

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

Week
Ending
Oct. 16th,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

In This Week's Entertaining Story Percy The Robot Becomes A Ghost—
By DAPHNE GRAYSON

PERCY GETS PEPPERED

"THE Haunted Caves! It's creepy here!" murmured Fay Manners. "I feel as if we're going ghost-hunting!" said Johnny Briggs excitedly.

Sally Warner smiled a trifle grimly in the tropical twilight.

"It's no ghost we're after, but a real live crook!" she said.

"Carl Kohler by name," added Don Weston. "I haven't seen a sign of anybody, yet. I wonder if we've got here first?"

The four chums—students from the College Ship, which was making a brief call at Taniki Island, in the South Seas—peered cautiously round the rocks among which they were concealed.

Some fifty yards away was a towering cliff, glinting a dull red in the fiery rays of the setting sun.

Sunset on Taniki, Sally & Co. tingled with excitement, thinking of a message which had come into their hands—a message intended for Carl Kohler, the mysterious bearded man whom they were tracking down.

"Haunted Caves—after sundown," that message had said.

The significance of those words they were here to find out. And now the crucial time was fast approaching.

"What's our next move, Sally?" asked Don.

Sally was the acknowledged leader of the chums who called themselves the Merry-makers. Her keen brain was working swiftly but coolly.

"Search round," she replied. "We haven't found the actual entrance to the caves yet. We want to do that before darkness comes."

Already the shadows were lengthening as the sun dropped lower and lower in the flaming sky.

"Wait!" said Sally suddenly. "Don't move yet!"

She had seen what looked like a deep gash in the face of the cliff. And then, just as she was surmising that that must be the entrance to the Haunted Caves, two figures had emerged.

"Two natives," whispered Fay. "I wonder if they're anything to do with Kohler?"

The islanders came through an opening in the wire barrier which enclosed that slit in the cliff. Jabbering to each other, they crossed over to a small hut built of bamboo-poles and palm-leaves. A few minutes later they left the hut, chanting a melodious South Seas song as they disappeared down a track through a palm-grove.

"Workers from the caves," guessed Sally. "Finished for the day and going home. Come on, Merry-makers! It's time we investigated those caves."

But she only took a couple of steps forward, and then came to a dead stop again. Two more figures had appeared, evidently having been concealed among some rocks.

Sally & Co. suddenly tensed, their hearts beating faster. No mistaking one of those figures—a burly, thick-set man dressed in a white linen suit, with a bushy beard adorning his cruel-looking face.

"Carl Kohler!" hissed Johnny. "And that's the native we saw running away from Martelli's Dive this afternoon after he'd delivered that message. We're too late—"

"I don't think so," broke in Sally. "They've been waiting for those two men to come out of the caves. Perhaps that was the significance of the message—telling Kohler that he could get in after sundown. Look, they're going in now. Follow them—but don't let them see us!"

The chums crept forward, quivering with excitement, hoping that soon they would discover what Carl Kohler's game on Taniki was, and

that they would be able to expose him for the crook they believed him to be. Nor must they fail. Dire trouble awaited Sally & Co. if their suspicions proved unfounded or if they failed to outwit their quarry.

To follow Kohler they had left the College Ship against orders that morning, defying the headmaster's ban to do so. Now it was evening, and their punishment would be drastic if they could not justify their actions.

They saw the bearded man enter the cave. And then they received a shock. The big, fuzzy-headed native turned back and stood by the wire barrier. It was obvious that he was stationed there to guard the entrance to the cave.

"Golly, that's upset the apple-cart!" gasped Sally in dismay. "Quick—dodge into this hut before he spots us!"

The native had started striding up and down like a sentry, and just in time Sally & Co. darted into the small hut. There they stood, palpitating and startled by this unexpected setback. Nor was their dismay in any way eased when they saw that the native was armed with a rifle. A very ancient rifle it looked, true, but the danger of it could not be ignored.

"Oh, gosh!" muttered Sally anxiously. "If only we could frighten him somehow or lure him away—" She paused. "With a ghost, for instance. After all, these are called the Haunted Caves."

"And how do you propose to rustle up a ghost at a second's notice?" scoffed Johnny.

"There's some white distemper here," said Don, looking round the hut. "We could smother you with it, Johnny—"

"Distemper! That's it!" broke in Sally excitedly.

"Wh? Look here, if you think you're

going to pour a pot of distemper over me—

"Not you, Johnny!" Sally's eyes were gleaming. "But there's Percy!"

The others looked excited then. Percy was the robot which had been invented by "Slick" Kaplin, a friend of theirs on the College Ship. The dummy was uncannily life-like, and had been so constructed that he was the living image of Professor Willard, the headmaster. It was because of this amazing likeness that Sally & Co. had managed to wangle their way ashore without leave.

Percy had already helped them out of a number of scrapes during their adventures in tracking down Carl Kohler, but on approaching the caves they had left him hidden in a near-by palm-grove.

"You mean turn Percy into a ghost?" asked Fay breathlessly.

"That's the wheeze!" Sally said. "Grab up that distemper, Don, and the brush! Then we'll slip out and get Percy as soon as the coast is clear."

Two minutes later, when the native's back was turned, they darted out of the hut and through the trees. Five minutes later they had located the robot.

Percy lay sprawled among some undergrowth, dressed in flowing gown and mortar-board.

"Can't have him looking like a headmaster," Sally said. "Fay, we'll plait him a grass skirt out of this tall grass while the boys get on with the painting."

In a few minutes Percy was transformed. Instead of the scholastic attire, a grass skirt hung round his middle, and he had been daubed with the white distemper from waxen head to waxen feet.

"Golly, Slick would have a heart attack if he could see his precious Percy now!" chuckled Sally. "But it'll wash off. How's he look?"

By pressing a lever, Percy had "come to life," the arms and legs stiffening at the joints so that the robot looked uncannily like a human figure as it stood there.

"Goodness, I wouldn't like to meet him in the dark!" murmured Fay. "But what now, Sally?"

Sally was turning the robot so that it faced in the direction of the pacing sentry and would have a clear run through the trees. Then she pressed another switch.

There was a faint whirring sound. Percy's legs began moving, and the robot went striding forward at full speed.

"Oooooo-er!" wailed Sally & Co. in their most ghostly sounding voices. "Oooooo-er!"

Kaka, the native sentry, heard that wailing from the direction of the palm-grove. He swung round, and his eyes almost popped out of his head.

For from those trees had suddenly appeared a figure that filled his whole superstitious being with fear. Eerily white it was in the moonlight.

"Tis the ghost of Menititi returned to the Haunted Caves!" babbled Kaka in his native tongue. And then he remembered the rifle he carried.

Tremblingly he raised it, pressed the trigger,

Ba-a-ang!
Sally & Co., peering from among the trees, gasped as a spray of buckshot peppered Percy. But the robot went stalking on as if nothing had happened—and at that Kaka gave a shrill scream. It was the ghost of Menititi—it must be, for not even a white man's rifle had stopped that awful apparition drawing ever nearer to him.

Kaka suddenly found the use of his limbs. With another terrified scream, he took to his heels.

And as he went, Sally & Co. ran forward, overtaking Percy just as the robot would have crashed into the wire barrier.

"All clear!" chortled Don. "Good old Sally! She's done it again!"
"You mean Percy has!" laughed Sally, quickly slipping gown and mortar-board on to the dummy again.

"There, he's been promoted from ghost back to headmaster! And now—on with the hunt, Merry-makers!"



IN THE HAUNTED CAVES

Sally led the way through the gash in the towering cliff. The moonlight was left behind as they plunged into the darkness of the caves. She cautiously switched on a torch.

The beam slashed through the darkness, revealing a steeply sloping, rocky path which led downwards into the heart of the cliff. Then the tunnel widened, and Sally & Co. found themselves in a lofty, rock-walled cavern.

"No sign of Kohler," whispered Don, and was startled as his voice echoed eerily within the cave. "Let's move on to the next one—"

"Ssssh!" hissed Sally, suddenly switching off her torch.

Darkness enveloped the chums, but not complete darkness. Hearts began to thud as they saw a faint glow of light over to the right of them—coming from the adjoining cave.

Sally tiptoed forward. Her chums crept after her, Don guiding Percy, the robot. Palpitating with suspense, keyed up and wondering what they would see, they peered into the next cave.

A lantern burned in the centre of the floor. And lying beside it was a pick, resting over a large hole which had been dug in the floor.

"He's been digging for something!" hissed Don. "But I can't see him anywhere. Come on—inside! He must have gone off—"

"I haven't gone! I heard you coming—and now I've got you!"

In ringing echoes that voice crashed through the cave. The shock was shattering, and for one awful moment the chums were transfixed. Then Sally swung round, to see Carl Kohler emerge from the shadows. And in his right hand was something that glinted dully in the glow from the lantern—a revolver!

"Make one move, and it'll be your last!" Kohler warned harshly. "I guessed it would be you four—and now you've got your headmaster with you, eh?" he added, glaring across at the robot, which Don had left standing against one of the walls. "Looking a bit pale, aren't you? Guess you should keep your students in order, then you wouldn't meet with these shocks. Well, since they're so mighty interested in my movements, they can now make themselves useful."

"What—what do you mean?" Sally asked.

"You can carry on digging that hole until you find what I've come here for!" the bearded man rapped. "Get busy!"

"Look here, you rotter—" Johnny began, with an angry snort. "Get busy, I said!"

Furious, but helpless, Sally & Co. could do nothing but obey.

Rock after rock they pulled and levered out of the hole. Sally tore one of her nails; Fay's fingers began to bleed. But Kohler watched unpitifully, a sardonic glim in his eyes.

"Say, your headmaster isn't doing much!" he jeered, staring across at the motionless robot again. "Gone dumb, too—"

"Gosh, what's this?" exclaimed Johnny at that moment. "Looks like a canvas bag—"

"That's what I want!" broke in the bearded man. "Get it out. Put it carefully on the floor. In that bag is a fortune—yes, a fortune. In it are hundreds of the loveliest pearls found off Taniki over the last two years! And I stole 'em!"

Sally drew in a hissing breath. So that was the man's secret—this was the explanation of why he had come back to Taniki.

Slowly he advanced towards the spot where Johnny had put the canvas bag. Gloatingly triumphant,

knowing he had these students at his mercy, Carl Kohler felt in a boastful mood. He told them how he had had to hide the pearls because he could not get them away from the island, and how he had schemed to make everybody think he was dead, so that he could return to Taniki in another guise and collect them. He told why he had destroyed Sally's painting on board the College Ship—that picture of hers which had shown his red sailing-boat. Knowing that the painting might be taken ashore, he had feared that the sailing-boat would be recognised and suspicion aroused against himself.

In tight-lipped silence Sally & Co. listened. Now they knew Carl Kohler for the ruthless crook he was.

"Yes, and my plans are laid," sneered the man. "You're staying in these caves until they're opened up again to-morrow morning—until I've escaped!"

The chums' eyes widened in horror. "You—you crook! You won't dare do that!" cried Don.

"You'll soon see if I dare do it. Now hand me that bag!"

He came forward, the gun still in his hand, stooping a little in readiness to receive the bag of pearls. It was Sally who stepped forward. Her gaze had been upon the pick which Johnny had left standing upright. And now, with startling suddenness, she acted.

Down came her foot, stamping on the side of the pick. The wooden handle whizzed forward, striking Kohler's hand and making him drop the revolver.

He gave a howl of rage. Sally swooped to pick up the canvas bag. "Grab him!" roared Don.

But that moment of triumph for the chums was short-lived. Suddenly there was the sound of running footsteps, and the big, fuzzy-headed native who earlier had been guarding the caves came rushing in, having recovered from his fright produced by Percy, the ghost.

"Don't let them get out, Kaka!" yelled Kohler.

Sally's heart was thumping wildly. Until the arrival of the native the odds had been in their favour. But, though there were four of them, they would stand no chance against these two powerful men.

"Bolt!" she cried, leaping across to the wall and setting Percy in motion. "This way!"

She ran deeper into the caves and her chums followed.

On they rushed, following the beam of Sally's torch, which she had now switched on. And after them peeted Carl Kohler and his native helper.

"We've got 'em!" yelled the crook. "We've got 'em cornered! They can't get out of the caves this way!"



THE HEAD IS GRATEFUL

"Sally, we're trapped!"

Don's voice was heavy with despair.

"Not yet!" panted Sally, as she rushed on.

"Don, take charge of Percy for a moment."

And, as Don did so, he stared in amazement. For Sally had swiftly thrust the bag of pearls into her pocket, had tilted it up and was emptying it of its precious contents.

"Right! Now turn Percy round."

And then Sally raised her voice to a shout. "I've given the Head the pearls, and he's going to make a dash for it. They surely won't harm the poor old Head!"

Percy, the robot, was now facing the other way. Sally pressed two switches, and thrust the empty bag into a crack in the dummy's plating, so that the top of it just showed.

The robot shot off at full speed, arms flailing up and down. Kohler, rushing along the wide, straight gallery which connected the caves, saw that figure charging towards him like a whirlwind. He had heard

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The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

By GAIL WESTERN

where he had left his own mount. The double reins held in one hand, he vaulted into the saddle, then set off down the canyon.

DANGER IN THE CAVE

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.

As a result of the scheming of Nathaniel Garsten, a rascally neighbouring rancher, Larry was arrested, and the sheriff declared that his horse, Prince, was to be impounded. Merle hid the horse, which she wanted to ride in the Gold Rider race, in a cave in the hills.

On the morning before the race she learnt that Larry had escaped, and when she visited the cave she heard someone talking to Prince. At first she thought it must be Larry, but when she peered round the bushes she saw it was a sinister masked figure—the mystery traitor about whom Larry had warned her!

THE mystery traitor intended to make off with Prince.

Having discovered where the black horse was hidden, he meant to make absolutely certain that Merle did not ride it in the relay race to-morrow.

There was consternation in Merle's eyes as she stood there in the entrance to the secret cave, watching the masked man untying the halter.

To think that this man was employed by her! To think that all this time, while posing as a loyal member of the Happy Valley staff, he had actually been plotting against her!

But who could he be? Merle had not the slightest idea, but sudden anger against the man made her leap impulsively forward.

"You—you hateful double-crosser!" she burst out furiously. "So I've caught you red-handed at last! Take off that mask—"

The traitor whirled, tensed. Then he saw her and, quickly recovering from the first shock, laughed harshly.

"So it's you, eh?" he muttered, obviously disguising his voice. "And you want my mask off! Waal, guess you're unlucky. Stand back, you little fool!" he added harshly, whipping out a revolver. "You're going to watch me take off Larry Denvers' horse—an' like it!"

He laughed mockingly as Merle involuntarily recoiled from the revolver. She stood with clenched fists, eyes blazing. It was unbearable to watch passively as the traitor rode off with Larry's horse.

Suddenly she remembered the Happy Valley cowboys at work on the near-by range.

"The boys will stop you!" she cried. "And when they learn the truth—when they unmask you—they'll help me to hide Prince until the race!"

And she recklessly whirled and made to dash from the cave.

"Stop!" he yelled. "Stop—or I shoot!"

Merle hesitated, an awful sense of fear suddenly gripping her. Yet somehow she forced herself to laugh scornfully.

"You daren't shoot! Even if the boys couldn't hear my shout they'd hear a shot—and come to investigate!"

For a moment the traitor's gun hand wavered uncertainly, and, screwing up her courage, Merle rushed forward again, sprinting out of the cave and down the winding canyon.

She heard heavy footsteps behind her. The traitor was in pursuit. Panting, Merle ran as never before. She saw her chestnut horse nibbling the grass not a hundred yards ahead. If only she could reach him!

"Pommie!" she gasped. "Pommie!" The chestnut heard her, looked up, and began to trot forward. She felt a thrill of hope.

And then it happened. A rope noose came whirling through the air, dropped over her head, and tightened viciously about her arms.

On leaving the cave the traitor had snatched up a lasso!

Merle had no chance. A brutal tug brought her off her feet, and before she could shout the masked man was at her side, clapping a hand over her mouth.

"Guess you need a lesson!" he snarled. "And you're goin' to get it! So you reckoned on winnin' the Gold Rider trophy to-morrow, did you? Waal, I'll take good care you don't. I've got Larry Denvers' hoss—and now I've got you!"

Held helpless—unable to shout; hardly able to move—Merle shivered as she found herself looking up into his masked face and saw the ruthless gleam in his eyes.

"You're comin' with me," he went on. "Garsten and me are takin' no more risks. Until after the race to-morrow Prince is goin' to be kept shut up, and you'll stay with him."

His words struck Merle with the force of a physical blow, and her captor laughed as he saw her distress. Quickly he set to work to gag and bind her, and for once Merle was too numb and dazed to put up any resistance.

All her hopes were shattered! Now it would be Celia Garsten, and not herself, who would win the Gold Rider; who would secure the precious secret that was hidden in the trophy.

True Larry had escaped from the lock-up—true he was free—but futile to think he could rescue her. He had no suspicion of her peril, and though her disappearance was bound to create a sensation, though there was bound to be a search for her, the mystery traitor would take good care that she was not found.

His work done, the masked man slung her roughly across Pommie's saddle and gave the chestnut's reins a savage tug that forced him forward.

Having collected Prince from the cave, the traitor led the two horses to



THE NOTE THAT BLUFFED MAMMIE

Tap, tap! Seated by the kitchen fire that evening, frowning at the sheet of paper she clutched in one ebony

hand, Mammie straightened up, with a start.

"Who am that?" she called. There came no reply, but from outside there came another cautious knock.

Pocketing the paper, the plump housekeeper rose to her feet and waddled across the flagged floor.

"Suppose it am one of the cowboys come to soft-soap me for another helping of pudding," she muttered. "I shure do think they am hollow—they eat so much. Never have I—"

And then she stopped, her face registering first delight, then alarm, as she opened the door.

"Massa Larry!" she gasped. For it was the young cowboy who had escaped that morning who stood there on the doorstep.

"Come in!" she cried, holding the door wide open. "Quick now—before any of those wooden-headed cow-punchers see you. And you must be hungry. Sit down while I get you some pie—real pie this time, not one with a file in it!"

She winked, and, stepping into the kitchen, Larry gave her a hug.

"You're simply swell, Mammie," he told her. "Guess but for you I'd still be behind bars; but I'm afraid I've no time for supper. I shouldn't have come at all if it hadn't been for Merle. I simply had to have a word with her. Never mind about supper, there's a honey. Go and tell Merle I'm here."

But the plump negress did not move, and all at once her cheery grin began to fade.

"But that is jest what I can't do, Massa Larry."

He stared at her. "What do you mean?"

"Jest that Missy Merle ain't here."

"Not—not here?" The face that usually held a look of sardonic amusement went suddenly grim. He clutched at her arm. "Then where is she?"

Mammie shook her head helplessly. "I don't know, Massa Larry. She didn't say. You see— But you shure had better read her note for yourself."

And pushing a plump hand into the pocket of her apron, she produced the sheet of paper she had been studying when Larry had knocked on the door.

"I was jest puzzling over it when you come," she explained. "A piccanniny delivered it not ten minutes ago."

The young cowboy took the paper and quickly scanned what was written there in a bold, girlish handwriting:

"Have decided it would be safer to stay away from the ranch until

after the race, so am taking Prince away from Broken Canyon to a new hiding-place. Don't worry—I'll be all right."

And underneath was scrawled Merle's Christian name.

Larry looked up sharply. "Are you sure that this is Merle's writing?" he asked. Mammie shook her head decisively.

"I not really know, Massa Larry. I shure isn't much of a scholar and all writing looks alike to me, but it certainly am very strange that Missy Merle say nuthin' about staying away before she left."

Larry looked at the note again and the suspicion in his eyes deepened.

"This looks more like Celia Garsten's handwriting than Merle's," he declared. "I'm afraid you've been tricked, Mammie."

"Tricked, Massa Larry?" "Yep." "Screwing up the note, Larry flung it into the fire. "I'm pretty certain that that note was a forgery."

Mammie rolled her eyes in startled amazement, and then she flung up her plump arms in fear.

"Then something must have happened to Missy Merle!" she wailed. "Oh, Massa Larry, what's become of her? What's become of her?"

Larry shook his head and put a soothing arm around her quivering shoulders.

"Fraid I don't know, but don't you worry. Guess I mean to find out."

He gave her another reassuring squeeze, then cautiously opened the kitchen door and peered out. The coast was clear; the cowboys were still at supper.

"Good!" he murmured. And, with a final wave at the tearful Mammie, went running across to the stables.

Helping himself to one of the horses there, he rode off, heading for Broken Canyon. There he hoped to pick up some clue which would enable him to decide whether or not that note had really been a cunning fake sent to allay suspicion—a clue which might reveal what exactly had become of Merle.

He had barely passed through into the canyon when something lying on the ground attracted his attention. It was a stetson hat.

Leaping off his horse, he snatched it up and examined it in the moonlight that was now flooding the canyon.

"Merle's!" he ejaculated. "Then she—"

With keen eyes he peered down at the ground. The marks there were unmistakable. There had been a struggle, and there, away to the left, was a treble trail of hoofprints.

His face grimmer than it ever had been before, Larry remounted his horse and set to work to trail those prints. Now he was convinced he knew the worst.

Merle had been kidnapped. Prince, too, no doubt. And he could guess who had done it.

"That darned traitor," he muttered. "The coyote aims to prevent Merle from racin'-to-morrow mornin'. Waal, I guess he's got another think comin' to him. And if he's hurt Merle—"

Out of the canyon and across the Happy Valley range the telltale trail led. Then, as the open prairie was reached, it became fainter and fainter—impossible to follow in the moonlight.

Baffled, the young cowboy peered about him.

For miles the prairie stretched. The kidnapper might have taken one of a dozen trails.

Larry's lips set in a grim, angry line. He hated to admit defeat, yet what could he possibly do?

If only he were not a fugitive, he thought. Then he could broadcast his suspicions; organize a search party. But he was a hunted man—liable to be shot at sight. No one would listen to his fantastic story. At the best he would only be clapped back in the lock-up if he sought help.

His fingers tightened on the reins until the knuckles shone white. He

was thinking of Merle—of the race to-morrow morning and what it meant to her. Unless she could win the Gold Rider she could never hope to find the mysterious secret left behind by the eccentric old prospector—the secret which he was convinced was so important to the future of Happy Valley Ranch.

"I've got to find her somehow—got to rescue her," he muttered. "But how—"

He stopped, his eyes narrowing. There was one man who could tell him where Merle had been imprisoned.

The mystery traitor himself! But the traitor was now undoubtedly in the Happy Valley bunkhouse, surrounded by his fellow cowboys, and no one but Larry suspected his identity. It would be madness for Larry to venture back there. Besides, even if he could get face to face with the traitor, how could he hope to force him to talk?

For a few moments more he sat there, then into his eyes crept a devil-may-care gleam.

"Guess there's one way, and one way only," he murmured. And, tugging on the reins, he swung his horse round.

Another second and he was riding back towards Happy Valley—riding not cautiously and secretly but in full view, careless of discovery—riding at a mad, reckless pace that matched his desperate mood.



LARRY'S RAID ON THE RANCH!

"What about one more tune, boys, before we turn in?"

Slim Harris looked inquiringly around the crowded dining-

hut, and there came a roar of approval from Jake Binns and the rest.

"Yep!" "That's the idea!" "Come on, Ted, strike up!"

Perched on the corner of the long deal table, the burly Ted Gardner grinned and obligingly picked up his ukulele.

"What's it to be, pard?" he inquired. "Mountain Trail" or—

But that was as far as he got, for suddenly there came an unexpected interruption. The door swung open and a lazy, sardonic voice drawled out:

"Sorry to break up the party, folks."

Everyone swung round, and then an amazed, almost incredulous gasp went up at sight of the slim figure that stood in the doorway, fingers nonchalantly hitched in his belt.

"Denvers!" "That darned rustler!"

For a moment the cowboys could hardly believe their own eyes. It seemed unbelievable that Larry should risk re-capture by coming here.

"Tired of freedom, eh?" roared Ted Gardner. "Waal, it'll be a real pleasure to put you back behind bars again."

And, dropping his ukulele, he made a grab at his holster that lay on the table; but his lunging hand never reached it, for that calm figure spoke again.

"If you take my advice, buddy, you won't try and monkey around with guns. It's liable to make me nervy."

And now something that gleamed threateningly appeared in Larry's right hand. Ted Gardner straightened up as if shot, for a revolver was pointing straight at him, and though the young cowboy's attitude was still nonchalant, almost casual, yet there was something about his manner that warned them all that he was in grim earnest.

That sardonic gleam which Merle knew so well back in his steel-grey eyes, Larry scanned the silent, glowering group, his gun fanning to and fro, covering first one, then another.

"Guess some of you guys don't get enough exercise," he drawled. "So what about a little arms stretch

routine? Come on—all together! Arms up!"

That lazy, mocking tone made the cowboys see red, but they dared not disobey, and Larry grinned again as a forest of hands went up.

"Keep 'em well up. I'd hate to see anyone gettin' tired."

"Look here, what's this tomfoolery mean?" burst out Jake Binns.

"Yep; what do you want?" snapped Slim Harris, the young foreman.

Larry shrugged his slim shoulders.

"Oh, just a friendly little chat with one of you!" he drawled.

"A chat?" echoed Slim blankly. Larry nodded.

"Sure. A feller gets kinda lonesome on his own, y'know, so I thought one of you fellers wouldn't mind ridin' back with me. I know a nice quiet spot where we can have a real heart-to-heart talk."

"Talk!" snorted Jack Binns. "You must be crazy if you think any of us has anything to say to a rustler like you."

"Oh, but you're wrong!" protested Larry. "One of you has something really interestin' he can tell me."

And slowly his steely gaze travelled around the hut. Most of the cowboys were looking puzzled as well as angry. Only one of them—the mystery traitor—guessed what Larry was getting at, and he made no sign.

"Look here—" began Ted Gardner.

But Larry checked him. His gaze had come to rest on a figure seated by the stove.

"I reckon you're the feller I want," he said quietly.

The figure did not move. A moment of silence, then one of the cowboys made a snatch at his gun that lay on a shelf. But if he hoped to catch Larry off his guard he was rudely disillusioned.

Crack!

The young cowboy's gun spat flame and smoke, and the other man gave a howl as his revolver was shot from his hand. It clattered to the floor, and Larry gazed warningly around.

"I've no quarrel with most of you, so you'd best not interfere," he said. "It's only this guy I'm interested in." Again his steel-grey eyes went to the figure by the stove. "Come on, get to your feet and follow me."

Still the figure did not stir. Larry's gun swung grimly.

"I'll give you until I count three!" he snapped. "If you're not movin' by then—"

He left the sentence unfinished. There was a second or two of electric suspense, then slowly he began to count. "One—two—"

"Beds of perspiration on his face, the man at whom the gun pointed stumbled to his feet.

"Get outside and mount the hoss you'll find there," ordered Larry.

Slowly, furiously, the man obeyed. Just as furiously the rest of the cowboys watched. Believing Larry to be a treacherous outlaw, they would have shot him down if they had dared. But that tensely held gun and the audacity of the young cowboy who had so calmly walked into their midst held them spellbound.

One after the other, captor and captive passed through the doorway, and not until the door had banged behind them did the pent-up feelings in the hut find expression.

"Come on, after him!" "That pesky rustler must ha' gone crazy!"

A wild rush was made for the holsters strewn about the room. Guns were snatched out, and in a yelling mob the cowboys plunged out into the yard.

But Larry had already mounted his horse, and in front of him, Larry's gun stuck in his ribs, was the man he had so daringly kidnapped.

"Guess I've got you, and I'm not going to let you go until you've told me the truth about Merle Wason," the young cowboy declared grimly.

And, oblivious of the shouts and shots that came from behind, he sent the horse galloping forward.

Who is the traitor—and what will Larry be able to learn from him? See next week's enthralling instalment.

Shock Of His Life

The **FOURTH** **GREY** **GHOST**

By DOROTHY PAGE



THE CLOCK TOWER SURROUNDED

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, also known as the "Wasp," and to prove the innocence of Glynn Tracy, a boy who had been expelled. Calling herself the "Fourth Grey Ghost," Penelope appeared at a meeting of the secret society and offered to help it. She managed to secure a plan which gave the location of a secret room in the school belfry that Hugh Mason, the leader of the Grey Ghosts, was anxious to find.

While in the clock tower Penelope and the three hooded boys were trapped by Mr. Aspell and a group of senior boys.

Two of the Grey Ghosts managed to escape, but it looked as if Penelope and Hugh, who were on the roof, must be caught.

"NO. 4, I'm sorry, but we're trapped."

Those quiet words of Hugh's still rang in Penelope's ears. They chilled her, for she knew they were true.

Side by side, grey robes rustling in the wind, they peered over the parapet. Below it was just possible to pick out Mr. Aspell and the seniors who ringed the clock tower.

"They're waiting," Hugh gritted. "The Wasp's sure of his capture. But they won't wait long. Soon they'll rush the tower—"

He broke off and turned.

"I don't know who you are," he said steadily, "but this is tough for you—just after you've joined us." He hesitated; his figure seemed to straighten. "There's a chance that I might get you clear."

She heard that wonderingly; her heart leapt.

"Get me clear? What do you mean?"

He crossed to the trapdoor, the wind whipping his robe about his figure, and pointed downwards.

"This is my plan, No. 4. We go down together. When we get to the door, I'll rush out and try to break through the ring. They'll probably converge on me. That'll be your chance to slip away unseen. With luck you may make it."

Penelope caught her breath as he finished speaking.

"But—but you?" she whispered.

In the gloom he seemed to give a tiny shrug.

"I'm the leader of the Grey Ghosts," he said simply. "It's right that I take the bigger risk."

Penelope felt a tiny, choky feeling in her throat. His sparkling courage steadied her own nerves. Her chin came up and resolutely she faced his dark, robed figure,

"Let's make a dash together, No. 1; take an equal chance—"

"No!" he cut in sharply. "We should both be caught—"

"Which means," she flashed, "that you know that if you try to break out first you wouldn't have a chance! You're just going to sacrifice yourself to save me!"

He gave a soft, rather grim laugh. "You've got me there, No. 4. But it's not only just to save you. Don't you see, man—"

He stepped closer, his voice very quiet and earnest.

"The Grey Ghosts must go on, No. 4! The fight for Glynn Tracy and against the tyranny of the Wasp must go on. We've all pledged ourselves to that, and that comes before the personal safety of any one of us. When—if—I'm caught, you and Nos. 2 and 3 must carry on the fight!"

Again she felt strangely thrilled. Oh, what a grand chap Hugh was! He was willing to make such a tremendous sacrifice that must inevitably mean expulsion in disgrace.

"No!" Impulsively she burst out. "Oh, no, Hugh, I can't let you—"

She snapped short. He had caught her arm, cowed head bent forward.

"Hugh!" he repeated sharply.

"Then you know who I am?"

Penelope smiled rather shakily. The name had slipped out.

"Yes, Hugh, I know," she said softly, her voice almost lost in the night breeze. "I've known a long time."

He was startled.

"I wonder how," he said slowly. "It's strange. Everything about you is strange, No. 4. You don't even sound like one of the chaps. I just can't place you. But that doesn't matter now, anyway. We're wasting time. Come on! My plan's the only one."

But she stood still, calmly shaking her cowed head. She knew now what she was going to do. The decision had suddenly come, making her pulses leap.

"No, Hugh. There's another, better way—a better chance. I—I didn't want to do this, but—"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

She drew a deep breath.

"I—I'm going to tell you who I am!"

He stared at her blankly.

"But what difference will that make?" he asked.

With a shaky smile, Penelope lifted a hand to her hood.

"A great deal of difference, Hugh. You see, I'm the Head's daughter."

"What!" He gaped at her, then he gave an exasperated gasp. "Look here, this isn't the time for idiotic jokes!" he cried.

"But it isn't a joke, Hugh," said Penelope, and this time spoke clearly in her own voice. "No. 4 is—always has been—Penelope Cartwright."

And slowly she slipped back her hood, letting the breeze toss her

curls. As Hugh saw them he gasped again.

"By gosh! A—a girl!" he exclaimed. Penelope nodded.

"Yes; are you sorry?" she said softly.

He didn't seem to hear. He had brushed back his own hood and was still staring, running a hand dazedly over his forehead.

"Miss Cartwright!" he muttered unsteadily. "It's you who is No. 4! It's you who has done all these things! But—but it can't be!"

"But it is, Hugh! I know you—Oh, listen!" Penelope stiffened. She had caught the sound of a very distant but clear voice giving some sort of order. It came from below. She caught urgently at Hugh's arm.

"That was the Wasp! We must be quick—get my plan into action!"

He steadied, breathing fast, still shaken.

"Miss Cartwright, look—I—I just can't grasp this yet. But"—shaking his head, he wonderingly stared at her—"this settles it! You can't keep in this—you, a girl—"

She almost shook his arm.

"Hugh, I knew you'd talk like that, but you mustn't!" she said fiercely. "Yes, I'm a girl—but have you forgotten that No. 4 has helped before! Listen to me, Hugh—listen to my plan! You've got to!"

In that moment, with Hugh dazed, it was she who became leader.

"There's a chance, if we can bluff, that we'll both get clear," she pressed swiftly. "And, Hugh, think of the Grey Ghosts. Isn't it better that you, their leader, should be safe—that we should all be safe to carry on the fight?"

"But—"

"Oh, I know!" she cried almost angrily. "I'm a girl, eh? So what? Can't girls have nerve, too, and take a chance? I won't let you throw yourself away and get expelled! I won't! Do you hear?"

Head up, eyes sparkling, flushed, she gazed at him. Her words, or perhaps the challenging, reckless ring in her voice struck him to silence.

"We can discuss everything afterwards, Hugh," she went on more quietly. "Now we must act quickly. Please listen to my plan."

At last the tallest shifted restlessly and turned, peering at the boy on his right.

"Smecke, warn the others that we're closing in on the tower. I am waiting no longer for those young scoundrels to come out!"

"Right, sir! Leave it to me, sir!"

And Smecke, the toady, hastened off eagerly. Mr. Aspell waited a few more seconds before touching the arm of Nicholas Bentley, head prefect of Harcourt.

"Bentley, follow me." He drew a deep breath of hard satisfaction. "At last, Bentley, we shall have our hands on the Grey Ghosts! We shall con-

A SURPRISE FOR THE WASP



Three shadowy figures stood opposite the arched doorway of the clock tower. They were still and tense.

At last the tallest shifted restlessly and turned, peering at the boy on his right.

"Smecke, warn the others that we're closing in on the tower. I am waiting no longer for those young scoundrels to come out!"

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"Bentley, follow me." He drew a deep breath of hard satisfaction. "At last, Bentley, we shall have our hands on the Grey Ghosts! We shall con-

pletely surprise them—unmask them! Flopping and expulsion will follow!"

Bentley said nothing. The vindictive triumph in the senior master's voice was not pleasant to hear.

Mr. Aspell slipped a cane from under his gown and strode cat-like towards the arched door of the clock tower. Bentley followed slowly. To right and left he saw the dim figures of the other seniors closing in round the base of the tower. He grimaced. The Grey Ghosts were trapped all right.

"Suppose they've asked for it," he mused. "But one can't help admiring their nerve. And Aspell seems so dashed gloating—"

His thoughts broke off. Mr. Aspell had paused, excited.

"Bentley! Listen, boy! They are there, coming to the door. Be prepared! And not a sound!"

They listened, Mr. Aspell breathing hard and fast. True enough, from beyond the heavy, closed door voices could be heard, coming nearer.

"Thank goodness you heard my call for help. I—I was afraid I should be locked in the tower for ages and ages—"

Nicholas Bentley started. Almost incredulously he turned his head, staring at Mr. Aspell's lean figure.

"Sir, I say—" he muttered. "That—that voice! Surely—"

He faltered, completely bewildered. Mr. Aspell was like a statue, his expression extraordinary. The voices drew nearer.

"Those awful Grey Ghosts! They were obviously going to meet in the tower until they saw me."

Nicholas Bentley whistled in stunned amazement.

"Sir, it is!" he hissed. "It—it's the Head's daughter! The Grey Ghosts must have locked her in the tower. What on earth—"

Mr. Aspell seemed incapable of speech, completely at sea. Like the head prefect, he could only stare blankly at the metal-bound door.

And on the far side of that door Penelope stood, pale-faced with tense excitement. In one hand she carried her music case, which she had tucked away behind the foot of the winding staircase before going up to join the Grey Ghosts.

In the case was her robe—and Hugh's! Under her other arm, as if supporting her, was Hugh's firm hand. For one breathless second they paused in the darkness, and Penelope glanced up at him.

"They've heard," she whispered unsteadily. "They're just outside. Now for the rest of the plan. We—we've got to bluff like anything, Hugh."

His fingers tightened reassuringly. Could she have seen his face she would have been steadied by the wondering admiration on it.

"O.K., Miss Cartwright!" he said softly. Then spoke out loudly so that clearly he could be heard. "You're sure you're fit enough to move now, Miss Cartwright? You must have given your leg a nasty twist on the staircase in the darkness."

"Yes, thank you," Penelope replied just as loudly. "I fear I was more alarmed than hurt. When I found they had locked me in and fled I lost my head a little—"

"Jolly brave of you, Miss Cartwright," said Hugh firmly. "You certainly scared them off, anyway. Now let me help you—"

And he leant forward and pushed open the heavy door. The night air rushed in, and they saw Mr. Aspell and the head prefect standing immediately in front of them. A flash of inspiration came to Penelope in that tense moment. She gave a realistic, startled little scream.

"Oh! The—the Grey Ghosts! They've come back! Oh, dud-dear!"

She clung to Hugh's arm as if in terror. And then Mr. Aspell's voice, an odd mixture of amazement, fury, and chagrin, barked out:

"Miss Cartwright—"

Penelope started, peering into the gloom.

"Why—why—" she gasped. "I believe— Why, it is! Mr. Aspell!

Oh, how lucky you're here, Mr. Aspell! Those awful Grey Ghosts—"

And as the rest of the seniors came hurrying up she rushed and caught the senior master's arms.

"Dear Mr. Aspell—"

"Mum-my gosh!" stuttered Smeeke, staring. "It's Miss Cartwright!"

"Miss Cartwright—calm yourself!" Mr. Aspell snapped angrily, pushing her away none too gently. "I want an explanation—ah!" he grated as he recognised Penelope's companion. "You! Mason, what are you doing here?"

There was a tiny pause. The seniors were gazing from Penelope to Hugh Mason, utterly bewildered. And Hugh, with a coolness that thrilled her, raised his eyebrows and shrugged.

"Just as well I did come, sir. Must be pretty frightening to be locked up in the tower by these Grey Ghost chaps—"

"Yes, indeed!" Penelope quavered hastily. "Oh, Mr. Aspell, just as I was going towards the music-room I saw those awful robed figures by the clock tower. As headmaster's daughter I felt it my duty to investigate. I hurried up, but they must have seen me—"

"And they locked you in!" caught up Nicholas Bentley. "Phew! Looks as if you scared them away, Miss Cartwright."

Penelope did not answer for a second; she was watching Mr. Aspell, her heart bumping. He was the danger, he and the sneaking Smeeke. And it was Smeeke who pushed forward now, pasty face ablaze with suspicion.

"Sir," he cried shrilly, "if you ask me, it's jolly fishy that Mason happens to be about. We've been here some time, and seen no one. Supposing the Grey Ghosts didn't bolt!"

Penelope's heart jumped painfully, and then she relaxed a little, for Smeeke, glaring at Hugh's cool face, had rushed on:

"Supposing they bluffed Miss Cartwright and they're still in the tower?" he cried. "Suppose Mason's trying a bluff now, pretending to rescue Miss Cartwright? He could easily have slipped off his robe. I say we ought to search the tower, sir—now!"

And he led the party into the tower.



A VISIT FROM SMEEKE

Penelope watched them go. Her knees felt so weak that she would have given worlds to sink in relief to the grass.

They had done it! They did not suspect her, and as for Hugh—well, they would find no proof against him in the tower!

Bentley hurried to the boy at Penelope's side.

"Mr. Aspell and that fellow Smeeke seem to have it in for you, Mason," he said. "Look here! Someone ought to see Miss Cartwright across to the Head's house. Give me an honest answer. Did you have a hand in playing a rotten trick on Miss Cartwright to-night?"

"No, Bentley," said Hugh quietly. "O.K., then, Mason! See Miss Cartwright over and return straight here. I'm trusting you. Don't be long."

"Thanks, Bentley. Will you take my arm, Miss Cartwright?"

They walked away into the darkness, Penelope forcing a slight limp. They moved for several seconds in complete silence. Penelope at last glanced up at him, and found she could grin rather breathlessly.

"What are you thinking, Hugh?"

He pushed his free hand through his dark hair.

"Miss Cartwright, I—I hardly know what to think or say—"

"We did it, Hugh! Gosh, you were grand!"

"I?" He looked at her almost in amazement. "I? What rot! I did nothing—not a thing. But you—your nerve! The way you carried it

through! And to think that all this time you, the Head's daughter—"

He stopped, shaking his head. "Still can't believe it?" she teased.

"No, I'm still floored. And, gosh, when Bob and Harvey hear—"

Penelope checked him. "Please, Hugh, don't tell them," she said a little anxiously.

"For safety's sake I never wanted any of you to know, and even now the few who know my secret the better. And another thing, couldn't you call me Penny? Miss Cartwright sounds so jolly stuffy, especially as we're partners."

"But we're not! I mean—" He paused. "You've been grand, Penny, but I can't let you remain in the Grey Ghosts. It's too risky for you, the headmaster's daughter."

"But that's just it, Hugh," she protested. "I want to open daddy's eyes to the sort of man Mr. Aspell is just as much as you. And if, as we suspect, the Wasp may be trying to stop our mission for Glynn Tracy, then, don't you see, in a way it's for daddy's sake that I carry on."

He was silent. "And another thing," she pressed, "as Head's daughter, with more free time, I can do things you boys can't—like trying to find the secret room in the belfry when everyone's at lessons. Hugh, I want to help awfully. And if you start saying that it's all right for boys but not girls, I'll—sock you!"

He ruffled his hair again and chuckled rather ruefully.

"Gosh, you're amazing!" he breathed. "I hardly—"

He paused. From the distance, in the direction of the clock tower, up-raised voices could be heard.

"I must get back," he said quickly. "Bentley's a good scout—can't let him down."

"Hugh, you think you'll be O.K.?" The Wasp and that hateful Smeeke don't like you."

"I know; but, thanks to you, their suspicions have been squashed. Look!" He hesitated. "I hate to ask this, but will you tuck my robe away somewhere for to-night? I'll contact you somehow to-morrow. We've got to decide about you helping—"

"We've got to decide," amended Penelope firmly, "about the Grey Ghosts' next move; how we're going to find that secret room; how we're going to scotch the Wasp. And there's tons more I want to know about Glynn Tracy and our mission!"

He spread his hands almost helplessly.

"Gosh, you're pretty determined, aren't you?" he murmured. "I—well, let's leave it for to-night. But one thing I want you to promise me," he added earnestly. "Give me your word that you'll take no more action until we've met again."

She smiled.

"Anxious about me getting into trouble, Hugh? All right, I give you my word—"

"Thanks! Now I must go. I shan't forget what you've done to-night. Good-night, Penny!"

"Good-night, Hugh!" she called softly as he turned and sped into the darkness.

She watched until he had vanished, and then she entered the headmaster's garden. Her smile faded as she realised she had now to face her father. Bluffing Mr. Aspell was one thing; John Cartwright, B.A., was a very different proposition.

"If only I dared tell him everything," she murmured. "But he'd never credit what we suspect about the Wasp."

She paused before the Head's house. There was no light in her father's study or the drawing-room. That meant that her father was over in the school somewhere—perhaps in his study there. So she had a respite.

She felt relieved, and, racing up to her bed-room, hid her robe and Hugh's. Then she stiffened as through the open window she heard the garden gate creak. Her father was returning! And he might well have heard already about the amazing happenings at the clock tower.

(Please turn to the back page.)

LEADER of the ALPINE REVELLERS

By ENID BOYTEN



THE FAKE LETTER

JILL GARDINER, leader of a cheery band of girls staying in Switzerland for the winter sports, was very keen for some of them to pass the Havensburg Test.

Those successful would be invited to a romantic castle for the Venetian Ice Fete.

Girls had never gone in for the test before, and Max Kildare, the coach who was training the boys at the hotel, believed it was too difficult for them.

Jill was anxious to persuade Hans Peterson, a strange, moody ex-guide, whom she was convinced had been unjustly accused of cowardice to act as coach, and, to show she was in earnest, she sent him a letter signed by six girls.

That night, however, Hans came to the hotel's indoor skating rink, and threw down what he believed to be the letter Jill had sent him, declaring angrily that he didn't like being insulted.

When Hans had gone the bewildered Jill picked up the letter and read it.

JILL'S heart seemed to stop beating as she gazed at the paper which Hans Peterson had thrown in a crumpled ball at her feet.

"But this—this isn't our letter!" she whispered. "It's got our signatures on it, but this isn't the letter we wrote to Hans."

In utter dismay she read the scribbled lines:

"Dear Hans.—We've decided after all that we don't want to be coached for the Havensburg Test by a disgraced boy guide with a yellow streak in him."

Then followed what seemed to be the signatures of herself and her chums.

The letter was in a good imitation of her own writing, and the signatures were cleverly imitated, too.

But how had it happened? She had put her own friendly note into an envelope and sealed it and delivered it at Hans' cottage herself. How had he come to receive this?

"Jill, what's the matter?"

"Why did Hans come stamping in here in such a rage?"

"Does it mean that the Havensburg Test is off? That we shan't be coached for it, after all?"

With anxious questions, the Alpine Revellers thronged round their leader.

"It's—it's a mistake!" she gasped. "Hans got the wrong letter. I'll have to go after him and explain."

The orchestra was striking up a quick-step, and couples were taking to the ice again, but Jill hardly realised what was going on around her. She glided to the side of the indoor rink, tore off her white doer-skin skating boots and pulled on her shoes.

Next moment she was hurrying into

the hotel buildings and racing up to her room.

Once there, she huddled on a warm coat and tied a scarf round her brown curls.

"I'll dash across to Hans' cottage," she panted. "And explain—"

Her thoughts broke off as a doubt struck her.

Explain! Yes, it sounded easy, but how exactly was she to do it?

How was she to convince Hans that the letter he had received was not the one she had written?

She knew how moody and queer-tempered the boy guide was. Very likely he would refuse to believe her. She could just picture him stalking into his cottage and slamming the door, refusing to listen.

"Unless I could take some definite proof!" she told herself.

She stood there, her pretty face puckered in thought.

And again the strangeness of it struck her. Why should anyone have played such a cruel, spiteful trick? Why should anyone have wanted to offend Hans so that he would refuse to coach Jill and her chums for the Havensburg Test?

"But somebody did!" she mused breathlessly. "And it must have been done when I left the letter here during dinner-time. Somebody must have crept in and taken the letter, steamed open the envelope, and put the forgery there!"

But how could she prove it? How could she convince Hans that this was what had taken place?

An idea dawned on her, and she swung round to the little writing-desk against the wall. Eagerly she picked up an object that lay there, and examined it closely for a moment, then, with a satisfied murmur, she slipped it into her pocket.

"This will help!" she murmured. "It's proof—of a kind!"

Impetuously she hurried from the room.

She mustn't waste another moment. The sooner she could reach the boy guide, the sooner she could convince him that she hadn't been responsible for that letter with its spiteful insult.

"I'll make him listen to me," she vowed. "Somehow I'll tease him out of that moodiness. And I'll get a definite promise from him to start coaching us for to-morrow morning."

Never was Jill down-hearted for very long!

Her spirits were buoyant again as she fitted under the pine trees in the moonlight. It did not take her long to reach Hans' cottage, and eagerly she pulled the bell-rope outside the door.

She heard the notes of the bell echo inside the cottage and die away. But there was no answer. No sound of footsteps. All was hushed.

"Perhaps he's still out," she told herself. "Or, more likely, he just won't answer."

She stepped back from the porch. The windows on the ground floor seemed to be shuttered, but as she

turned a corner of the cottage her heart-beats quickened, for a gleam of light came from an uncurtained window on this side.

Eagerly Jill peeped in.

It was an odd room—half workshop and half sitting-room. There was a bench at one end, piled with wooden toys and models, some of them only half finished.

Hans Peterson was sitting at the bench, but he wasn't working. He sat with his chin on his hands—grim, moody, silent.

Jill knew a strange little pang at sight of that lonely, boyish figure. Quickly she lifted her hand and tapped on the glass.

"Hans! Hans!" her clear voice rang out.

He looked up with a start and a frown. She felt her heart-beats quicken as he sprang to his feet and strode to the window. She hoped he was going to open it and speak to her, and give her a chance of explaining.

He did nothing of the sort, however.

There were stout wooden shutters inside the window. With a sombre frown he closed them with a slam, blacking out the room.

Jill was shut out!



THE PROOF IN THE MIRROR

Drawing a deep breath, Jill gazed at the dark cottage.

"So that's it!" she mused. "He's barricaded himself inside.

He's retired deeper into his shell than ever!"

She tilted her chin determinedly. "But he won't find it quite so easy," she vowed, "to keep me out!"

On tiptoe she circled the cottage, but found all the windows on the ground floor were firmly shuttered. The back door was closed and locked, too. When she turned her attention to the upper windows, all but the one above the porch were shuttered.

"Golly! What a fortress!" she exclaimed. "But if only I can climb up to that window above the porch—"

Breaking off, she stepped forward and grasped the edge of the wooden roof of the low porch. After a struggle she managed to swing herself up on to it, and at last she was able to stretch a hand towards the unshuttered window.

For a chilling moment it seemed as if the catch inside was fastened. But it had only stuck, and next instant it had opened to her pull.

With quickened heart-beats she softly clambered in. The bright moonlight, streaming past her, showed that she was in a small box-room. Holding her breath, she tiptoed to the door, letting herself out on to a dark landing, and switching on the torch she had brought in her coat pocket.

A short flight of stairs led to the tiny hall below, and noiselessly Jill crept down. A band of light under a door to the left showed her where Hans was, and she could hear the sound of a plane or similar tool. No doubt he had started work on the

toys and models she had seen on his bench.

Her heart was pounding, but there was a daring sparkle in her eyes.

"Now for it!" she breathed. She tapped loudly on the door, threw it open, and marched in.

The boy guide swung round from the bench on which he had been planing one of his models. A flame of anger burned in his cheeks at sight of Jill, and frowningly he strode towards her.

"You have the impudence," he cried, "to break in here, after I'd made it clear I didn't want to see you! After you and your precious friends sent me that insulting letter!"

She stood her ground, her brown eyes fixed on his rugged face.

"Hans! I had to come—" she began.

"And now," he broke in harshly, "I'm asking you to go. To leave my home and go back to your gay friends at the hotel. Will you kindly do that?"

"No!" It was Jill's turn to be obstinate now. A spot of colour in each cheek, she faced him squarely.

She saw his fists clench. Saw his foot tap the floor. And she guessed that if she had been a boy she would have been bundled out of that cottage in very quick time!

"I won't go," she went on more quietly, "till you've heard what I've got to say. I never sent you that letter, Hans, and I don't wonder that it upset you. I wrote a friendly note, which my chums signed, asking you to coach us for the Havensburg Test. And when I left the note in my room some plotter must have removed it from the envelope and put a clever forgery in its place."

He laughed bitterly. "You expect me to believe that?" he asked.

"Yes! When I've shown you the proof."

"Proof?" For answer, Jill drew a writing-pad from her pocket.

"I wrote my note on the top page of a new pad," she told him. "I blotted it when the ink was very wet, and almost the whole of it shows up on the blotting paper, the wrong way round. If you hold it in front of that mirror you'll see what I wrote."

For a moment she feared he would refuse. But, with another frown, he grasped the pad, walked across to the mirror and held it up, so that the blotted words were reflected the right way round.

He could now read almost all the original friendly note Jill had written.

"Hans! Isn't that proof enough?" she asked gently, stepping beside him. "I want to pass the Havensburg Test more than anything else in the world. Do you think I would go out of my way to offend the very boy who can help me do it?"

Still he was silent, though his frown had disappeared.

"And there's another thing," she went on quickly. "You've got a secret enemy, Hans—the one who hatched that cruel plot to make you lose your guide's badge through no fault of your own. And that enemy must be at work in the hotel. It must have been him—or her—who changed those letters. For some reason they don't want you to act as our coach!"

She caught his sleeve. "Don't you see," she cried, "that the best way to fight back at that secret enemy is to help us pass the test? By doing that, Hans, you may show him up!"

She felt she was persuading him. His expression was more friendly, though he frowned again as he glanced towards his work-bench.

"I've my work to do," he muttered. "Now that I can no longer act as a guide, I earn my living making toys. I've little time—"

Smilingly she interrupted him.

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

"But you've time to help me and my chums, Hans. Please!"

Jill made an appealing picture as she stood near the lamplight, and the boy's face softened as he looked at her. Then, to her delight, he nodded.

"All right," he said gruffly. "You mean you'll coach us?" she exclaimed. "And you'll be at the foot of the bob run to-morrow at ten, so that we can start right away?"

"Yes!"

"Hans! That's wizard!" She felt so happy, she took a few dancing steps up and down the room, and she felt like hugging him as he escorted her to the door.

"Good-night, Hans," she said. "See you at ten to-morrow!"

With a wave of her hand she was flitting off between the trees, bubbling over with excitement.

"Gosh! We'll have to work at that test!" she told herself. "But we'll love every minute of it. Ski-ing, ski-joring, skating—I'll have to find out just what we have to do. In fact, I cut a bit out of the local Swiss paper about the Havensburg Test, but I've been so jolly busy I haven't had time even to peep at it!"

She was humming a dance tune when she entered the hotel lounge, a little while later. And there, in front of her, was her special chum, Rosemary Walsh.

"Everything's O.K., Rosemary," she cried. "That misunderstanding was due to a mean, spiteful trick by somebody, but I've cleared it up, and we're meeting Hans at the bob run to-morrow. We must let the others know. And, by the way, is that jolly old dance still going on at the ice rink? Because I feel like dancing till midnight, and—"

She broke off, as she caught the rather worried expression on Rosemary's face.

"Anything wrong?" she asked, an uneasy feeling gripping her suddenly. Her chum nodded.

"It's Uncle Gavin," she replied. "He's heard about Hans and this idea of ours, and—and he doesn't seem to like it. He's talking about stopping it, and he wants to see you right away."



VOICES IN THE NIGHT

"Ah! So there you are, Jill!"

Mr. Gavin Walsh stopped pacing up and down his room as Jill breathlessly entered.

She had come on this winter sports holiday as a member of Mr. Walsh's party, and she liked Rosemary's kindly uncle very much. But he was, she knew, rather strict in some things.

"Jill! About this winter sports test—"

Her heart was pounding uncomfortably as she faced him. Suppose, after all her efforts, he was to forbid her and Rosemary to try for the test! It just wouldn't bear thinking about.

"I don't know that I mind you entering for the test," Rosemary's uncle said slowly, "though the sports coach at the hotel considers it more suitable for boys. In fact, I understand girls have never entered for it before. But, quite frankly, I don't like your choice of a coach."

Jill swallowed hard.

"But—why?"

"Isn't it obvious, my dear?" he said gravely. "I have been making

inquiries about this boy, Hans Peterson. It seems he is a disgraced guide. Hardly anyone in the valley will speak to him, because he deserted his post in time of danger—"

"He didn't, Mr. Walsh! He didn't!" Jill had forgotten her own ambition for the moment. Her one desire was to defend that boy with the moody, rugged face, whom she had left in his lonely cottage.

"It was a terrible injustice!" she cried. "Hans isn't a coward, and he never deserted those tourists. It's not true!"

"Steady, Jill—steady!" Mr. Walsh spoke dryly. "You're letting your warm heart run away with you. Doesn't it occur to you that others may be right and you may be wrong?"

He shook his head doubtfully. "And there's another thing," he went on. "It seems this boy came to the ice rink to-night and made a rowdy scene. Punched young Gerald Clarke and bowled him over! That certainly doesn't recommend him to me."

"But Gerald taunted him!" exclaimed Jill. "And the whole thing was due to a mistake—a forged letter. Mr. Walsh, I just know that Hans will make a wizard trainer for us. I'm sure of it!"

Still there was that doubtful frown on his face.

"And—and I've made definite arrangements," Jill hurried on. "We're to meet him at ten o'clock to-morrow for the first practice. I can't let him down, Mr. Walsh—I can't!"

There was a moment's silence.

Then, to Jill's relief, a twinkle showed in Mr. Walsh's eyes.

"My dear Jill, the last thing I want to do is to spoil your winter sports fun," he said. "But you must remember that I am responsible for you, as well as for Rosemary. However, I'll agree to the plan—on one condition."

Jill glowed. "You will, Mr. Walsh? Oh, that's splendid! That's—"

"Wait, Jill! You haven't heard the condition yet," he smiled. "It's just this. I shall watch these practices closely, and the methods of this boy coach, and if they should seem likely to lead to trouble or danger, I shall certainly have to forbid you to carry on. Is that clear?"

She nodded.

"O.K., Mr. Walsh! Fair enough!" she agreed. "But everything's going to be hunky-dory, you'll see. You'll have nothing to complain about."

She threw him a radiant smile, as she turned to the door, feeling as if she was walking on air.

The difficulties were being smoothed over. The way was clear!

"Roll on to-morrow!" she smiled to herself, darting into the corridor in her impetuous way.

And next moment she'd almost collided with Magda Beaumont, who seemed to have been standing close by the door.

"Oh! Sorry, Magda!"

That dark-haired girl had been on the skating rink, and looked very attractive in close-fitting, black bodice and crimson-flared skirt. For a moment it seemed to Jill she looked a trifle flustered, but she quickly recovered her usual poise.

"Congrats, Jill!" she drawled.

"Rosemary tells me you've actually bearded the wild boy in his den and persuaded him to train us, after all. How marvellous! And he really didn't bite you?"

Mockingly she glanced at Jill from under her silky lashes.

Jill's lips tightened, a little.

Of the five girls who were joining her in the Havensburg plan, Magda was the one she felt a little doubtful about.

"Look here, Magda—"

"No, Jill! Please!" With her dazzling smile, Magda raised a slim finger. "It's too late at night for lectures! I know you're afraid I shall rub the wild boy up the wrong way, but I shan't. In fact," she added

(Please turn to page 23.)



Flowers FOR DANGER

By PETER LANGLEY

THE WARNING GONG

"HALLO—a message from Nunky!" June Gaynor smiled as she switched on the light in the cosy sitting-room of the flat she shared with her famous detective uncle.

There was a card propped against the clock, bearing a few hastily-scribbled lines:

"Don't wait up for me. I may be late. Hope you like the flowers."
"NOEL."

"He's a dear!" murmured June, her eyes lighting up. "My favourite carnations—and what an unusual shade!"

She felt a little twinge of conscience as she fastened the dainty spray to her coat to try the effect. She had intended to get back earlier from the cinema, to sew a loose button on one of her uncle's jackets. On the table was a reel of blue silk cotton, with which, apparently, he had sewn on the button himself!

And then June noticed something else that caused her smile to fade. The drawer in her uncle's desk which usually contained his revolver was open, and empty.

That meant—June bit her lip, trying to stifle her anxiety. Though Noel always laughed at her fears, she could not help that little secret dread when he went out like this, on some dangerous quest, without explaining his errand.

The telephone bell suddenly rang. She turned and lifted the hand-set.

"Is that Mr. Raymond's?" came an agitated, girlish voice.

"Yes. This is Mr. Raymond's partner speaking. May I take a message?"

There came a little gasp of dismay at the other end.

"Has—has he gone? Oh, try to stop him—please! The red-bearded man is dangerous—"

"Wait!" exclaimed June. "Who is speaking?"

"Sybil! Sybil! the flower-girl. Tell Mr. Raymond to keep clear of—the voice grew faint—"Lotus Blossom—Parrot—danger—"

"Hallo!" called June, anxiously. But, with a click, the phone went dead. Her hand a trifle unsteady, the girl detective replaced the receiver. Unless that call was a hoax—and she quickly dismissed the possibility—Noel was in greater danger than he imagined!

For a moment she thought of phoning the police—but she had nothing to tell them beyond a wild, unconfirmed story. She did not even know where her uncle had gone; yet it was vital that he should be warned.

Desperately, she thought back over the strange message—her agile mind seeking a possible clue. A red-bearded man was a danger to Noel. But there might be scores of red-bearded men in London. What was that about "Lotus Blossom" and "Parrot"? The former might refer to a flower, a

June caught in her breath, with a sudden flash of inspiration. Quickly she took down a London directory from the shelf, and ran her fingers over a list of names. Her eyes lit up as she found the one she sought—recently underlined in ink:

The Cafe of the Lotus Blossom, Parrot Street. And that street was in Limehouse!

So that was her uncle's secret assignment!

The girl detective did not hesitate. If Noel was in danger, she must put him on his guard.

Pausing only to slip a torch into her handbag, she left the flat and hailed a taxi at the corner, giving the Limehouse address.

"Pull up a few yards from the cafe," she ordered breathlessly.

The man eyed her curiously, taking in her dainty, youthful appearance, but he simply nodded as he threw open the door. A moment later they were speeding through the slightly foggy streets of London towards Limehouse.

At length the taxi slowed to a stop, and June stepped out on to the pavement, turning to pay the driver.

"The cafe you want, miss, is at the corner," he explained.

June thanked him, and made her way along the narrow street towards the cafe. Through the fog drifted the mournful hoot of tugs, and the faint, unmistakable sounds of the nearby Thames.

The window of the cafe was curtained, but through a gap in the lace mesh the girl detective was able to glimpse the interior. There were about a score of white-clothed tables, tastefully laid and each bearing a vase of flowers—carnations, similar to those she was wearing!

The coincidence struck June as curious, but at the moment she was more concerned about her uncle's safety. The customers in the restaurant were few in number, most of them smartly dressed, and with a sprinkling of Orientals. But she looked in vain for Noel's familiar figure.

Nerving herself, June pushed open the glass doors and made her way quickly to a table in an alcove, from which she would have a clear view of the cafe without being too conspicuous herself.

A soft-footed Chinese waitress approached. June ordered coffee and chop-suey.

As she lingered over her unwanted, if tasty meal, she watched the coming and going of the cafe patrons, her anxiety growing with every passing minute.

And then suddenly she froze, staring across the cafe at someone who had just entered.

A tall man, wearing a dark coat, and a slouch hat and a muffer that barely concealed his fiery red hair and beard.

The bearded man against whom she had been warned—her uncle's enemy!

But—where was Noel?

June's hands clenched on her lap as she watched the bearded man cross the room and sit down at a table in

the corner. His eyes started to rove round the cafe, so she drew back in the alcove and lowered her head over her plate.

When, cautiously, she looked up again, another shock awaited her—for the table in the corner was now vacant, but behind it the embroidered Chinese curtains were swaying slightly, as though in a draught.

June drew in her breath sharply, a reckless gleam creeping into her eyes. She dared not let the bearded stranger out of her sight, until she had warned Noel. It was possible that her uncle was on the premises—that the man had gone in search of him!

She rose to her feet. Fortunately the waitress was not in sight, and the other customers paid little attention.

She crossed to the corner, and quickly parted the embroidered curtains. Beyond was a passage, dimly lit by a Chinese lantern, and a flight of stairs leading to the basement.

A large brass gong hung near the stairs, and the air was heavy with the scent of flowers. And then June's sharp eyes spotted something else—a tiny thing—but it sent her pulses racing madly.

It lay near the curtain through which she had entered. It was a small black button from the sleeve of a man's jacket. June bent swiftly, her hand shaking as she picked it up. There were a few threads of cotton still clinging to it—blue silk cotton.

The same cotton with which Noel had sewn on that loose button, before leaving the flat!

Then Nunky was here—in this strange cafe!

June's heart missed a beat as she heard a movement at the foot of the stairs. The bearded man was crouching there, his back towards her, revolver gleaming in his hand as he crept towards a partly open door.

June guessed that Noel was in that room, all unaware of his peril. How could she warn him? How—

In a flash she acted, scarcely pausing to think. With her clenched fist she struck the massive brass gong, and its deep, metallic clamour echoed startlingly in the narrow space.

With a stifled ejaculation, the bearded man spun round, and for one incredible moment June found herself staring fully into his keen blue eyes—eyes that she knew as well as her own.

"Nunky!"

The bewildered cry was frozen on June's lips as the door at the foot of the stairs was flung open and two figures sprang on the shoulders of the disguised detective, knocking the revolver from his grasp, and bringing him struggling to the ground.

June realised, too late, that she had betrayed her uncle to his enemies!



A PERILOUS BLUFF

Cold with horror, June stood by the curtained alcove, watching the struggling group below. She was sure that the red-bearded

man was Noel, but why he was so disguised she could not imagine.

Her first desperate thought was to fly to his aid, unarmed and helpless though she was. At the same moment

reason prompted her to call for help—to summon the police.

Even as she half turned towards the embroidered curtain, it was parted silently—and a tall, robed figure barred her way, a figure with inscrutable, wrinkled features and slanting eyes. It was the proprietor of the Lotus Blossom Cafe.

"You wait here, my young friend," he breathed, and his long fingers closed round her arm.

Struggling fiercely, the disguised detective had hurled back one of his attackers—when the door behind him opened softly and two newcomers appeared on the threshold.

A warning scream was stifled on June's lips as the Chinaman's hand closed over her mouth. The new arrivals—a burly, blond-haired man, accompanied by a smartly dressed girl, took in the scene at a glance.

The man strode to the aid of Noel's attacker, seizing the young detective from behind and pinioning his arms. Against the three the detective was helpless. Scowling, the blond-haired man stared into Noel's bearded face under the dim light.

"Foster!" he rapped. "What on earth are you doing here? I thought I gave you orders to take that load of flowers to—"

"Father—that isn't Nick Foster!" exclaimed the girl, as she flashed a torch into Noel's face. "It's someone in disguise!"

With a stifled ejaculation, the burly man whipped off Noel's disguise and snatched the torch from his daughter's hand.

"You're right, Irma," he grated, "and I recognise him! It's that meddling detective who was on our track—Noel Raymond!"

A little groan of despair rose in June's throat as she saw her uncle's pale face in the light of the torch. There was a grim smile on his lips, and his blue eyes were unflinching as he met his captor's stare.

"Ralph Hersht?" he asked coolly—and nodded as the other glared. "I thought so. I found your name in a diary kept by your red-bearded accomplice, together with the name of this cafe. I don't know, yet, what game you're playing, but I warn you—"

The other laughed harshly. "Warn me?" he sneered. "That is very good! Do you imagine for a moment, Mr. Raymond, that I'd be such a fool as to let you leave this cafe—alive? Bind him, men—and gag him!"

June's blood ran cold as his orders were carried out, despite Noel's struggles. Hersht turned his pale, merciless eyes up towards her.

"Who is that girl, Chang? What is she doing here?"

The cafe proprietor shrugged. "I think maybe she friend, Mr. Hersht," he rejoined in his soft, high-pitched voice. "It was she who gave the alarm."

"And—she's wearing the flowers, father!" breathed Irma Hersht, pointing.

The girl detective drew in her breath sharply, her thoughts racing. They were all staring at her—the inscrutable Chang, the two Chinese servants, the burly Hersht and his daughter—and Noel.

Her uncle's eyes were intent and worried. She guessed he had recognised her, but for her sake he was keeping quiet.

Her one hope lay in playing a daring bluff—and Irma Hersht had given her a clue.

The flowers she was wearing! Irma herself wore a similar bunch, and Ralph Hersht had a single bloom in his buttonhole. Evidently they were worn as a sign by members of the gang—some of whom were probably not known to the others.

"Come here, girl!" ordered Hersht. June's captor released her arm. She slowly descended the narrow stairs. There was no chance of escape, or of calling for help. She and Noel were hemmed in by enemies—trapped by her own hot-headed blunder.

Only by using her wits could she hope to undo the harm she had done. "What's your name, girl—and what

is your business here?" demanded Hersht.

A sudden gleam of inspiration flashed into June's eyes as she remembered the warning phone message.

"Sybil," she rejoined boldly. "Sybil—the flower-girl!"

She knew that she was taking a perilous risk, but it was her only chance.

If the flower-girl was known to the others—

She almost dreaded to look up, but the immediate effect of her words reassured her. Hersht's suspicious manner relaxed, and his daughter nodded quickly.

"Of course, father—this is the girl Nick Foster was employing to help us. He must have sent her here."

Noel was staring at her incredulously, but she avoided meeting his glance, fearful that she might lose her nerve.

"That's right," she drawled. "Nick sent me along—to receive orders."

"The fool!" growled Hersht, his heavy face darkening. "He had his orders—and bungled them nicely. You've probably got more wits than he has, girl, and you may be useful to us, meanwhile"—his eyes narrowed cruelly—"I think, Chang, that we may settle once and for all with this meddling detective!"

The cafe proprietor nodded impassively, and turned to unlock a door. June caught a horrifying glimpse of a flight of slippery stone steps, and the dull gleam of water far below.

A choking gasp escaped her lips, despite herself.

"What—what are you going to do?" Hersht smiled unpleasantly.

"That is my affair, young woman. You are here to obey orders—and mind your own business. Irma, take her into the next room and let her help you with the flowers. Mind you keep an eye on her."

"Come," murmured Irma, resting a hand on June's arm.

"Wait!" said the girl detective desperately. "There's something—someone you have forgotten."

"Eh?" demanded Hersht suspiciously. "Who are you talking about?"

June drew a deep breath, not daring to meet her uncle's stare.

"I mean Noel Raymond's partner—June Gaynor!"

"June Gaynor? What has she got to do with it?" snapped Hersht.

"More than you imagine," answered the girl detective. "I happen to be acquainted with June Gaynor. She—she thinks the world of her uncle, and follows every move he makes. She probably knows that he's come here to-night."

"Well?" demanded Hersht. June forced a sharp laugh.

"You're not a girl, Mr. Hersht—you wouldn't understand. When he doesn't return by a certain time, she'll become anxious and raise the alarm. Possibly he has told her all he knows about our plans. Don't you see, she's dangerous—"

"The girl's right, father!" cut in Irma. "We can't afford to take risks."

Hersht frowned at June.

"You say you're acquainted with Raymond's young partner? Well, what do you suggest doing?"

June was ready for that.

"If I can use the phone, Mr. Hersht," she said, "I'll persuade June Gaynor to come here—on her own—and you can be ready for her!"

Hersht chuckled, and Irma smiled admiringly.

"It's an idea, father!" she admitted. "Let her go ahead with it. We can watch her—just in case."

Her heart pounding, June strolled across to Noel.

"To start with," she drawled, "I want the telephone number of their flat—and it's probably in his wallet."

Her hand slid towards Noel's inside pocket. At the same moment she looked straight into his eyes. He looked back at her steadily, showing no trace of recognition.

Her groping fingers closed on the penknife which she knew he kept in that pocket. The others were watching her closely. She made a pretence

of searching through her uncle's other pockets, deftly concealing the penknife inside her glove.

"Here's his wallet!" she declared coolly. "And now for the number!"

Hersht led the way into an inner room, a room littered with large boxes of flowers, some fresh and others withered. There was a table piled with partly made bouquets, and a telephone in the corner.

Hersht pointed to the instrument. "Go ahead," he said curtly.

Noel was bundled into the room, and Chang closed the door.

June picked up the hand-set, swiftly dialling a number. Everything depended on the success of her reckless bluff.

A man's crisp voice came faintly over the wire.

"Hallo!" she called. "Is that Miss June Gaynor speaking?" Ignoring the surprised reply, she went on quickly.

"Listen! I have a message for you—from Noel Raymond. You are to come immediately to the Lotus Blossom Cafe in Limehouse, where your uncle is waiting for you—and you must come alone. Do you understand? It is vital that you should come without delay!"

She hastily slammed down the receiver as Irma took a step towards her.

"Well?" growled Hersht. "What did the Gaynor girl say?"

"She's coming right away—by taxi," said June steadily. "The little fool will walk straight into our trap."

Hersht smiled unpleasantly.

"I'll give her half an hour," he said. "If she hasn't shown up by then, we'll deal with the detective first."

June felt suddenly faint as Noel, helplessly bound and gagged, was carried into an inner room and the door locked behind him.

Would her reckless plan succeed—in time?



THE SECRET OF THE FLOWERS

"You're a cool card!" drawled the dark-eyed Irma, a hint of admiration in her tone as she glanced at June across the flower-littered

table. "I'd like to know what game you're playing."

"Game?" The girl detective's heart was thumping as she picked up a handful of carnations and secured them to a hollow wire cone, as Irma had instructed. "Oh—you mean, what have I got against June Gaynor?"

June laughed shortly, a trifle unsteadily, as her glance turned towards the inner room where Noel was imprisoned.

"She tried to be too clever," she murmured, "and—and she brought danger to someone I'm fond of. I hope this will be a lesson to her."

Irma smiled cynically.

"You can leave that to father—and to Chang," she drawled. "They've too much at stake to allow anyone to stand in our way!"

June chilled at the meaning behind the other's tone and instinctively she glanced at her wrist-watch. Nearly a quarter of an hour had passed since she had made that phone-call, that reckless bluff which she hoped would bring rescue in time.

But still no sound came from the cafe upstairs. Meanwhile, her active brain was at work—seeking to probe the mystery that had enmeshed both her uncle and herself in its coils.

What dark secret was hidden by these lovely carnations, a spray of which Noel had bought from a flower-girl—the girl whose name she had so daringly assumed?

One thing her keen eyes had noticed—the bouquets that Irma was making up were hollow! A single layer of carnations concealed the wire cones—but the flowers at the top were merely snapped-off blooms, secured to a wire mesh, and forming a kind of lid.

There were some completed bouquets in a box near the door that June dearly longed to investigate, but Irma was watching her closely all the time.

Another five minutes passed. Then,

muffled to her ears, came the distant chugging of a high-powered motor-launch.

June's pulses quickened with a sudden, wild hope—but the sound died away, and her heart sank. Irma had started to her feet and was peering out of the window.

"Are you positive that Gaynor girl is coming here on her own?" she demanded, turning suspiciously.

June nodded, her hands tightly clenched.

"Positive! She may be here now—waiting in the restaurant."

"You're right," Irma said quickly. "I'll warn father."

She hurried out of the room.

In a flash June was on her feet, darting to the door of the inner room. The key was still in the lock, where Hersht had left it. June turned it, and pushed open the door.

"Nunky!" she whispered.

On the floor of a dark room with a narrow, barred window, Noel lay bound and helpless. In a moment June was on her knees, slashing with his own penknife at the cruel gag that held him speechless.

"June!" he whispered huskily, as she tore it away. "I thought I was dreaming when I saw you on the stairs. Those scoundrels haven't hurt you—"

"Nunky—don't talk about me," gulped June. "All this is my fault. I came here to try to help you, and instead of that—"

Falteringly she blurted out her story as she slashed through the cords that bound his wrists and ankles. But instead of the reproach she expected there was admiration in her uncle's eyes.

"June—you were splendid!" he declared huskily. "I took a chance in coming here alone, following a clue I obtained from that flower-girl, Sybil, who turned against the gang when she learnt they were up to something crooked. I thought my disguise would see me through, but if you hadn't arrived when you did, the chances are that I'd have been trapped by the gang, without anyone to help me. Your daring bluff saved my life, dear,

but I still don't understand about that phone-call you made—"

He broke off. Footsteps had sounded in the adjoining room. In a moment Noel was on his feet, his arm tightening round her shoulder.

"They've got my revolver, June," he muttered, "but we'll beat them yet! Stand back—against the wall."

He snatched up a broken, rickety chair and edged towards the door. It creaked open at that moment—to admit the tall, sinister figure of Chang with a robed assistant. A revolver glittered in the cafe proprietor's hand.

"We have come for you, detective!" he said, peering into the shadows. "My cellar is waiting, and the tide will soon be in—"

"Hurry, Chang!" came Charles Hersht's snarling, agitated voice from the corridor. "That girl has tricked you. She's disappeared. We've got to silence them both before—"

There came a sudden, startled yell, as Noel swung the broken chair, sending the yellow assistant sprawling. Chang whirled—but Noel was quicker, his fist crashing into the Chinaman's face.

Chang crumpled like a sack, the revolver skidding across the floor. Noel jumped to scoop it up. But Chang was not finished. A long, thin-bladed knife appeared in his hand. June saw it and screamed.

"Nunky—look out!"

But, even as she gave the warning, there came a splintering crash. The window caved in and a uniformed figure leaped into the room, followed by several others.

From the fog outside came the chugging of a launch—the pounding of heavy feet on the wharf.

"The police!" cried June, wild relief in her voice. "Nunky—it worked, after all!"

The crooks were swiftly rounded up. Hersht, Chang and his assistants were handcuffed and led away, accompanied by the tearful, defiant Irma.

Pale and breathless, Noel turned to the inspector in charge.

"Richards—you got here in the nick

of time!" he declared. "But how on earth did you get the warning?"

Inspector Richards grinned, glancing towards June.

"I guess your young partner might clear up that little point, Mr. Raymond," he answered. "I got a mysterious phone-call from an agitated young lady who asked me if I was June Gaynor—told me that my uncle was waiting for me at the Lotus Blossom Cafe, and told me to come without delay—"

Noel whirled, meeting June's quick smile. His eyes gleamed admiringly.

"I've got it now!" he exclaimed. "You dialled Scotland Yard—when you pretended to phone the flat!"

"It was the only way, nunky," said June. "They were all listening, and I had to keep up the pretence. But, inspector—there was a flower-girl—"

Sybil—the girl who warned me in the first place—"

"We've found her," put in the inspector. "She'd been locked up by that red-bearded scoundrel—Hersht's accomplice—who runs a flower shop. But it beats me what's behind all this business, Mr. Raymond."

Noel smiled grimly. "I'm almost as much in the dark as you are, inspector—but my young partner mentioned just now that she had found a clue."

June's eyes shone excitedly as she crossed the room and took one of the bouquets from its box.

"They're really dummies, nunky," she said. "I know—because I helped to make one of them! Those flowers at the tip are merely a lid—"

She lifted the flowers, and a surprised ejaculation escaped Noel's lips as she emptied the contents of the bouquet on to the table.

"Clothing coupons, inspector—hundreds of 'em!" he exclaimed. "Forged, of course—and distributed by means of the flowers. June, my dear, you deserve a new winter coat for this, and I'll see you get it!"

(End of this week's story.)

Another exciting story of Noel and June awaits you in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

LEADER OF THE ALPINE REVELLERS

(Continued from page 20.)

mysteriously. "I've thought of a way of getting on the right side of him at the very start. You'll see! I shall be a perfect angel to-morrow, Jill. Nightie-night!"

And with an airy wave, and another mocking smile, she drifted away.

Jill shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, well! Forget it!" she told herself. "I can manage Magda, if she starts making trouble. No one—nothing—is going to interfere with our plan!"

Never had Jill felt so tense and keyed up. Never so utterly determined to make a success of her ambition.

Somehow the thought of it kept her from sleeping. She tossed and turned, thinking of the wonderful ski tour over the mountain pass to Havensburg Castle—the tour they would be able to take, if only they could qualify in the test. What a triumph it would be, especially as girls had never even tried for it before!

It must have been past midnight when suddenly she sat up in bed.

"That cutting from the local paper!" she thought. "It gives details of the test, though I didn't have time to look at it properly. I'll just have a quick glance at it, and then maybe I'll drop off, but—where did I put it?"

A little whisper of dismay broke from her.

"Oh, golly! It was in my evening bag, and I left it in the covered skating rink when I dashed off to find Hans!"

That was it! She had left the bag

in a little niche at the side of the rink, near the orchestra.

No doubt it would be safe there till morning, but Jill had set her heart on taking another glimpse at that cutting.

Impetuously she sprang out of bed and slipped a warm wrap over her shoulders.

"No time like the present!" she chuckled. "I don't want to lose my bag, or the cutting, either. So I'll make sure of them now!"

Dim lights gleamed in the corridors and stairways of the hotel as she crept softly down. There was an entrance to the rink direct from the hotel, and she fitted towards it, silently opening the dividing door.

Not long ago the rink had been filled with bright lights and gliding dancers. Now it looked dark and mysterious, with stray gleams of moonlight filtering through here and there.

She paused for a moment, trying to get her eyes accustomed to the gloom.

"Let's see! The band platform was on the left," she mused. "And that little niche where I left my bag—"

She broke off, her heart thudding suddenly.

To her ears had come a low murmur of voices from the direction of the platform, where she could just make out the dim shapes of the larger instruments that had been left there.

Only a few words reached her ears: "They're starting to-morrow," one voice muttered.

"Yes! But Mr. Walsh doesn't like the idea," came a second eerie whisper. "Nor do some of the other parents. It ought to be easy to prove Hans Peterson isn't to be trusted—break the whole thing up—to-morrow—"

The voices fell so low that Jill's tingling ears could catch no more.

Yet she had heard enough to set every nerve in her body throbbing excitedly.

Already she believed that Hans Peterson had a bitter enemy, and this conversation seemed to prove it. That enemy was here, with an accomplice!

So low had been the murmurs that she couldn't possibly recognise the voices. One of them, she believed, was a man's or a boy's; the other might have been a girl's. But she couldn't be sure.

What was certain, however, was that they were plotting further mischief.

In the darkness Jill's cheeks suddenly burned with anger.

She would unmask these plotters! Somewhere near the entrance was a master switch which would flood the whole rink with blazing light. Her heart thudding, Jill groped towards it, till some further muttered words reached her ears.

"Neither Jill Gardiner nor Hans must get an invitation to Havensburg Castle. We must make sure—"

Jill stiffened. Why had the plotters linked her name with the boy guide's?

But that problem, for the moment, could wait. Her first task was to find that light switch, and she had to be careful she didn't trip.

To think that somewhere in that darkened hall were enemies plotting against Hans and herself. She gained the wall, and, burning with indignation, she felt for the electric light switch, and she thrilled as her fingers found it. Now to see who the plotters were!

Next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will contain another thrilling instalment of this grand serial.

THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 14.)

Sally's shout, and he saw the canvas bag.

He made a grab at Percy, and then went reeling as one of those fists, pumping up and down with mechanical precision and rhythm, smote him on the jaw.

"Stop him, Kaka—stop him!" gasped Kohler!

The crook picked himself up and went dashing after the robot, Sally and her chums were ignored—forgotten. Quivering with excitement, they watched.

They saw Kaka staring, wild-eyed, as that charging figure swept down on him like a hurricane. He felt as if he had been struck by a hurricane as the robot's flailing fists brushed him aside. Percy juggernauted on, and after him rushed Kohler and Kaka.

"Oh, gosh!" Johnny spluttered. "Sally, you giddy marvel—"

"We've got the pearls, and can get free!" Sally chuckled. "Quick now!"

Thrilled and jubilant, they ran through the caves and, reaching the opening, went streaming out into the moonlight.

Thudding footsteps sounded ahead of them. And then they heard Carl Kohler's rasping voice:

"Got you! Come on! Hand over those pearls, professor!"

"I beg your pardon— Good gracious! How dare you! Release me at once!"

Sally stopped dead in her tracks, the colour draining from her face.

"That—that's the real Head!" she gasped in horror. "Oh, golly, it's Professor Willard, and he's being attacked by Kohler!"

For a moment the chums stood as if stunned.

They had known that Professor Willard suspected they were ashore, but they had not known that he would track them to the Haunted Caves. And now, by a most unfortunate stroke of ill-luck, he had arrived at the very moment when the infuriated Kohler was pursuing the headmaster's robot double. He had mistaken the Head for Percy!

"Oh, gosh!" gasped Sally. "We—we've got to save the Head! Come on!"

"Rescue, Merry-makers!" roared Don and Johnny.

They plunged forward, and now, in the moonlight, they saw three struggling figures—Professor Willard, the crook, and the native.

"Release me at once!" the headmaster was panting.

"Where are those pearls?" rasped Kohler.

"Pearls? I do not understand—"

"Hold his arms, Kaka, while I search— Look out! Here come those dashed youngsters again!"

Kohler had heard their shouts, and now, giving the headmaster a savage blow, he swung round.

Professor Willard sank half-dazed to the ground. Don and Johnny rushed up, blind to any danger in their determination to rescue their luckless headmaster.

Then Johnny bowled over Kohler, but in a flash Kaka had gripped them in his immensely powerful arms. Fay could do little. The headmaster, winded by that blow, lay panting on the ground.

"Hold them!" grated Kohler. "But there are only three of them! Where's the other kid—that girl?"

There was a thud of footsteps. The chums cheered. The crooks flung round—and once more it seemed to them that they had been hit by a hurricane.

There was Sally, and there, too, was Percy, the robot. Percy minus his mortar-board and gown; Percy gleaming white from the distemper which still adorned him. Sally had seen the robot running round in

circles and had promptly brought him to the rescue.

Kaka screamed, believing that the ghost had returned to haunt him. Then he subsided, stunned, as a flailing fist struck him. It wasn't really a fight. Kohler went down a second later, and stayed down.

Professor Willard, still lying on the ground, stirred. Hastily Sally switched off Percy's mechanism and allowed him to drop down into the undergrowth. Percy's existence was a secret known only to his inventor and to the chums—and a secret he had to remain.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Those crooks won't bother you any more, sir."

"Let me help you up, professor."

Anxiously the chums gathered around their headmaster. Gently they assisted him to his feet.

"Thank you—thank you!" he said faintly, and saw the two figures sprawling on the ground. "You—you came to my rescue. I am indeed grateful to you!"

"Hem!"

Sally coughed and looked suitably modest. So did her chums. The Head thought they had laid out the two men. Percy should be getting the credit—but Percy, the robot, was a secret, and, therefore, his glorious deeds would have to be a secret, too.

"It—it's nothing, sir!" beamed Johnny. "I say, look at old Kohler! His beard's come off. He was wearing false whiskers!"

And that was indeed true. The Head mopped his brow.

"Bless my soul, it's that man we picked up at sea! And—and he seemed to think I had some pearls in—"

"I've got them, professor!" said Sally, diving a hand into her pocket and allowing the gleaming pearls to run through her fingers. "Kohler was a crook. He stole these!"

"And that's why we came ashore, professor," put in Fay. "We suspected he was a rascal, and we wanted to expose him."

"And we have exposed him, sir," added Don, just to make sure that Professor Willard realised that point.

"Extraordinary—positively extraordinary!" gasped the Head, gazing at the chums. "I was extremely angry with you for coming ashore in defiance of my orders. I was going to punish you severely— Hem! But now I begin to understand, of course and—"

"Don't you think we ought to rope up these rotters, sir?" suggested Johnny. "We can use some of this creeper."

"A very good idea!" approved Professor Willard. "Really, you are most resourceful youngsters. I am proud of you. But now we will make our way back," he added, while the two crooks, slowly recovering, were securely bound. "The police commissioner must be informed of everything, of course. I have a car a little distance away. Come!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Sally.

She was thinking of Percy. They couldn't leave Slick's precious robot behind. On the other hand, Professor Willard mustn't see him.

"What is the matter, Sally? Ah, you must be feeling the strain, my dear! Wait. I will bring the car here."

Sally gasped. That didn't solve the problem of Percy. And then her gaze went to the hut in which they had found the distemper, and she remembered that there was a rush mat on the floor.

"Hem! Do you think we could take back a little memento of Taniki, professor?" she asked, her blue eyes beginning to twinkle.

"I think it would be a very good idea," beamed the Head. "I'm sure you deserve it. What were you thinking of, Sally?"

"I was thinking of a cute rush mat in that hut over there. It—it would look rather novel in our club-room on board ship, you know."

"Good gracious! What a peculiar memento! But I'm sure it can be arranged, Sally. I will speak to the commissioner when I see him. Take it, my dear. Have it ready when I return."

"Thank you, professor!" smiled Sally.

Her chums were grinning, too. They could guess what was in Sally's mind. And when the professor returned with the car there was the rush mat neatly rolled up—and concealed inside it was Percy, the robot.

They hoisted it into the car. Kohler, scowling and sullen and Kaka, jabbering in fear, were also dragged in. Then Sally & Co. scrambled aboard, and Professor Willard drove off, bumping over the track through the palms which led to the water front.

"Well done—well done!" he observed, beaming upon the jubilant chums. "I imagine you youngsters will always remember your visit to Taniki."

"I'm sure we shall, sir!" chorused Sally & Co.

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's delightful story, the Merry-makers are aboard ship once more in a very intriguing and light-hearted misadventure.

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 15.)

Penelope gulped, going a trifle pale. She stepped swiftly to her mirror and tidied her hair, then walked sedately downstairs. She opened the front door.

"Daddy—"

She moved out and abruptly stopped.

Standing rather uncertainly on the path was Harold Smeeke.

Penelope swiftly controlled herself. "Harold Smeeke! Gracious!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here? I thought it was my father. Do you want him?"

He stepped closer. He was breathing fast, either because he had been hurrying or through suppressed excitement.

"Miss Cartwright, it's you I want to see!" he cried.

Penelope peered towards him. There was something in his voice that struck an uneasy thrill into her, something half insolent and sly. And his lips were twisted into a strange and excited smile.

"Miss Cartwright, you said the Grey Ghosts locked you up in the tower and bolted, didn't you?"

Instantly she was on the alert. "Really, Harold Smeeke, did you come to ask me that?" she demanded stiffly. "I should have thought you would be better employed trying to catch these awful Grey Ghosts!"

He grinned unpleasantly. "That's just what I am doing! You see—he licked his lips—"I found something in the clock tower that no one else saw."

Penelope's heart lurched. "Indeed?" she muttered.

"Yes, Miss Cartwright!" He peered into her face, intent, watchful. "And do you know what? That something I found begins to make me wonder about lots of things that have happened in the last few days."

Penelope did not speak. Chills of dismay crept over her.

"Something," he went on huskily, "that makes me think that the Grey Ghosts escaped to-night because they were helped—helped by someone no one would dream of suspecting! Someone who is not even one of the boys. Can—you guess who I'm thinking of, Miss Cartwright?"

It looks as if Smeeke has guessed Penelope's secret! Will he unmask her? See next Friday's enthralling instalment.