

# GIRLS' CRYSTAL<sup>3</sup>

Week  
Ending  
August 21st,  
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



## The FOURTH GREY GHOST

The Headmaster's Daughter Who Helped The School Secret Society—By DOROTHY PAGE

### MR. ASPELL IN PURSUIT

**P**ENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, sympathized with a secret society calling themselves the Grey Ghosts. They were out to fight against the tyranny of the bullying senior master, Mr. Aspell, and for a mysterious boy named Glynn Tracy.

When Penelope asked her father about Glynn Tracy, he refused to discuss him, and, as he had complete confidence in Mr. Aspell, and did not approve of Penelope taking part in school affairs, she found it impossible to open his eyes as to the senior master's bullying character.

In the school grounds Penelope found a robe belonging to one of the Grey Ghosts, which she believed contained incriminating evidence of their identity. Before she could get away with it, however, she heard Mr. Aspell, nicknamed the Wasp, approaching. Her only hope of escape was to wear the robe herself. As the senior master appeared she thrust it on and dashed madly away.

"Oh, zimmy!" gasped Penelope. "Talk about hot spots—"

She leapt from the wall of her father's private garden and fled.

From the other side, forcing her to frantic efforts of speed, came another fierce shout from Mr. Aspell.

"Stop, boy! Stop! I command it! You cannot escape—"

"Can't I!" panted Penelope. "I've got to! If I'm caught— Oh, horrors!"

For one awful moment she had a shuddering vision of herself, the headmaster's supposedly prim and proper daughter, being unmasked in the robes of the secret society that had set Mr. Aspell at defiance!

"Stop thinking!" she ordered herself. "Just run—run!"

And, with the folds of the hooded robe flapping about her, she sped through the bright morning sunlight,

hardly taking heed of where she was going, conscious only of the desperate need to escape.

She had gained a momentary respite by her athletic swing over the high garden wall. Little chance that the senior master would venture to follow her example. But it would take him seconds only to dash out through the garden gate.

Then his lean, long legs would swiftly cut down her lead.

Penelope spurred, clawing at the hood to keep the eyeholes level with her own eyes.

To her left was the main mass of the school. The bell for morning roll-call was still tolling. Immediately in front was the old clock tower, where the cloisters started.

Ahead and to the right were thick bushes leading to the hedge about the school gardens.

"I see you! Stop! Stop, you young scoundrel!"

The Wasp was out of the garden, hot in pursuit.

Penelope swerved for the bushes; they would give her a little cover. It did not occur to her to give up. Penelope wasn't made that way.

The amazing happenings of the previous night had put her on the side of the Grey Ghosts. To the last gasp she would try to get clear with the incriminating robe that could condemn the unknown boys.

To the last gasp! And that wouldn't be long, she thought ruefully. With sinking heart, she heard the senior master—grimly silent now—racing through the bushes somewhere behind her.

"Penny, you've had it this time—"

She was stumbling, panting. The robe hampered her movements. Having to keep her knitting-bag concealed beneath it did not help.

Then suddenly she felt her cloaked shoulder seized in a strong grip that whirled her helplessly to the ground.

Caught!

The hood slipped round her head,

momentarily blinding her. Instinctively she struggled, but the strong grip held her flat against the grass.

"Not a move!" ordered a voice. Sheer surprise stiffened Penelope's limbs.

That voice! "Lie still," it continued steadily, coolly, "under this bush. I'll lead the Wasp off—"

It wasn't the senior master who had caught her. No. That calm voice—she knew it. She had heard it last night. It was the voice that had impressed her so much—the voice of the leader of the Grey Ghosts!

It was he, the unknown, daring boy, who had appeared from the blue to save her.

In spite of the danger of the moment, Penelope couldn't resist raising her free hand. She twisted the hood, staring up eagerly through the eyeholes.

She had a glimpse of a dark-haired boy leaping away, bent low. Then he was gone, smashing through the bushes in the direction of the clock tower, obviously making as much noise as possible.

"Mum-my golly, what a thrill! But look out, Penny! Danger!"

Panting, breathless, she lay under the bush, pressed close to the thick grass, as she heard Mr. Aspell coming. Nearer—nearer—

But suddenly he swerved. He had heard the boy's movements. Penelope held her breath, and then expelled it in a long sigh.

The senior master went past without a glance in her direction.

Penelope relaxed. A daredevil grin crept over her lips.

"Was that hot—or was that hot!" she breathed. "But that boy—"

Her brown eyes shone with admiration. He had obviously been coming to find and collect the robe she wore. Equally obviously, he had taken her to be one of the members of the Grey Ghosts, and had acted with cool daring.

"Wish I'd seen his face!" Penelope murmured.

Typically, she had forgotten her peril just past. No. 1 of the Grey Ghosts held her thoughts excitingly.

"Action, Penny!" she reproved herself sternly. "He's got you clear. Your job now is to get the robe clear—quickly."

She paused, hurriedly fumbling at the robe. There was a pocket in it.

In that pocket must be the evidence that could incriminate the Grey Ghosts—reveal their true identity. That was an intriguing thought.

Abruptly she stilled her fumbling hand and jerked up her head, checked by a high-pitched, triumphant shout from the direction of the clock tower.

"I've got him, sir! Here he is!" More voices sounded, including Mr. Aspell's grating tones.

Penelope's chin dropped.

"Oh, he's been caught!" There could be no doubt. The daring No. 1 had saved her—but now would pay the penalty for his cool recklessness.

"Will he? Not if I can help it!" The golden flecks were alight in Penelope's brown eyes. "Headmaster's daughter or no, this is where you take a hand!"

She scrambled from under the bush and whipped the hooded robe off over her brown curls. The incriminating evidence in that robe must wait.

Hastily making a small bundle of the robe, she tucked it well away in the heart of the bush and straightened. A swift glance around told her the coast was clear. She tidied her hair, smoothed her frock, and, primly holding her knitting-bag, stepped briskly towards the old clock tower.

A burst of excited talk greeted her as she rounded the far corner of the weathered grey stone building. Penelope paused, quick eyes taking in the scene.

Mr. W. Aspell she instantly saw. Hawk-faced, a high colour in his thin cheeks, he was half-turned her way, speaking harshly.

"So, Hugh Mason, you are a member of this outrageous secret society! I might have known it. You young scoundrel—"

In front of him, back to Penelope, was a dark-haired boy—the boy who had saved her. A burly youth—a senior by his size—was holding one arm. In the background was a silent group of Fourth Formers. It was plain by the expressions on the latter's faces—a mixture of curiosity and concern—that their sympathies were with Hugh Mason.

"Well," rasped the senior master, and how Penelope despised the coldly triumphant smile on his face, "do you deny it, boy?"

"He can't deny it, sir!" cried the burly youth holding Mason's arm. "I jolly well spotted him bunking round the tower. I grabbed him for you, sir."

"Yes, excellent work, Smeeke!" purred Mr. Aspell. "Well, Mason?"

Breathing swiftly, Penelope watched Hugh Mason. She mentally applauded the way he held his dark head up, coolly, disdainfully.

"Is there any crime, sir," his steady tones came, "in running round the tower? I understood you were chasing someone wearing a hooded robe. I have no robe, as you see—"

"Because you must have thrown it away!" broke in the burly youth. "In fact, I—I think I saw him throw something away, sir!"

"Fibbing sneak!" Penelope breathed explosively.

With satisfaction, she saw the dark-haired boy brush Smeeke's hand from his shoulder.

"Liar as well as toady, eh, Harold Smeeke?" he cried contemptuously.

"You know jolly well—"

"Silence, Mason!" snapped the master. He obviously did not like the boy. "Insults won't help you, neither will evasion. I am going to take you before the Head immediately! We will see then whether or not you have the audacity to say you are not a

member of this—the scandalous Grey Ghosts!"

Penelope saw the dark-haired boy stiffen in dismay, and impulsively she went hurrying forward.

"Oh, Mr. Aspell—Mr. Aspell!" she cried. "Such a dreadful thing! I have just seen one of that awful secret society—"

Heads snapped, staring. "Miss Cartwright!" exclaimed the master. "You saw—"

"Yes, indeed!" fluttered Penelope. "I actually saw the robe taken off! And, as headmaster's daughter, I think it is my duty to do my best to unmask the guilty person!"



## PENNY TO THE RESCUE

A soft hiss of disgust broke the silence which followed Penelope's dramatic statement.

Girl or not—headmaster's daughter or not—the Fourth Formers had no time for a sneak.

Penelope heard the hiss. She ignored it. She continued to look at Mr. Aspell, for she had a part to play.

The master's surprise had turned into a slow, rather cruel smile of satisfaction. The burly youth at his side looked equally pleased.

"This is excellent, Miss Cartwright!" purred Mr. Aspell. "We shall now be able to visit your father with conclusive proof! I applaud your sense of duty!"

"I always do what I think right, Mr. Aspell," she said gravely.

"Naturally," purred the master. He stroked his nose and smiled sourly. "Miss Cartwright, perhaps you would be good enough to glance around at these junior boys. I gather you had a good look at the boy without his robe?"

"A glimpse only," replied Penelope. "But I am sure I would recognise the guilty person by the hair alone."

Another murmur arose from the juniors. They shifted restlessly. Hugh Mason, slightly behind Penelope, had not moved. She purposely did not look at him.

"Look here, sir," suddenly burst out a sturdy, fair-haired boy, "I don't think it's fair to convict anyone on the colour of hair! Miss Cartwright might easily make a mistake—"

"Silence, Gower!" thundered the senior master, glaring. "I am quite sure we can rely on the evidence of Miss Cartwright—a completely unbiased witness. Do you dare to doubt the Head's daughter?"

The sturdy boy subsided, lips tight. Penelope shot him a covert glance and wondered if this boy could be another member of the Grey Ghosts, quick to spring to the loyal defence of his leader.

But no such thoughts showed on Penelope's prim face. She looked at Mr. Aspell and the smirking Harold Smeeke inquiringly.

"Now, Miss Cartwright!" prompted the master.

Penelope turned towards the juniors. A rather tense, expectant silence fell. She walked slowly in front of them, peering at each boy in turn. They looked back stonily. She passed Gower, who openly glared, and, with a little thrill, stopped in front of the dark-haired boy.

So this was the leader of the daring Grey Ghosts—Hugh Mason, of the Fourth!

He had a lean, good-looking face, dark curly hair, and dark rebellious eyes that steadily held hers without fear. Instinctively she felt her first liking for him confirmed. But she sensed tenseness in the set of his lips.

"And I know why," decided Penelope swiftly. "He thinks I've seen one of his chums taking off a hood. He's anxious in case I unmask one of his followers—not anxious for himself. Good for you, No. 1!"

She had a sudden temptation, hastily suppressed, to wink reassuringly at him. Mr. Aspell stepped quickly to her side.

"Ah, Miss Cartwright, you have recognised the young scoundrel!"

From somewhere among the other juniors Penelope heard a dismayed "Oh, gosh!" Harold Smeeke sniggered triumphantly:

"Just as we thought, sir!" Penelope raised eyes of the demurest wonderment.

"But this isn't the person who wore the hood, Mr. Aspell!"

"What!" "Not the slightest resemblance, Mr. Aspell."

An excited murmur from the juniors. Mr. Aspell's brows knitted angrily.

"Come, Miss Cartwright! This must be the boy—"

"Indeed not, Mr. Aspell," said Penelope primly. "You were kind enough to express confidence in my judgment—"

"Yes, I know, but—" "And of this I am certain, Mr. Aspell—the person had brown hair exactly the colour of mine!" Penelope added daringly. "There doesn't seem to be anyone here who—Ah-ah!"

She broke off, starting, seemingly seeing Harold Smeeke for the first time. That puzzled, burly youth stepped back from her intent gaze.

"Why, goodness me, Mr. Aspell! Could it be this boy? He has hair my colour. Why, I do believe—"

An involuntary chuckle swept the juniors. Smeeke went brick-red.

"Miss Cartwright, I say—"

"The same furtive expression!" said Penelope severely. "The same sort of sneaking way of moving—"

"Mr. Aspell, sir," cried Smeeke, "you know it wasn't me—"

"Oh, be quiet, Smeeke!" snapped Mr. Aspell. "Miss Cartwright—he breathed hard—"you are mistaken. It could not have been Smeeke."

Penelope frowned doubtfully. "Are you sure, Mr. Aspell? He looks very guilty to me. What was he doing here behind the clock tower?"

"I was running to be in time for roll-call!" Smeeke fumed.

"But that was what the other boy—Mason—said," put in Penelope innocently. "And Mason seems far more trustworthy. And he has black hair, not light brown like the guilty person."

She flicked a sideways glance as she spoke, and saw Hugh looking at her rather puzzledly, but with obvious relief on his lean face. The other juniors were frankly grinning at the surprising turn of events.

"But if you're quite sure about this boy, Mr. Aspell," continued Penelope, giving the red-faced Smeeke another suspicious stare, "then, obviously, the person in the hood must have escaped ages ago."

The master bit his lip. In the circumstances there was no other conclusion to arrive at—thanks to Penelope! His face was dark. It seemed to Penelope that the apparent innocence of Hugh angered him.

"I hope I have done my duty, Mr. Aspell," she finished primly. "I always try to! Good-morning! Good-morning, boys! I must continue my knitting!"

And she turned and walked sedately from the scene.

Only when her back was turned did she allow her lips to curve in a gleeful, gurgling smile.

What a wizard scene that had been! She had given that sneaking toady, Smeeke, something to think about! She had checkmated the harsh senior master—and saved the leader of the Grey Ghosts into the bargain!

The juniors wouldn't be thinking too well of her; she reflected rather ruefully, but it was all in the good of the cause.

Behind her she heard Mr. Aspell harshly dismissing the juniors.

"And fifty lines each for being late for morning roll-call!" he rasped.

"Bully!" muttered Penelope; but her quick frown soon went.

Fifty lines! It might have been so much worse for one of those juniors at least!

"But that robe!" she decided quickly. "I must get that away."

(Please turn to the back page.)

No Matter How Awkward The Situation, Dolores Is Never At A Loss—As Pat and Chris Realise Once Again This Week



# DOLORES THE Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

## TRIUMPH FOR THE CHUMS

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westonmouth Holiday Camp, were anxious to obtain a mysterious brass plate in the possession of Admiral Hardacre, who owned nearby Dartfleet Island, for they believed it was a clue to a secret connected with Chris' dead uncle.

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl staying at the camp, was also after the plate, and she visited the admiral in order to try to borrow it.

When she returned she admitted that she had succeeded in securing the plate and sent another girl off to her cabin cruiser to get it.

But when Pat and Chris saw the plate they were convinced that it was not the real one, but a worthless fake.

In order to test out their suspicions that Dolores had tricked them, they decided to show it to the admiral. They set out in a row-boat to meet him, but were run down by Dolores' cabin cruiser and thrown into the water, together with a handbag containing the fake brass plate.

"DOLORES deliberately rammed our boat! It was a plot to prevent us showing that fake brass plate to the admiral!"

Pat gasped the words as she wallowed in the water. Chris, spluttering at her side, nodded angrily. There could be no doubt that the "accident" had been artfully contrived, and the worst of it was—it had succeeded.

The handbag containing the all-important brass plate now lay at the bottom of the sea.

By now the cabin cruiser had come to a halt, and through the thinning mist they suddenly saw a slim figure dive overboard. It was the mischief-maker herself, and swiftly she came swimming to where the furious chums trod water.

"All right—don't struggle!" Dolores cried. "I've got you—we'll soon have you safely aboard."

And her hand closed over Pat's hair!

Pat gave a surprised gasp, and the mischief-maker tightened her grip, a mocking gleam in her lovely eyes, as she shouted again.

"No need to panic," she said. "I'll see you safe."

Pat was so taken aback that she allowed herself to be towed through the water. It took her several moments to realise the truth—to realise that Dolores, having been responsible for upsetting their row-boat, was now out to win everyone's admiration by posing as a life-saver.

"Why, you—you trickster!" spluttered Pat, and began angrily to struggle. But Dolores kept a firm grip on her, and at that moment there came another splash.

Willis Green, genuinely fearing that Chris might also be in danger, had

also dived in, and soon he was helping that girl towards the now stationary motor-boat.

Bruce Feltham, the young sports master, Lucy Green, and the others aboard leaned over and grasped the gasping figures. One by one they were lifted aboard, and as Dolores was helped over the rail there came an impulsive cheer.

"Good old Dolores!"  
"That was a smart bit of work!"  
"And good for you, too, Willis!"

Lying on the deck, Pat glared. As for Chris, she was so furious that she was rendered speechless. To think that the scheming mischief-maker should be cheered like this!

Bruce bent anxiously over the two girls.

"Not feeling any the worse for your dip, are you?" he asked.

Pat shook her head, while with an effort her chum found her voice.

"No, thanks to Dolores!" she burst out. "If she hadn't run us down—"

Bruce and the others looked shocked.

"I say, that's no way to talk!" declared Lucy Day. "It's true Dolores may have been speeding a bit, but, after all, she saved Pat."

"S-saved her!" spluttered the indignant Chris. "Why, Pat can swim like a fish!"

"Of course she can," agreed Dolores, smiling charmingly. "But I was afraid that she might have been hurt in the collision. You are sure you are all right?" she asked, bending solicitously over Pat but that mocking gleam still in her eyes.

"Yes—thanks," Pat said curtly. "But, all the same—"

"I know," put in the mischief-maker, shaking her head in mock regret. "I was a bit careless, I suppose. I'd have done anything to have avoided the accident, but, honestly, Pat, I didn't see your boat in the mist."

"Well, of all the—" began Chris, then broke off as her chum gave her a warning nudge. In the circumstances it was hopeless to accuse Dolores. To do so would be only to turn the campers against them.

"I didn't expect anyone to be about," Dolores went on. "And we were in a hurry. You see, at the last moment we decided to run across to the island and bring the admiral back in my cruiser."

"But I'm afraid we'll have to abandon that idea now," said Bruce. "Can't have you four hanging about too long in wet clothes. The sooner we get back to the camp the better. We'll tow back the rowboat." Dolores, where are the spare ropes?"

The mischief-maker pointed across the roomy well in the stern.

"In that locker," she said. "I'll get them."

"No, it's all right. I can find them," said the young sports master, and made for the locker. Instantly there came a cry of protest from Dolores.

"No, let me! I prefer to look for them!" she gasped.

Pat and Chris exchanged wondering glances: Why was their rival so agitated? Instantly suspicious, they watched as Dolores hurriedly darted across to the locker and took out a coiled rope. Bruce took it from her, then grinned.

"Better have another—just in case we need it," he said.

"All right, I'll get it," Dolores said, and again rather agitatedly she turned towards the locker. But this time Pat was before her. As she made to open the door the mischief-maker gave a shrill cry. "Don't you interfere, Pat. I don't like—"

But Pat, convinced now that there was something hidden in the locker that Dolores did not wish them to see, wrenched herself free from the other girl's grabbing arm and swung open the small door.

She saw a coiled-up rope lying in the cupboard, and, half hidden behind it, something that glittered.

Her heart gave a triumphant leap, for instantly she recognised the object hidden there.

"The brass plate!" she exclaimed. "The real plate!"

Before the furious Dolores could stop her she had plunged in her hand, seized the oblong plate, and dragged it out. Then, while Chris stared with bulging eyes, she flourished it acutely.

"Yes, this is the real plate right enough—the one from the Captain Kirabee figurehead!" she cried. "So you did have it all the time, Dolores! It was a fake one that you got Lucy to hand us!"



## DOLORES EXPLAINS

For a moment there was a startled, incredulous silence aboard the cabin cruiser. Everyone was staring at the brass plate as if hardly able to believe their own eyes.

Pat's pulses were racing. Despite the rascally trick which had caused Chris and herself to lose the fake brass plate, they were now in a position to expose Dolores for the schemer she was.

"Yes—the real plate," she said, looking around. "Now, perhaps, you will realise what a trickster Dolores is. You wouldn't believe me yesterday when I said the other plate was a fake. You thought I was just being spiteful, but now—"

"Now the truth's obvious!" cried Chris.

"But surely—" began the startled Bruce.

Pat held up her hand. "Please let me finish," she said. "I say Dolores deliberately planted that fake plate on us, and that's not all. She found out we were on our way to take the fake to the admiral, so she deliberately ran us down."

"Oh, Pat, how can you say such a horrid thing!" cried Dolores, and there were hypocritical tears in her eyes.

"I say it because it's true!" snapped Pat.

For a moment there was another uneasy hush. Everyone's attention was now riveted on Dolores. She,

superbly acting, was staring helplessly about her, as if utterly bewildered by the accusation brought against her.

"I— I hardly know what to say," she stammered at last. "Indeed, I hardly know what the fuss is about."

"The fuss," Chris put in, "is that you tried to palm a fake plate on us yesterday, while all the time you were keeping the real one to yourself. This is the plate you got from the admiral—"

"It is— of course!" Dolores nodded. "But I still don't see! But wait a minute. I remember now." Dolores vigorously nodded her head. "I sent Lucy to collect the plate from the cruiser here—"

"You sent Lucy to collect the fake, you mean," Pat corrected.

"But there was no fake. Oh, what are you talking about?" Dolores asked vexedly. "Do you mean Lucy brought back a different plate from that?"

"That's what Pat does mean," Willis Green said. "Lucy did."

"And I— Dolores said. "But no, of course I wasn't there when Lucy came back, was I? I'd gone off with Bruce, and therefore I never saw the plate Lucy brought back with her. If I had I should, of course, have recognized it at once as the wrong one— and said so. Oh, my goodness, I believe I begin to see it now! Lucy, when you got that plate, which locker did you go to?"

"Why, the right-hand one!" Lucy said. "That was what you said, wasn't it?"

"Was it?" Dolores ruefully shrugged her shapely shoulders. "I don't know. I might have done in the excitement of the moment—in which case I'm sincerely and dreadfully sorry," she added. "But now I can see it all," she added. "Lucy, was the plate you gave Pat a thing with a little ship on it?"

"Yes," Lucy said. "Then that accounts for this awful mistake!" And suddenly, astonishingly, Dolores broke into a dazzling smile. "Oh goodness, what chumps we are! I'd forgotten about that second plate. I found it weeks ago and tossed it into the right-hand locker and never thought anything more about it."

"You mean—" began Lucy. "That either you went to the wrong locker or else I gave you the wrong instructions. Bothered if I know which. But it's clear now, isn't it, how this wretched mistake arose?"

Pat and Chris were flabbergasted by this glib explanation, but not for a moment were they taken in by it. They knew Dolores too well to be deceived. But an excited hubbub arose from the others and the doubtful looks vanished as if by magic. Obvious it was that the artful Dolores had won over Bruce and the rest of the campers. She looked so apologetic, so attractively distressed as she uttered her false explanation that they accepted it implicitly.

"Well, that seems to settle it, doesn't it?" said Lucy. "We might have guessed that it was all a stupid mistake. I hope you are satisfied, Pat."

"Yes, please say you forgive me," put in Dolores. "It's hateful to think that we've been at cross-purposes, for I do so want to be friends. There are no hard feelings, are there, Pat?"

Chris turned away to hide the contempt in her face, and even Pat found it difficult to conceal her anger at Dolores' hypocritical charm. Then, as she remembered the plate she clutched, she forced herself to meet the mischief-maker's mocking eyes.

"No—no hard feelings," she said. "Why should there be?" After all, Chris and me have got what we want."

And she smiled as she saw the furious glare that flashed into Dolores' eyes as she calmly pocketed the all-important plate.

Not realising the secret antagonism that still existed between the two girls, Bruce grinned his relief; then got busy connecting the tow-ropes to the overturned rowboat. A few moments later the journey back to the camp was begun.

When the landing-stage was reached

Pat, Chris, Dolores, and Willis Green dashed off to change out of their wet clothes. The rest of the campers hurried along to the boathouse, there to prepare for the admiral's arrival.

There was no time for the chums to examine the brass plate, but when they had changed into their rehearsal costumes Pat stuffed it into her pocket.

"We must take jolly good care Dolores doesn't get hold of it again," she said.

Chris frowned anxiously as she led the way down to the water.

"Do you think she's managed to read the clue?" she asked.

Pat shook her head. "Don't know, but she's not going to stop us reading it," she declared.

When they reached the boathouse they saw that Admiral Hardacre had already arrived and was being shown around by Bruce. The ketch, converted into a Roman galley and decorated with shields and bunting, looked a brave sight and very picturesque and attractive were the campers in their Roman costumes.

"Magnificent!" the admiral cried. "Dash my buttons, I never expected to see anything like this! I haven't much time for boys and girls as a rule, but— He broke off as he caught sight of Pat and Chris. "Hey, aren't you the two I caught in Neptune's Nest the other day?" he demanded.

Pat nodded and quickly explained what had taken them there. To everyone's relief, the admiral accepted the explanation good-humouredly, and he laughed when he learnt about the brass plate.

"Contains a clue to some fabulous secret, does it?" he boomed. "Ha, ha! That's good. Fraid, my gal, you've let your imagination run away with you. There's no secret on my island. Still, if the plate amuses you, hang on to it. Now, young man,—he turned to Bruce—"what about getting down to business?"

Bruce nodded and gave a signal. Instantly the camper dressed as a herald took his place on the foredeck and blew a long blast on his trumpet.

It was the signal for the launching ceremony to begin—the ceremony which they all hoped would result in persuading the admiral to give his consent to them using Dartfleet Island on regatta day.



#### THE ADMIRAL'S DECISION

At once all was bustle and excitement. Smartly the Roman soldiers took up their places along the deck, while down below the

rowers grabbed their long oars. There came another piercing blast on the trumpet, then forty oars dipped as one and proudly the Roman galley slipped out of the boathouse into the sea.

Considering this was the very first rehearsal, everything went off with surprising smoothness. Everybody was so keen, so proud of their ship, that they might have been trained for weeks. From the decorated hatchway, now serving as a miniature bridge, Bruce bellowed his orders through a megaphone.

"Right!" he shouted. "We're about two hundred yards out. Hold on the course for Dartfleet Island. Now, this is the spot where we shall be attacked by the ancient Britons. Man the posts, everybody!"

There was a clanking and flashing of accoutrements and the grinning soldiers ran smartly into position. Then Bruce shouted his next order.

"Full speed! Full speed! Crowd on the sail!"

"Whoopee!" Pat gurgled. "I say, I'm taking a hand in this—"

It didn't matter really who joined in at this juncture. Nobody yet had been specifically selected for any job. In a flash Pat was swarming up the mast, ascending hand over hand until she reached the crossrees at the top. Smartly she let down the sail, aware that from below the admiral was critically watching her.

Nimbly she swarmed down to the

lower crossrees, and there, despite the terrific list which was now on the galley, lent a hand in unfurling the next sail. In a few minutes it was all over and magnificently the ketch was skimming along.

As breathlessly Pat clambered down to the deck again the admiral beamed on her.

"Fine work, my gal, fine work!" he boomed. "Smart test of seamanship—oh, aye! Could hardly have done it better myself in my young days!"

Pat blushed at the praise, and everyone cheered, knowing now that they had completely won the admiral over. The galley sailed its way round Dartfleet Island, and then returned. And when it had been brought to a halt outside its dock again, Bruce asked the question upon which everything depended.

"Well, sir, now you've got some idea of what we intend to do. We'll explain it in fuller detail later on. But what do you say, sir? Can we use your island on regatta day?"

There was a breathless pause. But the admiral was smiling genially.

"Why not?" he said. "Certainly you can use it, young man—but don't forget it's mine and don't forget I'm going to have my say in things. I shall insist on everything being ship-shape, you know. Aye, you can use the island all right, and I hope when the day comes you'll make as good a show as you're making now. Good luck to you all, and—"

There was a cheer. In which the rest of his utterance was drowned. The campers were fairly dancing with delight. Laughing and whooping, they disembarked on to the landing-stage. Only Dolores remained quiet and unusually subdued. She was obviously still furious because the chums, despite her trickery, had obtained possession of the brass plate.

Pat, anxious to examine it, gave her chum a nudge, and quietly they slipped away. They hurried to their chalet, and once inside, Pat took the plate from her pocket and laid it down on the table.

Green with age it was. On one side a number of seemingly meaningless words were engraved; on the other, a jumble of figures which the rust of years made difficult to decipher.

"Better get something and clean it up first," said Pat, after a moment. "Pop along to the stores and see if you can get a bottle of paraffin, Chris."

"O.K.," said Chris, and slipped out. She was only gone a few minutes before she returned with the paraffin and a duster she had managed to obtain.

"Good girl!" Pat applauded. Carefully she emptied some of the paraffin on to the duster and began to rub at the brass plate. Soon the rust began to disappear, leaving beneath a shining surface on which the mysterious letters and figures stood out boldly.

At last Pat gave a sigh of relief and laid aside the duster.

"That's it," she said. "Now we can easily read the plate."

Wonderingly the two girls stared at it, but at first they could make nothing of the letters and figures, and eventually Chris gave a baffled sigh.

"I don't know whether or not Dolores has managed to solve this puzzle, but it completely beats me," she declared.

Pat made no comment. She was thoughtfully regarding the figures on the back of the plate. Chris, watching, saw her chum's eyes begin to gleam, and suddenly Pat gave an excited whistle.

"Golly, I believe I see it!" she declared.

"See what?" asked Chris, quickly. "You don't mean to say—"

Her cheeks flushed, her eyes a gleam, Pat nodded.

"Yes, I believe I've discovered the way to, decode all these letters and figures," she said. "Don't worry, Chris. Soon the secret will be ours!"

Will Pat be able to decode the clue on the brass plate? And to what fresh adventures will it lead them? See next Friday's enthralling instalment.

# What A Shock For Sally & Co. When The Robot Headmaster Appeared With The Missing Necklace!



## The Merry-makers Afloat

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

### PERCY VANISHES

**CRASH!** Sally Warner, seated with her chums in her cabin aboard the Ocean Star—the college ship which was bound for Australia—looked up, with a start, as the door flew open. "Sally, have you got him? He's gone!" Samuel Kaplin, the American boy inventor, known to everybody as Slick, came charging in, and stared round agitatedly.

"Who's gone?" asked Don Weston. "And why should we have him?" added Fay Manners, with a smile. "Percy! Percy's gone!"

The chums leapt to their feet, looking at each other in alarm—and looking at Slick in dismay. Percy was a robot—Slick's latest and greatest invention.

"How do you mean—gone?" demanded Johnny Briggs. "I thought you were making some adjustments to him—"

"So I was. I put in some new wiring which made his arms and fingers work better. I slipped out of my cabin for a few minutes," explained Slick, "and when I got back Percy had gone. I thought perhaps you'd borrowed him—"

"We haven't!" "Then something must have happened to set the works going, and he's walking around somewhere!"

"Golly!" gasped Sally. "If Percy's discovered by anyone else, then the whole truth will be out. And we'll all be for it in a big way. We've got to find him—quick!"

The faces of her chums and Slick grew even more alarmed as they realised the truth of what Sally said. For they were the only ones on board who knew about Percy, the robot.

The mechanical figure had been invented by Slick to represent Professor Willard, the headmaster of the floating college, and so life-like was the dummy that everybody believed there was an impostor headmaster on board. Sally & Co. had never intended the affair—which had started as a joke—to go so far. For their secret to come out now would prove disastrous.

"Yes, come on!" said fair-haired Fay Manners anxiously. "The sooner we find Percy, the better for all of us."

They dashed out of the cabin and along the corridor. The whole length of B Deck they rushed, peering to right and left, opening doors and searching everywhere. But there was no sign of Percy.

Sally's alarm increased. How had Percy got away—that was what puzzled her. The mechanism had to be set working for the dummy to move, and how could that have happened while Slick was out of his cabin?

"Let's try the other decks," she panted.

And so the search went on, and

eventually they found themselves on the promenade deck. Still no Percy. Slick went scurrying one way, the chums another, peering frantically around them in the gathering dusk. And then Sally suddenly stopped.

"Look!" she cried joyfully, pointing ahead to a lonely, black-clad figure leaning against one of the ventilators. "There's the old rascal! Grab him; shipmates, before he vanishes again! Like an avalanche the four of them descended upon the motionless figure and grabbed him firmly by the arms.

Next moment they leapt back as the figure straightened up, with an angry exclamation, it rapped. "What is the meaning of this horseplay?"

"Oh g-golly!" Sally staggered back several steps. "P-Professor Willard." "Who else could it be?" rapped the ruffled headmaster. "Is it impossible," he asked despairingly, "to find any peace around here?"

"Terribly sorry, sir," Don put in hastily. "It—was just a game. Of course, we didn't know it was you."

"Rather not, sir!" gasped Sally. "Just an error because of the shadows and—and so on. Please forgive us." She smiled appealingly at the professor, who, rather grudgingly, nodded his head.

"I accept your explanation," he said sternly. "But don't let it happen again. Now be off with you."

The chums needed no urging. They were already off, furious with themselves at their mistake and the dire consequences it might have had.

"Gosh, that was near!" gulped Johnny. "We might have given the game away—Say," he added, suddenly stopping short, his eyes gleaming, as he peered along the deck. "Here comes Percy—and I'm not making a mistake this time, am I?" "You are not, chummy," replied Don joyfully. "That's old jerky Percy without a doubt."

Percy, the robot, it was, walking along the deck in his jerky way. It was no wonder, thought Sally, as they pelted in pursuit, that they had made the mistake with the real headmaster. For Percy, apart from his lurching walk, was uncannily like him in his flowing black gown and mortar-board. "Whoa, there!" she said quickly, grabbing Percy's gown.

"Wish the old chump could tell us how he got out," put in Don, "then we—"

He stopped, looking in some alarm at his chums as from along the deck came a sudden uproar, punctuated by a shrilly agitated voice.

"Trouble somewhere," said Johnny. "My hat, I hope it's nothing to do with Percy!"

He looked at Percy in apprehension. Then, before he could say any more, there came from along the deck the heavy thud of footsteps.

"Get him out of sight quickly!" whispered Sally.

It took only a moment to whip

Percy behind a pile of chairs, turn round, and smile in pretended nonchalance at each other as two rather breathless men dashed into sight. They stopped when they saw the chums.

"Say, you seen your headmaster around?" asked one eagerly.

It didn't take Sally a second to guess that the "headmaster" they meant was Percy. With her heart seeming to turn a somersault, she gave a shrug.

"Why do you ask?" she said in pretended indifference.

"Never mind," said the other man impatiently. "Come on, Fred!"

They pelted on. Immediately the mask of indifference dropped from Sally's face.

"I don't like this," she said worriedly. "It looks to me as if Percy's been up to something. We'd better get him downstairs—"

"Pronto!" Don nodded.

It was fortunate that everyone else seemed to have gathered at the scene of the commotion, for they were able to smuggle Percy to their cabin without meeting anyone. They almost fell into the cabin with him.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Fay. "But do you think we'd better find out what's going on? The noise sounds pretty grim."

"We'll get Percy right out of the way first," said Sally.

She pressed a switch. The dummy took a jerky step forward, his arm swishing past the pocket of his gown. And as his hand came forward Sally stared blankly. For dangling from that hand was a glimmering, shimmering diamond necklace!

At that moment from along the corridor came a high-pitched, hysterical shriek:

"My necklace! Thief—thief! My diamond necklace!"

The chums looked at each other in horror.

"G-golly!" muttered Sally in a hollow voice. "Oh golly! This—this must be the stolen necklace—and Percy must have taken it!"



### AWFUL FOR PROFESSOR WILLARD

Even as that awful realisation came to Sally there was the sound of rushing footsteps. Before they could whip Percy out of sight the door flew open.

"Phew!" said Don limply. "It's you, Slick—"

Slick's horn-rimmed glasses were askew, his hair almost standing on end.

"Suffering cats!" he panted, passing a trembling hand across his forehead. "Do you hear that—"

"Do you see that?" countered Sally, pointing shudderingly at the necklace. And then she gave a start, her face paling.

"What's the matter, Sally?" asked Don apprehensively.

"Those men who were asking for the Head," Sally said in a startled voice. "Percy looks like the Head, and Percy's got this necklace. My hat!

Don't you see what this might mean?"

"That everyone will think the real Head's pinched the necklace?" asked Don, agnast.

"Exactly! Oh golly!" Sally groaned. "How Percy got the necklace we don't know—but we do know that the Head didn't take it. Let's go up on deck and see what's happening—and I hope to goodness I'm wrong."

But no sooner did they reach the deck than Sally knew her worst fears were realised. There was Professor Willard, bewildered, protesting, indignant, surrounded by a gesticulating crowd, with the owner of the necklace well in the forefront.

"You were seen to leave my cabin!" she shrielled.

Sally pushed her way forward. "Madam, I assure you you are mistaken!" rapped the professor. "This is preposterous. I was here on deck—"

"The professor is right," put in Sally quickly. "We saw him here. And— inspiration came to her. "Why, it must have been the impostor!" she added. "The fellow who's been impersonating the Head!" "Of course!" The professor's angry and agitated face cleared a little. "That is the explanation. It is that rascal again—"

"I don't believe it!" shrielled the owner of the necklace. "I don't believe all this nonsense about an impostor—"

But as she was about to launch forth in another tirade against the professor a new and stern voice broke in. It was Captain Thorne.

"Madam," he said quietly. "I suggest that you and Professor Willard come along to my cabin. We'll thrash this matter out in private."

"A very good idea!" rapped the professor angrily.

In a very few moments the crowd, in excited, chattering little groups, was breaking up. While, white-faced and limp, the chums staggered back to the cabin.

"Oh goodness!" groaned Sally as she sank into a chair. "What on earth are we going to do? I can't think that anyone will really believe the professor is guilty, but we just can't let there be even a breath of suspicion against him."

"The only way out is to tell the truth about Percy," said Don slowly. "But if we do that—"

He didn't finish, but the chums huddled. If they did that, what awful punishment would be meted out to them—and to Slick?

"And—that necklace," faltered Fay. "We'll have to get it back, but how can we explain that away? Nobody would ever believe Percy just got it on his own."

Almost in despair, the thums eyed each other. From being an object of mirth Percy had suddenly become a menace. And yet, how could he have carried out this theft on his own? It was utterly absurd.

Sally shook her head in baffled irritation. Percy had disappeared from Slick's cabin, to re-appear on deck with the necklace in his pocket. In the meantime he had been to a passenger's cabin to steal that necklace. Impossible! Yet if he hadn't done it on his own, somebody must have been using him as a cloak for their own underhand activities. But who—

Sally sat upright, eyes wide with excitement.

"Those two men!" she blurted. "The two who were asking after the Head. They were the first to come pelting after Percy."

"So what?" asked Johnny heavily. "I've just remembered. I heard the purser saying that he was keeping an eye on them. Apparently they're suspected of being a couple of rather shady characters."

"That's right," agreed Don. "Yes, I heard that, too. But how—"

"Shush!" Sally suddenly gripped his wrist, silencing him. From outside came the stealthy pad of footsteps. As the chums listened tensely they heard the door of Slick's cabin click open.

Sally crept to her own door, very

quietly opened it a few inches, and peeped out. She could hardly suppress the gasp that came to her lips.

For outside was one of the two men the chums had just been discussing. And even as Sally stared, wide-eyed, the other crept stealthily from Slick's cabin. With a look of anger and fear on his face, he shook his head.

"Not there," he said, gruffly. "Where on earth has the thing got to?"

Very stealthily Sally closed the door, and turned elatedly upon her wondering chums.

"I was right," she hissed. "Those two men are mixed up in this. They were just looking for Percy—"

"Gee!" Slick looked dismayed. "Then they've found out about him?"

"They've found out about him—and used him," said Sally excitedly. "I'm beginning to see daylight now. Look, this is what I think happened. Supposing they borrowed Percy—"

Golly, yes!" she added in triumph. "They could have taken him to that woman's cabin, pinched the necklace, and planted it on Percy. Then sent him off again."

"And anybody seeing the disappearing figure would take it for the Head," put in Fay eagerly.

"The Head or the impostor who is supposed to be aboard," said Don. "Gosh, what a crafty game! Then even if they were suspected and searched, there'd be nothing to implicate them in the theft. And they could pick up the necklace from Percy later on."

"That's right," said Sally. "That's what they were after when they asked us if we'd seen the Head. But we got old Percy before they did. The only thing is that they've well and truly blackened the Head with a number of people, and somehow we've got to prove he's innocent without giving ourselves away."

"Pretty tall order," said Slick, with a sigh.

There was silence in the cabin for a time while the chums frantically racked their brains. Then Sally snapped her fingers.

"Got it!" she said jubilantly. "What about this? We find a cryptic note to the effect that the necklace and the impostor's disguise are hidden in the empty store-room near B Hold."

"Where do we find the note?" asked Johnny puzzledly.

"Wherever we like to put it," grinned Sally. "We take it to Professor Willard, pretending we don't know what it's all about. He'll twig it straight away and go along to the store-room, where he'll find the necklace and the clothes, proving that there really has been an impostor around, and the Head will get patted on the back for recovering the necklace. How's that?"

"A brain-wave!" approved Don. "The sooner we get that necklace out of our possession the better. Let's get busy."

The note was written. "Stuff hidden in empty store-room near B Hold. Destroy clothes," it read.

Sally surveyed it with satisfaction.

"We'll pretend to find it near one of the holds," she said. "So we'll go along there now. Slick, you keep watch for us and we'll join you later in your cabin. We'll take Percy along with us, because it's pretty obvious he's got to vanish completely until all this has blown over. Everybody agreed?"

Everybody was. And so the chums made their way cautiously along to the holds, taking the robot with them.

"O.K.!" said Sally. "Now, Johnny, take the necklace, Percy's mortarboard, gown, and glasses. Put them in the store-room, then fetch the Head. Meanwhile, we'll tuck old Percy away out of sight."

Five minutes later Johnny returned, accompanied by Professor Willard.

He glanced eagerly at the note which Sally handed him.

"It was lying around, sir," she said innocently. "We thought it might mean something—"

"If I'm not mistaken, it means a lot," said Professor Willard, his eyes beginning to gleam. "It looks as

though I may find the missing necklace. Thank you, Sally. I must follow this up—at once!"

With a quick, excited nod at the chums, he darted off, while Sally clapped her hands jubilantly.

"It's worked!" she cried. "We'll give him a few seconds, then we'll follow behind so that we can be there as witnesses when he finds the things. The Head will be cleared and— Look out!" she shrieked. "They've overheard! Those two men—"

Just for a moment she had glimpsed the face of one of the two crooks in the partly opened door. But even as she sprang forward the door slammed with a crash, the key clicked in the lock.

Sally & Co. were prisoners in the hold, while Professor Willard, all unsuspecting, was leading the crooks to where the necklace lay hidden.



### THE ROBOT TO THE RESCUE

"We must get out!" Sally pulled and hammered at the door. She was almost frantic with worry. "Those men will do anything to get the necklace. If the professor puts up a fight they'll soon overpower him—"

"And nobody will believe him if he says they're the real thieves!" wailed Fay. "Oh goodness, it's awful! Don— Johnny, can't you do anything?"

Don grabbed the door-handle, pulled until his face was deep red with exertion. Johnny did the same, then they both shook their heads.

"We want a bit more strength," said Don hopelessly. "If only—"

"Percy!" shouted Sally. "Remember Slick's been working on his hands and arms to give them greater strength. Let's try him—quickly!"

Trembling with eagerness, they trundled Percy towards the door; with a quick switch of the lever raised his hand and clamped the steel fingers around the door-handle. Then they flicked the walking switch over to reverse.

He took a jerky step backwards, then another, his fingers still clamped. There was a creak.

"Come on, Percy!" cried Sally. "Another creak—and another!"

"Is he going to do it?" breathed Don. "Is he—"

"Crack! The door burst in! "He's done it!" yelled Johnny. "Good old Percy! Come on, ship-mates—to the rescue!"

Off they rushed. And after them, his mechanism still working, strode Percy.

Not worrying about the robot, Sally & Co. raced along the passage which led to the unused store-room. And then, even as they approached, they heard a sharp cry in the professor's voice.

"Those rotters have got him!" yelled Johnny. "Come on, Don!"

He dashed into the room, followed by Don, with Sally and Fay bringing up the rear. Some yards behind them, Percy, the robot, still came on.

The two crooks whirled round as the chums entered. They held thick, ugly-looking sticks. Against the wall the professor sat slumped, a dazed look on his face, a red mark on his forehead where, quite plainly, he had been struck by one of the sticks.

"You rotters!" gritted Don.

He charged forward, fists clenched. One of the men grappled with him, forcing him back to the door. Johnny leapt at the other crook, who raised his stick.

Just in time Johnny dodged back. The stick swept up and down—crashing on to the head of Percy, the robot, who was just striding mechanically past at that moment.

There was a metallic thud. But Sally was hardly aware of it. She was attempting to grapple with one of the men, and aid Don.

The men were fighting viciously. Outnumbered though they were, they were gaining the upper hand. Johnny

(Please turn to the back page)

# The SECRET OF STUDY 7

By PETER LANGLEY

## THE MYSTERY JAPER

"IT'S grand to see the old school again, Miss Hartley!" declared June Gaynor, her grey eyes sparkling as she glanced round the sunlit quadrangle. "It seems only yesterday that I shared a study with Valda Terris—Study 7, wasn't it?"

A slight shadow crossed the headmistress' scholarly face as she turned to her attractive young visitor and ex-pupil—now famous as the partner of Noel Raymond, detective.

"It's strange you should mention that, June. I have been intending to speak of it—to ask your advice. Study 7 is at present occupied by Valda's younger sister, Shirley—"

"Why, of course," laughed June. "Val did mention it in one of her letters. She told me she'll be down on Speech Day to hear Shirley play in the school concert—and to discuss some business with you in connection with her own career—"

She broke off, noticing her companion's stern expression.

"I'm afraid, June," said Miss Hartley, "that Valda may change her mind when she hears the news. Shirley Terris is in disgrace. In fact, she is running a grave risk of expulsion."

June started. One of her reasons for visiting her old school during a free week-end was to see Val's young sister—and to live over again some of her memories of her own school-days.

Miss Hartley's news came as a stunning shock to her.

As they crossed the Close and entered the lofty Hall the headmistress outlined the events that had led to Shirley's disgrace.

It had all started when the bust of the school's founder was discovered one morning lying shattered at the base of its pedestal. There was an inquiry, and Miss Timkins, the music-mistress, reported that she had seen Shirley leaving her study—in the same wing—late on the previous evening, when the juniors were supposed to be in bed.

This accusation Shirley indignantly denied. The following day Miss Timkins found a threatening note pinned to her blackboard. That evening several valuable tapestries from the walls of the music-room were found lying, torn, on the floor.

Once again suspicion pointed to Shirley. A prefect, Delia Thompson, said she had seen Shirley stealing out of her study long after prep was over. Taxed by the headmistress, Shirley denied this, became defiant—and was sent to detention.

"I allowed her to be released this morning on parole," added the headmistress gravely. "But it will be her last—her very last—chance."

June bit her lip, her grey eyes troubled.

"Could there have been a mistake? I mean, is it possible that someone else might have been to blame?"

"It is very unlikely, June," replied the headmistress.

"Miss Hartley—I'd like to have a word with Shirley, if I may," said the girl detective impulsively.

"I wish you would, June! If you could persuade the misguided girl to make a clean breast of her folly I should be more than grateful. You can find the way to your old study?"

"Of course!" smiled June. "Leave Shirley to me, Miss Hartley."

Walking quickly down the well-



remembered corridors, the girl detective halted outside Study 7. For a moment she stared thoughtfully along the rather gloomy passage, with its nostalgic memories of other days; then quickly she knocked and opened the door.

A fair-haired girl seated broodingly at the baize-covered table started to her feet, her pretty, vivacious face flushing.

"Miss—Miss Gaynor!" she exclaimed, recognising June.

The girl detective smiled as she closed the door.

"Valda asked me to look you up, Shirley," she said lightly. "She's coming down to see you on Speech Day. You're playing in the school concert, aren't you?"

"I—I was," rejoined Shirley, her expression a trifle sullen.

June ignored the other's defensive tone and glanced smilingly round at the old panelled walls, the untidy rows of books, the familiar pictures. Her practised eyes took in every detail.

"It's scarcely changed a bit, Shirley!" she said. "The same dear old room that Val and I once shared. Only the picture of the hockey team has been moved from this alcove to the opposite wall."

"Has it?" asked Shirley, indifferently. "Perhaps one of the maids moved it when dusting. But—you needn't beat about the bush, Miss Gaynor. I know what you really came for. Miss Hartley told you—about me?"

June nodded.

"I've heard the whole story, Shirley," she said. "There's only one thing I want you to tell me. Did you do it?"

"No—I didn't!" blurted out Shirley, her hands clenched. "You probably won't believe me—but it's the truth!"

June looked steadily into those stormy eyes. She prided herself on being a judge of character.

"I do believe you, Shirley," she said gently. "You're rather like Val, you know—and she couldn't tell a fib to save her life."

Shirley gulped, tears starting into her eyes, as June's hand fell lightly on her shoulder.

"As you're not guilty, Shirley," said the girl detective, "we must find out who is. Two people declared they saw someone come out of your study—someone they thought was you. Do you generally lock the door when you go out, Shirley?"

The other girl nodded, regarding June wonderingly.

"You—you think that someone might have— But that's no use, Miss Gaynor. There's only one key to the study; the other's been lost for ages."

"It might have been found by someone," murmured June thoughtfully. "But what puzzles me is why the girl was seen to come out of your

study on each occasion—when no one apparently saw her go in—"

At that moment the door burst open impetuously, to admit a bespectacled, fair-haired girl, agog with excitement.

"I say, Shirley," she gasped, "Delia's on the warpath again! Something else must have happened—"

She broke off in obvious embarrassment as she caught sight of June. Shirley hastily introduced the newcomer as "Matty"—Matilda Barnes, the photographic enthusiast of the Fourth. Matty shook hands with the girl detective in evident awe.

"Don't let me interrupt you, Matty," said June. "Delia's the prefect who reported Shirley, isn't she?"

"Yes," agreed Matty, nodding indignantly. "None of us likes her. And now she's raging about something to do with a theat—"

Just then hurried footsteps sounded in the corridor, and June stood aside, a gleam of interest in her eyes as a tall, officious-looking girl strode into the study, flourishing a sheet of paper.

"Shirley Terris, I've had about enough of this!" exclaimed the newcomer angrily. "If this is another of your spiteful pranks I shall report you at once to Miss Hartley!"

The blood drained from Shirley's face as she glanced at the paper.

"I—I've never seen it before, Delia!" she gasped.

"It's your handwriting!" snapped the prefect. "And it was pinned on my study door—"

"May I see?" asked June, stepping forward.

Then, as the prefect stared at her, she introduced herself. The senior's manner changed immediately.

"Of course, Miss Gaynor—Miss Hartley told me you were calling," she murmured, handing June the paper.

The girl detective glanced quickly at the message written across it in red ink:

REVENGE IS SWEET, DELIA!  
LOOK OUT!

"But," remarked June softly, "Shirley didn't write this!"

Delia stared.

"You'll notice that the up-strokes are thick—and the down-strokes thin," went on the girl detective. "That means it was written backwards—an old trick when copying handwriting."

Delia bit her lip, obviously disbelieving.

"I shall show it to Miss Hartley, just the same!"

And she strode from the room as the bell for tea echoed down the corridor.

June turned quickly to the two juniors.

"You'd better make yourself scarce, Shirley," she said. "If the un-

known paper attempts to carry out her threat you mustn't risk being caught up in it. I'll see you after tea. Oh, and you might leave me your key to the study."

Shirley smiled gratefully as she handed June the key, taking leave of her in the corridor. The girl detective carefully locked the door.

"Miss Gaynor, may I have a word with you?" asked Matty Barnes. "It's about—about Shirley—"

"Why, of course, Matty," said June, as she accompanied the other girl down the corridor. "What is it?"

"I know Shirley's innocent," said Matty, "and—and I want to help her. But I'm not much good at anything except photography. If there's anything I could do, Miss Gaynor—anything at all—please let me know."

"I will, Matty," promised June, touched by the other girl's loyalty to Shirley. "By the way, who generally uses this corridor in the evening?"

Matty reflected. "Well, Della does—she's in charge of the museum. Then there's Miss Timkins, the music-mistress, and Miss Hartley herself—apart from Shirley and me. I've got my dark-room just round the corner. It used to be the old stationery-cupboard. Would you like to see it?"

"Why, of course," said June politely.

Matty opened the door of her little cubby-hole, proudly revealing her developing-tanks and other apparatus.

"I'm just going to do some developing now," she explained. "I'll show you some of my photos later. And please let me know if there's anything I can do to help Shirley."

She shut herself in the tiny dark-room, and June heard her busying herself with her task. Thoughtfully the girl detective moved on to the corner of the passage where, screened by a tall cupboard, she could keep watch on the whole length of the corridor.

This wing was normally deserted while the girls were at tea.

Ten minutes—quarter of an hour—passed—and June was beginning to tire of her vigil when the faint creak of a door reached her ears. She stiffened, leaning forward to peer down the gloomy passage.

Then her heart gave a jump and her eyes widened incredulously. For the door that was furtively opening was the door of Study 7!

And even as she watched a girlish figure stole out into the passage—a girl of Shirley's height and build, though a scarf concealed her face.

Yet June was certain there had been no one in the study when she had locked the door.



### JUNE'S TRAP IS SPRUNG

June was determined to solve the baffling mystery. Starting from her hiding-place, she commenced to follow the unknown girl—whom she felt convinced was not Shirley. Though had anyone else seen that muffled figure sneak from the study they would have drawn the obvious conclusion!

The missing girl seemed to be making for the school museum—but, changing her mind, she turned, entering one of the studies adjoining it.

As June stole after her cautiously she saw a name-plate on the door:

D. Thompson. School Curator.  
Private.

So this was Della's study! June's bewildered thoughts were interrupted by a crash from inside the study. The girl detective sprang into the room, to see that a large, framed picture had crashed into the fireplace—its supporting-wire cut—and in falling had overturned a bottle of crimson ink that had been jangling on the mantelpiece.

A faint sound from behind her brought June spinning round—as a muffled figure slipped out from behind a curtain, making a dash for the door.

Even as June raced in pursuit, she could see that the other girl's clothes were stained with ink.

"Stop!" she gasped. But the unknown girl reached Study 7 first, darted in and slammed and locked the door in June's face.

Swiftly June fumbled for Shirley's key. She opened the door and dashed in—only to halt in blank amazement.

There was no one in the study! But the casement window—which had been shut—now gaped open.

June raced to the window and stared down into the quadrangle—a sheer drop of some twenty feet. The ivy outside was ruffled.

June drew back. It seemed clear that the unknown trickster must have entered—and escaped—this way: though it was a dangerous ascent and descent for anyone to make.

At that moment there were excited, angry voices and hurrying footsteps in the corridor. The trickster's latest vengeful act had been discovered!

The girl detective hastened from the study—to come face to face with the agitated headmistress, who was accompanied by Delia and several other prefects.

"June!" exclaimed Miss Hartley. "Have you seen Shirley?"

"Not since she went to tea, Miss Hartley," June replied quietly; but she said nothing of the mystery figure who had come out of Study 7.

"Shirley didn't go to tea!" snapped Delia. "I've made inquiries, and no one's seen her for the last half-hour. It's jolly suspicious that this should happen, after I'd received that threatening note—"

She broke off as there came a sudden stir in the group and a mistress appeared, leading by the arm a fair-haired junior.

"Shirley!" exclaimed the headmistress. "Where did you find her, Miss Timkins?"

"In the quadrangle, Miss Hartley. I suspected that she had been up to some mischief, and she refused to give me an account of herself—"

"I don't see why I should give an account of my movements," retorted Shirley rebelliously. "I've done no harm, and—"

The headmistress took her by the arm, leading her to the door of the prefect's study. She pointed inside sternly.

"Do you deny that this spiteful act of revenge is your handiwork?" she demanded grimly.

"I—I know nothing about it!" exclaimed Shirley, staring. "I haven't been near the study—"

"I think, Miss Hartley," intervened June quietly, "that Shirley must be speaking the truth. When that picture was cut down it overturned a bottle of ink, spilling most of the contents. Yet there is practically no ink on the floor. That means that it spilt over the trickster's clothes. But there is no ink on Shirley's dress—nor on her hands."

The junior glanced at her in swift gratitude, and the headmistress looked impressed. But Delia scowled.

"That's all very well," she retorted, "but Shirley had a grudge against me, and I'm pretty certain she's to blame—"

"That's not fair, Delia!" cut in Matty Barnes, who appeared at that moment in the doorway, a roll of wet film in her hands. She had come straight from the dark-room, and was still wearing her overalls and rubber gloves. "As Miss Gaynor said, you've no proof against Shirley. Just because that threatening note resembled her writing—"

"That will do, Matilda!" interrupted Miss Hartley sharply. "June has already convinced me that there is a possible doubt as to Shirley's guilt. But she will be confined to the school and deprived of all privi-

leges until I have more definite proof of her innocence."

She left the room, after inviting the girl detective to join her for tea in her study.

June lingered to speak a reassuring word to the tearful, still defiant Shirley; then she drew Matty Barnes aside.

"Matty, you offered to help me," she murmured, meeting the girl photographer's eager glance. "I need your help! Between us we're going to lay a little trap to bowl out the real trickster!"

**H**ERE are the plans of the school that you asked me for, June," said Miss Hartley after tea. "I don't quite know what you have in mind—but no one could be better pleased than I if you are able to prove Shirley innocent."

"I shall do my best, Miss Hartley," promised June as she glanced at the plans. "You say you have telephoned to Valda?"

"I felt it my duty," replied the headmistress. "Naturally she was very upset and shocked. She will be arriving by the first train to-morrow to have a word with her sister."

June nodded and, thanking the headmistress, she hurried off to contact Matty Barnes.

"Matty, did you prepare the camera and flashlight apparatus that I asked you for?"

The girl photographer nodded eagerly, and led June to the dark-room. She pointed to a camera on a tripod, specially fitted for taking rapid exposures by flashlight.

"Good!" exclaimed June. "We'll fit up the camera at the spot where the trickster's most likely to appear."

With Matty's expert assistance June fitted up the camera in a deep, curtained alcove near the flight of steps leading to Miss Hartley's study and the school museum. A cunning arrangement of strong black thread assured that anyone who passed that way would spring the trap.

Most of the girls had permission to be out that evening, to attend a local film show—and when June returned towards dusk the school was almost deserted.

The girl detective glanced into Study 7, to make sure that no one was hiding there. Re-locking the door, she made her way softly down the passage and entered the headmistress' study, leaving the door ajar.

The minutes dragged past and the twilight deepened; then, unmistakably June heard stealthy footsteps.

As June made for the door there came a splintering crash—and she was in time to see a muffled figure dart out of the school museum.

The unknown girl tripped. Instantly followed a momentary, blinding flash, as June's camera trap was sprung. The girl detective raced on the heels of her quarry. But again the other was into Study 7 with the door locked before June arrived.

Even as June fumbled for the key Miss Hartley hurried on to the scene with Delia and the music-mistress.

"Have you caught her, June?" panted the headmistress. "She has overturned a cabinet of valuable curios in the museum—"

"She went in here!" declared June, pointing to the locked study. "Her idea is to escape from the window—the same trick that she played before."

"Then why are we waiting?" asked Delia, excitedly. "Open the door—quickly—before she escapes into the Quad—"

June smiled composedly as she produced the key.

"There's no hurry, Delia. This evening I took the precaution of borrowing a ladder from the janitor and put a couple of screws into the window from the outside. Her escape's been cut off."

Miss Hartley gave a sigh of relief, while Delia and the assistant-mis-

(Please turn to page 230)





# The **COWBOY** WHO **MYSTIFIED** **MERLE**

By GAIL WESTERN

## IN CHASE OF THE MASKED MAN

**M**ERLE 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 neighboring rancher, Larry declared himself her friend.

Both Merle and Larry entered for the Silver Trophy race. Merle was first past the post, but to her amazement Larry declared that he had deliberately let her win, and when he learnt that she intended to drive home alone with the trophy, he warned her she might encounter danger.

Mistrusting him as she did she ignored the warning, and on the way back to Happy Valley she examined the Silver Rider, to find hidden in it part of a map connected with the secret she was out to discover.

Hardly had she replaced the map back in the trophy when a masked horseman appeared on the scene. He snatched the Silver Rider from her and galloped off.

"COME on, Pommie! We've got to trail that masked man. We can't let him get away with the trophy."

As she spoke, Merle backed her chestnut horse out of the horse-box. The horse-box itself she drove on to a strip of grassland beside the road and then tethered the two harnessed horses to a tree-stump.

That done, she ran back to where Pommie waited. She swung up on to his bare back, for there was no time to spend saddling him. Every second was precious if the masked robber was not to get away with the all-important silver trophy.

But before she could take up the pursuit there came a loud haw from down the road. Turning, she saw two horsemen riding furiously from the direction of Lone Pine.

"Why, it's Jake and Ted!"

In surprise and relief she regarded the on-galloping figures. What had caused them to leave the rodeo before it finished?

"I don't know—but they'll be able to help me now!"

Impatiently she waited for the two Happy Valley cowboys to join her, and as they drew near she saw they were looking just as worried as she was.

"What's happened, Miss Merle?" called the bandy-legged horse-breaker, reining in. "By the look o' things you've hit trouble."

Merle nodded and swiftly explained. The two cowboys exchanged grim looks.

"Then that note wasn't a hoax, after all!" cried the burly, ginger-headed Ted Gardner.

"Note?"

Merle eyed them in surprise. "Yep, Miss Merle," said Jake, "it was handed to me a few minutes after you left. It said there was a possi-

bility o' you hittin' trouble along the trail an' advised me to go after you."

"But who was it from?" asked Merle.

The horse-breaker shook his head.

"Dunno—it wasn't signed."

Merle's heart gave a startled leap. Only one person, besides the Happy Valley cowboys, knew she was driving home alone—and that person had been Larry!

Was it possible that what he had told her had not been intended as a threat, but as a genuine warning?

Suppose it had been he who had sent that note!

As Merle led the way down the winding mountain trail in pursuit of the hold-up man, her mind was in a whirl.

Her common sense told her that it was absurd to think that Larry really had tried to save her. Time and time again he had proved himself her enemy. On the other hand, she could not forget how twice already he had come to her aid.

Oh, what a strange, mystifying boy he was! If only she could be absolutely certain of the truth about him!

Then her thoughts took a fresh turn. Who had been the masked man who had robbed her?

"He must have been a hireling of Nat Garsten's," she told herself.

She remembered his brusque, bullying manner and his rasping voice. Neither were characteristic of Larry, and the belief that the masked man had not been that young cowboy strengthened the hope that, after all, she might have misjudged him.

Oh, if only she had been mistaken! If only, despite his inexplicable behaviour, Larry really was her friend!

The possibility brought a flush to her cheeks, and then abruptly she reined in, for there had come a shout from Jake:

"The coyote's left the road! He's headin' through the pines!"

He pointed to where a telltale trail of hoof-prints swerved to the right and continued down the steep slope that led to a dense pine wood.

Merle turned her horse and at that moment Jake shouted again:

"There he is—just disappearin' through those trees! Come on—he can't escape now!"

And, whipping a revolver from his belt, the horse-breaker went galloping recklessly down the slope. Eagerly Merle and Ted Gardner followed.

At breakneck speed they plunged down the hillside and continued the chase through the wood. No prints had been left on the pine needles that covered the ground, but faintly from the distance came the clop-clop of hoofs.

"That's him," declared Jake. "Guess we're overhaulin' him!"

Merle's heart was pounding as she followed the two cowboys. She was thrilled at the prospect of regaining possession of the Silver Rider and the torn map that was hidden inside the trophy, but even more thrilled at the thought that soon they might learn the identity of the masked rider.

Who would he turn out to be? "Not Larry! I'm sure it won't be Larry," she told herself. "Despite all that's happened, I've a feeling that it's..."

Her excited thoughts broke off. Jake and Ted had reined in their panting steeds, were signalling for caution.

"He's stopped," declared Jake in a husky whisper. "I reckon he's hidin' somewhere hereabouts. You stay here, Miss Merle, while Ted an' me scout around. Can't risk you runnin' your head into danger."

Dismounting, the two cowboys stole forward on foot. Breathlessly Merle watched them. Suddenly she saw Ted stiffen and beckon. He was peering through the trees into a small, grassy clearing. The horse-breaker joined him.

Merle could hang back no longer. Recklessly she darted forward; excitedly she craned her head over the two crouching men's shoulders.

Through the leafy tracery she glimpsed a motionless horse. Standing beside it was a slim figure. He had his back turned, but Merle caught a silvery gleam from the object he was in the act of stuffing into his saddle-bag.

The Silver Rider! Merle's heart danced with triumph. "That's him—right enough!" shouted Jake Binns and, gun out-thrust, he sprang forward. "Up with your hands, you coyote!"

Still grasping the silver trophy, the figure by the horse turned. His face was clearly visible in the fading sunlight that flickered through the tree-tops, and at sight of it all Merle's newfound hopes died.

"L-Larry!" she gulped. "It's—it's Larry!"



## LARRY'S AMAZING STORY

So, after all, it had been Larry who had robbed her!

No wonder he had worn a mask and that disguising slicker; no

wonder he had changed his manner and voice. It had all been done so as to conceal his real identity, but now the truth was out. Here he was, his booty still grasped in one tanned hand.

The discovery shook Merle like a physical blow.

"Up wi' your hands!" Jake ordered again. "An' no monkey tricks!"

Slowly Larry raised his arms, but though he obeyed Jake's grim command, he remained as calm and nonchalant as ever.

"I suppose you've come for the Silver Rider," he drawled.

Jake scowled. "O' course we've come for it!" he rapped. "Hand it over, an' take that grin off your face. You've no reason to be pleased."

"Oh, but I have!" Larry smiled coolly around. "Guess I'm grateful that you acted on my note so quickly."

"Your note!" Merle gave a startled gasp. "Do you mean that it was you who sent Jake that warning message?"

Calmly the young cowboy nodded. "Sure. As you wouldn't listen to

me, honey, it seemed the only thing to do. You see—"

"We see that you're as big a bluffer as you are twister!" cut in Jake with an angry roar. "Don't you try an' fool us, because it won't work."

"I'll say it won't," put in Ted Gardner. "We know all about you. Slim Harris has told us how you had to hit the dust from Snake Canyon in order to avoid bein' roped in for cattle rustlin'. You tried to warn us about Miss Merle! Gee, that's rich!" He laughed scornfully. "Guess you'll be tellin' us next that you got that trophy back from the hold-up man in order to hand it back to Miss Merle!"

Larry gave another nod. "You've hit the nail right on the head."

"Wh-a-t!" There came an explosive gasp from the two Happy Valley cowboys while Merle regarded their prisoner dazedly.

"Are you—you suggesting that it wasn't you who robbed me?" she stammered.

Again that old, characteristic gleam flickered in Larry's eyes.

"Bull's-eye first time, honey."

"But—but—" Merle's voice trailed away. Once again she felt utterly bewildered. It seemed as if Larry delighted in baffling and mystifying her whenever they met. Surely it wasn't possible that her suspicions were mistaken?

Certain it was that Jake and Ted had no doubts on that score. The horse-breaker gave another scornful laugh.

"I suppose you just happened to run across the real outlaw an'" took the trophy off him," he said sarcastically.

Calmly Larry nodded. "Your intuition does you credit, old-timer. Guess you couldn't have summed things up better if you'd actually been on the spot. But now that we understand one another, perhaps I can lower my arms—"

And he made to drop his hands. Instantly Jake flourished his gun.

"Keep 'em up!" he roared. "Your smart excuses don't fool me. And hand over that trophy pronto."

"Sure. Only too pleased to give it back to Merle. And I'm very grateful to all of you for saving me a heap of trouble. It's a mighty long ride from here to Happy Valley, I guess."

And, ignoring both Jake's levelled gun and his glare, the young cowboy coolly stepped forward and held the silver statuette out to Merle. Still in a daze she took it, and for a moment his devil-may-care smile faded and it was with a touch of bitterness that he regarded her.

"Better look inside—just to make sure I haven't taken the map," he suggested.

Merle felt herself flushing hotly. She could not shake off the feeling that, incredible though it seemed, Larry's explanation was true. Impulsively she was about to speak when Ted Gardner, who had stepped across to examine the young cowboy's saddle-bag, gave a wrathful bellow.

"So you're not the hold-up man, eh?" he cried. "Then, mebbe, you'll explain what this outfit's doin' in your saddle-bag?"

And he pulled out first a grey slicker, next a neckerchief mask with two eye-holes cut in it, and finally the gun which had been used to hold up Merle.

For a moment Larry seemed to lose his usual nonchalance. Then he gave an impatient shrug.

"Guess it would be a waste of time explaining," he muttered. "Once a guy's got a bad name, he'd best keep his mouth shut."

And, as they all continued to gaze down at the slicker, mask and revolver, he gave Jake Binns a sudden push that sent him reeling, the revolver dropping from his hand.

With an angry roar Ted Gardner rushed forward. But Larry dodged past, leaping athletically into the saddle of his horse. Swiftly he gathered up the reins. Once again his manner underwent an astonishing

transformation, and he waved cheerily to Merle.

"So long, honey. Like a bad penny, I'll be back one of these fine days!"

He shot off into a gallop. From the two cowboys there came a furious shout and Jake snatched up his revolver.

"Come back, or—"

The horse-breaker raised his gun, but Merle caught him by the arm, pulling it back so that he could not take aim.

"No—let him go," she cried. "We've got back the trophy and that's all that matters."

As she spoke, she unscrewed the head of the silver cowboy and peered into the hollow statuette. To her relief there lay hidden the torn map that formed half of old Sam Crogan's secret. Then, looking up, she saw the Happy Valley cowboys surveying her in blank astonishment.

"But, Miss Merle," gasped Jake, "surely you haven't been taken in by that feller's bluff? It's plumb crazy to think he didn't hold you up. Why, there's his mask an' gun!"

"Besides," put in Ted Gardner, "we know from Slim Harris what a reputation he has back in Snake Canyon, and if that isn't enough—gee, the fact that he works for a bullyin' rascal like Nat Garsten ought to be sufficient."

Merle looked down, at the evidence on the ground, recalled those other occasions when Larry had schemed against her, and slowly nodded.

"I—I suppose you're right," she said, and it was miserably that she walked across to the waiting Pommie



### A BLOW AGAINST THE RANCH

During the ride on to Happy Valley Merle's mind was still full of the latest evidence of Larry's treachery, but when she reached the

little township and visited the hospital all thought of the young cowboy was forgotten.

It was impossible to be miserable in the presence of her uncle. He was so delighted; so full of pride and admiration at her success. The silver trophy clutched in one hand, the torn map in the other, he regarded her with glowing eyes.

"You've done wonderfully, dear!" he exclaimed. "Gee, but I wish I could have seen you ridin'! It must have been a grand race. And you're right about this map. The other half must be hidden in that other trophy old Sam Crogan left behind. If only you can win that—"

Merle gave his arm a fond squeeze. "I mean to do my best," she assured him. "As soon as I've discovered for what race the Gold Rider is being offered, I'll enter for it."

For a while they discussed the map, speculating excitedly as to what secret it could hold, and how it could affect the destiny of Happy Valley Ranch, and then Uncle Stephen sprang a surprise.

It seemed that arrangements had been made to transfer him to California, to a convalescent home on the coast. There he could secure special treatment which would enable his leg quickly to mend.

"That's grand news," Merle declared. "When are you leaving?"

"To-morrow afternoon, my dear."

"Then I'll come and see you off, and—oh, uncle!" Excitedly Merle surveyed him. "Wouldn't it be marvellous if you recovered in time to see me compete for the Gold Rider!"

She kissed him, then, restoring the torn map to the trophy, she took her leave. But before departing from the hospital she asked the motherly matron to lock the Silver Rider in her safe. It would be more secure there than at the ranch, and when she called to see her uncle off next day she could take it round to the bank and deposit it there.

It was happily that she rode back home. Despite Larry's scheming, things were going well. Her uncle was making a good recovery; she had

secured half of the all-important map; and she had managed to pay the money they owed to Nathaniel Garsten.

"We shan't have any more trouble with him," she told herself, as she cantered across the outer range of the Happy Valley Ranch. "Now that the debt's been settled, everything ought to go swimmingly."

Momentarily she reined in Pommie, looking around with pleasure at the cattle which, at her suggestion, had been driven from the home range to this better pasture that morning. Fat and well they looked, and Merle smiled with satisfaction as she thought of the money that would be realised when the pick of them were sold.

"More than enough to keep things going till uncle comes home," she told herself, as she rode on.

When she trotted through the ranch gateway she saw Slim Harris, the foreman, in the yard, busy cutting hay. He warmly congratulated her on her win, but there was a frown on his smooth, rather nervous face. She regarded him in surprise.

"Hallo, what's worrying you, Slim?" "It's the cattle, Miss Merle. I did as you told me—drove 'em across to the outer range—but it was against my better judgment."

"What!" Merle's astonishment increased. The home pasture was thinly grassed and the two water-holes there were almost dry. The outer range, on the other hand, had an excellent water-hole and the spring-fed grass was green and luscious.

"Whatever are you getting at?" she asked.

The young foreman frowned again. "It's Nat Garsten, Miss Merle. I'm afraid he'll cause trouble. You know, that land where the main water-hole is has been under dispute for some time past. Garsten thinks it's on his side of the boundary."

"Then he thinks wrong," declared Merle. "It's a good twenty yards on our side. Anyway, don't you worry about Garsten. He can't do anything."

"I sure hope you're right, Miss Merle," said the foreman, but he shook his head worriedly as he resumed work. It was clear that he was not happy about things and his fears were quickly proved correct.

Merle was eating the savoury supper Mammie, the negro housekeeper, had prepared for her when the telephone rang. Jumping to her feet, she lifted the receiver, and then she knew a moment's uneasiness, for it was Nathaniel Garsten's harsh voice that came over the wire.

"That Merle Wason? Good! I want to talk to you about your cattle. I understand you've had 'em shifted to the outer range?"

"That's correct," said Merle. "Waal, you can shift 'em back pronto. That water-hole by the boundary is on my property an' I won't have your steers usin' it."

Merle flushed at his bullying tones and her voice quivered with indignation as she replied.

"On your property?" she cried. "It's nothing of the kind. It's well on our side of the boundary. So I've every right to drive my cattle there. Besides, I couldn't move them even if I wanted to. The water-holes on the home range are nearly dried up."

He cut in with a hard laugh.

"I don't care a dime whether your cattle have water or not," he barked. "And I haven't rung up to argue with you—only to tell you what I want done. If my orders haven't been carried out by to-morrow, then I'll take drastic action."

And—bang! went the receiver at the other end of the wire. Angry Merle replaced hers. What a bully the man was! And to think that he was the rascal whom Larry had professed to admire. Birds of a feather, she thought scornfully, then bit her lip.

What drastic action was Garsten planning to take?

"He was just bluffing," she told her-

self. "He's furious because I won the Silver Rider—because I managed to pay off the mortgage interest. If he thinks he can frighten me he's mistaken."

And defiantly she resumed her seat at the supper-table.

But next morning Merle quickly realised her mistake in thinking that her unpleasant neighbour had been bluffing. She had just saddled up Pommie, preparatory to making a round of the ranch, when there came an agitated shout and Slim Harris rushed across the stable yard.

"I knew there'd be trouble, Miss Merle!" he gasped. "The herd's back in the home range. Someone must have driven 'em back from the boundary."

"What! You—you mean some of Garsten's men have driven them from the water-hole?"

Slim nodded. "Guess so, Miss Merle. Ted Gardner reported he'd seen a stranger ridin' out that way not an hour ago."

"Yep—an' he's still there," put in a deep voice, and the ginger-headed

cowboy himself came striding on to the scene. "Fencin' in the water-hole by the look o' it."

"Fencin' in the water-hole!" Merle's cheeks flushed with indignation. So this is what Nathaniel Garsten had meant last night. Not content with sending one of his hirelings to drive the cattle away from the rich pasture, he was actually planning to debar the steers permanently from using the one good supply of water Happy Valley possessed.

"Well, of all the cheek!" Merle gasped. "But I'll soon put a stop to his little game." She whirled on Ted Gardner. "Did you see who it was who was erecting the fence?"

He shook his head. "Guess he was too far away for me to recognise, Miss Merle," he replied, "but he didn't look more'n a boy—a slim feller about Slim Harris' build, wearin' a chequered shirt."

Despite herself Merle's heart gave a dismayed leap, for there could be no mistaking that description. It was Larry Ted had seen! So once again

the boy who had dared claim to be her friend was striking against her—and striking seriously this time.

The disputed water-hole was absolutely vital to Happy Valley. Without it they would be unable to maintain large numbers of cattle during the long summer.

Slim Harris, as he saw the look on Merle's face, shook his head glumly.

"It's a bad business, Miss Merle," he muttered, "but what can we do? Guess Nat Garsten is a mighty influential man and if he claims that water-hole—"

But impatiently Merle cut him short.

"What can we do?" she cried. "I'll soon show you what we can do. Neither Nat Garsten—nor that wretched Larry Denvers—is going to get the better of me!"

And leaping into the saddle, she sent Pommie galloping across the yard.

Prepare for a very dramatic—and surprising—meeting with Larry, in next Friday's instalment.

## THE SECRET OF STUDY 7

(Continued from page 236)

tress looked at June admiringly. The girl detective unlocked the door, threw it open, and switched on the light.

A cry of bewilderment burst from Della's lips.

"But—there's no one here!"

June started. She stared round the empty study: at the securely fastened window.

In spite of her precautions, the mystery girl had vanished.

But only for a moment was June shaken. Then a strange gleam crept into her grey eyes, for this seemingly incredible development clinched an exciting theory that had been lurking at the back of her mind.

The ruffled ivy and open window had been part of a daring bluff. The trickster had never entered or escaped that way!

"Where is the girl?" demanded the headmistress.

"Perhaps I was wrong, Miss Hartley," replied the girl detective, raising her voice a little. "Perhaps she—er—gave me the slip in the corridor. But she can't escape! With Matty's help, I've been able to get her photo—and by to-morrow morning we'll have the proof!"



### THE AMAZING PHOTOGRAPH

"How's it going Matty?" asked June, peeping into the dark-room the following morning. "Can I come in?"

The girl photographer nodded, her eyes shining behind her spectacles as she held up a film in the dim red light.

"It's coming on fine, Miss Gaynor," she declared. "You've got a clear picture of the corridor and the museum steps—and I can just see the figure of a girl!"

"But, Matty—that's wonderful!" exclaimed June.

"Yes, isn't it?" agreed Matty eagerly. "I do hope that it helps to clear poor Shirley. She declares that she was in her dormitory all last evening, but she's got no one to prove it."

"This film will be proof enough, Matty!" said June. "We must show it to Miss Hartley at once. She's in Study 7 now, with Shirley and Valda. Poor Val's terribly cut up about all this."

Followed by Matty, carefully carrying the precious negative, June led the way to Study 7, where an anxious little group was waiting for them.

Miss Hartley was there with Della. Shirley, tearful but still defiant, was sitting in a chair, her sister standing beside her. Valda Terris' attractive

face was very pale, but she turned eagerly as June entered.

"Well, June?"

"We've got the proof," announced June. "At least, Matty's got it in that film. It's all thanks to her."

Matty held up the dripping film, and they all crowded round.

"Let me see," said the headmistress, studying it obliquely in the light from the window. "Yes, I can see the corridor and the steps leading up to the museum. And there is a girl on the steps—"

They all held their breath as the headmistress endeavoured to make out the girl's features in the negative.

"But this—this is—Shirley?" she exclaimed.

There came a broken cry from Valda, and Shirley sprang to her feet.

"But—it can't be!" she gasped. "I wasn't there—it's not possible—"

"It's quite impossible!" agreed June calmly.

They all stared at her. "The whole thing's impossible," went on the girl detective. "Because—there was no film in the camera that I fixed up in the corridor last night!"

A blank, incredulous silence followed. It was broken by Matilda Barnes.

"But—that's crazy!" gasped the girl photographer, her face sickly pale. "There was a film! You—you handed it to me yourself this morning—and asked me to develop it as I'd promised—"

"The film I handed you, Matty," said June, her voice like ice, "was a blank film that had never been used! If you'd developed it you'd have discovered my little ruse. But, instead, you fell into the trap, as I hoped you would, and substituted it for a photo that you'd taken secretly at some other time, intending to incriminate Shirley!"

A gasp greeted June's accusation. "Matilda Barnes is the mystery japer!" she declared. "She was clever enough to hoodwink the whole school—but last night she went too far. She offered to help me fix up the camera to expose the trickster, knowing that she alone would handle the film. She purposely tripped over the threads and set off the flashlight, certain that she could easily escape when the hue-and-cry started—"

"You—you're crazy!" gasped Matty, her face deathly white. "The trickster came out of and went into Study 7 when I couldn't have been there. She was seen—on each occasion—you saw her—"

"That's quite true, June," put in the headmistress. "How do you explain—"

June smiled, glancing across at Valda.

"Remember the old days, Val?" she asked. "How we used to talk of

secret passages in the school? There were always rumours, though nothing ever came of them. But when I called to see Shirley yesterday I noticed that someone had moved the old hockey picture. That set me thinking. I borrowed a plan of the school from Miss Hartley—and last night I explored!"

"You—you mean there are secret passages in the school?" gasped the headmistress.

June nodded. "Yes," she said. "Situated in the most unexpected places, too, as I'll show you. Watch!"

While they all watched breathlessly she crossed the study and ran her fingers over the beading of the old panelling. There was a faint whir, and an amazed cry broke from Shirley as a square, dusty cavity appeared in the wall.

June flashed her torch into the opening.

"This leads to Matty's dark-room—that used to be the old stationery-cupboard," she explained. "Matty probably stumbled on it by accident, and kept the secret to herself. But, later—she looked steadily at the white-faced girl—later, Matty was able to use the discovery to her own advantage."

"You mean—these scandalous tricks?" exclaimed Miss Hartley, her face clouded. "But how did they benefit the wretched girl?"

"When I suspected her I began to make inquiries that told me the truth," said June. "Val knows part of it, too."

"I?" gasped Valda, staring blankly. "As a rising young architect," said June, smiling, "you were asked by Miss Hartley to submit plans for a small wing for the school. But Matty's brother had also submitted designs—which were turned down by the school governors in favour of yours. If Shirley had been expelled in disgrace you'd probably have turned in the contract, Val—and Matty and her brother were banking on that!"

"Matilda Barnes—is this true?" cried the headmistress.

Matty's sullen silence was answer enough.

"But, June, what made you suspect Matty in the first place?" gasped Valda, finding her voice.

June's grey eyes glinted.

"Matty wore an overall and rubber gloves while she was at work in the dark-room," she explained, "and they effectively hid the incriminating red ink stains when she came into Della's study. But she forgot that film is sensitive in ink—and there was a tell-tale stain on the negative she was holding. It was that little slip that gave her away!"

(End of This Week's Story.)

Noel and June tackle a very strange mystery in next Friday's story. Look out for THE CASE OF THE BROKEN TOYS.

## THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 230.)

Golly, I wonder what on earth is in the pocket!"

Caution told her not to dash straight back to the bushes—not while anyone was about. So she opened her knitting-bag and walked sedately around the stone-flagged quadrangle, working on a cardigan for her father.

She saw the Fourth Formers streaming from behind the clock tower, Mr. Aspell, gown flapping about his lean figure, striding out in front. Behind him trotted the burly, plump Smeeke.

She watched them disappear into the school, and, inwardly seething with impatience, waited until roll-call bell had stopped ringing, then quickly retraced her steps.

Once clear of the open quadrangle, her long legs broke into a heiter-skelter run that would have made her father gasp to see.

Panting, eager, she reached the bush where she had concealed the grey robe. There was no one about.

It gave her a pleasant thrill to handle the grey robe again, with its hood and the printed figure "3" on the forehead.

"Now—the pocket!" She eagerly dived in her hand. "Phew—a note!"

Eager brown eyes scanned the bold printing at the head of the paper:

"SEVEN O'CLOCK, THURSDAY NIGHT, THE FIGHT FOR G. T. BEGINS IN THE ABBOT'S ROOM. No. 1. GREY GHOSTS."

"Wow!" exclaimed Penelope. "That's to-night! And G. T.—that must mean that mysterious Glynn Tracy again! What on earth—"

She broke off, for at the bottom of the paper, obviously hastily added, was a short message in a small but firm hand:

"Above still stands, but have decided to have a preliminary meeting to-night in Small Chapel. Nine o'clock. Destroy this note immediately."

Penelope gave an excited nod. She

began to understand. The preliminary meeting in Small Chapel obviously referred to the one the previous night, and No. 3 had rather carelessly not immediately destroyed the note.

"Wow!" If the Wasp had found this, she breathed, "he could have traced No. 1 by his handwriting! Get rid of it, Penny!"

She ripped off the bottom part of the message and tore it into tiny shreds that could never be read. Then she turned her dancing eyes to the printed instructions again.

"Abbot's room." What ever's that? Seven to-night. Something to do with this Glynn Tracy—

"Ah, Penelope!" It was her father's voice behind her in the bushes, and there she was, standing with the incriminating grey robe at her feet!



### SMEEKE IS SUSPICIOUS

Penelope nearly lost her nerve—but not quite.

She plunged to her knees, dragged open the zip of her knitting-bag, snatched out her knitting, feverishly crammed in the robe, whisked the zipper across, and rose—to find her father behind her, staring in surprise.

Had he seen the robe? "My knitting daddy," she stammered vaguely, "on the ground! Your cardigan, you know—coming along nicely—"

Her voice faltered a little. He wasn't looking at the knitting at all. "It is as I feared, Penelope—"

"Is—it is, daddy?" "Yes. The high flush in your cheeks, the excited look in your eyes—"

Penelope stood tongue-tied. "This outrageous secret society affair has upset you," he went on rather weightily. "I have just had a short word with Mr. Aspell. The events just now were obviously too much for a shy, nervous girl like yourself—"

She could have slumped in pure relief. He hadn't seen the robe. "I have asked Aspell to spare no

effort to unmask these Grey Ghosts. And, when caught, their punishment shall be of the utmost severity!"

"Yes, daddy," murmured Penelope meekly. "But, honestly, I wasn't upset—"

"Allow me to know better, Penelope!"

The sternness of his face softened a little.

"However, we will forget it, my dear. These school matters are no concern of yours. Walk over with me to Senior House."

Penelope picked up her knitting-bag and followed him; but at the door of Senior House she left her father and she hurried up to her own room in the Head's private house. There she hid the robe.

"I'll keep it for the time being," she told herself. "Now to take a look in the Abbot's Room. It rather intrigues me."

The Abbot's Room, Penelope learnt, was situated in the east wing. Her only chance to visit it would be first to visit matron, whose room was on the top floor of the east wing; and then wait till break-bell rang, when the east-wing would be empty.

This plan she carried out, and as she left matron's room break-bell was just ringing, and boys were swarming from their classrooms.

From the nearest window she watched them, and as she looked she gave a sudden start.

For below, Harold Smeeke, the sneak, had appeared. He was now carrying out a painstaking search of the bushes, for the Grey Ghost's robe, Penelope guessed.

"Search away, sneak," she murmured scornfully. "You won't find the—"

And then she stopped, and plunged her hand frantically into her pocket.

"The paper—with No. 1's orders—it's gone!"

And then the dreadful realisation came to her.

At her father's approach she must have dropped the paper into the bushes—and now Harold Smeeke would find it!

How will Penelope prevent Smeeke from finding the incriminating note? Another fine instalment of this grand serial in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL

## THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 234.)

went staggering backwards. Sally was flung against the wall.

And then, just as the men were dashing away, in through the doorway strode Percy, the robot, mechanical arms flailing.

Right and left whirled Percy's arms like piston rods. Percy, indeed, seemed to have become a fighting fury. Percy, Sally suddenly realised, was completely out of control—caused by that bang on the head which had done something to the sensitive mechanism inside him!

Thud, thud! Impossible for the crooks to avoid those whirling arms.

"Gosh, look at that—and that!" roared Johnny.

One of the men suddenly dropped down as if pole-axed. A moment later his pal, getting in the way of Percy's pile-driving fists, sank beside him.

The robot, meeting with no opposition now, strode on and crashed into the wall. Over he toppled, the whirring sound inside him dying away as the mechanism was finally shattered by that collision.

Sally seemed to come out of a trance. Outside she heard the scampering of feet, the sound of excited voices.

"Someone must have heard the noise," she hissed. "But this is wonderful—we'll win all round even yet. Johnny, hide Percy behind those packing-cases. Quickly!"

Frenziedly Johnny grabbed Percy up, threw him over his shoulder, and dumped him out of sight.

A few minutes later a crowd of excited students burst into view.

"What's going on?" shouted Tubby Winwood.

He pulled up short in the doorway, his eyes goggling. While Captain Thorne, striding on to the scene behind him, stared in equal amazement.

For there was Sally, her face full of concern, helping a still dazed Professor Willard to his feet.

"You were wonderful, sir," she was saying in an awed voice. "Absolutely wonderful!"

"He certainly was," agreed Don fervently. "Gosh, sir, the way you laid out those two crooks! Just didn't know you had it in you!"

The professor blinked, shook his head to clear the mist from his eyes. He stared down at the two groaning men. Almost unconsciously he puffed out his chest a little.

"H'm! Must have finished them off just as they hit me with a stick," he murmured in satisfaction. "Not a bad bit of work, if I may say so—though, of course, you four gave me a little help," he added, with a beam at Sally & Co.

"You!" said a grunting voice from the floor. "Fat lot you had to do with it. It was that dummy knocked us out—"

"Dummy!" Sally gave a hasty laugh. "Are you still trying to pull that old trick, with a diamond necklace hanging out of your pocket and the clothes you disguised yourself with on the floor beside you?"

"It's fairly obvious that you two were the only dummies around here, put in Captain Thorne grimly. "And it's thanks to the professor and these four young people that you've been found out—"

"How can I tell you how sorry I am for my suspicions, professor?" The owner of the necklace fluttered on to the scene. "I feel so ashamed, especially after you've been so brave!"

There was a sneering laugh from one of the crooks, but next moment he was jerked out of the room by a brawny sailor.

"And that's the last of the impostor," said the professor, with a sigh of relief. "It was worth a fight to unmask the villain who has been posing as me. What a fantastic story—trying to blame their villainy on to a dummy! Ha, utter nonsense! And now, if everyone will excuse me, I shall retire and tidy myself."

And, head held high with pride, Professor Willard quitted the store-room.

It was some time before the crowd disappeared, enabling the chums to whisk Percy back to Slick's cabin.

Slick, a little upset at first at Percy's dishevelled appearance, grinned when the chums told him what had happened.

"So Percy did have a use, after all," he said. "Though I guess I'll have to take him to bits and hide him now. Still, he gave us some fun."

To which the chums heartily agreed.

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's complete story Sally promises to help one of the other students out of a difficulty—a boy whom Don does not trust.