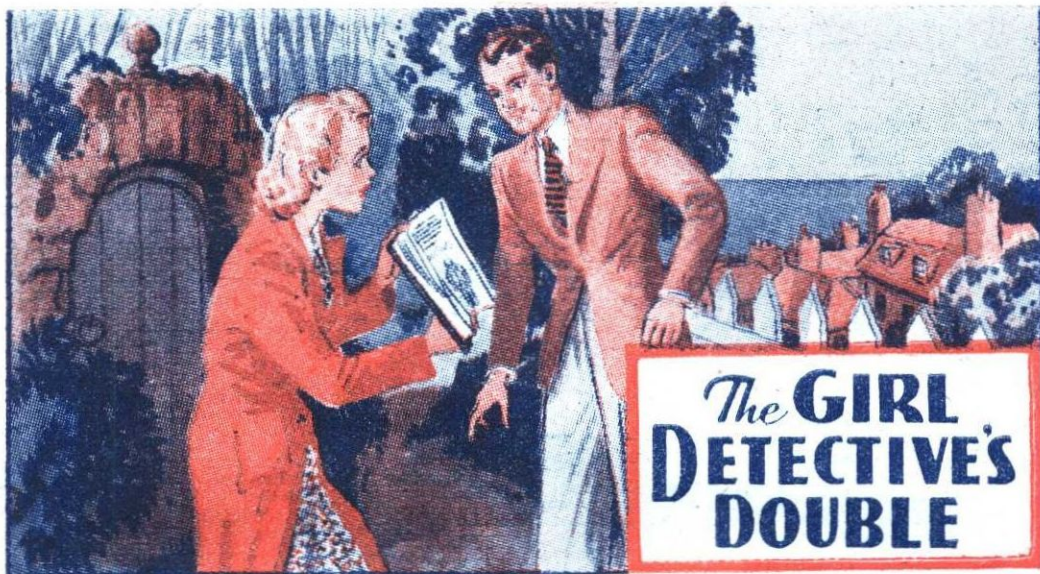


No. 555.
Vol. 22.
EVERY
FRIDAY.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ³

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
June 8th
1946.



The GIRL DETECTIVE'S DOUBLE

Your Old Friends, Noel Raymond And June Gaynor, Are Featured In This Intriguing Detective Story—By PETER LANGLEY

THE MYSTERY WATCHER

"HALLO—What's that girl playing at?" Noel Raymond, the young detective, halted abruptly on the promenade at Frigate-on-Sea, his keen eyes narrowed curiously.

Overlooking the bay at this point, the picturesque rock-gardens rose in terrace formation to a wooded copse, amid which could be glimpsed the gabled, red-brick turrets of an old Georgian mansion.

And a girlish figure, who had slipped unobtrusively from among the holiday crowds surrounding the bandstand, was crouching among the bushes, eagerly scanning the distant house through a pair of binoculars.

Noel had reason to be intrigued. He was on his way to that very House—the Grange—the residence of an old acquaintance, James Weatherall, in response to an urgent phone message.

Instinctively the young detective linked the girl's mysterious actions with his own errand, though the gay setting was far removed from anything sinister.

Quickly he made his way into the gardens, but the girl heard the soft crunch of the gravel under his shoes, and she looked round hastily, making a movement as though to screen her face with her arm.

But in that second Noel glimpsed the wide, startled grey eyes, the unmistakable fair hair and attractive features shaded by the summery hat, and a bewildered ejaculation escaped his lips.

"June!" In a flash the girl was on her feet, and was darting away among the bushes, intent on escape.

"June!" shouted Noel incredulously. "Wait!" But by the time he reached the bushes the girl had vanished. The young detective halted in his tracks, and frowned in perplexity.

Could he have imagined the amazing likeness? June Gaynor, his engaging young niece and detective partner, was supposed to be on holiday with a friend some fifty miles away. In fact, only yesterday he had received a postcard from her telling him how she was enjoying her vacation.

There must be some mistake, decided Noel practically. The girl must have been a stranger who resembled his niece. Nevertheless, the mystery of her actions still remained. Who was she, and why had she been so intent on watching the grounds of the Grange?

His professional instincts prompted Noel to return to the spot where he had seen her kneeling among the bushes. There he found a curious clue—a piece of thin, ornamented leather from an old book-cover, embossed in gilt lettering with the title: "The Man in the Iron Mask."

Pocketing the clue, he strode up the winding slope towards the house, his thoughts turned to his immediate errand.

A grey-haired manservant admitted him into the lofty hall of the Grange, and almost immediately his host, Mr. Weatherall, strode out to greet him.

But the young detective sensed a certain stiffness in the other's greeting and abruptness of manner that he could only put down to his old friend's present anxiety.

"I asked Inspector Clifford to let you handle the case, Raymond," said Mr. Weatherall, after a brief handshake, "as I understand you specialise in such matters—the disappearance of valuable curios and works of art?"

Noel gravely admitted that was so. "Unfortunately there have been serious developments since then," went on Mr. Weatherall, "though I have not had time to notify the Yard. I shall let you have the details in a few minutes. First meet my daughter, Alice—in honour of whose coming of age I gave this house-party and reception."

Noel turned smilingly to shake hands with the attractive, dark-haired girl who hurried forward to greet him. His shrewd eyes noticed that she had been crying recently.

"Congratulations, Miss Weatherall," he said warmly.

"But—but it's all been spoilt, Mr. Raymond," she declared, her lips trembling slightly. "Spoilt by these hateful, mysterious thefts."

Noel glanced quickly at his host, who nodded grimly.

"That is so," he replied. "The value of the stolen objects is considerable, but I am more concerned with the cloud that their disappearance has thrown over my daughter's party and her guests."

The young detective nodded comprehendingly, sympathising with the girl's feelings.

"You will try to clear up the hateful mystery, won't you, Mr. Raymond?" she pleaded. "I've planned and dreamt about this party for months, and now—"

Noel smiled at her reassuringly.

"Don't worry," he said. "Every mystery has an explanation, and we'll find this one if it's humanly possible. Now, Mr. Weatherall—he turned briskly to his host—"shall we go into details?"

"Certainly," replied the other, as he led the way through folding doors and across a sumptuously furnished lounge with magnificent views of the cliffs and sparkling sea. "First, have you noticed anything in particular?"

He glanced at the young detective shrewdly. "Several things," said Noel, whose keen eyes had not been idle. "First, you have an elaborate system of burglar alarms at the doors and windows, and a manservant who has the bearing of an ex-policeman."

"Correct!" said Mr. Weatherall, obviously surprised. "You don't miss much, Raymond. I employed Howard specially when I brought my curious home from abroad, and at his suggestion I had the house fitted with burglar alarms. But in spite of these precautions some of my most priceless possessions have vanished."

Noel whistled softly, his eyes narrowing as he stared round him.

"This man Howard is above suspicion?"

"Absolutely."

"And your other servants?"

"They all came to me with excellent references—except one—young Gilford, my librarian. I took him on at the recommendation of an old school friend, and he seemed a keen, honest young fellow. I would never have imagined—"

Mr. Weatherall broke off as they reached his study, and an alert young man in tweeds rose respectfully from the desk.

"My secretary—Roger Vining," said the owner of the Grange. "Vining, this is Noel Raymond, the detective. Any further news?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Vining, with an interested glance at Noel, "but nothing's come to light. I've made exhaustive inquiries, but no one has seen or heard anything of young Gilford since the early hours of this morning, when the gold plaque vanished from the library."

Noel's eyes glinted.

"Just a minute," he intervened, his quick brain picking up the threads. "Was this young man, Gilford, actually seen leaving the house?"

Vining laughed strangely, and his employer frowned.

"I'm afraid it's not as simple as that, Raymond. If anyone had attempted to leave the

house before Howard removed the alarms, a dozen bells would have awakened the household. Young Gilford was an early riser, and often started work by six o'clock. He was seen in the library at that time, busy with his books, and in company with one of the young lady guests. At eight o'clock the latest theft was discovered, and Gilford had vanished, leaving no trace."

"And this young lady guest?" asked Noel keenly, his interest fully aroused.

Mr. Weatherall hesitated, and it was the secretary who intervened respectfully.

"Allow me to explain, sir. Mr. Raymond—he turned frankly to Noel—"the young lady who was invited through a mutual friend of Miss Weatherall's should be well known to you. Her name is Miss June Gaynor, and I understand that she is your partner."

Noel stood as though frozen to stone by this amazing intelligence.

June—a guest at the house! And associated in some way with the suspected thief. No wonder James Weatherall's manner had been a little strained!

Abruptly he turned to Mr. Weatherall, finding his voice with an effort.

"Where is Miss Gaynor now?" he asked.

"She has gone out with some of the other guests," said Weatherall. "Naturally, I could not detain her. She indignantly denied any knowledge of young Gilford's disappearance or of the amazing theft."

"I shall speak to her when she returns," said the young detective quietly.

"If she returns," put in Vining, with a shrug.

Noel's eyes glittered.

"If the young lady in question is my niece and partner, June Gaynor, she will return!" he replied curtly. "And now, sir—he turned to his host—"with your permission I shall proceed with my investigations. First of all, I should like to examine the room where the latest theft took place."

"Certainly," said Mr. Weatherall. "And now that you are here, Raymond, I feel more happy about presenting my daughter with her twenty-first birthday gift, which I have kept locked in my safe till now. Vining, will you act as witness?"

He crossed to a massive safe in the wall, and manipulating the intricate combination, swung open the door. From a doubly-locked compartment within he drew a flat jewel-case, and opened it in front of them.

An involuntary ejaculation escaped Noel's lips, and the secretary whistled admiringly.

Flashing on its bed of white satin, each stone reflecting the sunlight in a thousand iridescent rays, was a beautiful necklace of sapphires and diamonds.

"Great Scott!" breathed Noel. "That must be worth a fortune."

"It's the Weatherall heirloom," replied his host. "The presentation to the eldest daughter on her coming of age is a family custom. In the ordinary way I should have taken precautions, and in view of the recent happenings I wish to be doubly careful. I want you to keep an eye on the proceedings, Raymond, in your official capacity, and to check up on everyone present."

Carrying the jewel-case with its precious contents, he led the way to the library, followed by the young detective and the secretary.

Noel looked round keenly as they entered the library—a spacious room lined to the ceiling with books. Breaking the shelves on the right was a curtained window alcove, and facing it across the room an ancient oak door studded with heavy nails.

Mr. Weatherall led the way to the inner door, pointing out a small cabinet from which the golden plaque had vanished.

"The guests will assemble in the library," he explained, as he unlocked the door. "My daughter will receive her gift in here. You will see," he added drily, "there is little fear of any burglarious entry."

Noel pursed his lips as he glanced round the inner room. It had once been used as an armoury, and the massive stone walls and deep-embossed window, heavily barred, gave it rather the appearance of a prison.

There were ancient weapons on the walls, and several suits of armour standing in dim corners.

In the centre of the room, facing the door, was a plain deal table and chair. On this Mr. Weatherall placed the precious box.

"I shall leave it here, Raymond, in your care, while I inform my daughter and the guests," he said. "The only entrance to the library is by the far door, so you may carry out your investigation without fear of interruption. Come, Vining, let us prepare the guests."

They stepped out into the library, and Mr. Weatherall locked the inner door, handing the key to Noel.

The young detective waited till his host and the secretary had departed, and turned to examine the cabinet.

"Obviously forced by an expert," he murmured. "Someone wearing gloves. Could it have been young Gilford?"

He straightened quickly, anxious to follow up his more intriguing clue before the guests arrived for the presentation. From his wallet he carefully extracted the leather book-title.

"The Man in the Iron Mask," he repeated softly. "That's by Dumas. It'd come in the fiction section—under 'D'—if our young librarian kept his books in order."

Quickly he made his way along the shelves, scanning the serried rows of books.

"Ah, here are the novels!" he muttered with quickened interest. "Let me see—'D'—that should be near the end of this row."

But the shelves terminated at the curtained alcove, with the letter "E," and the next block of shelves displayed books under the initial "C."

"Then 'D' must be behind the curtain, in the alcove," muttered Noel, with a faint smile.

He pulled back the velvet curtains, and the smile was frozen on his lips as he was greeted by a stifled cry.

A girl was crouching there in the window alcove, a dusty volume grasped tightly in her hand, a frightened look in her grey eyes.

"June!" gasped Noel, catching her by the arm and staring incredulously into her face. "June—"

His voice trailed away, and a look of utter amazement crept into his eyes.

He realised that he was staring at June's double—at an impostor!

THE STOLEN NECKLACE



NOEL'S first reaction to the amazing discovery was one of profound relief. June, his young niece and partner, was not mixed up in this strange affair.

But his relief was quickly followed by anger at the mystery girl's audacious imposture.

His hand tightened on her arm as she struggled, and his eyes were cold and accusing.

"Well, young lady," he said, "it looks as though the game's up. You know who I am?"

The girl nodded, her lips trembling, but her expression of terror had given way to one of desperate appeal.

"Please—please don't give me away!" she gasped. "You don't understand."

Noel stared at her, taken aback by the tragic appeal in her voice.

"I understand, young lady, that you have been deliberately impersonating my niece," he rejoined sternly, "and assisting a cunning trickster to rob your host."

"No!" gasped the girl, shrinking from him. "No, that's not true. Norman's innocent—I

swear it. Neither he nor I know anything about those dreadful thefts—"

"Just a minute!" cut in Noel grimly. "Who is Norman? The young librarian—Gilford?"

The girl nodded speechlessly, tears in her eyes.

"If he's innocent, where is he?" demanded Noel.

"I—I don't know," whispered the girl brokenly.

"Do you expect me to believe that? Come," when on the young detective, regarding her searchingly, "I want the truth! If you are as innocent as you ask me to believe, why are you playing the part of an impostor?"

The girl bit her lip, a trapped look flashing into her eyes.

"I can't explain now—I daren't," she breathed. "But you must give me a chance—a chance to find Norman and put everything right. Oh—hark!"

The blood drained from her face as there came a distant sound of footsteps and voices. Mr. Weatherall and his guests were returning.

"Let me go!" she begged. "Only for a minute. They mustn't find me here—"

There was something in the girl's appealing expression, the look in her grey eyes, that reminded Noel irresistibly of June.

And he was conscious of a sudden conviction of her innocence—a conviction that conflicted with his common sense.

"There's a screen over there by the door," he snapped tersely. "Get behind it—and wait till the others have gone. I'll have a word with you later."

With a swift look of gratitude the girl darted across the room, stepping behind the screen which stood by the door of the armoury. Noel, lighting a cigarette, walked coolly to meet Mr. Weatherall and his secretary, who entered the library with several of the guests. There was a glimmer of excitement in the secretary's eyes.

"I say, did you see her?" he demanded.

The young detective stiffened, instinctively on his guard.

"Who?" he inquired casually.

"Miss Gaynor—your niece," jerked Mr. Weatherall. "She was seen to slip into the house and come this way."

Noel's eyes were steady as he met the secretary's suspicious stare.

"I haven't seen my niece," he replied. "I am convinced she is not in the house."

"Nonsense, man!" rejoined Mr. Weatherall. "I tell you she was seen a few minutes ago, hurrying towards the library."

"I suggest we search the room, sir," put in Vining.

"That's quite unnecessary!" snapped Noel. "I have not left the room since you were here. No one could have entered without my seeing them."

"Then why," exclaimed Vining, pointing—"why is the door to the armoury open? Who's in there?"

Noel spun round with a start, his face paling incredulously.

Vining had spoken the truth. The inner door was standing open, though the key was still in his pocket.

"The necklace!" exclaimed Mr. Weatherall. He strode for the door, followed by his secretary and one or two of the bewildered guests.

Noel, his thoughts racing, seized the opportunity to glance behind the screen. The mystery girl was not there. She must have had a duplicate key, and let herself into the armoury.

At that moment there came an angry shout from Mr. Weatherall.

"Raymond! The necklace—it's gone, man—stolen!"

White-faced and stern, Noel strode into the armoury—to come to a sudden halt, his eyes narrowed incredulously.

On the bare table the jewel-case stood open, its priceless contents missing, and on the floor near by lay a girl's summery hat.

But of the mystery girl—June's amazing double—there was no sign. She had vanished from the barred, stone-walled room as though spirited into thin air.

Noel made to snatch up the crumpled hat, but Vining was too quick for him.

"Here's proof, sir!" he exclaimed, turning to the enraged Mr. Weatherall. "The girl was here, and now she's escaped with the necklace. It's strange," he added with a significant smile, "that Mr. Raymond did not see her enter—or leave."

Noel's hands clenched as he encountered his host's grim glance. He realised only too well that he was in a dangerously awkward quandary.

In giving way to a moment's kindly impulse, he had permitted the elusive girl to enter the armoury. Her hat was proof that she had been there. But by what incredible means had she escaped—taking with her the priceless necklace?

"Well, Raymond," put in Mr. Weatherall grimly, interrupting his thoughts, "what have you to say about this?"

"Frankly sir," he said, "I am baffled for the moment about the necklace. I assure you I did not unlock the armoury door, neither did I see anyone unlock it. But who ever may have been responsible, it was not my niece, June Gaynor."

Vining laughed shortly.

"Then how do you account for this hat, and the fact that the young woman must have given us the slip under our very noses, while you were supposed to be on guard in the library?" he demanded.

Noel's eyes narrowed suddenly. He was staring at something that lay near the pedestal of one of the suits of armour—something that looked at first glance like a wet, crumpled leaf. Quietly he picked it up. It was a scrap of damp seaweed. There was a strange glitter in his eyes as he pocketed it and turned to his host.

"Mr. Weatherall," he said, "I promise to give you a full answer to your questions—and Mr. Vining's—in a few hours' time."

The owner of the Grange eyed him sharply. "And the necklace?" he asked.

"Will be recovered when I arrest the thief," rejoined Noel coolly. "But I must ask, sir, for full liberty to pursue my investigation in my own way."

He looked challengingly at the secretary as he spoke.

"Very well, Raymond," said Mr. Weatherall, after a moment's hesitation. "On account of my old regard for you and your reputation, I'll give you till this evening to clear up the mystery. If you fail"—he shrugged—"I shall be compelled to call in the local police and inform them of Miss Gaynor's activities."

After Mr. Weatherall and his secretary had departed to break the news to the other guests, the young detective was galvanised into action.

His first care was to test the walls and stone floor of the armoury, and the single, iron-barred window. But the floor was as solid as the walls, and the bars at the window were immovable.

Baffled, he returned to the library, his mind still working on a train of thoughts awakened by his latest clue. A piece of seaweed!

The young detective crossed to the bolted french windows, and stared out across the terraced grounds to the distant, sparkling sea.

Reaching up, he drew the bolts and cautiously opened the windows. As he did so he heard the shrill pealing of a bell in some distant part of the house.

Swiftly Noel stepped out on to the terrace, closing the windows behind him. At the same moment the ringing ceased.

The terraced grounds were deserted, and bathed in the last afternoon sunlight. Noel realised that he had little time in which to keep his promise before dusk set in. He hurried down the steps and crossed the

grounds, looking for footprints. He failed to find any, and at last reached a low stone wall overlooking the cliff and the rock-strewn beach below. Some way to the left lay the public gardens and promenade, where he had first seen June's mystery double.

Noel stared over the wall. A narrow, treacherous-looking path led down the face of the cliff, and it was possible that the girl had been watching this spot through her binoculars.

With Noel to think was to act. In a moment he was over the wall, and making his way cautiously down the narrow path to the deserted beach.

The young detective slithered over rocks and seaweed, finding difficulty in keeping his footing. But his eyes glittered as he saw that someone had been here before him.

Unmistakable footprints showed in the wet sand, and they had not been left by a girl.

There was a faint frown on Noel's face as he carefully followed up those footprints. To whom did they belong, he wondered. Who had recently come this way?

The broken trail led to the base of the cliff, and as Noel followed it, his pulses quickening, he found himself in a deep fissure—rather like a narrow cave—ending in a mass of fallen chalk.

"Looks as though someone's been excavating recently," he muttered, staring up into the darkness. "And some of those boulders look a bit unsafe."

He stepped aside, and taking a fountain-pen from his pocket, touched a trigger. A tiny beam of white light cut the shadows, playing over the chalk walls and seaweed-covered floor.

With a surprised ejaculation he bent to pick up something lying among the seaweed—the last thing one might have expected to find in such a place. An old, leather-bound book, the title missing from its ribbed cover.

"The Man in the Iron Mask!" ejaculated Noel, his eyes glinting. "That's the book the girl took from the shelves before she disappeared. But why did she want it, and how on earth did it get here?"

Quickly he opened it, convinced that here was a vital clue to the girl's disappearance, linking with the scrap of seaweed he had found in the armoury. The girl had been carrying the book when she had vanished, and there was seaweed in the cave.

But there was nothing written on the fly-leaf as he had half hoped—nothing concealed among the yellowed pages.

Baffled, Noel closed the book, intending to examine it more closely at his leisure, but just then a faint sound caused him to turn.

He was in time to see something move on a shadowy ledge above, and at the same instant a girl's terrified scream awoke the echoes.

"Oh—look out!"

The young detective sprang back in the nick of time, as with a dull, ominous rumble a huge chalk boulder crashed from above, thudding into the sand where he had been standing.

White to the lips, half-blinded by a smother of chalk, Noel leaped in the direction from which the cry had come. His groping hand fastened on a girl's slender arm. As she tried to escape him, he dimly discerned her fair hair and pale, attractive face.

June's elusive double!

"I've been looking for you, young lady!" he said grimly. "You tricked me once, and I'm not letting you go a second time."

He heard her stifled gasp as he hustled her towards the entrance of the cave, and turned to stare at her in the sunlight that streamed through the opening.

Then an incredulous ejaculation was torn from his lips as he met the bewildered look in her lively grey eyes.

For the girl was not June's double. She was his young niece and partner—June herself!

(Please turn to page 177.)



FALSE FRIEND of the River Revellers

A STARTLING ACCUSATION

RITA CHALMERS and her chums of River House School joined forces with the boys of the near-by Grey Towers, under the leadership of Barry Howard, to enter a team, known as the River Revellers, for the forthcoming local regatta.

The River Revellers soon discovered that someone was secretly plotting against them.

After several encounters with the secret enemy Rita suspected him of being Ralph Nevison, the popular young sports master at the boys' school. Some of the boys, however, believed that Rita's chum, Cherry Oakwood, was the mysterious trickster.

Rita was given twenty-four hours to prove her chum's innocence and expose the real trickster.

Cherry found a box containing vital proof of Mr. Nevison's guilt, but was forced to hide it, to return for it later.

While her chum was gone, Rita was confronted by the boys, who demanded that she should give them the name of the secret enemy as she had promised. Desperately Rita hoped that Cherry would return in time with the proof as she declared recklessly:

"His name is Mr. Ralph Nevison!"

A STUNNED, incredulous silence followed Rita's dramatic accusation.

The boys were too amazed even to murmur as, open-mouthed, they stared from Rita's accusing figure to the smiling young sports master.

Mr. Nevison appeared as perfectly at ease as though nothing had happened. Hands in pockets, eyebrows slightly raised, he looked quizzically round the group—his glance resting finally on Rita.

In vain she looked for a trace of guilt on his handsome, boyish face—in his smiling eyes. She saw only amusement, and a hint of reproach.

"This is hardly a time for joking, Rita," he said pleasantly. "The boys want a serious answer."

"You've heard my answer—all of you!" flashed Rita, turning to the astounded group. "The secret enemy is standing there, in front of you. The sports master you've all trusted. Mr. Nevison!"

By RENEE FRAZER

This time the silence was broken by a loud, indignant mutter that grew into a roar.

"Rita!" protested Barry, unable to believe his ears.

"Are you crazy?" shouted Dan.

The squire's stern voice interrupted the tumult as he called for silence.

"Miss Chalmers," he said grimly, "kindly explain your fantastic accusation!"

"Come, Rita," put in Mr. Nevison in kindly tones, "own up to the joke! I can assure you there'll be no ill-feeling on my part."

Rita's hands clenched as she stared at him, amazed at his cool audacity. Even now—in face of her accusation—he was able to adopt that gentle, half mocking tone, as though he were humouring a child!

She felt her blood boil as she thought of his rascally efforts to spoil the regatta—his attempts to throw the blame on Cherry!

And he could stand there, smiling reproachfully, a pained look on his handsome face, his dark eyes cool and unflinching.

"I—I'm not joking!" declared Rita unsteadily, as she turned appealingly to the squire. "Mr. Nevison has tricked us all—and I'll show you the proof in a few minutes!"

She looked desperately towards the river as she spoke. Why hadn't Cherry arrived with the vital proof? What could have delayed her madcap chum?

"But this—this is preposterous!" exclaimed the squire, as the boys muttered angrily. "Nevison—what on earth is the girl talking about? Have you any answer to her absurd suggestion?"

The young sports master shook his head, a troubled expression on his face.

"I had thought Rita was joking, sir, but apparently she is in earnest. I can only suggest"—he glanced at her reproachfully—"that she has been persuaded by someone else to make this accusation. Someone who has cause to fear the truth."

His frank, pleasant manner, without a trace of rancour, made a profound impression on the squire and the boys alike—on all except Rita.

"Miss Chalmers," put in the squire sternly, "you have made a very serious charge against

Mr. Nevison. I demand that you show us the proof on which your accusation is based."

"Hear, hear!" chorused the boys. Only Barry remained silent and bewildered as he tried to catch Rita's eye.

Rita clenched her hands, her face rather pale.

"It will be here in a minute," she declared breathlessly. "Cherry is bringing it—"

"Cherry!" exclaimed Dan, and the boys exchanged significant glances.

The squire looked perplexed.

"I don't understand," he said. "Who—"

"Cherry Oakwood," explained Mr. Nevison easily. "Rita's friend. She is the girl you were inquiring about the other day, sir."

A sudden cloud crossed the squire's face, and it seemed to Rita that he was struggling under some emotion. With an obvious effort he regained his composure.

"Cherry Oakwood?" he murmured. "Yes, yes—of course. But how is she concerned in this affair?"

"Cherry found the proof," said Rita boldly. "She promised to bring it to me—here."

"You've only Cherry's word for that!" put in Dan.

"Cherry's word is enough for me!" rejoined Rita.

Mr. Nevison glanced at his watch, and a mocking gleam flickered for an instant in his dark eyes.

"Cherry appears to have been unduly delayed," he murmured. "Perhaps she had cause to change her mind?"

An angry murmur went up.

"Look here," cut in Dan, "are we boys going to be made fools of, like this? If Cherry's got the proof, as she told Rita, she's had time enough to bring it along. I suggest we go and find her!"

A loud buzz of approval greeted this suggestion.

"An excellent idea," agreed the squire gruffly. "The sooner we get this painful matter settled, the better—eh, Nevison?"

"Exactly, sir," agreed the young sports master.

"It's clear that Rita is suffering under some strange delusion—and I'm as anxious as you are to have the truth thrashed out."

Rita had no option but to comply—and, truth to tell, she was becoming anxious about her chum's prolonged absence.

Remembering Cherry's story of the meeting at Riverside Cafe, she had more cause than ever to dread the young sports master's unscrupulous tactics.

She knew that he would stick at nothing to gain his ends—and she had most reason to fear him when he smiled in that gentle, reproachful way she knew so well.

As Cherry had arranged to come by way of the river, it was agreed to take out the boats to find her.

Rita and the squire occupied the smaller of the two boats, with Barry and the young sports master. Dan and several of the other boys piled into the larger boat.

The remainder of the party stood anxiously on the sloping lawn, awaiting their return.

The whole thing seemed like a dream to Rita. The fading sunlight reflecting on the splashing oars, the silence almost unbroken except by the ripple of the water past the bows.

Scarcely anyone spoke during that strange river trip. Even the usually exuberant boys were strangely quiet.

The only person entirely at his ease was Mr. Nevison, as he and Barry took turns at the oars.

Rita, kneeling in the prow, stared anxiously towards the distant bend, hoping against hope to see some sign of her chum.

Suddenly a shout went up from Dan.

"Look—there's a canoe!"

Rita's heart gave a bound, as she shaded her eyes from the glare of the sun. Surely enough there was a canoe, just appearing round the

bend, swinging from side to side in a curiously erratic fashion.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the squire. "Surely—there's no one aboard!"

There came another shout from Dan.

"It's one of our canoes!" he exclaimed. "Look—and there's another! They're adrift!"

Rita's blood suddenly ran cold as she clutched the prow of the boat, staring at the drifting canoes.

What did it mean? Where—where was Cherry?

The young sports master had ceased rowing and Rita alone saw the strange glint in his eyes as one of the canoes drifted close to them and Barry made a grab at it.

"The mooring-rope's been cut, sir!" he exclaimed.

"This is foul play!" declared Mr. Nevison grimly. "Come on, you boys!"

He commenced to row more swiftly, and a moment later the two boats shot round the bend.

A yell went up from the boys at what they saw, and the squire's face turned black as thunder.

For the boathouse gaped wide open and the river was dotted with drifting craft, moored together and heading for almost certain disaster.

Coolly, above the angry commotion, came the young sports master's voice as he rapped out his orders.

The large boat swung round to head off the drifting craft, and Mr. Nevison and the squire scrambled ashore, followed by Rita and Barry.

From the river there came a sudden accusing shout. Dan was pointing excitedly—and as Rita followed the direction of his pointing finger, a cold hand seemed to clutch at her heart.

Away in the distance, rowing desperately from the scene of the disaster, was a white-clad, girlish figure in a small boat. A fleeting glimpse only Rita caught of it as the boys' shout reached her ears.

"That's the girl who did it, sir—that's Cherry Oakwood! After her, you chaps!"

"Cherry!" whispered Rita brokenly, her face deathly pale as she stared after the receding boat.

For the moment her throbbing brain could not grasp what the scene implied. Her one thought was to go to her chum's aid.

But as she started for the remaining canoe a firm hand closed restrainingly on her shoulder.

"One minute, Rita!"

She turned sharply, to meet the young sports master's grave, pitying glance.

"Rita—I'm terribly sorry," he said gently. "But you can see now how you were taken in by that girl—and how you misjudged me!"

The hot blood rushed to Rita's face as she drew away from him, her eyes blazing.

"You—you trickster!" she breathed, a sob in her voice. "You arranged this, to revenge yourself on Cherry. I—I hate you!"

HER CHUM'S RETURN



A HURT look crossed Mr. Nevison's handsome face, but behind the reproach in his eyes there was a gleam of mockery.

"Come, Rita," he said. "You don't mean that. Be sensible now, and tell the squire that you're sorry—"

"I'll tell him the truth!" exclaimed Rita defiantly.

The young sports master's eyes turned suddenly as cold as steel.

"I warn you, Rita," he said softly, "you'll find me better as a friend than as an enemy!"

Then his expression changed as Barry emerged from the bushes, followed by the squire.

"This is a most distressing affair, Nevison," said the squire gruffly. "Cherry Oakwood, of all girls—" There was deep emotion in his voice. "To think that she should have done a thing like this—"

"It's not true!" burst out Rita desperately. "Cherry isn't to blame—it's a hateful trick!" "I'm afraid, sir, that Rita's loyalty to her chum is blinding her to the facts," said Mr. Nevison gently.

The squire nodded, and even Barry's grey eyes held an expression of pity.

Rita bit her lip, realising the uselessness of appealing to them without proof.

Somehow she must find Cherry and discover what had happened.

In spite of her anxiety, Rita found herself wondering at the squire's unusual interest in her chum—his evident distress. There was a mystery here that Cherry alone could help to clear up. Perhaps—

Her racing thoughts were interrupted by the return of the pursuing boat, the boys looking angry and disgruntled.

"She gave us the slip, sir!" declared Dan grimly. "Got clean away. But it's plain as a pikestaff now that she's been tricking us all along."

"And Rita had the cheek to accuse Mr. Nevison!" shouted one of the boys. "When all the time it was her precious chum—"

"You can't blame Rita!" spoke up Barry loyally. "She trusted Cherry, and believed her story."

The squire had drawn aside with Mr. Nevison, and the boys assembled in an indignant group round Barry and Rita.

"Personally," announced Dan, "I'm fed-up with the whole show! I vote we disband the River Revellers and leave the girls to go their own way."

The blood drained from Rita's face, and a protesting cry escaped her lips.

If the River Revellers were disbanded, it would mean not only the collapse of all her cherished plans—but the triumph of the secret enemy!

Only by keeping their river enterprise going could she hope to unmask him and clear her chum's name.

She looked appealingly at Barry, and that boy came loyally to her aid. Though deeply hurt by Rita's accusation against his favourite master, his natural chivalry sought a way out.

"Look here, you chaps," he said, "there's no sense in chucking up the regatta just because one girl's been trying to ruin our plans—and failed. Cherry's out of it, for good!"

"Hear, hear!"
"We know," went on Barry, "that Rita's as keen on the stunt as any of us—it was her idea in the first place. And we can't blame her for standing by a chum. We'd all do the same!"

His words obviously had an effect, in spite of several dissenting murmurs.

Barry was quick to press home his advantage.

"I suggest we have a meeting to-morrow to discuss the whole question," he said, "and make new plans. Meanwhile, let bygones be bygones. We've got nothing more to fear from the enemy!"

There was a loud murmur of agreement, and as Rita looked up with a sigh of relief she encountered Mr. Nevison's mocking glance.

The young sports master had overheard!

The squire departed a few minutes later, and having salvaged the last of their boats and securely padlocked the boathouse, the boys dispersed in excited groups. Barry alone seemed as if he would linger for a last word with Rita, but she was anxious to find Cherry to discover what had taken place. She waited among the bushes till the others were out of sight, and then returned cautiously to the boathouse.

She hoped to find some clue, however slender, to explain the disaster—and her pulses

quicken as, among the tangled weeds, she came on a pile of ashes, still warm to the touch—and the charred remains of a wooden box!

Her thoughts flashed to Cherry's vivid description of her discovery at the riverside cafe. This must be the box her chum had hidden—the box that had contained the vital evidence!

Rita's heart sank as she stared at the smoking ashes, trying to picture the scene.

Cherry must have come here to fetch the box. And then—then what had happened? Who had cut loose the boats? Why had her chum been rowing away so desperately when they caught sight of her?

But surmise was useless, and Rita felt that precious time was slipping through her fingers.

Dejectedly she made her way back to the school.

As she entered the Common-room she became aware of an unusual atmosphere of tension—a sudden hush. Girls were gathered in whispering groups, and all eyes were turned towards her.

"So you've come back," sneered Della Hopkins. "Where's Cherry?"

Rita's eyes widened.

"Isn't she here?" she asked.

"Of course she's not!" retorted Della. "The whole school's heard what's happened. The headmaster of Grey Towers has phoned up Miss Lester, and she and Miss Ridley have been in confab for the last half hour. My goodness, I wouldn't care to be in your shoes—or Cherry's!" she added, with a snigger.

Rita eyed the sneak scornfully, as she turned to the others.

"You girls don't believe that Cherry was to blame?" she asked appealingly. "You know her as well as I do! Have you ever known her to do anything mean or spiteful? Answer me!"

She looked round at the self-conscious faces of her listeners. It was Joyce Hargreave who spoke up.

"We don't know what to think, Rita. We like Cherry—but we all know that she's a bit of a scatterbrain. And they say that she was actually seen—"

A distant rumble of thunder cut into her words, and some of the more timid girls moved away from the windows. Rita glanced anxiously at the darkening sky.

Where was Cherry—now?

Just then a hush fell on the girls as Miss Ridley came into the room. She glanced keenly round the group.

"Ah—Rita!" she said. "You will kindly report to the headmistress at once. Is Cherry here?"

"No, Miss Ridley," breathed Rita.

The other's lips tightened. There was another growl of thunder, a spatter of rain on the window as she curtly beckoned Rita to follow her.

The interview with the headmistress was painful and prolonged. Rita was questioned and cross-questioned—mainly by Miss Ridley. Staunchly she defended Cherry, asserting her chum's innocence of everything that had happened.

"Then where is Cherry?" inquired Miss Ridley tartly. "Why hasn't she returned?"

Rita clenched her hands, unable to reply. The rain, lashing against the window, struck a cold chill to her heart.

After supper Rita organised a search-party, comprised of members of the team. They searched the grounds and the towpath, calling Cherry's name—but at length they were forced to return in time for roll-call without finding a trace of the absent girl.

Rita did not even attempt to sleep when she retired to the dormitory. Fully dressed, she lay on her bed listening to the sound of the storm. After a while she decided to slip down to the Common-room to fetch a book.

A distant clock was striking eleven as she crept downstairs, the muffled fury of the wind and rain effectively hiding her stealthy footsteps.

By the gleam of her pocket-torch she selected a book and turned to the door.

And just then her heart missed a beat as she heard a soft eerie rapping—a rapping urgently repeated.

Instinctively she glanced towards the window as a glare of lightning lit up the leaded panes.

For a fraction of an instant she saw a white face pressed against the glass—Cherry's face!

DISGRACE FOR CHERRY



"CHERRY!" gasped Rita.

Frantically she groped for her fallen torch, and stumbled towards the window. Her fingers fumbled with the catch as she pulled it open, admitting a wild gust of wind and rain.

Then she saw the drenched, bedraggled figure kneeling on the sill, and with a little sob of relief she caught her chum by the shoulders, almost dragging her into the room.

Cherry's teeth were chattering, her clothes were torn and dripping with water, but her eyes shone in her pale face with a reckless excitement.

Rita felt almost too choked to speak as she hugged her.

"Cherry, I thought—I was afraid—"

Cherry shook some of the moisture from her hair as she tried to regain her breath.

"Sorry, old thing!" she panted. "I thought I'd never get back to-night. I got trapped in an old mill where I was taking shelter—the door slammed, and I had to climb through a window—"

"But, Cherry, what happened before that?" breathed Rita, as she took off her chum's dripping-blazer and wrapped her in her own dressing-gown. "The drifting boats—the boys think you're to blame. They saw you rowing away—"

"Oh—my goodness!" Cherry's face turned suddenly pale. "I hadn't thought of that. When I went to collect that box I saw someone meddling with the boats—and gave chase. Then the storm came on and I took shelter. But, Rita—I've got a clue!"

"You mean—" whispered Rita.

Cherry's momentary agitation had given place to excitement.

"The man dropped something," she breathed. "He must have been burning some papers, and one of them he held on to for some reason. It's terribly thrilling, Rita—it's part of the proof we want, though some of it is charred."

"Where is it?" breathed Rita eagerly.

Cherry was fumbling in her damp pockets. "I've got it somewhere," she declared. "It links up with the island—and with that picture we found. It's got the name 'Oakwood' on it, and a confession of some kind—"

"Cherry, let me see—quickly!" urged Rita.

But at that moment a footstep sounded in the doorway and the lights blazed up.

The two chums spun round to confront Miss Ridley and the duty prefect.

"Cherry Oakwood!" The mistress's face was grim as she eyed the dishevelled figure wrapped in Rita's dressing-gown. "So you have dared to return at this hour of night—after your scandalous conduct—"

"Miss Ridley!" burst out Rita, "Cherry can explain everything!"

"No doubt," put in Miss Ridley dryly. "She will have ample opportunity in the morning. Meanwhile, Hilda—she turned to the prefect—"you will please escort Cherry to the detention-room, where she will remain till her case is heard."

Rita's heart turned cold as she heard Cherry's broken cry.

The detention-room!

That could only mean one thing. Very rarely was that bare and cheerless room ever used—and its unfortunate occupants were usually girls awaiting expulsion.

"Miss Ridley—that isn't fair!" burst out Rita. "Nothing has been proved against Cherry. She hasn't been given a chance—"

"Silence, Rita!" exclaimed Miss Ridley, her eyes glinting. "How dare you question my orders? Cherry, you will go with Hilda at once!"

With a despairing glance at her chum, Cherry was led away.

Rita groped her way back to the dormitory, a choking lump in her throat, her eyes smarting with rebellious tears.

As she got into bed, her mind was still dazed by the dismaying plight in which her chum found herself, but one thought was crystal clear.

"I must have a talk with her," she murmured. "If only I can get that clue from her I may be able to prove her innocence."

She waited a few minutes, then throwing back the clothes, she donned her slippers and again stole out of the dormitory.

Along the corridor she groped her way, only suddenly to pull up in dismay. Footsteps sounded on the stairs, and before she could scurry away an irate voice rang out:

"Rita Chalmers, what does this mean?"

And there before her loomed Miss Ridley's stern figure.

Nonplussed, Rita stood there, and the Form-mistress pursed her lips grimly.

"You were about to visit your chum," she snapped. "Do you deny it?"

Helplessly, Rita shook her head.

"Yes, I was on my way to the detention-room," she admitted, "but—"

Miss Ridley raised an irate hand.

"I will listen to no excuses," she cried. "Surely you must know that it is forbidden for any girl to communicate with anyone in the detention-room! Get back to bed at once, and see that you do not leave it again until morning."

"Y—yes, Miss Ridley," stammered Rita, and reluctantly she re-entered the dormitory.

The Form-mistress's room was right opposite the dormitory, so Rita decided it would be foolish to risk being caught again; but next morning, as soon as she was dressed, she hurried down to the first floor and crept along the passage that led to the detention-room.

No matter what the cost, she must have a talk with Cherry. Only if she got the clue from her chums could she hope to save her.

Halting outside the door, she knocked—gently at first, and then more loudly.

"Cherry!" she called softly. "Cherry, it's only me—Rita. I want to talk to you!"

But there was no reply—not even the creak of a bed or a sleepy murmur.

A sudden uneasiness gripped Rita's heart, a premonition she could not explain.

Turning quickly, she hurried softly downstairs and out into the grounds.

The window of the detention-room overlooked a deserted corner of the garden, and as Rita came in sight of it a broken gasp escaped her lips.

Her vague fears were justified.

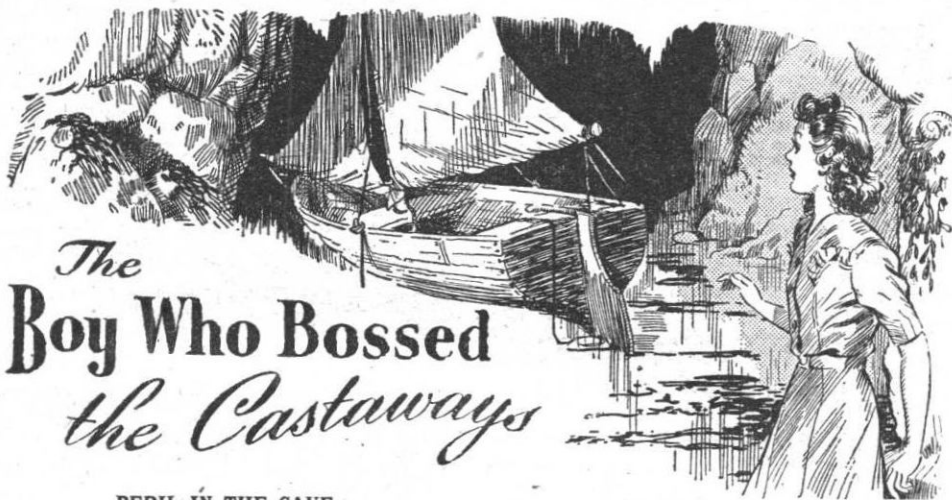
The window stood open, and dangling from the sill was a home-made rope of sheets and blankets, reaching almost to the ground!

Even as she darted towards it she heard excited voices and footsteps. From a side entrance hurried the duty prefect, accompanied by Miss Ridley.

The mistress took in the scene at a glance, and her eyes glittered.

"So!" she said grimly. "Cherry Oakwood has admitted her guilt—by running away!"

It seems impossible for Rita to unmask Mr. Nevison now—without Cherry's aid. You must be sure to read next Friday's chapters of this serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.



The Boy Who Bossed the Castaways

PERIL IN THE CAVE

JULIE WALLACE and her chums from the s.y. Daffodil were marooned on the Island of the Golden Palm, where Julie's father had been castaway for two years.

Julie and Larry Woodstock, a lawless boy also marooned on the island, discovered that the secret of a gigantic gold-coloured pillar in the form of a palm tree, was a diary belonging to a Captain Stubbs, who had died on the island. It gave details of a hoard of treasure on a near-by island, which the captain had left to Julie's father and his first mate, who, Larry told her, was his own father. Nell Gilson, one of the castaways, denied Larry's right to a share of the treasure, declaring that it was he who had been the captain's first mate.

While the castaways built a raft to carry them to the island, Julie discovered that Gilson had hidden in a cave a boat, all ready to sail. She realised that Gilson meant to desert the castaways, and, intending to warn her unsuspecting chums, she turned, to find herself confronted by Gilson and his two confederates, Ada Henshaw, and Hitchcock, a sailor.

FOR a moment Julie stood there as if petrified, staring helplessly at the three enemies who barred her way of escape. It was hopeless to dodge past them, but—what about the cave? Perhaps there was another way out of it!

Desperate, she turned and fled back into the deep tunnel in the cliff. Her action took Gilson momentarily by surprise, and then he gave chase.

Gaining the back of the cave, Julie stared frantically about her. There, in front of her, was the sailing boat in which Gilson & Co. intended to flee from the island. From it her gaze wandered to the limestone walls, seeking some break in them. In the back of the cave was the mouth of a long tunnel, but before she could investigate it, there came a rush of feet and Gilson, Ada and Hitchcock appeared in sight.

Wildly, Julie turned; but too late. Hitchcock had seized her, and, though frantically she struggled, he held her tight, while Gilson, running forward, produced a length of cord from his pocket.

In five minutes Julie was down and trussed up, and Gilson was towering above her.

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

"So much for your interference, Miss Julie Wallace!" he said. "When you get free you're welcome to rush off and split to your friends! But I think we'll keep you here for the present." You won't be found until we've gone—"

"You mean you're going—now?" Julie quivered.

"Not now," Gilson smiled. "To-night—after full tide. So sorry we shall have to leave you behind! But, unfortunately, you know too much."

He nodded to Hitchcock, who picked her up and carried her across the cave and dumped her on a mound of sand. Then the trio had a consultation together. Ada turned.

"Bye-bye!" she called, with a wave of the hand. "We're just going back to the camp to collect some oddments. But we'll see you when the tide's turned!"

And, with another mocking wave, they were gone.

For how long she lay there Julie hardly knew. But presently she became aware of a new peril—the afternoon tide was rising now. The cave was beginning to fill with water.

And she was alone—alone and completely at its mercy!

"Help!" she shrieked. "Help!" With horror Julie watched the incoming swirl of the waters, realising the dreadful peril of her position. Here she was, a helpless prisoner in a secret cave, unable to move either hand or foot because of the cruel bonds that chained her; with no one, except the villains who had left her in this plight, knowing where she was.

For how could Larry know? She must get free! That thought beat in her mind with frantic insistence. Not only for her own sake, but even more for the sake of her castaway friends whom Gilson and Ada and Hitchcock were so treacherously planning to betray.

They must be warned of Gilson's intention—must know that he was plotting to leave them stranded without help, communication, or food upon this island.

She found herself staring at the boat in which Gilson & Co. proposed their villainous getaway—the boat made by the hands of her own father and Larry's father.

A strong, sturdy vessel it was, rocking gently now in its natural little dock and rising higher and higher as the tide water deepened. That boat would accommodate all the castaways. In that boat, given fair weather, they could hope to reach Green Lizard Island in two or three days. But in the crazy raft which they were constructing now—

Julie shuddered.

Again she shouted and shouted—until at last her voice was hoarse. But now even the echoes did not answer her. They were drowned by the thunder of the incoming tide.

In helpless horror Julie watched the sea creeping nearer, nearer. Relentlessly it was sweeping across the floor of the cave, towards her feet. And presently she felt its cold touch as it lapped over her bound ankles. In frantic terror she shrieked again.

She strove desperately to scramble back a little, but only succeeded in toppling over on to her side. By a superhuman effort she managed to right herself and then sat rigid, with the water lapping around her knees as she saw, floating straight towards her, a huge balk of timber.

It was a plank of sorts, inches thick, and almost eighteen inches broad, and Julie saw jagged nails were projecting from its extreme ends, as though it had been violently torn from some heavy structure. Even in the distress of the moment she found time to wonder exactly where it had come from. And then, as a wave lifted the plank and sent it shooting towards her, her face blanched.

She thought for a moment it would crash straight down upon her.

But it didn't. The wave threw it to her right. But the same wave hit Julie. It seemed to lift her, to throw her back on to the slightly rising ground behind her, and when she had recovered sufficiently she found herself facing, not the cave mouth, but the back of the cave.

Again she saw the long tunnel with a gleam of light behind it; saw also that the great timber plank, the end studded with jagged nails towards her, was resting at her side.

"Oh, what luck!" she breathed.

She leaned forward. She pressed her bound wrists around one of the upstanding nails, and frantically she began to see-saw with her hands, pressing her cords against the nail in the desperate hope that she could fray them sufficiently to snap them.

Her agony of mind dulled her to the physical pain in her wrists. Furiously she sawed on, pulling madly as she sawed. And suddenly her heart gave a great jump, for now the cords, frayed through, snapped, and, with a jerk, she found her hands free—free—

Another wave flung her forward. The cave was full of a thundering, roaring sea water. "Oh, I must be quick—quick!" she almost sobbed.

She forced herself to be calm, though frantic necessity was urging her on. Fumblingly she attacked the bonds which bound her legs while the sea boiled and crashed about her. But at last she had done it. With a little cry of triumph, she threw the loose cords off, straightened up, and wheeled round. And then her heart sank.

The cave mouth was almost roof-deep in water. Down there in its dock the secret ship was bobbing and jerking like some animal straining at the leash. She saw at once that she had no chance of reaching the cave mouth against the forceful rush of the water still pouring in. And she saw that in another few minutes the cave would be absolutely full.

Even as she dismally wondered what she should do, a wall of sea water came crashing into her and swept her completely over the small rise on which she had been standing, and into the deeper water which, fed by a dozen turbulent streams, was now forming a gigantic lake behind her.

"Help!" she cried.

But no help was available. Desperately she trod water, feeling pins and needles of fire shooting into her wrists where the biting cords had lacerated her flesh. And then, beside her, she felt the friendly balk of timber, and a wild new hope possessed her as she caught at it; as, somehow, she levered herself on to it, and then lay, clinging to its broad surface on the point of sheer exhaustion.

It seemed to Julie that for a short space she lost consciousness. Everything became darkly vague. She was only conscious of thrashing thunder in her ears, of the seething water about her.

But the rest on the plank revived her. When, once again, she was sufficiently in possession of her senses to take stock of her surroundings, she found that she was being carried irresistibly forward on her improvised raft between the walls of the tunnel. Above her was a crack of light which gave out a sort of unearthly radiance; below her, was water—deepening, restless and black.

And she was shooting relentlessly forward. She realised that beneath her was some powerful current rushing her on to—where?

She did not know. And soon she had given up even wondering. For now the plank began to rock and twist alarmingly. Desperately she hung on. She shrieked as she saw the cliff-wall rushing at her. She clung convulsively as the raft crashed against it; shot back and almost turned turtle.

Julie sobbed aloud. But still she clung on, fiercely gripping the side of the plank with her knees. Back into midstream it bobbed; as though lifted by some gigantic hand from below, irresistibly rushed on again and again, with a sickening impact, crashed into the cliff, reeled back and dipped steeply beneath the waves.

Julie was feeling almost at the end of her tether when still desperately clinging, the plank bounded to the surface again and, in the grip of some fiendish current, rushed on.

She knew that a third collision at the cliff would completely unseat her. Once again she felt her senses swimming. Now ahead, she saw that the great chasm in which she was so nightmarishly sailing had closed up again, and she was entering into new unseen horrors.

Then, for the third time, her friendly plank was hurled against the cliff—this time with a force that made it jump clean out of the water and with a rending crack split right down the centre.

One moment the bewildered Julie found herself poised dizzily above the rushing stream, the next she hit the water, her last hope gone. Breathlessly she rose to the surface again, shaking her head weakly.

Then, even though she was spent, at the very end of her resources, Julie felt herself go paler still with horror. For swimming at her side was a great, silver-shimmering shape. She saw its beady eyes, saw the gleam of white, wicked teeth. And Julie knew that she had a most dreadful water companion.

A shark!

She saw it turn; saw those wide jaws open. She let out one wild, piercing shriek before a blackness, more frightening than any that had gone before, came to engulf her.

LARRY TAKES A MESSAGE



THROUGH that blackness; through that fog of awful fear that enveloped her brain, Julie heard a voice—like a voice in a dream. An untellable voice.

"Julie!" it said.

It was Larry's voice.

It was all a dream, of course, Julie told herself. But it called

her, for a moment, to her senses. It made her open her eyes for one brief, unbelievable blink. And then she saw him.

Larry stood no more than half a dozen yards away, perched on a rocky ledge that led into the cave. She caught a glimpse of steel in his hand. And then—another part of the dream—he had dived.

Julie could never remember clearly what happened then! The memory was vague, confused, punctuated with horrible fear. She was aware of white foam suddenly turning red; she heard Larry's cry of relief. Then she felt his strong arms about her, felt him tugging her forward, and knew with a great and gasping thankfulness that he had won his battle with the shark—that the shark would menace her no more.

Safe in that knowledge, she allowed her mind to grow thankfully blank until—how long after she did not know—she found herself lying on her back in semi-darkness, with Larry bending above her. At her feet the tidal stream still rushed, but here she was, on a gently sloping bank—safe.

"Oh, Larry," she whispered.

"Julie!" he said huskily, and she saw a great light of relief dawn in his face. "Gosh, girl, that was a near thing—"

"You—you killed it?" she asked unsteadily.

"Yeah. Later we'll cook it, and have a feed off it to celebrate the fact," he added.

"Look—"

She looked. There, a few feet away, was the monstrous carcass of the now dead shark, gleaming silver in the dim light of the cave.

"On, Larry," she said faintly. "You—you came just in time—only just in time. But—but how did you find me?"

He told her how he had been working in the cave beneath his hide-out, trying to make the old Daffodil's motor-boat serviceable just as he and Julie had originally planned.

This afternoon, when the tide rose, he had observed that it seemed to be coming on two different currents and had set out to investigate. And then he had discovered the passage that led back to the chasm in which Julie had met the shark and—

"That's all, I guess," he said simply. "But, Julie, how did you come to get in that fix?"

She told him everything, her words tumbling out as her mind freshly awakened to the danger of her castaway friends. Larry listened, his face hard and set, that old steely light in his eyes, his lips set like a tight trap. He breathed deeply when she had finished.

"And so Gilson left you—to that!" he said between his teeth. "And now he plans to run out on the people who trust him." His lips curled in scorn. "If they weren't such fools I'd say they deserve it. We must warn them, Julie!"

"Yes."

"If they'll believe us!" Julie cried, and rose giddily to her feet. "Larry, let's go—"

"You—you feel strong enough?" Larry asked doubtfully.

"Yes."

"O.K. then—"

And then they went, travelling by means of the narrow strip of beach which flanked the rushing stream—Larry with one arm round Julie to help her along.

Finally, after a long, long time it seemed, they reached the cliff.

But Julie was stumbling badly now. By the time they had at last emerged on to the sunlit beach she felt her knees giving way beneath her.

"Julie, you can't go on," he told her.

"But, Larry, I've got to go. I must—must warn them—"

His jaw set again. He knew better than Julie that she would not travel another hundred yards before she collapsed completely.

"Sit there," she said gently.

"But, Larry—I can't. I've got to—"

"I'll go and warn them," Larry announced.

"You?" she cried. Then, suddenly weak, she fell to her knees, and she knew as well as he

that she would not rise again for a long time. "Larry, you can't. They—they'd never believe you—"

"It's up to them," Larry said quietly. "You rest, Julie. You—oh, you poor kid!" he murmured in a compassionate under-breath.

For Julie, her resources utterly spent, had closed her eyes. Willing as her spirit was, exhausted nature had claimed its due, and she was fast asleep.

Larry straightened up. Perhaps it was better this way. Bracing himself as for some ordeal, he turned towards the sea. He hated the task; knew the scornful disbelief he was going to invite, but he was going through with it.

Purposefully he strode towards the castaways' camp. Every one of them was swarming over the raft which, very near completion, now stood on the beach. He got near enough to hail them.

"Hi, you!" he cried.

They looked up then. Larry, who had halted thirty yards away, stood still. For a moment they stared at him in incredulity. Then from Gilson came a roar.

"It's Woodstock! Of all the cheek!"

"Wait a minute!" Larry shouted, and there was that note of command in his voice which made them pause. "Before you start getting excited, hear what I've got to say. I've come from Julie—"

"Grab him!" screamed Gilson.

"Hold on! Wait a minute!" Dick said quickly. "If he has come from Julie—"

"This is just another trick!" Gilson cried.

"You ought to talk about tricks!" Larry said scornfully. "But stop wasting time. I've got a message from Julie—a message of warning—"

"What?" Dick asked.

"Gilson is plotting to run out on you all. He's leaving this island to-night—leaving you stranded—yes, without food or anything. He's got a boat way back on the west coast of the island, and he plans to sail off to-night. Hitchcock and Ada—"

"It's a lie!" shrieked Ada, but for a moment Gilson's face was livid. And among the castaways a buzz of amazement broke out. They did not believe Larry. Not for an instant were they prepared to believe him.

"It's a frame-up!" Gilson roared. "Where is Julie—"

"Not where you left her, you cur—to drown in the cave where your secret boat is hidden!" Larry retorted. "She—"

He got no further. For Gilson had suddenly stopped, snatching up a heavy stone from the beach. In the same second he started with a snarl towards Larry.

Larry saw that it was hopeless. Well, he had done his best. He had kept his promise to Julie, and if they would not heed his word, they could not blame him for what happened. He turned.

"Come back!" howled Gilson.

But Larry was running now—knowing he could easily outstrip his pursuers. And outstrip them he would have done if Gilson had not thrown his stone. Larry was unprepared for that. With vicious force it cracked on the back of his head and sent him pitching forward on to his face in the sand.

When he came to—minutes later—he was as firmly tied as Julie had been a few hours before. His head was reeling.

Twenty yards away, near the raft, the castaways were clustered. They were talking, but through the haze in his head Larry could not catch what they were saying—not that he was interested now. He had said all he had to say as far as the castaways were concerned.

Gilson was doing the talking. And he was staring thoughtfully at the dropping sun as he talked.

"Whether he came from Julie or not, we don't know," he said. "But I'm not feeling

easy in my mind. It's time we went and looked for her."

"Yes, rather," Dick said at once. "Let's form a search party—"

"Let's form two," Gilson amended quickly. "Ada and Hitchcock, you come with me. We'll go westwards—in the direction Woodstock came from. Mardle, you take Roly and go east. Professor and Mr. Fry—perhaps you'd better get some sort of a supper ready for our return."

They were all agreeable—especially Dick and Roly, whose anxiety for Julie was acute now.

And so, a few minutes later, they set off, while the sun sank lower and lower, and Julie, two miles away, slept on. By the time the secret cave was reached the moon was already riding in a sky that gave a hint of storm. There Gilson turned to Hitchcock.

"The tide'll be just right in about half an hour," he said with satisfaction. "Now, Hitchcock, you know what you've got to do!"

"Yes," Hitchcock nodded. "I go back and scupper the raft, so there's no danger of them trying to follow us!"

"That's it," Gilson nodded approvingly. "The raft'll be in shadow now, and nobody'll be there on guard. Most of them are out searching for Julie. So just dash back—and be as quick as you can. We sail in half an hour."

CONVINCED AT LAST



THE moon was full, and a breeze which had in it a hint of rain was falling across the beach when Julie finally stirred, and sat up to blink bewilderedly about her. She noticed that the tide was beginning to turn.

She felt refreshed and strengthened. Only a burning sensation in her bruised wrists and in her ankles where Hitchcock's cruel bonds had cut into her flesh reminded her of her recent ordeal. But—

Where was Larry?

For she saw, with an instant pang of alarm, that she was alone. And she knew that if Larry had returned he would be here by her side.

"Oh, my goodness," Julie muttered. "Then—they've captured him—"

A flutter seemed to run through her pulses. She guessed immediately what had happened—what was now happening. The others would not listen to Larry. And even now Gilson would be getting away.

She started forward, breaking into a stumbling run in her anxiety. When she came upon the castaways—with Dick and Roly just returned to report a complete lack of success in their search—she was gasping and out of breath.

They all jumped at sight of her.

"Julie!"

"Where's Larry?" she panted.

"Woodstock—over there"—Dick pointed to the helpless human shape lying on the sands. "He came along this evening with some phony story that you'd sent a message—"

"And I did send a message," Julie blazed round at them. "Where's Gilson and Hitchcock and Ada?"

"Out looking for you—"

"Are you all crazy?" she cried. "Are you all idiots? Must you let yourself be taken in with every lie Gilson chooses to tell you? Gilson at this moment is on a boat—Gilson is preparing to leave this island and maroon you here—for ever. Who's got the diary with the treasure clues in it?" she flared at the professor.

"Why, Gilson," the professor stuttered. "He borrowed it this afternoon—"

"And you let him have it?" Julie almost choked. "You've let him get away with everything, you stupid, senseless things! You wouldn't believe Larry—"

"Why should we?" Dick began.

"Why should you? If you'd believed Larry before you wouldn't have landed yourselves in half the messes you have landed in. You were ready enough to believe Gilson! But perhaps this time you will learn sense—even if it's too late! I tell you Gilson is sailing away from this island at this moment—"

"Really, Julie!" Mr. Fry said disbelievingly. "Even if that's so, this is a pretty fine time to come and tell us about it."

"I sent Larry to tell you about it; but how did you treat him?" Julie flared. "I've been Gilson's prisoner—yes, don't stare, it's true—and here are the marks to prove it!" she added, holding out her wrists. And then she told them the whole story. But she could see, even now, that they were inclined to doubt her. "Do you want me to prove it?" she challenged.

"Well, after all that's happened—the professor rumbled. "Dash it, Julie, you can't expect—"

"Very well," Julie said scornfully. "But never mind. If you want the last and final proof, you shall have it. Perhaps you can see across to the west coast from the top of that cliff. If so, you can see Gilson making his getaway. Free Larry—"

They stared at her. But still there was doubt in their faces.

"Well, I think it's only fair to give Julie her chance," Dick said. "This isn't a trick, Julie?"

"Dick, talk sense," Julie cried impatiently.

"Anyway, we'll leave Woodstock where he is," Roly decided. "If there is any funny business—"

He wilted under the look of scorn which Julie flung at him. But it was obvious that his opinion was shared by the others. Julie saw it.

"All right," she said. "Leave Larry if you're so scared. But when you know the truth I hope you'll all go on your knees to him and beg his pardon. Come on—"

She led the way. The others, half against their will, followed. Now the breeze was stiffening, and Julie could feel the rain in the air as she toiled upward. With a wind like this in his sails, Julie reflected, Gilson would get away from Golden Palm Island to a spanking start. By the time they had reached the cliff top it was already blowing half a gale.

She gazed anxiously towards the west coast. Nothing seemed to be happening there. Her heart lifted for a moment as she thought of a possible disaster to Gilson.

"Well, I don't see anything," Mr. Fry began obstinately. "I told you—"

"Look!" Julie said.

She lifted a quivering finger. They all looked and they all became rooted. For there, just heaving into view beyond the cliff line, was a boat—a beautiful white boat—scudding before the wind and licking out to sea at a speed which would have done credit to a motor-boat. Like some graceful phantom it was riding seawards—away from Golden Palm Island in a due-northerly direction.

"In that boat is Gilson," Julie informed them. "The man you trusted. That is the boat you didn't believe existed—the boat made by Larry's father and my father. Now do you believe Gilson is running out on you?"

They were all looking stupefied now. Furiously angry, too. The last doubt had gone. "Thank goodness we've still got the raft!" gasped Dick.

"Have we?" the professor said in a queer sort of voice.

"Why—"

"Look—"

They all turned to stare—at the raft on the beach below them. It had broken free from its moorings and was adrift on the wind-tossed water!

Whatever you do, don't miss a word of the next exciting instalment of this grand serial.

The Merry-makers at College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE EXPELLED GIRL'S RETURN

"THANKS for the coaching, Benny," Sally Warner said, gathering up the balls from the tennis court. "I expect you've had enough for to-day!"

"Just about, Sally. I'm not feeling like it!" Benny Ross said—and Sally understood the listless, troubled look on the young pro's face, as he took up his racket and left her with her chums.

"Poor old Benny!" remarked Don Weston.

"He hasn't been the same boy since Wendy Lynn was expelled," murmured Sally, her eyes sad. "I haven't got over it myself, I must say—Wendy a thief! It sounds crazy. And she and Benny were such great pals—"

She watched him sympathetically as he walked back to his quarters adjoining the pavilion. Benny Ross was the young tennis coach of Roxburgh Co-Ed College, and had become a favourite with all in the short time he had been here. But his special friend had been Wendy Lynn, one of Sally's own house-mates, and whose sudden expulsion on the grave charge of stealing was still the sensation of the college.

"It was odd that all the thefts happened here!" Johnny said. "It was only at tennis that people had their pockets picked and their lockers rifled in the pavilion!" Then he paused. "Oh, let's forget it," he added. He grinned and grabbed a tennis ball from Sally. "Let's see you catch this, Sally!"

Ping! And with a whack from his racket he sent the ball skying over the courts.

"You'd better stick to baseball, Johnny!" said Sally, laughing. "All right, I'll go!"

She streaked out through the gate in the wire netting, watching the ball in its flight. It came down in the region of the pavilion, right outside Benny's little shop, where rackets and balls were sold. Now to find it! They'd bought quite enough new ones lately.

Sally was groping in the long grass outside the shop window, when a girl's shadow passed behind the pane. It would be the new assist-

ant, of course, who was helping Benny with the serving and repair work. Sally took a peep at her through the window. A young, trimly-built girl, she was wearing a white overall, and with the loveliest fair hair. She was quite unaware that anyone was watching her. She opened her handbag, held the mirror before her, and began patting that lovely fair hair of hers—

And then Sally's eyes suddenly started from her head. That fair hair was a wig! It was a wig, and the girl was taking scrupulous care now to see that it was properly set! Her own hair beneath it was a glossy black! It was like—

Sally's heart gave a wild jump and she pushed open the door.

"Wendy!" she said tensely. "Wendy Lynn!"

The discovery was an equal shock to them both. The girl who faced her was the girl who had been expelled from Roxburgh a week ago for stealing! She stood gazing back at Sally with her colour ashen beneath the disguising wig.

"Why have you come back, Wendy?" Sally asked in the strained hush.

"Because—" The other drew her breath in quiveringly, then answered in a wild little rush: "Because it was the only way to clear the whole thing up and catch the real thief!"

Sally held her gaze for long seconds. Wendy's eyes were hunted and frightened. She was trying to say that someone else, and not she, had been guilty of the thefts, which she had never denied.

"You're—you're saying"—and Sally faltered unhappily over the words—"that you weren't the—the thief, Wendy?"

"I was not!" Wendy's head went up with a little flash of spirit. "Sally, you know me better!"

"But—but you didn't deny it, Wendy, and you were caught with some of the stolen property!" Sally said. "Money and bits of jewellery were actually found in your tennis locker!"

"Yes! I hid them there, Sally, after they'd been planted deliberately on somebody who was as innocent as I was!" Wendy said tremblingly. "That's why I didn't deny anything when the things were found. Because I

couldn't explain without throwing the blame on to—on to someone else!"

"You mean you were shielding an innocent person?" And Sally gave a sudden violent start. "Who, Wendy?"

Wendy's eyes filled.

"Benny Ross!" she said. "I've been great chums with Benny, and I know he'd stand by me in anything, Sally. I just had to stand by him when I knew that someone was trying to make him out a thief. He could never have cleared himself if he'd been caught with the property. It would have been his ruin—"

"But what about yourself, Wendy?" Sally burst in.

"I can clear myself—I can show up the real thief now, if only I'm given a chance!" Wendy rushed on. "That's why I let the dean expel me. That's why I've come back here. Benny advertised for a girl helper. I fixed it with him that I'd put on this disguise and pretend to be his new assistant. I called myself Janet Wilson. I—I never dreamed anyone would recognise me. But now I'm done for, Sally—I'm done for if you give me away, and—"

Her voice broke off in panic. "Oh! There's someone coming!"

Sally threw a hurried look to the open door.

A boy was passing with a book under one arm, a deck chair under the other. It was only Elmer Lankin. A studious, unathletic youth, he was moving his chair to a sunnier spot, to be curled up next moment in his usual abstract fashion, head buried deep in the ponderous volume he was reading. No fear of Elmer Lankin hearing or suspecting this drama that was happening so close to him.

Sally felt Wendy's arms clinging to her now, heard her whispered voice pleading desperately.

"Don't give me away, Sally! Please—please don't give me away! I did it for Benny—I'll prove the truth if only you'll give me the chance! Will you believe me—will you trust me?"

It was those last little words that went straight to Sally's heart. As she met Wendy's tearful eyes, heard the pleading in her voice, pleading for a chance to prove her innocence, Sally could not refuse her.

"I won't give you away!" Sally said softly. "And—and good luck. I've got to fly now, Wendy—the boys will be wondering where I am. But I'll keep your secret. As far as I'm concerned, you're a stranger, you—you're Janet Wilson."

She didn't wait for Wendy's thanks. She hurried out.

"You've been a long time, Sally," was Johnny's greeting. "Couldn't you find it?"

"Find what?" Sally had completely forgotten why she went to the pavilion.

"The ball, of course!" And Johnny groaned as he saw that her hand was empty. "Gee, we'll all come and look for it!"

It was the last thing Sally wanted. Don and Fay joined them, and back she had to go while they all conducted a search under the window. Behind it hovered Wendy's shadow. She was making a pretence of stringing a racket on the shop bench.

"I'll ask Benny's girl to help," Don said brightly. "What's her name—Janet Wilson?"

He moved to the window, but instantly Sally spotted the ball, and with a cry held it aloft. She was only too glad to call the search off and hustle her chums away.

Wendy's secret hovered uneasily in her mind during afternoon lecture. Rightly or wrongly, she had promised not to give her away because she trusted Wendy. But supposing someone else discovered her identity? Supposing the dean found out that she had dared to come back in disguise, after being expelled!

It was not till late in the evening that Sally found any real ground for her fears. But then a sudden commotion came from the tennis courts, causing her to race to the pavilion.

"What's happened?" she asked, as she saw

the agitated crowd on the veranda and in the locker-room doorway. "Anything wrong?"

Then her colour drained as a babel of voices greeted her.

"The thieving's begun again!"

"Worse than before!"

"Look at our lockers! Every one has been rifled while we were playing!"

"My wallet's been stolen and every cent I had in it, Sally!" came tensely from Don. "We can't blame Wendy Lynn this time—she's gone!"

SALLY HAS HER DOUBTS



SALLY averted her gaze from Don lest he should see her pallor. Wendy was not gone! Wendy had come back—and this fresh outburst of thieving had coincided with her return! Was it Wendy's work? Had she done wrong in trusting her?

That fear pierced like a knife in Sally's conscience. Her own chums—Fay and Johnny as well as Don—had all been robbed; and it might be—it might be that a word from her could have saved them!

"Who could have done it?" Don and Johnny were saying wonderingly.

The boys were all seething to catch the culprit—the girls could think only of the losses they had suffered.

"I wouldn't mind the money, but my brooch has gone, Sally," Fay was saying. "The little shamrock brooch that granny gave me!"

"And my wrist-watch—it was a birthday present!" choked Bunty Shane.

"The thief could have had everything of mine except my little gold horseshoe," gulped the superstitious Pat Waters, and the tears brimmed in her eyes as she looked at Sally. "You didn't play this evening, did you, Sally, so you haven't lost anything. And I'm jolly glad, for your sake!"

Sally couldn't speak. Her feelings were in turmoil. Was she to blame for trusting Wendy Lynn? Was Wendy a thief, after all, and was this the real reason why she had crept back to Roxburgh, to continue her thefts under cover of disguise?

Then her thoughts leapt to Benny Ross, who was Wendy's friend, and who was also in her secret. The boys were speaking of him now.

"How was it Benny Ross didn't hear anyone? He was working in his shop only next door!"

"He's still there—I heard him not a minute ago!" Johnny said, darting out of the pavilion. "Let's ask him whether he—"

Johnny's voice stopped abruptly. He was tugging at the door of the shop, but it was locked.

"Funny!" he exclaimed. "I know I heard him just now, and he must have heard the row we've been making! Why should he snoop off like that, chaps, without even asking us what's up?"

"Easy, Johnny!" Don said hastily. "That's rather like insinuating—"

"I know it is—and I want Benny Ross to answer it!" interrupted Johnny, his face warming. "He's paid to take charge here—and when we get robbed, he just buzzes off! Where is he?"

"When did you hear him, Johnny?"

"Only a minute ago!"

Don gave a queer look at the others.

"Come on, let's find him!"

Sally followed as they made towards the small cottage which Benny Ross shared with the other sports pros. No one, of course, dreamed of suspecting Wendy whom they thought had left the college. But their suspicions were pointing to Wendy's friend—Benny Ross! She could hear it in their tone.

Then a sudden shout came from Andy Ruggles as they were passing the swimming pool.

"Hey! There's Ross—in the water!"

"Wha-at?"

The crowd came to a dazed halt on the edge of the pool. There in the water, just finishing a ten-length race with the swimming coach, was Benny Ross!

"I say, Benny," Johnny asked with a gasp as he came puffing up the steps, "how long have you been here?"

Sally's heart hung in dread suspense. She knew the questions that must follow. She knew that it would have taken Benny Ross quite a considerable time to change and swim ten lengths.

"About half an hour," he answered out of breath. "Why?"

"Because our things have been stolen again, and we heard someone moving about in your shop only a couple of minutes ago!" Don burst out. "Are you sure you locked up properly?"

"Why, of course—" But Sally saw Benny's colour bleach. "More thefts?" he whispered. "Then—"

"Then it clears Wendy Lynn—that's the first thing!" Johnny said excitedly. "The second thing is—who could have got into your shop after you locked up? Has anyone got a key besides you, Benny?"

"Only the girl—only Janet Wilson," Benny said, and Sally knew that it was not the cold which made his teeth chatter now, "but she left before I did!"

"Hear that, chaps?" Johnny cried. "Someone broke into the tennis shop to-night, because I heard them there, and it's that someone who is the thief! Come on, Benny! Get your clobber on and let's have a thorough search of your shop. The bouncer may have left some clue there!"

Sally didn't join in the search. She drifted away to her chalet, her heart torn with doubts and fears. It was Wendy Lynn whom Johnny had heard in the shop! Was it Wendy who had carried out the thefts? Was she a thief acting in league with Benny Ross—or was she truly playing this dangerous and desperate rôle in order to nail the real thief?

The problem kept Sally awake for hours that night. Her conscience tormented her for not betraying what she knew—but some glimmer of trust bade her wait—wait till she could have another word with Wendy.

She seized the first chance next morning. Everyone else was going off to breakfast when Sally hurried down to the deserted courts, to the little tennis shop beside the pavilion.

"Sally!" A breathless hug greeted her as she stepped inside. "Oh, you were an angel to give me my chance! The thief's started again, and now I know I can catch him!"

Sally could only gape speechless. Wendy's eyes were shining, her face radiant, under the attractive blonde wig.

"I nearly caught him last night!" she rushed on eagerly. "I heard him at the lockers. I was hiding in this shop—waiting for him to bring the stolen things here, and plant them in Benny's desk, the same as he did before. He was disturbed just too soon. He heard the others coming up from the courts, and he didn't have time. But he was left with the stuff on his hands, Sally, and now he'll take the first chance he can get to plant it in here—where I shall catch him!"

"But, Wendy—" Sally's senses whirled, for her own suspicions of Wendy were scattered to the four winds. She had only to look at her to see the honest truth in her glowing eyes. "But, Wendy, supposing you yourself had been caught here last night?"

"That's why I flew as soon as they came! I knew you'd keep your promise and not give me away, Sally!" Wendy said happily.

"Yet you were taking all this fearful risk for—Benny's sake!" Sally gasped, and a wild suspicion jumped into her mind. "How long have you known Benny Ross, Wendy? Do you really know him awfully well?"

"Yes—everything about him!" And Wendy's eyes clouded suddenly. "You see, Sally, it's so terribly important to Benny that he should keep his good name here," she confided, "because he once got into trouble in the past!"

Sally's heart hammered. Was it Benny Ross who was behind these thefts? Was Wendy putting her faith blindly in a scamp?

"Where was Benny when you heard someone tampering at the lockers, Wendy?" she asked swiftly.

"He was swimming—that was why I came here to keep watch!" answered Wendy.

Sally's thoughts somersaulted. Benny, of course, was innocent, for she had seen him herself in the pool!

Then who was it who had committed the thefts? Who could it be but some third party—someone who had a down on Benny.

"Hasn't Benny any suspicion—haven't you any suspicion who it might be, Wendy?" Sally asked earnestly.

"No; but he'll give himself away, because I know he'll bring the stolen things here as soon as he thinks Benny's out of the way!" insisted Wendy.

"What worries me is that you might give yourself away first," muttered Sally, gazing at her anxiously. "That disguise wouldn't stand any close scrutiny, Wendy. Your own hair's showing a little now under the wig. Let's see what I can do about it!"

It was a poor light for such an exacting task, but she drew Wendy closer to the window, and rapidly removed her blonde wig. Deftly she began pinning her dark hair higher above her ears.

"Now we'll fix the wig—"

Sally held it up, then a smothered gasp came from them both. A boy with a book under his arm was sauntering past the window—and he had seen them!

It was Elmer Lankin. His mouth and eyes gaped open. He was staring in spellbound recognition at the unmasked Wendy Lynn—and at Sally framed in the window beside her with that blonde wig held in her hand! The stupefied look on his bookish face Sally would never forget.

"Run for it, Wendy—quick!" And wildly she threw open the door.

"B-but, Sally—"

"Quick! Come with me!" Sally panted. "I'll hide you somewhere!"

She was rushing Wendy frantically down to the courts—then out through the gate which led into the woods. Her mind was in chaos. She had been taken clean off her guard, knowing that there was no tennis at this hour, no danger of the players turning up yet. It was the cruellest mischance that a bookworm like Elmer Lankin should come browsing there to read. But he had seen Wendy—he had seen them both! It would be all round the college in a few moments!

"Where—where can I hide, Sally?" Wendy was saying in panic. "They mustn't find me! Not till I've cleared myself—not till I can clear Benny—"

Sally was racing her to a small hut buried in a corner of the woods, under the college wall. It was cunningly concealed in the bushes, and it stood in a spot that was too close to the college to excite any search there.

"Now lie low till we've gone into lecture," breathed Sally. "Then get into touch instantly with Benny. It's your last chance to catch the thief, and it's now or never! Good luck—I won't give you away!"

She hurried back into the college by a different gate, nerving herself for the inevitable storm—but, to her surprise, the campus was deserted. That was odd! It wasn't lecture time yet.

She ran up the steps and pushed open the door of the main hall.

An ominous stir went up as she entered. Everyone was assembled there. Everyone was staring at her in nervous awe. She heard the dean call her name:

"Miss Warner!"

With fast-beating heart, Sally walked to the front of the hall, to the raised dais where the dean stood sternly waiting.

"A serious outbreak of thieving, Miss Warner," he began steadily, "caused me to expel a certain girl from this college a week ago. Last night that thieving broke out afresh. This morning that girl was seen here again. She was masquerading as a member of the staff, but she was recognised as Wendy Lynn—and she was seen in your company!"

"That's true, sir!" Sally said, through lips suddenly parched.

"You admit it! Now where is she?"

Sally moistened her parched lips but didn't speak. She had given her promise to Wendy, never dreaming that the matter would so swiftly reach the ears of the dean, or involve herself as a suspected accomplice! But there could be no going back on her promise.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said faintly. "I can't tell you!"

She heard a murmur go through the hall—then all was tense silence. She saw the dean's face go paler, harder, like a face of wax. He waited a long, tense moment before pronouncing his ultimatum.

"The college will assemble here again, Miss Warner, at two o'clock," he said with deadly quiet. "That will give you time to reconsider your answer. If by then you still refuse to produce Wendy Lynn, you will be instantly expelled!"

AT THE VITAL HOUR

"SALLY!"

It was a stunned cry from Don—it seemed to catch in his throat. Fay and Johnny were on their feet beside him.

"Sally, you've got to answer," Don said hoarsely. "You've got to think of yourself!"

"You've got to think of us!"

implored Johnny. "To lose you, Sally—"

But they hadn't the heart to go on, for Sally was shaking her head mutely, and they knew that look on her white, strained face.

Others came crowding round them—Sally's friends and rivals alike—their faces drawn with concern, all rivalry forgotten now.

"You've got to make her see sense, Weston!" gasped Nat Piggot, of K House. "We know Sally had nothing to do with it—she's only trying to cover up Wendy Lynn!"

Even Mr. Grittall's nephew, Horace Bagshaw, who had never been a friend of Sally's, was vehement in her defence.

"It's a shame!" he cried. "Benny Ross ought to be fired out of the coll—not Sally!"

"Why do you say that, Horace?" challenged Sally, facing him.

But everybody was saying it now. Wendy Lynn could never have come back in disguise without the knowledge of Benny Ross! And he must have had a reason for his silence—a guilty reason.

Sally stood tight-lipped and silent, the despair of her chums. Helplessly she realised that Benny's enemy had achieved his end, after all!

Elmer Lankin came worriedly across to Don & Co.

"I'm terribly sorry—I didn't mean to let Sally in for this," he said wretchedly. "But I saw her talking to Wendy Lynn, and what could I do?"

"It's not your fault," muttered Don.

"I'm sorry for Wendy, too, and if you ask me, it's all through her getting mixed up with that tennis coach fellow," Elmer went on, his hands

clutching at the book he was nursing. "He's no good, I'm sure—"

The lecture bell rang at that moment, and it was a relief to Sally to escape. She sat through the long hours in a kind of stifled suspense. The dean's ultimatum hung over her like a black and terrifying shadow. The threat of expulsion! She had only a short respite until two o'clock. But she had given Wendy her chance—she had kept her promise not to betray her. Would that respite be long enough for Wendy to collect evidence that would clear her, and unmask the real culprit?

Dismissal came at last. Somehow Sally eluded her chums. Somehow she manoeuvred her way into the woods unseen, to that sheltered little hut in the bushes.

"Wendy!" Wild hope pounded in her heart as Wendy burst out to meet her. "Did you see Benny? Have you got on to a clue?"

"We've found one little clue, Sally, but it's not enough—it doesn't lead us anywhere," Wendy said shakily. "It was on the lawn, just near the shed where the deck chairs are kept!" And she placed a tiny metal object in Sally's hand.

Sally gazed at it in blank dismay. It was Pat Waters' little gold horseshoe—quite the most trifling of all the stolen articles.

"Is this all you found, Wendy?" she asked, aghast.

"Yes. The thief must have dropped it when he was disturbed last night," murmured Wendy. "But he's bound to bring the other things back to plant them in Benny's desk—that was his only aim in stealing them!" she added in hope.

Sally's white face did not reflect that hope. She clasped the little horseshoe feverishly in her hand.

"Let's hope it brings us luck, for we're going to need it!" she said grimly.

IT was two o'clock, and in a solemn hush both J and K Houses were assembled again in the main hall.

Don and Johnny and Fay, their faces ashen, walked to the dais when the dean asked if there was anyone who wished to speak on Sally's behalf. They stood side by side with Elmer Lankin, who nursed his inevitable book under his arm, and who had been called upon to repeat how he had seen Sally in company with Wendy Lynn. The last member of the group was the young tennis coach, Benny Ross, his upright, athletic figure presenting a striking contrast to the stooping, bookish-looking Elmer.

"Miss Warner!"

Sally walked to the dais with a quiet little step, but all her chums could see that resolute tilt of her chin, that unwavering purpose in her face.

"Miss Warner, before I repeat my question to you, I want you to realise fully the seriousness of your position!" the dean said in tones of grave warning. "If you persist in your attitude, it will mean your immediate expulsion from this college—all because you choose to shield a girl who is a proved thief!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Sally said earnestly. "but I shielded Wendy Lynn because I'm certain she is not a thief!"

"Do you suggest that the thief was some other, unknown person, then?" demanded the dean, his voice tinged with sarcasm.

"Possibly, sir!" Sally said steadily, and turned to Elmer Lankin. "You usually sit by the tennis courts to read, Elmer, so you would have seen any stranger who broke in while we were playing. Did you ever notice a stranger anywhere about?"

"No!" Elmer said without hesitation. "The only people I've seen there are the players—and, of course, Ross!"

(Please turn to the back page.)





The GIRL DETECTIVE'S DOUBLE

(Continued
from
page 164.)

NOEL LAYS A TRAP

"WELL, Uncle Noel!" gasped June, the first to break the silence.

Noel's mind was in a whirl as he stared at her, hardly able to believe his eyes.

"June, where on earth did you spring from?" he demanded huskily.



"That's what I was going to ask you, nunky," rejoined June, with something of the old roguish gleam in her eyes. Then quickly her attractive face grew serious, and she shivered slightly, staring into the dark mouth of the cave. "Goodness, it was a narrow escape!" she whispered, gripping his arm. "Though I never dreamt it was you when I called out."

"Your warning probably saved my life, June," Noel said quietly. "But I can't make head or tail of this business. How on earth do you come to be mixed up in this amazing affair?"

"I'm not mixed up in anything yet," replied June simply. "I only arrived in Fringate half an hour ago to keep an appointment."

"With whom?" asked Noel quickly.

For reply June took a postcard from her handbag and held it out.

It was addressed to June at the seaside hotel where she was staying, and Noel scanned the neat, girlish handwriting on the back.

"If you really meant what you promised, please meet me in the public gardens at Fringate on Wednesday afternoon at four. I'm desperately in need of your help.—Eva GILFORD."

The young detective started.

"Eva Gilford!" he muttered. "Do you know this girl, June?"

"Well, hardly," replied June, with a smile. "I only saw her for a minute, when I changed trains at Fringate on my way to Westpool. It was almost dark, and I was standing too near the edge of the platform when an express came through. A girl behind me grabbed my arm and pulled me back in the nick of time."

Noel's eyes gleamed with sudden interest.

"Did you see her face?"

"Only in the dim light," said June, "though she was staring at me very hard. I thanked her, and said that I wished I could do something to repay her—just on the spur of the moment, nunky, as you might have done. I never expected to hear from her again."

"But how did she discover your address?" asked Noel.

"That's easy," smiled June. "I had a card with me—an invitation to a terribly dull house-party given by some friends of my school chum. The house was in Fringate, I believe. Anyway, I gave this girl the card with my name and address on it."

"So that explains it!" breathed Noel, a glint of enlightenment in his eyes. "Was the house called the Grange by any chance?"

"How did you guess?" demanded June, staring in her turn.

The young detective smiled grimly.

"Now I'll tell you a story, June," he said, "and we'll see whether your wits can supply the missing link."

Swiftly he related the amazing chain of events that had led to their encounter. June gasped as he concluded, her grey eyes sparkling.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff, nunky," she declared. "Eva is the young librarian's sister. She must have recognised my name, and when her brother was suspected of the thefts she wrote asking for my help."

Noel nodded approvingly.

"Then something happened, making it imperative for her to act at once," he said. "She decided to take advantage of her likeness to you, and the chance possession of the invitation card to gain access to the house. But that doesn't solve her disappearance or the mystery of the thefts. By the way, what brought you to the cave?"

"Simple," said June. "When Eva didn't keep the appointment I decided to stroll along the beach. And you know how I love caves. It was just sheer luck that brought me along just then."

"And feminine curiosity," murmured Noel. "But frankly, June, it's too dangerous for you to stay here. Do you realise that you're liable to be arrested as the suspected confederate of a thief? Until we've found your double you'd better keep out of the way. But there's one thing you can do to help me," he added, and placed the old leather-bound volume into her hands. "I've an idea that the mystery of Eva's disappearance is linked up with this book," he explained. "Just how, I don't know. Take it upon the prom, and see if your feminine wits can find a solution. Meanwhile, I'll tackle the mystery from another angle. There's someone I've reason to suspect—"

He broke off, his hand tightening on her arm. There was a faint clattering at the mouth of the cave as several pieces of loose chalk fell among the rocks.

"Someone's coming down the cliff path," muttered Noel anxiously. "You mustn't be caught here, June. Make for the prom while I divert their attention, and meet me at the bandstand in an hour's time."

June nodded, and darted away. Noel, strolling out of the cave, glanced up at the precipitous path. He could see a figure moving cautiously among the bushes at the top of the cliff, apparently reconnoitring.

With a grim smile the young detective commenced to scramble up the slope, tensed for possible trouble. But as he reached the top he could see no trace of the lurking figure.

Perplexed and momentarily off his guard, Noel straightened himself, and at the same moment the bushes parted and he found himself staring into the muzzle of a revolver.

The young detective acted in a flash. His hand shot out, even as he ducked, and with a powerful twist he had the weapon in his own hand, covering the bushes.

"Come out of there!" he rapped.

A dishevelled, grey-haired figure in a crumpled black suit emerged reluctantly.

"Howard!" exclaimed Noel, staring at the manservant in amazement. "What's the idea?"

The other's heavy features looked a little chagrined.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I thought at first you might be"—he hesitated—"the thief who's been stealing the master's treasures."

"What gave you that idea?" demanded Noel, eyeing him keenly.

"The alarm bell went just now, sir, and I found the french windows in the library unbolted. I came out on to the terrace and caught sight of someone climbing the cliff wall. I came down to investigate—"

"That's all right," put in Noel, his suspicions momentarily allayed by the other's blunt, honest manner. "Afraid I've given you a lot of trouble for nothing. I was doing a bit of investigating on my own account, and I may have a definite clue to the thief's identity."

Was it his imagination, or did the other give a slight start?

"Indeed, sir?" Howard asked.

"Yes, finger-prints," replied Noel, "on one of the missing valuables. I'm going out now to fetch in an expert. While I'm absent I shall lock the clue for better safety in the armoury, and I want you, Howard, to set your alarms and keep a special watch on the windows."

"Very good, sir," replied the manservant. "And you might inform Mr. Weatherall and Mr. Vining that I shall be out for an hour or so, and may not be back for tea," Noel added.

The manservant departed on his errand, and the young detective made his way quickly to the house. Unlocking his suitcase, he took out a polished wooden box, and carried it to the library, watched by several curious guests and servants.

He still held the key to the armoury, and depositing the mysterious box on the table, he locked the door and made a few swift arrangements before leaving the house boldly by the main entrance.

But once out of sight of the windows he turned quickly from the drive and cut through the shrubbery on to the terrace.

A quick glance through the windows showed that the library was deserted. He had made certain before leaving that the french windows were unbolted, and the alarm apparatus temporarily out of action. Entering noiselessly, he stepped behind the screen.

A few minutes later the manservant came into the room and crossed to the french windows. With a grunt of surprise he bolted them and reset the alarm.

In the doorway he encountered Mr. Weatherall and Roger Vining, and Noel heard the man deliver his message.

Waiting till the three had departed, the young detective slipped from behind the screen and entered the armoury, carefully locking the door behind him.

"Now for it!" he murmured.

It seemed impossible that anyone could enter or leave the barred room except by way of the door, and yet June's elusive double had vanished, to say nothing of the priceless necklace.

And Noel had a shrewd idea that the mystery thief would attempt to strike again.

The daylight was fading swiftly, and the cell-like room with its narrow, barred window became increasingly gloomy.

The young detective drew up a chair near one of the suits of armour, from which vantage point he could watch both the door and the window.

The time dragged interminably in the darkened room, and Noel was thinking anxiously of his appointment with June when a faint yet blood-chilling sound reached his ears.

A hollow chuckle that seemed to come from the room itself. At the same moment a dark figure launched itself from the shadows behind him, its arm upraised. Noel spun round—but too late! He received a cowardly blow on the side of his head, and he pitched to the floor.

Fighting to regain his senses, the young detective struggled to his knees. Instinctively he glanced towards the table, and a stifled ejaculation escaped his lips.

The polished wooden box had vanished! Dazedly he stared at the locked door—at the

barred window; and as he did so he heard a girl's terrified scream from the grounds.

"Uncle! Help!"

"Great Scott, that's June!" muttered Noel.

White to the lips, he sprang to the door, fumbling frantically in his pocket for the key. Then his blood ran cold. The key was missing—stolen by his mystery assailant.

And June's cry for help still rang pitifully in his ears.

WHAT JUNE DISCOVERED



THE young detective did not hesitate. Whipping out his revolver, he fired several shots into the woodwork that supported the lock. As the deafening reports died away, he flung himself against the door. It crashed open, and he raced out into the library.

Somewhere in the distance an alarm bell was ringing; he could hear shouts in the grounds—the sound of running footsteps.

Noel flung open the french windows and sped across the terrace. He almost collided with his host, who stared at him in amazement.

"Raymond—I thought you were out!" "What's happened?" panted the young detective, dreading the worst.

"Happened?" echoed Mr. Weatherall, his face pale and agitated. "I've been robbed, man, again, in spite of your promise! My safe's been opened, and the remainder of my valuable curios spirited away."

Noel caught in his breath, his hands clenching, and just then Roger Vining appeared.

The secretary's hand was roughly bandaged, and a vindictive gleam flashed into his eyes as he caught sight of Noel.

"I've examined your study, sir," he said, turning to his employer. "The young woman broke in through the window, and I cut my hand on the glass."

"Young woman?" echoed Noel sharply.

Vining stared at him maliciously. "Your precious niece and partner—Miss Gaynor. Howard caught sight of her in the grounds, and gave chase. I hope he caught her!" he added.

Just then there came a sound of hurrying footsteps, and Howard, the manservant, burst on them breathlessly.

"I caught her, sir," he panted, "but she gave me the slip—dived under my arm, and got clean away."

Noel gave an involuntary sigh of relief, though his thoughts were racing.

"Was she carrying anything?" demanded Mr. Weatherall.

"I couldn't be sure, sir, though it looked as if she had something bulky under her coat. She cried out when I grabbed her—taken by surprise."

"Did you hear what she called?" demanded Vining.

"Yes, Mr. Vining. She called for help. 'Uncle! Help!' Those were her very words."

The secretary gave an unpleasant laugh. "If that's not proof, what is?" he demanded.

Mr. Weatherall turned furiously on Noel.

"That settles it, Raymond," he said grimly. "I've given you every chance, but this is too much. Not only has your niece betrayed my hospitality and assisted that young scoundrel Gilford in his thefts, but it's clear that you have been screening her from arrest! I shall see that your disgraceful conduct is shown up in the right quarters. Meanwhile, I'll have the local police on Miss Gaynor's track!"

Furiously he strode indoors, followed by the secretary and manservant.

The young detective drew a deep breath. It looked as though he would be ruined professionally unless he could find the mystery girl—June's double—before the police arrived. But he was not worried about himself. His one thought was for his niece.

"I must find June and warn her," he muttered. "Why on earth did she disobey me and come here?"

He hurried across the grounds in the gathering dusk, trying to decide which way June had run when she escaped from the manservant.

His sharp eyes discovered a trail of footprints on the dewy grass, and he followed them across the flower-beds and into the shrubbery.

And unexpectedly he came on June, hiding in a little stone grotto.

"Uncle!" she gasped, starting up. "Oh, thank goodness!"

"Thank goodness you're safe, dear!" said the young detective huskily. "Why did you come—"

"I had to," breathed June. "When you didn't turn up at the bandstand I got worried. Besides, I found the clue!"

"The clue?" echoed Noel.

"The one you wanted—in the book," breathed June excitedly. From under her coat she drew the bulky volume. "Look—the last two pages were stuck together, and there's a drawing there in ink."

Noel stared at it, and a low whistle escaped his lips.

Just beneath the printed words "The End" was a sketch of a knight in armour, his visor drawn.

"Does it—does it mean anything?" whispered June anxiously.

"It's the missing link, June!" Noel declared. "The Man in the Iron Mask." I might have guessed it!"

"Tell me!" urged June.

Noel smiled.

"All along I felt certain there was a secret exit from the Armoury in the Weatherall's house," he declared. "There was no other possible way in which your double, June, could have vanished after the theft of Alice Weatherall's necklace. But the trouble was, though I searched high and low, I couldn't find it."

June stared at the open book, her romantic mind stirred by the thought of an ancient hidden underground passage.

"And does this book tell you how to find it?" she asked.

Noel nodded.

"Rather! 'The Man in the Iron Mask'—that's just the clue I needed," he declared.

"And the quicker I follow it up the better."

Eagerly June clutched at his arm.

"Let me come with you, Nunky," she urged, but Noel shook his head.

"Sorry, but I'm afraid you'll have to stay here," he said. "I must clear up the mystery before the police arrive to search for you."

"For—for me?" gasped June.

"I'm afraid so," said Noel. "We're up to our necks in trouble this time, June, but we'll sink or swim together. Wait for me here, whatever happens. I won't be long."

Pressing her hand quickly, he hurried away among the bushes. June stared after him, her heart beating quickly. She waited with as much patience as she could muster, and presently she heard the sound of a car on the drive, and distant, excited voices. Then silence—a silence that was almost intolerable to her lively, impatient nature.

After a seemingly endless wait she ventured to emerge from her hiding-place in the hope of seeing or hearing something of her uncle.

But she had barely taken a dozen cautious steps along the path when the bushes parted suddenly and her way was barred by a tall, sorrow-faced young man whom she recognised from her uncle's description as Roger Vining, the secretary.

"So there you are!" exclaimed Vining, grabbing her by the arm. "That'll save the police a search. They're waiting indoors for you. I suggest you come quietly. It'll be better for you and your uncle."

White-faced, her heart beating quickly, June accompanied the secretary indoors.

Vining led the way across the library and into the armoury, where Mr. Weatherall was talking to a stern-faced police inspector and a constable in uniform. Howard, the manservant, hovered curiously in the doorway.

They all turned as the secretary entered with his youthful prisoner.

"I've caught her, sir," declared Vining triumphantly, "skulking in the grounds!"

"Miss Gaynor!" exclaimed the inspector incredulously, recognising the famous detective's young partner. "Surely—surely there must be some mistake?"

"There's no mistake, inspector," said Mr. Weatherall grimly. "Miss Gaynor took advantage of my hospitality to assist my librarian in robbing me. And I regret to say that Noel Raymond himself is implicated—"

"You leave uncle out of this!" exclaimed June, her eyes flashing indignantly. "You're making a crazy mistake. This is the first time I have ever been in this house, and—"

"Just a minute," interrupted the inspector, turning to Vining. "Can you swear, Mr. Vining, that this is the young woman who was staying here, and, as you allege, assisting in these thefts?"

"I swear it!" declared Vining unpleasantly.

"Be careful, Vining!" boomed a hollow voice from behind them. "I suggest you look again!"

They all spun round. An amazed gasp escaped June's lips, and the secretary turned suddenly white as death as one of the suits of armour turned slowly on its pedestal, and a familiar, boyish figure sprang from the cavity beneath.

"Uncle!" cried June delightedly.

"Howard—guard that door!" rapped Noel.

Instinctively the manservant obeyed as the secretary made a sudden move.

"Not so fast, Vining!" snapped Noel, catching the scowling young man by the wrist. "Let the inspector see that hand you're supposed to have cut on the broken window in the study."

With a quick movement he whipped off the bandage, revealing not the supposed wound, but a dark, bluish stain.

"Just a little trick of mine, inspector," explained the young detective coolly. "I suspected Vining of the thefts, and set a little trap—a box containing a rubber bulb of indelible ink. Vining attacked me and stole the box—as he had stolen the other things, which I found in the secret passage leading from the armoury to the caves."

He took something from his pocket and held it out to Mr. Weatherall—something that flashed and scintillated in the dim light.

"My daughter's necklace!" exclaimed the owner of the Grange in amazement and relief.

WHEN HER PET WAS UNDER SUSPICION

by
ENID BOYTEN

Those popular characters Jean Wayland of Rainbow Ranch and her wonder dog, Kim, are featured in this enthralling story of life in Canada. It will appear complete in next Friday's

GIRLS' CRYSTAL

"The gold plaque and other curios are in the cave," said Noel. "I suggest that you pay a visit there with the inspector to see the arrangements Vining made to smuggle them away. He stumbled on the secret of the armour by accident, and if it had not been for your librarian and his plucky young sister the thefts would doubtlessly have continued."

As he spoke he stepped aside smilingly, and Mr. Weatherall and the inspector gasped in amazement, while an involuntary cry escaped June's lips.

For emerging from the cavity in the floor was the vanished girl—accompanied by a pale, rather dishevelled young man.

"Goodness!" breathed June, staring incredulously at the girl. "You're almost me to the life!"

Eva Gilford smiled unsteadily as she held tightly to her brother's arm.

"I'm sorry, Miss Gaynor," she breathed. "I took your place because my brother was in danger. Can you ever forgive me?"

June gripped the girl's hand.

"Of course," she declared. "I'd have done the same in your place."

"Vining trapped young Gilford when the latter tumbled to his secret," explained Noel. "But Norman managed to send a message to his sister, and Vining, realising his danger, caught the girl as she was about to rescue her brother. I found them both tied up in the cave, and no doubt they would have remained there if my niece hadn't found the clue that enabled me to rescue them."

The girl impostor's eyes lit up.

"Then we've got you to thank for that, Miss Gaynor," she breathed.

"I think we can call it 'quits,'" laughed June. "Eh, nunky?"

After Vining had been led away, and Mr. Weatherall's stolen treasures had been recovered from the subterranean passage, Noel and June took a stroll on the gaily lit promenade.

"The Man in the Iron Mask," said Noel, smiling. "It was a clear pointer, when you come to think of it—that, and the drawing of a visored knight. By the way, June"—he glanced quizzically at his young niece and partner—"how did you come to discover that drawing when I missed it?"

June laughed softly.

"Feminine intuition, nunky," she replied. "When a woman opens a book she always peeps at the end before starting it. Shall we go and listen to the band?"

THE END.

THE MERRYMAKERS AT COLLEGE

(Continued from page 176.)

"Did you ever see Wendy Lynn behaving suspiciously in the pavilion?" Sally asked him.

"I'm not a player, so I don't go into the pavilion," answered Elmer.

"You were reading there on the lawn last night when the theft occurred, weren't you, Elmer?" pursued Sally.

"Yes!"

"And you came there to read again early this morning, before anyone else had finished breakfast?" said Sally. "Would you mind showing the dean the book you're reading?"

"Really, Miss Wafner, what has this to do with the case?" the dean began sharply.

But in that same instant Sally made a snatch at the book under Elmer Lankin's arm.

He jumped away like a startled hare. Too late! The book dropped to the floor with a curious clatter. It was a dummy book. Its covers burst open, revealing a box-like cavity.

Out from inside it rolled a host of small pieces of jewellery, money, fountain pens, Don's wallet—all the entire plunder stolen from the tennis lockers last night!

The sensation held everyone petrified. Elmer Lankin was shaking like a leaf—not a word would come from his guilty, quaking lips. It was Sally who broke the silence.

"I'll answer your question now, sir!" she said radiantly to the dean, and rushed to the door. "Wendy's here—she's just outside—waiting, sir, for you to reinstate her!"

IT was the expulsion of Elmer Lankin that was witnessed on that never-to-be-forgotten day in the hall—but not before a full confession had been dragged from him. Why had he struck so treacherously at Benny Ross? Because he knew there had been one small lapse in Benny's past, and a second lapse would lose him not only his job at Roxburgh, but a handsome windfall from his only living relative. That windfall, had he lost it, would have gone to Elmer Rankin's own brother!

Benny had never remotely suspected Elmer, neither had Wendy. Their gratitude to Sally was beyond words to tell. She had cleared them both and made them the happiest pair in Roxburgh—and the most mystified.

"How, Sally—how did you come to suspect Elmer?" Wendy asked in a daze.

"By a few simple footprints on the lawn," Sally said softly. "Elmer must have dropped that little horseshoe when he was putting his chair away in the shed last night. He said himself that he'd never seen any stranger about the courts, didn't he? No one except players. Yet those footprints were made by someone who wasn't a player; someone who was wearing leather shoes—and the only one it could have been was Elmer Lankin! It puzzled me what he could have done with the stuff—till I remembered that book he was carrying to the courts this morning, while everyone else was at breakfast! No wonder he got a shock when he saw you in Benny's shop, Wendy! We can guess what his business was there! And now," she said, shiny-eyed, "let's get you moved back into my chalet!"

But, first of all, after Elmer Lankin had departed from Roxburgh—for good—the chums, led by a triumphant Sally, escorted Wendy Lynn and Benny Ross to the college cafeteria for a celebration tea.

"And, after receiving Wendy's heartfelt thanks for her trust and help, Sally suggested that everyone should turn up at the courts the following morning, to witness a "Grand Tournament," the stars of which would be Wendy Lynn and Benny Ross.

"Jolly good idea!" declared Don.

"Rather!" cried Johnny, and there came a chorus of approval from all around.

Next morning most of the members of J House, and a good sprinkling of K House, were present to watch the really exciting final game of the tournament between Sally and her partner, Don, and Wendy and Benny. Never had Wendy been in such splendid form—no wonder that she and Benny were the easy winners.

"And"—Wendy smiled as she shook hands with Sally at the net—"it's all thanks to you, Sally."

(End of this week's story.)

In next week's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** you'll be able to read another complete tale featuring the cheery Merry-makers. Don't miss it.