

GIRLS' CRYSTAL³

and "The SCHOOLGIRL."

Week
Ending
Aug. 26th,
1945.



It was a strange task which Max had set Claudine, but she was determined to carry it out. It was her only chance of proving that she had not been a friend of the Nazis.—By ENID BOYTEN.

SCORNFUL BY THE VILLAGE!

"CLAUDINE, why aren't they making us to the grand supper after the festival? Everyone else in the village is going. Why aren't we?"

Claudine Dural looked down at her scuffed eight-year-old sister with a smile, though there was an odd tremor in it.

"Maybe there won't be enough to go round, so someone had to be left out. Never mind, Mimi. We'll have a fine supper on our own with granddaddy down in the cove. And now come and help me decorate the balcony. Those roses and ivy-leaves and wickeria will look lovely—perhaps we'll win the prize for the best decorations."

In the cobble square of the little fishing village of St. Clai, in the Channel Islands, all was gaiety and bustle.

Great piles of flowers were heaped here and there, and boys and girls were busy decorating houses and shop fronts with all kinds of floral designs. It was the day of the summer Flower Festival, with its sets and dancing and supper—the first that had been held since the war.

For long years the islands had been occupied by the Germans, and the steep, winding streets of St. Clai had echoed to the tramp of the hated invader. And then had arrived that glorious day when freedom came, and no longer was the grim, spectral face of Colonel von Britten, the Nazi commander, seen in St. Clai. So this year the Flower Festival would be a victory celebration as well.

Only for Claudine Dural, her little sister, and her grandfather, the shadow of war still lingered.

As Claudine watched roses round the pillars of the balcony, she heard a shrill voice in the square below.

"Look at that Dural girl! I wonder she has the cheek to decorate the cafe. She ought to have been shipped off with her German friends when the war ended."

Claudine recognized the voice. It belonged to Marie Lesvite, always foremost in stirring up feeling against her.

"Never mind, they won't be allowed to compete for the prize for the best decorations," replied a boy's voice. "I hear they haven't been invited to the supper, either. None of us would sit down with them, anyway."

Her dark eyes flashing, Claudine bit her lip and glanced at Mimi, but thankfully her small sister had not heard those hostile remarks.

She could not really blame the village folk; for she knew they had good reason for looking on her with suspicion and bitterness.

It was well known that she had been very friendly with the Germans during the occupation. She had volunteered to help in their officers' canteen, to sing at their camp concerts; she had gone out of her way to make them welcome at the cafe. She had been granted special privileges by the Nazis, because of all the work she had done for them.

No wonder, now that peace had come, that she was an object of scorn and dislike!

"Oh, if only Paul would come back!" Claudine murmured, breaking off a long spray of wisteria. "He is the only one who can tell them the truth, the only one who can prove that I was never pro-German!"

Everyone in St. Clai knew of Paul Waring,

the daring young member of the resistance movement. When he returned to his native village he would surely be greeted as a hero.

But no one knew that Claudine had been Paul's secret ally. No one dreamed that her seeming friendliness with the Germans was just a mask so that she could obtain vital information from them, which at great risk to herself she passed on to Paul.

He had promised to come back as soon as the war was over, and tell them the truth about Claudine, so that they would no longer look upon her as a traitor.

But V-Day had come and gone, and still there was no sign of Paul. Not even a letter from him. And Claudine, pledged to secrecy about her war-time work, could not speak up in her own defence. In any case, so bitter was the feeling against her, it was unlikely that the villagers would believe her without any proof.

"What can be keeping him?" she asked herself for the hundredth time. "Surely he could have sent just a letter, which would have given all the proof I need."

Above the house and chatter in the village square, her keen ears detected a distant sound from the rocky coast. It was the high-pitched note of the Whistling Tower.

Around the coast of the island were many old towers, used at one time for defence, but perhaps the Whistling Tower was the strangest of them all. It had a funnel-shaped orifice in its stone wall, and when the wind blew in a certain direction this made a weird, high-pitched whistle that rose and fell in a long-drawn note.

The tower had been a meeting-place for Paul and Claudine during the perilous years of the war. Many times she had risked everything to meet him there with some vital message.

"And he would send me his secret signal," she thought, as she helped Mimì with the roses. "But now—"

Suddenly she paused, head lifted, ears straining, a growing look of wonder in her eyes.

For she had detected a change in the note of the Whistling Tower. Instead of a long-drawn, continuous whistle, it now came in interrupted blasts, long and short: *hoo-coo-hoo-coo!* No one in the flower-decked, sunny square had noticed the change, but Claudine was sure of it.

"Paul's signal!" she breathed. Long ago they had discovered a way of stopping up the orifice in the tower wall, so as to produce these long and short notes. That had been Paul's secret signal to her during the German occupation. And now—now he had come back—would be able to clear her name of those horrible suspicions. She must go to him at once.

With a hasty excuse to her sister, telling her to get on with the decorations, Claudine sped down the stairs, her heart singing. At the foot she paused, hearing a stern voice coming from the little living-room behind the cafe.

"I'm sorry, Duval, but I'm very doubtful about renewing your lease of the cafe," the voice was saying. "There's a lot of feeling against you in the village on account of Claudine. We've no love for pro-Germans here."

It was Mr. Lucas, the local magistrate and owner of the cafe. It had always been grandfather's bar that when the time came to renew the lease of his beloved little cafe, Mr. Lucas might refuse. She could imagine how pale and troubled grandfather would be looking at those stern words of the magistrate. Half an hour earlier Claudine herself would have heard them with sinking heart.

But she could afford to smile now. She was going to meet Paul, and then their worries would be over.

Eagerly she hurried into the bright sunshine of the square, and, leaving the flower-decked village behind her, she sought the

steep cliff path, the shrill note of the Whistling Tower ringing louder in her ears. At the final bend in the path where it joined the beach, she came in sight of the tower, standing at the far end of a causeway of rocks stretching into the sea.

Luckily the tide was out, for it was no easy task to scramble over those foam-splashed rocks at high water.

"How like Paul, sending me that secret signal, just as in the old days!" Claudine laughed, as she scrambled over the rocks. "Anyone else would have come straight to the village, but trust dear old Paul to do something unusual and romantic."

She was so sure that only Paul could have sent that signal. Never had they disclosed the secret to anyone else.

In front of her the old grey tower rose up, rugged and weather-beaten, with that weird whistling note rising and falling, drowning the splash of the waves. A large notice-board with the single word "Danger!" was fixed to the base, for some time ago experts had declared that the Whistling Tower was becoming unsafe and might fall into ruins.

But no thought of danger troubled Claudine's mind. Breathlessly she reached the flat rock on which the tower was built, and hurried to the low-arched doorway on the seaward side, then stepped into the tower itself, pausing at the foot of the crumbling stone steps that wound upwards.

"Paul!" she called. As the echoes of her call died away, she heard a laughing voice in reply:

"At your service, Miss Claudine!"

With a cry of amazement she swung round to see, perched on a block of granite, in the shadows at the foot of the stairway, a tall fair boy in a striped jersey, a beret perched jauntily on his head.

"But—but you're not Paul!" she gasped.

"No, his name's fading, see in his feet!" "No, I'm not Paul," he replied, watching her with shrewd, narrow eyes. "My name is Max Barry, and I'm a friend of Paul's. Paul could not come—there is still a war going on at the other side of the world, you know, and his services are needed there. But he asked me to meet you here, told me about the secret signal, and everything. And he sent you—this!"

From his pocket the fair-haired boy drew an envelope. He held it up so that Claudine could see it was addressed to her in Paul's round, bold handwriting.

"It contains a letter explaining just what you did in the war," went on Max, with a friendly smile. "None of your friends will despise you again, Claudine, once they have seen this letter."

Claudine's heart bounded. So Paul had not forgotten her! Although he could not come himself, he had sent the proof that she so desperately needed—the proof that she was not a traitor to her country. Eagerly she held out her hand for the precious letter.

"Oh, give it to me, please!" she cried eagerly, but to her astonishment Max shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't let you have it just yet."

"But—but why? I don't understand," Claudine faltered. "Paul—"

He shrugged his shoulders, and to her bewilderment firmly thrust the letter back into his pocket.

"I'm sorry, but I'm following Paul's instructions." He flashed her his quizzical, friendly smile again. "He has got one little secret service job for you first, Claudine; and as soon as you've done it—secretly and swiftly—I'm to hand you the letter that will put an end to your troubles."

The note of the Whistling Tower rose and fell above their heads, while Claudine stood staring at the strange boy in puzzled astonishment.

CLAUDINE'S STRANGE TASK



"DON'T look so thunderstruck, Claudine! I know this is rather a surprise, but it is a perfectly simple job that we want you to do."

Max was speaking again in an easy, friendly way that began to put Claudine at her ease.

"Do you remember Colonel von Ritzsen, the Nazi commandant at St. Cle?" he went on.

"Who doesn't? He was the biggest pig of them all," replied Claudine grimly, thinking of the hard-faced German who had not only bullied the villagers, but had collected a hoard of loot from various parts of the island, hiding it away so cleverly that even when the Germans surrendered it had not been discovered.

"Well, amongst the odds and ends left behind by the Germans there's the colonel's best uniform!" said Max softly. "Have you any idea where it might be, Claudine?"

She nodded.

"Probably in the store-room at the manor, locked away with the other lumber they left behind," she replied.

"Good! Then there's your job, Claudine!" He spoke eagerly, in an urgent whisper. "I want the tunic of the colonel's uniform, and I want you to get it secretly for me. Once it is in my hands, I'll be free to give you Paul's letter."

"But—but couldn't I have the letter right away?" Claudine asked hopefully.

"Sorry, but I've got to keep to my instructions," he replied. "I'll meet you at the foot of the cliff path at six o'clock, Claudine—and from what Paul has told me of you," he added softly, "I know you won't fail me. Good luck!"

It was in a very different mood that Claudine made her way back from the Whistling Tower. She could not doubt that Max came from Paul. His possession of the letter, his knowledge of the secret signal, seemed to prove it. Yet what a strange mission he had given her!

And why should Paul have insisted that she must complete this task before Max handed her the letter which meant so much to her?

"No use puzzling about it, though," Claudine told herself. "I've just got to carry through this last secret task, though it won't be as easy as Max seemed to think."

There was so much suspicion against her in the village that it would never do for her to be found lurking around those German relics in Mr. Lucas's store-room. Yet somehow she must gain entrance to that room and discover the Nazi colonel's uniform. And already it was mid-afternoon, leaving her only three short hours.

She quickened her steps, and sped breathlessly up the cliff, then, skirting the village square, she reached the old Norman archway that led to the manor house. Now how was she going to get into the locked store-room without being seen?

A rumble of wheels made her dart into hiding behind a clump of pine-trees, and a moment later a clumsy farm cart rolled along the lane and halted by the archway.

"Confound those Nazis!" she heard the driver mutter to his mate. "They're still causing us trouble. Here's some more of the lumber they left behind them, got to be locked up in the store."

Claudine, peeping from behind the tree-trunk, saw that the cart was piled with boxes and trunks and bundles.

"Go and get Mr. Lucas to open up the store-room," said the other man. "Then we'll unload the stuff and carry it in."

The driver went off, leaving his friend still perched in front of the cart, while Claudine behind the tree trembled with sudden excitement as a daring plan flashed into her mind.

"I've got to risk it," she breathed. "It's the only chance I've got."

Noislessly she crept forward, hoping that

the man beside the driver's seat would not turn and see her. Without a sound she pulled herself on to the back of the cart, crouching there amongst the boxes and trunks. Could she find one that would suit her purpose?

The first trunk she opened, was full of German Army blankets, with scarcely room for a mouse to hide. Claudine, hardly daring to breathe the opened another. It was stuffed to the brim with ground-sheets and haversacks. And already Claudine could hear footsteps and voices, as if the driver was returning with someone else.

In desperation she opened a third trunk. Ah, this was better! It contained only some Army manuals and papers scattered in the bottom. Thanking her lucky stars that she had a slim figure, Claudine silently climbed into the trunk.

And not a moment too soon, for hardly had she lowered the lid than the driver arrived, with Mr. Lucas himself.

"I've unlocked the store-room," she heard the magistrate say. "Just dump the stuff in there, men, and then go and enjoy yourselves at the festival. Don't bother to sort it out just now."

That was good news, Claudine told herself. It meant, she hoped, that the men would not open the trunks or bother to take out what they contained.

She felt the cart jerk and creak as the various articles were unloaded, while she crouched there, uncomfortably hot and almost stifled. Then there came a violent jolt as the trunk in which she was hiding was dragged off.

"Each one seems heavier than the last," she heard one of the men grumble.

Claudine felt herself being carried up some steps and along a corridor; and then the trunk was dumped unceremoniously on the floor.

"One more box and we're finished," she heard the driver exclaim, with relief.

She waited there, not daring to move, till the men came back with the last box. She heard the door close, and the click of the key being turned again. Only then did she dare to raise the lid, and, hot and dusty, creep from her hiding-place.

"Well, I've got in," she breathed, "but goodness knows how I'm going to get out!"

However, she would think about that when she had found the uniform.

Swiftly she began to search amongst the goods which were piled on shelves and in racks, and heaped on the floor. She found Colonel von Ritzsen's tunic at last, to her joy, on a hanger at the far end of the store-room, recognising it by the rows of medal ribbons sewn on the tunic, and it had the colonel's name on a tab under the collar. Quickly she slipped it from the hanger.

"It seems such a strange thing for Paul and Max to want," she murmured. "A Nazi colonel's uniform tunic. What in the world did—"

She broke off in alarm as a chorus of voices and clatter of footsteps echoed in the corridor outside. Once more the key clicked in the lock, and Claudine just had time to dart behind a huge pile of folded Army blankets before the door opened and a burst of Harry's voice rang in her ears.

"Jolly good of you, sir, to let us have old Von Ritzsen's uniform for our dummies!"

"Wonder what he'd say if he could see it flaring away on the bonfire! I guess his waxed moustache would go curly with rage, eh?"

And then came Mr. Lucas's voice:

"This way, all of you! The uniform is hanging right at the end here. We will soon have your things properly dressed!"

Claudine caught her breath in utter dismay. Never had she expected such an unlucky turn of events.

It was quite clear to her what had happened. Dick Randall, Rose Merrion and Marie Lassiter, with a dozen other village boys and

girl, had made an effort of the hated Nazi commandant, with a very life-like mask. And they had obtained Mr. Lucas's permission to dress it in the colonel's actual uniform. And then they planned to burn the whole thing off a bonfire.

She shrank back in her hiding-place, grasping the tunic, and then she heard the magistrate's voice again.

"But there's something missing here! What has happened to the tunic? I'm quite certain it was here an hour or so ago!"

Claudia's heart was thumping. She must escape quickly, she told herself; somehow she must dodge away before they began to make a search of all would be lost. But as she made to move disaster overtook her.

That huge heap of folded blankets had been piled very carelessly; instead of being upright, it jutted over to one side, though Claudine had not realized how shabby it was. She tumbled against it lightly as she tried to creep round the back, and the whole pile suddenly slid over sideways with a dull thud. Claudine gave a gasp of dismay as she stood there, fully exposed to view. She saw Mr. Lucas and his young companions swing round, heard their startled exclamations, and saw the anger leap into their eyes.

"It's Claudine!" Marie's shrill voice rang out. "And look, she is holding that missing tunic!"

There was no chance to escape now. Three of them sprang forward and held her fast, before she could move an inch. And again it was Marie, her blue eyes gleaming spitefully, who broke out in shrill accusation.

"Don't you see, all of you? She heard we were going to burn the colonel's uniform on an effigy, so she thought she'd protect it. She hated to think of the Nazi's coat being burnt, with all his medals on it, so she sneaked in here and tried to save it. She is still a pro-German as she ever was!"

Claudine's heart sank as she met their angry glances. She could not explain, for Max had pledged her to silence. And now had come this spiteful accusation that she was trying to save it from the bonfire, because she was pro-German.

She trembled slightly as she met Mr. Lucas' gaze.

"You know that you are trespassing here, Claudine! You had the impudence to break into my house and interfere with these German uniforms. You wanted, it seems, to protect Von Kitzner's precious medals. Words fall me to express what I think of such a girl as you!"

An angry protest sprang to Claudine's lips, but she did not utter it. "What was the use? How could she defend herself when she was pledged to silence?"

"Hush me that tunic," Mr. Lucas said. "Pale-faced and trembling, she was compelled to obey."

"I spoke to your grandfather to-day," the magistrate went on, "the same green tunic. I told him I was doubtful whether I should renew the lease of his safe because of your pro-German actions during the war. I can only say that your escapade this afternoon has made me still more doubtful. You can go, Claudine!"

And feeling as if the world was falling in ruins about her, Claudine went, followed by their scornful glances.

Not only had she failed in her attempt to secure the tunic, she thought unhappily, but she had made things even worse for grandfather. There had been a very grim note in Mr. Lucas's voice when he had spoken about the café.

Claudine in the lane, she hid behind the pine trees. She had not long to wait before Jack and Marie and the rest of them came crowding out, laughing and chattering, carrying the effigy. Now that it was dressed in the colonel's uniform it was really a remarkable likeness of that stiff, grim-faced tyrant.

"You'll have to watch it, boys, even after you've perched it on the bonfire," cried Marie.

"That girl may make another attempt to grab the tunic before it is burnt!"

"Don't worry! We'll keep our eyes open!" laughed one of the boys. "Claudine won't get another chance to touch it!"

They hurried down the lane, waiting for the village square, and with a sinking heart Claudine watched them go.

It seemed almost impossible now that she could obtain the tunic before it was destroyed for ever.

She thought of the strange boy, who would be waiting for her at the foot of the oak path in little more than an hour's time. He had been friendly enough, but she felt sure that if she failed to keep her side of the bargain he would never hand over Paul's letter, which meant so much to her and Mimi and grandfather.

"I mustn't fail—I mustn't!" she told herself.

Determined to think of another plan, she made her way to the gaily-decorated square. But as she reached the café, she stopped short, her eyes wide with dismay, her lips trembling.

All the flowers with which she and Mimi had so carefully grouted the balcony had been torn down, and now lay in an untidy, dusty heap against the wall. On top of them lay a piece of card, with these words chalked on it:

"No flowers for the traitors' café!"

TRICKED!



"Oh, Claudine, they've torn down all our flowers! And they won't let us go to the dance or the stunts or anything."

Little Mimi's childish voice, choked with disappointment, greeted Claudine, as she hurried into the living-room. Grandfather was there, too; though pale and worried himself, he had plainly been trying to comfort the little girl.

"Don't worry, Mimi, everything will come right," Claudine forced a smile. "You mustn't worry; neither must grandfather. Just stay here quietly for a while."

Even as she spoke an idea had dawned in her mind. In the scullery hung an old German tunic which had belonged to one of the soldiers who had been billeted at the café during the war. She ran and fetched it.

"You can help me, Mimi. Clear up, darling, and fetch your workbox with all those coloured ribbons. We've got to get busy!"

They watched her wonderingly as she cut the ribbons into narrow strips and sewed them on the front of the tunic. It was a rough, quick job, but at a distance it would look like the tunic on the effigy with its rows of medal ribbons. There was just a faint hope that she might get a chance to exchange them.

She rolled the tunic into a small bundle, then took some roses and wisteria and covered it over so that it was like a big bunch of flowers. Many folk in the village were carrying flowers, so she would be able to carry the bundle like this without attracting attention. She forced herself to summon up a gay smile, to wave cheerily to them, and then darted out into the village square, carrying her bundle.

By this time the band, on its gaily-decorated platform, had struck up a lively tune, and the dancing had begun. Bunches of flowers were being thrown from hand to hand, the air seemed full of blossoms and bright sunshine, and at any other time Claudine would have thrilled at the colourful scene, but now her gaze was fixed upon the bonfire.

It had been built in the centre of the square, with the effigy of Colonel von Kitzner perched securely on top, and near the bonfire several

(Please turn to page 397.)



Detective June's MOST THRILLING CASE

By PETER LANGLEY

WHAT JUNE OVERHEARD

I WONDER what Uncle Noel wants me for? Hope it's something exciting!"

June Gaylor, seated in the front seat on the top of a Westminster-bound bus, gazed with shining eyes through the window at the maze of traffic which filled the Strand.

It had always been June's big ambition to become a professional detective like her famous uncle, Noel Raymond, and she was never happier—or prouder—than when he allowed her occasionally to assist him on his smaller cases.

And now he had sent for her—urgently. She thrilled as she thought of the telegram in her pocket.

"COME AT ONCE—NEED YOUR HELP—NOEL."

June had wasted no time. She had caught the early morning train up from Oakdene where she was spending the summer holidays with her cousins, and here she was in London.

"What a good job school doesn't re-start until next week," June told herself, as the bus swung round into Whitehall. "It would have been awful if I'd been unable to come, but I wonder—"

She broke off, involuntarily eavesdropping on the conversation of the two men who occupied the seat immediately behind her.

"I see the Grey Falcon's got away with another haul—Lady Stranmore's diamonds this time," commented one, rustling the newspaper on his lap. "It's a real mystery who he is, and how he manages to bring off these audacious coups of his!"

As she listened, June's heart gave a sudden little lurch, for a wild, incredible hope had come to life. Suppose her uncle wanted her aid in running to earth the master crook whose astonishing exploits these two passengers were discussing! For she knew that Uncle Noel had been concentrating all his energies for months in trying to discover the identity of the mysterious Grey Falcon.

And then she found herself listening again, for the man with the newspaper had mentioned Noel's name.

"This detective fellow, Raymond, seems to be making a complete mess of things," he

commented. "In fact, according to the papers, it was his fault that the Grey Falcon wasn't caught last night. Apparently the police had a suspicion that Lady Stranmore's house might be broken into, but Raymond persuaded them to follow up one of his ruses instead. The result was that the man they were after was calmly able to help himself to Lady Stranmore's diamonds. An extraordinary blunder, I must say."

The other man laughed. "If it was a blunder!" he put in. "Why, what do you mean?"

He started wonder the man with the newspaper regarded his companion, while in the seat in front June sat as if petrified, a hot, indignant flush dyeing her cheeks. For anyone to cast even the slightest slur on Uncle Noel's detective ability was to her intolerable. Whatever had happened, she told herself loyally, Uncle Noel hadn't been to blame. Quivering, she waited for the other passenger's reply.

"Well, it wouldn't surprise me if this chap Raymond is not hand in glove with the Grey Falcon!" He gave a short, cynical laugh. "In fact, some people are suggesting that he may be the Grey Falcon himself! I know it sounds fantastic, but it wouldn't be the first case of a detective turning crook. And by all accounts Noel Raymond has been living pretty extravagantly of late—"

But that was as far as he got, for with an angry cry June had bounded to her feet, swung round, and with flashing eyes she regarded her fellow passengers.

"How dare you!" she gasped. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves! To sit there and talk like that about one of the best and straightest men there are!"

The man with the newspaper looked abashed, but his companion glared at the angry schoolgirl who confronted him.

"Here, steady on, miss. Careful what you're saying," he began, but June cut him short.

"It's you who ought to be careful what you

say!" she stormed. "Daring to call Noel Raymond a crook! Why, he's my uncle, and let me tell you that he's one of the finest men alive. What's more—with a sudden gasp she realized that the bus had pulled up at her stop, but she delayed her departure long enough to give the unknown another withering glare. "What's more," she panted, "he's going to catch the Grey Falcon! You wait until he does, then perhaps you'll realize how silly you are!"

And, oblivious of the stares of the other passengers, she tossed her head, then went racing frantically down the stairs, to jump down to the pavement, as the bus began to move on.

The almost incredible conversation she had overheard had brought the tears to June's eyes, and she was still trying to blink them away when she reached the big block by the river where Noel Raymond had his flat.

"I've never heard anything so—so absurd in my life," she told herself, as she fumbled in her bag for the key with which her uncle had provided her.

Still, glowering, she let herself in and marched straight down the hall to Noel's study. As she had expected, he was there, busy at his desk, and as she entered he looked up from the papers he was studying and smiled a greeting.

"So you've come, June—good girl," he said. "Sit down quietly for a minute, will you? I won't keep you long."

June obeyed, but as she waited her eyes never left the famous detective's face. How white and strained it was, and how weary had sounded his voice.

"It must be this Grey Falcon business," she told herself. "It must be an awful strain handling a case like that, and if that rumour I overheard's got about—"

She broke off and started to her feet, for with an irritable gesture the detective had dropped the papers back on the desk, given a heavy sigh, and rubbed his eyes, as if they smarted. In an instant June was at his side.

"What's the matter, nunky?" she whispered. "Is it the Grey Falcon you're worried about?"

He nodded rather ruefully. "Fraid it is. Sorry to admit it, June, but that rascal's proving himself too smart for me. I thought I had him last night, but it seems it was he who laid a trap for me, not me for him."

June put a sympathetic arm around his shoulders.

"I know, nunky. Two men on the bus were talking, and they actually had the check to say—"

She stopped abruptly, flushing in confusion. For a moment Noel's keen grey eyes regarded her, then he gave what was for him a bitter laugh.

"So you've heard the rumours, eh? Bit fantastic aren't they? But don't worry, dear." As he saw how distressed she was, he became his old self again and gave a laugh. "Those crazy stories aren't worth a moment's thought," he declared. "Especially as I've a shrewd idea who's putting them about."

June straightened up with a jerk. "Not the Grey Falcon himself!" she ejaculated.

To her amazement, he nodded.

"Yes—you see, he knows that, despite all my apparent blundering, I've hit on his trail. He guesses I've got a suspicion as to who he really is, so he's out to get me discredited. He thinks that if he slanders me enough he will force me to give up the case. But not me. I'm going right on."

"You bet you are!" Approvingly June surveyed her uncle's grim face, then excitedly she leaned across the desk. "And am I going to help you?" she breathed.

He shook his head decisively. "Nothing doing, my dear," he said. "Sorry,

but this is no case for girls. The Grey Falcon's too big and dangerous a bird for you to net. Besides, I have another job for you—a case after your own heart, and a case I want you to tackle all on your own."

Despite her deep interest in the elusive master crook, June felt her heart leap. A case all on her own. A real chance to prove her detective ability!

"Oh, nunky, what is it?" she breathed.

Noel smiled. He seemed to have forgotten the cases which were weighing him down.

"Come with me and I'll show you," he said. It was with his old briskness that he led the way out of the study, across the hall, and into another room.

The first thing June noticed when he opened the door was a big school trunk standing in the centre of the floor, with the initials "D. W." painted on it in white. Then her gaze went to a framed oil painting that stood on an easel near by. It was the portrait of a girl of about her own age and about her own build; the most striking difference was that whereas June's hair was fair and rather long, the unknown's was dark.

With a smile the detective indicated the picture.

"Allow me to introduce Dorothy Whitman," he said. "A new girl who next Monday is going to become a resident at Port Craig College."

"I know—that marvellous school on the West coast!" exclaimed June, staring curiously at the portrait. "But what's she to do with this case you mentioned, nunky?"

Noel's lips twitched.

"Everything. You see, she's going to solve it."

"But what about me? If you've already put her in charge—"

"But I haven't. It's you who's going to be in charge. You see"—Noel paused tantalizingly—"you are Dorothy Whitman," he concluded.

June gasped. She felt that her head was spinning round.

"You mean—"
"That it's you I want to go to Port Craig," was the astonishing reply. "You're to be Dorothy Whitman."

JUNE'S NEW ROLE



JUNE sank down into the nearest chair and looked at the famous detective with wide, amazed eyes.

"But, why?" she asked. "And where's the real Dorothy Whitman?"

Noel chuckled.

"There isn't one," he said calmly, taking out his cigarette-case and lighting up. "That's the first name I thought of when I made arrangements for you to go to Port Craig."

"But that portrait?" Weakly June waved towards the oil painting, and her uncle chuckled again.

"An imaginative effort on the part of an artist friend of mine, my dear. Eventually it is destined to advertise someone's shampoo. I was struck by its resemblance to you, so I thought it would make a good model when you came to disguise yourself. For if you're to be a pupil at Port Craig, it's essential no one should know you're my niece."

"But why do you want me to carry on this impersonation?" gasped June. "What exactly do you want me to do?"

Noel seated himself on the edge of the big trunk and leaned forward, his expression very earnest.

"I want you to solve the mystery of the forbidden play," he declared.

"The—the forbidden play?" echoed June, her heart thumping.

Her uncle nodded and drew thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"Got a note-book?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Good. Then you'd better make notes while I tell you all about it. It's rather a long story."

Her pulses racing, June produced a note-book from her blazer pocket. She was almost quivering with excitement, for this case promised the kind of adventure she adored, but, desperately anxious to seem professional, she assumed a business-like air, and, pencil poised in readiness, she looked across at Noel Raymond.

"If you will give me the details——" she began.

Noel's eyes twinkled. He seemed to have completely forgotten his heavy cares of a few minutes ago.

"Well, first of all I'd better tell you a bit about the background of the college. It was founded in 1786. Before that it was a castle and its last owners were brothers—Sir Richard de Coreville and Sir Philippe. Richard was a real knight—always at the wars. Philippe, on the other hand, was a budding William Shakespeare. One of his plays, with the curious title of 'The Casket of the Three Virtues,' has become a tradition of the college. But we'll come back to that later."

Noel took another pull at his cigarette, thoughtfully blew a perfect smoke ring, then continued:

"One day Richard and Philippe quarrelled—about that very play, as it happened. Richard had never approved of his brother's play-writing, and that particular play featured a girl whom Richard was fond of. In fact, it showed her up in rather an unpleasant light. Richard ordered Philippe to destroy the play. Philippe refused—there was a furious quarrel, and the upshot of it was that the two fought a duel."

"And—and who won?" breathed June, her romantic mind thrilled by this story of long ago.

"Strangely enough, Philippe. In fact, his warrior brother died of his wounds, but not before he had laid a curse on 'The Casket of the Three Virtues.' He vowed that if it were ever produced he would come back and haunt the producer, bringing disaster to him and all the players."

"And was the play ever produced?" asked June, her pencil rapidly making notes.

Noel blew another smoke ring.

"Rather! Many times. And according to the old records, disaster always overtook the performers. sheer coincidence, I expect—though the superstitious don't believe that. Then the castle was turned into a school, and the story was forgotten, until one day someone had the bright idea of making the play a feature of Foundation Day. It was a big success, and the college, developing a theatrical tradition, for years performed it every Foundation Day."

"But what about the curse?" demanded June.

Her uncle chuckled.

"As the years went by it seemed to lose its potency. Once or twice there were minor tragedies—one year, for instance, the principal lady strained her ankle the day before; another time a thunderstorm damaged the roof of the old Refectory where the play is always performed. But that is all—until three years ago."

Noel paused, and when he spoke again his voice took on a deeper, grimmer note.

"It was the Third Form who set out to produce it, and disaster after disaster overtook them. And that's not all. Many of the girls vowed that they had seen the ghost of Sir Richard and that he had ordered them to abandon their efforts. Some of the girls were scared, and Miss Wigley, the headmistress, eventually banned the performance."

Again he paused, and June, her brain buzzing, looked up expectantly from her notes.

"And now it's going to be produced again!" she exclaimed.

"That's why you want me to go down there, isn't it?"

Noel nodded.

"Exactly. This time it is the Upper Fourth who are going to present it, and they don't believe in ghosts. They ridicule the old superstition. So does Miss Stanton, the new headmistress. They haven't started on the play yet, so they don't know what's going to happen, but Julie Vermont, who is the leading spirit, has received a warning."

"A—a warning, nunky?"

"Yes—just before the end of last term. It was a note tossed through the window. Here it is."

From his wallet Noel extracted a dirty, creased piece of paper and passed it over. Instantly his schoolgirl niece read the threatening message which had been scrawled on it in pencil:

"Abandon your plans. Remember the curse of Sir Richard de Coreville. Perform 'The Casket of the Three Virtues' at your peril."

June drew in a deep breath, as she saw her uncle's eyes were regarding her inquiringly.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he asked.

"First of all, the handwriting's feminine," deduced June. "A schoolgirl's, I should imagine. And this piece of paper's been torn from a school exercise book. You can just see part of the printed word 'college' at the top. That suggests a leg-pull to me. Yes, that's it, nunky, this threat's just a college joke."

"That's what Julie thinks, and I agree with her. It seems that the Fifth and the Upper Fourth are deadly rivals, and according to Julie some of the Fifth are jealous because Julie & Co. are going to have all the limelight on Foundation Day—if the play is a success. But her father takes a different view. He's superstitious, and he's very uneasy. Anyway, he asked me to investigate the matter. I told him it was hardly in my line—particularly now that I've got my hands full with the Grey Falcon—and then I thought of you, my dear." Noel smiled across at her. "Well, do you feel keen to tackle it?" he asked.

June did not hesitate.

"Father!" she cried, then she frowned. "But what about my present school? And what about aunt?" she asked.

Her uncle patted her knee reassuringly.

"Don't worry. I'll fix everything up," he said. "All you have got to do is to disguise yourself and get to work. But I'm afraid you won't have much time. Port Craig's new term has already started, so I'd like you to catch the one-fifteen from Paddington. That all right?" June nodded and Noel relaxed. "Right, then I will just give you a few words of advice, then I'm afraid I'll have to leave you."

June sat back and listened intently.

"Well, now it's up to you, my dear," he concluded when he had given her all the information he thought she would need. "Good luck, and—remember, if things should take an unexpected turn—if this threat should prove to be something more than a stupid practical joke—you're got to give up the case and return immediately. I can't have you running into danger."

"I understand, nunky." Deliberately June made a non-committal reply. She had her own views as to what she would do if danger did threaten! "But what about reporting back to you?" she inquired. "Shall I write here at the first?"

He shook his head.

"No. I'll be away on—or—business. In fact, for the next week or so I will be living very near the college. Now let me think. He screwed up his eyes, then smiled. "I know. Near the college, right on the edge of the cliff,

there is an old watch tower. If you want to get in touch with me leave a note for me there. There's an old cupboard on the wall. Put the note in there. It'll be safe from prying eyes and I'll be sure to find it."

June nodded, and shrewdly she looked up at her uncle.

"Going down to Port Craig, are you?" she commented. "And you want to keep your address secret? That means that you think the Grey Falcon's operating in the neighbourhood of the college. Goodly!" Her eyes lit up. "Then perhaps I'll be able to help you, after all."

But decisively Noel shook his head. "Not a chance, my dear. Under no circumstances could I allow you to risk any contact with a scoundrel like the Grey Falcon. Thank goodness our two cases are entirely separate."

June made no comment, but her heart was pounding wildly, for across her mind had come the startling feeling that for once her uncle was wrong.

It was absurd, she told herself, and yet for a fleeting second she had the strange intuition that the paths of herself and the master-crook who had sworn to bring about Noel Raymond's ruin were destined to cross.

That the tentacles of the mysterious Grey Falcon were going to reach out even to the quiet, studious precincts of Port Craig College!

THE GREY FALCON'S THREAT



"MY, if auntie could see me now she'd have a fit—that is, if she recognised me!"

June laughed as she stood up in the empty third-class compartment and surveyed herself in the mirror that formed the centrepiece of a photographic display advertising the beauties of the county of Devon.

She had made no changes in her attire—except for her blouse, which now bore the colours and badge of Port Craig College—and only the minimum number of changes to her features.

And yet it was doubtful if any of her friends would have identified her.

A West End hairdresser had dyed and cut her hair, and set it to match that of the girl in the oil painting in Noel's flat. That had made a tremendous difference. A slight but skilful alteration to her eyebrows and a few artificial freckles had completed her disguise, and, as she studied it, she gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Hallo, we must be steaming in!" she exclaimed, as the train began to slow down.

Looking through the open window, she caught a glimpse of a dashing blue sea, of tall, jagged, black cliffs, of a small, picturesque harbour in which red-sailed fishing smacks lay at anchor. Then the train was running between houses, and she began gathering together her suitcases and other baggage.

When she had descended on the solitary, tiny platform a grizzled porter wearing a blue jersey that gave him a seafaring look took charge of her luggage.

"Taxi, miss?" he said in answer to her question. "No, ye'll not get one now, but the college's only a step or two beyond the town. Take the cliff road, and I'll see your bags is sent on."

June nodded. After the long journey a little exercise would do her good, she decided; so, giving up her ticket, she set off through the narrow, winding streets of the little fishing port. Presently she found herself on the cliff-top, with a great wooded estate looming up before her, with a view of ancient stone walls and arched slates through the trees.

That, she guessed, was the college, and her

pulses quickened. What adventures awaited her there?

Again she went over in her mind the stranger story Uncle Noel had told her, with its roots stretching back into the dim, romantic past.

It was absurd to suppose that a ghost could really be responsible for the disasters which, according to the legend, overtook whoever produced the forbidden play. Yet why should any human being seek to prevent the college girls from enacting "The Casket of the Three Virtues"? Thinking of the threatening message which had been sent to Julie Vermont, June's lips tightened.

"It's just a practical joke," she told herself. "Uncle Noel's right."

Her attention was suddenly attracted by a half-ruined tower which rose above the cliffs like a dark, broken finger. That must be the old watch tower of which Noel had spoken. Instantly her thoughts went back to that disturbing conversation she had overheard on the bus; to the lone-handed bottle her uncle was waging with the mysterious Grey Falcon, and momentarily that queer premonition came to her again—that in some way her case and his were connected.

"But that's absurd! How could they be?" she muttered.

A little angry with herself for harbouring such a fanciful idea, she dismissed the thought, and, passing through the open gateway of the college, looked about her with interest.

The school certainly looked ancient and romantic, she told herself, with its ivy-covered walls and battle-scarred battlements. But the grounds were modern enough. They were laid out for hockey and cricket. There were both hard and grass tennis courts, and through the trees she glimpsed an open-air swimming pool.

The grounds were deserted, but that was because it was tea-time, she decided, and she was about to walk on up the main drive when away to the left she saw a great barn-like building that stood on its own, hemmed in by a half-circle of huge oaks. From what her uncle had told her she knew that this must be the refectory which had been turned into the college theatre. Instantly her eyes lit up.

"I'll have a look round there first," she murmured, and resolutely she strode off down the narrow path which led through the trees.

When she reached the clearing in which the refectory stood she saw that she had come upon it from the back, and she was about to make her way round to the other side, when agitated footsteps crunched on the gravel path and an aggressive, rather shrill voice hailed her.

"Where have you come from? What are you doing here?"

Looking round, June found herself confronted by a tall, angular girl, with black hair parted in the middle and wearing spectacles.

"I'm a new girl," she explained. "My name is—"

She stopped hurriedly, as she realised that she had been on the point of revealing her real name. "I'm Dorothy Whitman," she amended, "and I was just looking round."

The other girl did not reply at once, but behind her spectacles her blue eyes gleamed in vague suspicion.

"Just looking round, eh?" she muttered at length. "You are sure you hadn't any special reason for coming here? I mean, it wasn't you who pinned that note on the refectory door, was it?"

June shook her head, and, intrigued by the other girl's manner, she regarded her curiously.

"What note?" she asked.

"A threatening note," was the unexpected reply, and June's heart gave a sudden leap.

But before June could learn any more, there came a sudden interruption. Footsteps sounded on the gravel path and a white crowd of girls emerged through the trees, laden down with baskets, bundled-up frocks and other

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signal that would lead him into a cunningly laid trap!

THE SHEIK IN DANGER



FREDA spun round with a start as Kay sprang towards her.

"What—what do you want?" she asked, backing away. "I thought I heard a noise and came in here to—"

"Give me that lamp!" exclaimed Kay unsteadily.

"Don't be silly!" rejoined Freda, edging towards the window. "What harm is it doing you? If you're not careful, I'll have it over—"

Her voice trailed away suddenly, and a triumphant gleam flashed into her eyes. Following the direction of the other's glance, Kay felt her heart give a sickening jump.

Far out across the desert a light was twinkling—in response to the treacherous signal.

It was the young sheik's answer. With a cunning smirk, Freda raised the lamp; even as Kay made a desperate grab at it, attempting to wrench it from her hand.

The lamp flared up as they swayed in a frantic struggle to gain possession of it. Then, with a splintering crash, it fell to the ground, setting fire to one of the rush mats.

Freda rushed to the door crying for help while Kay managed to stamp out the blaze and turned to confront Mr. Stanhope.

"So, my girl," he rapped, "you're trying to get fire to the house, eh? What madness is this?"

"You know well enough!" retorted Kay, her eyes flashing.

"You're obviously not safe to be left at liberty," Mr. Stanhope went on. "As soon as Dr. Malston's back is turned, you get up to some new lolly. Freda, fetch the key to the box-room, and make up a bed. Kay can spend the night there."

"I won't! You daren't do that!"

Though Kay fought frantically to release herself from the other's grasp, she was bundled ignominiously out of the room, and up a flight of narrow stairs that led to the lumber room—a bare attic room, with one narrow, barred window.

The door was slammed behind her, the key turned in the lock.

Desperately Kay darted to the window, tugging at the rusted bars. But they were securely fastened.

The moonlight blazed through the narrow window now, and as she looked up despairingly, Kay's heart gave a sudden, violent bound.

There was a trapdoor in the ceiling, almost obscured by the clustering cobwebs.

A gleam of hope crept into Kay's eyes. Fervently she set to work, dragging a pile of old boxes and other lumber into the middle of the room, and climbing on to it. After a struggle she managed to force open the trapdoor and drew herself up on to the flat roof of the house.

Unsteadily, her heart thumping, she crossed to the parapet. The walls were covered with thick creepers, and, though it was a risky descent, she managed safely to climb down to the ground. Then noiselessly she sped across the grounds, making for a gate in the wall.

She was within a few yards of the gate when she heard the faint, unmistakable whinny of a horse in the road outside.

The next moment the gate was flung open noiselessly, and a tall figure was silhouetted against the moonlight.

"Hassan!" gasped Kay. The young sheik took a swift step towards her, then a sharp cry of warning was torn from Kay's lips as a score of shadowy figures launched themselves from the gloom, surrounding the young sheik.

"Ha!" he shouted, "A trap!" A shot rang out—another! One of the

assailants staggered back, clutching an injured wrist.

But the young sheik was fighting against hopeless odds. A moment later he was disarmed, and his wrists pinioned behind him.

Mr. Stanhope, followed by Freda, strolled from the shadows to confront the young captive.

But the young sheik barely glanced at them. His gaze was turned towards Kay, and in those reckless dark eyes Kay imagined she saw a look of bitter reproach.

Did Hassan believe she had betrayed him?

Be sure you don't miss next Friday's thrilling chapters of this enthralling serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

DETECTIVE JUNE'S MOST THRILLING CASE

(Continued from page 288.)

gear. At their head was a rather plump, jolly-looking girl whom June recognized from the description Noel Raymond had given her.

"That must be the Upper Fourth Dramatic Society," she told herself, "and that must be Julie Vermont."

At signs of June and the older girl the newcomers pulled up, and instantly June's companion whirled on their leader.

"It's no good, Julie," she declared, and there was a note of malicious satisfaction in her voice. "Now you'll simply have to give up your petty idea of putting on that play."

The schoolgirl actresses glared while Julie tossed her head in exasperation.

"Give it up? Not likely!" she retorted. "It will take more than a silly practical joke to scare us, Cora Jarrold."

The bespectacled girl gave a shrill laugh. "It isn't a joke. That warning was meant in earnest. If you don't believe me, come and see."

And, turning, she led the way round the side of the refectory, towards the front entrance. Too mystified to meet June, the Upper Fourth Formers followed. June, her pulses racing with expectancy, went too.

Two great iron-studded doors gave entrance to the ancient building, and as she reached them Cora Jarrold pulled up and pointed.

"Just take a look at that!" she ordered.

Wonderingly the other girls pressed forward, and then startled cries arose as they saw the sheet of paper which was pinned to one of the oak panels. June, edging her way to the front, excitedly scanned the few lines of writing.

"DON'T FORGET MY WARNING. I SHALL NOT SEND YOU ANOTHER. NEXT TIME I SHALL STRIKE. GIVE UP YOUR PLANS TO ENACT THE FORBIDDEN PLAY NOW! DISASTER OVERTAKES YOU ALL!"

But it was not that message, startling and threatening though it was, which held June's petrified attention, which sent her heart leaping up into her throat.

It was the challenging, almost defiant signature which appeared underneath.

Breathlessly she read it, her thoughts returning to that strange premonition she had had in Uncle Noel's study.

"The Grey Falcon," she whispered, hardly able to believe the evidence of her own eyes.

The schoolgirls' unknown enemy and the audacious master-crook whom Noel Raymond had vowed to capture, were one and the same person!

What an incredible situation this is! That June should find herself involved with the sinister Grey Falcon! Don't miss a word of next Friday's exciting chapters of this serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.



CLAUDINE and the WHISTLING TOWER

(Continued

from

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of the boys were standing about, obviously keeping an eye on the effigy.

They were decent good-hearted boys, with whom Claudine had been friendly in the happier days before she was so bitter was their feeling against her now, however, that she knew it would be useless to appeal to them.

Then what could she do? How could she obtain that tunic, when the effigy was under observation all the time?

"But I must—I must!" she whispered.

The church clock struck five. Only an hour left before her rendezvous with Max!

A dance had come to an end and Mr. Lucas, who was Master of Ceremonies, was speaking to the crowd through a megaphone.

"Don't forget supper at the manor-house in at nine o'clock, everybody. Mind you work up a good appetite. And now for the special St. Giel floral dance."

So the fun went on, while Mr. Lucas hurried away to supervise arrangements in the manor, leaving the megaphone on a small table beside a flower-wreathed arch near the band platform.

The sight of that megaphone sent a daring, reckless gleam flashing into Claudine's eyes. Keeping in the shadows, she crept closer to the bowery arch, trembling with excitement, wondering if she could carry through the plan that had just sprung into her mind.

She knew it would be her only chance, and if it failed there would be no hope of taking that vital tunic to Max—

The floral dance came to an end, amidst a burst of clapping, and the bandmen sat back for a short interval. And then a ringing voice was heard through Mr. Lucas's megaphone:

"Will everybody go to the village hall, please! We've a special holiday surprise for you there. Don't miss it!"

That announcement caused great excitement, especially amongst the boys and girls. Even Dick Randall and the other boys near the bonfire joined the general rush for the hall, wondering what new treat Mr. Lucas had in store for them. Grown-ups followed, laughing and chattering, and in a surprisingly short time the square was empty.

It was then that Claudine darted out from her hiding-place behind the floral arch.

Her plan had worked. It was she who had made that announcement through the megaphone, though everyone thought it had come from Mr. Lucas.

"I'm sorry they've all got to be disappointed!" she thought. "But it was the only way!"

She scrambled on the pile of broken wood that formed the bulk of the bonfire. They had dazed the tunic so firmly on the effigy that it took her longer than she had expected to pull it clear. Then, with trembling fingers, she brought the old tunic from amidst the flowers that concealed it.

"Oh, goodness, the effigy's head has got twisted!" she panted. "I'll have to fix it somehow before—"

A shrill voice rang out, echoing through the square:

"Come quickly, all of you! It's that girl Duval! She's on top of the bonfire wrecking the effigy! She has taken the tunic of it—she's smothering it!"

Claudine's heart sank. Marie Lesclapier had hurried back to the square before the others, and it was her shrill voice that was giving the alarm.

There was no time to repair the damage, or to put the other tunic in place. Her heart thudding, Claudine snatched up the original tunic and scrambled down from the bonfire. She heard a rush of footsteps as a group of boys and girls came running in answer to Marie's high-pitched scold. And she heard, too, Mr. Lucas's stern voice not far away.

"I must dodge them!" she panted.

Instead of making directly for the cliff path, she raced towards a low wall at the other end of the square. It would be fatal to lead them towards her meeting place with Max. She must go the other way and then double back, throwing her pursuers off the scent, if possible.

She heard them pounding after her as she swiftly vaulted the stone wall. Then, slipping low, she ran sideways, hiding amongst some winter-flowering camellia bushes. Scrambling up a clod of earth, she flung it towards some trees farther on.

At that moment one of the boys jumped the wall.

"She's over there, amongst the trees! I heard her!" he shouted to those behind him. "Come on!"

Claudine breathed a sigh of relief as, crouching amongst the bushes, she watched them race the other way. For the time being, at any rate, she had thrown them off the scent; had given herself a chance to meet Max, hand over the tunic and secure that precious letter. And after that, she told herself joyfully, nothing else would matter.

She crept along the wall, and made her way into a winding alley that joined the cliff path. The church clock was just striking six as she reached the shore; and there, leaning curiously against a rock, was the tall, fair boy, his berth perched at a jaunty angle.

His gaze was tense and eager as he turned towards her.

"You've brought it? Good girl!"

He fairly snatched the tunic from her.

"And the letter from Paul?" Claudine pantingly reminded him.

"The letter? Oh, of course!"

He drew from his pocket the envelope he had showed her before, addressed to her in Paul's writing, and handed it to her. Then with an odd smile he turned abruptly and vanished around the fitting cliff.

At that moment came a rush of footsteps and a chorus of angry cries.

"There she is! There's Claudine Duval!"

They had tracked her down at last, Dick and Marie and Rose and the rest of them, with Mr. Lucas in their midst. The magistrate's face

was stern as he strode towards her.

"You have behaved outrageously, girl! You have made a deliberate attempt to upset the festival—you had the impudence to imitate my voice through that megaphone. And you've done your best to spoil the effigy of that scoundrel, Von Ruten. You—"

He paused in surprise, as he saw that Claudine was smiling gaily. She held out to him the envelope which she had risked so much to obtain.

"Please read that letter, Mr. Lucas," she said quietly. "Then I think you will understand—everything. It's from Paul Waring."

At the name of the young hero of the resistance movement, a sudden silence fell. All stared wonderingly at Mr. Lucas as he slit open the envelope. Then he looked up, his eyes blazing angrily again.

"Are you crazy, Claudine?" he burst out. "This envelope is empty!"

Claudine's face grew pale.

"Oh, but—but it can't be!" she cried. "There's a letter from Paul in it, a letter which proves—"

Her voice died away on a note of despair as Mr. Lucas, with an angry gesture, flung the envelope towards her, and she saw that he spoke the truth. Though it was addressed in Paul's handwriting, it contained nothing at all. She had been tricked by that fair-haired boy, with his jaunty beret and friendly manner. She had readed all—for nothing!

The truth almost stunned her. And in the midst of her confusion and distress she heard the voice of the magistrate, coming like a whip-lash.

"This is the last trick you will play on me, my girl!" he said grimly. "I told you I was doubtful about renewing your grandfather's lease of the café. These crazy, treacherous actions of yours have made up my mind for me. I shall not renew the lease, and the best thing you and the rest of your family can do is to clear out of this island. You are not wanted here!"

"And so say all of us?" shrieked Marie, while a murmur of approval came from the boys and girls grouped around her.

Then, at a word from the magistrate, they turned their backs on Claudine, and vanished round a bend in the cliff path, going back to the festival with its flowers and dancing and gay music.

THE SECRET OF THE TOWER



FOR a few stunned moments Claudine could not grapple with the grim questions that rose up in her mind. Why had Max deceived her? If he was a friend of Paul, as he had declared, why had he tricked her with an empty envelope? Where had he gone now? What did he want with Colonel von Ritzen's tunic?

Her whirling thoughts were interrupted suddenly. She became aware of a change in the high-pitched note from the Whistling Tower.

Hooco-hoo-hoo-hooco!

From one continuous note it had changed into three long and short blasts. It was the secret signal again!

A thought struck Claudine, spurring her to action. She sprang to her feet, raced breathlessly along the shore to the bend of the cliff, from which she could see the weatherbeaten old tower.

The rising tide was splashing and foaming over the causeway of rocks that joined the tower to the mainland, and with straining eyes Claudine saw a figure leaping from rock to rock, hastening towards the tower. It was Max, with Colonel von Ritzen's tunic under his arm.

But the secret signal had already sounded from the Whistling Tower. So it could not have been Max who had sent it echoing across the tumbling water.

Then—who was it?

She scarcely dared ask herself that question. She only knew that she must act swiftly. She must go to the Whistling Tower again and solve its mystery, outside the boy who had deceived her so cruelly. She raced along the beach, telling herself that there was not a moment to lose.

It was at reckless speed that Claudine sprang forward, keeping her balance so by a miracle on those foam-plashed ledges. As high tide there were always treacherous currents splashing around this rocky causeway. There would be little hope for anyone who should

fall into those tumbling, treacherous waters. Ahead of her, the weird whistling note rose and fell from the old gray tower, pale screaming around its banded top.

Panting for breath, she reached the tower. Soft-footed, she crept around its base.

Then she paused, her face tense, her eyes watching.

At the entrance to the tower, Max Harry was crouching with his back to her. He had taken out a knife and was slitting the lining of the tunic, fumbling inside it with eager fingers. She heard him give an excited cry as he grasped something and drew it out.

It was a sheet of paper, but the eager look on Max's face faded to one of disappointment as he examined it.

"It's a blank!" Bitterly he spoke the words aloud. "I've had all this trouble just for a blank sheet of paper. But there must be something else here, this can't be all!"

Angrily throwing the paper on the rock he began to search in the lining again, ripping and tearing it.

So that was what he had wanted! He had suspected that there was something hidden in the Nazi colonel's tunic, and had tricked Claudine into obtaining it for him. She saw, too, that a small motor-boat was moored to the seaward side of the rock; evidently Max was planning to make his escape in it, when he had obtained what he wanted.

She glanced keenly this way and that, then suddenly her gaze fell on a tiny glittering object in a crevice of the rock. She stooped and picked it up, and then caught her breath in excited wonderment. It was a small silver tiffin, with the initials F. W. woven into a monogram.

It was Paul's! One which she had given to him herself. Surely—surely it must mean that he was here!

"Max told me he had gone to the Far East," she thought. "But maybe that was just a trick, too. Maybe he is keeping Paul a prisoner in the tower."

She knew there was a turret room at the top of the tower, with the funnel-shaped orifice in its wall which produced the weird whistling sound. It was there that she must search, quickly, before Max discovered her.

So silent was the fair-haired boy on his frantic examination of the Nazi's tunic that he did not hear Claudine tip-toe into the tower behind him. Her heart throbbed, she sped up the winding stone stairway; but halfway up she paused, her eyes wide with dismay.

A great crack had appeared in the stone wall at this point, a gap through which she could see the sky and the tumbling waters. She was certain it had not been there when she last visited the tower. And even as she paused, she felt a strange trembling and swaying through the whole fabric of the tower.

The whole grew louder, till it was like a cry of warning. Claudine remembered the many times she had been warned of the danger that the tower might collapse. Perhaps, at last, that time had come!

Pale-faced, she sprang higher, reaching a stone-floored landing, where a stoutly-built oaken door faced her. It was this that led to the turret-room. Usually, there was a rusty key in the lock, but the key had gone. Claudine flung herself against it, but it was locked.

"Paul! Paul!" she shouted.

There was no answer except the weird whistling, and the scream of the gulls outside. Had she, after all, been mistaken?

Claudine glanced down at the stone floor. It was covered with a fine dusting of sand, which had been whipped up there by the wind. And the marks of footprints could be plainly seen.

Besides her own, there were others, and as she quickly examined them she saw they had been made by more than one person. And in one place they were shuffed together as if there had been a struggle.

Again, as if to spur her to swift action, she

old the old tower away and tremble, as if a pair of giant hands were shaking it. Max, she told herself, must have the key to the turret-room, and somehow she must get it from him before it was too late.

She raced down the stairway again, averting her eyes from that ominous crack, which seemed to have grown wider. She knew now that Max was not a friend; he was her enemy, and Paul's, too.

Panting, she reached the stair-foot. Max was still out there, still tearing that German tunic almost to shreds in his efforts to find what he sought. He was wearing the striped jersey in which she had first seen him. Was the key in his pocket? she wondered.

Then, for the first time, she noticed a grey sports coat hanging on a nail in the wall. That, too, must surely belong to Max; he had laid it aside, not needing it on this hot summer day. She darted towards it, lifted it down, and groped in its pockets.

A gasp of relief broke from her as her fingers closed over the rusty key. And at that moment Max Barry turned and saw her.

None of that easy friendliness in his manner now! His face twisted with rage, he made a rush at her. Claudine, to gain a few precious moments, flung the sports coat in his face, blinding him for an instant. Then she turned and fled up the stairs, knowing he was pursuing her.

"Stop—stop!" Max's angry shout rang in her ears, but she reached the landing ahead of him and thrust the rusty key in the lock. To her heartfelt relief it turned easily; she pulled the key out again, pushed open the creaking door and slammed it behind her, locking it again just as Max reached it.

Then, panting for breath, she turned to gaze around the turret-room. The wind had died down for the moment, and the sound which came through the orifice now was a mere murmur. And to Claudine's lips came a glad cry as the figure she saw at the further side of the little stone-walled room, gagged and bound to an old chair.

"Paul!" she flew to him, her fingers fumbling at the knot of the gag, tearing it away from his face. He gave her his old gay smile.

"Good old Claudine! You've never let me down yet, old girl, but—good! I was in a mighty tight fix. I managed to lift that piece of timber with my feet and block the funnel once or twice to make our signal, but I couldn't be sure it would reach you."

"I heard it, both times," Claudine told him, as swiftly she unfastened the ropes that bound her friend. "But Max pretended he had sent the signal himself, and—"

"Max!" Paul spoke the name grimly. "He worked his way into my friendship, then attacked me from behind and locked me up here, while he followed up a clue to that hidden German loot which he wanted for himself. He stole an envelope I had addressed with your name, and tricked you into helping him. I'll deal with Max!"

"Oh, take care, Paul!" she faltered, as he sprang from the chair and strode to the door, ringing it open.

Max was still on the landing, and like a tiger Paul sprang at him, while Claudine watched, her heart in her mouth. But though wild and sore from his long imprisonment, Paul was more than a match for the other boy. The struggle ended in Max crashing down backwards, with Paul on top of him.

"The ropes, Claudine!"

He had no need to ask for them, for Claudine had already fetched the ropes that had tied Paul to the chair, and in a few moments the half-stunned Max was securely trussed up. Paul hoisted him over his shoulder.

"This fine fellow has got to be put under lock and key," he panted. "I believe he is really a Nazi, and in some way he learnt about that secret store of loot which no one has been

able to find. And we'd better hurry. The old Whistling Tower is none too safe."

At his words the whistle shrieked out again, almost deafening them, and they felt the tower rock and shudder as they hurried down the winding stairway to the rocky ledge outside. Paul placed his prisoner in the motor-boat, then swung round quickly as he heard an excited cry from Claudine.

Her quick eyes had noted something queer about the blank piece of paper which Max had found in the letter of Colonel von Hiltzen's funds. She had poked the paper up, gazing at one corner which had been dampened by a splash of sea water.

"There is something appearing here where the paper is wet!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Some black lines."

Hastily she bent down, dipping her hand in the sea and wetting the rest of the paper. Before their startled eyes lines began to appear all over the sheet which had so disappointed Max Barry by its blankness.

"It's a plan of the Whistling Tower!" Paul burst out, peering over Claudine's shoulder. "That obviously cannot have been made in an invisible ink, which becomes visible when the paper is dampened."

"And there's an arrow pointing to the seventh stair!" cried Claudine. "Paul, it's the hiding-place of the stolen loot! Quick! Let's search!"

She was turning to rush through the entrance again when Paul caught her arm, putting her back.

"Let me go, Claudine! The tower isn't safe! It's creaking and crumbling every moment! You wait by the boat!"

"As if I should!" she retorted, a reckless sparkle in her dark eyes. "We've shared risks before, Paul, and we will share this one. But let's hurry!"

Side by side they made their way up to the seventh stair, while the shrill whistle waited its last warning.

"This little cross marked on the plan must represent that knob of stone," Paul said. "Let's see what happens when I press it. Ah!"

When the knob was pressed, part of the stonework slid aside, revealing a cavity below. And there, to their joy, they found the gold plate and precious jewellery which Colonel von Hiltzen had looted from all over the island, and which he had hidden for safety in the tower, no doubt meaning to collect it at a later date.

Frantically they gathered it up. "We can take it all in one trip!" gasped Paul. "But—quickly, Claudine!"

Dust fell about them as they loaded themselves with the loot. Strange crackings and groanings echoed in their ears, while fresh cracks appeared every moment in the crumbling stone walls. The whistle shrieked louder and louder.

Startingly they stumbled down the stairs with their precious burden, raced through the arched entrance to the boat, where their captive still lay helplessly. In a moment they had jumped in, and Paul had started up the engine, steering the boat away from the rocks.

There came a sudden, dull roar. Claudine, gazing back with started eyes, saw the top of the tower collapse, falling inwards, throwing up a mighty cloud of dust. The shrill whistle died away for ever.

Paul's eyes were fixed gravely on her. "That's the end of the Whistling Tower," he said quietly. "And it would have been the end of me, too, if it hadn't been for you. You saved my life, Claudine, not for the first time. And now"—his gay smile flashed out again—"we're going to give some startling news to the villagers of St. Ciel."

"PAUL! Paul Waring has come back!" The shout rolled through the flower-docked village square. There was an excited rush towards the platform where all could see

the young hero of the resistance movement, waving his hand in greeting to his fellow-villagers. They all knew of his many deeds of daring against the Nazi invaders, both in the islands and in near-by France. Spinning, he waved them to silence.

"Thank you, my friends! I'm glad to be back." His "deans" voice rang through the square. "But I didn't step up here because I wanted to be cheered. I had another reason—a better reason. I want to introduce you to a heroine."

A heroine? In that sunny square, the village folk gazed at one another in excited surprise. Whom did he mean? Had he brought some girl member of the resistance movement back from France with him?

"Step up here beside me, Claudine!" they heard him say.

A gasp of utter amazement ran through the square as Claudine shyly climbed on the platform beside her friend.

"Again and again Claudine risked her life to bring me vital information during the war," Paul told them. "You thought she was pro-German because she was friendly with the Nazis. But that was all part of the plan—it was the only way she could obtain the information I needed, and never once did she fail me. Not only that, but this very afternoon she has discovered the fact that Von Mitten stole from our island. In the name of all my comrades in the resistance movement, I want to thank her before you all."

For a moment there was dead silence. And then pandemonium broke out.

Everyone rushed forward at once, wanting to shake Claudine by the hand, to apologise for all the eggs and insults she had had to suffer, to cheer her again and again.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw grandfather beaming at the side door. So near now that he would have to leave his beloved little wife! And Mimi was dancing with her while aware that she would now be a welcome guest at the grand supper that night. Her vision was blurred a little as Paul gripped her hand in a warm clasp.

"You've been true-blue from first to last, Claudine," he told her.

And perhaps those simple words were her, best reward.

THE END.

NOT WANTED AT SEAVIEW VILLA

That is the title of next Friday's grand double-length complete story, featuring a cheery band of young holiday-makers.

THE MERRYMAKERS AT COLLEGE

(Continued from page 290.)

the short cuts were no more. They reached the motor road just where it was intercepted by a railway crossing.

"I believe we've done it in time! No sign of a tail yet!" Sally panted, leaping down from her saddle.

"Listen! I can hear something coming now!" yelled Johnny.

Sally didn't stop either to look or to listen. Without thinking twice, she made a dash for the level crossing, seized the arm of the

barrier under the very eyes of the astounded gatekeeper, and swung it down, locking the road to all traffic.

There was a shriek of brakes from the coming taxi—a howl from the driver:

"Hi! What are you doing?"
"We're going to rescue you of your daughter!" cried Sally, and led a rush to the taxi, banging the door open.

Then, with a gasp, all four chums staggered back aghast.

"So all four of you are parties to this disgraceful outrage!" said a stern voice—and out from the taxi stepped the Dean!

Sally stood thunderstruck. She saw Nellie Bryan now climb out of the taxi, after the Dean, and in sick horror she realised that her flight had been construed as proof of her guilt, and the Dean had set out after her.

"An outrage is the least I can call it!" the Dean went on, in trembling anger. "I put you under lock and key, Miss Warner, because you had stolen highly important documents from this new girl, the young stranger who has come to the college. I had hoped that it was just a reprehensible lapse. Now I know, that it was a deliberate intent to rob this girl. It is too serious a matter for the college. The police must be informed, and—"

But Sally didn't hear the rest. All the while was another taxi approaching with a shriek of brakes, as the driver saw that the crossing was closed.

"Miss Warner, what are you doing?" the Dean cried.

For Sally had rushed to that taxi and wrenched open the door.

"I can return the papers to you now, sir!" she said breathlessly. "I think you'll find they're here!" And she made a grab at something inside the taxi.

An attaché case rolled out on to the road, and with a startled cry Janet Gade tumbled out after it. She saw the Dean standing there with Nellie. She stopped frantically to seize the case. Then her knees wavered to give way, for the case burst open as she lifted it, and a tell-tale sheet of papers dropped at her feet.

"Janet!" Nellie tottered forward unbelievably. "They're my papers! You—you've got them!"

"Janet had them all the time, Nellie!" Sally said crisply.

THERE was plenty of room in Janet Sinder's chalet now, for Janet was gone, sent away from Roxburgh in disgrace.

In a confession to the Dean, she had told how her cousin put her up to stealing Nellie Bryan's papers. It was his one hope of hanging on to a valuable little property in Peru, which—as Mr. Perry swiftly proved on his return—was the rightful property of Nellie and her mother. It had been Janet's trick to write anonymously to Nellie, warning her in advance of a secret enemy in the college, then allowing suspicion to point to Sally.

Hardly had Sally returned to her own chalet, than a premature tap sounded at the door, and there stood Nellie Bryan.

"Do you really mean, Sally, that you'll let me come back to your chalet—after all the terrible things I said of you?" she whispered, and there was a swirl of pleading in her eyes.

"Of course I mean it, Nellie! I knew from the start I was going to like you!" Sally assured her. "Bring your things along, and I say, don't forget these are yours!" And with a smile she handed Nellie the vase of roses.

(End of this week's story.)

Look out for another delightful, complete story featuring the cheery Merry-makers in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.