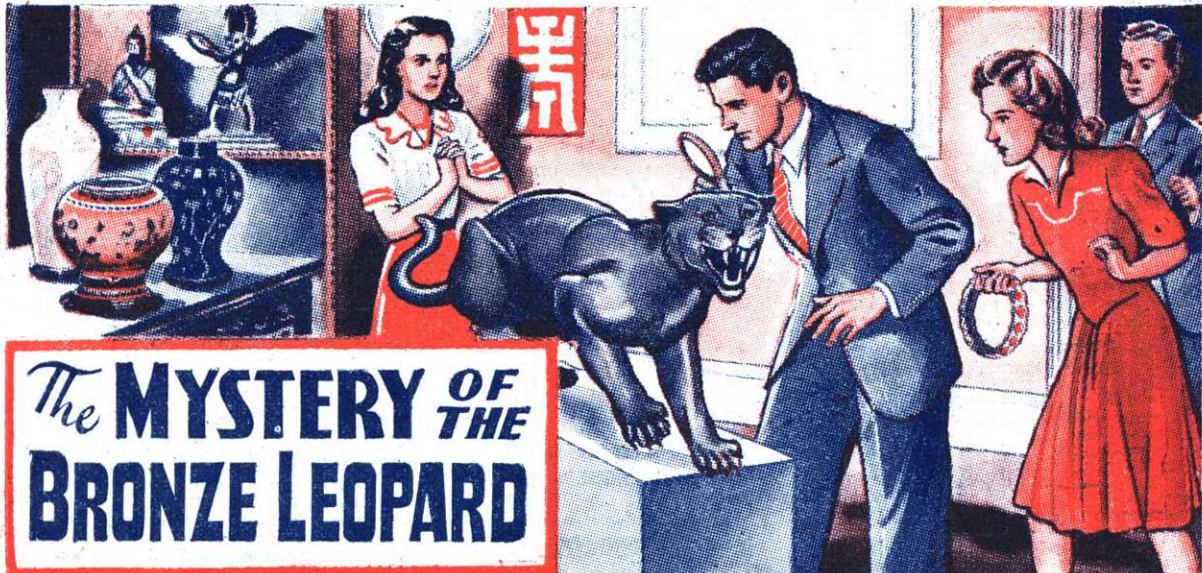


GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^o}

Week
Ending
Sept. 18th,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The MYSTERY OF THE BRONZE LEOPARD

How Could A Metal Animal Walk? That Was The Amazing Puzzle Noel And June Had To Solve—By PETER LANGLEY

THE INCREDIBLE HAPPENS

"THERE'S something I want you to see, June—and you, too, Mr. Raymond!"

Noel glanced keenly across the pleasant, book-lined study at their attractive young hostess. It was not often that the famous detective had an evening free, but he had found time to accompany June Gaynor to a little party given by her old school chum, Sharon Dale.

"I thought you'd been saving up a surprise, Sharon!" declared June, smiling. "You hinted at something in your letter, but I've not had a chance to get a word with you on your own, till now."

There was a suggestion of anxiety in Sharon's dark eyes, and her face looked a little pale under the shaded lights as she looked at Noel and his young partner.

"I—I didn't quite know how to put it, when I wrote," she explained apologetically. "It all sounds so impossible, I was afraid you'd laugh at me. I cabled daddy for advice—but his reply must have been held up."

June nodded. Professor Dale, Sharon's father—a great traveller and an authority on native crafts—was at present on his way home from the East.

Sharon pulled back a curtain screening the panelled wall, and both Noel and June stared in surprise at a small square cavity fitted with glass, a dim light glowing beyond it.

"This is a private window to daddy's museum, next door," she explained. "He had it specially built into his study so that he could keep an eye on his treasures, without having to go out into the grounds. The museum is always kept locked, as some of the things are quite valuable."

June hurried forward, eager to try the novel peep-hole, while her famous uncle followed interestedly. Taking it in turns to peer through the tiny window, they saw a stone-walled

room, lit by concealed, artificial lighting.

Displayed effectively beneath the soft glow were many wonderful examples of native craftsmanship—exquisitely carved tables and screens, rugs and tapestries, and curios in metal and ivory.

But the most arresting object in the museum was a crouching bronze leopard, as large as life, its rippling muscles tensed as though in the act of springing, its green glass eyes shining in the soft light.

It was mounted on a tall pedestal in the corner, and round its neck hung a curious metal collar of native workmanship.

"That's a magnificent piece of work, Miss Dale!" declared Noel.

"It looks—almost alive!" breathed June.

Sharon glanced at them quickly. "That's—Chang," she said hesitantly. "Daddy brought it home with him from a ruined temple in Africa. All—daddy's native servant—declared it was unlucky, but we thought he was just superstitious. I wish, now, that—"

She turned suddenly to face them, her hands nervously clenched.

"Mr. Raymond—June," she blurted out, "have you ever heard of a bronze image that—that could walk?"

Noel raised his eyebrows sharply, and June caught in her breath.

"Walk?" she echoed, glancing instinctively through the spy-hole at the crouching bronze effigy. "Sharon—you're joking!"

Sharon bit her lip.

"I know it sounds crazy," she said, "and Aunt Esther declares that All's been putting ideas into my head. But—but recently there's been several scares: the servants have been frightened by something leaping out at them in the dark. And twice—" she lowered her voice—"twice, when I've looked through the spy-hole, I

could have sworn that Chang's pedestal was empty!"

Noel whistled softly. "You were probably deceived by the dim light, Sharon," he said. "That image must weigh a considerable amount!"

"I—I know," said the girl. "It was brought here in a van, and three men had to carry it. But—I can't help feeling a bit scared—"

Just then there came a burst of merry laughter from the hall, and the lively voices of the guests calling for their hostess. Sharon hastily pulled the curtain across the spy-hole, glancing appealingly at the detective and his young partner.

"Please don't breathe a word to the others," she begged. "I don't want the party spoilt by rumours—and Aunt Esther would be dreadfully annoyed. Perhaps I've been imagining things—"

"Just one question," put in Noel keenly. "Who holds the key to the museum?"

"I do," said Sharon. "Daddy entrusted it to me before he left. I only open it when All has to dust the curios, and I always lock it up afterwards—"

"Sharon—come on!" came an impatient shout from the hall. "We're playing a new game and Effie's given us the slip!"

With a quick smile the girl turned, linking her arm through June's.

"Let's join the others, and—and forget what I've been telling you."

There was a very thoughtful expression in Noel's eyes as he strolled to join the merry party in the hall.

Effie Layton, one of the younger guests, was hiding—and so far the search for her had been in vain.

"She must have gone out into the grounds," declared cheery Dick Marlow, Sharon's cousin. "I vote we collect torches, and round her up—"

He broke off, and June felt Sharon's fingers tighten on her arm as from

the grounds outside came a girl's terrified scream.

"That's Effie's voice!" gasped Sharon.

Noel was already streaking for the door, torch in hand. It was a lowering, cloudy night, and the gleam from his torch stabbed a brilliant path through the shadows.

The young detective saw a pretty, fair-haired girl stumble from the bushes into the light, her eyes tearful and fear-stricken.

"Steady!" exclaimed Noel, catching her by the arm as she almost fell headlong over the steps. "What's wrong?"

"It—it sprang at me," she gasped. "I—I felt something cold touch my cheek, and a horrible snarling sound that—"

Noel turned swiftly, flashing his torch among the bushes. Nothing stirred, but he fancied he saw something gleaming dully in the undergrowth.

Just then June arrived on the scene, with Sharon and the other young guests. Noel handed the frightened girl into their charge, and strode into the bushes to continue his search.

When he returned, a few minutes later, the party had been joined by Sharon's aunt, Miss Esther Norton—a brisk, grey-haired lady, who was keeping house in her stepbrother's absence.

"These scares are becoming intolerable, Mr. Raymond!" she declared, turning to the young detective. "Who, or what, is responsible, I cannot imagine—but if anything of the kind happens again, I shall insist on my niece shutting up the house until her father returns."

"But—but I promised daddy I wouldn't leave it," declared Sharon unsteadily. "He was so anxious about his treasures—"

Miss Norton sniffed. "Rubbish! Those old curios are more trouble than they're worth. When Richard returns I shall persuade him to get rid of them, and that furtive native servant of his who—"

She broke off as a twig cracked under a stealthy foot and a figure appeared from the shadows—an impressive figure wearing a blue robe, his swarthy features set off by a white turban.

Noel looked at the man sharply. The latter bowed gravely.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" he inquired.

"Something is very wrong, Ali," said Noel. "One of Miss Sharon's guests has been badly scared. I wonder—do you recognise this?"

Unexpectedly from his pocket he produced the object he had found among the bushes—a curious metal circlet, with a broken clasp.

June stared at it, wondering where she had seen it before; and Ali's eyes widened.

"That—that is the collar of Chang, the bronze leopard!" he exclaimed huskily. "I warned my master that misfortune would come if he brought him to England—"

June started. She encountered Sharon's horrified stare.

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Norton angrily, as an uneasy whisper went round the group. "Are you suggesting, Ali, that—that the bronze leopard could have come out of the museum—and attacked Miss Effie?"

Ali looked uneasy, but he made no reply.

"We can soon put that to the test!" declared Noel. "Sharon—you have the key to the museum? I suggest we go along there at once."

Except for the frightened Effie and a few of the other girls, the entire party, headed by Noel, made for the locked museum.

It stood in gloomy isolation, almost hemmed in by trees on three sides, its fourth wall being flush with the house.

Noel unlocked the door and threw it open. Holding her breath, June peered over his shoulder.

The museum, faintly lit, looked

almost precisely the same as when she had seen it from the study. The bronze leopard was crouched on its pedestal.

Only one thing was missing—and Sharon gave a little cry, pointing.

"The collar!" she gasped. "Ali was right—that was Chang's collar!"

An incredulous murmur went up. Noel stepped beside the pedestal and with his magnifying-glass examined the bronze neck that still bore traces of the metal collar. June stood by, holding the collar.

"Gosh—someone's playing a trick on us!" exclaimed Dick Marlow, a trifle unsteadily.

The young detective's face was grave.

"Miss Norton," he said, "I suggest you take the girls back to the house. You boys"—he glanced at Dick and the others—"will you stand by to patrol the grounds, if you're called on? I want you, Ali, to wait outside, while Miss Gaynor and I search the museum."

In a few moments June and Noel were alone.

"Nunky," said June, staring at him, "you spoke almost as though it weren't a practical joke—as though there were some real danger!"

"Perhaps there is," Noel said quietly. "That missing collar isn't the only strange thing, June. When we looked through the spy-hole just now, did you notice which way the leopard was facing?"

"Why—it was facing us," said June. "I was staring straight into its eyes and—"

"And now," cut in Noel grimly, "it is facing towards that corner. You see what that means, June?"



NOEL'S "MAGIC" CIRCLE

A little shiver ran down June's spine as she followed the direction of his glance. In the general excitement, she had not noticed the change in the figure's position.

"But, nunky—it's impossible!" she gasped. "It's fixed to the pedestal—and—and—"

"A bronze leopard could hardly walk out of a locked museum," agreed Noel. "There's trickery here, June—but trickery of a dangerous kind, or I'm much mistaken."

"But how did the leopard move, nunky?" asked June uneasily. "And—and what was it that scared Effie?"

Noel did not reply at once. He was flashing his torch round the museum. The light flickered over the many quaint curios and across the walls, resting on the spy-hole in the opposite wall, communicating with the professor's study.

"I don't know, June," he said slowly, "but we can keep watch—and take precautions to see that it doesn't happen again. Ali!" he called.

"I come, sir!"

The dusky manservant appeared in the doorway.

"Bring rope, Ali," ordered the young detective. "We are going to secure Chang, the leopard, so that he will not walk again!"

The man's eyes goggled as he bowed, and departed.

"Nunky, you're not serious—surely?" gasped June.

"I am serious, June," said Noel gravely. "And while Ali's away, we'll try a little experiment!"

While June looked on, completely mystified, he commenced to move a number of the lighter objects in the room—chairs, ornamental screens and tables—placing them in a rough circle around the leopard's pedestal.

He was engaged in his curious task when Chang returned with a coil of rope. The servant's mouth dropped open as he watched.

"I am making a spell, Ali," explained Noel gravely, "to trap the evil one that brings fear to your master's household! Give me the rope."

The servant obeyed, and Noel proceeded to secure the rope from one object to another, while a gleam of enlightenment dawned in June's eyes.

It seemed to her that Noel was making a barrier to hamper anyone who attempted to approach the bronze leopard. Did he suspect Ali? Was he trying to test out the man?

But the young detective's expression was inscrutable as he encountered her glance.

Ordering Ali to report back to Miss Norton, Noel beckoned June to leave the museum, securely locking the massive door behind them.

"Own up, nunky!" said June challengingly. "All that business with the rope was just a trick—to test Ali?"

Noel shook his head.

"It was more than that, June. It was an honest attempt to prove an amazing theory of mine—and I'll need your help."

June brightened up.

"What am I to do, nunky?" "I want you to join the others," said Noel. "Tell Miss Norton and Sharon that there's no further need for alarm—that I've taken all precautions. Then, as soon as possible, I want you to slip away from the party and have a look through that spy-hole in the study."

June's pulses quickened. "What—what do you expect I'll see?" she breathed.

The young detective looked at her steadily.

"I'm not sure, June—but if it is anything alarming, I want you first to flash your torch out of the window. I shall be watching the house. Then collect the boys and bring them round to the museum. You understand?"

June nodded. "Nunky, please don't take any risks!" she begged.

Noel smiled reassuringly. A moment later they parted—Noel to keep watch in the grounds, while June retraced her steps to the house.

Sharon and the others greeted her with excited, anxious questions—but June assured them Noel had everything well in hand.

Sharon gave a little sigh of grateful relief, echoed by her youthful guests;—though Dick Marlow and one or two of his chums looked a little disappointed that there was to be no excitement.

"I'm very glad to hear it!" announced Miss Norton. "I had commenced to pack Sharon's things and my own, intending to leave to-night—but of course, if Mr. Raymond is certain there will be no more scares, we may cancel our intention."

With their anxiety lifted, the party went with a swing. For a while, June took part in the general gaiety—endeavouring to hide her fears. But she seized the first chance to slip away to the study.

The room was in darkness, and June did not attempt to switch on the light. Her heart beating quickly, she crossed to the curtain that screened the spy-hole and pulled it aside.

A faint glow of light came from the locked museum. For a moment June hesitated; then, shaking herself impatiently, she bent to peer through the narrow aperture.

A cry of incredulous horror immediately escaped her lips.

For the pedestal was empty—the bronze leopard had gone! And Noel, all unsuspecting, was keeping watch in the grounds.



DANGER IN THE GARDEN

White to the lips June turned, fumbling for her torch. Her mind felt too numbed to seek any explanation of the fantastic

unearthly mystery. All she realised was that the bronze leopard was no longer in the museum—and that her uncle might be in deadly peril.

Remembering Noel's instruction, she raced to the window, dragging out her torch.

But before she could flash it in warning, a man's shout echoed on the

(Please turn to the back page.)



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

By GAIL WESTERN

THE PLOT THAT FAILED

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, to be raced for at Red Hill Rodeo.

Larry Denvers, a strange young cowboy working on the ranch, entered Merle's name for the race. He also told Merle there was a traitor on the ranch.

Slim Harris, the ranch foreman, declared Larry was the traitor, and pointed out he had once worked for Merle's enemy, Nathaniel Garsten, a neighbouring rancher. But Merle refused to believe him.

One night Merle learnt of a plot to destroy a vital waterhole on the ranch. She, Slim and a cowboy named Jake Binns galloped towards it, but suddenly there was a shattering explosion and they discovered Larry lying unconscious amongst the debris.

"GUESS this proves it, Miss Merle!" "Aye, it was Denvers who blew up the waterhole right enough. He must have been knocked out when the dynamite exploded."

And angrily Slim Harris and Jake Binns glowered down at the unconscious cowboy.

Merle made no comment. The shock of finding Larry here had left her mind in a turmoil.

The evidence of his guilt seemed overwhelming, and yet—

Merle bit her lip as she remembered that on at least one occasion Larry had saved her life. She remembered, too, all the events which had caused her to trust and admire him.

Surely such a boy was incapable of striking such a treacherous blow against the ranch she loved?

There came a sudden groan, and instantly Merle forgot all her worrying doubts. Dropping to her knees, she lifted Larry's head and gestured to the two cowboys.

"Water!" she called. "Get water. He needs attention."

Both Slim and the burly horse-breaker frowned. It was evident that they had little sympathy for Larry.

"Don't fret yourself about that coyote, Miss Merle," growled Jake. "He only got what he deserved." Merle gestured more urgently than ever.

"Never mind about that—get some water quickly."

Reluctantly Jake plunged through the fast disappearing smoke and dust. While she waited for him to return Merle dabbed at the cut on Larry's forehead with her handkerchief. He gave another groan and then his eyes flickered open. Anxiously she bent over him.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked. "You—you're not badly hurt are you?"

Weakly the young cowboy shook his head.

"No, I guess I'm all right—feel a bit dazed, that's all," he said. "But what—"

His voice trailed away and he sank back to the ground, putting a hand to his head. At that moment there came a series of hoarse, excited shouts, and, turning, Merle saw the horse-breaker running back, carrying his battered stetson hat filled with water.

"Miss Merle! Miss Merle!" he shouted as he ran. "The waterhole—it's not been touched by the explosion!"

"What!" With a startled shout, Slim Harris rushed off to investigate, while, incredulously, Merle stared at Jake.

"It's a knock-out, isn't it?" the horse-breaker said as he handed over the water. "A doggoned miracle! But it's true. Reck'n the waterhole is as good as ever it was."

Merle was overwhelmed by glorious relief. If the ranch water supply was really safe, then Nathaniel Garsten's plot had failed miserably.

With a shaky smile, she turned to bathe Larry's bruised, cut face, and saw that he was smiling weakly, that sardonic look of amusement she knew so well in his eyes.

"Bit of a surprise, eh?" he said. "But though the waterhole's safe, Garsten's old gully has kinda taken a beating."

Involuntarily Merle looked across at the opening in the rocky hill which had originally formed a narrow lane connecting Happy Valley with the neighbouring ranch.

That narrow lane was now a wide gap. Great masses of rock had been torn clean out of the walls, and as she gazed at the startling transformation which had taken place Merle gave a startled gasp.

To her it seemed obvious that the explosion had not taken place at the waterhole, as she had first believed, but in the narrow gully.

But why should Garsten's hiring, whoever he might be, have tried to blow up the narrow opening in the hills?

Suddenly Merle felt her heart leap, and, almost trembling with excitement, she turned to Larry, who now lay with his eyes closed, as if exhausted by his recent effort to speak.

"I see it all now!" she cried. "Larry, you didn't come here to destroy the waterhole—you came to save it!"

"What!" There came a startled shout from Jake Binns, while the young foreman, returning from his tour of inspection, stared at Merle as if he thought she had taken leave of her senses.

"It's crazy, Miss Merle!" Slim gasped. "Denvers is a no-good and always will be. He just bungled the job—that's all."

But Merle hardly heard him. With shining eyes she was regarding the young cowboy outstretched before her.

"It's true, isn't it?" she cried. Larry's whispered reply was too weak for her to hear, but he gave a nod and her heart gave another joyful leap. "I knew it!" she exclaimed.

"He must have got here just in time to see the fuses burning. There wasn't time to put them all out, so he risked his life by grabbing up the dynamite and hurling it away."

"It's crazy, I tell you," declared the foreman again.

"It sure is," agreed Jake. But Merle was not listening. Having finished bathing Larry's face, she jumped to her feet.

"Unhook that gate!" she cried, pointing across the range. "We'll have to use it as a stretcher."

"You mean, you're goin' to have him carried back to the ranch?" gasped Slim. Merle nodded and he shook his head glumly. "You'll regret it, Miss Merle," he declared. "You mark my words, you'll regret not gettin' rid o' him. It's all moonshine to think that—"

"Please get that gate and don't argue!" Merle almost stamped her foot.

Still frowning, the foreman followed Jake across to the near-by fence and when they returned with the gate Merle helped them to lift Larry on to it. Then the two men raised up the improvised stretcher and set off.

Merle collected the three horses and prepared to follow, but suddenly she stopped, for an alarming thought had just occurred to her.

If Larry was innocent, then who had been the unknown man she had seen talking to Nathaniel Garsten in the ranch yard? Who had been the scoundrel who had tried to blow up the waterhole?

There could be only one possible answer to that question, and as she walked on, leading the horses, she felt the blood draining from her face.

"Larry was right," she told herself. "There must be a traitor at Happy Valley—a secret enemy who is in league with Garsten!"

THE COWBOYS' ULTIMATUM



Not until Merle had helped to make Larry comfortable in his tent and had dressed his cuts did she think of bed, and then it was

long before she could get to sleep.

The realisation that one of the men she had always thought so loyal and trustworthy was a traitor kept nagging at her brain.

Who could it be?

She ran over the names of all employed at Happy Valley, then helplessly shook her head. She found it impossible to suspect any of them.

But as she remembered what she had heard Nathaniel Garsten say to the unknown traitor, her look of despair vanished.

The rancher had stated it would be too risky for him to meet his hiring again and had suggested that they communicate with one another by means of notes posted in an old hollow oak near the trail through the hills. Surely if she kept watch she would sooner or later be able to intercept one of the messages and so identify her secret enemy?

"I'll visit the hollow oak every day until I do discover the truth," she told herself, and with that thought

firmly implanted in her mind she at last fell asleep.

As usual, she was up early next morning and when she had let the chickens out of their houses and helped Mammie prepare the breakfast, she got out the ranch First Aid outfit and set out to see if Larry needed attention.

Jake, Ted Gardner and a number of other cowboys were at work in the yard, cutting hay and weighing cattle cake. Merle greeted them cheerily, but for once they seemed unresponsive to her bright smile while Slim frowned as he saw the First Aid outfit.

"If that's intended for Denvers, Miss Merle, then it's not needed," he said.

Merle's heart gave a joyful leap. "You mean, he's fully recovered?" she asked.

The foreman thrust his thumbs into his belt.

"Don't know about that, Miss Merle," he said. "If you ask me, he never was as bad as he made out. Anyway, he's up and about and I've sent him off to Lone Pine to collect a load o' oats for the horses. I figured it would be best to keep him away from the ranch until after the boys had held their meetin'."

"Meeting?" echoed Merle in surprise. "What meeting?"

"A meetin' to discuss what to do about that no-good Denvers," growled Jake Binns.

The colour flooded into Merle's cheeks, and fiercely she whirled on the horse-breaker.

"How dare you call Larry a no-good!" she cried. "Why, last night he was nearly killed in saving the ranch!"

"In tryin' to ruin it, you mean, Miss Merle," corrected Jake. "If he hadn't bungled things, the boundary waterhole would have been destroyed."

"That's not true!" gasped Merle. "It is, Miss Merle. Sorry to argue with you, but the time's come for plain speakin'."

There came a murmur of agreement from all around and in angry dismay Merle stood there, for it was obvious that all the cowboys were of one mind.

"We've always known Denvers was a rascal—ever since he had to leave Snake Canyon on account o' his rustlin' tricks," declared the horse-breaker gruffly. "That's why we were against him comin' to Happy Valley in the first place. We knew he'd create trouble afore long."

"And last night showed we were right," put in Ted Gardner earnestly. "That's why we've decided to put our foot down, Miss Merle."

"Aye—Denvers has got to go," snapped one of the other cowboys. Merle could hardly believe her own ears.

"G-go?" she stuttered. There came another chorus of agreement, and Jake Binns gave a grim nod.

"Reckon there isn't room on this ranch for us and that treacherous coyote," he declared. "Sorry to be so blunt, Miss Merle, but it's your own good we're thinking of. That's why we want you to give him his marchin' orders when he comes back with the oats this afternoon."

For a moment Merle was too staggered to speak, then stormily her eyes flashed.

"Get rid of Larry?" she gasped. "Why, you must be mad! Apart from the injustice of it, don't you realise that I can't enter for the relay race for the Gold Rider without his help? He's promised to lend me his horse, Prince."

Jake gave a scornful laugh. "Reckon promises come easy to a trickster like Denvers," he asserted. "He was only leadin' you on, Miss Merle. He won't lend you any horse. When the day of the race comes he'll take good care that Prince is missin'."

"Oh, how can you say such things!" exclaimed Merle, almost in tears now. "We say 'em because they're true," growled the horse-breaker. "Better get rid of him now than have a big disappointment later on."

Slim Harris nodded.

"Fraid Jake is right, Miss Merle," he said earnestly. "You take my advice and do as the boys say. It's only your interests they have at heart, you know."

There was an expectant hush. Every eye was turned on Merle. Very pale she looked, but very determined as well. She understood the cowboys' point of view, but nothing they could say would weaken her faith in Larry.

She knew Larry was honest and true—a staunch friend whose only aim was to help her to defeat Nathaniel Garsten's plotting and see her win the Gold Rider, that all-important trophy which she was convinced held the other half of the clue to Sam Crogan's secret.

"Well, what'd you say, Miss Merle?" asked Jake quietly.

Fiercely Merle shook her head. "Get rid of Larry?" she cried.

"Never!"

"But you must!" "Must!" The colour rushed back to her cheeks. "How dare you talk to me like that! You seem to forget that my uncle owns Happy Valley—that he left me in charge!"

"Aye—and afore he was injured we promised him we'd see that no harm came to the ranch," put in Jake doggedly. "A promise we mean to keep. We hate goin' against you, Miss Merle—we admire the way you've been runnin' things—but we can't let you be fooled by that rascal, so whether you like it or not, Denvers is goin' to be cleared out."

Merle drew in a startled breath. "Unless you give him the sack," continued Jake, "we'll take the law into our own hands."

There came a storm of approval. "Yes—we'll throw him off neck and crop!"

"We don't want any traitors here!" And with grim, almost threatening nods, Jake, Ted and all the rest turned and went back to their work, Slim, the young foreman, going with them.

There could be no mistaking their determination. Convinced that they were acting in the best interests of the ranch, they intended to take firm action against Larry.



LARRY TO BE ARRESTED

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

Again and again Merle asked herself that question as she fed the chickens,

groomed the horses and did her usual morning chores.

She had intended having another practice ride on Prince, Larry's magnificent black, but she felt in no mood for riding. Indeed, unless somehow she could win over the cowboys—prevent them from carrying out their threat—it would be futile to practise any more. For if Larry went then his horse would go with him, and that would mean the end of all her hope of winning the relay race.

As she thought of all that the forthcoming contest meant to her—as she thought of the torn map that was hidden in the golden trophy—she became desperate.

She could not let Larry be driven away. Without him she could never discover the old prospector's secret. Besides, it was so unfair, Larry was innocent. It was cruelly unjust to mistrust him after all he had done.

"It's that unknown traitor who's turned the cowboys against him," Merle told herself, as she helped Mammie prepare the dinner. "It's he who's at the bottom of all the trouble."

With a bang she put the pot of newly peeled potatoes down on the kitchen range and fiercely her lips set.

At all costs she must discover who that secret enemy was—must expose him. And quickly. For unless Jake & Co.'s eyes could be opened, this afternoon Larry and his horse would be driven away from Happy Valley.

"There's only one chance—to visit the hollow oak Garsten spoke about," she murmured. "If I could find a note there then I might be able to track down the real traitor."

Immediately the meal was over she saddled up Pommie and set out for the place where the rascally rancher and his unknown hireling had agreed to leave the letters.

The hollow oak stood in a small clearing well back from the road, and Merle's heart was pounding excitedly as she left the main trail and rode up the narrow, twisting path through the steep woods.

If only a note were there! And if only she could recognise the writing!

Once that was done she would know for certain who was the mystery traitor at Happy Valley. And even if Garsten had written the note there was bound to be some clue in it which would help her to identify her secret enemy.

"Then the men would have to believe Larry is innocent," Merle breathed happily. "He'd be able to stay at the ranch and help me train for the race for the Gold Rider."

Reaching the clearing, she slipped from the saddle, and leaving Pommie to nibble contentedly at the juicy grass around the trees, she ran across to the gnarled oak.

Anxiously she thrust an arm into the jagged opening in the trunk and fumbled about with her hand. Suddenly it touched something. An envelope.

Then one of the conspirators had left a letter! Then, after all, she might be able to expose the unknown traitor in time!

Her eyes gleaming, she drew up the envelope and ripped it open. A single sheet of paper was inside. She smoothed it open, but before she could read what was written there came a startling interruption.

"No you don't, you little spy," rapped a voice, and a gloved hand was thrust over her shoulder, tearing the letter from her grasp. Next second she received a push that sent her reeling.

Tripping over a trailing root, she fell headlong, and as she lay there, there came a jeering laugh.

"Suppose you thought this letter would help you to bowl me out! Waal, I guess you're unlucky. It was Garsten who wrote it, not me."

And, looking up, Merle found herself confronted by a masked man, a long slicker, or mackintosh, draping his slim figure.

Instantly she recognised him. This was the outlaw who had held her up after her last race—the thief whom at one time she had mistakenly thought to be Larry himself! This man was the unknown traitor!

As she scrambled to her feet, he glanced swiftly at the letter, then laughed again.

"Guess there'll be no need for those fools back at Happy Valley to run Denvers off the ranch now," he commented. "Garsten's thought of a better scheme."

"What do you mean?" asked Merle, her voice little more than a whisper, for there was something so grim and confident about the man in the mask that all at once she felt terribly frightened.

The traitor's eyes gleamed. "I mean that nothing you can do can save Denvers now," he snapped.

"And once he's been disposed of, your number will be up, too. Without his horse you won't be able to ride in the relay race. As for the ranch—waaal, it won't take me long to ruin that once Denvers is out of the way."

An icy shiver ran down Merle's spine.

"Larry out of the way? What do you mean?" she gulped.

"Reckon there's no harm in you knowin' now," he jeered. "He's goin' to be put behind prison bars."

"Behind—behind prison bars?"

"Yep—the sheriff's on his way at this moment to arrest him!" was the mocking reply.

You will learn what is behind this staggering statement in next Friday's instalment.



DOLORRES

The Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

THE ALARM BELL

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westonsmouth 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.

As a result of Dolores' scheming, the holiday campers turned against Pat and Chris, and Dolores was elected to play the role of empress in the forthcoming regatta.

The chums learnt that Admiral Hardacre, the owner of Dartfleet Island, had invited Dolores and Bruce Feltham, the young sports master, to pay him an early morning visit, and they were horrified to discover that the mischief-maker had persuaded their host to allow her to explore Spy Tower.

Determined that she should not find the secret hidden there, Pat and Chris decided to make a secret trip to the island, and in the early hours of the morning they set off in a row-boat.

BRIGHT was the moon above them; patchy was the mist as Pat and Chris pushed away from the shore and pulled strongly towards Dartfleet Island.

"Pat, do you think we'll manage it?" Chris asked.

"We've got to manage it!" Pat said grimly. "It's neck or nothing this journey, Chris. Fail now and we leave the game in Dolores' hands. Whatever happens we've got to find that secret to-night."

Chris nodded. Her face glowed. Many times Chris had been grateful for the friendship of such a chum as Pat, but never so much as now. She did not speak any more, and in silence the two girls moved on.

"Dartfleet Island ahead," Pat whispered at last. "Go slow!"

They slackened. Now, out of the mist, the rocky island loomed, the moon glinting on the spiked iron railing which guarded the crescent strip of shore. It seemed deserted enough, silent enough. Except for the soft lap of the waves there was no sound.

Reaching the shore, they disembarked and pulled the boat up above high-water mark. Then they crept across to the railings and climbed over them, but as Chris dropped down on the other side she gave a sudden gasp.

"Pat, my hand touched something—a loose wire, I think. I hope—"

She broke off and they both stood in consternation, for abruptly the silence had been broken. From the distance had come the clanging of a bell. It was answered by a second bell and yet another, until the whole island seemed to echo with the clamour.

"A burglar alarm!" gasped Pat. "That's what you set off, Chris."

Chris nodded ruefully. "Sounds like it," she agreed. "But what—"

Again she stopped, her heart leaping wildly, for from afar off came the sound of voices. The alarm signal had been heard.

"We mustn't be seen here," cried Pat. "We've got to hide!"

Desperately she and her chum gazed around, seeking some place of concealment, but the sandy beach was devoid of any hiding-places. The voices drew nearer, and as the alarm bells ceased to ring they heard a bellowing roar in a voice they knew only too well.

"The admiral!" Chris whispered. "And that sounds like his nephew with him. Oh golly, they're making straight for the beach! What are we going to do? If they catch us here—"

"Neptune's Nest!" cut in Pat. "That's our only chance! Come on!"

And she led the way frantically along the foot of the cliff, just as footsteps sounded on the steep steps that led down to the shore.

"Come on, Malcolm!" came Admiral Hardacre's angry voice again. "The villains can't get away. If we look sharp we must catch 'em!"

Blindly Pat and Chris raced on, not stopping until they had rounded the shoulder of the rock which hid the romantically named cavern from the view of anyone on the main beach.

By the narrow entrance to Neptune's Nest they paused to recover their breath, then, as there came more shouts, they plunged blindly forward. Inside it was inky black, and they pulled up, peering about them uncertainly.

"Pat, the torch!" Chris cried.

But the torch which Pat had brought with her was already in her hand. Swiftly she pressed the button. And then as the button remained fixed, pressed again.

"Pat—" Chris cried again. "It—it won't work! The button's jammed!" Pat gasped, still frantically pressing. "Something's gone wrong—"

A groan broke from Chris. Pat felt beads of perspiration starting out on her forehead. Desperately and more frenziedly she pressed, but still the button remained fixed. The torch was useless!

And then, from the foot of the near-by cliff steps, they heard the admiral's voice again.

"This way, Malcolm. Along the beach there. Shoot at sight if you see the lubbers—"

"Pat!" Chris gasped. "Oh, goodness—"

"This way—" Pat said, and thrust the useless torch into her pocket.

She was trying desperately to re-visualise the picture of the admiral's treasure-house as she had last seen it in daylight. Now she remembered—near the wall to the right had been a great lump of coral rock, festooned with sponges. There

was just a chance, by crouching behind that, they might escape detection. Certainly not in the chest again—even if they could find the chest in this bewildering darkness. The chest would be the first thing the admiral would examine after the last escapade.

She pushed forward, Chris at her heels. There came a gasp from Chris as in the darkness she barked her shin against some unseen object. Pat herself crashed into another object, and then recoiled as whatever it was went over with a heart-stopping crash.

And then, just when she began to feel she had lost all sense of direction, she saw, its whiteness faintly glimmering, the great mass of coral rock. With a gasp she hurried herself forward, feverishly feeling her way round it, at the same time thrusting out another arm to make contact with the wall—

"Chris, here!" she whispered. "Quick! Down!"

She caught her gasping chum. And then, as footsteps sounded outside, she flung herself flat against the wall, Chris on top of her. And immediately a startling thing happened.

"Chris—" she gasped. But it was too late. For beneath her the floor of the cave seemed to split open and slide away.

There came a crash, a rush of small stones. Then Pat and Chris found themselves falling—tumbling down through empty space.



THEIR FIND IN SMUGGLERS' CAVE

Down—down the chums hurtled through inky blackness. One frightened scream only were they able to give, then they landed with a bone-jarring thud that robbed them of their senses.

It was several hours before Pat recovered consciousness and, dazed and bruised, she at first found it difficult to remember what had happened.

Instinctively she felt for her torch and pressed the catch. Instantly a bright beam flashed out. Evidently the fall had released the jammed button. By the torchlight she saw that she was sitting in a large underground cave.

All around her were ancient barrels, rotting bales, and great wooden chests, and not far away was a long ladder, green with age.

"Golly, where am I?" Pat whispered, and then suddenly she heard a groan from beside her, and, turning her head, she saw her chum weakly struggling into a sitting position. Anxiously she regarded her.

"Chris, you're not badly hurt?" she asked.

Chris shook her head. "No. No bones broken, thank goodness! But what about you?"

"I'm okay, thanks," Pat replied. "But where on earth are we?"

She let the light rove around, and to the chums' surprise they found

that there was no hole in the roof, only a square wooden trapdoor.

Instantly Pat guessed the truth, for she had read how long ago Dart-foot Island had been a haunt of smugglers.

"This must be the smugglers' secret treasure-cave!" she exclaimed. "And we must have operated the mechanism that works that trapdoor when we bumped against the wall of Neptune's Nest."

Chris nodded. "Expect you're right," she agreed. "But what's the time?"

Pat consulted her watch, which was still going, then gave a startled whistle.

"Nearly half-past six! Golly, we must have been lying here for ages! Come on, we'd better try and get out. Don't forget we've still got to search Spy Tower."

Scrambling to their feet, they made their way past the rotting bales and ancient barrels to where stood the ladder.

"Only hope it will bear our weight," said Pat, as she stopped in front of it. "I don't fancy—"

And then she stopped, her attention attracted by something that lay on the floor at the foot of the ladder. It was a small, leather-bound book.

"Why, it looks like a diary!" she exclaimed in surprise.

Picking it up, she examined it, while curiously Chris peered over her shoulder. Then they both cried out again, for on the fly leaf was written a familiar name.

"Charles Caslon," read Pat. "My uncle!" gasped Chris. "Great Scott, what can it be doing here?"

Pat passed it over, and eagerly Chris flicked over the pages, her face full of emotion as she saw the writing of the uncle who had been drowned at sea.

The first entry was dated April 27, 1944, and both girls' hearts leapt as Chris began to read it.

"Am making progress with my quest on Dartfoot Island. Am filled with the greatest hope that I shall find the hidden jewel hoard which my grandfather, Ezekiel Caslon, was supposed to have hidden when he owned the island. Have now discovered the clue of the Captain Kirabee figure-head—"

"Oh, jumping starfishes!" Pat breathed. "Go on, Chris—Here, sit down. Let's read it together!"

And almost shaking now with excitement, they sat down, and by the light of Pat's torch read the rest of the diary which had come so unexpectedly into their hands.

Almost completely it told them the story they wished to know—a story rather surprising because, contrary to their assumptions, Charles Caslon had not hidden the original clues. Many years before, apparently, Dart-foot Island had belonged to the Caslon family, its head eccentric old Ezekiel, who had been a collector of precious stones, but who had died so apparently penniless, that the island and all its contents had had to be sold.

From some old letters left by his grandfather, Charles Caslon had discovered that Ezekiel had hidden his stones somewhere on the island and had left the clue to his hoard on the figure-head of Captain Kirabee.

"And so," Charles Caslon had written, "in odd times during my leaves ashore I am searching for this treasure. But I am uneasy about the interest that is being shown by Phillip Bellamy, who is my subordinate on board the armed ketch. Talking to him last night, I told him the story, and I fear I have aroused some avaricious streak within him. He has done nothing but pester me for details since—"

"Bellamy!" breathed Pat. "Bellamy! Chris, it's beginning to link up! Bellamy—somebody belonging to Dolores, Chris—and your uncle was suspicious of him! Gosh, don't

you see? It must have been this Phillip Bellamy who put Dolores on to the track—"

Chris nodded. She was tense with excitement now. With eyes burning she turned the pages and read on.

Charles Caslon, apparently, had pursued his quest, more and more suspicious of Phillip Bellamy, who was now watching and following him at every opportunity. Then had come the day when Chris' uncle had discovered that his grandfather's hoard was hidden beneath the ninth stone in Spy Tower and had discovered a secret way into the tower which, the diary said, was behind the sign of the skull and crossbones carved into the wall of Smugglers' Cave.

"I am looking forward on my next visit there to lifting the hoard," the diary went on. "But I shall have to be careful to avoid the vigilance of Phillip Bellamy who, I am now sure, has designs upon the hoard."

And there, abruptly, the diary ended.

"So—so that's it," Pat breathed. "Chris, it must have been just after that last entry that your uncle's ketch was wrecked. He feared Bellamy. Perhaps he knew that he was going to die, and—so scratched that message on the cabin floor, hoping that somehow it would get to you."

Chris nodded. Her face reflected the emotional tumult that was raging within her. In that moment she could not speak. With sudden realization that time was passing, Pat looked at her watch.

Then, electrified, she jumped to her feet.

"Chris, look—a quarter to seven. And Dolores—Chris, she's due to arrive on the island at eight. You can bet your boots she'll lose no time in getting into the tower—"

In an instant Chris had stuffed the diary into her jacket and jumped to her feet.

"Then let's get busy," she cried. "Rather," agreed Pat. "And the first thing to do is to look for that skull and crossbones sign. We've got to find that secret entrance into the tower your uncle talked about."

Eagerly they set to work to examine the walls of the underground chamber into which they had fallen, for they were certain that this must be the Smugglers' Cave mentioned in the diary.

It was not an easy task, for heavy barrels, chests filled with ancient, now mouldy tea, and other cumbersome objects, stood piled against the rocky walls.

Before long they were panting with their exertions, but resolutely they stuck to their task, shining their torch on every fresh patch as it was uncovered.

Quickly the time passed, and the knowledge that before long Dolores would be landing on the island spurred them on. Another half-hour slid by, and then, as they dragged aside yet another huge barrel, Chris gave a sudden cry.

"Shine the torch down here! I believe—Yes!" Her eyes lit up with triumph as she peered at the rocky wall. "Look, there it is!"

And excitedly she pointed to a faded sign carved on a square block of stone.

It was the grisly sign of the skull and crossbones!



A RACE AGAINST TIME

"But where's the secret entrance?" ejaculated Pat.

Experimentally she pressed against the stone, and suddenly there came a muffled, whirling sound, and slowly the great block pivoted round, revealing a black, tunnel-like opening.

"Whoopee!" Chris shouted her delight. "Come on, let's explore!" she urged.

Eagerly they stepped into the tunnel. It sloped steeply upwards, but after proceeding a few yards they were forced to a halt, for ahead the floor was covered with broken rocks and rubble. A section of the roof had evidently caved in, and part of the secret way to the Spy Tower was blocked.

For a few moments the chums stared in dismay at the fallen debris, then they began to pull and drag at the rocks with their bare fingers, but it was terribly slow work, and before long Pat straightened up.

"It's no use—we'll never be able to clear away all this stuff with our bare hands," she declared.

"Fraid you're right," agreed Chris, and she rubbed her sleeve across her hot, moist face.

For a moment or two they stood there glumly, then Pat's eyes lit up as she remembered what she had seen on their first visit to Neptune's Nest.

"The admiral doesn't only keep his treasures up there," she said, nodding towards the roof. "I remember seeing a pile of tools, and—who knows?—there may be a shovel amongst them. Anyway, let's go and look."

She groped her way back into Smugglers' Cave and crossed over to where stood the ancient ladder. Between them she and Chris managed to shift it until it was reared right underneath the wooden trapdoor in the roof. Then a little gingerly they began to climb. The ladder creaked and groaned, and once a rung broke beneath Chris' foot, but, their hearts in their mouths, they climbed on, and at last Pat, who was leading, found herself right under the wooden trapdoor. She flashed her torch on it, and one swift glance told her the nature of its mechanism. It worked on springs, and was set in motion by a lever at one side. Swaying dangerously, she reached up for the lever, grabbed it and tugged.

"Nothing happened. Looks as if it's stuck through rust," observed Chris gloomily.

"It mustn't be," Pat gasped. "It's got to move—"

She tugged again—frantically.

And then, with a crash, the door slipped back, and breathlessly Pat blinked in the bright daylight that filled Neptune's Nest. One second she paused, then recklessly she caught at the edge of the opening and hoisted herself into the upper cave. With a gasp she straightened, and anxiously swung her torch to and fro. In one corner lay a pile of tools, and her heart leapt as she gazed across at them.

"Our luck's in," she cried to Chris, who still stood on the ladder. "There are a couple of shovels over there. You stay where you are—I'll get them."

Hurrying across the cave, she picked up the shovels, and then paused, listening in alarm. From outside had come the splutter of a motor-boat engine, followed by a shout in the admiral's voice:

"Hallo, Miss Bellamy! Hallo, Feltham! Glad to see you!"

Pat risked a peep out of Neptune's Nest. She saw Dolores, radiant and beautiful, in a white yachting costume, stepping off her cabin cruiser, followed by Bruce Feltham, the young sports master. Admiral Hardacre was greeting them warmly.

"We'll have breakfast first," he boomed. "You can look around the Spy Tower afterwards, Miss Bellamy."

Pat gave a groan.

She and Chris had only about half an hour to dig their way up the secret tunnel. Could they do it before Dolores visited the Spy Tower? Could they possibly get there first and find the hidden jewel hoard?

Passing the shovels down to Chris, she descended the ladder, and they both entered the opening in the wall. Then, with a frenzy born of desperation, they began to shift the great pile of debris that barred the way.

It is a race against time for the chums. Will they be able to win it? See next Friday's concluding chapters of this thrilling serial.



The Fourth GREY GHOST

By DOROTHY PAGE

HER SECRET IN PERIL

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.

Jinney, the school porter, told her that Glynn Tracy had left the school the previous term in disgrace.

Penelope learnt that Mr. Aspell had set a trap for the Grey Ghosts in Abbot's Room in the east wing.

Donning her hooded robe, she went to warn them, but before she could utter a word the Grey Ghosts, suspicious of her, hustled her into a secret room.

"I don't trust this chap," declared one of the robed trio, a boy named Bob Gower. "I vote we see who he is."

And he made to pull off Penelope's hood.

DESPERATELY Penelope shrank back.

It was imperative that the Grey Ghosts should not discover that she was a girl—should not find out that she was the headmaster's daughter.

"No—please don't snatch off my hood!" she gasped, trying to speak as gruffly as possible.

The robed figure she knew to be Bob Gower paused and regarded her sternly through the holes in his hood.

"Why not?" he demanded. "If you are not a trickster, what have you got to conceal?"

"N—nothing. At least—"

Penelope broke off, for Bob had given a scornful laugh.

"Nonsense. You can't bluff me," he asserted. "If you won't be sensible and talk, then we must take other means of discovering the truth about you."

And again his hand stretched out towards her hood.

To Penelope it seemed that her secret was doomed, but suddenly, to her unbounded relief, the leader of the Grey Ghosts spoke.

"Steady, No. 3," he said curtly. "You must remember that this chap is on our side."

Bob Gower dropped his hand, but he still glared suspiciously at the shrinking Penelope.

"I'm not so sure of that," he growled.

"Oh, but I am—honestly I am!" cried Penelope.

"Then why this secrecy?" demanded Bob. "If you're one of us, why don't you tell us who you are?"

"Why don't you tell me who you are?" countered Penelope.

Hugh Mason, the leader, chuckled. "He's got you there, No. 3. Maybe, like us, he has his reasons for wanting to keep his identity dark. Anyway, I vote we respect his desire for secrecy—for the moment."

Penelope heaved a sigh of relief. The danger was over, temporarily at

least. Then, as she saw No. 1's gleaming gaze fixed on her, she braced herself to meet his next question.

"How much do you know?" Hugh Mason demanded. "And what were you doing in Abbot's Room?"

He paused, and in grim, watchful silence the three boys waited.

Penelope had to answer. Strangely thrilled at the part she was playing, she spoke in a low whisper through the folds of her hood, again disguising her voice.

"I came to warn you that the Wasp suspected you might be here," she declared.

"Bit late, weren't you?" snapped Bob Gower. "It was that sneaking headmaster's daughter who accidentally saved us—not you. No. 1, I still say we can't trust this fellow. It seems to me—"

He subsided as No. 1 touched his robed arm.

"Go on," ordered Hugh, his gaze never leaving Penelope's hooded face. "So you know we're up against the tyrant, Mr. Aspell, do you? Well, what else do you know?"

Penelope hesitated. Her heart was racing excitedly. The boys were regarding her intently, but they had not recognised her voice—had no suspicion that she was the Head's daughter whom they mistrusted.

"I also know," she said, "that you came here to-night acting in the interests of Glynn Tracy, the boy who disgraced the school last term."

She checked herself in alarm as she saw No. 3 clench his fists, as she saw the other two Grey Ghosts stiffen angrily.

"Why, you rotter—" blazed Bob Gower.

"Steady," rapped Hugh. He leaned towards the startled Penelope, his eyes flashing through the eye-holes.

"So! You call yourself our helper," he rapped scornfully, "yet you accuse the finest fellow Harcourt has ever known!"

Amazed by the fierce reaction, Penelope steadied herself.

"But you don't know the real truth," she whispered. "Glynn Tracy didn't leave ordinarily. He was thrown out in disgrace—"

"Thrown out—yes, but unjustly!" came the lightning answer from No. 1, his voice ringing. "The Grey Ghosts know that! The Grey Ghosts fight to clear his name! That is our mission!"

Penelope gasped.

Was this, then, the true answer? That, unknown to any but the Grey Ghosts, Glynn Tracy had been falsely accused and expelled?

She could not doubt the fierce ring of sincerity and certainty in Hugh's voice. A joyful hope flooded her.

"On—on your honour, No. 1?" she breathed.

The robed Bob Gower made a wrathful movement. Again Hugh checked him.

"You're a strange chap, whoever you are," he said grimly. "But I give you my word. I know Glynn was innocent—"

"But the Head—"

Penelope had

to break in anxiously. "Are—are you accusing the Head of being unjust?"

"No!" Quietly the hooded leader shook his head. "Mr. Cartwright was absent when it happened. And the evidence was such that he had to expel Glynn. What really happened we mean to find out. No, we don't blame the Head—"

He paused, hands clenched.

"But the Wasp—how he gloated over Glynn's expulsion! Dear old Glynn, who, as head prefect, had always fought for the juniors against tyranny—as we now carry on his fight—"

He stopped, as if conscious that his feelings were carrying him away.

But his ringing words had created happiness and excitement in Penelope.

She had no doubts now that Glynn was innocent; that the Grey Ghosts were justified in trying to carry out their double mission.

"But why come here—to this secret place?" she asked curiously.

"Because," said No. 1, "it is in a secret room that we will find evidence of Glynn Tracy's innocence."

"But what proof?" asked Penelope, looking around. "There's nothing here. There couldn't have been anyone in here for years and years—"

"So we've discovered to-night," said No. 1 curtly. "Just now we found this bolt-hole, but it's not what we seek. But somewhere in the school is another secret room, and the Grey Ghosts will—must—find it!"

Penelope's eyes sparkled behind her hood. Here was a thrill! Here was the daring adventure so dear to her heart.

"Let me help!" she burst out impulsively. "Tell me what you hope to find—how you know all this—what your plans are now—"

She faltered, conscious in the flickering light that they had stiffened.

"And how," asked No. 1, "do we know we can trust you?"

"Agreed," growled No. 3. "He's too nosy for my liking. If he's for us, why doesn't he tell us who he is?"

"And why don't you tell me who you are?" challenged Penelope again.

"Fair enough," said No. 1, "but the Grey Ghosts only tell their secrets to those they know they can trust, and we cannot be certain that you—"

He paused. No. 2 had touched his arm.

"I have an idea, No. 1," came Harvey Doane's drawl. "This chap says he wants to help—be one of us. Well, let him prove it—by a test!"

"Test?" repeated Penelope, thrilling. "What test?"

"We suspect," continued No. 2, "that somewhere in the school is an ancient, architect's plan of the Abbey. That old plan may well give us a clue to the secret room we seek. Help us get that plan, and we shall then know we can trust you."

No. 1 gave a grim little chuckle, his eyes on Penelope.

"You hear?" he said. "Have you the nerve? Will you take this risk—to become one of us? I warn you it may be dangerous."

Penelope's eyes began to sparkle. How grand to become one of the Grey Ghosts—a trusted, if secret, member!

To learn their secrets, to fight against the Wasp to help in their daring mission, to help prove the innocence of Glynn Tracy!

"Where do you think this old plan is?" she asked.

A pause.

"We think," said No. 1 slowly, "that it is in the possession of the headmaster!"



THE ALL-IMPORTANT PLAN

Penelope started. She couldn't help it. The movement was seen, and Bob Gower's scornful laugh rang out.

"That's made you think twice, hasn't it!" His hood turned. "No. 1, this chap won't have the nerve! I suggest—"

Penelope checked him with uplifted hand.

"Think twice yourself, No. 3!" she retorted. "I said I'd take the test—and I will!"

The Grey Ghosts stilled.

"More than that," continued Penelope coolly, "I'll prove my worth by doing the job single-handed!"

The Grey Ghosts looked quickly at each other, then at her. Hugh Mason whistled very softly.

"If you mean that," he breathed, "if you think you can do it—"

The admiration in his voice pleasantly thrilled Penelope.

"I will—somehow," she declared. "Leave it to me to make my own plans. Just tell me how I can contact you to report on progress—and we'll see," she added mischievously.

"Whether No. 3 will have to eat his words about my nerve!"

Bob Gower, honest as the day, gave a grunt.

"Get that plan—and I'll eat my words, and glad to!"

"Thanks," said Penelope softly. "You're a good scout."

Perhaps her tone was hardly boyish enough, for suddenly Hugh Mason seemed to be regarding her intently, puzzledly. But he relaxed.

"Very well," he said crisply. "Now listen. If you want to contact us, leave a message inside the mouth of the gargoyle of the disused fountain in the Cloisters. Clear?"

"Right! Now I'm going to open up the secret panel. Off you go; we'll follow in turn. If you can do this for Glynn—well, good luck!"

"And when you make your plans about tackling the Head," put in the hooded Bob with a growl, "look out for his sneaky daughter!"

Penelope wrinkled her nose impishly behind her hood.

"I'll look out," she said gravely.

As she spoke, No. 1 quickly extinguished the candle. Then followed a click, and part of the wall slowly pivoted revealing the exit into the dim confines of Abbot's Room.

"All clear," came No. 1's cool voice in the darkness. "Out you go. Watch your step, whoever you are. The Wasp may still be about—"

Penelope swung through the opening, robe rustling. Darting silently from Abbot's Room, she entered the music-room. The light still glowed above the piano, her music-case beside it.

Rather breathless with excitement, she clicked off the light—and then snatched up the case. Like lightning became her actions then. In the darkness she whirled off the hooded cloak and stuffed it into the case.

That done, she passed out into the passage, and a few seconds later stepped from East Wing, case swinging in her hand. As she entered the headmaster's house and ascended the stairs to her own room, she thought deeply about the task she had so impulsively taken on.

"Wonder where on earth daddy keeps the old plan—if he really has got it?" she wondered, as she tucked the secret society robe away in her chest of drawers. "I daren't ask him outright about it, so—"

She paused, then her eyes began to sparkle.

"Zimmy, I believe I've got the very idea!" she ejaculated.

Switching on her bedroom light, she got out her writing-pad and a pencil. She worked hastily, making a very rough and haphazard sketch plan of the school buildings.

The creak of the garden gate heralded the return of her father. Penelope wrenched off the top sheet and went downstairs like a whirlwind. She dropped the sketch inside her father's study and turned away—just as he entered through the front door.

He stopped. His eyebrows rose with disapproval.

"Penelope—you should be in bed by now. It is getting late. You must think of your health."

"I'm just going, daddy," Penelope said, looking the picture of innocence.

"Did Mr. Aspell catch those awful Grey Ghosts?"

"He did not," said the Head grimly. "He is making a last search before joining me. But you'd better go to bed, my dear."

"Yes, daddy," said Penelope meekly. She kissed him fondly, turned and started to mount the staircase. She went slowly, expectantly. Surely, as he entered the study, he would see the sheet of notepaper? Surely—

"Penelope—one moment. Is this yours?"

With an inward thrill, she retraced her steps. He was standing, regarding the sketch with a slight frown.

"Oh, yes—thank you, daddy!" Penelope gave him a bright smile. "I must have dropped it. Don't you think it's a good drawing?"

He handed back the sheet. "I have told you many times, Penelope, that if any job is worth doing, it's worth doing well. As a ground plan of the Abbey it is markedly inaccurate and badly and hastily executed. I fail to see why you should be pleased with it."

"I'm sorry, daddy," murmured Penelope, "but it's almost impossible to do a flat plan by just looking at the buildings, isn't it?"

"In which case," he commented, "you should not have made the attempt without some reference or guide."

Penelope's pulses quickened. Things were going as she had planned! Now for it!

"But where, daddy," she asked innocently, "could I find a guide?"

"Well, strangely enough," he said dryly, "only a few weeks ago an ancient plan of the Abbey came into my hands. I am having it reproduced in my book on English monasteries—"

With an effort Penelope hid her excitement. This must be the all-important plan the Grey Ghosts had referred to. It existed. Daddy had it! But steady—steady—

She put on a bright smile of interest. Now for it!

"Perhaps you'd show it to me some time, daddy—"

And there she faltered, for his grey eyes had suddenly become very penetrating indeed.

"This interest of yours in the architectural aspect of the school seems rather sudden, Penelope," he remarked slowly.

"Does—does it, daddy? It doesn't really matter, of course—"

"That is just as well—because the plan was so stained and tattered that I sent it to the bookbinders in Bettingley for restoration."

Penelope's heart dropped in utter dismay. Bettingley! A little market town some ten miles away; but a town out of bounds to the school—and therefore out of bounds to herself.

But worse was to come, dashing her happy hopes.

"And when it is finished," continued her father, "it is being forwarded to my publishers to have a block made. So I fear you will not be able to see it for many weeks—until my first proofs are received, in fact."



THE WASP IS SUSPICIOUS

Pale moonlight stole between the chintz curtains of Penelope's bedroom window.

It bathed her pensive face as she stared unseeingly out into the school grounds, thoughtfully rubbing her freckled nose against the top of the window-sill.

Penelope ought to have been in bed—she ought to have been asleep. But Penelope was very much awake, thinking hard and desperately.

She had made a vow to the Grey Ghosts. She had said she would set the plan so vital to their mission.

"And now you're dished, Penny!" she muttered. "You've failed before you've really started. Single-handed you told the boys—and now look at you!"

She wrinkled her nose in self-disgust, then gave a sudden gasp.

"Zimmy, but there's one chance! If I were to break bounds, take the early bus into Bettingley before breakfast, then I might be able to persuade the booksellers to lend me the plan."

It was a daring scheme, for there would be trouble if she were caught. But deliberately Penelope shut her eyes to the risk. She could not let the Grey Ghosts down.

So next morning she got up at seven, and when she had washed and dressed, she cautiously stole downstairs and let herself out through the back door.

No one was about, so, unseen, she climbed over the school wall and dropped down into the lane on the other side. A few minutes later a bus hove in sight. She stopped it and stepped aboard.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Bettingley was reached. There were very few people about and, to her dismay, she found that Crouch's, the local booksellers, were not open.

"Idiot me!" she exclaimed. "I ought to have thought of that. Oh, gee, what a bind! And the worst of it is, I daren't hang about too long, or my absence from the school will be noticed."

Restlessly she took a stroll about the small town, and as she waited for the shop to open she tried to think of a way of obtaining possession of the plan. She daren't ask to take it away, for the fact would certainly reach her father's ears.

But she had pencil and paper. Suppose she announced herself as the Head's daughter, and with that authority try to make a copy of it?

"Gosh, that'll take the dickens of a time," she muttered anxiously. "Trouble with you, Penny is you don't look before you leap! But chin up! Wait till you see the plan before making difficulties—"

Pondering deeply, she was only vaguely aware that a man was cycling in the road in her direction. In fact he was but some ten yards away when she consciously brought him into focus.

A tall, lean figure, thin-faced, with high cheek bones, small moustache, and dark, hard eyes.

"Oh—"

Penelope's knees felt suddenly weak.

For that cyclist was Mr. Aspell, the tyrannical senior master, deadly enemy of the Grey Ghosts!

He had seen her. Staring blankly, he was dismounting—

Penelope groaned. Flight was useless. She was trapped. Oh, what a wretched stroke of luck it was that had brought the Wasp, of all people, into Bettingley so early!

She tried to force a prim little smile.

"Good-morning, Mr. Aspell. Fancy seeing you!"

For a moment he did not answer. His bright, hard eyes were narrowed. They glittered as he noted her patent dismay. For all his oily ways before the headmaster he was a spiteful.

(Please turn to page 287.)

The Big Race



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

JOHNNY SHOWS HOW

"TAKE it easy—take it easy!" chanted pretty dark-haired Sally Warner, her blue eyes sparkling merrily.

"Steady does it," cautioned Don Weston.

"Another few yards—oooh, careful!" cried fair-haired Fay Manners.

The boy to whom those remarks were addressed looked neither to right nor left. With a look of intense concentration on his youthful face, his cute little white and scarlet pill-box hat tilted at an angle on his dark head, he ran quickly and steadily along the games-deck, a round tray laden with a pyramid of glasses, poised on one upraised hand.

His hat, his tight, waist-length jacket and navy-blue trousers with a broad scarlet band down each leg showed that he was one of the bell-boys aboard the Ocean Star, otherwise known as the Floating College, en route for Australia.

"Oh, good man!" cried Johnny Briggs approvingly as the boy reached a chalk mark on the deck, and Sally & Co. applauded vigorously. "Good show!"

"Not good enough yet." Fifteen-year-old Jimmy Bowles, the youngest bell-boy aboard, shook his head ruefully. "I've only got six glasses on the tray, and I've got to balance eight of them to win the race."

"You'll do it, Jimmy," said Sally encouragingly. "Your speed's very good and the race isn't until after dinner to-night."

"Plenty of practice," said Johnny. "That's what you want. Eight glasses is easy enough. Only wish passengers could enter the race. Bet I could do it with double that number."

Sally, Don and Fay winked at each other, smiles on their faces. Dear old Johnny, confident as always, really thought it was as easy as it looked. It was a pity, thought Sally with a little chuckle, that he couldn't enter for the bell-boys' race to-night, carrying a tray loaded with a pyramid of eight glasses. At least he'd provide a lot of amusement, even if lacking in skill.

"You'd do fine," grinned Don. "You could forget all about the race after the first step and play broken bottles."

Johnny loftily ignored that. Jimmy turned aside to hide a grin.

"Come along now," said Johnny, having appointed himself Jimmy's trainer. He perched another glass on top of the pyramid, surveying it anxiously. "Do you think I'd better try it first for balance?" he asked.

"I guess it's all right, thank you," returned Jimmy hastily.

"Wise boy," murmured Fay. "Now come on—get ready." She stood, stop-watch in hand as Jimmy toed the line ready to start. Sally dropped

a handkerchief, and off he went cautiously, but speedily.

"He really is good," murmured Sally approvingly. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he wins."

"Hope he does," returned Don. "There's a twenty-dollar prize."

Jimmy was nearing the end of the stretch now. For a moment the seventh glass wobbled precariously. Fay gave a gasp. But with a dexterous slight upward tilt of the tray Jimmy righted it again and darted on.

"Must make sure he gets plenty of practice to-day," said Sally. "Keep him at it—oh!"

She gave a jump as a loud voice behind her suddenly shouted "Hey!" Indignantly she swung round, staring into the angry red face of the senior bell-boy. "Boy" was a courtesy title only, in reality he was a man of indefinable age and of a somewhat irascible nature.

"Quiet!" roared Johnny, without turning his head.

Whether it was the man's shout or Johnny's roar it was difficult to tell, but Jimmy started, faltered. And before he could save it the topmost glass fell from the pyramid, shattering to the deck.

"Clumsy young scoundrel!" snapped the man, striding past the chums and glaring at the discomfited Jimmy.

"That'll be deducted from your wages. What are you doing up here, anyway? Why aren't you on duty?"

"I—It's my off-duty hour, Mr. Scott," faltered Jimmy.

"And you know the boys were given permission to come and practise up here as long as they didn't annoy the passengers," put in Sally, her face red and indignant as she joined the group.

"I suppose broken glass lying around won't annoy the passengers?" said the man with a sneer. "In any case, I don't remember them being given permission to practise with the ship's glassware." He snatched the remainder of the glasses from the tray, indicated the broken one with his foot. "You clear that up, my boy. Any more trouble from you and you'll be put on duty again—pronto!"

For a moment hot words trembled on Jimmy's lips, but he bit them back. This was his first trip as bell-boy, and his whole future depended upon this man's report of him at the end of the voyage. But no such consideration affected Johnny Briggs. His face red and angry he glared at the man.

"That's not fair," he said vehemently. "If you hadn't yelled, Jimmy wouldn't have dropped that glass at all."

Alfred Scott did not reply to that. With another glare, he stalked off, glasses in hand.

"Don't mind him, Jimmy," said Sally comfortingly. "He's probably got a touch of indigestion or some-

thing. And it won't take us a jiffy to clear up the broken glass." "Thanks, Miss Warner," replied Jimmy, swallowing hard. "But—but I—I guess he's kind of put me off. Besides, I can't practise without glasses."

"That's another difficulty very quickly overcome," smiled Sally. "Don, will you nip down to my cabin and get those green tumblers out of my case? There's well over a dozen there. Jimmy, run and get dustpan and brush, and we'll get rid of this glass."

In a very short time the tumblers were fetched, the glass cleared away. But it was plain that the incident had upset Jimmy. He had lost some of his confidence, and confidence was all too necessary if he was to win the race.

"It's a shame," muttered Sally indignantly. "Why did that wretched man have to upset him?"

"Should have thought he'd have been glad to see his youngest, boy putting up such a good show," replied Don. "He must have seen how promising he was. Oh, bad luck!"

"I've lost the knack, I guess," said Jimmy, with a rueful shrug, as half-way down the course the seventh glass toppled off again. "At this rate, I'll never manage eight."

"Oh, yes, you will," said Sally firmly. "You've got the rest of the day to practise. You'll soon get your confidence back."

"And just to help you," put in Johnny airily. "I'll show you how easy it really is! Just a sec while I get another tray and some glasses!"

"This'll be good," chuckled Sally, as Johnny appeared again, with a tray and an armful of glasses. "Gather round, everyone," she added gravely. "Johnny's going to show us how!"

They gathered round, gurgling. Johnny began to arrange his tray.

"Right," he beamed. "There's the tray loaded, and there's the eighth glass. It's all a question of balance—"

"The voice of experience," murmured Don.

"Get the tray on your hand—so!" said Johnny, in a voice that suggested he had been handling loaded trays all his life. "Raise it up—Wow!"

It had looked so devastatingly easy when Jimmy had done it. Johnny had been so sure he could do it with equal ease. But he did not bend his hand back far enough. The loaded tray slipped. Even as the chums and the horrified Jimmy leapt forward to save it, the glasses crashed to the deck, splintered in a thousand pieces.

And before anyone could speak, as if he had been lurking near waiting for something to go amiss, the angry form of Alfred Scott leapt forward. He didn't look at Johnny; he just glared at the bell-boy.

"So you've done it again, eh. Bowles?" he roared. "Well, I warned you! There'll be no more practice for you to-day. Down below with you, sharp! And don't let me catch you up here again!"

And ignoring the chums' indignant protests, he marched Jimmy off.

"Well, that's that!" Johnny's voice was glum. "My fault, too. If only

the bad-tempered blighter had let me explain—

But Sally, staring after the two retreating figures, frowned thoughtfully. That first display of anger she had put down to sheer bad temper on the part of Alfred Scott. But this time it was different. For if it was only bad temper, why had the man been lurking near, obviously waiting for a chance to pounce on Jimmy and forbid him to practise any more? And why, having achieved that, had his face worn such a triumphant, self-satisfied grin as he marched off?

Almost, thought Sally, puzzled, as if he didn't want Jimmy to win the race.



A STRANGE ENMITY

"Jimmy!"

Jimmy, alone in the large pantry dolefully polishing silver cruets, looked up with a start to see Sally's face peering round the doorway.

"Nearly finished?" she asked eagerly.

"Quite finished," replied Jimmy. "But it's no good—Mr. Scott said I'm not to go upstairs to practise."

"Who asked you to?" demanded Johnny, joining Sally in the doorway.

"Old Scott's tied up in a game of cards with some of the stewards—he's safe for another hour or so. And you can come and practise in the students' corridor."

Jimmy's face lit up for a moment, then fell again.

"But bell-boys aren't allowed in the students' corridor," he objected.

Sally rolled her eyes with despair.

"For a potential race-winner, you can find more objections to practising than Tubby Winwood can to dieting. Not so many arguments—come on! We've got everything arranged!"

And Jimmy, with a grin on his rather girlish face, went. Except for Don and Fay, the students' corridor was deserted, the students having assembled in the café for afternoon tea or enjoying themselves on the games deck. Don, complete with tray and glasses, gave a cheery smile as Jimmy hurried forward.

"Here we are, Jimmy. We've marked out your course, too!"

"And don't worry about getting caught," said Fay encouragingly, "because we're keeping watch. You've simply got to win this race, Jimmy, if only to punish old Scotty for being so mean to you."

"And I've got a feeling that it'll be a mighty big punishment to him for some reason or other if you win," put in Sally, who had spoken of her doubts about Alfred Scott to her chums.

Jimmy looked puzzled at that, but he nodded confidently.

"I'll win, just to show you what jolly good sports I think you all are," he said boyishly. And with a return of his old confidence he took the tray, balanced it on his hand, and waited for Sally's signal to start.

"Wait a minute!" called Johnny. "I'm joining in this, and just to give you a bit of competition I've got sixteen glasses on my tray. Look!"

He emerged proudly from the doorway of Slick, the American boy inventor's cabin, nonchalantly poising a tray laden with sixteen glasses. While Slick, who had been let into the secret of Jimmy's practising, looked on with a grin.

Sally & Co. stared in utter disbelief as Johnny twirled the tray round without a glass so much as tilting, while Jimmy just gaped.

"Told you there was nothing to it," said Johnny airily. "Now then, off we go!"

Sally dropped the handkerchief Johnny positively hurtled forward, the tray tipping this way and that, but somehow miraculously keeping its load intact. Along the corridor he shot, with the chums staring in open-mouthed amazement.

"Golly! We misjudged him," said Sally dazedly. "He can do it."

They watched Johnny nearing the finishing mark, still full of airy confidence. While Jimmy, unable to continue in the face of such astounding competition, just goggled in admiration.

"Record time," gasped Fay, staring at the stop-watch in her hand. "He—oh, my hat!" she groaned. "Not again!"

Don and Sally clapped their hands to their ears, waiting wincingly for the crash as the triumphant Johnny, almost on the finishing mark, trod on a dangling shoelace and tripped.

Over pitched the tray and glasses. But those glasses, most amazingly defying the law of gravity, remained firmly fixed to the tray.

Sally's amazement changed to twinkling-eyed mirth as she rushed forward and picked up the mysterious tray.

"Johnny, you old leg-puller!" she gurgled. "Why, they're glued to the tray and to each other—every one of them!"

"Nert, eh?" chuckled Johnny, as a roar of mirth went up. "Slick fixed 'em up for me. Now, come on, Jimmy, see if you can beat that!"

When the laughter had subsided, Jimmy tried again. And this time, to his own and the chums' infinite satisfaction, he succeeded with seven glasses. Again, and again he tried, until Sally was sure he was perfect.

"Splendid!" she enthused. "Now for the eighth glass—"

"Cave!" hissed Fay.

With one movement Sally grabbed the tray and pushed Jimmy into her own cabin. Then, balancing the tray insecurely on her hand, she began to totter down the corridor, as round the corner appeared Professor Willard, the students' headmaster.

He frowned at Sally, before peering rather suspiciously around.

"Did I see a bell-boy down here?" he asked.

"Bell-boy?" Sally looked vague, though her heart jumped a little uncomfortably. "Oh, you're thinking about the tray. Just seeing if I can do the thing myself. Whoops! Sorry, Professor!" she added, as the tray tilted dangerously in Professor Willard's direction.

"Cease this foolishness, Sally," said the professor reprovingly. "You know the race is for bell-boys only. I made sure I saw one of them down here," he added, staring at the blandly innocent faces of the chums.

"Funny tricks imagination plays, sir," rattled Johnny happily. "Now I remember—"

"I am not interested in your memories, Briggs," said the professor coldly. "I have already had a complaint that you four students have been seen in the company of a bell-boy, and that you have been encouraging him to be impertinent. I will not tolerate that sort of conduct. Furthermore, there is a very strict rule that no bell-boys are to enter this corridor. I will not allow it in any circumstances. Remember that."

And, with another keen look at the four rather red faces before him, he marched off.

"That rotter Scott must have told him," flared Johnny, as the professor disappeared. "And added a few lies into the bargain."

"More and more I'm beginning to believe my suspicions are right," murmured Sally thoughtfully. "Why else would Scott want to make trouble for Jimmy? But if he is trying to make him lose, he's going to be unlucky," she added determinedly, and called: "Come on out, Jimmy!"

CHALLENGE YOUR FRIENDS

to see which of you can collect the most waste paper. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that your salvage efforts are helping the Export Drive.

Jimmy, rather scared and pale, stealthily emerged from the cabin.

"Praps I'd better go," he said nervously. "I don't want to get you all into a row after you've been so jolly decent to me."

"Never mind that," said Johnny. "Come on—eight glasses."

Carefully Sally arranged the pyramid of eight glasses. Looking very taut, but full of determination, Jimmy took the tray.

Hardly daring to breathe, the chums watched. But Jimmy seemed to gain confidence as he ran forward, the tray held as steady as a rock.

"He's going to do it!" exulted Fay.

"He is—he is!"

"And even better time than with six glasses," whooped Johnny. "Oh, that's the boy!"

"That certainly is the boy!" grieved a voice. "Well, professor, wasn't I right? Aren't these students encouraging this boy to disobey my orders?"

And on to the scene, a malicious smile on his face as he stared at the white-faced Jimmy, strode Alfred Scott, accompanied by Professor Willard.

"I am sorry to say you are right," said Professor Willard in a grim voice. "You four students will do a special detention to-morrow after morning lecture. What this boy's punishment will be I leave to Mr. Scott."

Scott's eyes glittered.

"I think," he almost purred, "that an evening spent polishing five hundred new glasses in my pantry will give him time to repent of his impertinence."

Jimmy gave a little cry. Sally started forward in dismay.

"But the race," she cried.

"Jimmy's entering for the race."

"Most unfortunate," returned Scott smoothly. "But he should have thought of that before. Now then, off you go," he rapped.

With a despairing glance at the chums, Jimmy went. While Scott, following, rubbed his hands together as if in glee.

"So that's that!" Sally heard him murmur. "He's finished—now it's all plain sailing!"

And, like a flash, her previous suspicions of the man crystallised into certainty. He was trying to keep Jimmy out of the race. But why—why?



SALLY THE BELL-BOY

"Whatever the reason he has for keeping Jimmy out of the race, he's not going to get away with it," said Sally hotly.

"Hear, hear!" agreed Don. "But—what can we do?"

The Merry-makers sat in deep silence for a few moments, wrinkling their brows thoughtfully. Then suddenly Sally straightened up.

"I've got it!" she said triumphantly. "I'll take Jimmy's place."

"You? In the race?" asked Johnny blankly.

"Of course not, chump! Downstairs in the pantry."

"Well, if you say so," said Don doubtfully. "But supposing somebody looks in? I don't suppose Jimmy makes a habit of wearing a girl's dress when he's working."

Sally raised her eyes despairingly.

"I shan't be wearing a dress," she explained. "I'll be wearing Jimmy's spare uniform. We're about the same height and build," she continued.

"We're both dark—and I can tuck my hair up under the cap. Remember, all the other bell-boys will be up on deck."

"That's right," said Fay enthusiastically. "And I know Scott won't be around. I heard him arranging with the stewards to continue their game of cards. He said the race was in the bag, or something—and why should he bother to watch it?"

"In the bag, eh?" said Johnny grimly. "Well, maybe Mr. Smarty

Scott is due for a surprise. By the time he finds out about it the race will be over. And if Jimmy's won—as he jolly well must—he won't be able to do a thing about it."

"That's the ticket!" approved Don. "But I say," he added in some dismay, "it won't be much fun for you, polishing five hundred glasses, Sally."

"It's all in a good cause," Sally smiled. "Don, you go and contact Jimmy and get that spare suit. Don't let yourself be seen."

Don nodded, slipped out of the cabin. In an amazingly short time he was back, a paper-wrapped uniform in his arms.

"O.K.!" he said brightly. "Jimmy was a bit dubious at first, but I managed to persuade him. But buck up," he warned, as he and Johnny quitted the cabin. "The race starts in fifteen minutes. And for goodness' sake, Sallykins," he added warningly, "don't get caught."

"Don't worry!" said Sally. "Rap on the door when the coast is clear."

A few minutes later Don rapped. The door opened, and Johnny gave a whistle of admiration as a very snappy-looking bell-boy emerged.

"Whew! The belle of the bell-boys," he grinned.

Sally gave a chuckle. With Don's raincoat round her shoulders, she made her way stealthily with her chums down to the pantry. Jimmy, eager-eyed and excited, and maybe a little apprehensive, was waiting for them.

"Gee, thanks, Miss Warner—" he began.

"Never mind that," smiled Sally. "You pitch in and win, young Jimmy. Now, off you go!"

She watched as they all disappeared, and a little dolefully turned to survey what seemed to be acres of glasses. Everyone else, of course, was on the games deck, she thought wistfully. Well, at least she wouldn't be disturbed. And, with that comforting thought, Sally switched on the ship's radio, which was through to the games deck, and started on her polishing.

Whilst up on deck Jimmy was taking his place at the starting-line with the crowd of other bell-boys. He smiled across at Don, Johnny and Fay a little nervously.

"Hope he makes it," murmured Don. "Be too bad if poor old Sally went to all that trouble and then he lost."

"Hope he remembers my training," said Johnny. "If he followed my tips he can't lose."

"If he follows your tips he can't win," chuckled Fay. "But don't worry, he'll do all right."

She watched tensely as the starter held the flag poised, gave a little hop of excitement as it dropped and the row of boys started forward. Very smart, very competent they all looked, one tall boy in particular running forward in a confident manner that showed he did not anticipate any rivalry.

For the first time the chums felt a shattering doubt. Jimmy seemed so far behind, almost hidden among a crowd of other boys.

Sally, down below, her glass polishing forgotten as the commentator's voice came over the radio, began to feel doubtful, too. Various other names were mentioned, but never Jimmy's.

"Poor Jimmy," she murmured to herself compassionately. "He practised so hard, too. If it hadn't been for that beastly Scott—" Her eyes flashed as she thought of that unpleasant man, of his treatment of Jimmy. Why, she wondered for the thousandth time, didn't he want Jimmy to win? What possible objection could he have?

Then suddenly she tensed, a sudden flush of excitement in her cheeks.

"Oho!" said the commentator. "A dark horse coming up here. I think—yes, it's Jimmy Bowles, the youngest bell-boy on the ship. He's coming along at a spanking pace—"

The man's voice rose more and

more excitedly. And Sally's excitement mounted with it. Jimmy had drawn up to third place—now to second—

Whilst up on deck Don, Johnny and Fay were shouting themselves hoarse. It was amazing the way Jimmy had pulled up, almost as if he had been saving his energy for the last few yards. Now Arnold Bates, the tall favourite, was only a few feet ahead, now only a foot—

Full of confidence, running without a tremor, Jimmy slipped ahead, to touch the finishing rope a couple of feet ahead of Bates to the accompaniment of a crescendo of cheers.

Don, Johnny and Fay uttered wild whoops of joy. Down below Sally threw her glass-cloth up in the air in an ecstasy of delight, her face bright with joy, as the commentator gave the time and the second and third. Then suddenly his voice changed, took on a serious note:

"Oho! Seems there's trouble here!"

Sally waited tensely, then jumped violently as a voice thundered through the loud-speaker.

"Stop!"

It was Alfred Scott's voice! On deck, with groans of dismay, Don, Johnny and Fay looked at the suddenly scared Jimmy, at Scott, who was now talking to Captain Thorne.

"My orders have been deliberately disobeyed, sir," he gritted. "I ordered this boy to stay below during the race. I glanced in at the pantry just now—I thought I saw him there. Now—" He glared round, caught sight of the three chums. His eyes glittered. "Now I think I can see it all. Those students over there have been encouraging him all the time. One of them is missing. I have reason to believe she may have taken his place. And in view of all this," he continued, hardly stopping for breath. "I demand that this race should be re-run, without this boy."

Sally gave a gasp of dismay as she heard this clearly over the ship's radio. Next moment she felt even more dismayed as she heard the captain's quieter tones:

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Mr. Scott. The race was won fairly. But I certainly must, and will, investigate your charges. We will go below—"

"Oh, my hat!" Sally looked round frantically. She'd got to get out of here. Wildly she flung the glass-cloth on to the line above her head. It flicked against a cardboard folder of papers, sent it thudding to the floor, the papers flying in all directions.

"Oh, goodness!" groaned Sally. With trembling fingers she scabbled the papers together, thrust them back in the folder. Then suddenly she sat back on her heels, staring at one of the papers, her haste and agitation forgotten.

She was still in that position when the enraged Scott, accompanied by Captain Thorne, burst into the room. Behind came the chums and Jimmy.

"There, what did I say?" Scott rapped triumphantly. "This is all a plot—a put-up job. And in my opinion the race should be run again—"

"Well, Sally?" asked Captain Thorne sternly. "What have you to say?"

"I agree," replied Sally sweetly. "It is a plot—but it's a plot on the part of Mr. Scott! I see now why he made Jimmy's life so miserable, why he tried to prevent him from practising. Why he didn't want him to win."

"Pay no attention to her, sir," cut in Scott hurriedly.

Captain Thorne looked puzzled, a little angry.

"I hope you know what you're saying, Sally."

"Certainly I do," replied Sally. "I know that Scott thought Arnold Bates was a certain winner—until suddenly he saw how good Jimmy was. You didn't want Jimmy to win," she added, turning to the agitated head bell-boy, "because you'd made a

bet that Arnold Bates would. You stood to gain ten pounds if Bates won the race—"

"It isn't true!" cried Scott. "Don't listen to her—"

"It's true enough," said Sally scornfully. "Here, captain, look at this betting slip. It fell out of his file of papers which I accidentally knocked down."

Captain Thorne looked at the paper she handed him. His face grew stern as he eyed the cringing Scott.

"You know my rule," he snapped. "No betting. I never have allowed it, and I never will. And you have made your crime worse by making an innocent young boy suffer. I will deal with you later. Meantime—" He turned to Sally. "Thank you, my dear, for bringing this to light—and for standing by young Jimmy. I only hope he appreciates it."

"Indeed I do, sir," said Jimmy eagerly. "And—er—with your permission I'd like to buy her a strawberry sundae with my winnings."

"Well," said Captain Thorne dryly, "since she's a bell-boy herself, I could hardly object." And, with a twitch of his lips, he looked at Sally's uniform.

While Sally, with a laugh, followed Jimmy from the pantry.

"One strawberry sundae going down," she said; "and we mustn't forget your trainer and his two helpers."

And in a merry group the five of them made for the café.

(End of this week's story.)

Another delightful story of Sally & Co. awaits you in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 284.)

mean-spirited man, and he had not forgotten that Penelope had twice—unintentionally though, he thought!—made him look rather foolish.

But Mr. Aspell was also puzzled and intensely curious. Privately regarding Penelope as a nervous, prima girl, her presence in forbidden Bettinging at this early hour struck him as peculiar, indeed.

"I am no less surprised to see you, Miss Cartwright. You are aware, of course, that Bettinging is out of bounds? No doubt"—his intent gaze searched her face—"no doubt," he added suavely, "you have the Head's permission to be here?"

Penelope gulped. She could think of nothing to say.

His eyebrows rose. Then he smiled slowly and very unpleasantly. The snile froze, to be replaced by dawning suspicion.

Penelope saw that look, and her uneasy fears began to grow more intense.

That he had some plan in mind she did not doubt—and that that plan would get her into trouble she was even more sure.

Apprehensively she waited, and he, after one more, smug, completely self-satisfied look at her face, frowned at her.

"So," he murmured. "Can it be, my dear Miss Cartwright, that you are deliberately breaking bounds? Can it be that you are not quite the model of decorum we all supposed?"

Penelope's heart lurched. "It—it's all right, Mr. Aspell," she blurted desperately.

"No doubt—no doubt," he purred. "But I find this very odd, and as I am aware that you are subject to school rules, I consider it my duty to insist that you return to the school with me, my dear Miss Cartwright, so that you can make your explanations to the Head himself!"

How will Penelope be able to get out of this alarming plight? And what about the plan? Don't miss next Friday's thrilling chapters.

THE MYSTERY OF THE BRONZE LEOPARD

(Continued from page 278.)

night air—followed by a blood-chilling shriek. Then silence.

The torch slipped from June's nerveless fingers.

For she recognised that deep shout. It was Noel's voice.

Galvanised into frantic action, June sped from the room, almost colliding with Dick Marlow in the hall.

"Dick—quickly!" she gasped, grabbing his arm. "Fetch the others. There's danger in the grounds!"

"Count on us, Miss Gaynor!" exclaimed Dick, his eyes gleaming. "Hi—come on, you chaps!" he shouted. "There's work to be done!"

With June and Dick leading, the boys raced pell-mell out of the house.

"The museum!" gasped June. "The sound came from that direction. Uncle—uncle was keeping watch outside, and—"

But she did not complete her sentence, or mention her secret dread. For what she had seen through the spy-hole was too uncanny—too fantastic, almost to be believed.

Gasping for breath, she halted as she came in sight of the dark building hemmed in by trees.

The door was still shut, as Noel had left it. But just then there came a crashing sound among the bushes, and with a loud shout the boys raced in that direction, brandishing sticks and torches.

A dishevelled figure burst from the trees, and June gave a broken cry of relief.

"Nunky!"

"Mr. Raymond!" shouted Dick. A reassuring smile on his face, Noel gripped June's arm.

"Good work, June!" he panted. "Thanks a lot, boys. I was taken unawares by someone—or something—that sprang on me from the bushes, and I might have got the worst of the struggle if you hadn't come along so promptly."

"Did you see it, nunky?" whispered June, holding tightly to his arm.

Noel's eyes glinted.

"It was too dark to see properly. June—and the torch was knocked out of my hand. But I've got a shrewd idea what we're up against. You looked through the spy-hole?"

"Nunky, it—it wasn't there!" gulped June. "The pedestal was empty!"

A grim smile crossed Noel's face.

"I rather expected that," he said. "Come on, boys—let's have a look in the museum."

There was a breathless silence as he approached the museum door. Just then the group was joined by Miss Norton, with Sharon clinging to her arm.

"What—what is this fantastic rumour I've heard?" asked Miss Norton unsteadily. "That the bronze leopard is missing from the museum—and has been seen in the grounds just—"

"Most rumours have a basis of fact, Miss Norton," put in Noel gravely, as the blood drained from Sharon's face. "But there's no need for alarm at the moment. I fancy that Chang is safely back on his pedestal."

He unlocked the massive door as he spoke and flung it open. A gasp of relief went up—and June's eyes widened. For, surely enough, the bronze leopard was crouching in its usual place, surrounded by Noel's "magic" circle of rope.

Could her imagination have played some fantastic trick?

"Do you notice anything wrong, June?" asked Noel softly, as he drew her aside. "Try to remember exactly what you saw when you looked through the spy-hole."

June stared round her, baffled by an elusive memory; then, suddenly, she caught in her breath.

"Nunky—I didn't see that rope and the things tied to it!"

Noel's eyes glittered. "That's all I wanted to know!" he breathed. He beckoned Dick Marlow, whispering certain instructions. Surprised, the boy hurried away.

Miss Norton's agitated tones rose above the excited clamour of voices.

"I insist that we shut up the house and leave to-night, Sharon. My nerves will not stand any more of these scares." She appealed to Noel.

"I'm sure you'll agree that it is the wisest course, Mr. Raymond."

Noel nodded. "I fully agree with you, Miss Norton," he declared. "It is foolish to take unnecessary risks. I will ask the police to have a watch kept on the house in your absence. Meanwhile, I propose taking certain precautions."

He turned as Dick Marlow re-entered, and a surprised murmur went round. For Dick was carrying a stout length of chain, with a strong padlock.

"I found it in the toolbox of your car, Mr. Raymond, where you said," he explained, with a grin.

June stared at her uncle in amazement, but his expression was unusually grave as he fastened the chain round the neck of the bronze leopard, padlocking it to an iron ring on the wall.

He handed the key to Miss Norton as they left the museum.

"As soon as you are ready, Miss Norton," he said, "I shall be glad to take you and your niece in my car. June—perhaps you will help Sharon with her packing."

Soon afterwards, the party dispersed. Only June remained, helping Sharon to pack, while Dick Marlow waited for them downstairs.

Noel had left in his car, to make certain arrangements with the police, and the house seemed very silent.

As the girls joined Dick downstairs he beckoned them mysteriously.

"There's something moving in the shrubbery" outside, he breathed. "I'm going to investigate!"

"No—wait!" gasped Sharon, her face rather pale.

She glanced at June, and the girl detective nodded. Together, they hurried to the darkened study, and June pulled back the curtain that screened the spy-hole.

Then a cry escaped Sharon's lips, and June caught in her breath sharply.

For the bronze leopard had disappeared—again!

Just then, from the grounds outside, came a sound of running footsteps—the crack of a revolver.

"I'm going out!" shouted Dick. He burst out on to the terrace, followed by June, with Sharon holding tightly to her arm.

On the moonlit terrace a surprising sight greeted them. Ali, the native servant, was struggling with a man in chauffeur's uniform, who held a smoking revolver in his hand.

"Good work, Ali!" exclaimed a familiar voice, and Noel Raymond sprang from the bushes, followed by a uniformed constable.

The chauffeur was sent sprawling, and a pair of handcuffs was snapped on his wrists.

"Watch him, Ali," jerked Noel. "That's the fellow who's been causing the scares—but he was acting under instructions. I fancy that we'll find the real trickster in the museum."

They found the museum door ajar, and someone moving inside. As Noel flung the door wide, June gasped.

She saw the bronze leopard still on its pedestal—and kneeling beside it, in the act of removing the chain, was—Miss Esther Norton!

"Aunt—Aunt Esther!" cried Sharon, in horrified bewilderment.

The woman sprang to her feet, to find her way barred by Noel. Sternly the young detective seized her by the arm.

"Well," he asked, "I think we need

an explanation, Miss Norton—badly." "I—I don't know what you mean!" gasped Miss Norton. "Kindly release my arm."

"Not until you explain," Noel said firmly. "Why were you removing the chain from the leopard?"

"Please!" With a sudden twist Miss Norton freed herself, and edged towards the window. "I—I can't think what makes you—"

But June's quick eyes had seen the sheet of paper clenched in her hand.

"Nunky, look out!" she cried. Noel sprang swiftly, whipped the paper from her hand and scanned it.

"As I suspected, Miss Norton—the scares were planned by you!" he declared sternly. "This letter is from your father, Sharon—and was deliberately concealed from you by your aunt."

Her face pale and bewildered, Sharon read the letter.

"Daddy—daddy urges me to take immediate steps to contact the curator of the local museum, and to have the bronze leopard removed for safe-keeping. He's learnt that priceless jewels are concealed in the pedestal—"

An excited murmur went up and Noel turned to the cringing woman.

"You planned deliberately to frighten your niece and the servants away from the house, so that you could have the leopard removed secretly and broken up. I purposely left you the key to that chain—to trap you into giving yourself away."

"But, nunky, burst out June as the baffled trickster was led away. "I still don't understand. How—how did the leopard move—how did it disappear?"

Noel smiled.

"That was a clever trick that baffled me for a time," he said. "Actually, of course, the bronze leopard never moved from its pedestal! Let me show you."

While June and the others looked on in amazement, Noel climbed on a chair and examined the spy-hole that communicated with the professor's study. Shattering the glass, he inserted his hand—pulling out a wooden box fitted with lenses and an oblong card.

With a dry smile, he passed the card to June.

She gasped, staring blankly at two sets of photographs—one pair showing the museum, with the leopard on its pedestal; the other, almost identical—but with the leopard cunningly blotted out.

"Why—it's a stereoscope!" exclaimed Dick Marlow.

"Precisely!" said Noel. "You've all seen a similar apparatus before, I imagine. It is a simple apparatus used to make postcard views more realistic. When you thought you were looking into the museum, you were actually looking at one of these photos. The card could be moved secretly by Miss Norton to create the effect—while her confederate, the chauffeur, caused a scare in the grounds."

"But how did you tumble to the truth, nunky?" asked June.

"That was simple," said Noel. "The whole trick depended on the objects in the museum being identical with those in the photograph. What Miss Norton overlooked was that the leopard had been shifted slightly by Ali during his periodical dustings since the photos were taken—and that difference aroused my suspicions."

Sudden enlightenment dawned in June's eyes.

"So that was why you made the 'magic' circle!" she exclaimed. "To test your theory? Oh, of course!"

Noel's eyes twinkled.

"I'm sorry I mystified you, June," he said. "But, at the time, I couldn't be sure of Ali—and I had to take precautions!"

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday Noel and June have exciting adventures in THE HOUSE OF WEIRD HAPPENINGS.