

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

Week
Ending
August 14th,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The **FOURTH** GREY GHOST

Opening Chapters Of A Novel New School Serial—by DOROTHY PAGE

PENELOPE PLAYS A PART

"PENELOPE, while you are at this school you must never forget that you are the headmaster's daughter!"

"No, daddy."

"As such, you will always comport yourself with dignity."

"Of course, daddy."

"There must be no—er—escapades of an unlady-like nature."

"Oh, daddy, of course not!"

Penelope Sue Cartwright—Penny for short—raised solemn eyes to the ceiling—very brown eyes that could look unbelievably demure, or sparkle and dance with golden glints of joyous high spirits.

She held the meek pose for a second, and then plumped herself down on the window seat with a sigh.

For Penelope had been re-enacting to herself the conversation that had occurred exactly four days ago when she had arrived at Harcourt Abbey School to join her father, John Cartwright, the headmaster.

"Dear, stern old daddy!" she murmured rather wistfully. "Such strict ideas about behaviour."

She sighed again and rested her freckled nose against the open window in the sitting-room of her father's private residence.

To a high-spirited, adventure-loving girl like Penelope, being the daughter of a headmaster who was a stickler for discipline and exemplary behaviour was not all honey.

"And what a bind being stuck in a boys' school for the rest of the term!" she grimaced.

But there had been no option for Penny. Her own girls' school, where she had been the leading light in the Fourth, had suffered an epidemic of scarlet fever, and she had had to join her father until the vacation.

"Some of the boys here look pretty decent types," she ruminated aloud, "but what a dull lot! Doesn't anything exciting ever happen in boys' schools—"

She snapped short and sat bolt upright. For from somewhere in the garden, cloaked in the soft twilight, a boy's voice had whispered on a note of desperate urgency:

"Danger! The Wasp's on the prowl!"

Penelope started.

"Jimmy, what's happening?" she asked herself.

Intrigued, all her wistful boredom gone in a flash, she listened and watched. Away over the low wall that surrounded the house garden she could see distant lights in the old rambling school, once an abbey.

There was no movement. But that boy's voice—whence had it come? And: "Danger! The Wasp's on the prowl!"—what did that mean?

"Penny, my love, something's doing!" she decided excitedly. "Action!"

With a thrill and a wave of long, slender legs, she swung herself through the open window, and dropped down into the garden in a way that would have startled and shocked her father to see.

She landed lightly on the turf below, but a stone was there beneath her foot. She twisted off her balance and fell face forward towards the wall of the house. Next moment her head would have received a nasty knock, but in the nick of time someone leapt forward, whipped a strong arm round her, and interposed himself between her and the wall.

A stifled exclamation of pain rang in her ears, but the firm grip that had saved her did not falter.

She was lowered gently to the grass.

"Near thing," said a boy's steady voice. "Are you all right?"

Penelope gasped, a little dazed, her face in the dewy grass.

"Yes, thanks to you—"

From somewhere in the warm dusk the hoot of an owl rang out mournfully. She felt the unknown boy's arm stiffen. He drew it free.

"Sure?" asked his voice, pleasant but urgent.

"Absolutely! But, I say—"

Penelope twisted round on the grass, a smile of wondering gratitude on her lips. The unknown boy had saved her and taken a nasty blow in consequence. She sat up—and gasped blankly.

"Do I dream?" she breathed. "Where—where on earth—"

She was alone. Of the boy there was no sign.

It shook Penelope. For a second it seemed that a vapoury, ghostly shape floated through the fruit trees against the far wall of the garden. She stared harder—and could see nothing.

"Well, what d'you know!" Penelope muttered breathlessly. "And I said nothing ever happened! Voices in the night; a boy who saves you, and gets hurt himself—and then just magically vanishes!"

Immeasurably intrigued and excited, she made to rise, and at that moment the tall, furtive figure of a man stole across the dark lawn in front of her.

Penelope went rigid again.

"Jimmy!" she gulped. "What is happening?"

She watched, tensed and amazed. The furtive figure became clearer, breathing raspingly, making to skirt the ornamental lily pond, aiming for the fruit trees, peering with darting glances to right and left.

Even in the dusk, Penelope suddenly recognised him.

"Mr. Aspell!" she told herself, startled.

Mr. W. Aspell, her father's senior master. She could just discern the thin, hawk-like features, the almost beaked nose as he crept along in rubber-soled shoes.

A different look crept into Penelope's lively eyes.

She had encountered Mr. Aspell twice. Her father had introduced her the first time, and she had instinctively been repelled by his appearance and manner. The second

occasion she had been a witness at a distance of a scene that had made her blood boil.

A junior boy had accidentally broken a window with a cricket ball, and the caning he had received there and then had seemed unnecessarily harsh and cruel to warm-hearted Penelope.

Now a flash of scorn, and wonder, too, crossed her face as she watched his furtive figure.

"A snooper!" she breathed disgustedly. "Zimzy, I've got it! He's the Wasp! W. Aspell—the Wasp! Of course! And for some reason he's after that boy who saved me—"

Penelope's eyes gleamed, and she came to a very rapid decision.

Who the strange boy was; why he had been in the forbidden garden; why the senior master was after him, and where he had gone—these strange things were beyond her at the moment.

But all her instincts put her on the side of the intriguing, vanishing boy who had saved her. She could not forget the note of real and desperate urgency in his voice.

"So that bully is on his trail, eh?" she told herself grimly. "Right! Penny, this is where you step in—and pay back a debt!"

She bounced to her feet, opened her mouth, and a pair of healthy lungs sent a piercing scream soaring into the dusk:

"He-e-elp! Help! A burglar in the garden! Help!"

The effect on the prowling master was electric. He straightened with a harsh exclamation:

"Who—what— Miss Cartwright, is that you?"

"Help! Burglars—girl!"

"Don't be absurd, girl! It is I, Mr. Aspell—"

Penelope waved her arms wildly.

"Go away! Burglars! Daddy, where are you? Help!"

With a furious exclamation, the master strode towards her.

"Girl, be quiet!"

Still yelling, Penelope dodged. The master skidded on the dewy turf; he hit his toe against the ornamental lily pond, and tottered and fell.

And at that moment there was a rattle as the wicket gate of the garden was unlatched, and a tall, commanding figure in rustling gown strode into the garden.

"Penelope! What is this?"

"Oh, daddy—"

Her head lowered to hide the dancing light in her eyes, Penelope flew to him and concealed her face against his gown.

"Du-daddy, a great, hulking brute of a bi-burglar!" she quavered. "I think he tripped into the pond—"

"What! Penelope, don't be absurd!"

Then the Head started as his keen eyes swept the scene. He saw a figure clamber out of the lily pond, its trousers sopping wet.

"Calm yourself, Penelope," he said.

"That is Mr. Aspell, although what possible reason he can have—"

"Mr. Aspell, daddy?" stammered Penelope, peering doubtfully round her father.

"Oh, but it can't be! Mr. Aspell wouldn't come sneaking across your garden—"

"Please, Penelope, allow me to know my own masters! Aspell," he added curtly, "an explanation, please!"

The senior master approached. Even in the dusk his hawk-like features were clearly livid. He controlled himself with an obvious effort.

"Oh, gig-goodness," murmured Penelope in demure surprise. "It really is Mr. Aspell, after all! But what was he doing?"

"That," broke in the senior master harshly, "is simply explained! Head, thanks to your daughter's intervention and nervous mistake, the most lawless and ruffianly boy in the school has been warned and escaped apprehension!"

Penelope started. She glanced swiftly up at her father. The sudden stern set that came to his features startled her.

"You mean, Aspell—"

"I mean, Head," the master rasped, "that but for your daughter I should have unmasked the leader of the young scoundrels who call themselves the Grey Ghosts!"



THE MEETING OF THE GREY GHOSTS.

"The Grey Ghosts!" Penelope couldn't prevent the involuntary exclamation; couldn't help feeling a leaping thrill of

wonder.

"Goodness, daddy, what—what are the Grey Ghosts?" she asked.

The headmaster did not answer her question.

"I think, Penelope," he said dryly, "you have had enough excitement. I advise an early night. Aspell, you'd better come inside and change those trousers and give me full details of this affair."

The senior master nodded sharply; he had himself under control now.

"Thank you, Head—but I must be quick. I have information that these lawless boys are meeting at Small Chapel. I will call up some prefects—"

With an irritated, unpleasant glance at Penelope, he turned to follow John Cartwright into his private house.

Penelope watched them go. She made no move to follow.

"Phew! Things are happening! Penny, what do you make of it?"

One thing at least seemed clear. Some of the junior boys had banded themselves together under the title of the Grey Ghosts against the rule of Mr. Aspell. Her breath came faster as she remembered the ghostly shape she had seen disappear among the fruit trees.

That pleasant-voiced boy—the one who had saved her—was obviously the leader. He must have been taking a daring short cut across the Head's garden towards Small Chapel.

The golden flecks in Penelope's eyes began to sparkle.

"The Grey Ghosts are meeting there! Zimzy, a secret society! Wonder who they are—why they're doing this?"

Mr. Aspell's rasping words jumped to her mind. "The most lawless and ruffianly boy in the school."

Penelope's pointed chin tilted with a sudden challenge to the absent senior master. Would a boy so described have jumped immediately to her aid—would he have risked capture by staying to make sure she was all right, knowing that the senior master was on his track?

"No!" she decided firmly. "He was a jolly decent type, and here's hoping that that snooping Mr. Aspell doesn't catch him!"

A thoughtful look crossed her lively features as she remembered what the senior master had said. He had somehow discovered that the Grey Ghosts were meeting at Small Chapel. So they would be caught—unless—

"Unless," Penelope told herself slowly, "they're warned!"

Impulsively she whirled and sped silently to the far wall of the garden.

With a leap and a lithe swing, she was over into the dusk-shrouded grounds beyond.

She paused a second, taking bearings. Small Chapel was, she knew, situated on the west side of the school, just inside the big outer wall.

It had been built—as the Abbey itself had been—in the Middle Ages, but during the war a flying-bomb had brought it down in ruins. Now only Big Chapel was used, and weeds, wild flowers, and rank grass softened the tumbled masonry of Small Chapel.

An ideal, lonely spot for a secret meeting while most of the school was at prep.

Penelope sped through the gloom. As the ruins loomed ahead there came the harsh, lonely cry of an owl. It was repeated twice, and her eyes suddenly glimmered with the thrill of discovery.

"That must be the signal of the Grey Ghosts!" she told herself.

It had come from the rear of the ruined little chapel. On tiptoe she crept through the long grass—slowly, cautiously.

With startling abruptness a voice whispered in the night:

"Grey Ghosts, we will take the oath."

A tingle ran up Penelope's spine, and instinctively she crouched low in the cover of a bush. Whence had come that voice? Incredibly, it seemed to arise from beneath her feet.

She was perplexed—until a faint, soft glow beyond the bush told her the truth. The bush, growing against the side of the ruins, hid a doorway that led down to the cellar of the chapel.

Eagerly she peered through the opening.

Below, in the cellar, a single candle flickered on a fallen piece of stone. As Penelope's eager gaze grew accustomed to the wan glow she saw something that made her suck in her breath.

Three silent figures stood in the dancing shadows—figures in robes and hoods—the Grey Ghosts!

Penelope watched with fascinated eyes. One of the hooded three moved forward and began to speak. It was undoubtedly the boy who had come to her rescue.

"Grey Ghosts, you know our task," he said quietly. "We are banded together to fight the tyranny of Mr. Aspell. We are pledged to fight the oppressor of the junior school; to reveal his true harshness and unfairness, to John Cartwright, the Head—"

Penelope caught in her breath.

Was it, then, true that the senior master had a side to his nature completely unsuspected by her father? Certainly Mr. Cartwright had little personal contact with the junior school, especially now when he was concentrating on preparing the senior boys for the Harcourt Classics examination.

The clear voice of the boy below held her attention again:

"The Head has only been here a term, and the Wasp is so cunning in his methods. But the Grey Ghosts will beat him—we must! To-night he was on our trail. Nos. 2 and 3—were either of you seen?"

One of the grey figures shook his head. The other spoke:

"I lost my robe in the chase. That's why I'm wearing the spare. And—you know what my robe contained!"

The leader stiffened.

"Then the robe must be recovered! If it fell into the Wasp's hands the Grey Ghosts would be lost! I will find it later."

The clear, pleasant voice, so steady and resolute, brought a gleam of admiration into Penelope's eyes. She began to feel that this unknown boy was someone after her own heart.

Completely entranced, she crouched there, peering down. Slowly the leader took a small photograph from under his robes and laid it beside the candle. An air of expectancy stole over the hooded figures.

They moved forward and joined hands over the photograph, while their leader's voice rang out, strangely moved and sincere:

"We fight against tyranny—and we fight for Glynn Tracy, the finest fellow Harcourt has ever known! I have pledged myself to that, as you know, even though it may end in my expulsion!"

Penelope couldn't tear her eyes away from that upright, cloaked figure. The quiet honesty and courage in his voice brought a little lump in her throat.

At the same time she was filled with a great wonder, and a certainty that what she had at first taken to be a daring rag by three boys against an unpopular master was something far, far greater.

"You know the danger ahead of us," continued the leader quietly. "To-night has proved that. Absolute secrecy must be preserved, so in

(Please turn to the back page.)



DOLORES

The Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

DOLORES' GOOD NEWS

PAT ROCKWELL and her cnum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westonmouth Holiday Camp, were helping to turn an old ketch into a regatta.

Chris believed that the ketch had once belonged to her Uncle Charles, who had been drowned while sailing it.

The chums discovered that a secret connected with the ketch was linked with a mysterious brass plate in the possession of Admiral Hardacre, who owned near-by Dartfleet Island.

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl staying at the camp, was also after the brass plate.

The campers, however, were in the admiral's bad books.

Dolores cunningly stole Pat's plan to appease the admiral, and went across to Dartfleet Island. She told the campers that she hoped to persuade the admiral to allow them to use his island in the regatta—and to borrow the brass plate.

When Pat and Chris arrived at the landing-stage, Dolores was just returning.

"GOSH, Dolores seems to be on top of the world," Pat said. "I wonder if it's because she's got the plate?"

"We'll soon know," Chris returned grimly.

And tensely they watched as the gleaming cabin cruiser came cutting through the water, Dolores in the cockpit. As they all waited for her to land, one of the camp messengers approached Bruce Feltham, the young sports master.

"The manager wants you—in his office," he jerked. "Telephone or something. Will you come right away?"

"Blow!" said Bruce. But he had to go, of course, much as he would have preferred to wait and listen to the news Dolores was bringing from Dartfleet Island. With a glance at Pat and Chris, he turned and went walking off. A few moments later Dolores, with a gay "Ahoy," came gliding up alongside the landing-stage. She made fast the mooring-rope and as she stepped ashore there was an eager rush forward.

"Dolores, how did you get on?"

"What did the admiral say?"

"How did he like the Buddha?"

"Wow! One at a time!" Dolores laughed. She glanced at Pat—a mocking glance, a triumphant glance.

"He loved the Buddha," she said. "The whole stunt worked like magic."

"And—did he say we could use the island for the regatta?" Lucy Day asked eagerly.

"He didn't give any definite promise, but don't worry, he will. I got him so interested in the regatta that he's coming over to see the ketch. That visit will clinch things. But where's Bruce?" Dolores added, looking around.

"And where—" began Pat.

"Oh, Pat—you here," Dolores dimpled, as though she was just aware of her. "What have you done with Bruce? I've got to see him."

"Bruce," Pat said, "has been called away by the manager. And Bruce said, before he went, that you were going to ask the admiral about that brass plate. Dolores, did you—"

"Oh, Pat, really," Dolores remonstrated. "Can't that wait? I tell you, I must see Bruce—importantly. Come along! We'll talk as we go back to camp—"

"But the plate—" insisted Pat. Her voice, however, was drowned in the general jubilant clamour. Everybody was excited by Dolores' confident statement. Hope for the regatta, in a swift flood, had returned. Pat felt herself thrust back as Dolores' admirers thronged round her, almost pushing her up the hill. Chris looked grim.

"She's stalling," she said. "She knows something. Come on, Pat. Keep at her."

That was exactly Pat's own idea. Dolores had tricked them, had stolen their idea, and now, obviously, she was trying to put them off the track. But not if Pat knew it. She pushed her way through the throng and caught Dolores by the arm.

Dolores wheeled, with a little frown. "Oh, Pat! I wish you wouldn't do—"

"No doubt!" Pat said. "But, Dolores, we want to know. You've won over the admiral—O.K. But there was something else you went over to Dartfleet Island for—that plate. Did you get it?"

Dolores paused. But she saw that Pat now had switched the interest of the crowd. She shrugged.

"Yes, I've got it. I don't know what's on it because I haven't had time to examine it properly. I'll let you have it—later!"

"Gosh, you really mean the admiral lent it to you?" Willis Green exclaimed.

"Yes, of course."

"Then never mind later! Let's see it now!" Chris demanded.

"Yes; come on," Willis eagerly supported. "We're all interested in Chris' secret; we all want to know what's on the plate—"

"Yes, rather!"

"Trot it out, Dolores!"

Dolores frowned.

"I'm awfully sorry, but I've left it on the cruiser. Lucy, be a dear and slip back and get it, will you? It's in the right-hand locker. Well, now are you satisfied?" she added to Pat, as Lucy, only too willing to oblige, slipped away.

Pat nodded, though she still felt uncertain. She could not believe Dolores would hand over the vital brass plate so easily. As they reached the manager's office, Bruce emerged and he hailed Dolores excitedly.

"You certainly worked wonders, Dolores," he declared, regarding her with admiration in his eyes. "The admiral himself has just phoned through and has told me all about your visit. He's coming over to-

morrow morning at half-past nine. But come inside. The manager wants to talk to you about it."

He and Dolores disappeared into the office, and Pat and Chris, more interested in the brass plate than the regatta, turned and hurried back to the landing-stage, followed by most of the crowd. As they neared it, they saw Lucy standing in the cockpit of the cabin cruiser brandishing something above her head.

Pat drew in a thrilled breath. "The brass plate!" she breathed. "Then Dolores wasn't bluffing!"

Running forward she held out an eager hand, as Lucy jumped ashore. "You've found it, then?" she cried. "Good! Let's have a look at it."

She almost snatched the plate, and curiously the crowd pressed forward, craning over the chums' shoulders as they bent over the brass plate.

"So that's the clue to the secret," Rosemary Dalton said. "It doesn't look very thrilling, though, does it? What's it lead to, Pat—hidden treasure?"

Pat did not reply. She was staring at the plate in consternation. For it looked suspiciously new, and engraved on it were none of the mysterious figures of which the admiral had spoken. She found it difficult to believe that it had ever adorned the ancient figurehead in Neptune's Nest. "Funny," she said. "It certainly doesn't look as if—"

"Oh, gosh, don't say there isn't a secret, after all!" broke in Willis Green.

"There isn't!" Pat's lips set and Chris frowned in dismay. "There's no hint of a clue here—nothing."

"Then—then it's all moonshine?" Lucy Day ejaculated. "You mean there—there never was a secret?"

A pause. Everybody was looking disappointed now. Everybody, too, was looking sympathetically at Chris, who seemed rather dazed by the unexpected sequel to all her hopes which the plate had roused. Willis looked across at Pat.

"Are you sure the clue should have been on that plate?" he asked.

"Positive," Pat said. "It must be unless— And then in one blind, convincing flash, the truth burst upon her. "This isn't the real plate!" she cried. "This is only a cheap fake. Dolores has fooled us—tricked us once again!"



PAT HAS A PLAN

A sudden startled silence followed that outburst. It was broken by a cry of protest.

"Oh, crumbs, Pat, that's a bit thick!" Doris Latimer declared.

"It's a fake!" Pat quivered. "An absolute fake! This isn't the figure-head plate—Dolores has just planted a worthless fake on us!"

There was a mutter—a rather angry, resentful mutter. Most of the boys and girls began to look indignant and scornful.

"You mean," Rosemary Dalton cried, "that because it's not the plate you expected it to be it must be a fake! That because there isn't any

secret, after all, Dolores has been playing some dirty trick. Shame on you, Pat!

"Yes, rather! You ought to take that back."

"It's not fair to blame Dolores for your disappointment."

Sympathy had changed into hostility now.

"Pat, I think you're about the meanest thing I've ever met," Lucy Day said witheringly. "After all the trouble Dolores has gone to, this is the thanks you give her. But, oh, why go on?" she snorted. "Blow the plate—and the secret. And, anyway, there goes the tea bell," she added, as the gong boomed from the restaurant near by. "Come on, everybody. Put a stop to this silly argument."

There were nods, but many of the campers were still looking angry and resentful as the party broke up, leaving the chums both standing there, the plate still clenched in Pat's hands. Only Willis Green and little Muriel Dale lingered.

"Pat, I'm sorry," Willis said. "It must be a bit of a blow, I know, but—cheer up," he said softly.

"Don't take it to heart," Muriel whispered.

And then they too, strolled off, leaving Pat and Chris alone. Angriily they regarded one another. They did not notice the figure which had abruptly halted at the corner of the near-by chalet, and then, seeing them, had swiftly withdrawn out of sight. It was Dolores herself.

"Again that mischief-maker gets away with it, and once more we've fallen for her trickery!" Chris gasped. "They all think now that Dolores is the misused heroine and we the sneaky, snooty little churls! Oh, gosh, if we could only open their eyes!"

Pat's eyes suddenly flashed.

"We will," she declared.

"But how?"

"We've got to unmask her," Pat said. "It's about time the camp knew her for what she is! This plate is a fake right enough—and it's pretty plain Dolores had this wheeze in mind when she went over to the island—"

"You mean?" Chris asked.

"She took this fake plate with her, then borrowed the real one from the admiral," Pat went on. "She hoped to keep us quiet with the fake while she got on with solving the clue on the real one. Nobody, of course, can prove that—except the admiral himself. Well—"

Pat's lips set fiercely. "Supposing we show this fake to the admiral? Suppose we ask him if this is the plate he gave Dolores?"

"But how could we—without Dolores knowing?"

"Listen," Pat said tensely. "The admiral's coming to the camp at nine to-morrow morning, isn't he? Right. That means, of course, he'll have to row over. Well, what's to stop us from rowing out to meet him?"

"Gee!" Chris' eyes lit up. "And then show him the plate, you mean? And make him tackle Dolores about it when he comes ashore?"

"That's it."

Chris glowed then.

"Pat, you've hit it!" she cried. "Gosh, yes. That's the wheeze all right. But—but what about in the meantime? Supposing Dolores gets to work on the real plate?"

"She won't," Pat said grimly. "We'll give her no chance. From now until bed-time we'll just be shadows to Dolores. And she won't be able to do much after bed-time because the lights are turned off at eleven. So—come on—"

And, little guessing that their conversation had been overheard, they hurried into the cafe. Dolores was already seated there, and she pushed back her chair before they were half-way through tea. Their own meal instantly forgotten, the chums followed her out of the cafe, and as she saw them emerge Dolores stopped and regarded them mockingly.

"Pity about the plate!" she commented. "You must be awfully fed-up to know that there's no secret to solve, after all. I hear you've been saying hard things about me, but

bless you, I forgive you! Where are you going?"

"Where you go!" Pat retorted.

"Really? But why?"

"You can guess why," Pat said grimly. "You see, we happen to know your tricky little game, and we don't intend you to get away with it this time! Lead on, we'll follow—"



DOLORES THE DESPERATE

A scowl momentarily marred Dolores' loveliness. Then, with a shrug, she disdainfully turned and walked across to the canteen.

Doggedly Pat and Chris followed.

There Dolores bought chocolates. Then, with Pat and Chris still following, she went out again. This time she went to her chalet and closed the door, leaving Pat and Chris to peer through the window. They saw her sit down at her table and write something. By that time the crowds were strolling out of the restaurant and the loudspeakers were beginning to announce attractions for the evening: Then Dolores came out again.

"Still snooping?" she asked pleasantly.

"Still snooping," Pat assented calmly.

"Keeping an eye on me, eh?"

Dolores asked amusedly.

"Just that," Pat agreed.

"Such a bore," Dolores yawned.

"And such a lot of trouble for nothing. And I do hate nice girls to go to a lot of trouble, for nothing, you know. And you two certainly are, aren't you? But if you really are interested in my movements for the rest of the day, please take this. You will find it will help you immensely."

And mockingly she flipped into Pat's hand the paper on which she had been writing. And as, still smiling, she sauntered away, Pat opened the paper out.

"Movements of Dolores Bellamy," it read. "Times and places at which she can be found this evening."

There followed a list—a detailed, mocking list of all sorts of impracticable times. Pat, flushing, crunched it angrily in her hand.

"Funny!" she said. "But she's not fobbing us off with this. Come on. Stick to her—like glue."

And like glue they did stick to her. Not, as it happened, that there could have been a great deal of secrecy about Dolores' movements that evening. For two minutes later Bruce called them all together—Bruce bursting with a great idea.

To-morrow, he said, they would give the admiral something to remember the holiday camp by. The ketch must be got ship-shape this evening, and to-morrow, dressed up in their Roman costumes, they would get the admiral to officially launch it. That, Bruce concluded, amid enthusiastic cheers, should stimulate the admiral's interest in their show.

"Whoops, and how!" grinned Willis Green.

Excitedly and enthusiastically they set off to carry out the suggestion. Forthwith they all marched off to the ketch. Out came paint and tools, and from then until supper-time the old White Phantom was a scene of feverish activity. Dolores was with them, of course; and Pat and Chris, making it their task to work near her, never allowed her to stray out of their sight.

After supper there was a great trying-on of costumes, but nobody this time was allowed to wear the garments of the emperor or empress. As Bruce said, neither of those dignitaries had yet been officially elected, and the royal poop would be reserved, anyway, for the admiral himself.

And so, at last, bed-time came with Pat and Chris keeping a watchful eye on Dolores' chalet until the lights went out. In the morning—a warm, heavy morning, with a white mist covering the river-mouth—the chums were up early and immediately after an early breakfast they set out for the landing-stage.

Eager to intercept the admiral on his way across from the island, they forgot all about Dolores, but that mischief-maker did not forget about them—or the conversation she had overheard the previous day, as shortly they were to discover for themselves.

Despite the mist, Pat and Chris were happy, as they launched a rowboat and began to row across to Dartfleet Island. They were certain that the admiral would declare the brass plate to be a fake, and that would mean that Dolores' treachery would be exposed.

Pat smiled across at the handbag that contained the plate, as she tugged on the oars.

"What a shock Dolores will have when we come back with the admiral," she chuckled, for she had no suspicion that the mischief-maker knew of their plans.

Chris nodded, and they rowed on. For some time the boat nosed its way through the water, driven by the steady strokes of the chums' oars. Then suddenly Pat stopped rowing.

"Not much use going too near the island yet," she said. "It's a wee bit too early for the admiral to come, and if anyone's watching it might look suspicious if we hang around the island."

"We might even think we're trying to land again," Chris agreed, pulling a little face. "Still, if we stop rowing the tide will carry us towards the island."

Shipping the oars, the chums allowed the boat to drift forward. For a moment neither of them spoke, each being occupied with their own thoughts.

Chris was thinking of the real plate that Dolores had tricked from them, and Pat of her coming encounter with the admiral.

She knew Admiral Hardacre might still be antagonistic towards them, and might refuse to speak to them. On the other hand, he welcomed interest in his collection and might listen to her if she mentioned it and then produced the plate they had been given.

"Sun's coming up," Chris said all at once, with a little shiver. "I'm not sorry. This mist is terribly chilly."

With a shock, Pat realized it was, and as one the girls began to row again in order to keep warm.

As the sun rose higher the mist began to disperse and at last they could discern Dartfleet Island ahead of them.

"We ought to spot the admiral's boat any minute now," Pat said, then turned her head as from behind came the hum of an engine. "Hallo, that sounds like a motor-boat," she commented.

"And it's coming this way," declared Chris. "Speeding flat out, too. Ahoy there, be careful!" she cried in alarm as the other boat came roaring up out of the mist. "Go easy—"

But the motor-boat's speed did not slacken. On through the water it plunged. It was a cabin cruiser and a slim, girlish figure could be discerned at the wheel.

"Great Scott, it's Dolores!" gasped Pat. "And Bruce, Lucy and others are with her. But what—"

Breaking off, she tugged frantically at the oars, for to her it seemed that the cabin cruiser must run them down. But even as the rowboat swung round, Dolores, a desperate gleam in her lovely eyes, spun the steering-wheel. The cabin cruiser changed course quickly, raced on for a moment more, and then—

Crash! It caught the rowboat a glancing blow, upsetting it. Pat and Chris were flung headlong into the water, and as they wallowed there they both cried out in dismay for the handbag containing the fake brass plate had also been knocked out of the boat, and now it was dropping down to the bottom of the sea.

It looked as if the one piece of evidence they had had against Dolores had vanished for good!

What will happen now? See next Friday's thrilling chapters.



The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

By GAIL WESTERN

MERLE DEFIES LARRY

MERLE WASON believed that a secret, vital to the future of her home, Happy Valley Ranch, was hidden in the Silver Trophy, to be competed for at Lone Pine rodeo. She encountered a strange young cowboy named Larry Denvers. Although he worked for Merle's enemy, Nathaniel Garsten, a neighbouring rancher, Larry declared himself her friend.

Both Merle and Larry entered for the Silver Trophy race. Merle won it and took the trophy to the near-by stables to examine it. There she was confronted by Larry.

WONDERINGLY Merle regarded Larry.

What could he possibly want to talk to her about?

Her sense of uneasiness deepened as she remembered the promise he had made to the Garstens, and involuntarily her grip tightened on the Silver Rider trophy.

Surely he had not come for that! Surely he would not dare to try to rob her of the secret she believed it contained!

"I'm afraid I've no time to talk with you—even if I wanted to," she said coldly. "I'm in a hurry. I've got to drive Pommie back home."

He nodded. "I know. That's what I've come about. You're goin' alone, aren't you?"

She stared at him in bewilderment. "What if I am?" she asked. "It's no business of yours, is it?"

His face was grim as he faced her. "It certainly is. The road back to Happy Valley isn't safe for a girl to take. Guess there's no tellin' what danger you might run into, so I've decided to accompany you."

She drew in her breath angrily. "Well, of all the cheek!" she gasped. "So you have decided to accompany me, have you? How very gallant! But I suppose it hasn't occurred to you that, unlike Celia, I might not be very keen on your company?"

He flushed, and for a moment seemed disconcerted; then he regarded her appealingly.

"Now, don't take me wrong!" he urged. "I was only thinking of your safety."

She laughed scornfully. She was convinced that he was up to some artful game.

"My safety!" she echoed. "Thanks, but I'll feel safer on my own."

He frowned. "Then you won't let me drive you home?"

She shook her head decidedly. "Then what about lettin' me take charge of the Silver Rider—just in case you should hit trouble on the way back to Happy Valley?"

She drew in her breath sharply and her hands tightened on the trophy. So this had been where all his questioning had been leading—to the

statuette which he had failed to win in the hurdle race!

"Let you have the Silver Rider?" she gasped. "So that you can give it to the Garstens, I suppose! You must take me for a fool! Now I've won it I'm keeping it."

And, her one anxiety now to get away, she strode forward; but he caught her by the arm.

"At least let me have a look at it," he pleaded. "After all, it's the least you can do in the circumstances."

She stopped, staring at him in utter bewilderment.

"What do you mean?"

He shrugged, that sardonic gleam she knew so well returning to his eyes.

"Well, I did kind of encourage you durin' the race, didn't I? Guess those little taunts of mine spurred you on no end."

She gasped. Never had she heard a more amazing statement. It took her breath clean away.

"Are you actually suggesting that you didn't taunt me to put me off, but to egg me on?" she cried.

Calmly he nodded. "But—but it's preposterous! Why, next you'll be trying to kid me that you deliberately got your horse to jib at that last fence so as to let me catch up!"

To her astonishment, he nodded again.

"Guess I did just that, honey."

Dazedly she stared at him. "What! Are you daring to suggest that you actually let me win?"

For the third time he nodded, and her cheeks flamed scarlet.

"You must be crazy if you think I'll fall for that!" she gasped. "As if anyone would deliberately throw away a race! Besides, I heard you plotting with the Garstens! I discovered gilt-edged proof that you're in league with them, and I know—"

Breaking off, she wrenched free her arm.

"Let me pass!" she ordered. "I've had as much of this foolery as I can stand."

But he continued to bar the way, his face grim again now.

"I see it's no use arguin' with you," he muttered, "so there's only one thing for it. I'll have to take the statuette."

"Take it!" Anger showed in her eyes. "I'll see you jolly well don't! Don't you dare touch it!" she stormed, and she whirled round and raced for the other doorway.

"Don't get alarmed! I only want it—"

But that was as far as he got, for, as she heard him bound in pursuit, she took a backward kick at the bucket she had used for washing.

Crash!

Over it toppled, spilling soapy water over the floor and rolling right in the young cowboy's path.

Before he could realise his danger he had put a foot in the pail, and over he went, with a yell.

It was Merle's chance, and she was quick to seize it. Swinging open the

door, she plunged out of the stable, the Silver Trophy clutched tightly.

Outside was the horse-box. There was no sign of the Happy Valley cowboys, but the horses had been harnessed up and Pommie had been made comfortable in the van.

Racing across to it, Merle put the Silver Rider down on the high driving-seat, then climbed up beside it.

"Merle! Merle wait a minute! I must warn you that there's danger!"

There came a husky cry from the stable doorway, and she saw Larry come rushing through.

But she ignored his shouts. Gathering up the reins in one hand, she snatched the whip with the other and cracked it.

"Get up there!" she panted. And as Larry came pounding across the enclosure in hot pursuit, she sent the horses plunging forward, out through the gateway and round into the road.



THE SECRET OF THE SILVER RIDER

"The Silver Rider must contain the secret—otherwise Larry Denvers wouldn't have been so anxious to grab it!"

Merle glanced excitedly down at the trophy as she drove out of Lone Pine and turned into the lonely mountain road that led back to Happy Valley. Then she frowned as she thought of that strange, disturbing conversation she had had with Larry.

Was it possible that he really had allowed her to beat him in the hurdle race?

It seemed absurd. She knew that Nathaniel Garsten was desperately anxious to secure the Silver Rider; knew that Larry was in league with Celia's father. And hadn't she herself overheard the young cowboy promise the Garstens that he would prevent her from winning the trophy?

And yet, despite these facts, Merle felt a moment's doubt.

She remembered Larry's superb horsemanship; remembered how eagerly his black horse had tackled the other fences. It seemed extraordinary that Prince should have jibbed at the last one, even more extraordinary that Larry should have lost control over him.

But what possible reason could Larry have for faking that accident—for letting her win?

"It's absurd," Merle told herself again. "Larry's my enemy. I've had ample proof of that. Why, it was he who stampeded poor Pommie to Forbidden Pass before the race. The last thing he wanted was for me to win it."

Then her thoughts turned to Larry's supposed concern for her safety, but scornfully she brushed aside the warning he had shouted after her.

"It was a trick," she murmured. "He hoped I'd let him ride back home with me, then he'd have watched his chance to examine the trophy. It was only when he saw that I was wise to him that he tried other measures."

She flushed angrily as she recalled how he had tried to snatch the precious statuette from her

What a mystifying, astonishing fellow Larry was! Enemy he might be, yet there was something strangely attractive and intriguing about him. And, scoff as she did at his pretended concern for her safety, Merle felt vaguely uneasy as she sent the horses galloping along the winding road.

Very lonely it was here. On one side was a gaunt, forbidding cliff; on the other a steep, pine-covered slope.

The ideal place for a hold-up! She cast a nervous glance at the statuette at her side; then, unable to resist the temptation which had burnt in her ever since she had left the rodeo stadium, she tugged on the reins.

The horses slowed to a standstill, and eagerly Merle picked up the Silver Rider.

Now to see if her high hopes had been justified!

With fingers that trembled, she grasped the hat of the silver figure of the cowboy and tried to twist it. Her heart leapt as she felt the head move. Then the trophy, like its bronze replica, was hollow!

But did it contain old Crogan's secret? And what did that secret consist of? Even more intriguing, how could it possibly affect the destiny of Happy Valley Ranch?

Hardly daring to breathe, Merle unscrewed the silver head and peered into the cavity revealed. Her excited smile faded and a look of bitter disappointment filled her eyes.

"Empty!" she ejaculated. "There's nothing here! I've had all my trouble for—"

She broke off, for as she shook the trophy she heard a faint crackling sound. Something was hidden inside it, after all!

Turning the statuette upside down, she shook it more vigorously than ever, and suddenly something fluttered down on to her lap. She seized it. It was a jagged piece of paper, yellow with age. Eagerly she examined it, drawing in her breath sharply as she saw what was drawn on it in faded ink.

"A map! And it seems to show the land around uncle's ranch!" she cried.

Peering closer, she saw that there were a couple of lines of faint writing under the map:

"An enemy seeks to rob me of my secret, but only Stephen Wason shall find it. Follow the dotted lines and look in . . ."

And there, maddeningly, the writing came to an abrupt end. Merle gave a dismayed cry.

"The map's been torn! Only half of it is here!" she told herself. "Oh golly, where can the other half be? Without it this part is useless."

Gloomily she stared at those dotted lines on the map which came to such a sudden tantalising end, and then, as she remembered that the eccentric old prospector had left behind him yet another trophy, the excitement returned to her face.

"The Gold Rider!" she whispered. "I'll bet the other half's hidden in there! It must have been Sam Crogan himself who tore the map in half. Scared lest his enemy should steal it, he hid a part in each of the two trophies."

The more she thought about it, the more certain she became that her theory was right, and her eyes were sparkling as she pushed the map back into the trophy and screwed on the cowboy's head.

How thrilled her uncle would be when he learnt the news! And what a triumph over Nathaniel Garsten!

Had it been that rascally rancher whom the old prospector had feared? Merle wondered.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she murmured. "Anyway, I've got the better of him. I've won the first half of the map, and—"

Her lips set with determination. First thing to-morrow she would make it her business to discover in what race the Gold Rider was to be competed for. As soon as she did find out she would put down her name, for now it was absolutely vital that she should win the other trophy.

She replaced the statuette on the driving-seat, and was just picking up the reins when she heard the clatter of horse's hoofs on the tree-covered slope to her right. She turned her head and peered in surprise.

"Who ever can be riding down there?"

Through the trees she glimpsed a black horse, and her heart gave a startled leap. Surely the unknown rider could not be Larry?

"It looks a bit like Prince, but it can't be," she murmured. "What could—"

And then her voice trailed away and she gave a gasp of alarm. At last the black horse had emerged from the trees, and she could clearly see his rider.

It was a man—a man whose body was draped by a slicker, or macintosh cape. But it was not that which held Merle's startled gaze. It was the neckerchief which was tied around the horseman's face, leaving only his eyes visible.

Even as she realised that he was masked, he urged his horse up on the road ahead of the horse-box, reined in, and stared up at her.

"Guess you know what I've come for," he rasped, "so look sharp and hand it over!"

And he pointed with a gloved hand towards the Silver Rider.



WHO WAS THE MASKED HORSEMAN?

So Larry's hint that danger might be encountered on the homeward trail had been borne out!

That was Merle's first reaction to this alarming situation. But surely it wasn't possible that the young cowboy had been really concerned about her safety—had genuinely tried to warn her!

Her peril forgotten for a moment, Merle shot a sharp glance at that grim figure that barred the way. An electrifying suspicion had flashed through her brain. Suppose that Larry had known about the danger because he himself was planning it?

Suppose Larry himself was that masked rider!

The horse was certainly like Prince, and, despite the draping slicker, the outlaw seemed to be slimly built. And yet his voice and manner were nothing like Larry's.

As she sat there on the high driving-seat, utterly mystified, not knowing what to think, the unknown trotted forward.

"Come on, hand it over!"

Instantly a thought of Larry was wiped from Merle's mind. She could only realise that the precious silver trophy was in danger, and now that she knew it contained half of old Crogan's secret it was doubly precious.

She could not let it be stolen, she told herself, and impulsively leaned down to snatch up the reins. There was only one thing for it. She must try to ride past the masked horseman. But it was not to be.

Even as she made to urge forward the horses the rider's hand whipped under his slicker. When it reappeared it clutched something that gleamed in the fading sunlight.

A revolver!

"Better not try any tricks, or you'll get hurt!" he barked.

In face of that gun Merle was helpless. The reins dropped from her hand and, white-faced and despairing, she sat there.

The horseman rode alongside, laughing harshly.

"I thought that would make you sensible!"

Angrily Merle glared at him. She still felt a desperate need to know his identity.

"Who are you?" she gasped.

He laughed again.

"Never mind who I am—give me that trophy!"

And, thrusting out his gloved hand, he snatched at it. Despite the threatening gun, Merle clung to it.

"No—you shan't—"

But he wrenched it from her and tucked it under one arm. Then, holstering his gun, he swung round his black horse.

"Before I go," he said calmly, "I'm just going to see that I'm not followed for a bit. Guess now that I've got the Silver Rider I'm goin' to take good care that I don't lose it."

And riding round to the back of the horsebox, he turned, then removed the key Merle always kept in the door, left unfastened in case she needed Pommie at any time.

He pocketed the key, then mockingly raised his gloved hand.

"So-long!" he cried.

With a touch of his spurs he sent the black galloping on down the winding road.

For a second or two Merle sat there, her brain in a whirl. She was convinced that that unpleasant husky voice had been disguised, and yet there was something vaguely familiar about it.

Had the robber really been Larry? Was this his rascally way of keeping the promise he had made to Celia and her father?

"Somehow I can't believe it," Merle gulped. "And yet—"

Breaking off, she became galvanised into furious action. Larry or not, the outlaw mustn't be allowed to get away with his booty. Unless the Silver Rider and its intriguing contents could be recovered, all hope of Merle and her uncle discovering old Crogan's secret would be gone.

"I've got to follow him—see where he goes," Merle told herself as she jumped to the ground, and, running round to the back of the horse-box, tugged at the double doors. Of course, they were fastened too tightly for her to break open, but the masked rider did not know the horse-box as well as Merle.

Once before the key had been lost, and then Merle had found that the lock could be operated by a patiently applied knife. And what could be achieved once could be achieved twice.

Feverishly she thrust her hand in her pocket, to heave a sigh of relief as she found that she had brought a clasp-knife with her.

Opening it, she slipped the blade into the lock and jiggled it. The seconds sped by as she twisted the knife and strove to operate the lock, and she became more and more anxious as she realised that with every moment the masked rascal who had stolen the Silver Rider was getting farther and farther away.

But at last there came a telltale click, and, with a gasp of relief, she pulled open the double doors.

"Come on, Pommie; I want you," she called.

The beautiful chestnut horse, happily engaged in munching the hay the cowboys had provided for the long journey, turned his head and regarded her in surprise. He could not understand why she was looking so flushed and agitated.

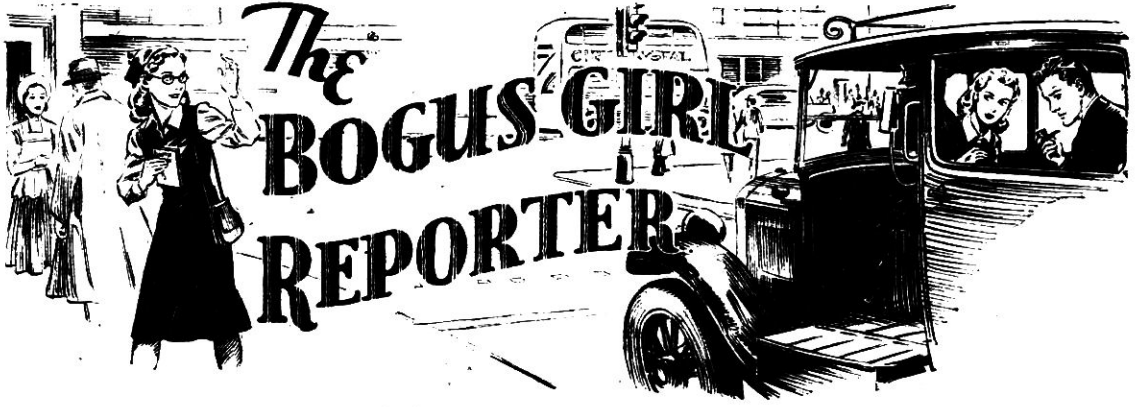
Impatiently Merle snapped her fingers.

"Sorry to interrupt your meal, honey," she gasped, "but we've got to get busy. We've simply got to trail that rascal—got to discover where he goes. Unless we do, we'll never get back the Silver Rider—never discover old Crogan's secret."

She swung up into the box, and with anxious haste untied his halter.

It is a bold, daring move Merle has decided upon. You will read, the outcome of it in next Friday's fine instalment.

Save
All your old paper,
Letters, cardboard, etc. Their
Value as salvage is really
All-important in the
Great Prosperity drive.
Every little helps!



AN AUDACIOUS TRICK

"GOODNESS—look over there, nunky!" exclaimed June Gaynor, with a laugh, as she and Noel Raymond, the famous young detective, stepped from the hotel lift. "We'll be lucky if we can get away without being interviewed!"

Noel raised his eyebrows as he followed the direction of his young partner's glance. On the pavement outside the hotel were several determined-looking young men, with notebooks and pencils, arguing with the stolid commissionaire.

"Reporters, eh?" murmured Noel, his eyes twinkling. "They must have got wind of the reception, and the reason for our visit. We'll just have to run the gauntlet, June—and trust to luck! There's a taxi pulling up at the kerb now."

He signalled to the commissionaire, who promptly hailed the taxi. A flashlight glared and cameras clicked as Noel hurried his niece across the pavement and assisted her into the darkened taxi, springing in behind her.

"Sorry, boys!" he called good-naturedly, leaning out of the window. "You'll have to ask Mr. Barrington for the story, after the reception. My lips are sealed!"

The murmurs of protest were drowned as the taxi started. Noel sank into the corner seat, facing his niece, only to sit up with a jerk as a soft, apologetic voice spoke from the shadows in the far corner:

"I'm afraid you'll be furious, Mr. Raymond—but I've simply got to get this story!"

Noel stared incredulously. The dimly-seen, girlish figure, wearing a blue pinafore dress and light blouse, must have slipped in through the opposite door while his attention was occupied by the reporters.

Now, as the taxi slowed at the traffic lights, both he and June saw their unexpected companion more clearly.

She was leaning towards them hopefully, notebook in hand; a smart felt hat was pulled over her chestnut hair, and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles lent a business-like expression to her attractive face.

Noel's momentary annoyance gave place to amusement.

"You've certainly got a nerve, young lady!" he remarked with assumed sternness. "By rights, I should order you out of this taxi—"

"Please don't do that!" the girl begged anxiously. "Not without an interview. You see, my name's Sandra Gaye—and this is my first real reporting job for the 'Milhurst Record.' I just want to tell our readers that Noel Raymond, the famous detective, and his attractive young partner, were interviewed on their way to the Grange—"

"So you guessed our destination?" put in Noel.

"Of course! All the town knows that Henry Barrington, the celebrated painter, is giving a reception

in honour of that grand old actress, Lisbeth Darnay, whose portrait he has just completed."

"And what do you want me to say?" inquired Noel with a smile.

The girl leaned forward eagerly. "I just want you to confirm that you and Miss Gaynor are going to keep an eye on Mr. Barrington's priceless collection of old pictures—including the world-famous 'Red Cavalier'—"

Noel whistled, flashing a glance at June.

"You appear to know as much about our business as we know ourselves, young lady," he commented dryly. "Someone seems to have been spreading rumours—in spite of Inspector Finch's precautions—"

The girl made a little grimace.

"I think the inspector's horrid not to let reporters come to the reception!" she complained. "But, anyway, I have interviewed you," she added with a smile, "and our photographer got your picture as you were stepping into the car. If only—she looked at them appealingly—"if only I could have your—or Miss Gaynor's—signature—to print under the picture. That would be a wonderful 'scoop' for the 'Record.'"

Just then the taxi slowed down in a traffic jam, and as the detective hesitated, glancing out of the window, the girl reporter slipped a card into June's hand.

"Please, Miss Gaynor!" she begged. With a good-natured smile, June wrote her name—and the girl sprang gaily to her feet.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Gaynor—thank you, Mr. Raymond! I'll never forget your kindness—never!"

Impulsively she pulled open the door and dived out, to vanish with a wave of the hand among the stream of traffic.

The young detective frowned thoughtfully.

"Miss Sandra Gaye certainly doesn't believe in losing any time—" he began, when June, with a little cry, bent forward.

"Oh, she's left her hanky on the seat—a lovely hanky, too, embroidered with her initials—"

"Let me see!" said Noel, his eyes narrowing as he took the handkerchief.

"Hallo—what's this? 'R.F.' doesn't stand for Sandra Gaye—Great guns!" he ejaculated, his face paling. "Those initials, June—and that perfume—"

June stared at him in dawning horror.

"Nunky, you don't mean—she can't have been—"

"That girl's no more Sandra Gaye, reporter, than you are, June," declared Noel grimly. "She's Rosina Fontaine, the audacious girl crook who escaped from the liner when we landed in England. And Rosina's stolen your signature for a purpose!"

June gasped. Rosina—past-mistress of disguise; the elusive, fascinating trickster whom they had last encountered on their voyage from America! Rosina and Sandra

By PETER LANGLEY

Gaye, reporter, were one and the same!

"But, nunky, why should she want my signature?"

Noel shrugged, his eyes grim.

"If I know Rosina, she doesn't want it for a keepsake," he said. "It's more than a coincidence that she should be so interested in Barrington's reception—and the priceless 'Red Cavalier.' He suddenly leaned forward, grabbed the speaking-tube and urged the driver to put on speed. "The sooner we reach the house and contact Inspector Finch, the better!"

"Ten minutes later the taxi swung down the drive of the Grange, Mr. Barrington's country residence. As the door was opened to Noel's urgent ring, the first person they saw was Inspector Finch, looking very spruce in a blue serge suit, as he kept a wary eye on the visitors.

Noel greeted the inspector, then turned quickly to the manservant who had opened the door.

"Has a girl reporter been here?" he asked. "A brown-haired girl, wearing a blue pinafore frock and horn-rimmed spectacles?"

"Why, yes, sir—" began the man.

"What?" barked the inspector, glaring. "I thought I gave orders that no reporters were to be admitted?"

"But this was different, inspector," put in the manservant. "The young lady brought a card signed by Miss Gaynor—"

The inspector whirled on June, his face reddening.

"What's this, Miss Gaynor? You've allowed some cheeky girl reporter to get the laugh of you?"

"Just a minute, inspector," Noel drew the irate officer aside, motioning June to follow. "My niece is not so much to blame as you imagine. The girl who tricked her has hoodwinked the police many a time!"

"Who—what are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Rosina Fontaine—the girl crook!" rapped Noel. "She's in this house now—with designs on the 'Red Cavalier.'"

The inspector started.

"That girl—Rosina!" he muttered incredulously. "But the reporter had brown hair, and—"

"A trifling matter of disguise doesn't worry Rosina," put in Noel dryly. "Our job's to catch her, inspector, before she gets at the pictures. Are they safely guarded?"

"They're in the library," nodded the inspector, "and my men are keeping watch outside. Here comes Mr. Barrington—"

Their distinguished host appeared at that moment from his study, and Noel swiftly put him in possession of the facts. A worried expression crossed the other's handsome face.

"Rosina, the girl crook, in my house!" he exclaimed incredulously. "We must have her arrested, in-

spector, before my guest arrives. Lisbeth Darnay is far from strong these days, and the shock might upset her. Of course, you are taking steps to safeguard my precious pictures—

"Rosina won't leave here with any of your pictures—I promise you that, sir!" declared the inspector confidently.

"I'd like to have a look at the pictures, if I may, Mr. Barrington," intervened Noel.

Their host nodded and led them to the library. A plain clothes officer stepped back from the door as Mr. Barrington switched on the lights.

The panelled walls were hung with fine old paintings, many of them of great value. In an alcove facing the door hung the most priceless item of the collection—the "Red Cavalier."

Noel assured himself that the windows were securely fastened, and he could hear the measured tread of a uniformed constable pacing the drive outside.

Their host pointed to a portrait on an easel—the portrait of a white-haired old lady, her face still charming, despite its wrinkles.

"Lisbeth Darnay," he explained. "A wonderful old lady, Mr. Raymond. I intend to present her with her portrait as a token of my esteem. I trust you will take every care that her visit is not disturbed by that audacious girl crook."

"I will do all I can," Noel replied. "And I suggest, inspector, that we examine the adjoining rooms for a start. Where does that door in the corner lead, Mr. Barrington?"

"To the writing-room," explained their host. "That door is not used, as the key is lost. We can reach it from the hall."

He led the way across the hall and opened the door of the small writing-room.

"No one here!" declared the inspector, switching on the light.

"One minute!" jerked Noel. "Someone has been here recently! There are muddy footprints on the polished floor—signs of a struggle!"

He sprang across to the curtain, jerking it aside—to reveal a large glass conservatory, with french windows opening into the grounds.

June gave a horrified cry as she reached his side, for lying huddled among the plants in the conservatory was a slender, girlish figure, her hands and feet tied with strips of cloth, a handkerchief bound round her lips.

"Sandra—Sandra Gaye!" gasped June incredulously, staring at the girl's pale face and twisted, broken spectacles. "Nunky, this is the real Sandra Gaye, and Rosina must have attacked her!"



INSPECTOR FINCH BLUNDERS

June dropped to her knees, anxiously loosening the girl's bonds, as the inspector pushed his way forward.

"Guess you and Miss Gaynor have bungled things between you, Mr. Raymond," he said angrily. "This poor girl's the reporter right enough—here's her card, 'Milhurst Record.' She must have slipped into the house when my men were busy. Thanks to your niece, Rosina got in under false credentials and came face to face with her."

He waved June aside, kneeling beside the sobbing girl.

"There, there," he said, patting her shoulder. "You're all right now, miss. Nothing to worry about. Just you tell me what happened."

Noel was staring round the conservatory, his eyes narrowed, while the girl blurted out her story.

She had been sent by her paper to get details of the reception, she told them, and had shared the railway compartment with a dark-haired, attractive girl whose description clearly fitted Rosina, the fascinating girl crook.

Rosina had got into conversation

with her, inquired her business in a friendly way, and offered to help her.

"She—she told me she was a friend of Mr. Barrington's," faltered the girl, "and that orders had been given not to admit reporters. But if I came round to the conservatory door at eight o'clock she would let me in. She seemed so charming and friendly that I believed her. I—I came a bit earlier than she had arranged. The conservatory door was open, and I stepped in. There was a dim light in the writing-room—and someone was standing by the mantelpiece, making up in front of the mirror. She was startled when I came in and sprang at me. I tried to scream, but she pressed something over my mouth. You—you know the rest," she added, dabbing at her eyes.

"Just a minute, Miss Gaye," put in Noel. "You say the girl was making up. Did you happen to notice the colour of her hair?"

The girl reporter nodded unsteadily.

"It's strange you should ask that. I thought the light must have deceived me. Her hair looked—white!"

"White?" ejaculated the inspector incredulously.

Without a word Noel strode across the writing-room and ran his fingers over the mantelpiece.

"Powder," he commented, "and—Hullo! Here's a scrap of grease-paint—a dark lining-stick for making wrinkles." He dropped to his knees, removing some torn scraps of cardboard from the fireplace and fitting them together. A soft whistle escaped his lips.

"Take a look at this, inspector!" The inspector strode forward, followed by Mr. Barrington. A startled ejaculation escaped the latter.

"Why, that's a photo of Lisbeth Darnay, my expected guest!"

Noel's eyes gleamed as he met the inspector's puzzled stare.

"It looks, inspector, as though Rosina's playing a very deep game!" he commented. "She got into the house in the guise of Sandra Gaye, but she realised that she couldn't keep that up. I wonder why she should be trying on a white wig?"

Amazed enlightenment suddenly dawned in the inspector's eyes.

"Got it!" he exclaimed. "The whole thing's as clear as a pikestaff. I bet you what you like that Rosina's sent a wire to delay Miss Darnay—and means to turn up in her place!"

Mr. Barrington's face turned pale. "That's an amazing theory, inspector!" he protested.

"You can bet it's the right one, sir," declared the inspector, with a triumphant glance at Noel. "Can't think why Mr. Raymond didn't tumble to it at once. I'll have the handcuffs on Rosina as soon as she shows up in her disguise as Miss Darnay—"

"One minute, inspector," interrupted Noel. "Aren't you jumping a bit too fast? So far as we know, Rosina must be in the house, probably hiding. How's she going to get out, made up as Miss Darnay? You say your men are on guard—"

Inspector Finch waved aside the objection. "I'm not worried how she works her little trick. My job's to arrest her before she lays hands on that painting."

He strode off, while June and Mr. Barrington assisted the dazed girl reporter to her feet, and helped her to a small dressing-room across the hall.

Noel, meanwhile, busied himself with his magnifying-glass. There was a worried expression in his blue eyes as he examined the floor.

When June returned he was standing by the open french window.

"This must have been the way Rosina escaped, nunky," said June, crossing to his side.

"That's the obvious explanation," agreed Noel dryly, "except for the fact that there are no footprints outside the door—not even Miss Gaye's. That girl's story, June, was a pack of lies!"

"What—"
"Look at these marks in the con-

servatory. June," went on Noel. "According to Sandra, Rosina attacked her. There are certainly signs of a struggle—but they were made by one person. Even the plants weren't broken when we found her—and I noticed that the knots securing her wrists and ankles were very loosely tied. She might almost have tied them herself, June!"

June's mind was in a whirl as she realised what was in his mind.

"I'd like another word with Miss Sandra Gaye," Noel added grimly.

They hurried across the hall to the dressing-room, and June opened the door.

"Miss Gaye—" she began, and broke off with a start. "She's gone!"

"I might have guessed it," said Noel tersely as he threw the door wide. "She slipped out as soon as your back was turned." He snatched up a cushion from an armchair and pointed with a grim smile. "All that is left of the astute girl reporter!" he commented.

June gave a cry as she stared at the brown wig, the broken spectacles, the notebook lying on the chair.

"Then Sandra Gaye—the real Sandra Gaye—"

"There never was a real Sandra Gaye," snapped Noel. "When Rosina discovered that we were on her track she had to think quickly. She might have escaped, but that didn't suit her book. She'd come here to steal—and she had no intention of leaving empty-handed."

"You mean—she faked the attack—tied herself up, to make it look as though she was Rosina's unfortunate victim?" gasped June.

"Precisely!" and she hoodwinked the inspector with a clever tale to divert his suspicions—to send him on a wild-goose chase. At this moment he's laying plans to arrest an innocent and respected actress—Mr. Barrington's guest—"

"Oh goodness—listen!" gasped June, as there came a sudden commotion at the front door.

"Come on, June!"

He raced down the hall with June at his heels. Servants and guests were crowding in the same direction, attracted by the noise. In the porch stood Inspector Finch, triumphantly holding by the arm a white-haired, distinguished-looking old lady, who was protesting indignantly to Mr. Barrington.

"It won't do Rosina!" exclaimed Inspector Finch. "I've seen through your game. You'd better come quietly—"

"Take it easy, inspector!" cut in Noel. He turned to the old lady, his manner gravely courteous. "Miss Darnay—forgive me—there has been an unfortunate mistake! Would you be good enough to remove your gloves?"

Her hands trembling, the old lady obeyed. There came a startled, chagrined exclamation from the inspector. For, clever though she was, even Rosina could never have faked those thin, wrinkled old hands that were now clasped together in agitation.

"This was the real Lisbeth Darnay, without a doubt! Crimson in the face, the inspector muttered his apologies, and Mr. Barrington's distinguished guest was escorted to her room to rest."

"Rosina was too clever for us," Noel admitted when she had gone. "That story about the white wig momentarily took me in. Even now I can't guess what game she's actually playing. One thing, the library is safely guarded by Thomson, the inspector's man—"

Inspector Finch started violently. "Oh, my stars!" he ejaculated. "When the commotion started Thomson came running up with the others, and—"

"Then the library's unguarded!" snapped Noel, paling.

Followed by Mr. Barrington and the inspector, he and June raced towards the library. As they burst

(Continued on page 227.)



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

PERCY DOES THE TRICK

"THERE!" Sally Warner put down her needle with a sigh of satisfaction. "There's Percy's gown all ship-shape again."

"Better not let Professor Willard see it!" warned fair-haired Fay Manners, with a chuckle. "He's furious."

"Yes, he even offered twenty dollars reward for information about the impostor!" laughed Don Weston. "Gosh, wouldn't he go up in smoke if he knew the impostor was really a robot!"

Johnny Briggs nodded and grinned. Professor Willard, who was in charge of the students aboard the college ship, Ocean Star, knew there was someone aboard posing as himself. But he certainly didn't dream for one moment that the impostor was a robot made by Slick Kaplin, the clever American boy inventor who occupied the next cabin to Sally and Fay.

It was Percy the robot's gown which Sally had just finished mending, Slick having trodden on it and torn it badly when he had hurried the robot away after Sally & Co. had tricked the professor with it the previous day.

"I'd better take it back now while there's no one around," said Sally, folding the gown into a small parcel. "Wouldn't do—"

She stopped suddenly, a puzzled look on her face. For from outside the cabin door came the smothered but unmistakable sound of sobbing.

"Somebody crying," said Fay, her tender heart immediately touched. "Oh, Sally, who—"

But Sally had already darted across to the door and swung it open. There was a startled gasp from the girl outside.

"O-oh!" she said, choking back another sob. "I—I thought there was nobody about. I—I—" She dabbed frantically at her eyes, her quivering mouth trying to smile. "I—I'm just going to my cabin."

"Hey, not so fast, Elaine!" said Sally softly, putting a sympathetic hand on the girl's arm. "What's the trouble?"

Elaine Brent, small, petite, with a delicate, pink-and-white complexion, enormous blue eyes, and shoulder-length auburn hair, suddenly and unaccountably flushed a brilliant crimson.

"Oh, I—I couldn't possibly tell you!" she choked, and then gave another little sob. "But I—I'm so miserable."

"Miserable? And you've been chosen to sit at the captain's table at his party-to-night?" asked Don in amazement.

"Th—that's the point," faltered Elaine. "I—I don't think I shall be sitting there. Th—they'll give the place to Carmenita Pascali instead, as she was s-second in the draw for the seat." And once again Elaine's rose-

petal face crumpled up, threatening another deluge of tears.

"Oh, crumbs! Not again, Elaine!" said Don in alarm. "Here, come inside! You've told us so much already; you might as well tell us the rest."

And very firmly he gripped Elaine's arm, drew her into the cabin.

"Now tell us," said Sally gently. "I—I feel such a fool," faltered Elaine, blushing again. "But—but when I came aboard the first officer was so kind to me, and he's so handsome, and I was feeling kind of homesick—"

"Yes?" prompted Sally.

"Well, I wrote a poem to him. I know it's silly and all that, and, of course, I never sent it. But—but Alec Burt has got hold of it somehow, and—and—Elaine sniffed—and he's going to take it to the professor. You know how furious Professor Willard gets about anything like that. He's sure to punish me by forbidding me to go to the captain's party-to-night, and—and then Carmenita Pascali will go instead."

"That sneak Burt!" said Don grimly.

"It sounds to me," put in Johnny belligerently, "like a put-up job. He's a crony of Carmenita's, and she was furious that she wasn't first in the draw."

"But what can we do?" asked Fay, her face full of indignation.

"You can't do anything!" wailed Elaine. "He—he'll be coming along any moment now on his way to the professor's study."

"Oh, will he, indeed?" Sally's pretty face was suddenly alight with mischief. "Elaine," she said briskly, "leave this to us. No, don't ask questions. Just shoe—buzz off. And don't cry any more. I've got a feeling that Mr. Sneaky Burt is due for a surprise!"

And quickly she bundled the wondering but already hopeful Elaine outside; watched her disappear down the corridor.

"What's the wheeze, Sally?" asked Don puzzledly.

"Percy's the wheeze!" chuckled Sally. "Don't you see, we fooled Edgar Phineas into thinking that Percy was really the professor; now we'll do the same with Alec Burt. But into Slick's cabin—quickly!"

Grinning now the chums followed Sally to the next door. As they rapped and called out to Slick, the door swung open, operated by a special lever invented by Slick himself.

The boy inventor was lying at ease in his specially designed armchair, arms folded. A mechanical arm held his book in front of his eyes, with a special contraption attached to it which turned the pages when Slick pressed a switch. At his other side a peculiar, claw-like metal object held a glass of coca-cola suspended, from which Slick languidly sipped from time to time.

But for once Sally & Co. had no eyes for all these marvels.

"Slick," cried Sally urgently, "we want to borrow Percy again. May we?"

"Sure!" replied Slick imperturbably. "Help yourselves."

He threw over a lever beside his chair. There was a whir as the cupboard door flew open.

"I pity the persons who have this cabin after you've gone!" grinned Don. "They'll probably go crazy trying to find their way around."

Sally meanwhile had stepped into the cupboard. She came out again leading Percy the robot. He certainly bore an amazing likeness to Professor Willard, particularly when Sally draped the black gown around him and placed a mortar-board on his head.

"Draw the curtains, Fay," she said hurriedly. "Slick, put some records in Percy suitable for telling a boy where he gets off."

Deftly Slick opened the dummy at the back, inserted some small records which bore impressions of Professor Willard's voice, while Sally & Co. experimented with the switches and buttons which operated the robot's movements.

They were not a moment too soon, for as Slick returned to his chair the sound of footsteps could be heard in the corridor. With a wink at her chums, Sally nipped to the door.

"Yes, professor, I'll bring it to you here," she said in a loud voice.

"Eh?" The weedy, crafty-faced boy who was just walking past, halted. "Say, is the professor in there?" he asked. "I want to see him; got something that might interest him."

And, with an unpleasant grin, he pushed past Sally into the study. He blinked in surprise at the dimness, but suspected nothing.

"Oh, professor," he said in a voice of oily regret, "I don't like doing this, but I'm afraid, there is something you should know."

Don, hidden behind the dummy, felt his hands itching to punch the sneaking Burt. Instead, he switched on one of the records at the back of Percy.

"You have brought me your imposition?" rapped the professor's voice.

That was a lucky guess on Don's part. Burt's mean face flushed.

"Nun-no, sir!" he stammered. "This is something else. One of the girls—"

But the professor was now well launched on his tirade against the boy who had failed to deliver up an imposition—Jerry Cantell, in fact—a lecture which Slick had managed to record.

"You dare to come here," thundered the robot, "and tell me you have not done your imposition? Disgraceful! No, no, I don't wish to hear what you have to say! I want no excuses—"

Sally & Co. covertly grinned at each other as they saw Alec Burt opening and shutting his mouth like a landed fish.

"Your slackness is appalling!" the professor carried on grimly. "For your impertinence, your imposition is doubled! And do not come near me again until every line of it is finished."

"But, sir," cried Burt, his sallow face flushing with indignation, "I've already got five hundred lines to do. It'll take me all night."

"Splendid!" muttered Johnny. But the professor, apparently, was taking no further interest in the proceedings. In the dimness his eyes were fixed stonily upon Burt.

"I'd go, if I were you," whispered Sally, "before he doubles it again. He's in that sort of mood."

With a gulp, Burt fled, while the chums collapsed with laughter.

"Great work!" chuckled Don. "That impot record came in just right. But we still haven't got the poem, Sally."

"We've made sure that Burt won't be seeing the professor again this evening," replied Sally. "He won't dare show his face until it's finished, and it'll take hours. And somehow I've got a feeling that after that it won't matter. Thanks, Percy, old top, you've been a great help. Elaine will be thrilled to bits about this."

And there Sally stopped, her face suddenly alarmed as from along the corridor came the upraised voice of Carmentita Pascall, the Mexican spitfire.

"But what you tell me is not right. You cannot have seen Professor Willard, for I myself have just seen him on deck talking to the captain."



CARMENTITA SUSPECTS

"Golly!" Frantically Sally guided Percy back into the cupboard, while Slick pushed over the lever to shut the door.

Then she tiptoed to the cabin door and peered out.

At the end of the corridor was Carmentita, her black eyes blazing with excitement as she clutched the dumbfounded Alec Burt.

"You have been tricked, do you not see?" she almost hissed, shaking the bewildered Burt. "But this time those Merry-makers have been a little too smart. Tell me," she demanded, "who was in the cabin?"

"Well"—Burt frowned deeply—"there was Sally and Fay and—oh, yes, Johnny and Slick! I didn't notice Don. The cabin was dim—"

"Ah! Now I have it!" Carmentita cried in glee. "That pretend professor—that was Don in disguise! It is all clear now. He is the impostor, the one for whom Professor Willard is looking. He is the one who pretended to be the professor before."

"Oh, my hat!" Sally's face was suddenly stricken with dismay as she gazed at her dumbfounded chums.

It was the sheerest bad luck that Carmentita should have seen Professor Willard on deck at the same time that Burt was supposed to be interviewing him down below. It was natural that, not seeing Don, Carmentita should conclude that it was he who had been pretending to be the professor.

Carmentita was wrong, of course; but how could they prove that without producing Percy? And to produce Percy was absolutely out of the question, for to do that would mean dire trouble for the chums and for Slick.

"Oh goodness, what can we do?" asked Fay worriedly.

"Shush!" warned Sally, and once more peered out of the door.

Carmentita's face now was filled with malicious glee as she gazed at Alec Burt.

"But this is wonderful!" she said gloatingly. "I heard the professor say he would be back in his study in fifteen minutes. We will collect some of our friends and go to see him—tell him who this impostor is. Those Merry-makers will not be feeling so merry soon, I think." She gave a short laugh. "And the poem—you still have it?"

Burt nodded; patted his pocket. "That is good! That also we shall show to the professor."

And, with a gleeful smile, Carmentita continued with Burt down the cor-

ridor, while Don, his face pale with consternation, tottered back into the study and sank limply into a chair.

"Gosh!" he said dazedly. "We start out by trying to help Elaine out of a scrape and land ourselves in an even worse one—"

"Without helping her at all," said Sally gloomily. "We've still got Percy—No, wait a minute!" she cried, her eyes beginning to glow with excitement. "What about this? Carmentita doesn't know that we know of her suspicions. We'll take Percy along to the professor's cabin, so that he's there when Carmentita & Co. comes in, and use Percy to bluff them."

"But what about Professor Willard himself?" asked Fay. "We can't let them meet."

"Of course not," replied Sally hastily. "That's where Slick comes in."

"Oho!" Slick lazily roused himself. "I had a feeling I shouldn't get through that book this afternoon. Well, spill it, Sally!"

Sally glanced at her watch. "We've got about ten minutes before Carmentita goes to the professor's cabin," she said tensely.

"That just gives us nice time to get there first. Slick, you've got to go on deck and delay Professor Willard so that we can deal with Carmentita and Burt. O.K.?"

"Leave it to me!" grinned Slick, and left the cabin.

While Sally & Co. got hold of Percy again, hurriedly changed his records, pressed down his "Walk" switch, and guided him towards the door.

A quick look up and down showed them that the corridor was deserted. A few moments later the chums, with Percy walking jerkily between them, were making their way to the professor's cabin, hoping fervently that they would meet no one en route.

"I'll spy ahead round the corner," whispered Sally, hastening in front.

But, as she paused to crane forward and peer, Percy, striding on, bumped into her.

"Hoi!" gasped Sally. "Hold the old chump back, boys, while I—"

"Well, really," exclaimed a scandalized voice, "I have never before heard a student speak in such a disrespectful way to her headmaster!"

And, to the chums' dismay, round the corner appeared Miss Frith-Haines, a very thin and vinegary woman who, to the students' amusement, had from the start of the voyage taken a deep interest in the professor.

She raised her lorgnettes, staring in concern at Percy, the robot, who had stopped as Don hastily clicked up the "Walk" switch.

"Such a way to speak to him," she snapped, "especially when the poor man is obviously ill! Why, his face looks positively waxy!"

Johnny gave an explosive sound, which he covered with a cough, while Don, with great presence of mind, pulled off his scarf and placed it round Percy's neck, drawing it well up around his neck.

"I think he's started a heavy cold," he said hastily. "His throat's too sore for him to speak. But we'll get him to his cabin—"

"Perhaps the dear professor would like me to assist—" started Miss Frith-Haines coyly.

"Oh, nun-no!" gasped Sally.

"Leave him to us. We—we understand him. Excuse us, please—"

And, leaving Miss Frith-Haines looking rather staggered, the chums whirled Percy on round the corner and out of sight. Only then did they slow.

"Gosh, was that close!" gulped Sally. "But—quick! We've only about three minutes before Carmentita & Co. are due to arrive! Thank goodness we're nearly there! I'll nip ahead and see if the coast is clear!"

Stealthily she hurried along the corridor ahead. A few doors along was the professor's study. She peered in, and smiled triumphantly as she saw that it was unoccupied.

Hurriedly she rejoined her chums and Percy.

"O.K.!" she murmured. "Carmentita hasn't arrived yet, and—Oh, my hat! Back!" she cried, pushing, violently at her chums and the robot. "Back—quickly!"

"Sally, what is it?" gasped Fay. Sally, white-faced, stared at her chums distractedly.

"The professor!" she groaned. "Something's happened. Slick didn't hold him up. He's just walking up the corridor to his cabin!"



BAFFLING FOR BURT

Even as the chums stared at each other in stupefied horror, Sally's mind was working rationally.

Their plan had failed. The real professor was by now in his study, and at any moment Carmentita would be coming along to show him Elaine's poem, and triumphantly denounce the Merry-makers as the people responsible for the imposture.

"Oh, help!" groaned Johnny. "Where do we go from here?"

"Listen!" hissed Sally, her eyes blazing with hope. "Here's our only chance to save Elaine and ourselves—and let's hope it works. Don, you take Percy and get him out of sight somewhere—anywhere—until we can safely return him to Slick. Go on—quickly!"

"O.K., skipper!" replied Don, and trundled off Percy into one of the empty rooms.

"Johnny, and you, Fay, listen to me. Stroll along the corridor as if you're unaware that Carmentita & Co. are about. You must laugh and talk loudly, so that they hear you—"

"What do we talk about?" asked Johnny blankly.

"I'm coming to that," said Sally. "Say something like 'super wheeze for old Don to take the professor's place again.' What a sell for Carmentita!"

Fay and Johnny grinned at each other.

"We get you," said Johnny. "Leave it to us."

"Make it sound good," said Sally. "It all depends on you."

Sally now had her own part to play, which necessitated her being in the professor's study when Carmentita and Burt arrived. Waiting a little while, she marched across to the professor's study, knocked firmly, and entered.

The professor looked up.

"Well, Sally," he asked, "can I help you?"

"It's like this, professor—" began Sally haltingly, frantically racking her brain for a good reason for her presence. And then suddenly she stopped, staring at the professor in assumed alarm as from outside came a loud voice.

"Now, remember, I'm taking charge of this, everyone. Follow me!"

And, with a crash, the professor's door suddenly flew open. Alec Burt, a sneering smile on his pasty face, crossed the threshold. Behind him stood Carmentita and other students.

Professor Willard stared at him.

"How dare you!" he cried. "What is the meaning of this—"

"Come off it!" said Burt contemptuously. "Who do you think you're fooling? I know who you are!"

"Bless my soul!" The professor began to look alarmed. "Has the boy taken leave of his senses—"

"Really, Burt," murmured Sally, "you mustn't speak to the professor like that!"

"If you'd ever had any sense," sneered Burt, ignoring Sally and lounging forward with his hands in his pockets, "you'd never have started this business! You're a hammy actor, if ever there was one! Professor! Bah!"

Trembling with wrath, the professor rose to his feet. Leaning over the desk, Burt flipped a contemptuous hand in his chest, sending him hurtling back into his chair.

"Just look at yourself!" he sneered. "Did you ever see a real person with hair like that? And that nose—you

couldn't have made a worse job of it! You phoney professor!"

"Boy!" thundered Professor Willard, hurtling again to his feet. "How dare you speak of my hair—my nose in that insulting fashion!"

"It's awful of you!" cried Sally in shocked tones.

"Your hair!" sneered Burt, shoving Sally aside. "Your nose! They're no more yours than they are mine—and I'll jolly well prove it!"

And, with a quick movement, he lunged forward, grabbed the professor's hair in one hand, his nose in the other, while Carmenita & Co. cheered him on from the doorway.

Sally, nearly exploding, rushed forward to the professor's rescue.

"Don!" she yelled. "Johnny! Fay! Help! The professor's being attacked! Quickly!"

"Don!" repeated Burt, still struggling with the writhing figure of the professor. "What sort of a mug do you think I am, Sally? I know this is your precious friend! I know he's the impostor the professor's trying to find. And it'll be little Alec who collects that reward. And, my word, won't you all be for it!"

He gave another tug at the professor's nose. The professor gave an anguished howl. At the same time there came an encouraging cry from the doorway:

"O.K., sir! Hold on! We're coming!"

Carmenita & Co. gave wild gasps, their eyes almost starting from their heads as they saw Don. Then, without waiting for any more, they took to their heels and fled.

While Alec Burt tottered backwards, his face suddenly ashen. Hiding grins, Don and Johnny gripped him firmly on either side.

"B-b-but, sir," he faltered, his jaw

dropping slackly, "I—I thought you were the impostor! I—I thought this rotter Weston was pip-pretending to be you—"

"You will not lessen your crime, Burt," ground out the professor in a terrifying voice, "by trying to blacken another boy—a boy who came to my rescue when I was suffering under your dastardly attack." He touched his nose tenderly, dabbed at his watering eyes, then smoothed back his ruffled hair. "Had you been possessed of the slightest grain of common sense you would have seen plainly that I was no impostor. You are a fool, boy—a complete fool!"

Burt cringed even more abjectly, while Sally & Co. glanced at each other, desperately trying to hide the twinkle in their eyes.

"You shall be punished for this—punished severely! But I shall let you know later what that punishment is to be. At the moment," said the professor, wincing a little as he once again caressed his smarting nose, "I know I should err on the side of harshness. Now go—go!"

And, like a whipped dog, Burt went, with a black glare at the chums as he passed.

But Sally & Co. were not minding Burt. They were glowing under the grateful thanks the professor was bestowing upon them.

"Gosh, I'll hand it to you, Sally!" said Don in an admiring whisper, as they quitted the study at length. "It was a wizard wheeze to make Burt & Co. think it was the fake professor in the study instead of the real one—"

"Sally! Oh, Sally, what has been happening?"

Elaine Brent, her face white and bewildered, suddenly appeared in the corridor, darting an apprehensive

glance through the open door towards the still dazed professor.

"Ahem!" Sally gave her chums a warning glance. "Elaine, how long have you been here?" she asked, drawing the girl along the corridor.

"I—I had to come along," blurted Elaine, "to find out what was happening. I followed Carmenita and the others. But, Sally," she asked puzzledly, "why on earth did Burt go for the professor like that?"

"Well," replied Sally solemnly, "for some peculiar reason known only to himself, Burt thought he was the impostor, and acted accordingly."

"Oh, my hat! What a joke!" Elaine's eyes twinkled. She gave a chuckle. Then quickly her face clouded again. "But my poem! Burt's still got that."

"He thinks he has, but he's due for another shock." With a smile, Sally opened her hand; revealed a folded piece of paper. "When I was trying to pull Burt away from the professor I was going through his pockets at the same time. And here's the cause of all the trouble." She handed the piece of paper to the flushed and radiant Elaine. "If I were you, old thing, I'd get rid of that quickly," she advised.

"Oh, Sally, I will!" replied Elaine, tearing the paper into minute scraps. "And thank you—thank you all a thousand times!" she added, as with a grateful smile, she rushed for the deck to throw the scraps overboard.

"And now Elaine can enjoy herself to-night with a contented mind," said Sally happily.

Which, thanks to the Merrymakers—and to Percy!—Elaine did.

(End of this week's story.)

More fun and excitement with the Merrymakers—and Percy!—in next Friday's complete story.

THE BOGUS GIRL REPORTER

(Continued from page 224.)

in there came a horrified shout from Mr. Barrington.

"The 'Red Cavalier'—it's gone!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

In the alcove hung an empty frame—the precious picture had been spirited away during the commotion. Rosina's daring plot had worked—only too well!



ROSINA'S BRILLIANT BLUFF

His lips tight set, Noel rapped out his orders.

"Inspector, pass the word to your men! Rosina must still be in the house somewhere!"

But although an exhaustive search of the house and grounds was made, not a trace did they find of Rosina; the elusive—nor of the priceless 'Red Cavalier.'

A worried and baffled group assembled in the library after the search.

"Mr. Raymond, haven't you any suggestion to make?" demanded Mr. Barrington, turning to Noel. "You've allowed a mere girl to beat you all along the line—to rob me of my precious painting—to say nothing of playing a dastardly trick on my famous guest."

And he nodded to the portrait of the distinguished old actress that still stood on the easel in the middle of the room.

Noel's eyes gleamed as he studied the kindly, wrinkled face of the portrait.

"I suggest," he said quietly, "that, if Miss Darnay is feeling well enough after her shock, you assemble the guests here and make the presentation you intended without delay. There are other valuable pictures in here—and Rosina may not be satisfied with one."

Mr. Barrington's face paled. "Then—you think that Rosina is still in hiding?"

"I'm convinced that we haven't seen the last of her," Noel said. "It would be best if Miss Darnay and the other guests left as soon as possible."

Mr. Barrington nodded. "I agree," he said. "Supper is ready, and immediately afterwards I shall make the presentation."

"I'll keep watch in the library, in the meantime!" Inspector Finch declared. "Rosina's not going to pull any more of her old games on me!"

As they left the library Noel drew June aside.

"I'm sure Rosina's still in the house!" he said.

"But, nunky, where is she?" gasped June.

Noel whispered something in her ear, and June stared incredulously.

"But—what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'm going outside while you'll keep watch outside the room I mentioned, but mind that you are not seen. Even now Rosina may beat us—if we're not careful!"

INSPECTOR FINCH stood in the library with his host, looking round at the crowd of guests.

"All right, Mr. Barrington, you may as well start the proceedings," he said. "Mr. Raymond seems to be keeping out of the way—but you can rely on me to catch Rosina if she tries any more funny business."

Word was sent to Miss Darnay that they were ready for her, and a few moments later the frail, white-haired figure of the old actress appeared in the doorway, leaning on her stick.

Smiling round at the guests, she accepted a chair, while Mr. Barrington presented her with her portrait, making a brief, gallant speech.

The old lady rose to her feet, thanking him in a tremulous voice.

She remained a few moments longer, chatting with the guests, and then, escorted by her host and Inspector Finch, who was very anxious to make amends for his unfortunate blunder, they left the room.

A car was waiting outside. The smart chauffeur sprang out to open the door.

Respectfully he held out a hand to

assist the old lady, and Inspector Finch gave a startled, bewildered shout as a pair of handcuffs snapped over Miss Darnay's wrists.

"What on earth—" he ejaculated, glaring incredulously at the chauffeur as the latter whipped off his peaked cap. "Mr. Raymond! Have you gone mad?"

"On the contrary, inspector," rejoined Noel, with a grim smile, glancing at the pale, furious face of the old lady. "You arrested Miss Darnay—but I've arrested Rosina! Look!"

He snatched off the old lady's white wig—revealing a close-cropped head of dark, shingled hair.

Rosina gave an angry laugh, as Noel wiped the pencilled wrinkles from her lovely, defiant face.

"You're just too clever, Mr. Raymond," she declared.

"And you were not quite clever enough, Rosina," said Noel coolly. "You hoodwinked me, as a girl reporter—and you tricked the inspector into arresting the real Miss Darnay, taking advantage of the sensation to slip into the library and cut the precious 'Cavalier' from its frame. Then you hid—in Miss Darnay's room—till the old lady came up to rest after her shock. It was a simple matter to administer a sleeping draught to her—and to come downstairs later in her place. June is helping to revive her now—and I trust she will be none the worse for your scoundrelly trick."

"So what, Mr. Raymond?" Rosina drawled. "You say that I've stolen the 'Red Cavalier.' Well, where is it? Do you suppose that I'm carrying it in my handbag?"

"In a better place than that, Rosina," said Noel, with a smile. "In the only place, in fact, where you could have hoped to smuggle it from the house."

As he spoke he took the framed portrait of Lisbeth Darnay from the servant who was carrying it, and calmly opened the back—producing a magnificent painting—the priceless 'Red Cavalier'!

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's detective story June pays a visit to her old school and solves—**THE SECRET OF STUDY 7.**

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 218.)

future all communications between us must go through the secret letter-box.

He paused, and solemnly ended: "Grey Ghosts, we have got to win, even though every hand may turn against us; even though eventually we have no friend!"

The figures moved back, the leader limping slightly—the limp he must have earned helping Penelope. Involuntarily Penelope's hands clenched. Her brown eyes were sparkling with a sudden surge of unusual emotion, and then she turned her head as there came the sound of footsteps.

Mr. Aspell, reinforced, was on his way to Small Chapel!



THE WARNING MESSAGE

"The Grey Ghosts shan't be caught!"

It was an impulsive decision Penelope made. All her instincts put her on the

side of the Grey Ghosts in their fight against Mr. Aspell.

Swiftly she drew a pencil and a scrap of paper from her pocket and scribbled a message.

"GET AWAY—QUICK! THE WASP IS COMING."

A daring light danced into her eyes, and impulsively she added at the end:

"THE 4TH GREY GHOST!"

In a moment it was done. She groped for a stone and wrapped the paper round it, then carefully tossed it through the doorway.

A startled exclamation reached her ears from below, followed by seconds of complete silence before, abruptly, the glow of the candle went out.

Penelope rose to her feet and darted behind a near-by bush.

A stone clicked in the ruins. She just caught a glimpse of three vague figures seeming to come from the ground. They melted speedily into the darkness.

"They're clear," whispered Penelope, and lost no time in fleeing herself.

"MORE toast, daddy?"

At the head of the breakfast-table, Penelope passed the toast-rack across to her father. His strong features relaxed into a smile, softening that slightly remote and forbidding expression that the boys of Harcourt Abbey had learnt to respect and rather fear.

"Thank you, Penelope."

He turned his attention again to a pile of school papers at his side. Penelope shifted in her seat, nerving herself to broach the subject that was so completely occupying her mind.

The previous night she had slipped into the house without incident and gone straight to bed, her mind awfully with excited thought.

To her disappointment, however, her father had not said a word of the Grey Ghosts' affair. It was obvious that he did not consider school matters to be any concern of Penelope's.

But Penelope meant to make discoveries. She summoned up her most innocent and casual manner.

"Oh, daddy, is—is Glynn Tracy one of your best pupils?"

Her father's head jerked up instantly.

"Penelope—where did you hear that name?"

His expression startled her.

"Why—why, daddy, I just overheard a boy mention him—"

"What boy?"

"I couldn't say. But, goodness, daddy, why—"

"Understand this, Penelope," he rapped, "I do not wish to hear that boy's name mentioned in this school! I forbid it!"

He picked up his papers again. "Yes, daddy, of course," murmured Penelope obediently.

But she was thunderstruck, her mind in a whirl. Deeper and deeper grew her sense of wonderment. What was the mystery of this Glynn Tracy? What part did he play in the daring activities of the Grey Ghosts?

She decided to try another approach.

"Daddy, did Mr. Aspell catch those—er—naughty boys last night?"

The headmaster looked up again.

"He did not," he said rather grimly.

"Those audacious, so-called Grey Ghosts escaped him. But they will eventually pay the penalty for daring to band together to defy Mr. Aspell!"

Penelope's heart beat faster beneath a demure exterior. Now to try to make her point.

"Goodness, isn't Mr. Aspell popular, then, daddy?" she asked innocently.

"I mean, isn't he fair to the boys? He was awfully frightening last night—and so strange the way he was creeping about."

The Head eyed her sharply. Slowly he laid down his papers.

"Now, listen, Penelope!" His tones were measured. "Being a girl, you are naturally easily alarmed. But you must understand that Mr. Aspell is in complete charge of the junior school, which holds some of the most unruly members of Harcourt. He is stern but just, and it is essential for discipline that he should quash this audacious secret society."

Penelope started to speak, but he raised his hand.

"Furthermore, Penelope, I must impress upon you that the running and affairs of this school are no concern of yours. This outrageous affair must be banished from your mind. The gravest penalty awaits those boys when they are caught. Now, let us close this matter."

Penelope felt rather hopeless. Suddenly her father's frown softened.

"Come, my dear, I do not wish to sound harsh," he said quietly, "but while you are here you must concentrate upon your music and knitting and so forth and leave your father to run the school."

Penelope impulsively smiled back with warm regard.

"Yes, daddy," she said. "If you've finished I'll tell Nellie to clear the table, and then do some knitting."

"An excellent idea, my dear."

Demurely, primly, Penelope left the room. But once in the hall her expression changed.

"Dear, stern daddy," she murmured, "but"—her hands clenched and a determined little flash entered her eyes—"I'm sure he's being deceived by Mr. Aspell! If only I could prove it! And—why on earth wouldn't daddy speak about this Glynn Tracy?"

It was baffling, intriguing.

After asking Nellie, the maid, to clear the table, she picked up her knitting-bag and walked sedately out into the sun-bathed garden.

First bell for roll-call was ringing across the quadrangle from the old clock tower. Over the wall she could see a stream of boys hurrying in through the Norman doorway of High Hall. Her eyes gleamed as she watched them.

Amongst them, unknown, were the daring Grey Ghosts!

Which three were they? Which was the leader who had so impressed her?

Her gaze suddenly flickered and grew fixed.

"Zimmy!" she gasped.

She was staring at a grey, hooded cloak with a number "3" painted on the forehead of the cowl.

It hung, strange to see, in the bright sunlight, straight down the

trunk of a fruit tree by the wall, caught by a knotty projection.

For a second she was held spell-bound, and then enlightenment came. This must be the robe No. 3 had lost the previous night—the one their daring leader had said he must and would recover.

Probably the leader had searched later, but had searched in vain, for, naturally, he would have expected to find the robe on the ground.

As Penelope remembered that the boy who had lost the robe had declared that if it fell into Mr. Aspell's hands the Grey Ghosts would be lost, she took an impulsive step forward.

She tugged at the robe, but, to her dismay, it would not budge. The wind of the night before had blown one of the ends upwards and it was twisted round a branch high up in the tree.

With a frown, Penelope surveyed it. She knew it would be disastrous for the Grey Ghosts if that robe was left there, so, to her reasoning, there was only one thing to do.

"Penny, my dear," she said to herself, "you've got to get it down."

It would not be a hard task for her to climb the tree—she had climbed many at her other school. In fact, her only danger was if someone should come along and see the Head's daughter acting in such an undignified way.

"Can't be helped," she told herself. "Well, here goes."

One swift glance round her satisfied her that there was no one in sight, and, grasping the trunk of the tree, she began to climb.

Within a few moments she had reached the branch around which the end of the robe was twisted and had climbed astride it.

With a little laugh, she bent forward and swiftly tugged at the robe.

At once it came free in her hand.

"Good-o!" she breathed, and swiftly began to roll it up into a bundle. Then a sound from the garden below made her look down, and at once her heart gave a jump.

Coming towards her, with slow, measured stride, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the ground, was her father.

Penelope gulped. In a second she had done the only possible thing. Gathering the robe under her arm, she flung herself down flat along the branch.

She dared not think what would happen if her father saw her now—and with the robe under her arm. The only thing to do was to lie low and hope for the best.

Slowly the Head approached, and every one of his steps seemed to take an hour to Penelope. But, to her relief, he did not look up, and slowly passed her by.

As soon as he had passed out of the garden Penelope hurriedly descended the tree. She tightened her grip on the robe and made to turn away, then stiffened, for from the other side of the high privet hedge came the senior master's voice:

"Very well, Head. I am glad I met you. I will just check the garden, in case they left any clue to their identity."

Penelope gave a horrified gasp. She mustn't be caught here with the secret society robe in her hands; and it would equally be disastrous for the Grey Ghosts if Mr. Aspell gained possession of it.

Daringly, she did the only possible thing—she quickly donned it, pulling the hood over her head. Then she made a running jump for the garden wall; but at that moment Mr. Aspell appeared on the scene, and at sight of the hooded figure he gave an angry shout:

"Boy, come back! Take off that robe! Let me see who you are!"

And he came running across the garden.

Will Penelope be able to escape? See next Friday's enthralling instalment of this grand new serial. You will find it packed with thrills and surprises.