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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

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1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

A Lovable Puppy Starts Sally & Co. On An Intriguing Adventure—
By DAPHNE GRAYSON

WHO OWNED THE PUPPY?

"COME on, partner!" laughed pretty, blue-eyed Sally Warner. "It's up to you now!"

"Leave it to me, Sally," said Don, and leant forward, rope ring in hand. "This one's going right over the peg—I hope!"

The four Merry-makers were on the games deck of the Ocean Star, the College Ship en route for Australia, and Sally and Don were partners against fair-haired Fay Manners and Johnny Briggs in a game of deck quoits.

"Bet you a strawberry sundae you miss it!" chuckled Johnny.

Don grinned and pitched the ring. At the same moment there was a scuffling, clattering sound. Scampering on to the pitch came the chubby body of a young spaniel, a walking-stick held between his teeth.

The rope ring was in the air. The puppy paused, and as he did so the stick tilted up sideways, so that the ring slipped neatly over it.

There was a roar of laughter from the chums.

"Well fielded!" cried Sally. "Why, you clever boy!"

She leant down and patted the puppy, who wriggled ecstatically, dropped the stick, and rolled over on to his back, waving his legs in the air, his little tail beating a lively tattoo on the deck.

"Where did you spring from?" asked Johnny, tickling the puppy's ribs. "Nice little fellow! Never seen him around before."

"No name on his collar," said Fay, laughing as a wet tongue curled round her fingers. "Isn't he a pet? But—"

"Here's somebody now," said Sally, as the thud of footsteps sounded behind them. "Must be his owner."

She swung round, a smile on her lips. But the smile quickly faded at the sight of the angry-faced man who thrust past her, agitatedly grabbed

up the stick, and glared at the puppy.

"Little brute!" he gritted. "Coming along and snatching my stick!" His fingers closed convulsively around the silver-knobbed stick, then he swung on to the chums. "Why don't you keep the little beast under control? Anyway, dogs shouldn't be allowed aboard!"

He made a lunge at the puppy as he spoke, flipping it spitefully across its soft muzzle.

Immediately the angry red flared into the chums' faces.

"I say, steady on!" growled Johnny truculently. "It isn't our dog, as it happens, but that's no reason why you should knock it about."

"In any case, he's only a puppy. He's just playing," protested Sally.

"Not your dog?" the man echoed. A startled look leapt into his eyes and he stared at the puppy, now rapidly retreating down the deck with his tail tucked well between his legs. He gave a start. "Why, I believe—"

He said no more, and started off rapidly down the deck in pursuit of the puppy.

For a moment the chums stood still, wondering at the man's extreme anger and agitation. They had seen him once or twice before, limping around the deck or going into the dining saloon, always leaning heavily on his stick. But there was no sign of a limp now, thought Sally fleetingly, as she watched his hurried retreat.

"Come on, Merry-makers!" she said quietly. "If he thinks he's going to touch that puppy with his stick he's mistaken!"

The chums needed no urging. Like a flash they darted off, skimming down the companion-way where the man had disappeared. There was no sign of him, however, when they reached the corridor below. But from around the corner came a low whim-

pering, the sound of scratching, and excited little barks.

"Must have found his way home," said Sally, smiling with relief as she turned the corner and saw the puppy scrabbling at one of the closed cabin doors. "Wonder if there's anyone in?"

Just then the cabin door swung open. Framed in the doorway stood a black-haired girl—very pretty, with an amazingly fair skin, but with a queer, almost frightened look in her grey eyes. At sight of her the puppy yelped in joy and leapt up at her, his whole body wriggling, eager whines coming from his throat.

The girl gave a little cry. Instinctively her hand went out, and then she stiffened as Fay spoke:

"I'm so glad he's found his mistress. And isn't he pleased to see you?"

"He's not mine—he isn't!" There was a queer, frightened defiance in the girl's instant denial. "I don't know anything about him. Get him away from here!"

Sally & Co. stared at the girl, then at each other, in dumbfounded amazement. It was so obvious that the dog knew her, that she was all the world to him. So why the denial? And why that attitude of fear?

"Down!" said the girl fiercely, for once again the dog was leaping up. "Go away—bad dog!"

The puppy cringed down, his ears drooping, his whole attitude one of unhappiness, his large brown eyes pathetically asking forgiveness. And as the girl stared at him, Sally saw her mouth quiver slightly.

The girl was lying, Sally felt convinced of that. But for what purpose? It was utterly bewildering. But even while Sally tried to puzzle it out, footsteps sounded around the corner.

With one movement the girl stooped down; swept the dog up into her arms.

"Very well," she said hastily.

"Since the dog seems to like me, I'll let him stay for a little while. I'll find his owner later."

And slam! went the cabin door right in the startled faces of the chums.

"Well!" Johnny let out his breath in an explosive gasp. "Is everyone around here crazy?" he asked indignantly. "If that wasn't her dog I—I'll eat my hat!"

"I'm sure it was her dog!" said Fay hotly. "Fancy not wanting a sweet little thing like that! She must be awfully unkind."

"I'm not so sure," said Sally slowly. "It seemed to me that she thought the world of that dog, but for some reason didn't like to show it. She seemed sort of—sort of scared," she added puzzledly. "Look here, shipmates, I suggest we hang around a bit and see what happens."

The rest of the Merrymakers were in complete agreement, and they took up a position where they could see the cabin door, but not be seen by anyone entering or leaving.

They did not have to wait for long. A few moments later there was a click. The cabin door opened. The dark-haired girl, now wearing huge dark glasses, peered quickly up and down the corridor. Having satisfied herself that it was deserted, she darted back into the cabin, to re-emerge with something concealed under the voluminous travel coat she was wearing. With another quick look round, she darted down the corridor, making for the stairs at the end.

"She's going down into the hold!" whispered Sally excitedly. "And she's got the pup under her coat. Come on!"

They slipped after the girl, careful to keep out of sight. It was that caution which slowed them up, for when they reached the bottom of the iron staircase she was nowhere to be seen.

"Now, where——" began Don. Warningly Sally held up her hand. "Listen!"

The chums strained their ears. Faintly they heard the sound of a murmuring voice, of smothered little yelps.

"She's in No. 3 hold," muttered Johnny. "This way."

Very silently they made their way forward, peered into No. 3 hold. A mountain of carefully stacked luggage confronted them, but the voice was louder now. As stealthily as cats, they crept round, then all stopped in utter amazement.

For there indeed was the dark girl. But what a different girl! Her dark glasses had been discarded. She sat on the floor, holding the quivering little puppy in her arms, her face buried in his soft fur, laughing a little chokingly as every now and again he twisted his eager head round to bestow wet kisses over her face.

"Oh, Folly! Folly!" she choked. "You adorable scamp! Forgive me, Folly, for having to scold you—it nearly broke my heart!" She hugged the dog tightly again. "But how did you get away, you rascal? Don't you realise you nearly spoiled everything? Oh, if only I could have you with me——"

There was a world of yearning in her voice, a little sob that made the tender-hearted Fay blink quickly once or twice as she looked in bewilderment at her equally baffled chums.

"What," she whispered huskily, "does it all mean? Why——"

"Gosh, she looks as if she hates parting with the dog at all!" muttered Johnny dazedly. "Yet—oh, gee, of all the mysteries——"

"What do you think is behind it, Sally?" asked Don.

"Don't know," his chum murmured. But Sally, despite her puzzlement, felt a glow of happiness. So the girl wasn't the unkind person the chums had thought her. She loved the puppy, was miserable at being parted from him.

But why was she parted from him? What was the mystery here?



A BLUFF IN THE HOLD

Before Sally could do more than ponder that problem there came the distant sound of a voice from the head of the stairs.

The girl gave a violent start. With one quick, agitated movement, she grabbed her glasses, rammed them on, then leapt to her feet with the puppy in her arms. An open suitcase stood at her feet, with a leash fixed inside it. Quickly she fixed the leash to the puppy's collar, and patted his head as she placed him gently in the suitcase.

"Please, Folly," she whispered, "stay there. And don't make a sound."

She hurried from the hold, brushing past the place where the chums stood concealed.

"Well, that beats all!" muttered Johnny. "That pup does belong to her, after all!"

"And she loves it," said Fay softly. "She's terribly upset at having to hide it away. It seems so queer."

"Queer it is," replied Sally slowly. "That girl's scared of something or somebody, and in some way the dog's connected with it. I do wish we could help her, poor thing! She seems so unhappy—so frightened——"

Then she paused, staring, for the man with the stick, his face even angrier than the last time the chums saw him, had appeared in the doorway of the hold.

"So you're here, eh?" he growled. "Have you seen that dog anywhere around?"

The chums instinctively stiffened, returning the man's probing glare calmly. But Sally's mind was beginning to race. After all this time, the man could not still be after the dog to punish him for the stick incident. There was something more to his determination to catch the dog than that. Could he, for some strange reason, be the answer to why the girl was keeping Folly concealed?

It seemed far-fetched, and yet the girl had obviously recognised this man's voice from a distance. She had turned pale, had hidden Folly away, telling him to keep quiet.

And suddenly Sally remembered the man's startled exclamation up on deck when he had watched the puppy running away: "Why, I believe——"

He believed what? Could he have recognised the dog then? There was something decidedly fishy here. But instinctively liking the girl as she did, it wasn't likely that Sally was going to give away the secret of Folly's hiding-place.

"The dog?" she asked blandly. "Which dog was that?"

The man's face turned a dark red. "You know quite well which dog I mean!" he said threateningly. "I've got an idea it's down here, and if you know anything about it you'd better tell me, if you know what's good for you!"

Sally & Co. eyed each other, their bewilderment growing. Also growing was the antagonism they felt towards this blustering bully, and their determination to keep him and the dog well away from each other.

"But I thought it wasn't your dog," said Don coolly, "so why do you want it so badly?"

The man gave an unpleasant laugh. "But I'm pretty sure he's the dog belonging to a little crook," he gritted; "and if I'm right, then that girl is aboard this ship. She's got to be found before she can get up to her thieving tricks again. Now do you understand why it's dangerous for you to meddle in this business?"

Sally felt a shock go through her as the man made that statement. The girl a crook! Then almost instantly her mind rejected the accusation. It wasn't true. The girl might look scared, but she certainly did not look dishonest. In any case, it wasn't Sally's policy to condemn—or see condemned—anyone until they had had a chance to explain.

She shot a look at Don, Fay, and

Johnny, and, by their almost imperceptible nods, she knew they were willing to follow her lead. She smiled amiably at the man.

"Well, that certainly makes a difference," she admitted. "Naturally, we'll help look for him. Let's begin over there," she added, pointing to the corner farthest from the puppy's hiding-place.

"Very well. Come on——" And then the man paused, his eyes narrowing as from the direction of the suitcase came a plaintive little whimper.

"The dog!" he roared.

He rushed off across the hold. In consternation, the chums saw him reach the suitcase, unless the whimpering puppy, take him out, and then snap another leash to his collar.

He straightened, facing the chums. "So you thought you could fool me, eh?" he almost snarled. "Well, just for that there'll be trouble for you over this! What's more, this little tyke will lead me straight to the girl I want to find—his mistress!"

And, with a sneering grin at the Merrymakers, he strode off.



FOLLY FINDS THE SECRET

"We've got to warn her!" said Sally frantically. "We must let her know what's happened."

Full of horror and dismay, the chums watched the puppy being led up the stairs, getting a vicious jerk on the leash every now and then as he made growing little darts at the walking-stick the man carried.

"At least we've got a start on that rotter there," Don pointed out. "We do know where her cabin is. Come on—quickly!"

They darted up another staircase, pelted towards the girl's cabin, hammered frenziedly upon the door. There was no reply.

"Out!" muttered Johnny. "Now what?"

They dashed out on deck, looking around. The girl was nowhere to be seen. But coming along the deck was Folly, pulling eagerly at the leash held by his triumphant captor.

"Goodness, they're making for his mistress' cabin!" gasped Fay in dismay. "We must do something—we must!"

But Sally was already doing something. She was remembering Folly's craze for sticks. It was a slender chance—but the only one. With a quick movement, she snatched one of the pegs belonging to the game of peg quoits, and sent it spinning along the deck right past the puppy's nose.

Folly gave a shrill bark of joy, jerking wildly at the leash. It caught the man off his balance. He tottered, almost fell. And in that moment Folly was free, scampering along the deck in pursuit of the peg.

"Good little Folly!" cried Sally exultantly. "After him, shipmates!"

They started forward. The man did the same, while Folly, grabbing the peg, pranced proudly about. Suddenly he dropped it, and, with his nose glued to the deck and little whimpering cries coming from his throat, raced forward.

His sudden change of direction gave the man a lead over the chums. With an agility which surprised and alarmed the Merrymakers, he hurtled forward between the line of cabins. Racing desperately to get ahead of him, the chums saw Folly pause. With an ecstatic little "Wuff," he reared up, pushed his two front paws heavily against one of the cabin doors. It shot inwards, precipitating Folly head-over-heels into the cabin.

There was a startled cry from inside the room.

"Folly! Oh, Folly——" The voice died away in a wild cry of alarm as, with a triumphant bellow, the man crashed the door wide open and stood accusingly on the threshold.

(Please turn to the back page.)



PENELOPE'S PLAN

PENELOPE 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.

Penelope knew that Mr. Aspell meant to set a trap for the Grey Ghosts, and she determined to warn them, though she knew that they did not trust her.

She overheard the Grey Ghosts talking in the Art Room, and as they made to come out, she put into action her plan to save them.

"HELP—help! The Grey Ghosts!" Her eyes dancing with excitement, Penelope managed to infuse the right amount of startled alarm into her voice—and the cry was just loud enough to ensure that the three Fourth Formers in the Art Room would hear it!

A moment of tense silence, then abruptly the Art Room door burst open. Hugh Mason jumped quickly into the dim passage, dark eyes alert, fists clenched.

"Miss Cartwright!" he gasped in surprise.

Penelope fluttered forward, all feminine agitation.

In the doorway behind Hugh, Harvey Doane and Bob Gower had appeared. They stared at her, alarmed, uncertain.

Penelope saw the lightning, warning glance Hugh shot them—and she admired the way he swiftly controlled himself. Only his dark eyes showed puzzlement and alertness to danger.

"Miss Cartwright—we heard you shout, about the Grey Ghosts! What did you mean?"

She sensed the boys' tenseness as they awaited her reply.

"Oh, it was awful!"—she pointed a trembling finger—"the figure was outside that door. One—one of the Grey Ghosts, crouching, seeming to listen. I could not mistake it. Then—oh, dear—it fled!"

A swift, meaning look passed between them. They relaxed a little. "I say!" muttered Bob. "It must have been—"

He cut short as Hugh nudged him. "Quick, chaps!" ordered Hugh. "Search along the passage. Try to find out who it was—that's vital," he added meaningly.

"Definitely," murmured Harvey, and for all his languid manner he went off like a streak, sturdy Bob doggedly at his heels.

Hugh turned back, putting a hand under her elbow.

"Miss Cartwright—I'm very sorry about this. It must have been a shock. You'd better sit down a moment."

He opened the Art Room door and carefully guided her inside.

And in that brief second Penelope swiftly dropped in the doorway the note she had scrawled a minute before!

Part two of her daring plan was on its way!

Hugh had pulled a chair forward; with a fluttering sigh Penelope sat down.

"Miss Cartwright, can I get you some water?" he asked quietly.

His lean, good-looking face was a little anxious, and more and more she admired him. For Hugh had no reason to trust or like her—rather to the contrary—and his mind must have been intent on the further activities of this mysterious No. 4, yet he was instinctively concerned for her.

"Thank you, I am better. But wait"—she peered up at him primly—"why, goodness, aren't you the boy concerned in that fuss about these awful Grey Ghosts this morning? Hugh Mason?"

"Yes, Miss Cartwright," he said rather curtly.

"I—I'm glad nothing was proved against you—"

The words came out impulsively, frankly. She was unguarded, and perhaps there had been a sparkle in her eyes, for he looked at her sharply, curiously.

"Why, thank you, Miss Cartwright," he said slowly. "But I thought—"

Penelope could have kicked herself for the slip—for acting out of character, but fortunately Hugh had no time to dwell on it, as heavy footsteps sounded on the stone passage at that moment.

The rugged-faced Gower hurried in.

"No sign, Hugh! The fellow obviously dodged down the back staircase." He lowered his voice, casting a rather grim, distrustful glance at the back of Penelope's head. "Hugh," he whispered, "it must have been this No. 4!"

Hugh quickly touched his arm for caution.

Harvey Doane lounged in, immaculate as ever, for all his speedy dash down the passage.

"Nothin' doing, Hugh," he drawled. "These—er—Grey Ghosts are tricky—" He hesitated, starting, and then, his long face still impassive, he made a lightning swoop at the floor, scooped up the note, swiftly scanned it, then slipped it into Hugh's hand.

"Ah, Miss Cartwright"—he turned and gravely, solicitously stepped to her side, cleverly masking the other two—"allow me to adjust your cushion. Most upsettin' for you—definitely."

The Fourth GREY GHOST

By DOROTHY PAGE

"Thank you," said Penelope primly.

Inwardly she was delightedly gurgling, immensely appreciating Harvey's little ruse to give Hugh and Bob a chance to study her note.

The note that said:

"YOUR MESSAGE ABOUT ABBOT'S ROOM FELL INTO WASP'S HANDS. HE IS LAYING TRAP FOR YOU TO-NIGHT—THE 4th GREY GHOST."

Her mission had succeeded. She had warned and saved them—without them suspecting the real truth about No. 4 for one second!

"Miss Cartwright"—Hugh stepped forward, his voice amazingly steady—"just rest a few moments, while we have a final look round. Come on, chaps!"

They hurried from the Art Room—and as the door closed Penelope became a bundle of activity that would have amazed them.

She guessed instantly that the Grey Ghosts wanted to discuss the vital note. What would they think? What would they do? Four lightning steps took her to the door. She listened, breath held.

It was as she suspected. They were outside, talking in whispers.

"... if this note is true—and I don't see how we can doubt No. 4 now," Hugh was saying tensely, "he's saved us again! We've escaped a trap! But even so—we're beaten—dished—"

Penelope's expression changed. What did Hugh mean?

"Don't you see?" continued the boy, "the Wasp now knows we're interested in Abbot's Room. After tonight he'll be constantly on the alert, probably have it locked up and barred! For Glynn Tracy's sake we've got to get into that room quickly, but how—how on earth is it to be done?"



PENELOPE RECEIVES A SHOCK

"Oh, Jimmy—what now?"

Penelope drew back slightly from the door. She had not foreseen this aspect of the case.

—the vital importance of getting into Abbot's Room.

Once again this mysterious Glynn Tracy had cropped up!

She heard a soft murmur of talk, then Bob Gower's louder, more aggressive voice:

"Look here, let's get rid of Miss Cartwright—first—"

Penelope whirled and flashed back to her seat. And as she did so a gleeful smile curved her lips—for inspiration had come.

The door opened and Hugh led the way in.

"I'm afraid there's no sign of the boy, Miss Cartwright," he said coolly. Penelope sat up. Her glance flashed over them. Their anxiety was concealed. Harvey's face was sleepily impassive; Bob Gower looked at her with frank distrust; Hugh was again quietly courteous, with just that hint

of uncertainty, curiosity in his steady gaze.

"Incidentally, Miss Cartwright," growled Bob, "what were you doing in this passage, anyway? There's only the Art Room here."

Penelope hid a thrill. This was just the lead she wanted—to help them.

"I wished to see Mr. Aspell on an errand for my father," she answered stiffly. "Can it be I was misdirected? Ah, boys, what a pity he wasn't here just now! He is very keen to catch these awful Grey Ghosts, isn't he?"

"Very," said Hugh rather grimly.

"In fact," continued Penelope gravely, "he is visiting my father to-night at eight o'clock—to report, I think, on the result of some plan he has of catching these boys!"

She noted the lightning glance that passed between them.

"And then he's going to stay on with my father," continued Penelope brightly, "discussing daddy's work on the monasteries of England, you know."

Again the swift glance between the boys.

"You mean," put in Hugh quickly, "that Mr. Aspell will be with your father from eight o'clock onwards—for some time?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," nodded Penelope, thrilling to see how they were seizing on her information. "Whatever happens, daddy will want to press ahead with his work, and dear Mr. Aspell's assistance will, of course, be invaluable."

She rose, primly smoothing her frock—but did not miss the quick "thumbs up" signal Hugh gave the other two!

Penelope was hard put not to show her glee.

Her idea had got home to them—and it was, she knew, a good one.

Mr. Aspell would lay his trap at seven o'clock. After an hour's fruitless wait—at the very most—he would certainly decide the trap had failed, that the Grey Ghosts had been warned somehow.

And as he had a definite appointment with her father at eight o'clock—then eight o'clock was obviously the right, if daring, moment to strike!

And equally obviously Hugh had seized upon the idea.

"Well, boys, I must not forget my errand!" she announced. "Thank you for your help. Now if you would direct me to Mr. Aspell—"

"Of course," said Hugh. "On up the main staircase to the top landing. Masters' rooms are there, the rooms lettered. You can't miss it."

"Thank you," said Penelope with dignity.

The door closed. For a second Penelope paused.

She just caught a quick, excited whisper from Hugh:

"Chaps—our chance! Eight o'clock—"

"Oh, Zimmy—done it!" Penelope gleed, as she skipped down the corridor, golden flecks of fun and triumph in her brown eyes. "They trust No. 4 now—but they won't suspect me in the slightest."

Her heart was joyous. It was grand to have helped those three! Feeling on top of the world, she skinned up the main staircase.

Fortunately, the whole school was at prep now, and there was no one to observe this surprisingly tomboyish trait in Miss Cartwright's supposedly prim and proper nature.

She reached the top landing at a run—and then hastily fell into a slow and dignified walk.

A little way along the passage Jinney, the elderly porter, was collecting the masters' evening mail from a small box on the wall.

Penelope approached, preparing for a prim "good-evening."

But she did not speak the words, for her lips suddenly dropped apart, and brown eyes became fixed in a stare of dumbfounded wonder.

For there it was—that name!

"Glynn Tracy!" she gasped.

She blinked, stared again, really startled. But there was no mistake.

Beside the post-box was a big, highly polished oak board on the wall. In gold lettering across the head was the inscription:

HARCOURT HONOURS BOARD.

And under the date, 1947, the name that had so immeasurably intrigued and baffled her seemed to jump out like a blow.

GLYNN TRACY.

A joyous, thrilled smile slowly curved Penelope's lips. There was still much that remained a mystery; but here—here at last was something that cleared any doubt from her mind.

Glynn Tracy must have been a member of Harcourt Abbey last term—and a highly honoured member at that—to be on this board!

"Miss Cartwright—you know Master Tracy?"

The porter's surprised, curious voice brought her back to the present. She turned, trying to conceal her intense excitement.

"Why—not exactly, Jinney. I—I have heard his name mentioned. But you must have known him—of course! He must have been a fine boy to have his name up there—"

Her voice faltered uneasily, for a look of contempt had spread on the porter's face.

"By rights, Miss Cartwright," he said sharply, "his name shouldn't be up there after—"

"Why—why, Jinney"—Penelope tried to smile—"what do you mean? He fidgeted uncomfortably.

"I'm sorry, Miss Cartwright. I shouldn't have said anything. I—I just saw red a moment when you spoke his name. You see, I'm one of the few that know the truth about Master Glynn Tracy."

A slow horror stole over Penelope, killing her joyful excitement of seconds before. Oh, what was this? With a great effort she masked her apprehension.

"Jinney," she said, trying to feign casualness, "you needn't mind saying anything to me—the headmaster's daughter. I shan't say anything. Tell me—it's so interesting. What was the truth about Glynn Tracy?"

The porter hesitated, glancing up and down the passage.

"Miss Cartwright, I don't know that I should—"

"Please, Jinney!"

"Well, then—it was only because Mr. Cartwright, your father, didn't want a scandal that his name stays up there. None of the boys know that the boy they thought a hero was—"

"Was—what?"

"Was the worst young scoundrel this school has ever known, miss; that although most everyone thought he'd left just normal like, he was really slung out in disgrace!"

THE GREY GHOSTS IN PERIL

Those words hit Penelope like a blow.

She felt dazed.

"Jinney—"

"Excuse me, miss. Please don't say anything. I must go now—"

Instinctively her hand went out to stop him. She must learn more.

But as she moved she realised another reason for his sudden desire to go. Mr. Aspell had emerged from a door farther along the passage.

Jinney shot the master a wary glance of dislike, touched his cap to Penelope, and moved away with his letters.

"Ah, my dear Miss Cartwright—"

The master came up, gown flowing about his lean figure, very white teeth bared in the ingratiating smile she so disliked.

Penelope somehow forced a prim, answering smile.

"Oh, Mr. Aspell, my father wondered if you would lend him your

book on the History of Harcourt," she said. "He'd like to have it now as he is working on his Monasteries of England."

"Of course—delighted! I will get it for you." He glanced down at his watch. "I shall be seeing the Head later—perhaps with some very important tidings, Miss Cartwright! Very important!"

A slow, cruel smile touched the thin face with its hooked nose and bright, hard eyes.

Penelope knew what was in his mind. The trap for the Grey Ghosts! But her thoughts were not on that. She hardly knew what Mr. Aspell said, what she said, when he produced the book from his study. She took it, hastening down through Junior House, her mind on one thing only—the sensational, disturbing discovery she had made about Glynn Tracy!

"Oh, goodness!" she breathed. "Have I been wrong all along? Have I really been helping a rotter in some way? Jinney obviously spoke the truth—he knows. Penny, what does it mean?"

Her mind in a dismayed whirl, she found herself back at the headmaster's private house in the grounds.

"Penelope, wherever have you been all this time?"

She looked up with a start. Her father was standing in the front porch. Hastily she composed her features. But her father's grey, penetrating eyes sharpened.

"Penelope, you look pale. What has been happening?"

"I—I didn't know Mr. Aspell's room, daddy," she gasped hastily, her heart beating fast. Oh, daddy mustn't suspect anything! "I'm sorry I was such a time. Here is the book—"

He took it, nodding rather sternly.

"I see—you have been hurrying, Penelope!" he accused. "You have been overdoing it, forgetting how frail you are."

"I'm all right, daddy—really," she said softly, "but I think I will go to my room, and—and rest, or sort my music, or something quiet."

He nodded, patting her shoulder. She entered the house, hurried up to her room, and plumped herself down on the eiderdown of her bed.

"Oh, Penny—Penny," she muttered. "What is this? Glynn Tracy did something awful. Hugh and the others are helping him in some way—and you're helping them!"

She banged clenched fists on her knees.

"But it doesn't make sense—it doesn't. I just know Hugh is wizard. He couldn't help a rotter. But supposing the Grey Ghosts don't know the true Glynn Tracy? Jinney said only a few knew about—about what really happened."

She leapt to her feet, and strode about the pretty little bedroom.

Oh, what was she to make of it? What had happened last term?

Time passed. By now, she suddenly realised, the tyrannical Mr. Aspell would be taking up his fruitless post. A ghost of a smile touched her lips. It vanished.

"And soon the Grey Ghosts will be going into action," she muttered.

"Are they doing something for a rotter without knowing it?"

In desperation to try to clear her mind, she in fact got out her music-case and began sorting the sheets. But she broke off doing that and she took out the spare Grey Ghost robe from her chest of drawers.

She stared at its rustling folds, thrilling slightly, still trying to sort this matter out—to decide what she must do.

"Penny," she told herself ruefully, "this isn't just a wizard adventure. It—it's getting much bigger—more baffling." Abruptly her pointed chin came up. "But I'm certain of one thing at least—Mr. Aspell is a mean tyrant, and I hope the Grey Ghosts dish him! I just know they're tops. But—but this Glynn Tracy—"

So, ruminating worriedly, the time

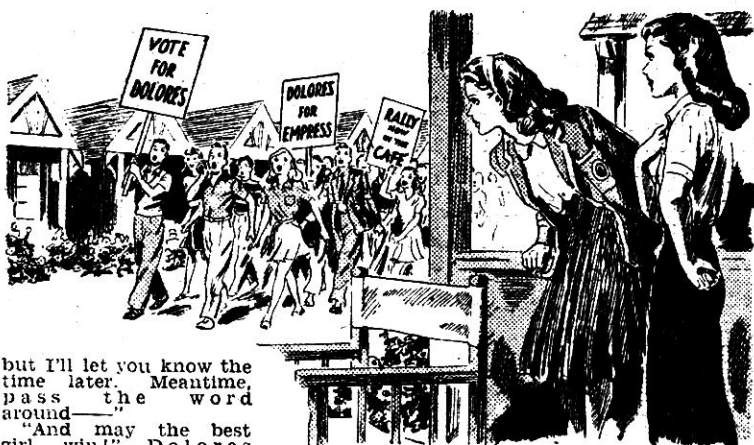
(Please turn to the back page.)



DOLORES

THE Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE



DOLORES PUZZLES THE CHUMS

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westonmouth Holiday Camp, discovered that a secret connected with Chris' dead uncle was hidden in Spy Tower on near-by Dartfleet Island.

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

Spy Tower belonged to Admiral Hardacre, who owned the island. He told the chums that he would only allow the person who took the part of empress in the forthcoming regatta to enter the tower, and then only on regatta day.

As the rôle of empress called for a really expert diver, Pat felt that she would be chosen. But, to her dismay, Dolores also offered to take the rôle of empress.

CHRIS and Pat stared in blank amazement at Dolores. They knew she was not a good diver and, therefore, were utterly taken aback by her claim that she should be considered for the rôle of empress.

"You mean—you really mean that you would do that dive from the Spy Tower?" Pat gasped.

"Absolutely!" Dolores laughed. "Why not?" she added. "If you can do it, Pat, why not me?"

"But, dash it, we've never seen you high dive!" Chris expostulated.

"You've never seen me do a lot of things," Dolores said severely. "You'd really be surprised, my dear Chris, if you knew some of the things I can do. It's all a matter, of course, of putting one's mind to it, and—well, I'm putting my mind to this—like anything. We're friends, Pat, and I like you immensely, but I'm not going to let you have everything your own way," she added, with a smile that robbed the words of their sting.

"Good for you!" Lucy Day cried. "And so," Dolores went on, "I also enter the lists for the honour of playing empress at the regatta. And if that's O.K. with everybody—"

There was a murmur—approving, applauding. Everybody was looking happily excited now. Such a spirit of good-humoured rivalry appealed to them all. But still Pat stared at Dolores, wondering all at once what new scheme this consummate actress had in mind, and still convinced, despite Dolores' apparent sincerity, that all this was bluff.

"O.K. it is!" Bruce said heartily. "At least, as far as I'm concerned. Anybody any objections?"

"I'll say not," Willis Green said. "Anybody else want to put themselves forward, the understanding being, of course, that they'll have to do the dive from Spy Tower?"

Dead silence. A good many girls there would have liked to become empress, but there was not one of them anxious to risk that daring dive.

"So be it!" Bruce said cheerfully. "Then that leaves a clear field for Pat and Dolores. And, in my opinion, there's only one way to settle their claims—by an election. Can't manage that before this evening, I'm afraid,

but I'll let you know the time later. Meantime, pass the word around—"

"And may the best girl win!" Dolores laughed. "Gosh, this is

going to be fun! I hope you don't mind, Pat, but I'm going to do my level best to beat you, you know!"

"And are we going to back you up?" Lucy Day enthused.

"And aren't we going to back up Pat!" cried Muriel Dale, amid a hearty chorus of "Hear, hear!" from Willis Green and a crowd of others.

Pat had to force herself to smile, though there was certainly no lightness in her heart. Though it went against her will, knowing the mockery that lay behind the gesture, she took Dolores' hand as impulsively that girl thrust it towards her. And then a great cheer went up as the two rivals shook hands, and as Dolores broke into a rippling laugh which belied the cold, measuring look in her eyes. And then, with everybody in a mood of high exuberance, the lunch bell went.

Good-humouredly the crowd split up. There was a high-spirited scamper to the restaurant, and much buzz and chatter as the meal was consumed. For the moment the regatta itself had taken a back seat in the excitement of the coming election. From then until lunch was finished it was all election talk, and one great question was on every lip and in every mind.

Who would win—Pat or Dolores? Who was destined to be the empress when the regatta took place?

There was a cheer for Pat and Chris when, just before the meal ended, they rose and, nodding, walked towards the door. It was a cheer, Pat noticed, in which Dolores hypocritically joined, waving merrily as she did so. Pat smiled, trying to gauge from the volume of cheering exactly how many likely supporters she had. But that proved difficult to estimate.

Back in their chalet, she and Chris faced one another. Chris was looking a little grim and anxious as she realised what was at stake.

"Pat, what is Dolores' game, do you think?" she asked.

"Obviously to win the election and become empress," Pat replied. "And we know why she wants to do that—"

"So that she'll be the one shut up in the Spy Tower on regatta day," Chris said, and her eyes flashed.

"Exactly. And being left alone in the tower will enable her to search for the secret hidden there," Pat pointed out. "Oh, yes, that's her game all right, but what puzzles me is how she hopes to wangle out of that high dive."

"It certainly is baffling," agreed Chris. "We know she's no diver, so she'd never dare attempt it, but—Oh, blow Dolores and her tricks!" she ended. "They can wait. What we have to concentrate on at the moment is stopping her being elected. Come on! Let's start canvassing for votes."

She led the way out of the chalet, but on the veranda she stopped. "Oh, great pip!" she cried. "Just look at that!"

Pat also stared, and she gasped as she saw a small procession, headed by Lucy Day, marching down the road between the chalets. All the boys and girls in it were shouting Dolores' name, and three of them carried striking placards:

"VOTE FOR DOLORES."

"DOLORES FOR EMPRESS."

"RALLY NOW IN THE CAFE."

The two chums looked at each other.

THE ELECTION



For a moment the chums stood there, staring in dismay at the procession, then Chris plucked at Pat's sleeve.

"Come on! Let's follow and see what's in the wind," she urged. "Our canvassing must wait."

They fell in behind the procession and entered the cafe after it. It was to find the gaily decorated room on the cliff-top crowded, and the centre of attraction was Dolores. A bundle of pound notes in one hand, a glass of lemonade in the other, she stood against the counter, and, as the chums entered, several of her supporters toasted her. Dolores smiled happily, and threw another pound down on the counter.

"Let everyone have all they want," she told the woman in charge. "The treat's on me." Then she gave a whoop as she saw the chums standing in the doorway. "Hallo, rivals!" she called. "Come amongst us! Order anything you like!"

"But, here, wait a minute!" Lucy Day expostulated. "They're the enemy!"

"Rivals, Lucy—not enemies," Dolores replied. "And friendly rivals at that, even though the prize is an empress' crown. Grab a glass, Pat! And you, Chris! And here," Dolores merrily added, holding her own on high, "is to the purple robes of Rome!"

"And may Dolores wear 'em!" someone shouted.

"After," Chris countered, "Pat has finished with 'em! I'm sorry, people, that we haven't the money. Dolores seems to have to chuck about—"

"Oh, Chris—now, now!" Dolores chided. "Don't be jealous! Don't I always spend money on my friends? And shan't I go on spending it, whether I'm made empress or not? Pat, here's to you!" she added falsely. "I hope all who don't vote for me vote for you!"

There was a cheer. An enthusiastic cry of: "Pat! Pat!" as glasses were raised.

"And here's to Dolores!" whooped Lucy Day. "Who says Dolores shan't be empress?"

"Well, I jolly well do for one!" Chris retorted. "Dash it, there wouldn't have been any talk of empress if Pat hadn't had the idea in the first place!"

"Fair enough," supported Willis Green.

"And there wouldn't have been any Dartfleet Island if Dolores hadn't fixed it with the admiral," Hetty Grayle retorted.

"Right again! Good old Dolores! Vote for Dolores!"

"And vote for Pat!" cried Muriel Dale.

Immediately the cafe was full of noisy excitement. But it was all good-humoured. And good-humoured the campaign continued to be, though, as the afternoon wore on, excitement became more and more intense.

Definitely, Dolores meant business, and she was obviously determined to make her money help all it could. Several times during the afternoon's canvassing Pat and Chris saw her liberally treating her supporters.

"If money can win votes, then Dolores'll get 'em all!" Chris snorted. "But she won't get away with it—not when the election comes. Pat, how do you think we stand now?"

"I don't know," Pat looked a bit worried. "As far as I can judge, the odds are a bit on Dolores at present. But, as you say, there's no indication as to what might take place when the election comes off. Hallo! Here's Willis Green & Co. Let's sound them."

Willis Green and three of his chums came swinging along. They stopped as Chris halted them.

"How's it going, Pat? Going to win?"

"Well," Pat smiled, "that's up to you. Can we rely on your vote?"

Willis nodded vigorously. "I'll say you can. I intended to vote for you, anyway, but after the way Dolores has been throwing her money about— He made a grimace of disgust. "It's not cricket, if you ask me—trying to win votes by treating people."

"That's what lots of campers feel," put in Muriel Dale. "It's turned quite a number of them over to you, Pat."

Pat and Chris exchanged gleeful glances. It was good to know that for once the mischief-maker had overreached herself. Her "generosity" looked like having the opposite effect to that intended.

And as Willis and Muriel walked away the camp loudspeakers boomed out.

"Listen, people! Listen, all! Everybody interested in voting for the regatta empress come now to the main recreation-room, where the election will take place. Hurry, please! All voters must be in by half-past six, after which the doors will be closed."

Off the chums raced for the main recreation-room, joining the excited stream that was flooding through the doors. Bruce was there on the platform, and with him two of the camp staff. Dolores, brightly beaming, was seated at his side. He signalled Pat to take a place beside her.

A few minutes later half-past six chimed, and Bruce rose to his feet.

"O.K.! Close the doors!" he said; and when it had been done he briefly introduced the rivals, then called for a count.

There were a hundred and ten voters in the room.

"Right-ho!" Bruce said. "Let's get on with the job. My assistants here will act as tellers, and the ballot will be taken in the usual way. All you have to do is to put a cross against the name of the girl you favour."

The ballot papers, bearing the typewritten names of Dolores and Pat, were handed out. Pat watched tensely as she saw heads bent, as she heard the mutters and saw the pencils moving.

And then, while that excitement

nervously mounted, the tellers moved out and collected the filled ballot papers, took them to a small table on the far side of the platform, and began the counting. A breathless, expectant silence fell.

At last one of the tellers turned. "Votes counted, sir," he said to Bruce.

Everybody sat tense as Bruce nodded, and a slip of paper giving the result was placed before him. And then, as he rose, Pat held her breath.

At last the ballot was finished. The great question now was—who had won?



PAT CHALLENGES HER RIVAL

While everyone watched tensely, Bruce consulted the slip of paper in his hand, and his eyes opened wide as he scanned the figures written there. Then he looked up.

"The result," he said, "is a tie. Both Dolores and Pat have each got fifty-five votes."

"A—a—tie!"

"Oh crumbs! What do we do now?"

Gasps of dismay went up.

"We've just got to find another way out of this," Bruce declared. "If anyone has any ideas, please speak up."

He paused, hopefully inviting suggestions. Next to her, Pat saw that Dolores, frowning now, was thinking furiously. The result of the ballot had obviously been an unpleasant disappointment to her, and, obviously now, she was trying to think up some Dolores-favoured means of overcoming it. Suddenly—just as Pat's own idea came—she saw her rival's face light up, her lips open. But before Dolores could voice a word, Pat herself had jumped to her feet.

"I know!" she cried.

"Yes?"

"Supposing," Pat suggested, "we make a competition of it? Supposing—"

"Just," Dolores gushingly enthused, "what I was going to suggest, Bruce. How clever of you, Pat, to think of the same idea! Let's make a track race of it."

There was a murmur. Excitement began to creep back into the faces of the hearers as expectantly they looked at Pat.

"I wasn't thinking of a race," Pat said. "After all, this has nothing to do with racing. My own idea was a competition that fits the event, and, seeing we want to make sure we have the best diver—well, what's wrong in making a diving competition of it?"

"Between you and Dolores?" Bruce asked.

"Yes, that certainly would settle it," Willis Green cried.

Another pause, with excitement seething again, and with immediate approval registering itself on every face there. Pat saw Dolores for a moment glance at her; saw those lovely eyes of hers narrow in gleaming, thwarted fury. But at once Pat's suggestion caught on. Its appropriateness appealed immediately. There was a shout, drowning the words Dolores uttered.

"Tops, Pat! A great idea!"

"A whizzer!" Bruce Feltham agreed warmly. "But what are the details, Pat? Where do you propose the competition to be held? We can't very well stage it on Dartfleet Island—"

"Rather not," Dolores said quickly. "I think—"

"I wasn't suggesting we staged it from Dartfleet Island," Pat said. "A mile down the coast—at Lobster Point—there's one of those old, high Martello towers. It would be a pretty good test to dive from the top of that, and I don't see why it shouldn't be done, especially when the tide is full, as it will be to-morrow morning. If Dolores is willing—"

There was a shout. Definitely the idea had caught the imagination of the crowd. Once again Pat saw the cold, furious glitter in her rival's

eyes, and she knew then that Dolores was as afraid of that suggestion as she was at the prospect of diving from the Spy Tower. But outwardly she was smiling.

"Well, of course," she said, "if everybody wishes it, then I'm in." She shook her head a little, smiling with false affection at her rival. "You really are dreadfully keen to be the empress, aren't you, Pat?"

"I am," Pat admitted. "Very keen indeed. But do you agree to my idea?"

Dolores hesitated, then nodded.

"Of course," she said. "And again, Pat, I hope the best girl wins. Bruce, when does this contest take place?"

"To-morrow—before breakfast," Bruce briskly decided. "The tide will be in then, which means that the water will be nice and deep. What time? Well, suppose we fix it for half-past seven?"

And fixed at that time it was. In great jubilation the meeting broke up. Gleefully Pat and Chris rushed off to their own chalet, feeling again that victory was theirs.

"Who says we haven't got Dolores sewn up now?" Chris asked. "I'm certain she hates the idea of a diving contest."

"Hate it or not," Pat dimpled, "she can't jolly well wriggle out of it. Or can she?" she added thoughtfully. "She's cunning enough even now to think up some wheeze! I vote we keep a close watch on her."

Chris nodded, and kept an eye on the mischief-maker they did. Dolores, of course, speedily became aware of the fact, but she made no effort to avoid their vigilance. She seemed, rather to Pat's disapproving bewilderment, to be enjoying herself—seemed, in fact, more utterly self-assured and confident than ever. Pat was puzzled and not a little uneasy. What was Dolores' game?

She was still trying—unsuccessfully—to puzzle that out when she went to bed that night. In the morning, with the first peep of the sun through the window, she and Chris were up. Pat at once dressed herself in the swim-suit she would wear in the diving competition, and went along to the ablution hut with Chris for a refreshing splash in cold water. It was as the chums were leaving the hut that Chris caught Pat's arm.

"Pat, look! Dolores! What is she up to?"

Instinctively Pat drew back into the porchway of the hut. She stared. Just below was Dolores' chalet, and out of that chalet Dolores had now emerged. They saw her softly lock the door of the chalet, saw her look round—quickly, furtively, then, after a moment's hesitation, hurry along the path that led to the sea, again anxiously glancing over her shoulder as she did so. Pat's eyes glimmered.

"She's up to something—and something pretty fishy," she said. "Come on, Chris! This is where we get on to the game, whatever it is!"

Together the chums stole after Dolores, who had now entered the woods. It was not difficult in the dewy grass to follow the fresh tracks she had left, and when they emerged from the trees they caught sight of her again, fifty yards ahead, heading along the coastline. Pat's eyes gleamed more fiercely than ever.

"She's making for the Martello tower," she breathed. "We might have guessed she had some scheme on there, Chris. Gosh, what is the girl's game?"

"Follow! Find out!" Chris said. And stealthily they followed the trail, little guessing that Dolores was acutely aware of their presence; little guessing that Dolores was chuckling to herself.

Not for a moment did either of the chums guess the real scheme that was in their rival's mind. Not for a moment did it dawn upon them that they were blindly walking into another of Dolores' ingenious traps!

What is Dolores up to now, and what Pat and Chris fall into her trap? See next Friday's thrilling instalment.



The COWBOY Who Mystified Merle

By GAIL WESTERN

LARRY IS NOT WELCOME

MERLE WASON believed that a secret, vital to the future of her home, Happy Valley Ranch, was hidden in a trophy called the Gold Rider.

She encountered a strange young cowboy named Larry Denvers. Although he had once been employed by Merle's enemy, Nathaniel Garsten, a neighbouring rancher, Larry declared himself her friend, and stated that he would come to Happy Valley and work for her.

Merle learnt that the Gold Rider was a prize at a relay race to be held at the Red Hill Rodeo. When she went to Red Hill to enter for it, however, she discovered that not only would she need a second horse for the race, but that it was too late to enter.

THE sheriff's office closed!

In blank dismay, Merle stared at the office window. It seemed that all hope of her winning the important Gold Rider trophy had gone.

William Higgins, her uncle's old friend, patted her sympathetically on the shoulder, then strolled away. At that moment the office door opened and a gaunt, grizzled man, wearing a big brass star in his shirt, emerged.

Undoubtedly it was the sheriff, just about to go home, and eagerly Merle rushed across to him and asked if he couldn't possibly accept her entry. He shook his head.

"Fraid not. You're too late, miss," he said. "The entry sheet's closed. In fact, I was just about to post it up."

And he held up the rolled sheet of paper he clutched in one hand. Forced to admit defeat, Merle nodded and miserably watched him nail the list to a post.

"I wonder whether Garsten's put in an entry," she murmured suddenly.

She looked across at the notice, and the top name seemed to leap out and hit her between the eyes.

"Celia Garsten."
So the rascally rancher's own daughter was to compete! And as Merle saw the names of the two horses entered beneath Celia's name she gave a startled gasp.

"Brown Dan and Hurricane!" she exclaimed. "Why, they are two real thoroughbreds! The Garstens must have bought them specially for this race!"

In consternation, she stood there. Though Celia was not a particularly good rider, with two such magnificent mounts as these she was bound to do well.

The possibility that her enemies might secure the vital trophy—might after all cheat her out of the secret that meant so much to the future of Happy Valley Ranch—drained the blood from her cheeks.

It was little consolation to know that even if she had been able to enter herself she would have stood little chance against her wealthy rival.

"I'm a better rider than Celia, and

Pommie's every bit as good as Brown Dan," she murmured, "but I'd never be able to find a second mount to beat—"

And then she stopped, for as the sheriff, his work done, stepped away from the notice she had a good view of all the names printed there.

"I must be dreaming!" she gasped. "It can't possibly be true!"

Incredulously she stared at the list. But there was no mistake. Her own name appeared there!

"But who can have put in my entry?" she exclaimed in wonderment.

The blood rushing back to her cheeks, she stepped closer, and then she gasped again, gaping at the names of the two horses printed underneath her name.

One was Pommie. The other—"Prince!" she cried. "Larry's horse! Then—"

She caught in her breath. It must have been Larry who had entered her for the race. And, apparently, he intended to lend her his own magnificent black.

Oh, how wonderful it was! Why, Prince was as good, if not better, than her own beloved chestnut. With him as a second mount, she would stand a marvellous chance of beating Celia.

Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed, and then, abruptly, she looked shamefaced. For flooding back into her mind came all her doubts of this morning.

She had been disinclined to believe all Larry had told her. She had believed that her foreman, Slim Harris, was right—that the young cowboy's decision to leave the V-Bar-V and come to Happy Valley Ranch was but a cunning trick.

Oh, but how wrong—how wickedly wrong she had been! She could see it all now. It must be true that all along Larry had secretly been helping her. Absurd in face of this notice to think that he could ever have been an enemy.

In her new-born joy she felt like dancing. Despite Larry's mystifying behaviour, despite his exasperating manner, she had always liked him deep down and it was grand to know that from now on they could be firm friends.

Rushing across to where Pommie patiently stood at the hitching-rack, she untied the reins, then threw her arms around his glossy neck.

"Oh, isn't it swell, honey?" she cried. "With Larry working on the ranch there'll be no need to worry about Nat Garsten's rascally tricks. And that's not all." She gave the chestnut another hug. "He'll be able to help me to train for the race."

Swinging up into the saddle, she set off for home. Larry had declared his intention of coming to the ranch at tea-time, and although she couldn't possibly get back by then she was eager to see the young cowboy as soon as ever she could.

It was nearly seven by the time she reached the ranch. Cantering through the gate, she saw Mammie, carrying a basket of newly collected eggs, coming from the chicken-run. Jumping to

the ground, Merle rushed excitedly across to her.

"Where is he, Mammie?"

The plump, motherly negress stared.

"Where am I, Missy Merle?"

"Why, Larry—Larry Denvers! Don't say he didn't come!"

"Oh, yes, missy, he show up, but he no stay! When I tell him yo' was out he rode off."

"Rode off!"

The sparkle died from Merle's eyes. Surely Larry had not gone for good!

With an effort she swallowed her disappointment and led Pommie across to the stables, there to groom and feed him. When she had made him comfortable for the night she stepped back into the yard, there to pull up in surprise as she heard the sound of angry voices coming from beyond the orchard.

"Gee, what's happening?"

Bursting through the trees, she glimpsed a small tent in the meadow beyond. Gathered in a hostile half-circle around it were the Happy Valley cowboys, and facing them a sardonic gleam of amusement in his eyes, was Larry Denvers.

As Merle pulled up in dismay Slim Harris strode furiously forward, indicating the tent.

"Pack up that outfit and clear off," he ordered. "And make it snappy, or I'll chuck you off neck and crop."

Larry regarded the young foreman calmly.

"Chuck me off, will you?" he drawled. "Gee, I reckon this ought to be good! Who'll you get to help you?"

"Why, you sassy interloper!" shouted Slim. "I'll show you!"

And he hurled himself forward. At the last moment, with deceptive swiftness, Larry side-stepped, with the result that Slim's furious blows hit only the air. Reeling forward, he lost his balance and fell headlong, but he was up in a flash, beckoning urgently to Jake Binns and the rest of the cowboys.

"Come on, grab him!" he panted.

"Ay, give the coyote beans!" roared the bandy-legged horse-breaker. "Show him we don't want any cattle rustlers at Happy Valley!"

There came a chorus of approval and the whole crowd surged forward.

MERLE PUTS DOWN HER FOOT

Desperately Merle intervened, rushing between the still amazingly nonchalant Larry and the crowd of men that menaced him.

"Stop!" she gasped. At sight of her the cowboys fell back, while Larry turned and greeted her with a cheerful grin.

"Oh, hallo, hallo!" he drawled. "Got back, have you?"

"Yes, and only in the nick of time, by the look of it!" she exclaimed. "What does this disgraceful scene mean? She whirled on the cowboys. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves, all of you attacking one man?"

Some of them looked a little sheepish, but Slim and Jake's faces remained grim and angry.

"Guess we only meant to give him

what he deserves, Miss Merle," said the foreman.

"Ay, the impudence o' it!" snorted Jake. "Pitchin' his tent here, without so much as by your leave!"

Merle's frown cleared as she looked across at the tent and saw the bags and gear piled up beside it. She understood now. When Larry had ridden off he had only gone for his kit. He had had no intention of departing for good, as she had feared.

A sigh of relief escaped her lips; it was grand to know that Larry had come to stay. But before she could speak Slim came striding forward, regarding her earnestly.

"You leave this to us, Miss Merle," he urged. "Reckon it's only natural that a girl like you doesn't approve o' rough stuff, but it's necessary sometimes. Now you run off—we'll sling him out!"

Merle frowned. "But I don't want him slung out," she protested.

"What!"

In shocked surprise, the cowboys stared at her.

"You mean——" gasped Slim incredulously.

"That I have decided to sign him on," Merle announced. "We can do with another hand on the ranch."

"Sign him on!" exclaimed the foreman, his face red with indignation. "But you must be crazy, Miss Merle! That guy's a cattle rustler! Ask anyone at Snake Canyon what kind of feller he is—they'll tell you fast enough. And that's not all! He's in league with your worst enemy—workin' hand in glove with Nat Garsten!"

Merle shook her head. "No, he isn't—and never has been!" she declared. "I know the truth about him now."

"But, Miss Merle——"

"Am I boss of Happy Valley or am I not?" Merle asked quietly.

"Of—of course you are."

"And are you all going to keep your promise to rally round me while uncle's away?"

Anxiously she looked around, and from most of the cowboys came a murmur of assent.

"O.K.! Then please let's have no more of this bad feeling," she said. "If we're going to pull through we've got to work as a happy, united team, and from now on Larry's a member of that team. Please remember that, and now run along, all of you. I've got some business to discuss with Larry."

Shaking their heads dazedly, as if still unable to believe they were not dreaming, the cowboys slowly departed.

When they had gone, Merle turned. Larry was regarding her with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Guess that was swell," he drawled. "Couldn't have handled them better myself. The perfect girl boss, eh?"

"She was so happy that she smiled at the teasing note in his voice."

"Oh, Larry, I've been such a blind fool!" she cried. "How ever will you forgive me for mistrusting you?"

"That's O.K., honey! There's nothin' to forgive. Let's forget it."

"But I can't—never shall! It was splendid of you to put in that entry for me—and to include your horse's name! After the way I treated you, I can't think what made you do it."

He grinned. "Well, seem' that I'm employed here, I'm naturally interested in seein' you win."

"But you weren't employed here when you put in that entry!" she exclaimed. "You couldn't possibly have known then that I was going to sign you on."

His grey eyes twinkled again. "Well, I kinda banked on it," he said calmly. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll start unpackin'."

"But you can't sleep out here!" she protested. "I must find you quarters at the ranch."

"Thanks, but I prefer to camp out. Guess I can keep a closer watch on things out here."

Merle caught in her breath, for suddenly she remembered how Nathaniel

Garsten had threatened her when she had met him on the trail.

"You think, then, that Garsten will really try some more of his rascally tricks?" she asked quickly. "Oh, but he wouldn't dare! With you and all the rest of the cowboys here to guard the place——"

"You think a lot of the guys who work here, don't you?" he cut in.

"Of course! They are all splendid chaps, and though they're a bit upset because I've signed you on, they'll soon cool down. Every one of them is wonderfully loyal——" She broke off with a startled gasp as she recalled what Larry had hinted earlier on. "Oh, you couldn't have been serious this morning!" she cried. "You can't really think there's a traitor on the ranch! It's so absurd. Oh, Larry——" Agitatedly she caught at his arm, and, more gentle than she had ever seen him before, he patted her hand.

"There, there, honey, don't upset yourself!"

"But——"

"Just forget it. And now you really must be goin'. I've got a lot of unpackin' to do, y'know. See you in the mornin', when maybe I'll let you have a practice ride on Prince."

He grinned cheerily, then turned and bent over his baggage. For a moment Merle stood there uncertainly before walking away. What a tantalizing boy Larry was!

Returning to the ranch, she found Slim and all the other cowboys in the yard, obviously discussing what had happened. Anxious to win them over, she explained fully what she had discovered, and, to her delight, most of them seemed to accept what she said.

"If you're really certain that feller's on the level, then that's good enough for me," declared Ted Gardner gruffly. "Me, too," came in a chorus.

Only Slim and Jake looked unconvinced, and appealingly Merle turned to them.

"You'll try to get on with him, won't you?" she asked.

The horse-breaker hesitated, then rather reluctantly nodded. As for the foreman, he gave a heavy sigh.

"You're boss, Miss Merle, so what you say goes, but—I'm warning you. That guy's not to be trusted. If you ask me, him comin' here is just a ruse between him and Nat Garsten."

And, with a glum shake of the head, he strode away. Merle gazed after him in dismay. She didn't for a moment believe Slim was right, yet, despite herself, she had the uneasy feeling that Larry's advent might be going to cause trouble.



VOICES IN THE NIGHT

But it looked as if Merle was wrong. Certainly nothing happened during the next two days to re-awaken those vague fears.

All but Jake and Slim accepted Larry, and even the two exceptions did their best to conceal their mistrust of the newcomer.

As for Larry himself, his one ambition seemed to be to give a good account of himself. He obeyed every order promptly, and soon revealed himself as one of the most capable cowboys on the ranch.

And in between his work he helped Merle to train for the forthcoming Gold Rider race. She would never forget that first morning when she had her first break-neck gallop on Prince. The young cowboy's black horse more than came up to her expectations, and as she reined in at the foot of the hills she patted him admiringly.

"You're a grand chap," she told him. "With you and Pommie as mounts, I—believe I can win the relay race. What do you think?" she added eagerly, smiling across at Larry, who mounted on Pommie, had accompanied her on that exhilarating gallop across the outer range.

Larry nodded, but he did not speak. His attention seemed to be fixed on the water-hole by the boundary—that water-hole which Nathaniel Garsten had tried to fence in. Something

about his manner made Merle feel suddenly anxious.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, nothin'! Just a kind o' thinkin', honey!" he said hastily.

"What about?" persisted Merle.

He frowned.

"Oh, just thinkin' that it would be kind o' awkward if anything happened to that water-hole! It's the only reliable one on the ranch, isn't it?"

Merle nodded. "Yes; but what could happen to it?"

"Nothin'. No need to get worried, honey. I was only day-dreamin'. Come on, I'll race you back home."

Merle thoroughly enjoyed that gallop back to the ranch, but during the rest of the day she kept remembering Larry's cryptic reference to the all-important water-hole. She had the feeling that though he had tried to dismiss the matter lightly, actually the subject was prominently in his mind. He seemed pre-occupied with his thoughts, and when, after supper, she reminded him that they had arranged to practise jumping in the morning, he only nodded absently.

Next day the sun shone brightly, and, eager to continue her training, Merle hurried through her breakfast. When she went out into the yard, however, there was no sign of Larry, nor of the two horses. The only person visible was Slim, and he was glaring around bad-temperedly.

"Mornin', Slim," Merle called.

"Seen anything of Larry?"

The foreman shook his head. "No, I haven't, Miss Merle—I wish I had. Last night I gave him some jobs to do, but he seems to have forgotten them and ridden off on some joy-ride of his own."

Before Merle could pass any comment there came the clop-clop of hoofs, and Larry came galloping down the trail on Prince. Both he and the horse looked tired and dusty. Merle stared in surprise as they passed through the gateway.

"Why, Larry, where ever have you been?"

"Yep, what's the big idea?" added Slim angrily. "I thought I told you to cut some hay first thing this mornin'?"

Larry nodded calmly. "Sure—and I did it before I went out."

"And mend that boundary fence!" barked the foreman.

"That's been attended to also."

Slim's eyes rounded in amazement. "But you couldn't have done both those jobs—not unless you've been up half the night!"

"Maybe I have," suggested Larry, then calmly smiled at Merle. "Ready for your jumpin' practice, honey?" he asked. "I groomed Pommie before I left."

As he spoke he turned to the nearby stables and led out Merle's chestnut, gleam from mane to tail. Merle gasped. How ever had the young cowboy found time to groom him? Slim must be right, she told herself. Larry must have been up half the night. And what had taken him away from the ranch?

When they were riding for the improvised hurdle course that Larry had fixed up on the home range she questioned him herself, but he only grinned blandly.

"Oh, I just felt like a bit of exercise!" he drawled, and that was all she could get out of him.

In the thrill of tackling the unusually high hurdles Merle forgot all about the puzzling incident, but that night, as she went to receive Slim Harris' daily report, she was quickly reminded of it. The foreman looked grim and worried, and when they had finished discussing ranch matters he put a detaining hand on her arm.

"Just a minute, Miss Merle," he said. "There's something I feel I ought to tell you."

Merle regarded him wonderingly.

"What about?"

"About that no-good cowboy, Larry Denvers, was the unexpected reply. "I've discovered where he went ridin'."

(Continued on page 263.)

When June BLUFFED NOEL



IN THE EMPTY FLAT

"HALLO, that's queer!" exclaimed June Gaynor, halting suddenly in the dimly lit mews. "There's someone breaking into that empty flat—a girl!"

June had returned from a brief holiday, to find a message from Noel Raymond, her famous partner and uncle, explaining that he had been called away on an urgent case and might be back very late.

The girl detective was on her way to a nearby cafe when a furtive movement on the fire-escape outside the empty flat had arrested her attention. She was just in time to see a slim figure slip cautiously through one of the windows.

June was instantly intrigued. She hesitated, then darted forward, mounted the fire-escape and climbed through the same window.

She heard an alarmed cry. The mysterious intruder whirled from the centre of the room, and June had a chance to study her in the moonlight. She wore a light fawn coat and smart hat, with a rather unfashionable, very thick veil. That veil was raised, and her blue eyes were boldly defensive in a youthful, slightly freckled face.

"I say—what are you doing here?" asked the girl detective.

The other smiled a little unsteadily. "I don't suppose you'll believe me when I tell you," she replied frankly. "I've come to meet Ginger—my brother."

"Your brother?" echoed June, staring in bewilderment round the bare room, furnished only with a broken-down table and bench. "But the flat's empty—it has been for several days."

"I know it sounds crazy," admitted the girl. "I suppose Ginger chose this place to meet because it is empty, and"—her face paled a little—"there's not much chance of them finding us here."

"Them?" repeated June quickly. "Is someone looking for you?"

The girl nodded, with a hurried glance towards the door.

"Uncle William—and the detective," she breathed. Then, noticing June's involuntary start, she added hastily: "I promise you I've done nothing wrong—and neither has Ginger. It's all a hateful plot!"

Impulsively June stepped forward, her interest fully aroused.

"Look here—suppose you tell me about it," she suggested. "I do a bit of detective work myself. My name's June—June Gaynor."

The girl drew in her breath quickly as she encountered June's shrewd, sympathetic glance. A glimmer of hope crept into her eyes.

"I've heard of you, of course, Miss Gaynor. Oh, if you could help—"

She hesitated, then impulsively blurted out her amazing story.

Her name was Doris Ashton, and she and her elder brother, Kenneth, had been orphaned by the death of their father a year ago. While Doris had been sent to a finishing school, Kenneth had been given a job in the office of their guardian, William

Marnay, a distant relative, for whom neither had any real affection.

"He was daddy's partner," explained Doris, "and—and he always rather scared me. I thought I was stupid, until I received a letter from Ginger—my nickname for Kenneth, you know—just before we broke up at school, this week. He told me to come to this address—without breathing a word to Uncle William—and he asked me particularly to bring the silver amulet—"

"The silver amulet?" echoed June. Doris nodded. Opening her handbag, she took out a polished wooden box and snapped open the lid, revealing a round silver object, engraved with a bird's claw and other signs.

"Daddy gave it to me not long before he died," said Doris. "Then it vanished. I thought I must have mislaid it. Why Ginger wants it I don't know. But—let me tell you what happened first. I arrived home and Uncle William was in a terrible rage. He told me that Ginger had robbed him and left home. I flew into the air, of course, and there was an awful row. He said he'd engage a detective to find Ginger and have him arrested."

She paused, gulping, and June waited sympathetically.

"He asked me if I'd heard from Ginger. I refused to answer, and he locked me in my room. Then I thought about Ginger's letter. I searched, found the amulet—Uncle William had it in his desk. It was he who had taken it—why, I don't know. Anyway, I bolted with it, hid in the woods and then hitch-hiked to London. I managed to find the flat—and the rest you know."

June looked steadily at the girl. Her story was an amazing one; but her frank tones held the ring of truth.

"Your guardian sounds pretty unpleasant," she murmured. "But why should your brother ask you to bring the amulet here? And why isn't he here to meet you?"

"I—I don't know," whispered the girl. "Of one thing I'm sure—Ginger never committed a robbery in his life. Uncle William is up to something—"

She broke off with a gasp as there came a loud knocking at the door.

"Steady," said June. She stepped to the window and peered cautiously out.

"There's a car with a chauffeur outside," she whispered. "A big grey and black saloon—"

"Oh! That's uncle's car!" gulped Doris, going white. "He and that detective must have traced me—somehow. And if he finds me he'll force me to speak about meeting Ginger and—"

June gripped the girl by the arm as there came the sound of the front door being forced. Her keen glance rested on a cupboard.

"Don't worry," she whispered. "I'll stand by you—promise. Quick, into that cupboard."

By PETER LANGLEY

"But if they look into the cupboard? They're—they're sure to—"

"Not if my bluff works," said June, eyes gleaming.

Quickly she crossed the room to the window, opened it wide, and tossed one of her gloves conspicuously on to the sill, then raced to join Doris Ashton in the cupboard.

Only in the nick of time. Heavy footsteps mounted the stairs, and as June kept the cupboard door slightly ajar, two shadowy figures hurried into the room.

The burlier of the two men turned angrily to his companion.

"I employed you to find my ward, and recover the amulet she stole from me—also to find her rascally brother, and what is the result? Why have you brought me to an empty flat?"

The reply came in a cool voice that sent June's heart leaping.

"Your ward came here, Mr. Marnay, intending to meet her brother. The charred scrap of paper she carelessly left in her fireplace gave me the address—and from your story both of them have robbed you. You can rely on me to find them and see that justice is done!"

The moonlight flooded into the room, clearly revealing the detective's clean-cut features. June bit her lip to stifle a cry.

For the detective was Noel Raymond, her own famous partner!

JUNE UNMASKED



June's thoughts whirled as she crouched in the cupboard beside Doris Ashton. Never in her exciting career had she found herself in a quandary like this.

She had promised to help Doris Ashton, because she believed in the girl and her story; while Noel seemed equally determined to track down both Doris and her missing brother!

For a moment June wondered: had she been deceived by the girl beside her? Doris said the amulet was hers. William Marnay said she had stolen it.

June made up her mind instantly. Her trust was in the girl. Then—Noel had been misled. But supposing Noel discovered their hiding place!

Holding her breath she peered cautiously out. Noel had crossed to the window. June watched her fingers tightening warningly on Doris' arm.

"Do you recognise this glove, Mr. Marnay?" came the detective's quiet voice. "It has no marking—but it was worn, I should say, by a tallish,

slender girl, who is not in the habit of using nail varnish or wearing a ring."

The burly William Marnay examined the glove.

"It might be my ward's," he grunted, "but Doris wears a small ring on her right hand."

"Strange," murmured Noel, slipping the glove into his pocket. "You're certain your ward was alone when she escaped?"

"Positive!"

"How was she dressed?"

"I caught a glimpse of her. She was wearing a fawn coat—and a green hat, with a heavy veil, the latter to conceal her features, I imagine. But we're wasting time, Raymond. I'm no detective—but this glove on the sill obviously shows that Doris must have left this way."

June's heart pounded as she awaited her uncle's reply.

"Possibly you're right, Mr. Marnay. I doubt that your ward can be far away. I suggest we search in the area. Come on."

Together they left the room, and June heard their footsteps descending the stairs. Then the front door slammed, and there came the sound of a car starting up outside.

Only then did June relax. She heard her companion's stifled gasp of relief.

"All right, Doris," she whispered. She darted out and across to the window. "The car's gone!"

"Thank—thank goodness," said Doris unsteadily. "And thank you, Miss Gaynor—you were wonderful. But did you hear Uncle William?" she rushed on angrily. "The lie he told about the amulet! It's mine—not his! He's trying to blacken me—as he blackened Ginger!"

June patted her shoulder soothingly.

"I believe you, Doris," she said quietly. "And it seems pretty apparent that the mystery is centred round that amulet! I'm certain your uncle is up to something, and that he's deceived—that detective."

"But your trick put them off the scent," said Doris admiringly.

June frowned slightly.

"I happen to know that detective, Doris—and he's not easily hoodwinked. The sooner we get away the better. Something must have happened to prevent your brother turning up—and we've got to talk over plans."

"Where?" asked Doris eagerly.

"There's a little café—the Green Cat—at the end of the road," June said. "But it would be wiser if we're not seen together. I'll leave the flat first—wearing your coat and hat. That'll serve as a decoy, in case anyone's watching. I'll dodge down the back streets and join you at the café when the coast is clear."

The girl's attractive face lit up.

"I say, Miss Gaynor, you're being grand. If only I knew that—that Ginger was safe—what all this is about—"

"Don't worry," said June quietly. "I fancy the amulet is the important link. Look, I think I'd better take charge of it, just in case!"

For a moment the girl hesitated; then trustfully she handed over the little polished box. Then they changed coats and hats and June slipped the box into her handbag, determined to examine it more thoroughly when they met in the café.

June swung through the window. There was no one in sight. She descended the fire-escape and dodged down a shadowy alley.

She frowned a little as she thought of Noel. It was so unlike him to be taken in by a plausible rogue—for she was certain William Marnay was that. Yet, much though she disliked the task, she would have to pit her wits against Noel—until she could discover the truth.

Cautionously she emerged from the dark alley—and without warning a hand fell on her shoulder.

"I've been waiting for you, young lady!"

June stood motionless, staring

through the meshes of the thick veil into her uncle's stern, boyish face!

Her heart sank. It was clear that Noel had seen through her little ruse in the flat—and had waited for his quarry to emerge. He imagined her to be Doris Ashton.

June's first reaction was to reveal herself. But suppose Noel was not convinced by Doris' story? Supposing he returned to the flat and arrested Doris? June had given the girl her promise to help her—and she meant to keep her word at all costs.

She must play for time, to give Doris a chance to escape. Before she could speak or act, however, a car drew up at the kerb and William Marnay sprang out.

"Ah, you've got her, Mr. Raymond!" he cried eagerly. "Good work! So, Doris, you thought you'd get away, did you—and join that rascally brother of yours, eh? Into the car, my girl—and we'll have the truth from you when we get you home!"

June, with pounding heart, allowed herself to be bundled into the car. She had burnt her boats. It was too late to draw back now. Her consolation was that Doris was safe. Her daring imposture had succeeded, to a point; but what would happen when Noel discovered the trick she had played on him?

After a seemingly interminable journey, the car turned into a private drive, to pull up outside a gloomy, old-fashioned house. The chauffeur unlocked the door and June was escorted into one of the rooms.

William Marnay switched on the light and, momentarily dazzled, June looked round at the dark panelled walls, lined with books and antiques—and the chauffeur standing grimly in the doorway.

Then her glance rested on Noel.

The young detective was smoking a cigarette. The expression in his blue eyes was hard to fathom.

"I suggest, Mr. Marnay," he remarked, "that it might be better if I questioned your ward on her own. Perhaps I should be able to get at the truth."

William Marnay frowned, a cruel expression on his heavy features.

"You can leave Doris to me, Raymond," he rejoined. "I congratulate you on a smart piece of work, and you may name your own fee. There is no need to detain you any longer."

He held out his hand, momentarily relinquishing his hold on June. Seizing her chance, the girl detective made a swift dive for the door—only to be grabbed by the chauffeur.

In the struggle, the veil was torn from her face. There came a startled, incredulous shout from William Marnay.

"Raymond—you've been tricked! That girl isn't my ward!"

Her face pale, her grey eyes reckless, June turned to confront Noel.

NOEL PLAYS A BAFFLING PART



The famous detective regarded her steadily. Not by a twitch of his eyelids did he reveal surprise or recognition.

Coldly flicking the ash from his cigarette, he stepped towards her, dropping a hand on her shoulder.

"An impostor—eh?" he demanded grimly. "Who are you, and what's your game?"

As he spoke, June felt his hand tighten warningly on her shoulder.

In a flash, she realised that Noel himself was playing a part! But—why? Had he seen through her ruse from the first? If so, why had he brought her to this house—instead of returning to arrest the real Doris Ashton?

Quickly June stifled the questions that rose to her mind. She knew that her famous uncle never acted without a good reason, and she determined to play up to him.

"For that matter—what game are you playing?" she countered. "I've been kidnapped—and brought here

against my will. I've a good mind to call for the police!"

She saw a swift, apprehensive glance pass between William Marnay and the chauffeur.

"Be careful, young lady!" said Noel. "I have reason to believe that you are aiding and abetting a girl named Doris Ashton—who ran away from her guardian's house, after robbing him."

"Oh—that's not true!" gasped June involuntarily, forgetting herself. "Doris is innocent. I—"

William Marnay started forward. "You hear that, Raymond? The girl admits being in league with my ward! It's quite clear that she deliberately acted as a decoy, to enable Doris and her rascally brother to get away with my amulet."

June caught in her breath, her fingers tightening involuntarily on her handbag, with its precious contents.

"Your amulet?" murmured Noel. "I understand you have proof that your ward actually stole it from you?"

William Marnay nodded, producing a torn letter from his pocket.

"I found this after my niece had left the house," he explained. "She obviously commenced to write it to her brother—but changed her mind."

Noel's eyes narrowed as he held the torn paper to the light, reading aloud the few sentences:

"Dear Kenneth,—I've followed your instructions, and stolen uncle's amulet. I'll give him the slip, and meet you as we arranged at—"

"Oh!" gasped June, starting forward. "Doris couldn't have written that!"

"Eh?" demanded Noel, eyeing her keenly. "Why are you so sure?"

"The girl's in league with Doris—naturally she'd try to defend her!" snapped William Marnay. "That letter speaks for itself, Raymond. This girl knows more about the amulet than she'll admit. I shouldn't be surprised if she's hiding something in that bag of hers— Ah, hold her!"

June made a desperate attempt to reach the window, but Noel's hand closed on her wrist. There was a warning gleam in his blue eyes as he took the bag from her hand.

"We'll soon see," he remarked coolly, ignoring June's imploring stare and turning his back for a moment as he opened her bag. "Hallo!" he exclaimed—and June gave an involuntary cry as he held up the polished wooden box.

"That's it!" exclaimed William Marnay. "That's the amulet!" He snatched the box, his hand shaking in his eagerness. "Good work, Raymond. I'll pay you well for this—"

He snapped open the lid and his expression changed. A furious ejaculation escaped his lips—and June gasped. For the box was empty!

Noel's expression was inscrutable.

"You're quite certain that is the identical box, Mr. Marnay?" he asked coolly.

"Of course I'm certain!" rapped the man, his heavy face pale with baffled anger. He rounded on June. "What have you done with the amulet, girl—and where is Doris? Answer me!"

He made to seize her by the shoulder, but Noel barred his way.

"Steady, Mr. Marnay. Remember—we've no real evidence against this girl, except that she's wearing clothes similar to your ward's. I suggest you lock her up securely, while we return to the empty flat to make another attempt to find Doris."

June stared at her uncle, horrified bewilderment in her eyes. Whatever game Noel was playing, this, surely, was going too far!

But Noel had turned his back, refusing to meet her imploring glance, as William Marnay gave orders to the chauffeur to lock June in an attic, and to mount guard till their return.

June was marched away. The chauffeur bundled her into a narrow

attic room, locking the door. She darted to the window—but stout iron bars prevented any chance of escape.

She heard a car starting up outside—heard Noel's brisk voice, and the slamming of the car door. Then the sound of the purring engine as it receded into the distance.

She could not believe that Noel would have deserted her like this—without a word of explanation! Yet he had gone, with William Marnay. A few minutes later she heard a dull thud—followed, after an interval, by the sound of heavy footsteps mounting the stairs.

June waited rather anxiously. Possibly the chauffeur was returning to question her—by his employer's orders! The key grated in the lock and the door opened. June gave a cry.

"Nunky!" Noel smiled as he caught her by both hands. June stared at him, tears of relief and bewilderment in her grey eyes.

"Nunky—I thought—I really thought that you'd gone—"
"Then I must have acted my part better than I imagined, dear," he said dryly, "though I couldn't equal your own performance! I made an excuse to leave Mr. Marnay, and follow later. The chauffeur gave me a bit of trouble," he added, with a grim smile, "but I think I've safely settled with him."

"Then—they are crooked, nunky?" said June quickly. "I knew Doris was telling the truth—"

"And you might tell me the truth, June," cut in Noel, with a quizzical glance. "When I accepted this job of tracing Doris Ashton and her brother, I suspected there was something phoney about the business—but I decided to bide my time. It was not till I found your glove in the empty flat that the case became really interesting—"

June drew a quick breath. "You mean—you guessed, then—"
"I guessed you were mixed up in it," nodded Noel. "That's why I waited for you outside. But I didn't get a chance to question you. I had to think quickly, and as it was clear that you were on Doris Ashton's side—I decided to play your game."

"But I was doing the same thing, nunky!" exclaimed June—and breathlessly she repeated Doris Ashton's story. Then a look of dismay flashed into her eyes. "But, nunky—the amulet! Where—"

Noel's eyes twinkled as he took the silver curio from his pocket. "A little sleight-of-hand trick, June!" he explained. "I've not had a chance to examine it properly, but do you notice that the ring on the

top of the amulet is shaped rather like a key?"

June nodded, her eyes shining with relief and excitement.

"It's my guess," said Noel, "that this fits a safe—or box—in the possession of William Marnay: a box to which he has no right. That's why he did not dare to call in the police."

"But why did Doris' brother send her that message, asking her to meet him at the empty flat?" asked June.

"And—where is he?"

Noel looked grave. "You might help me there, June," he said.

"I, nunky?"

"You seemed positive," said Noel, "that the incriminating letter that Marnay showed me was not written by Doris to her brother. Why were you so certain it was a forgery?"

"Because," replied June promptly, "Doris always calls her brother by his nickname—'Ginger.' She would never have written 'Dear Kenneth—'"

Noel's eyes flashed.

"You've told me more than you imagine, June!" he said tersely. "I know now where we shall find Ken Ashton—and there's not a minute to lose!"

DORIS ASHTON glanced anxiously at her watch. Her freckled face was pale as she walked up and down outside the cafe where she had waited for over an hour.

She had trusted June implicitly, but the girl detective had not returned. And June had taken the amulet!

Doris retraced her steps towards the empty flat, in the faint hope that her brother might have turned up. She drew in her breath quickly. The front door stood ajar!

Entering, she heard a sound of footsteps in the room upstairs.

"Ginger!" she called breathlessly. "Ginger!"

She raced upstairs, throwing open the door—and a scream was frozen on her lips.

"So, my dear Doris," murmured William Marnay, as he locked the door swiftly behind her, "you have come—at last! I trust you have brought the amulet—and that you will tell me where your precious brother has hidden the lacquered box he removed from my collection."

"I—I don't know," gasped the girl defiantly, "and—I wouldn't tell you if I did. When Ginger—when Ken comes, he'll—"

William Marnay laughed unpleasantly as she struggled in his grasp.

"You won't see your brother again," he rejoined softly, "until I have recovered the amulet and box. Tell me

what you have done with them—"
His fingers tightened on her arm, bringing a cry of pain from her lips.

At the same moment, the door burst open with a splintering crash, and a burly young man leaped across the room—a young man with a shock of red hair, his face clouded with anger.

"Ginger!" cried Doris.

William Marnay started back, whipping out a revolver.

"No, you don't!" rapped a voice, and a second figure sprang into the room, twisting the weapon from his hand. Next moment, Ken Ashton sent his scoundrelly guardian sprawling to the floor, and Noel bent to snap the handcuffs on the man's wrists.

"Good work, Ken!" said the young detective, as June followed him into the room and stepped quickly to Doris' side. "We got here just in time. Where did you hide the casket?"

Ken Ashton smiled across at his sister, then bent to raise one of the floorboards. He lifted out a stout lacquered box, secured with metal bands.

"Sorry I couldn't tell you more in my note, Doris," he said. "I never did trust Uncle William. I suspected that dad's will was in this box—that's why I took it. But how to open it baffled me, until I remembered that quaint amulet that dad left you."

Noel brought out the amulet and bent to unlock the box. He produced the missing will.

"You were right, Ken!" he said grimly, after swiftly scanning it. "It's plain enough that your guardian has been systematically robbing you both—but foolishly held on to that box. He probably realised that the amulet was of importance, but did not guess at its secret until Doris took it. Then, of course, he was desperate to get back both amulet and box."

"But, nunky," put in June, "I still don't understand how you discovered that Ken had been made a prisoner in Marnay's house."

"You told me, June," replied Noel, smiling. "When I was first called in by Marnay I noticed a hat lying on the hall table. Obviously it had been recently worn—and there were a few red hairs clinging to the band. I didn't give it a second thought at the time—but when you told me that Doris called her brother 'Ginger'—I realised the significance of those hairs."

(End of this week's story.)

ROSINA'S MOST DARING COUP is the title of next Friday's Noel and June story, when once again they match their wits against the audacious girl crook.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 260.)

so early. I happened to run across old man Naggs, the postman, this afternoon, and he told me that he saw Denver's comin' away from the V-Bar-V."

Merle gave an incredulous gasp. "From Nat Garsten's ranch?" she cried.

Slim nodded. "Yep, it's pretty plain that he went out for a talk. I knew all along that he hadn't broken with that rascal, that he and Garsten were still in league, and I reckon this proves it."

Agitatedly Merle shook her head. "No, no, you're wrong, Slim. Naggs must have been mistaken. I'm certain Larry wouldn't visit Garsten. He's our friend—not his."

But, though she refused to believe the foreman's story, it was worryingly that she took her leave of him and wandered back to the ranch-house.

Had he been right, or was there some other explanation for Larry's early-morning ride towards Garsten's ranch? Perhaps some job—

Then she frowned and shook her head. No task for Happy Valley

Ranch would take Larry towards the V-Bar-V!

"I'm getting suspicious again," she told herself chidingly. "After all Larry's done for me it's unfair. But if I could see him for a moment, ask him about it—"

With that purpose in mind she left the ranch once more, and this time made a round of the buildings in the hope of finding Larry.

But he was nowhere to be seen. Neither was he in the meadow where he had pitched his tent.

Disappointed she was returning once more to the ranch when she ran into Jake Binns, the horse-breaker.

"Seen Larry, Jake?" she asked.

"Guess I have, Miss Merle," he responded. "He's just out on a job."

Merle nodded, bade him good-night, and entered the house. It was un- easily that she went to bed, and when she got there she found it impossible to sleep.

"I'll never mistrust Larry again," she told herself as she tossed restlessly to and fro, "but—oh, I wish he wouldn't be so secretive! I wish—"

Abruptly she broke off and stiffened. From outside had come the sound of voices. But who could be in the yard, talking, at this time of night? She glanced across at the old alarm clock

on the bedside-table, and her feeling of uneasiness deepened as she saw that it was nearly midnight.

On a sudden impulse she threw back the blankets, got out of bed, and tiptoed to the window. Peering through, she dimly made out two figures in the yard. One was on foot, the other on horseback, but it was far too dark to recognise them.

The window was open, and so eagerly she strained her hearing. Up from below came a harsh laugh—a laugh it was impossible to mistake.

"Why, it's Garsten!" she gasped.

"But what's he doing here? And who's that with him?"

Certain it was that the rascally rancher had not ridden over for any innocent purpose; certain, too, that his companion was a member of the Happy Valley staff!

She shivered as she remembered what Slim had told her earlier on. Surely it couldn't be Larry? She tried to smother the awful thought, then recalled the young cowboy's cryptic suggestion that there might be a traitor on the ranch.

Traitor or Larry—which of them could it be?

Will Merle be able to discover the answer to that question? Don't miss next Friday's exciting instalment.

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 253.)

swiftly passed, and it was with a sudden start that she heard a rather high-pitched voice below.

"The voice of—Mr. Aspell! She glanced at her watch. It was nearly eight o'clock."

She moved to the half-open door in time to hear him say harshly: "The trap failed, Head. I suspect that these young scoundrels somehow learnt my intentions, or, more likely, saw me waiting."

In spite of herself, Penelope wrinkled her nose with scornful glee in the direction of the hall below. At least it was wizard to have outwitted the tyrant.

She could not catch her father's answer. Mr. Aspell's brittle voice continued:

"In which case I am prepared, Head. If they were watching and saw me come here they will think they can carry out whatever scoundrelly affair they have in mind. So I have taken no chances. I have posted Smeeke, that most trustworthy Fifth Former, with definite instructions!"

Penelope leant forward, suddenly alarmed.

"If these boys carry out their plans

Smeeke will let them get inside the building, not attempting to challenge them, and then close the outer door that leads to Abbot's Room. They will be trapped! Smeeke will remain on guard until I return—"

Penelope stepped back into her bedroom. She stared unseeing through the window into the dusk-cloaked grounds.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh, gosh! I—I never dreamt—"

She had reckoned without the cunning, relentless mind of The Wasp. He had taken no chances indeed! Harold Smeeke, the toady and sneak, was in hiding at East Wing—to trap the Grey Ghosts.

"And they will be trapped!" she groaned. "They'll walk right into it, and, indirectly, Penny, you're the one responsible! You thought you were so clever and smart, and now—what now?"

What now, indeed. On the one hand was this revelation about Glynn Tracy to dismay and baffle her even further; on the other was the immediate peril to Hugh—and to the Grey Ghosts.

Did she believe in the boys, despite the evidence that suggested they might be acting in an unworthy cause?

"I do!" she muttered fiercely. "Oh, I do!"

In which case— She drew a deep breath and made her decision.

"Penny, my love," she told herself slowly, "this is where you take the biggest adventure of all. You owe it to the Grey Ghosts, if you believe in them, and you owe it to yourself to find out about Glynn Tracy. Seconds are precious—so get cracking!"

Mr. Aspell was still talking below—but it would not be long before he returned to the East Wing.

She padded across the carpet, snatched up the grey, hooded robe, stared at it for a moment, then crammed it into her music-case.

"Now for it, Penny!"

She crossed to the window, swung her long, slender legs over the sill, and glanced down. It was a nasty drop, but there was a flower-bed below, and it was the only way out unobserved!

She dropped, sank her heels into soft earth, reeled, recovered, and, clutching her music-case, sped across the dim garden.

No. 4 of the Grey Ghosts was going into action, heading for the East Wing—and Abbot's Room!

The strokes of eight o'clock tolled from Clock Tower.

You will find next Friday's instalment even more exciting. Don't miss it.

THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 254.)

He took a step forward; snatched roughly at the dark glasses worn by the white-faced girl who crouched back against the dressing-table, fear in every line of her face, yet mingled with it a defiant pride.

"So," he cried gloatingly, "it is you, Esme Pearson. Just as I thought! You can dye your hair black, but you can't fool me! And what are you doing in my cabin, eh?" he asked threateningly. "Up to your old tricks, I suppose, you little thief!"

The girl flinched as though she had been struck. But next moment she raised her chin proudly, defiantly.

"You know that's not true, Herbert Braydon!" she cried. "Oh, I know you made everyone think I stole that necklace! But I know you have it somewhere—that's why I've been searching your cabin!"

"A likely story!" The man gave a sniggering laugh, then, in sudden anger, looked down, jerking at his stick at which Folly was making playful little grabs. "Get out of it, you brute!"

He lifted the stick and gave the puppy a whack which made it squeal. With a sharp cry Esme started forward, and at the same moment Sally, her heart beating suffocatingly with fury, darted into the cabin, her chums behind her.

"Don't you dare strike that dog!" she panted.

"Oh!" Braydon looked her up and down offensively. "The crook's little pals, eh? Still sticking together. Well, birds of a feather—"

"That's enough of that!" snapped Don. "Keep your rotten remarks to yourself!"

"Why, you young whippersnapper

In an instant there was uproar in the cabin—uproar that was suddenly quelled as a sharp voice sounded from the doorway.

"What on earth is going on here?" It was the first officer, a rather angry expression on his usually amiable face. Herbert Braydon smiled unpleasantly.

"Glad you came, officer," he said affably. "I found this girl in my cabin going through my things. I happen to know she was dismissed from her last job for the theft of a diamond necklace, so I didn't relish finding her in my cabin. When I

remonstrated with her these four youngsters—contemptuously indicating Sally & Co.—interfered. As a matter of fact, they've been helping her all the time, despite what I told them about her."

The first officer swung round upon the chums, a frown on his face.

"We-ell, sort of," admitted Sally. "But, you see—"

"I see that this is all very unpleasant," said the first officer grimly, "and that there's going to be a spot of bother for you when I tell Professor Willard what's been going on. Meantime—he looked at Esme—"you'd better come with me to the captain. And you, sir," he added to Braydon.

Braydon nodded triumphantly. Esme turned even whiter.

"You don't understand," she cried frantically. "He's lying—the way he lied before! Oh, you must believe me! I was a parlourmaid at my last job; he was the butler. When the necklace was missing he accused me, had me dismissed in disgrace. But I know he took it. I'm sure he's got it with him somewhere. Oh, why can't I find it?" she sobbed wildly.

Sally felt a lump rise in her throat as she saw the girl's distress.

Herbert Braydon, about to speak again, suddenly glanced down, glaring at Folly, who was once again attacking his stick. He tightened his grip on the stick, stealthily kicking Folly aside. Sally saw that movement, saw the convulsive way the man gripped the stick, saw the queer agitation on his face.

Sally started. She was remembering now the man's immense agitation when Folly had first snatched his stick; she remembered the limp which had suddenly disappeared when the man had darted in pursuit of the puppy. As far as Sally could remember, she had never seen him without the stick, the excuse being that he needed its support for his lame leg. But if he wasn't really lame, if he was only pretending— A wild idea came into her mind. It seemed crazy, and yet she'd got to test it out.

"Good dog, Folly!" she said loudly and clearly. "Bring the stick!"

For an agonised second she wondered whether the puppy would understand, obey. Then, before Braydon realised what was happening, Folly leaped forward with a glad bark, grabbed at the stick, and dragged it slyly away, scampering over to Sally with it in his mouth. "Sally!" rapped the first officer

angrily. "Have you taken leave of your senses—"

Next moment he was spinning sideways as, with a howl of rage and fear, Braydon sprang forward, snatching savagely at the stick.

"Drop that!" he roared. "You little brute—"

Sally got the stick first, and Don sprang forward to her aid. But before he could touch it there came a splintering noise. The stick broke jaggedly in two, and from its hollow interior fell what seemed to be a shimmering mass of fire.

"The necklace!" cried Esme. "He did have it! I knew—I knew— Oh, how did you guess?" she asked the triumphantly smiling Sally. "How did you know?"

Sally did not answer that immediately, for, with a very different expression on his face, the first officer had caught up the necklace and was staring at the cowed-looking Braydon.

"You'd better come with me to the captain!" he said curtly. "It seems Miss Warner has discovered the real truth."

"Just a lucky hunch on my part," said Sally modestly, as Braydon was led off. "You might tell us something yourself, Esme—how did you keep Folly concealed for so long?"

Esme, happily fondling the puppy, smiled back.

"A member of the crew was looking after him for me," she explained. "You see, after my dismissal I decided to join my brother in Australia, but I couldn't bear to be parted from Folly. When I found Braydon was travelling on the same ship I guessed he must have the necklace with him. I was determined to get it back and clear my name, but I daren't let him know I was aboard."

"So you concealed Folly in case he gave the game away, dyed your hair, and wore dark glasses," Sally nodded. "Well, it's a good thing Folly's got a passion for sticks, otherwise you might never have solved the mystery."

"It's a good thing Folly's got the sense to scent out the kindest, most helpful people on the boat," said Esme fervently and gratefully, "otherwise I'd never have proved my innocence!"

(End of this week's story.)

In next week's complete story of the Merry-makers afloat Johnny Briggs causes a considerable stir—when he becomes a prefect!