a cry of horror, for a stick whirled aloft, descending with stunning force on the animal's head. With a yelp, the wolfhound sank to the ground.

Bernhard reached it in a spring. He dropped beside it swiftly, anxiously examined it, and then jumped up. But as Florinda made to tear past he dragged her back.

"Let him go!" he said fiercely. "He's got too much of a start. And he's dangerous with that stick, the brute! But I'd like to meet him again—"

Eyes blazing, Florinda stared at the now tiny figure which was dodging and darting down the rocky mountainside. And suddenly she started.

"I don't think it is a he," she said; "it looks more like a girl."

"A girl?" Bernhard bit his lip, pondering. "That's queer!"

He shook his head, frowning; and Florinda frowned, too. But not with puzzlement; for she was thinking of Melita, daughter of Count von Mee, whom she had already had cause to suspect as an enemy of hers. Could it have been her?

"Bernhard, don't let's tell Peter about this," she said. "It'd only worry him."

"We won't, Florinda. There's no need to. But you and I have got to be careful in future," Bernhard declared, his face hardening. "A good thing we spotted that spy in time, or we might have given away my hideout. It's only about half a mile from here."

Still a little shaken, Florinda nodded, and then gave a cry of relief as Spartan stirred. Kneeling beside him, she cradled his head in her lap, stroking it gently. His eyes opened—big, deep brown eyes that stared up rather dazedly at first; then they brightened, and he licked her hand.

"Poor old boy, you did have a nasty knock, didn't you?" Florinda murmured. "But you're better now, aren't you?"

Spartan indicated that he was by struggling to his feet, and then covering Florinda's face with doggy kisses.

"Hi, steady on," Bernhard ordered. "Down, boy! One of these days you may have a chance to get your own back for that bump on the napper. You scared the person off, anyhow."

"You don't think she'll come back?" Florinda asked, stepping on to a rock to gaze down the mountainside.

But the mysterious shadow had vanished, and they had neither sight nor sound of her during the rest of the journey.

The tortuous pathway ended at last, some twenty feet short of the needle-shaped top of the mountain. It formed a sort of shelf, and set into the rock, behind an enormous boulder that acted as a natural screen, was a cave.

Bernhard, stepping behind the boulder, gestured with a little bow.

"Home," he announced. "Not as magnificent as yours, but home all the same—cosy, roomy, and—" He winked. "Far from the maddening crowd," as the poet said. But come and inspect it."

He stepped into the cave. Florinda, her heart pounding, went after him. At last, she was about to meet her brother!

As Bernhard had said, the cave was roomy, but he had been modest when he dismissed it as cosy. In the light of an oil-lamp he took from a staple in the wall, she found herself surveying a perfectly equipped apartment.

There was a table, some chairs, a folding bed, a small bookcase, a cupboard, shelves affixed to one of the walls and containing crockery and cooking utensils—everything one might want; even a portable radio, and rugs on the stony floor.

"Golly," Florinda ejaculated, her anxiety on Peter's account momentarily driven from mind. "A kitchen, sitting-room, and bed-room all in one. How-ever did you get all this stuff up here, Bernhard?"

"Oh, a friend helped me, you know," Bernhard said. "There's a much shorter and easier route from the other side of the mountain. But you're wondering where Peter is?" he went on, smiling. "Now for the masterpiece!"

And Florinda gasped then. For Bernhard, swishing back one of the rugs, revealed a trap-door of wood which he tugged back on hinges. Hands clasped, Florinda craned over, peering down into another apartment like this, only smaller, with steep wooden steps descending to its stone floor.

Then, as the light of another lamp approached the steps, she lowered herself through the trap-door and slithered down.

"Peter—oh, Peter!" she cried. "Florinda!"

With a jump, she landed on the floor. Swiftly, eagerly, she straightened up. A figure, standing before her, dumped the oil-lamp on a chair. Her brother—her brother, at last! And how marvellous he was looking, his face one huge grin of delight, his hands stretched out towards her.

"Oh, Peter," Florinda choked, and flung her arms around him.

They were both rather overcome with emotion. They laughed and chattered without really knowing why, or what they were saying. They did not even realise that Bernhard had joined them in the underground cavern until he put a hand on each of their shoulders and said, very softly, understandingly:

"Well, I think we can take it you're pretty pleased with yourselves."

Florinda laughing, flushed. Peter, his dark eyes agleam, stepped back.

Gay and high-spirited the three of them then, as Florinda arranged the hamper's contents on the little table. There were whoops from the two boys at sight of the food, and a special cheer from Peter when Florinda held up a box of his favourite brand of cigarette.

They made a meal, chatting light-heartedly most of the time. But all of them realised in their hearts that they were postponing the inevitable discussion of more serious things.

And when Florinda eventually broached the subject that was on their

minds, both boys looked at her attentively.

"I'm so glad you're well, Peter," she said, placing her hand over his. "You're having plenty to eat and—everything?"

"Thanks to old Bernhard I've everything I want. He's a brick, Florinda! You shut up," Peter jokingly ordered, as Bernhard started to protest.

Florinda, catching Bernhard's eye, nodded.

By mutual consent they had withheld mention of her discovery until the most suitable moment. That moment had now arrived. The comfort and relief of her reunion with Peter was something that would endure, no matter how unpleasant, how disturbing the subject they had to deal with now.

But it shouldn't be too depressing if the book proved half as valuable as Florinda hoped. It might put them on the track of the real traitor, and that would be an enormous step towards clearing Peter.

"Peter, we've a clue," Bernhard exclaimed. He put the book on the table. "Florinda found this this morning in

pects, any one of whom might use the secret room.

"And," Florinda voiced another possibility. "there's no proof that this is a list of spies or confederates." She bit her lip; then, almost irritably, turned back to the book. "Well, let's finish it, anyway."

It did not take long, with Florinda reciting quickly.

"—Heinrich Scholtz, David Kerna, Count von Mee—"

She broke off. She looked up, first at Peter, then at Bernhard. They all looked at each other, astounded, startled, and yet thrilled.

"Count von Mee?" repeated Peter. "He can't be mixed up in this, surely?"

"Why not—why not?" Florinda breathed. She was thinking of Melita, and that girl's suspicious behaviour recently. "I wouldn't trust him half a yard. And— My golly! Peter!" she jerked. "Peter, what was it that poor servant of yours started to say just before he—before he died?"

"Why, something about my being able to rely on him. Oh—count on me."



"M. M.," said Florinda, reading out the initials on the handkerchief. Did this mean Melita von Mee had been spying on her?

that room off the museum. It contains a list of names—"

"Plotters?" Peter cried.

"I'm sure of it," Florinda cut in excitedly. "Look!" Rising, she went to his side, while Bernhard went to the other, and pointed to one page. "Council of Action," she read. "Surely that means all these people are mixed up with the spying. And if any of them live at the castle—"

"Phew!" whistled Peter.

Keenly, they began to run down the list of names, Florinda reading them out in a voice that gathered tremendousness at every syllable.

"Rodolph Goetzman, Emmanuel Ludwig—why, he's at the castle," she cried.

"One of uncle's secretaries," remarked Peter thoughtfully.

"Walter Hertz," Florinda resumed. "Baron Siegfried Erb! Why, that's another! And—and so are the next five! Look!"

She ran her finger down the list. Each of the next five names belonged to retainers at the castle, and she and the boys exchanged grim looks. It rather tempered their sense of achievement to realise there were so many possible sus-

That's what it was. 'Count on me' to do something or other, poor chap."

"No, he wasn't, Peter," Florinda said, her face working excitedly. "Oh, don't you see, both of you—she gripped their arms—" he was trying to tell you the name of the traitor—"

"What?" Bernhard cried.

"But—but how? And who—"

"A name we all know," Florinda went on intently. "Someone at the castle, whose daughter's been acting very funnily towards me. A girl, Bernhard," she added, with a significant glance that only he understood. "And his name is almost exactly the same as 'Count on me.' Just a 'y' on the second word and we have—"

Almost together Peter and Bernhard leaped to their feet.

"Count von Mee!" Bernhard barked.

"My gosh!" Peter gasped.

Florinda, too, jumped up then, experiencing a tremendous, breath-taking thrill; for she knew she had proved to the boys' satisfaction, just as completely as she had proved it to her own, that the traitor responsible for Peter's terrible plight—the person who must be exposed if Peter was to be vindicated—was none other than the

country's highly respected foreign minister!

WAS MELITA TO BLAME?

"I'll be careful," Florida vowed, setting her chin. "I won't give anything away. And I'll have this advantage—he won't suspect what I know."

"But, for goodness' sake, don't run any risks, Florida!" Peter begged. "You know what uncle's decided. If you don't satisfy him at the end of a year—out you go!"

"Nearly everything rests with you, Florida," Bernhard said simply.

Florida, her eyes gleaming, clenched her hands as she sat again at the table in the underground cave.

Yes, everything did depend on her now—at least, for the immediate future. For over an hour she and the boys had discussed their staggering discovery—thrilled, delighted, but apprehensive, too.

For if they now knew the identity of the traitor, who to watch and attempt to unmask, they also knew this—he was dangerous, powerful, menacing.

He was the last person to fall under suspicion. He was in the baron's confidence. In innumerable ways he could make things difficult for Florida in her effort to pass her probation if he so desired—and that would be the first thing he'd do if ever he had an inkling of her secret activities on behalf of the young man he had plotted against.

Florida would be in constant danger at the castle, but she was not afraid. She'd watch the count, she'd watch Melita, she'd try to learn all she could, and inform Bernhard of everything.

It was time to part then. Affectionately Florida and Peter said goodbye. And then, accompanied by Bernhard, Florida set off.

On the journey down the mountain they kept eyes and ears open for further sign of any watcher; and Spartan, ahead most of the time, seemed on the alert, too. But they encountered nothing suspicious at all, and did not come upon anyone until, crossing the picturesque bridge, they noticed a peasant in shorts, jacket, and feathered hat trudging down the path beside the stream, a long stick in one hand.

It was the only sign of life they met with until, Florida having changed into her own clothes at the back of the inn, they made for the royal carriage concealed amid the trees.

Bernhard, untethering the horse, led him towards the path.

But suddenly Florida, frowning, caught at Bernhard's coat.

"Just a minute!" she said. "Look at the mud on the carriage wheels. It wasn't there when we left it. Can it have been moved?"

"Moved?" exclaimed Bernhard. He stared at the horse and carriage, then laughed. "Oh, no, Florida! You're imagining things. Why—"

For Florida reaching into the carriage, was groping on the floor. She straightened up, turning back to him, her eyes gleaming.

"Am I imagining this?" she said, displaying a lace handkerchief; and as Bernhard whistled and caught hold of the spotlessly white linen she pointed to one corner. "'M. M.," she said. "Melita von Mec. She has been here, and she moved the carriage! I was right!"

"Well, she couldn't have discovered anything, that's one blessing," was Bernhard's consoling reflection. "But we'll have to keep an eye on her in

future. By the way, I'd like to keep that book. There are one or two people mentioned in it I want to tackle in my own way."

"And if I want you I'll flash a light from my balcony window," Florida smiled.

Bernhard, giving her his hand, helped her into the seat, dumped the hamper beside her, and stepped back with a mock salute. Not to be outdone, Spartan reared up on to his hind legs and raised a front paw in an excellent imitation of his master.

"Why, you darling!" Florida laughed. Leaning down, she patted the wolfhound's head. "Well, bye-bye, both of you! Hope I'll be signalling pretty soon, Bernhard."

She set the carriage in motion, waving farewell.

Next moment she was out of sight, making for the main path that led by devious twists and turns up to the castle.

As she caught a glimpse of that ancient building with its turrets and towers and battlements, Florida set her lips.

Now to face the music. Not that it was likely to be such very unpleasant music if she played her cards carefully. Madame Karenina was hardly likely to suspect the trick that had been played on her—and, in that case, even the baron could scarcely find any excuse for justifiable anger.

"No," Florida comforted herself, glancing round at the village square, beside which she had to turn into the main path: "I think I'll manage her all right. It's Melita who's the trouble." She frowned. "Wonder if it was she on the mountain? Oh, well, even if it was, she's hardly like to tell uncle, in case he wanted to know what she was doing there!"

Suddenly Florida had to slow up, for a short way up the sloping path was a child—a girl—reaching for some flowers at the very edge of the sheer drop. Florida leapt out of the carriage.

Apprehensively she went to the child and gently lifted her out of harm's way.

"I shouldn't go quite so near the edge, darling," Florida gently advised. "If you fell over you'd go an awful bonk, you know—right on your head."

The youngster, kicking one foot against the other, stared at Florida with doubtful, disappointed eyes.

"Want pretty flowers," she lisped. "'Ook! Ppretty b'ue ones. Mummy get some, too. Mummy over there."

"Well, I'll get some for you, dear," Florida smiled. And there and then, on hands and knees, she picked quite a large bunch. "There you are, my pet," she began. "Some for you and some for mummy. Aren't they—"

She broke off then, with a welcoming smile, as a young woman in the pretty white skirt and blouse and tight-laced black bodice of the villagers came hurrying towards them, a basket of flowers over one arm.

"I just picked these for your little girl," Florida said, holding out the bunch. "She nearly fell over the side trying to get them herself."

But the young woman's behaviour filled Florida with pained amazement.

Almost roughly she seized up the child, turning it away from Florida. With blazing eyes, her face a mask of contempt and hatred, she looked at her.

"Keep them!" she said curtly. "My little one and I need no favours from you. And now, your Highness—with the suggestion of a sneer—"do what you like. Send guards to arrest me. I

don't care. None of us care—in the whole village!"

"But—but— Oh, stop! Listen! Please—please, what—what do you mean?" Florida burst out, as the woman turned away.

"I mean," the woman flashed back over her shoulder, "that there is not one of us, man or woman, who does not—despise you!"

And then, as Florida, hurt, stupefied, fell back, the young mother hurried out of sight, still clutching her child as if afraid for its safety.

Never had Florida been so dazed and upset in her life. The woman's attitude was inexplicable. And what did she mean—the whole village despised her?

But, back at the castle, Florida swiftly discovered what the trouble was, although it left her more distracted and amazed than ever. A captain of guards, saluting and eyeing her strangely, informed her that the baron wished to see her at once in his study, and when, in puzzlement and trepidation, Florida made her way there, she knew at once that something serious was the matter.

Her uncle, rising from his desk at her entry, strode towards her, rage and purposefulness in every movement.

"Uncle," Florida began, "you want to see me? Is it about—"

"About your drive, Florida?" he barked. "Yes!"

So the baron guessed the trick she had played on Madame Karenina!

"You are not going to deny, Florida," he said grimly, "that you were in the carriage alone from half-way down the path?"

"No, uncle, I'm not. Only—only the—"

"The horse bolted apparently?"

"Well, I—I suppose it must have done, uncle. But—but—"

"Florida, we have banded words enough!" The baron's voice was curt and harsh. "You know to what I am referring—your outrageous, brutal conduct in driving madly through the village, and, after knocking down a child, going on in the most callous manner!"

Florida stared at him like a girl in a dream. What on earth was he talking about? She hadn't driven through the village; she hadn't knocked down a child!

"Uncle," she began, starting towards him, "I—I swear it wasn't—"

"There is no possible excuse, Florida!" he cut her short. "Even though the horse may have been out of control you could have returned to inquire after your victim."

"But—but, uncle, I didn't drive through the village!" Florida panted, grasping his arm, only for him to shake off her hand and fold his arms.

"How can you make such a denial, Florida?" he stormed. "The carriage was recognised. Half the village saw what happened. They saw the royal crest. And they are seething, Florida—inflamed against you, against the House of Colberg. You have heaped more shame and disgrace on us by this terrible thing, and I tell you, Florida, I cannot—I will not—forgive it!"

"Oh, please, uncle—please let me speak!" Florida begged.

But the baron appeared not to hear. He flung a trembling arm towards the door.

"Go! Go to your room! And do not leave it until I give consent!"

Is there any way in which Florida can prove that she was not guilty of the dreadful accident? Be sure not to miss a word of next Friday's engrossing chapters of this delightful story. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL in advance.



JUDY'S Exciting Seaside Outing

By ELIZABETH CHESTER

WHEN THEIR COACH BROKE DOWN

NOW, girls, have we got everything but the kitchen stove? Where did I put that charabanc—ah, there it is at the kerb," said Judy Jordan, looking at the large red motor-coach. "Phew! Glad we didn't forget that!"

Judy was in merry mood; for this was the day of the firm's outing—or, rather, Mr. Gerald Dorchall's outing, and every girl on the work-room staff of Messrs Dorchall & Son had vowed to make whoopee instead of the usual costumes, mantles, and gowns.

"Oh, golly, am I happy?" asked Judy, fairly bubbling over with excitement. "Come on, girls, pile in—the sooner we get to the sea the better. And don't forget to give Mr. Gerald a cheer when he comes to see us off."

At that moment the young boss arrived on the scene, carrying a camera.

"Whoopee!" he said, and then suddenly caught sight of the work-room manageress' shocked expression and coloured slightly. "Lovely morning, girls!" he said.

Judy gave the signal and all the girls cheered, then Mr. Gerald took their photograph.

"Don't forget Miss Snyder," said Judy, with a wink.

"Oh—ah!" said Mr. Gerald, and turned to aim his camera at the sour-faced manageress, who assumed a most extraordinary expression that was doubtless meant to be benign.

"Why doesn't she smile?" asked Judy.

"She is smiling," said Jill Wren. "Didn't you see her ears move back a full inch?"

"Her face will be stiff to-morrow," said Judy, shaking her head. "It isn't used to this sort of exercise. Oh golly! We shan't see her all day, girls. Not for a whole day!"

"Hurrah!"

They all looked at Miss Snyder and cheered; and she, not knowing why they were cheering, but supposing it was a mark of affection or esteem, hurt her face again by smiling.

"That's all. Time we started," said Judy, looking at her watch.

But there was one little delicate matter that had to be settled before they started off—one that she hardly

cared to mention. Money! The coach was paid for, but the young boss, who was standing this outing himself, was to pay all expenses—and to hand Judy the cash.

"Well, girls," he called, "have a good time! Better get started."

"Um," said Judy, with a slight frown. She had fourteen and sixpence herself, and there were twenty girls!

"Haven't forgotten anything?" asked the young boss. "No turning back, you know."

Judy was not going to risk the day's happiness for the sake of false delicacy, and she leaned out of the window, put a hand to her mouth, and hissed:

"Spondulicks! Oof!"

Mr Gerald gave a violent start.

"Gosh, I forgot! I say—"

He patted his pockets, and Judy's heart stood still. Then it thumped again as the young boss brought a thick envelope from his pocket and gave it to her.

"To help you enjoy the holiday," he said. "Cheer-ho! Right away, driver."

Judy gave the signal, and the entire company blew the laughing Mr. Gerald a kiss, and off they went, happy as larks.

"Judy—how much?" asked Jill.

"It looks a fat wad," breathed Bernice.

"Isn't he just grand?" sighed Lydia.

"Why couldn't he be manageress?"

Judy slit the envelope, and opened it. She had never seen so many pound notes in her life.

"Gosh—twenty-five!" she gasped. "A pound a head, and some for luck!"

It was a magnificent gift, and the girls' estimate of the young boss rose

Judy and her friends were grateful to the passing motorist for the help he gave them on the road. But they were not so grateful when they realised that he had stolen the money they had been given to spend on their day's outing!

considerably, high though it was already.

"Now, girls—anyone who isn't happy will be sent to Coventry," said Judy. "We've got to make this a red-letter holiday. Golly, but it was jolly decent of Mr. Gerald to give us all this money! I don't wonder his old father is always ragging him for chucking the stuff around—or so they say."

"It's true enough I heard them rowing the other day," said Sadie Miller. "The old man was just mad with temper I heard quite a lot, but someone was coming—"

"Oh, you listened!" said Jill curtly.

"Well, so would you! Mr Gerald was suggesting giving us a rise, and the old man was making animal noises at him. You would be glad I'd listened if I heard something worth hearing!" snapped Sadie.

"Whoa—no cross words," said Judy.

"We're on holiday."

On whirled the motor-coach. Soon London was left far behind, and Judy & Co. were thoroughly enjoying the country views, when without warning the engine began to splutter. A minute later it stopped altogether, and the coach jolted to an abrupt halt.

"Hallo, what's wrong?" Judy asked the driver.

"Carburettor," he replied curtly.

"Choked."

"Is that bad?" asked Judy.

"Well, it means we're stuck here for a bit unless I can clear it."

Judy turned to the others with a slight frown.

"We're stuck here for a bit," she said. "He's going to choke the carburettor, or something. Why didn't he do it before he started? Just like men. I'll bet he starts taking the thing to bits, and it'll be scattered all over the road like a Meccano outfit for the next five hours."

Judy really did not think that or she would not have spoken so lightly. She and her chums chattered light-heartedly for a time, then, as they realised that twenty minutes had passed, they grew anxious.

"I say," said Judy, clambering down and joining the driver at the bonnet. "can't you mend it?"

The driver looked at her and grunted.

"Haven't got a spanner of the right size. I'll have to stop a passing car and borrow one."

Judy turned to the road.

"If that's all, it's easy," she said lightly.

For out of a side turning a car was approaching, a magnificent vehicle, which looked as though it ought to have every kind of spanner, screwdriver, and

other tools aboard. It gleamed and shone even at a distance, and when it drew nearer its magnificence was enhanced by the stately chauffeur.

Judy jumped into the roadway and waved her arms. The chauffeur swerved as though to avoid her, and then slowed, drawing into the kerb.

"Were you endeavouring to stop me, miss?" he said. "What is wrong?"

Before Judy could tell him, the owner looked out of the rear window. He had a red face, and looked irate.

"What the dickens did you stop my car for?" he demanded. "I have to be at Shoresea at half-past eleven."

Judy was sorry; she never liked to inconvenience people, and said so.

"It's just a spanner we want to get us going. We're going to Shoresea, too, oddly enough," she smiled. "And here we are stranded. Not funny, is it?"

The old gentleman knit his white brows, and his eyes had a hawk-like glitter.

"It certainly is not funny," he said. "It's impudence. What do you take this car for, my girl—a travelling garage?"

Judy flushed.

"All right, don't get hot up," she said. "I only asked for a spanner. If you have one, then you must be pretty mean not to be willing to waste a few minutes helping us on our way. Still, as you're so nasty, you can keep it. We'll stay here and dig castles in the road."

Judy sniffed and turned away disdainfully; then, seeing another car, she brightened. It was a little ancient and the worse for wear, driven by a man who matched it in appearance.

"Spanner?" he said, when Judy had asked for one. "Yes, I dare say I can fix you up."

He ran the car to the side of the road and rummaged under the seat, bringing out a bundle of tools which he gave the driver of the motor-coach.

Judy, hearing whispering from the motor-coach windows, looked up.

"All right, girls, we'll be on our way in a minute," she said. "This is just a minor hitch—and they do say that a hitch in time saves nine."

"Judy!" called Jill desperately; and then whispered, as Judy drew near: "Don't you know who that man in the fast car is?"

"No. Who?"

"The senior boss—Mr. Dorchall. Mr. Gerald's father and— Oh golly! Here he comes!"

The man from the magnificent car came striding forward, taking a little notebook from his pocket. His face was stern, and his eyes had an even more unpleasant glitter than before as he surveyed Judy. Meeting them, Judy suddenly saw a likeness to Gerald Dorchall.

This was the "Old Man," whom she had never seen at the firm—the real boss, the master mind. Everything she had heard about him came back to Judy in a flash, and she nearly sank to the ground.

"Young woman," he said, "you have the appearance of being what is termed a beanfeast, or outing. I imagine that you are employees of some firm taking a holiday."

Judy looked slantwise at the other girls, who were now sitting meekly in the coach. No one was singing; no one was even talking.

"Well—" said Judy. "Um—er—"

"I demand to know the names of your employers, so that I may report your rudeness to them," said Mr. Dorchall senior. "If I ever heard that

work-girls of mine—and I am an employer of labour—had behaved in this way on the road, I should immediately and without question dismiss them."

"Oh," said Judy, "I—I see! Without question?"

"Without question!"

Judy swallowed, blinked, then forced herself to smile. The only way of dodging trouble is to bluff.

"Oh, we're just a merry little band!" she said lightly. "Mean to say you've never heard of the Wayside Warblers?"

"Wayside Warblers?" His lips curled. "Do you mean to imply that you are a concert party? Hah! Then I will not bother you for your address. I do not want to give free advertisement to a vulgar seaside troupe. Good-day!"

He lifted his hat and got back into his car. As it went on, the rest of the girls stared at Judy.

"Well, of all the nerve!" exclaimed Jill. "Fancy daring to bluff him like that!"

"But suppose he finds out?" asked one of the other girls.

Judy shrugged.

"Oh, let's forget it! It's our day out, and he's not going to spoil it. He didn't see any of you; only me—and he thinks I'm a pierrette. Good job he didn't realise I was carrying the twenty-five pounds his son gave us!"

And, with a chuckle, Judy patted her inside jacket pocket, where she had put the money.

If Mr. Dorchall were to learn that his son had given that large sum to help them to behave as though they enjoyed being alive—well, well, well! Judy could guess the row there would be. But she cast the Old Man from her mind and turned to the driver.

"All clear yet? Choked the carbuncle—or whatever it is?"

The owner of the spanner turned to her with a grin.

"You've got a small hand; just give this a final wrench and it'll be jake."

"Good!" said Judy. "Oh, for the touch of a woman's hand! Well, here we go! If the whole thing catches fire tell me."

"Just a minute!" demurred the owner of the spanner. "There's grease there; it'll spoil that natty jacket. Better take it off while you get down to mechanics."

Judy took it off, and he held it for her. A final neat twist of the spanner and the job was done. The driver started the engine; Judy put on her coat again, and all was well.

"Hurrah!" cheered the girls.

"Thanks!" said Judy to their friend in need. "You're a sport!"

She climbed into the coach; and, with a cheery wave of the hand, the man in the ancient car departed. A few moments later the coach also got under way.

"We're on our way, girls," said Judy. "And that's the last of our troubles."

"They come in threes," said Jill. "We've had two; watch out for the third—"

"And the third is usually the worst of the lot," remarked Sadie. "Perhaps we shall crash headlong into a wall."

"Or lose all the money," laughed Lydia.

"Not so likely," said Judy, and patted her jacket pocket. "I've got it safe."

"Goody, goody!" sighed Lydia. "You know, when that man held your jacket I nearly shouted out; but it would have been insulting as he was so kind."

"He was all right," said Sadie

Miller; "though I wouldn't have let anyone hold a coat containing twenty-five pounds."

Judy suddenly felt the responsibility of holding all the money, and she decided it would be safer if it were divided up.

"Don't let's take any risks," she said, diving her hand into her pocket and pulling out the envelope. "We'll split it up into—"

Her voice trailed away and the blood drained from her cheeks as she opened the big envelope. Instead of a wad of pound notes, it contained only an old empty wallet!

COULD THEY FIND THE THIEF?

"THE money—it's gone!" gasped Judy. "That man—he must have stolen it!"

She stared up the road, but there was no sign of the ancient car; so desperately she shouted to the coach-driver:

"After that car! Catch it up! That man driving it took my money—every penny! Oh, quickly—quickly!"

Judy, nearly frantic, looked at the others, who sat petrified.

"It's all my fault—every bit!" she said in despair. "Oh, girls, I'm sorry! But what's the use of being sorry? Twenty-five pounds—the whole lot! What are we going to do?"

None of the others spoke. Even Sadie Miller, usually glad to score over Judy, was too dismayed to utter a word. Glumly they sat there, hoping against hope that they would be able to overhaul the ancient car and force its owner to hand back the missing money.

It was five miles farther on that they saw the ancient car, parked at the edge of a wood. The coach-driver clapped on his brakes, and, almost before he had stopped the vehicle, Judy jumped down and ran to the car.

There was no one inside and no one near, but it was undoubtedly the same car. All the girls climbed down and searched the wood, but none of them saw the man who had "helped" them.

When the hope of finding the man was fading, a policeman arrived on a motor-cycle, and asked what the trouble was. He listened, then pursed his lips.

"I should say the car has been abandoned. Probably not his," he said. "But good enough to get him this far. H'm! Yes; petrol is down to zero. It faded out, and he left it. He could have caught a bus from here to Shoresea. By now he might be there. Give me his description, and I'll check him up."

But by that time, as Judy dismally told herself, the twenty-five pounds might have been spent. There was no telling when the police would catch up with him, for he might lie in hiding for a whole day or cut right across country.

The girls grouped together silently, no longer joyful, and Judy fought back tears of bitter disappointment and vexation. She could have kicked herself for her folly.

"Well, and now what?" asked Sadie Miller. "Shall we go home?"

"No. Let's go on," said Judy. "He may be at Shoresea. That's where he'll go if he wants to blue the money. Oh, the hateful crook! I won't rest until I've caught him! Come on! Even if we don't get the money back, we can at least have a bathe and a look around!"

Desperately she tried to bring back the gaiety to the party, but it was hard, uphill work—until the sea came into

sight; then, despite themselves, the girls cheered up. There was something so invigorating about those sun-flecked waves, and, as they glimpsed the pier and the white cliffs beyond, they all forgot their worries and cheered.

"Oh, golly, won't bathing be grand!" murmured Judy eagerly. "And just look at the sands—the real railway-poster golden sands!"

They all stood at the windows and looked out, pointing out to each other the sights—the amusement park, with its scenic railway, Eastern-looking buildings, bright colours, and throngs of people.

Other holiday-makers were promenading, and everywhere there was an air of gaiety, enhanced by the bright flowers along the Walk, the blue sea, and the lovely sands.

But Judy sighed a little, for everywhere they looked there was temptation to spend money.

"My word, finding that rascal in all this crowd won't be easy!" she murmured.

The driver of their coach made for the pier and there pulled up, although the town regulations would not allow him to park the coach there.

"Where now?" he asked Judy.

Judy's brain had been busy, and not in vain. She had noticed how well the men were dressed, and it occurred to her that the pickpocket would want to be similarly attired now that he had money to burn. He had looked rather down-at-heel. Also, he would want to disguise himself—just in case he ran into them. Judy decided that it was probable the man would first of all go to an outfitter's and buy new clothes.

"Tell you what," she said, looking at the rest of the girls. "You all trot on to the pier for half an hour. I've got an idea I want to work out—a way of catching that rascal."

"I'll come with you, Judy," Jill offered.

"Me, too," said Bernice.

But Judy only wanted one. A large party might ruin her plan; so, after a little argument and discussion, Jill, Bernice, and Lydia agreed that they would spin a coin to decide who should go with Judy. Jill it was who won.

"Good! Then off we go!" said Judy. "Never mind about unpacking the kit. The coach can come back here for us all in half an hour. Jill and I'll meet you here then. O.K.?"

O.K. it was, and Judy went off with Jill, who was greatly mystified, wondering what scheme her friend had in mind. Counting her change, Judy decided that she had enough to afford to hire a car for half an hour. It would have seemed an extravagance ordinarily, but time was what mattered now, and she led Jill to the taxi rank.

"Can you take us, first of all, to where the bus comes in from the London road, and then look for a place where a man would go to buy a new hat?" said Judy. "And please charge as little as you can."

"Do it as cheap as I can, miss," promised the driver.

Three minutes later the taxi slowed at the halt where the buses from the main road pulled in. It was where Judy guessed their quarry would end his journey. Near by was an outfitter's shop, and Judy went to it.

There were one or two men in the shop, but not the one they sought. Just in case he had been in, Judy described him to the assistant. But, unless her description did not fit him, the man had not been in the shop.

By the time they had tried three more shops, and had drawn blank, Judy was

beginning to lose hope, while Jill was frankly sceptical of the whole idea.

"Just a minute, though!" mused Judy. "We've tried large shops. Let's try a smaller one—in a side street."

The taxi-driver thought the matter over, took a side turning, and pulled up at a small outfitting shop. Judy, leaving Jill in the taxi, advanced to the shop.

Even though Judy was hoping to see the man, when she looked through the glass of the door and saw him there, in gay new flannels and sports jacket, trying on a Panama hat, she nearly jumped out of her skin.

"Got him!" she exclaimed, and ran to Jill with the glad news.

"Call a policeman!" urged Jill.

But Judy shook her head; she had been thinking this over, and she realised that they had no absolute proof of the man's guilt. Convinced though they were of it themselves, it was, in the eyes of the law, only suspicion.

the hint and "shushed." Her words of explanation died away, and she looked from her friends to the man in some bewilderment.

"Sorry—it's a deadly secret who we are," she said to him. "But we're not the Jazzy Jujubes, or whatever you said." And because the man seemed so upset, Judy added: "But if you describe them and we see them, we'll send them along. What's happened? Have they gone astray?"

The man told her the story. He had lost the concert party. His name was Willoughby, and he was the manager of the pier concert hall. In half an hour's time the show was due to begin, but the concert party hadn't turned up. In some odd manner they had taken the wrong route, or mistaken their venue. And here he was with no one to open the show.

"I say! I say!" murmured Judy. "That's bad. Pity we can't rally round and help you; but apart from Lydia, who can do a little crooning,



"You don't mean that you will take their place on the stage?" said the pier manager eagerly. "We will," said Judy. It was all part of her plan to bowl out the pickpocket.

"We've got to trap him," she said. "Listen, Jill! You stay here and keep watch, while I buzz back to the pier and get the rest of the girls."

PIERRETTES—FOR TWENTY MINUTES ONLY

WHEN Judy reached the pier she saw that her chums were gathered about a worried-looking man, who stood in the

entrance. "Hallo, hallo! What's wrong?" asked Judy.

It was Lydia Holt who replied.

"This man thinks we are the Jolly Jazzibelles," she said. "The concert party that's to give a show in the theatre on the pier."

Judy laughed; the mistake struck her as being funny, especially as this was the second time they had been taken for a concert party.

"That's soon explained," she said. "We're not. If you want to know who we are—"

She was interrupted by Lydia, and by others. Lydia nudged her; some said "shush," while others grimaced.

Judy, although she was puzzled, took

we're not much good. I know a couple of funny faces I can pull. It usually amuses the kids—but I should think the audience would tire of it after the first twenty minutes. Bad luck, Mr. Willoughby—"

Then Judy called the girls to the motor-coach, which was drawn up outside. She was sorry for Mr. Willoughby; but it was his loss not hers; and it was far more important that they should capture the pickpocket.

"Come on—urgent!" said Judy excitedly. "No loitering, girls; tumble into the coach! I've found him."

"Found him? Oh, cheers!"

"Where? Is he in prison now?"

"Not yet," said Judy. "He may not even be where I left him, so we'll have to hurry. And mind—do exactly as I say when we do meet him; everything will depend on that."

They climbed chattering into the coach, and Judy told the driver where to go.

"Now, you duffers," she said as she took her seat. "Why couldn't I tell him who we are—Mr. Willoughby, I mean?"

"Why," gasped Lydia, "because Mr. Dorchall came up while we were standing there waiting to go on to the pier."

"And he jolly nearly recognised some of us," added Sadie.

"Only the man thought we were a concert party, and so did old Dorchall," cut in Bernice. "So we had to go on pretending, and couldn't say who we were."

"Oh," said Judy, a little worried by this new encounter with the boss. "But—why did he come up to you at all?"

"Because," said Lydia, "that same pickpocket must have taken his wallet, too. Anyway, he's lost his—"

"And almost accused us of taking it," added Bernice.

Judy gave a soft whistle of dismay. She had hoped that they had seen the last of old Dorchall; but apparently he was loitering in the seaside resort, and was keeping an eye on them. Perhaps he even suspected the truth!

"Well, anyway," said Judy, "he shan't stop our having fun. The first thing we've got to do is to capture our crook—and there he is!"

She ended with that excited shout as the motor-coach turned into the small side street where Jill waited for them. The man had just emerged from the shop. He did not recognise Jill, who had been merely one of a number in the coach, and so she was able to detain him by asking him the time, without his suspecting who she was.

But, looking up, he saw the coach. "Gosh, what a start he gave!" muttered Judy, ordering the driver to stop. "Now do as I say—everything depends on it. Greet him as a pal."

Judy sprang down a moment before the coach actually stopped moving and ran forward, waving excitedly to the man.

"Hallo, here we are!" she cried joyfully, as though he were a long-lost friend.

"Hurrah!" cried the others. Judy's eyes glistened as she saw the man change colour in confusion. He was trapped; he just did not know what to do.

"Fancy meeting you!" cried Judy, and slapped him on the back. "He's our rescuer, girls. This is the man who got the old motor-coach going again for us. Our pal!"

"Oh, not at all—a mere nothing," said the man awkwardly. "I—er—just gave a hand, you know. That's all."

He made as though to move along, but Judy held on to his sleeve.

"Your car broke down, too. We saw it by the roadside," she said solemnly. "You can't go walking everywhere. Come into our motor-coach to the pier."

Judy was playing an artful game; for the man did not know what to do. The girls' manner suggested that either they had not yet realised their loss, or that they did not in any way blame him for it. If he bolted, then they might become suspicious.

That was what he thought—and that was what Judy meant him to think.

"Gather round and cheer him, girls, urged Judy. "He's a jolly good sort."

The girls, now thinking it rather amusing as well as thrilling that the thief was caught, gathered in a group in such a manner that he could not have escaped without a struggle, and Judy set up a chant of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

The sickly smile on the man's face amused her, but she saw that it meant victory.

"Not too loudly, girls, or we'll attract the attention of a policeman," she warned them. "We're blocking the roadway—"

The mention of a policeman did the trick, for the man no sooner heard the word than he hurried into the motor-

coach. And after him went the girls, all chattering, nudging and whispering.

"Back to the pier, driver," said Judy briskly. "We're standing our friend here lunch. Just a small return."

Some of the girls were in favour of handing the man over to the police; but as Judy in whispers, pointed out, they had no proof that he was the culprit. She doubted even if they could demand that he was searched. But Judy had a plan that would reveal the truth.

When the motor-coach reached the pier again, the unfortunate Mr. Willoughby was still there, looking about him anxiously.

Judy jumped down, making sure first that the girls would prevent the man escaping.

"Hallo, concert-party not arrived yet?" she asked.

"Not yet; they'll be here about twenty minutes after the show is timed to begin," the unfortunate manager groaned. "How am I going to keep the audience interested for twenty minutes?"

Judy was silent for a moment, and then put her daring plan to him.

"Have you any kit—costumes and things?" she asked.

"Yes, pierrot things. You don't mean," he asked eagerly, "that you will take their place on the stage?"

"We will," said Judy gaily. "My golly, yes! If it's only twenty minutes, we can do something. And, what's more, we've got a prize comedian with us, Mr. Scatterly."

As Judy had supposed, when the pickpocket was introduced as Mr. Scatterly, a load was taken from his mind. He thought that she had made a genuine mistake. His fears that his guilt might be suspected, vanished.

With the girls grouped around him, he had to go along to the theatre at the end, and there Judy whispered to Mr. Willoughby.

"One good turn deserves another. That man stole our money. He still has it, or most of it. Make him tog up in pierrot kit, will you? And watch if he takes out a wad of money!"

As not all the girls would be needed on the stage, Judy posted one or two near the exit from the dressing-rooms to make sure that the man did not escape, and then sent Lydia to look for old Mr. Dorchall; for if he had been robbed by the man, he was as interested as they in his recapture.

Ten minutes later, Judy and her friends in the dressing-room of the pier theatre were arrayed in pierrot outfit of red-and-black silk.

"Goodness knows what we shall do on the stage," fretted Sadie Miller.

"What do you suggest, Judy?" asked Bernice nervously.

"Do?" asked Judy, amazed. "Why, sing! Get the audience singing. Community singing, of course. They'll like it. Bernice can play the piano well enough."

Judy thoroughly enjoyed being made-up, and with the theatre dresser advising and helping, the process did not take long. Soon all the girls were enthusiastic. It certainly made a break in the routine of their ordinary work, although one or two of them were examining the outfits and criticising the work.

Judy, the first to be ready, hurried to Mr. Willoughby, who waited outside in the corridor, and asked what had happened to the man.

"I did as you said—I offered him a pound if he'd stay on the stage for twenty minutes," said the manager.

"Goody, goody!" said Judy, in glee. "And now all I need is some rope and a chair."

Judy invoked the doorman's aid, and found both rope and chair. Then, joined by the pickpocket, now in a smiling state of confidence, she looked over the nine girls who had been selected to play the part of pierrots. The curtain was rising, and soon they would have to go on to the stage.

"You girls leave this to me," said their "prisoner," becoming jaunty with confidence. "I'll carry this off—"

"You leave it to me!" retorted Judy. "We're starting with community singing—some old-timer songs, and then a special conjuring act."

When the curtain went up, the piano was being thumped, and Judy got them all singing to ease their nervousness. Not all the seats by any means were filled, but there was a good enough crowd, and moreover, there were passers-by on the pier who could hear something of the show—so the girls had an audience.

"All together everyone!" called Judy. "The more we are together, the merrier we'll be—"

They sang "John Peel," "Pack up your troubles," and several other favourites, then Judy called a halt.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," she said. "A grand conjuring trick. Mr. Scatterly will show you how to get free from a mass of knotted rope."

From the back of the stage the manager called softly:

"They've arrived—"

"Then tell them to buck up and get changed," answered Judy from the side of her mouth, and winked at their victim. "Now, everyone, I want two men from the audience to come up here and tie a few knots, please."

Mr. Scatterly, though puzzled, sat down on the chair that Judy pushed forward, and the audience, intrigued, fell silent as two volunteers walked on to the stage.

"Please examine the chair first," said Judy, "just to see that there is no trickery!"

Their victim examined the chair himself, amidst laughter, and then the two young men from the audience did the same. The other girls, not quite following this new move, watched, puzzled and interested.

"I want you to tie the knots tightly," said Judy. "And then—hey presto! A flick, and they will come undone!"

Mr. Scatterly looked a little uneasy as rope was bound round his legs and arms, for the men certainly tied knots well. And in a minute or two he was trussed like a turkey.

"Now," smiled Judy, "the trick! Watch, everyone! I just pull the back of the chair—"

Judy pulled the back of the chair, and pretended to be worried and puzzled that nothing happened. She pulled the legs, and other girls helped, while the man in the chair muttered and began to take alarm.

"Dear, dear!" said Judy, scratching her ear. "Ladies and gentlemen," she added, advancing to the front of the stage, "I must apologise. The trick has failed. My next may be more fortunate. Has any lady or gentleman a gold watch?"

A roar of laughter came—for everyone knew the trick of pounding up a gold watch—and Judy's failure did not suggest that the second trick would be luckier.

Amidst more laughter, Mr. Willoughby gave the signal that the real concert-party was ready to take over, and down came the curtain. Judy pointed to the now angry Mr. Scatterly. "Carry him off!" she said. "Now we've got him trapped all right. No chance of his bolting!"

As the girls trooped from the stage, amidst applause, on came the real concert-party, breathless, but in their own costumes, and ready to start. They had gone thirty miles out of their way—but now they meant to make up for the blunder.

"My dear girls, you saved me!" said Mr. Willoughby delightedly. "You did wonderfully well. Kept the audience still and happy. But what about this man?"

"He can wait until Mr. Dorchall comes," said Judy. "My friend has gone to find him at the police station."

Lydia returned only a minute later—accompanied by Mr Dorchall and a detective. Mr. Dorchall recognised the man immediately Judy wiped off the make-up.

"That's the rascal!" he said to the detective. "Search him!"

"He's wanted for stealing a car," frowned the detective. "All right, Jeff Simmonds, I know you!"

"Rascal!" snapped Mr. Dorchall. The pickpocket's eyes glinted, but he did not try to escape as he was freed. Instead, he wheeled upon Judy.

"That girl's a fraud! She isn't a concert-party pierrot. She's from Dorchall & Son. So are they all!"

Judy had not expected the rascal to turn on them in that way, but she put a smiling face on it.

"And so we are!" she admitted to the startled Mr Dorchall. "And loyal to the firm, sir! I only hope we've got your money back for you!"

For a moment Mr. Dorchall frowned, then he smiled.

"If you have, I shall be very pleased," he said, "though it is not the money I am worried about, as the important paper the wallet contains."

The thief was searched, and not only was the document recovered, but also most of the stolen money. Mr. Dorchall saw that Judy & Co. received the full amount they had lost, and also insisted on standing them dinner in the pier restaurant. And what a meal it was!

After the meal, they visited the amusement park, then enjoyed themselves on the sands—bathing, going for donkey rides, and laughing at the pierrots. It was an outing they would never forget.

But that was by no means the end of all the fun Judy & Co. had that day. As they went back along by the pier, they saw Mr. Willoughby, the concert-party manager, standing outside the pier theatre, beaming expansively. He caught sight of them at the same moment, and his smile widened still more.

"Hallo, girls!" he called. "Having a good time? I say, our next performance is due to start in a few minutes. How would you like to come in and see it? You must be my guests—have the best seats!"

"What-ho!" grinned Judy. "Are you game, girls?"

Were they! They piled into the theatre, and enjoyed every moment of the show—the show that they had themselves helped to save from disaster.

It was after midnight before they got back to the hostel, and, tired but happy, Judy surveyed her chums.

"All over, girls!" she sighed. "Golly, but what a grand day it's been! Work to-morrow, worse luck. I only hope our present melts Miss Snyder's heart."

But the manageress was asleep, so she had to wait until morning for her present—a toy Cheshire cat, with a placard around its neck: "Laugh and the World Laughs With You!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Another enthralling story about Judy & Co. next Friday. Order your **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** now.



FROM ONE GIRL TO ANOTHER

Cheery Chatter and Helpful Hints by Penelope

coloured felt they are particularly fashionable this year.

A GOOD TURN

It's a long time since I told you about young schoolgirl-cousin Kathleen, isn't it?

Well, I had a plaintive letter from her the other week (from her boarding school on the South Coast) begging me to send her a pair of my tennis shoes.

"You know we take the same size, Penelope," she wrote, "and I've got to have another pair for sports day. I darent write and ask mother, because I had a new pair at the beginning of term—but I've lost the blessed things. Be a dear and lend me yours—"

So I sent off to Kathleen a pair of white tennis shoes in almost new condition.

This morning a parcel arrived, containing shoes and a letter. I looked at the shoes first, to see if they were completely worn out—and then I nearly fainted.

For my white tennis shoes had turned into black gym-shoes!

At first I thought Kathleen had returned the wrong pair. But no—the wretched child had dyed them! So I snatched at the letter.

"My own shoes have mysteriously turned up now, Penelope, so I'm returning yours. Sorry I had to touch them up a bit—but we're not allowed to wear white shoes on sports day, I discovered. Thanks very much for them. They helped me win the sack race."

So here am I, left with a pair of black tennis shoes—if you can imagine it. I think I'd better send them back.



A WONDER MEAL

Don't you think the pupils—and mistresses—of the Central School at Great Casterton, in Rutland, are to be congratulated? The pupils are able to get their dinner at school for fourpence a head—fourpence! And even so the school has been able to show a profit!

But perhaps you think fourpence is TOO little, and that it could not buy a proper dinner. Well, here—to show you it does—is a typical menu: Boiled mutton, potatoes, and peas, followed by stewed fruit and custard.

I wish they'd tell me the secret of such good food for so little cash! Good-bye, now, until next week.

PENELOPE

HALLO, EVERYBODY!—Here is your Penelope, feeling in gay and summery mood, and with as much to chatter about as ever!

Do you realise it is nearly the longest day of the year? I always used to think that June 21st was the longest day, but, apparently, it's the 22nd.

Midsummer Day is not the same as the longest day, of course: that comes on the 24th.

Two friends of mine have birthdays on the 21st (which means two presents for poor me to buy!). I tell them that they're lucky, for they have the longest birthday possible—much luckier than the girls who have birthdays on December 21st, for example, the shortest day of the year!

EASY CUTTING

I think I may have told you before that very simple way of dealing with scissors that are a bit stiff. You simply cut the rinds off the breakfast bacon with them. Not only does this trim the bacon very neatly and economically, but it oils the scissors perfectly.

GAY GLOVES

If you're like me, you don't like wearing gloves this weather. But because I've been brought up that way, I always carry a pair, I confess, however hot the day.

All the same, there are some occasions when you simply have to wear gloves—to church and out to tea, for example.

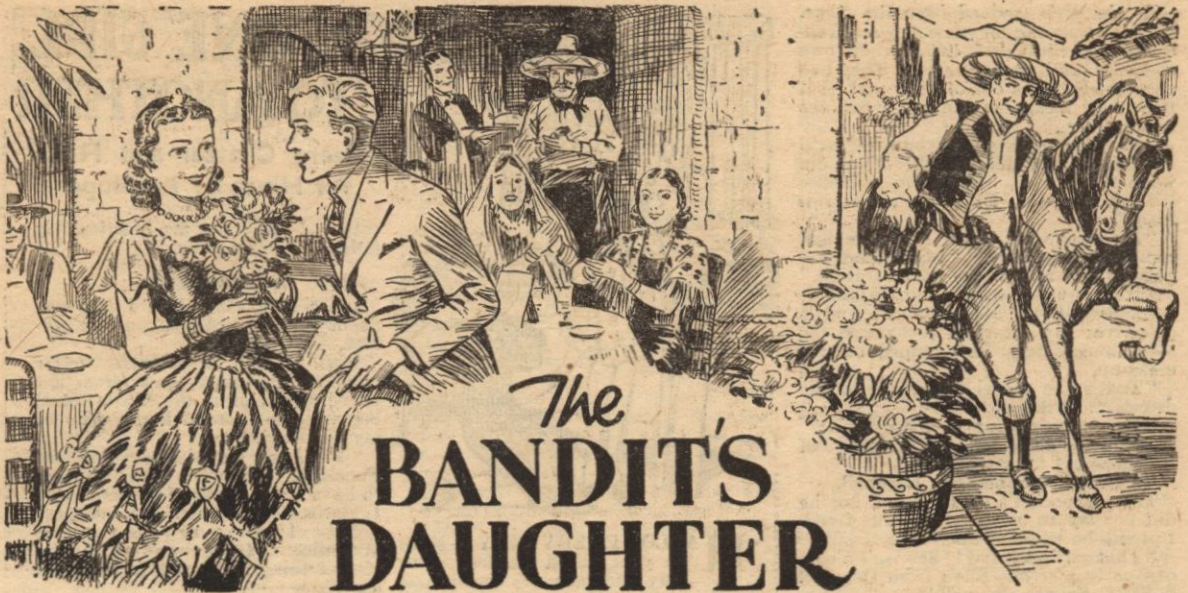
You can buy very serviceable gloves for sixpence a pair—white ones; just right for special occasions.

And those of you, who're nimble with your needles could very easily give them a much more costly look.

Take a peep at the picture here and see. Pretty buttonhole stitch could be worked all round the top of the gloves and round a slit made in the wrist part to make them look more exciting.

Net gauntlets to match your dress is another, good way of trimming gloves—a particularly bright notion if they are too short. You can make the new gauntlets with a strip of net gathered on to the wrist of the glove. Initials are always smart, of course, wherever they are worn.

If you make them from brightly



The BANDIT'S DAUGHTER

By RENEE FRAZER

THE GREY SHADOW'S HOME

LOLA SHARMAN was eager to win fame as a dancer in Mexico. But she also longed to clear her outlawed father's name, for he was now a bandit, known as the Grey Shadow.

She began to make a success of her dancing, and at first she was helped by Tony Creswick, an English lad. But Tony was bent on tracking down her bandit father, and eventually Lola believed that he was pretending to be her friend only for his own ends.

Her father felt sure that the proof of his innocence was hidden in his old home—the Hacienda San Valdo. It had been taken over by new tenants, and Lola went there one night, hoping to be able to find the proofs.

But when she entered the hacienda, she was amazed to find the door opened by—Tony Creswick!

"WHY have you come here, Lola?" repeated the boy.

Lola shrank away from him, her hands clenched, her eyes wide with dismay.

It had come as a stunning blow to find that the new tenant of the hacienda—her father's old home—was Tony Creswick, the boy whom she had believed to be her enemy!

He was staring at her in that whimsical way she knew so well; his smile was friendly—his tone boyishly masterful.

At one time, Lola might have been deceived. But not now! She felt that he had deliberately trapped her—invited her into the house under false pretences, in order to discover her purpose.

He stood now with his back to the door, his arms folded, barring her way. "Well?" he asked quietly.

Lola stared round desperately. Somewhere in this old house was hidden the secret so vital to her bandit father—the secret that would help to clear his honour.

Not only her father's good name, but her own career—her future as a dancer, depended on the recovery of that ebony casket of which he had spoken.

She forced a semblance of composure, meeting his quizzical glance with an icy stare.

"After what has happened," she

replied, "I don't think you have any right to question me."

Tony reddened, biting his lip. "Dash it all, Lola," he objected, "that's a bit thick. I mean, you came here of your own accord."

"But I didn't know you were here," rejoined Lola, bitterly. "Do you think I should have come in, if I had known?"

Tony gave a twisted smile. "P'raps not," he admitted. "But I just had to find out why you'd come. I thought for a moment—" He shrugged a trifle bitterly. "I thought you might have forgiven me. I can see I was mistaken."

Lola swallowed hard. There was something so naively boyish about Tony that it was difficult to prevent herself from weakening in her resolve.

But she hardened her heart deliberately, concentrating all her thoughts on her secret purpose.

"I used to know some people who lived here," she replied. "I didn't know it had changed hands."

Tony smiled, relieved by her apparent softening.

"It belongs to Senor Garcia now," he explained, "and I've rented it on behalf of my uncle. We've had to do an awful lot to it, as the place was going to rack and ruin. I say"—he hesitated—"I suppose you wouldn't care to look round? It's an interesting old place," he added persuasively. "I've stumbled on no end of queer things since I've been here."

Lola's pulses quickened. Of course she wanted to look round—it was the very reason why she had come! But she must not appear too eager.

"It's very kind of you," she replied

Her bandit father was injured, and desperately Lola looked around for help. It was at that moment the Mexican troubadour appeared, and gladly Lola accepted his aid. But it was not until later that she realised the true identity of her helper!

coldly, "but I think I had better be going. As my friends aren't here, there's really no point in my staying."

Tony's face fell. "Please!" he urged. "Just—just for old time's sake. I'm all on my own, just now, though I'm expecting Senor Garcia later this evening. I've discovered some quaint old curios, and Garcia's anxious to see them."

Lola caught in her breath quickly, any lingering hesitation banished. She must see those curios. Perhaps—she hardly dared to hope—perhaps the very object she sought might be among them!

"Very well," she replied carelessly. "I'll just look round—but I can't stay for long."

Tony's face lit up. "Oh, good!" he said. "I know you'll like the place. We'll start with the downstairs rooms first."

He picked up the lamp and led the way across the paved hall; Lola followed him, her heart thumping.

From one room to another they made their way, Tony pointing out the beauties of the old house with the cheerful pride of possession; the house that was her own home, by right!

"And here," he announced, unlocking a door, "is the most interesting room of the lot. I imagine it used to be the study, or library; anyway, I found a lot of old books and other junk hidden away in an old chest behind the tapestry."

He held up the lamp, and Lola drew in her breath sharply.

This room must have been her father's study. From the tall windows overlooking the veranda she could see a vista of waving trees and snow-capped hills—the scene he had so often described in his letters to her.

On a chest in a corner of the room were piled tattered books, papers and old curios, most of them covered in dust.

"There are dresses, too," explained Tony. "That chest's half full of them. I've not had time to go through the things properly—and anyway, they don't belong to me. As Garcia bought the house, I suppose they're his—unless the previous owner can be traced."

Lola did not reply, at once. Her

eyes were anxiously searching the heap of lumber—seeking a small ebony casket, with a silver hasp.

Her father had described it carefully—explaining that he had been forced to flee from the hacienda, leaving a number of valuables behind.

Lola's hands clenched suddenly; a gleam of excitement flashed into her eyes.

Protruding from under a pile of books, she imagined she saw the precious casket. Only one corner was visible, but it was undoubtedly of ebony, inlaid with silver!

Lola's heart thumped wildly as she bent nearer, uneasily conscious that Tony was watching her.

How could she best examine the casket without arousing the boy's suspicions?

Tony was obviously impatient to continue their tour of the house.

"Let's leave that dusty junk," he said lightly, "and go up on to the roof. It's topping there in the moonlight—and there's a gorgeous view of the hills. Come on!"

He took her arm firmly, leading her towards the door.

Lola bit her lip. She could think of no legitimate excuse for remaining.

The boy motioned her to precede him, pausing to close the door.

"I wish I knew what time to expect old Garcia," he said. "I want to get back to San Paseo this evening. One thing, he's got the keys and can let himself in."

Lola clenched her hands, her face paling.

At all costs she must examine that casket before Ramon Garcia arrived!

Very little was spoken as Tony led the way to the flat roof of the hacienda.

It was a lovely, haunting scene that was spread out before them—a scene that would have quickened Lola's heart under any other circumstances.

But just now she was wondering desperately how she could best give Tony the slip and return to the study without his following.

"Look here, Lola," said Tony gruffly, "why can't we be friends again?"

He spoke pleadingly, but Lola's hands clenched.

"It's no use, Tony," she said. "We've had all that out before. You're my father's enemy."

"But not yours," declared Tony. "I want to help you, Lola—honestly. Look here, let me see you back to town."

"I've got another appointment," replied Lola hastily. "My carriage is waiting outside." She glanced nervously at her watch. "I think I'll have to be going."

As she turned she dropped a glove—deliberately.

Glumly Tony accompanied her down to the hall, and, opening the front door, hailed the waiting coachman.

"Where can I see you again, Lola?" he persisted.

Lola evaded the question; she was looking anxiously towards the closed door of the study.

"My glove!" she said suddenly. "I think I must have dropped it on the roof."

"I'll fetch it," volunteered Tony.

He hurried away, and Lola waited, her heart in her mouth.

Then she darted to the study door and turned the handle.

The door was locked!

Lola's heart sank as she wrenched at the knob. She wondered whether Tony had locked the door intentionally—whether he suspected.

She heard his footsteps returning,

and drew back quickly as he burst into the hall.

His boyish face revealed suppressed excitement and a certain grim determination.

"Here's your glove, Lola," he said quickly, thrusting it into her hand. "And—maybe it would be best if you pushed off now." He glanced at her strangely. "I've just seen a signal from one of my men. I've got to get busy."

Lola clenched her hands despairingly, but there was nothing she could do. Tony assisted her into the waiting carriage, and stood by as the coachman cracked his whip.

"Au revoir, Lola!" he called. Lola did not reply; she felt too choked with dismay.

Whatever the reason for Tony's strange change of manner, her hopes of recovering the precious casket seemed to have been wrecked.

Lola's eyes flashed as she came to a desperate decision.

As the carriage bowled out of the gates and turned into the narrow, winding road, she sprang to her feet. "Stop!" she ordered breathlessly.

The coachman drew rein. "Senorita?" he inquired.

"I—I've changed my mind," said Lola, trying to speak calmly. "I have decided to walk."

The man looked surprised, but he made no comment as Lola paid him his fare and stepped out into the road.

She watched the carriage drive away, then, her heart thumping, she crept through the bushes, approaching the hacienda from the rear.

She saw that the lights in the house had been extinguished, and a moment later Tony himself appeared in the porch, thrusting a bundle of papers into his pocket.

The boy's face, even at that distance, looked pale and stern. He slammed the door and hurried to the stables; a few minutes afterwards there was a clatter of hoofs as Tony spurred his horse down the drive, riding as though on an errand of life and death.

Lola waited till the muffled sound of the hoofs had died away, then, her eyes gleaming desperately, she ran swiftly up the steps that led to the terrace.

A moment later she was standing outside the tall windows of the study. She felt no qualms about her desperate purpose. The hacienda was her father's home; all that it contained was rightfully his!

Cautiously she tried the windows, hoping against hope that the ancient catches might prove to be insecurely fastened.

Her hopes were justified. One of the windows gave suddenly beneath the pressure of her hand. Lola pushed it wide and, her heart beating wildly, she crept into the moonlit room.

In a moment she had reached the ancient chest with its litter of dusty treasures. Her hands trembling, she pulled out the ebony casket, carrying it to the window.

The moonlight reflected on the silver hasp, but though Lola sought to open it, the lock resisted her efforts.

Perhaps the key was in the old chest? Lola darted to the chest, lifting the lid. A faint gasp of wonderment escaped her lips. For the chest was three-parts full of dainty dresses—exquisite gowns of silk and satin, colourful shawls and headresses, tiny satin slippers with diamante buckles.

Lola sank to her knees, her desperate purpose momentarily forgotten; a faint, elusive perfume crept up from the open chest—a scent of long ago.

Tenderly she picked up one of the dainty gowns; it was fashioned like a Mexican peasant's costume, but in finer material and with exquisite embroidering.

Initials had been embroidered to form the centre of the pattern, and Lola tried to decipher them.

"R. S." Rhoda Sharman—her mother's initials! That sweet, talented mother whom Lola could only just remember.

Tears smarted suddenly in Lola's eyes as she pressed the faded gown to her lips.

Her mother had been a dancer, too, and these were her dresses. Her father must have cherished them all these years, not bearing to part with them.

On an impulse she could hardly explain, Lola slipped the peasant costume over her head, smoothing out the soft folds.

And just then an ominous sound



Lola turned as a footstep crunched behind her. It was Ramon Garcia, her father's arch-enemy. "Who are you, girl? And what are you doing here?" he demanded.

reached her ears—the distant sound of galloping hoofs.

Lola stiffened, her heart quickening uneasily. Whatever happened, she must not be found here!

She snatched up the ebony casket; there was no time to search for the key. She wrapped it in a coloured scarf, slipping another over her head so as partly to conceal her features.

Climbing out on to the terrace, she darted swiftly across the moonlit grounds.

She had reached the gates, and was looking cautiously down the road when a footstep crunched behind her.

With a stifled cry, Lola turned, to stare into the cruel, sallow features of Ramon Garcia, her father's arch-enemy!

THE EBONY CASKET

WHITE to the lips, Lola encountered Ramon Garcia's suspicious gaze. Instinctively she clutched at the precious bundle wrapped in the scarf, hoping against hope that she would escape recognition.

Luckily, her face was shadowed by the trees, and Garcia could not see her clearly.

His sharp, ferret eyes scanned her peasant costume. His lips curled.

"Who are you, girl?" he demanded sharply in Spanish. "What are you doing here?"

Lola desperately plucked up her courage, realising that she could gain nothing by silence.

"If you please, senor," she faltered in the same tongue, "I came to ask employment of the young senor who lives here, but there is no one at home. The house is in darkness."

Ramon Garcia eyed her narrowly.

"That is strange," he said. "I, too, have come to visit Senor Creswick; he was expecting me. You are certain there is no one in the house?"

"Positive, senor."

"Umph!"

Ramon Garcia fingered his small moustache, a frown on his face. He seemed about to question her further, then abruptly he changed his mind.

"I shall go up to the house and make certain," he replied. "You can mind my horse while I am gone."

He pointed to his horse that was cropping the foliage on the other side of the road, and, with a slightly scornful gesture, tossed a coin into Lola's hand.

"Mind you take care of him," he added. "He's a spirited animal."

"Si, senor," whispered Lola, hurrying to obey.

With a little sigh of relief, she watched Ramon Garcia's burly figure disappear up the drive.

Her eyes shone desperately. She realised that Garcia would quickly discover that something was amiss, and would return in search of her.

Her fingers tightened on the bridle of the restive horse.

Ramon Garcia was her father's enemy, and there was no time for any scruples.

Swiftly she swung herself into the saddle, spurring the horse at a reckless gallop down the moonlit road.

Far behind her she imagined she heard a distant angry shout, but Lola did not slacken rein.

She had gained her purpose; the vital casket was in her possession. All that remained now was to seek out her father and acquaint him with her success.

The devious, winding path that led from the Hacienda San Valdo to the

bandit's secret stronghold in the hills was seared deeply in Lola's memory. It was the route that her father had taken on that unforgettable evening of her arrival in Mexico.

Within half an hour she came in sight of the ravine, and saw the rushing falls glittering in the moonlight.

She dismounted as she reached the brink of the ravine, and, with a shuddering glance at the foaming torrent below, hurried on foot towards the narrow bridge.

And then she caught sight of the bandit's tall, unmistakable figure standing motionless in the shadow of the rocks, staring out across the chasm.

He had not heard her approach owing to the hissing roar of the falls.

His face looked drawn and tired, and there was an expression of utter weariness in the stoop of his broad shoulders.

"Father!" whispered Lola, a lump in her throat.

She darted towards him, emerging from the shadows into the moonlight.

Just then the bandit turned, glancing in her direction.

He started, passing a hand over his eyes, a look of utter amazement on his face.

"Father!" exclaimed Lola breathlessly.

The Grey Shadow took a swift step towards her, catching her in his arms.

"Lola!" he exclaimed huskily. "I thought for a moment that I was dreaming—that you were—"

He held her at armslength, gazing at her in the moonlight.

"Your mother's dress!" he said brokenly. "It was one of her favourite costumes. But how—"

Breathlessly Lola blurted out her explanation.

"Everything's all right, dad!" she declared, smiling up into his tired face.

"I've got the casket—see?"

Triumphantly she thrust it into his hands, watching the expression of amazement and relief smooth the troubled lines from his features.

"Lola, my dear," he said unsteadily, "this has made a new man of me! I was beginning to despair; but, thanks to your loyalty and courage—"

"Dad, will this really prove your innocence?" gasped Lola.

"I hope so, my dear—I believe so," replied the bandit, as he fumbled eagerly with the catch. "It was your mother herself who locked certain letters in this casket—letters written to her by an old family friend with whom I have long lost touch. I had almost forgotten them until recently. It's possible that their contents may provide the very information I have been seeking. If they had fallen into Garcia's hands all would have been lost."

He was attempting to open the lid, while Lola looked on anxiously.

"There's a secret spring," he said. "I'm almost certain—Ah!"

His eyes lit up as the clasp flew open. With a trembling hand he grasped the lid as Lola bent eagerly over his shoulder.

And at that instant a shot rang out in the moonlight night, sounding clearly above the roar of the falls.

Lola hardly realised what had happened when her father staggered, raising a hand to his forehead.

"Dad!" she cried brokenly. "Dad!"

Desperately she caught at his arm, dragging him away from the brink of the chasm.

But the ebony casket slipped from his nerveless hands, bounding from the side of the cliff and falling with a dull splash into the foaming torrent below.

SAVED BY A STRANGER

LOLA, pale as death, dropped to her knees at her father's side as he lay huddled on the grass where he had fallen.

There was an ugly, shallow wound in his forehead, where the bullet had grazed him—a bullet fired by some unknown enemy from the cliffs above.

The bandit's eyes were closed, and he was breathing heavily.

"Dad!" whispered Lola, her voice choked.

She supported his head against her arms, staring round her desperately.

Her fear and anxiety were coupled with a white-hot anger against the unknown person who had fired the shot.

But her first thought was for her father's safety. Whatever happened, he must not be found here by his enemies.

With all her strength, she contrived to drag him into the shelter of the bushes.

She crouched there by his side, waiting and listening; but apparently his unknown enemy believed that his work had been done, and had departed.

Lola, pale with anxiety, crept from the bushes. Whatever happened, her father could not remain here—wounded and in pain.

Somehow she must obtain help.

Cupping her hands to her lips, she gave the bandit's strange signal—the cry of a coyote. It was a forlorn hope that the signal could reach her father's men, but she dared not leave him, to seek assistance.

Thrice she gave the signal; then, ripping a length of material from her gown, she ventured as near to the falls as she dared, contriving to soak the cloth in the ice-cold water.

Darting back to her father's side, she tenderly bound his head, and rested him more comfortably against a mossy bank.

Then followed long minutes of anxious waiting, while her hopes slowly ebbed.

Hark!

Somewhere, close at hand, a twig cracked beneath a soft footfall. Someone was approaching!

Her heart quickening, Lola peered from the bushes. Then she bit her lip, drawing back hastily.



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The newcomer was a stranger—a young Mexican with dusky complexion and jet-black hair.

He was picturesquely attired in the fashion of a wandering troubadour, and he carried a guitar slung across his shoulder.

Lola hesitated, her hands clenched. Dared she risk asking him for aid? A glance at her father's pallid face decided her. There was no time to lose.

Swiftly she stepped from the bushes; the young troubadour turned with a start, raising a hand to his broad-brimmed hat. His back was to the moon and his face in the shadow, but Lola could see that he was handsome, in a dark, foreign way, and wore a small moustache.

"Senorita?" he inquired gruffly, taking a step towards her.

Lola blurted out her story. A friend had been badly injured. Would he give his aid?

"Senorita—Lorenzo Pascala is at your service," rejoined the other swiftly. "Where is your friend?"

Lola led him quickly to her father's side.

"Ah—what scoundrel has done this?" demanded the young troubadour, his eyes flashing.

Lola shook her head, almost too choked to speak, as the young man raised the injured bandit in his powerful arms.

"Which way, senorita?" "Across the bridge," whispered Lola. "We have friends who will meet us there."

The young man asked no questions. With the injured outlaw across his shoulder, he approached the treacherous bridge, warning Lola to take care.

A few minutes later they were on the other side, within the shadow of the secret ravine.

Once again Lola gave the bandit's signal, while the young troubadour watched her curiously.

And this time, her signal was answered; the massive boulder that masked the entrance to the stronghold was swung open—and Pedro, her father's faithful lieutenant, stood there, rifle in hand.

He started as he caught sight of the young stranger, and raised his weapon. But there came a cry from Lola.

"Pedro—it's all right! He's our friend."

"Senorita!" exclaimed Pedro huskily. Then he caught sight of his injured leader, and he sprang forward, his swarthy face paling.

"Senorita—what has happened?" Brokenly, Lola explained. The faithful Pedro clenched his hands.

"Someone will pay dearly for this!" he declared. "This way, senor—quickly."

Together they carried the injured bandit leader through the secret entrance of the stronghold.

The young troubadour hesitated on the threshold, staring round him.

"There is no more I can do, senorita?" he asked, as Pedro rather pointedly barred his way.

Lola shook her head with a grateful glance.

"I'll never forget what you have done," she replied, holding out her hand.

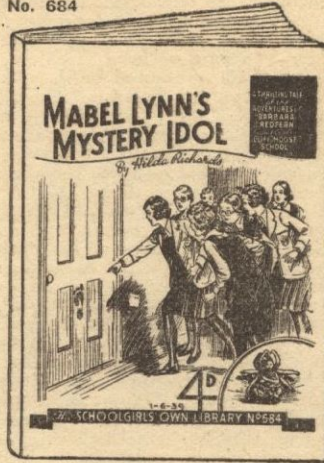
"And, senor," added Pedro meaningfully, "what you have seen will remain sealed on your lips!"

The young man bowed gravely and stepped back. The massive stone door swung back into place, hiding him from view.

Pedro carried the bandit leader to the cave, the other outlaws crowding round with anxious questions.

STORIES THAT THRILL

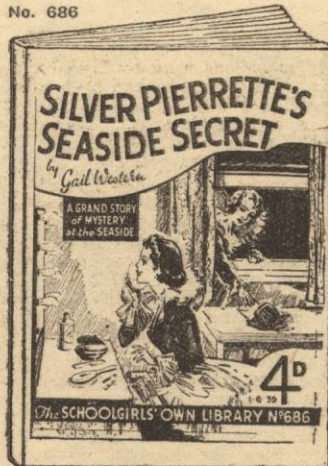
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Alone with her father, Lola anxiously tended his wound, waiting for him to recover consciousness.

Luckily the wound was only superficial; and, with his magnificent physique, there was little doubt about his recovery.

But Lola's mind was haunted by conflicting thoughts as she knelt at his side.

She dreaded to have to answer the question that he would inevitably ask. The ebony casket had been lost—and with it all their hopes; and that at the very moment when success seemed to have crowned their efforts.

How could she tell him the truth?

Her father moaned faintly, opening his eyes; in an instant Lola was bending over him, smiling through her tears.

But he did not recognise her; he stared at her in a wondering, perplexed way.

"Rhoda?" he muttered.

Lola bit her lip. She realised that he was delirious—that he imagined her to be her mother.

"Rhoda—dance for me," he breathed.

Tears sprang into Lola's eyes, as she rose softly to her feet. Her father was watching her in a fevered, puzzled way. She knew that at all costs he must be humoured, if he were to recover.

Crossing to the moonlit opening of the cave, she commenced to dance, in her mother's peasant costume, her eyes brimming with tears.

It was the strangest, most tragic dance that Lola had ever performed. Her accompaniment was the whisper of the wind, the distant roar of the falls.

Her audience was a wounded outlaw—the man who meant more to her than anything else in the world.

And she was rewarded by her father's smile as, gradually, he closed his eyes, falling into a heavy sleep.

With a stifled sob, Lola crept to his side, to keep her vigil through the night.

IN the morning her father's condition was improved—though he was still very weak.

Too ill, as yet, to be informed of the loss of the precious casket, he seemed to take it for granted that it was safe.

"Lola," he muttered, as she brought him a cooling drink, "Lola—there is something you must do for me; I can trust no one else with the task. The letters in the casket—you must take them to my old friend Henry Grayland without loss of time. His address is on the back of an old snapshot in my case."

He pointed weakly towards his shabby leather case.

Lola, her lips trembling, turned away to open the case. She discovered a faded portrait of a handsome, bearded man in his early prime.

There was an address scribbled on the back—an address in distant New York!

Lola clenched her hands. Dared she tell her father the truth? That the casket was lost—and, with it, the vital letters?

She glanced at his drawn, eager face, and the words died on her lips.

She couldn't tell him—she couldn't! If only she could recover those letters—

She bit her lip, her eyes a gleam with sudden determination.

The casket might have been washed up on to the jagged rocks in the ravine. There was just a frail chance.

It was barely daylight when Lola left the bandit's stronghold, bent on her perilous task.

A few minutes later she reached the chasm, and stared down at the foaming torrent below.

Her hopes sank. It seemed scarcely possibly that the ebony casket could have been saved from that maelstrom.

Cautiously she made her way along the treacherous brink of the chasm.

Then abruptly she came to a halt, with a swift intake of breath.

She had caught sight of something wedged between two massive boulders—something that winked and glittered in the faint light of the rising sun.

The silver mountings of the ebony casket!

Lola dropped to her knees, her pulses racing as she stared down.

That casket, wedged between the cruel rocks, meant all the difference to her father's happiness—and her own.

Barely pausing to calculate the risk, Lola slid over the edge and commenced cautiously to descend, clinging to stunted shrubs and jagged crevices.

She dared not look down, for fear of giddiness; but she could hear the relentless roar of the torrent growing louder as she slowly descended.

And then, unexpectedly, came disaster. A shrub to which she had clung gave way suddenly under her frantic hold; she felt herself falling, and a choking cry was torn from her lips as her fingers scrambled desperately for another hold.

For an instant they caught in a crevice, and she hung there, suspended helplessly over the chasm, believing that every moment would be her last.

Then, to her numbered ears came a shout—from close at hand.

A shower of stones fell past her; an athletic figure swung itself on to a ledge just below her. The cruel drag on her arms was relieved as a powerful hand supported her—assisting her, half-faint-

ing, on to a wide ledge of rock a few feet above the torrent.

Her lips trembling, her eyes wide with gratitude, Lola stared into the dusky features of the young troubadour!

"Senorita," he said huskily, "are you mad that you must risk your life in climbing these rocks? I tried to warn you, but you paid no heed."

"I—!" Lola swallowed hard, pointing to the boulders below. "There is something of vital importance to me down there. A casket containing letters. I was trying to reach it—"

Her voice trailed away as the young troubadour rose to his feet.

"Stay here, senorita," he said quietly. "Do not move—until I return!"

Lola caught a glimpse of his dusky features, shadowed by the broad brim of his hat. She imagined that he was smiling.

There was something about that smile that struck a chord of memory in her mind. She tried to find words to thank him, but he was gone in a flash, swinging himself from crevice to crevice with the agility of a gazelle.

A few minutes later he returned, bearing the ebony casket—badly splintered, and streaming with water. He thrust it into her hands and, waving aside her broken thanks, assisted her back to the path.

"An revoir, senorita," he murmured huskily. "And keep away from this chasm; the next time you may not be so fortunate."

With a curt salute, he strode away, his guitar slung across his shoulders, whistling a gay, romantic tune.

Lola stared after him, attempting to pull herself together. Even now she

felt as though she were dreaming. But the ebony casket was real!

Eagerly she turned her attention to the splintered lid, contriving to jerk it open. Then her heart sank, and a look of stunned dismay crossed her face.

The casket was empty! The vital letters had gone.

For a moment, Lola's mind felt too numbed to think clearly. Her last faint hope had been snatched from her.

Who had taken the precious letters? They must have been removed from the casket before she left the hacienda; unless—

She caught in her breath sharply, a wild, incredible suspicion flashing into her mind.

The troubadour!

She remembered his strange smile; the eagerness with which he had volunteered to fetch the casket; his curious, abrupt departure.

But why—why should he have done such a thing, after coming so bravely to her aid? Of what use could the letters be to him? Who was he—

"Oh!" gasped Lola, the blood draining from her face.

In a blinding flash came enlightenment. That carefree, boyish swagger; that smile. The mysterious way in which he had appeared, as though from nowhere—his curiosity about the bandit's secret stronghold.

They all pointed to one bewildering fact.

The troubadour was Tony Creswick in disguise!

Can this startling suspicion possibly be true? And if so, are the Grey Shadow's days of freedom numbered? You must make certain of reading next Friday's enthralling long instalment. Order your GIRLS' CRYSTAL to-day.

THE FALSE CONFESSIONS

(Continued from page 218.)

away on a wild-goose chase and knew nothing about all this.

"I felt suspicious of Dr. Sanders, though, after he'd bungled trying to bandage my arm for me. He'd never tied a bandage in his life before, though he was supposed to be a doctor. I realised then that the robberies had only happened since he had come to the house; he had been the one to discover them—and he had access to the treasure-room.

"My suspicions were confirmed when I asked him if anyone had been in the room while I was out in the grounds, or if he had left it at all. He denied this—but there was a small trace of fresh mud on the carpet.

"One thing still puzzled me. What had he actually done with the curios? How had he made them disappear? It was a tiny scrap of straw that gave me the answer. It had dropped from a bird's-nest. Where could the bird's-nest be? I suddenly realised—up the chimney. And it's there, I think, where you'll find all the valuables."

Janet crossed the room and thrust her hand up the chimney, while Noel kept an eye on the prisoner. Next moment the girl brought down some soot and the two missing Turkish swords, then she brought down the other missing curios.

"They were on a ledge up there," she said.

"Exactly!" smiled Noel. "Jacobs unlocked the door, entered the room, grabbed some of the valuables, and stuffed them up the chimney, then shouted that there had been a robbery."

"Confound you!" snarled the captive, glaring at Noel. "But how did you discover my real name?"

"I took the liberty of looking in your doctor's bag this evening," Noel replied, "and there was your name on your driving licence. There's only one thing now I don't understand. Why did Willings confess to a crime of which he was perfectly innocent?"

It was the butler himself who supplied the answer the next day. He had been brought back to Ham Lodge from the village and reinstated. He reddened when Noel asked him the question.

"Well, Mr. Raymond, it was like this," he said confusedly. "I'd no idea the thief was that scoundrel Jacobs. The evidence did seem pretty black against Janet—Miss Mitchell. She has to support her father, who's disabled; and I thought perhaps lack of money had driven her to—to this."

"Her father saved my life during the War, and in doing so was badly wounded; that's why he can't work now and depends on Janet. So I had a sort of debt to pay off to him."

"And, therefore, you took the blame for the thefts on your own shoulders?" said Noel gravely. "Mr. Willings, I would like to shake hands with you."

But Janet, her face flushed and happy again, insisted on kissing the loyal butler—who had made the first of those two strange confessions.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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G.C.W. 34

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