

*Revised*

THRILLING NEW SERIAL FOR SCHOOLGIRLS BEGINS THIS WEEK

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EVERY FRIDAY.

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

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



"HER DANCING DAYS  
IN MEXICO"



# HER DANCING DAYS IN MEXICO



## WHERE WAS HER BROTHER?

"THESE is the Boundary Rock, senorita. You haf say your brother weell come here to meet you!"

With a sudden clatter of hoofs the horse-buggy drew to a standstill, and Lesley Brallsford seemed to awake from a dream. She picked up her case, the only one not sent on in advance, and jumped lightly down to the trail.

"Oh, thank you. I—I'm afraid I haven't been paying much attention." Her grey eyes sparkled with excitement, and laughter. "You see, there's so much in Mexico to—"

"Ah, our zo beautiful scenery?" the moustachioed driver smiled knowingly. "Pedro, he understand."

He pushed his battered sombrero to the back of his head, bowed after taking the fare, and, with a further salute, wheeled the horses in the opposite direction.

"Perhaps I, too, viseet your dancing school one day," he called back. "Until then—adios, senorita!"

Lesley, a slim, attractive figure in riding breeches and gay polo sweater, was left alone with her case and light coat, whilst, in a cloud of dust, the clattering buggy retreated.

She drew a deep breath as she gazed towards the verdant valley below. The rocky trail, winding through greasewood and cacti-studded country, fell away to rolling, green pastures. And in the background rose the purple-white peaks of the mighty mountain chain, the Eastern Sierra Madre.

"It's wonderful—I can still hardly believe it," Lesley murmured. "Oh, and there's the Don Ramon hacienda!"

In the heart of the valley, surrounded by gay orange trees, nestled a group of white, adobe buildings—the ranch where she was going to live, going to teach modern dancing. Don Ramon, her father's old friend, had given her this wonderful chance which brought her from England to join her ranch-foreman brother, Jim Brallsford.

It was an experiment—an experiment which might even result in a central dancing school being built at San Redas. Lesley was to start at the ranch by instructing the little communities of the great haciendas.

"It must work!" she breathed, her eyes shining. "I know it can be a success. I only wish Jim would hurry and meet me."

Her brother had arranged by letter to bring a horse for her to Boundary

Rock. It was to be an additional thrill, for he knew how she had always loved riding.

She craned forward eagerly, intent on that winding, white ribbon of trail to the valley. A joyous cry sprang to her lips when a distant cloud of dust heralded the approach of a rider.

"Here he comes now!" Lesley gleed. Nearer and nearer drew the cloud, and she was able to make out a second horse being led. He had seen her! The young rider, his green kerchief fluttering in the breeze, whipped off his cream stetson and waved it. She saw his blonde hair tossed by the wind.

"Jim! Jim!" Lesley cried, her heart leaping. "Oh, bother! Now he's vanished again!"

The gaily waving rider was hidden from sight by a formation of trees, and she waited impatiently to see him emerge. A puzzled frown clouded her flushed face when the seconds dragged with no sign of her brother. She glanced about, fidgeting restlessly, until—

"Oh!" she gasped. She stood as if rooted, scarcely able to believe her own gaze. For again the cream stetson flashed into view, but the horseman was no longer approaching. Riding furiously, crouched low in the saddle, the young rider swerved away at a tangent.

He took no notice—not even an answering wave. Horse and rider crashed through the brushwood and sage to disappear finally in the direction of the hills.

What could have happened? Why had he gone?

Lesley stared after him in startled dismay.

"I don't understand," she faltered. "I wonder what could have—"

Snatching up her case and light coat, she commenced running to where her brother had been; ran stumblingly towards the green belt of trees. Perhaps he had seen some stray cattle—some urgent job he must do? A dozen reasons suggested themselves.

"But I should have hardly thought he'd leave me flat," she decided. "It's jolly queer he should go off like that."

Lesley smiled ruefully, for common-sense struggled with dismay. She was just halting to recover her breath when a clatter of hoofs made her glance up.

"Hallo, there!" someone called merrily.

Galloping from out of the trees, his horse rearing recklessly, came the owner of the gay, laughing voice. Lesley had a startled glimpse of tanned, dare-devil features surmounted by a tousled mop of brown curls.

A fawn, low-crowned sombrero swung from the rider's neck on to broad, jaunty shoulders; white teeth flashed in a smile. Dropping to the ground with the lithe ease of a cat, the young rider sauntered towards her, leading his horse.

"Senorita Brallsford, I believe?" He bowed smilingly and pushed back the unruly curls with a gesture. "I'm afraid you must have thought we'd forgotten you. Impossible now I've seen you, of course."

Lesley blushed, but returned the cool regard equally coolly. From her brother's letters she realised she was being addressed by Kirk Denby, Don Ramon's nephew. She took stock of the silk shirt thrown artistically open, short bolero jacket and high-heeled, spurred boots.

"Yes, the scapegrace Kirk at your service," he bowed again laughingly. "Senorita, I have a horse for you here. I shall be charmed to accompany you back—my honour."

"Thank you, but I'm afraid I must wait here for Jim," she smiled back with answering charm.

"Then I, too, am afraid, senorita," he rejoined. "You see, I'm here to meet you because your brother can't possibly come."

"What, you mean he's not coming back here?" Lesley cried in astonishment. "I've just seen him. He—"

"I think you were mistaken, senorita. It was, no doubt, myself you saw."

"But I didn't—I saw Jim!" she burst out. "I don't know what you mean."

Lesley stared in utter bewilderment; the air of mystery about her arrival increased with a rush. She gave a gasp when Kirk led a second horse from the trees—she thought of the horse her brother had led a few minutes ago.

"Please, Senor Denby, where is Jim? Why did he ride off?" she blurted. "I know I saw him—he was leading that horse."

"Kirk, to you. And I'm sorry you're not mistaken, Lesley." The young rider shook his head sadly. "Er—my uncle's waiting for you," he reminded. "In Mexico it's not polite to be late."

**This Grand New Serial  
By DENISE COWAN  
(Author Of "The Impostor At The Winter Sports") Begins To-day**

Bewildered, Lesley mounted the horse, her brain awghirl.

What did it mean? What was all this playing with words? If this was a joke, then Kirk Denby was taking it too far.

"Please, Kirk, where is my brother?" she pleaded.

She watched Kirk gather her case and light coat, and vault lightly to the saddle of his horse. Whistling carelessly, he slapped both the mounts into motion.

"So you've come to teach us dancing," he grinned. "Did you ever—"

"I asked you about Jim!" Lesley flashed.

Kirk Denby stopped whistling and nodded thoughtfully.

"So you did. And I'm talking about dancing," he answered. "I know, we'll talk about the scenery just for a change."

Lesley bit her lip, for her anger was rising. Why was he ignoring her questions?

Her earlier uneasiness was now a definite anxiety. The mystery of her brother's behaviour was heightened by Kirk's evasive replies. They rode on in silence until the white, adobe buildings were reached.

The beauty of the ranch, the scent of jasmine and pink oleanders thrilled Lesley despite all her thoughts. She was greeted by the white-bearded Don Ramon, tall, courtly, and aristocratic. Lesley hugged him as she would her own uncle.

"I still don't know how to thank you, Senor Ramon," she began, blushing at her own temerity. "I—well—"

"Don't try to, my dear. I, too, am very happy about this," Don Ramon smiled kindly. "My people love dancing, like you do. I think the experiment will work out very well."

He led the way into the delightfully Spanish ranch-building where a plump, homely Mexican woman came forward to take Lesley's things.

"This is Rosa, our cook," Don Ramon said. "I will have to leave you in her charge, my dear. I hope you will accept a host's apologies for having to leave you so soon, but Rosa will, no doubt, make amends."

"Rosa's a great cook!" Kirk Denby laughed merrily.

The sound of his voice, half-mocking, half-serious, brought Lesley sharply back to the thoughts of her brother.

"Senor Ramon, I—is my brother here?" she burst out. "I'm dying to see him, and—"

Her voice trailed off at the sight of Don Ramon's grim face. There was something wrong—but what? Her heart missed a beat. Kirk Denby took a sudden step forward.

"Er—Lesley rather fancied she saw Jim," he drawled. "She was right, uncle. I guess I didn't like to explain."

"No, Kirk—thank you," Don Ramon said quietly.

"Please, I don't understand," Lesley faltered.

She broke off, for Don Ramon's expression had become graver than ever.

"My dear, your brother has gone—left us. He will not be coming back," Don Ramon replied.

### LESLEY IS MYSTIFIED

"NOT coming back?"

The incredulous cry echoed Lesley's bewildered dismay.

"But—but Jim works here," she protested pleadingly. "He wouldn't go without seeing me—without even a word. It doesn't make sense."

Lesley scarcely knew what she said; the shock robbed her of words.

"My dear, a lot of things don't make sense in this world," Don Ramon said gently, and his arm tightened around Lesley's shoulders. "I shouldn't try to probe into them too far—just accept them. You've come here for a very special purpose, you know."

He smiled, and Lesley's head came up proudly. She knew for certain there was something they were trying

to hide; something they realised would hurt her.

"Now I really must leave you to Rosa. And, my dear, don't inquire too closely into—shall we say—mysteries," Don Ramon said kindly. "Let's leave it that Jim wants to better himself."

Gathering his wide-brimmed sombrero, he squeezed Lesley's arm and hurried away through the door. She stared after him, trying to speak.

"Dinner, senorita. You must be very tired," Rosa's voice interrupted her thoughts. "I think you better come with old Rosa."

"That's right, look after her," Kirk exclaimed softly. "No, no more questions, Lesley," he smiled. "For the time being, adios, senorita."

With a playful flick of Rosa's dark hair, he vaulted the low-railed veranda and, with clinking spurs, ran to his horse. The devil-may-care swing of his shoulders was Lesley's final impression. She followed the motherly Rosa to where a charmingly laid meal was prepared.

"Ah, but he is a real vacquero, that one!" Rosa shook her head laughingly. "Eet is 'appy he make everyone here."

"You spoil him, I'm afraid," Lesley smiled.



"My dear, your brother has left us. He will not be coming back," Don Ramon said gravely, and Lesley's uneasiness deepened. What was the mystery which surrounded Jim's unexpected departure?

She smiled for the old lady's sake—Rosa was rather a darling. Yet the mystery surrounding her brother made it difficult to eat with enjoyment; the joyous thrill of arrival had been partly lost.

What was it the kindly Don Ramon was hiding? Why should Jim have left so abruptly—ridden wildly away? The questions surged into her mind.

"I must find out—find out from Kirk," Lesley murmured. "There's something wrong, terribly wrong."

She had just finished the meal and thanked Rosa when the lattice window was drawn open wide, and a mop of unruly brown curls appeared. Broad shoulders followed, and Kirk Denby swung into the room.

"Hallo, Kirk. Anything the matter with entering by the door?" Lesley asked. "Or do you always come in by the window?"

Although surprised, she regarded him coolly, for the unexpected entry brought a twinge of annoyance. It seemed to her slightly theatrical.

"Oh, I don't know—I thought it was rather impressive," he grinned, and suddenly appeared very boyish.

"Senorita, I have the pleasure of conducting you over the ranch—uncle's orders. I rather thought you might like to see where you'll dance."

"Dance—the school?" Lesley caught her breath.

Her eyes lit up, and she gazed hard at the bronzed, handsome features, trying to fathom what was in Kirk Denby's mind. Was the young rider's gay charm sincere, or—

"Well, I'm waiting!" His own eyes sparkled mockingly. "I am honoured to carry out all my orders."

"Kirk, there's something I want to ask you," Lesley said very quietly. "about this morning. I want to know what—"

"I'll show you the school," Kirk replied, interrupting her smilingly.

"I'm so bad at answering questions," Lesley's lips tightened, and the angry colour flamed to her cheeks. Always evasive answers or teasing. But she was determined to find out about Jim; more determined now than before.

"After you, senorita!" The young rider held open the door.

He led the way out of the ranch-house, past a little orange grove, and to a white, adobe building around which clustered honeysuckle and jasmine. He bowed and stepped back to allow her to enter.

"Oh!" Lesley whispered, enthralled.

The beauty of the snowy-white hall, its Moorish arches and magnificent floor took her breath away for that first thrilling moment. Sunlight



streamed through the high, lattice windows to illuminate suspended baskets of flowers. There was a little dais at one end for a band, and on it stood a radiogram for use when no band was available.

"Like it, Lesley?" Kirk leaned back on the door-jamb. "Perhaps you'll even teach me to dance?" The senorita will give her first lesson this evening."

"This evening?" Lesley echoed delightedly.

"A little surprise," he said gaily. "The band will be men from the ranch. Dancers will come here from all haciendas."

"Lovely!" Lesley sighed, and stood enraptured.

Already she could picture the scene—her own class of European dancing; dark-haired senoritas, swirling skirts and picturesquely-clad riders. Her imagination swept her away.

"I know I can do it," she murmured. "I must make the school a success. We can run balls, masques—"

The ideas bubbled up in exciting succession. All Lesley's ambitions and plans became more than mere dreams; her glance flitted expertly over the hall.

"The senorita seems entranced!" Kirk exclaimed.

"I am—you don't know what it means," Lesley breathed. "I love dancing like—"

She broke off, a shadow clouding her happiness. There was her brother—the strange mystery of why

he had left, the evasive replies to her questions. She had to get to the truth; there could be no peace until she had done that.

"Kirk, I must know the truth!" She whirled upon him. "Don't you see, I've got to know about Jim! He's done something, hasn't he—he's offended you in some way or other?"

"Yes, I suppose you might put it like that."

"Kirk, I must know!" Lesley begged.

There was a little silence before Kirk replied.

"He's been sacked!" he said grimly.

"Sacked!" Lesley whispered in horror. "But—but why? What has Jim done?"

Before Kirk Denby could answer a clatter of hooves echoed outside, and a burly, dust-covered rider strode in. He grabbed Kirk aside and whispered something in Spanish.

"Right, Juan, I'll be there at once," Kirk Denby rapped, and turned towards Lesley again. "Senorita, I think you had better come, too," he said softly. "This will answer the question you asked me."

He was smiling and boyish again; the teasing, bantering note returned to his voice. But what did he mean? Lesley wondered. She was aghast at the news she had received.

Jim sacked—forced to leave in disgrace. It didn't seem possible. Her heart sank as she followed the pair of them to where an excited group of Mexican girls—members of the ranch staff—were gathered around a young cowboy seated on a black horse.

"Sorry, Lesley, I hate to do this," Kirk murmured, "but I guess it's better you find out for yourself."

Lesley did not answer, but a chill of dismay increased her misgiving as the young Texan cowboy advanced on his horse.

"It's those rustlers again, Kirk," he nodded. "I reckon they struck from the hills. Anyway, we've lost thirty steers and Michele's stopped a bullet in his arm—he's being fixed up. He told us how he tried to go after 'em."

"Did he recognise anyone?" Kirk asked grimly.

The Texan looked towards Lesley uncomfortably, and pressed something into Kirk Denby's hand.

"Waal, yes and no, Kirk," the rider, Jess Williams, grunted. "The hombres were pretty well masked. But one of them must have dropped that," he said slowly. "I reckon you can guess who it was."

"Kirk, what is it? I want to see!" Lesley cried.

She thrust forward, an overwhelming fear growing each moment. Without a word, Kirk Denby held out a bright green bandana—a neckerchief of highest grade silk. It was folded and in it had been cut two eye-holes. Obviously it had been used as a mask!

Lesley's heart seemed to stop beating. She herself had sent that bandana from England—she had also seen it that day once before. Her gasp of horror died before uttered.

The bandana belonged to her brother. She did not need to guess what they thought.

"It means Jim's a rustler," Kirk said. "That's what we were trying to tell you before."

### A RIDE TO BARE PINE

LESLEY'S cheeks went white. She took the bandana and stood very still. For a moment everything swam.

Jim a rustler—it could not be true! There must be some mistake. Yet the bandana was his without doubt. She had bought the silk and made it herself; made it with a tiny, concealed pocket which could hold book-matches and a few cigarettes.

She had been very proud of that idea, and felt the fold of silk to make sure.

"Kirk, you can't really believe this. Jim can explain," Lesley cried. "It's a mistake—just a terrible mistake."

She did not doubt Jim—could not believe this, however things looked. Kirk dropped his gaze and turned un-

comfortably towards the big Texan, Jess Williams.

"You tell her, Jess," he said quietly.

Lesley listened in horror whilst the whole story was slowly unfolded—how someone answering to her brother's description had been seen working with the rustlers before. Then a large sum of money had been found hidden beneath the boards of Jim Brailsford's room. Evidence piled upon evidence.

"That's when uncle sacked him," Kirk explained slowly. "He gave him the chance to clear out—get away from the country. I guess Jim hasn't taken that chance."

"Now he's hiding out in the hills," Jess said harshly. "There's a whole gang of outlaws up there. Brailsford's seen fit to team up with them."

Lesley did not speak; her heart was too full.

"But it's not true—I know Jim," she told herself. "He's innocent, whatever they think. I must help him—find out the truth!"

Determination conquered her bitter dismay; Jim was in trouble. He needed a friend, someone to believe in him and help prove his innocence.

She walked away slowly, the green kerchief still grasped in her hand. Understandingly, no one spoke; no one stopped her. A lump came to her throat as she crumpled the smooth silk of the scarf in her fingers.

"Jim's innocent—I know it. If only I could—"

She suddenly stopped dead, for her fingers brushed against a thin slip of paper in the hidden folds of the pocket.

Idly at first, then with eagerness, Lesley dragged the slip from where it was hidden. It might be of no importance, of course, but—For no real reason her heart started thumping. She unfolded the paper and drew a sharp breath.

The paper—an ordinary cigarette-paper—bore four words scrawled in Jim's handwriting:

"FIRST ROCK. BARE PINE."

The haste of the impromptu jotting was obvious. The paper was scored where it had been pressed against something hard like a saddle. In two places the pencil point had gone through.

What did it mean, and why had Jim written it?

"He did it hurriedly—something he didn't want to forget," Lesley gasped. "It was important enough for him to use the only paper to hand."

She searched the pocket again, hoping to find something else. There was only fluff and the dust of tobacco.

"Bare Pine," Lesley murmured.

The name struck a chord in her memory—a giant pine alone on the hillside, yellow-white and devoid of all bark, she had seen it during her ride earlier on. "Struck by lightning," she had said to herself.

The memory grew clear, and her pulses thrilled with excitement. Supposing the note held a clue to the mystery—was connected with her brother's predicament?

"It's to do with that!" The thought was a flash of intuition. "There's something at the first rock near the pine—something that might help Jim."

Lesley tucked the slip of paper away, and all but ran to reach the hacienda again. She must go there—find out what that note meant. The rock near Bare Pine held a secret!

She reached the hacienda and looked around hesitantly; the horse she had ridden before was at the hitching-rail, quietly cropping the grass. Ought she to tell anyone first?

"No, better not," Lesley decided. "It'll be safer to do this on my own. Even Don Ramon's against Jim—he can only be convinced by real proof."

She knew her brother's guilt was taken for granted; it was up to her to work by herself. Her breathing grew quicker as she unhitched the horse from the rail.

Lightly, her hopes and excitement growing each moment, Lesley swung up in the saddle. Then she was away—galloping the horse up the rocky

trail which led from the valley. The wind beat on her cheeks and heightened her colour. The smooth rhythm of the horse brought an exhilarating thrill.

Great clumps of "prickly pear," looming boulders, and stunted trees passed in a blur; grey-white dust swirled beneath hoofs. At long last they were mounting the uneven slopes of the hills.

Like a white, pointing finger the giant pine rose against the sky-line, a landmark now impossible to miss. There was something strange, almost eerie about it.

Lesley drew nearer and nearer, then started in sudden dismay. For riding wildly towards her, recklessly half out of the saddle, came the dare-devil form of Kirk Denby.

"Oh!" Lesley gasped, her heart sinking.

The young rider cleared his horse over a whole mass of brushwood, swerved alongside, and brought her horse to a halt.

"Going anywhere, senorita?" he grinned. "Er—what happened to the others in the race?"

Lesley fought to keep her bitter dismay from her face. If only she could have gained the pine first!

"I don't think you're very pleased to see me. Lesley, I'm hurt," Kirk went on. His eyes danced with amusement. "You—er—you wouldn't be keeping anything from me?"

"I—I thought I'd like to ride," Lesley replied calmly.

"Then I'll come along with you," Kirk smiled. "Was there any particular place you were making for?"

Lesley turned with a start, for there was a strange note in his voice. Its amusement held a flavour of grimness.

What did he know—what was he getting at? The uneasy questions sped through her mind.

"If you don't mind, I'll ride by myself," she replied.

"But uncle wouldn't like that!" Kirk shook his head. "It's not safe for you to ride out alone. There are outlaws," he added more slowly.

"Outlaws!"

"That's right, Lesley—rustlers, for instance," Kirk said.

With a sudden movement he jerked the bridle, so Lesley's horse turned.

"I'll show you around—I've to look after you," he explained gently. "We mustn't let you fall in with bad company."

The young rider slammed both horses into movement, and they headed away from the pine. Lesley, her cheeks flushed with anger, realised he was taking her back to the ranch.

Had Kirk been hinting at her brother? Could he suspect the real reason behind her ride to the pine? A sudden warning of danger made her pulses beat fast.

They galloped on, Kirk pointing out landmark after landmark.

"You see, Lesley, you can be so very happy here," he smiled. "It would be a pity to let anything spoil it. There's the dancing—the school. It would be such a pity to do anything silly."

"Silly! What do you mean?"

Lesley caught her breath, aware of a far deeper meaning. Was this some kind of a threat?

"Why, like falling out with me," Kirk laughed merrily. "Don't worry, I'm only teasing you, Lesley. I think we'd better start getting back."

Lesley did not reply, but her hands clenched very tight on the reins. Beneath Kirk's gay, bantering charm she sensed something else. He had achieved a purpose; done something he planned.

"I don't trust him. He's hard—hard as steel," she decided.

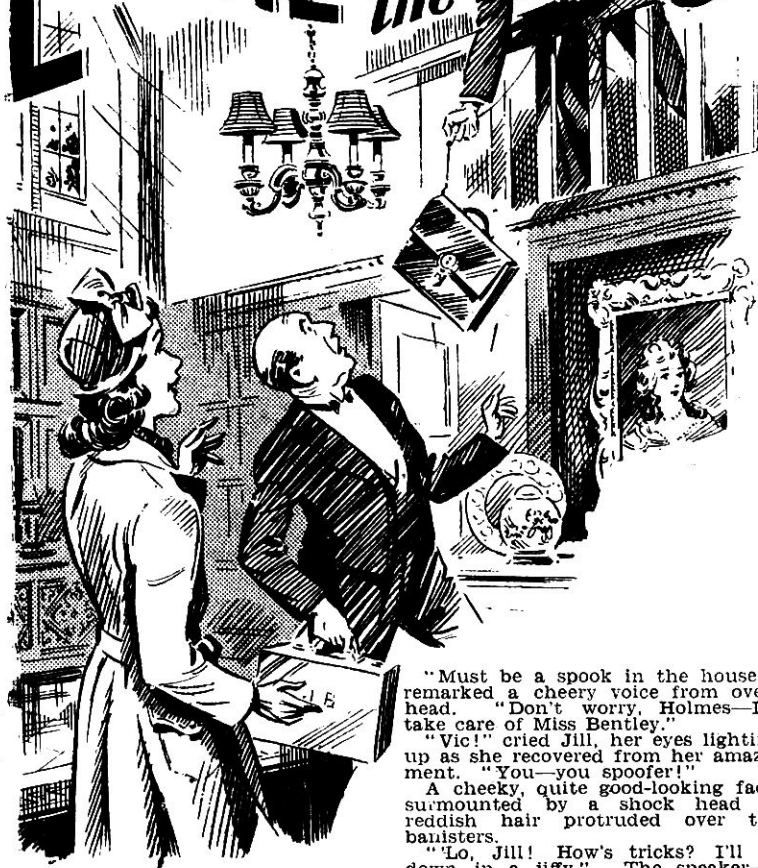
Her intuition of danger—of something wrong—had increased. Lesley stifled a cry when they arrived before the low hacienda. A stern-faced Don Ramon was waiting there with a number of picturesquely-clad riders; there were dark-eyed Mexican girls in beautiful dresses.

(Please turn to the back page.)



# LOYAL to the BOY JOKER

By RENEE FRAZER



## A PRANK THAT DIDN'T PLEASE

GOOD evening! My name's Jill Bentley. I think Mr. Archer is expecting me."

The slim, attractive girl standing in the porch of Abbot's Grange spoke a little breathlessly. It was clear to the dignified butler that she had walked from the station with her light luggage. Her face was flushed from the exercise, and her dark hair escaped in wayward tendrils from under a close-fitting hat.

She returned the butler's grave scrutiny with a friendly smile.

"You're Holmes, aren't you? Uncle Norman mentioned you in his letter. I'm his niece, you know—Vic Chane's cousin."

Into the butler's impassive features flickered an expression that might have been a smile.

"Mr. Archer expected you to come by a later train, miss. Master Vic was to have met you with the car."

He relieved her of her case, and reached for the music-satchel she carried.

"Please take great care of that, Holmes," Jill said anxiously. "It contains some important papers Uncle Norman asked me to bring."

"I'll hand it to Mr. Archer personally, miss," promised the butler, "and I'll inform him that you've arrived."

With dignified steps he led the way to an ante-room. Jill started to follow—and then a startled gasp escaped her lips.

Suddenly her music-satchel was whisked out of the butler's hand—to soar ceilingwards, as though of its own accord!

Hovering for a moment as it cleared the glass chandelier, it rose again more swiftly towards the landing above.

"Must be a spook in the house!" remarked a cheery voice from overhead. "Don't worry, Holmes—I'll take care of Miss Bentley."

"Vic!" cried Jill, her eyes lighting up as she recovered from her amazement. "You—you spoofer!"

A cheeky, quite good-looking face, surmounted by a shock head of reddish hair protruded over the banisters.

"Lo, Jill! How's tricks? I'll be down in a jiffy." The speaker—a cheery youth of about Jill's own age—proceeded calmly to wind up a length of black thread, with the music-satchel attached by a hook. "Tea an' crumpets for Miss Jill, Holmes!" he added breezily.

The butler seemed to make an effort to recover his impassive demeanour.

"Very good, Master Vic," he replied, and departed with an air of ruffled dignity, while Jill hurried forward to greet her cousin.

"Vic, you haven't changed a bit!" she declared, smiling reproachfully as he gripped her hand. "The same old prankster."

"Worse!" replied the boy solemnly. "Let me see, how long ago was it that you used to tell me off for putting dummy ink-blobs on your homework—and floating sugar-lumps in Aunt Agatha's tea?"

Jill's lips trembled in a reminiscent smile.

"It must be nearly two years. Poor dear Aunt Agatha! She had a lot to put up with, with the pair of us, before she went to America. Since then I've been at boarding-school—and you've been at college. And now Uncle Norman has found a real job for us both!"

"You're telling me!" Vic grinned, glancing at the music-satchel. "I see you've brought along those inventions that your dad left in his

will. Uncle Norman got the idea of manufacturing them in a big way, and putting me on the engineering side—while you help in the office. Quite a jolly team!"

Jill's eyes sparkled. "I think it's a grand idea, Vic! You always were clever at mechanical things."

"Umph! Uncle Norman doesn't think so sometimes," said the boy ruefully. "Well, better trot along and see him, or he'll think I've vanished you!"

He handed Jill her music-satchel and then strolled off on his own.

Jill reached her uncle's study, and raised her hand to knock. Then she paused. The door stood ajar, and from within came a murmur of voices. She recognised the ponderous tones of Holmes, the butler.

"Young gentlemen will have their fun, Mr. Archer, but I felt it my duty to report the incident as you happened to refer to Master Vic."

"Thank you, Holmes"—Uncle Norman's bluff voice betrayed his annoyance—"I will speak to my nephew about it. The boy is old enough to know better. No; you needn't stay to clear up, I shall be doing some writing in here after dinner. If you'll kindly inform Arnold Trent that I would like to see him—Ah! Come in!" he added, as Jill piteeked up courage to give a gentle knock.

Uncle Norman rose from his chair to greet her, while the butler stepped unobtrusively out of the room, closing the door.

"Well—well!" His massive figure towering above her, eyes shrewd yet not unkindly beneath his greying hair, Uncle Norman regarded his niece.

"Had a good journey, my dear—and brought the papers safely? Splendid! There's no need to tell you why I sent for you—all the details were in my letter. Are you keen on the job—hey?"

"I'm just longing to start, Uncle Norman!" Jill declared. "Thank you ever so much!"

"Don't thank me," grunted Uncle Norman. "I like keenness and ambition in young people—no use for tomfoolery. Which brings me to that hair-brained cousin of yours."

Jill caught her breath as she saw that frown that crossed the other's face.

"Uncle, Vic's all right!" she affirmed loyally. "He doesn't mean any harm."

"Oh, doesn't he?" growled Uncle Norman, treating her to a keen glance. "I suppose you would make excuses for him, seeing that you were almost like sister and brother together at one time. But I've had about enough of his capers. If he doesn't take himself in hand I'll seriously consider handing the job to someone else."

The thought that Vic—her inseparable companion of schooldays—might lose his big chance through his light-hearted escapades filled Jill with dismay.

"Uncle, you can't mean—you're not really serious?" she burst out impulsively. "Vic's as keen as anything on the job—I know he is."

"Then it's up to him to prove it!"

Who Was Responsible For The Startling Happenings At Abbot's Grange? Suspicion Fell On The Boy Japer, But Jill Could Not Believe Him To Be Guilty



granted Uncle Norman. "I've warned him more than once, and I'm beginning to lose patience. Upsetting my servants, annoying my guests—"

"He won't do it again, uncle!" Jill promised. "I'll—I'll have a word with him!"

Uncle Norman's manner changed as he saw her distress. With a kindly smile he patted her shoulder.

"We'll say no more about it, my dear," he declared. "After all, it's no fault of yours. Let me take charge of those papers, and then write your signature to a little document."

First locking the plans in his desk, he then explained that as her father's inventions had never been patented, he was taking out a provisional patent in her name to safeguard them. He merely required her to sign a paper agreeing to this, and he had sent for one of his guests to witness her signature.

"A smart young fellow—son of a neighbour of mine," he went on. "No nonsense about him. Ah—come in, Trent!" he added.

The door opened to admit a sleek, bespectacled youth some years older than Vic.

"Delighted to meet you, Miss Bentley," he said affably. "Heard a lot about you from your cousin, Jolly type, but a bit reckless with his jokes, what?"

Jill was up in arms at once at the other's condescending tone.

"Vic's jokes never did any harm to anyone," she announced hotly.

"Well, well, we won't go into that now!" put in Uncle Norman, with a smile. "I want you to witness my niece's signature. Trent—just a little business, matter, but very important."

He switched on the reading-lamp on the table by the window, and spread out the document for Jill to sign. Jill felt a thrill of excitement as she appended her signature.

She had always longed for the day when her father's inventions would reap the reward they deserved—a reward denied him in his lifetime. And it was grand to think that she and Vic, working together, would be helping to bring about that success.

Arnold Trent added his signature as a witness, and Uncle Norman reached for the blotting-paper.

And just then a slight sound caused Jill to look round; a startled gasp was frozen on her lips. She saw the ornamental inkstand give a sudden jump and overturn, sending a dull mauve stream over the precious document and over Arnold Trent's immaculate striped trousers.

A horrified shout from that elegant youth was echoed by Uncle Norman's exclamation of dismay as he stared at the ruined document.

"Bless my soul! Who did that?"

Jill's thoughts were racing as she recovered from her first bewilderment. She imagined she heard a faint rustling outside the window; and now, looking more closely, she could see a slight bulge under the plush tablecloth.

Next moment Arnold Trent had whipped back the cloth—disclosing a deflated rubber football-bladder, with a length of tube disappearing out of the window.

"There you are, sir, that's the explanation!" he exclaimed. "An old practical-joke—and it's pretty clear who's to blame!"

"My young rascal of a nephew!" roared Uncle Norman, his face purpling.

"Shall I find him for you, sir?" demanded Arnold Trent, with ill-disguised satisfaction.

"Yes—by all means," Uncle Norman growled. "Tell the young trickster to come along to my study—at once!"

The young man departed, and Jill, stammering some hasty excuse, sped from the room.

She intended to find Vic first—and warn him. It was the least she could do, for old time's sake. Why he had done such a crazy thing, she could not imagine—but this was not the time for questions or reproaches.

As it happened, she almost ran into

Vic as he entered the house by way of the conservatory. He stared at her in surprise as she caught at his arm, and there was the old bantering smile on his lips.

"Hallo, Jill—where's the fire?" he asked. "Or is someone chasing you?"

Jill gulped for breath, her face pale and anxious.

"Vic—Arnold Trent's looking for you! Uncle's in a towering rage, and says you've got to go to his study at once. Oh, why did you have to play such a trick—"

"What are you talking about?" Vic demanded, and now there was no laughter in his eyes. "Tell me!"

"Unsteadily, Jill described the scene in her uncle's study, and a curious expression crossed Vic's face.

"Listen, Jill," he said tersely. "And believe it or not. That rubber bladder's mine, right enough—I bought it to play a 'spook' trick on Arnold Trent. But I swear I didn't use it this evening, and I've no more idea than you have, who upset the ink in uncle's study!"

### THE UNKNOWN TRICKSTER

"VIC—on your honour?" demanded Jill, staring him straight in the eyes.

"On my honour, Jill!"

Jill swallowed hard, her mind in a whirl.

"Then—then, Vic—what does it mean?" she breathed.

Vic did not reply at once; there was a strange expression on his face as he stared across the darkened hall.

"Looks as though I'm not the only joker round here," he commented flippantly. "Maybe someone's jealous of Arnold's striped trousers—oh, hallo, Arnold!" he added, his manner changing as that youth came hurrying up. "Looking for anyone?"

"I'm looking for you, Chane," panted the other, his face rather red.

"Your uncle wants to see you in his study—at once! No doubt Miss Bentley has told you?"

"I gather there's been a spot of trouble about the ink," Vic murmured, glancing at the youth's mauve-stained trousers. "Y'know, that colour rather suits you."

Arnold glared.

"I suppose you think that's smart?" he snapped.

"Quite natty," Vic grinned. "If I were you, I'd take out a patent before anyone else pinches the idea. Well, I must be off. See you later, Jill!"

Whistling unconcernedly, he strode off towards the study.

Jill's heart sank as she gazed after him. Vic might make light of the affair, but the fact remained that he was in for serious trouble—trouble that might well affect his whole future, and hers.

"I say, Miss Bentley," remarked Arnold Trent, "you want to be careful of that chap. He's a menace with his mad-brained pranks—"

"Thank you!" Jill flashed, her chin coming up. "If other people knew Vic Chane as well as I do, they wouldn't say such things about him. I'm quite capable of taking care of myself, Mr. Trent."

Arnold Trent was snubbed—and he knew it. The expression in his eyes, behind their horn-rimmed spectacles, was not pleasant at that moment.

But Jill had other, more important matters to think about. Turning her back on the youth, she made her way slowly towards her uncle's study.

What did it all mean? If Vic had not played that practical-joke—and how could she doubt his word?—then it meant that someone else in the house had set up as a rival prankster. Was it someone with a grudge against Vic, personally—or against Uncle Norman?

Jill knew that there were several other young people in the household; her uncle had mentioned the fact, and she had heard the sound of youthful voices, though as yet she had not met any of the guests apart from Arnold.

Her heart sank lower as she neared the study, for she could hear her

uncle's voice raised in anger, almost drowning Vic's quiet replies. Instinctively she quickened her steps, wondering whether she dared intervene; and just then the study door was thrown open, and Vic, his face rather white, stood on the threshold.

Uncle Norman's voice boomed after him:

"Remember, Victor, this is your last chance! If it weren't that your cousin interceded for you, I'd send you packing at once! Not only have you ruined an important document, and annoyed one of your fellow-guests, but you have held up my plans concerning Jill and yourself. One more stupid prank in my house, and I'll wash my hands of you!"

"Uncle—" began Vic.

But the door slammed behind him. Vic turned, and a slight flush crossed his pale face as he caught sight of Jill standing there:

"Oh—hallo!" he said, forcing a wry grin. "So you heard?"

"Vic"—Jill started forward, catching at his arm—"did you tell uncle that—that it wasn't you?"

Vic shrugged.

"I started to tell him, but he wouldn't listen. 'Give a dog a bad name, y'know, I say'—his flippant tone changed—"thanks a lot for backing me up. Jolly sporting of you."

Jill shook her head impatiently.

"Never mind that, Vic. The important thing is for you to keep in uncle's good books. Promise me you won't play any more jokes—please!"

Vic hesitated.

"But, look here," he objected, "I didn't play that trick—and I'm jolly well going to bowl out the joker who did!"

"Of course, Vic!" Jill's hand tightened on his arm. "And I'll help you all I can. But meanwhile you mustn't take any risks. Promise me, Vic—word of honour!"

A slow smile crossed Vic's face.

"All right, Jill, you win," he said. "Word of honour!"

Jill gave a sigh of relief.

"And now—" she began eagerly; but just then a dignified voice spoke behind them:

"Your tea's served in the small drawing-room, miss. The crumpets are freshly toasted."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Holmes!" Jill turned quickly, to meet the butler's gravely reproachful glance. "I'd forgotten. Are you coming, Vic?"

"Had my tea ages ago," said Vic cheerfully. "You buzz along—mustn't let the crumpets get cold, eh, Holmes? I've a few little jobs to do before dinner. See you anon, Jill!"

With a wave of his hand he strolled off, and Jill, rather puzzled by Vic's manner, followed the butler to the drawing-room, where a dainty tea had been laid for her on a tray by the fire.

"A likeable young gentleman, Master Vic," remarked Holmes, shaking his head in a fatherly way as he arranged the tea-things. "But a bit of a worry to his uncle at times, I'm afraid."

Jill restrained an impulse to speak up in Vic's defence; the butler, no doubt, was still conscious of his recent injured dignity. Instead, she picked up a book that was lying near the tray and glanced at it casually.

"The Legend of Abbot's Grange," it was entitled.

"This looks interesting, Holmes!" Jill said, anxious to change the subject.

"Very interesting, miss," agreed the butler, with a faint smile.

"Master Vic found it in one of the attics, I believe, with an old framed picture. He told me that Abbot's Grange is supposed to be haunted—not that I'm in favour of spreading such stories, with young people about. Is there anything further you will be requiring, miss?"

"No, thank you, Holmes."

Her interest fully aroused by the book, Jill was scarcely conscious of the butler's silent departure. Her tea became cold and so did the toasted crumpets as she read on.

It was quite an enthralling legend



—about a sinister Black Monk, at one time an occupant of the Grange. "Just the kind of book Vic would find," Jill murmured smilingly, as she skimmed several pages to reach the most exciting part. "I wonder if he had some idea of playing a joke—"

She pulled herself up sharply, loyally dismissing the thought. Whatever her prank-loving cousin might have had in mind, she reassured herself by the memory of his recent earnest promise.

But her eyes were thoughtful as she finished her tea. If Vic had been telling the truth, there must be someone else in the house who was playing tricks. But— who? And what was the trickster's purpose?

Jill was determined to use all her wits to find out.

After tea, she went in search of Vic, but her cousin seemed to be purposely keeping out of her way. Thoughtfully, a glint in her grey eyes Jill hurried to her room to change; and half an hour later, excusing herself to the other guests, she stole out into the grounds in the gathering dusk.

Uncle Norman had introduced her to most of the party—a staid enough little gathering of adults, with a sprinkling of young people. Jill could hardly imagine any of them playing a deliberately spiteful trick on their host!

But with Vic's future at stake, Jill meant to leave nothing to chance.

With the aid of a small torch, she made a careful search of the flower-bed outside the study window—and was rewarded by the discovery of footprints.

But the prints were very blurred, and might have been left by the gardener. Despite her enthusiasm, Jill had no experience in detective work and she decided reluctantly that it was impossible to follow such a faint trail.

Only one thing she noticed as unusual. The pattern of a rubber heel had a small piece missing, as though it had been broken off. That might be important, and Jill made a careful note of it, just in case.

The boom of the dinner-gong sent her hurrying indoors, to find the party already assembling in the raftered dining-room softly lit by shaded candelabra.

To her relief, Vic had turned up and was looking his old cheery self as he laughed and chatted with the others.

But though she sat next to him at table, with Arnold Trent on her other side, Vic skillfully evaded all attempts on her part to question him about his recent absence.

Dinner passed pleasantly, but underlying the general laughter and talk Jill was aware of a certain tension, possibly due to the fleeting, hostile glances passed between Vic and Arnold Trent.

But it was not till coffee was served that this tension suddenly took a dramatic turn.

Uncle Norman had signalled to the attentive Holmes to switch on the overhead lights, and as the butler obeyed, there came a stifled cry from a pretty, fair-haired girl seated opposite Jill.

She was staring in horrified fascination over Jill's shoulder.

"Oh!" she gasped. "What a dreadful-looking picture!"

Jill turned. Glaring down at her from a dusty gilt frame, previously unnoticed in the shadows, was a pale, gaunt figure in a black robe, a cowl partly shadowing his grim features.

"The—the Black Monk!" exclaimed Jill, almost without thinking.

There came a murmur of interest from the other guests, but a sudden frown had crossed Uncle Norman's face.

"Holmes, who hung that picture there?" he demanded angrily. "I gave orders that it was not to be removed from the attic, owing to its condition."

The butler's eyes goggled as he stared at the picture.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I obeyed your

instructions and locked the attic myself."

"Then how did the picture get out?" demanded Uncle Norman. "Vic"—he turned sharply on his nephew—"do you know anything about this—hey?"

Vic's expression was bland, his blue eyes unflinching, as he met Jill's quick, challenging glance.

"Must have walked," he said coolly. "Queer things seem to be happening in this house—don't they, Arnold?"

Arnold Trent glared. "Very queer," he agreed. "I thought I saw you coming down from the attics about half an hour before dinner."

"Must have been dreaming, old man," said Vic, easily. "I was—er—snoozing in the library at the time."

"That's your story—" Arnold began, but Uncle Norman interrupted brusquely.

"Enough of that, you boys! I shall look into this matter later. Meanwhile, Holmes, you will kindly remove that picture—burn it, if you like."

"Very good, sir!"

"But who is—who was the Black Monk, Mr. Archer?" asked the fair-haired girl, with a kind of shivery fascination, as everyone stared at the picture.

Rather shortly—aware of the goggle-eyed curiosity of the young maid who was assisting Holmes to remove the dishes—Mr. Archer repeated the

a coloured silk handkerchief that lay on the floor; the same handkerchief that her cousin had worn in his breast-pocket at dinner!

Then—where was Vic? Even as Jill bent to pick up the handkerchief, her anxious thoughts were startlingly interrupted.

From the direction of the hall came a girl's terrified scream.

Jill whirled. Across the hall stood a scared-looking maid, a tray of broken crockery lying at her feet. And in the doorway of the moonlit library, arms raised, eyes gleaming menacingly through the slits in its hood, crouched the figure of the Black Monk!

### THE HOODED FIGURE

FOR a moment Jill felt frozen, unable to move or cry out. There was something horribly frightening about that figure, even though she could guess its identity.

It must be Vic. Her cousin had broken his promise!

The figure half turned; at the same moment the sound of running footsteps and angry voices came from across the hall.

The monkish shape hesitated and then made a dive for the stairs. Jill shook off the spell that gripped her, and sped frantically in pursuit.

Even now her loyalty to the boy japer mastered every other feeling. Though Vic's crazy action could not



"What does this mean?" demanded Uncle Norman, and sternly he pointed to the incriminating hooded costume which hung over Jill's arm.

legend connected with the sinister monk.

"A lot of nonsense, of course!" he added.

When the party broke up, after dinner, Jill saw Vic slip away and hurried after him. Crossing the darkened hall, she heard the creak of the library door, and caught a glimpse of her cousin's figure standing there in the moonlight.

"Vic!" she called softly.

But the chimes of the big grandfather-clock in the hall drowned her cautious voice, and the next moment Vic had gone. Worried by his stealthy manner, Jill hurried across to the library and opened the door.

Then her heart gave a jump, and she stared round her in bewilderment: for the library was deserted, though she had plainly seen Vic enter barely a moment ago!

Baffled, she ran to an inner door that communicated with her uncle's study; but that was securely locked. The windows, she could see, were all fastened. And the only possible hiding-place was an ornamental cabinet in the corner.

With an uneasy recollection of that blandly innocent expression on her cousin's face when he had left the dining-room, Jill darted to the cabinet and opened the door.

"Vic—" Her voice trailed away.

The cabinet was empty—except for

be excused, she was prepared to stand by him—whatever happened.

Soft-footed, its black robe rustling, the cowered figure glided swiftly up the dim staircase, Jill in pursuit. From the hall below came her uncle's stentorian shout:

"Stop, there—come back, you scoundrel!"

As yet Jill herself had not been sealed for the bend in the stairs concealed her from view. But the monkish figure was plainly visible as it crossed a patch of moonlight on the landing.

Jill quickened her steps. How she could help her reckless cousin she did not know; but at the back of her mind was a loyal, rather hopeless thought of assisting him to hide till her uncle's anger had simmered down a little.

What would happen after that she dared not surmise.

Panting for breath, she reached the corner of the landing and then came to a bewildered halt. For the hooded figure had vanished; the daring prankster had momentarily eluded pursuit.

But Jill's relief was short-lived. Uncle Norman and the others were hurrying upstairs. Vic could not hope to escape eventual capture. He would be caught red-handed, wearing the incriminating black robe—

Then her heart missed a beat. As



she turned, with a desperate idea of delaying the pursuit in some way, she stumbled over something that lay crumpled on the floor in a corner. In the pale moonlight it lay there, sinister and unmistakable. The Black Monk's hooded cloak!

Jill snatched it up, her thoughts racing. So Vic had managed to discard his disguise. But if it was discovered it might bear some clue to the culprit. She dared not risk its being found.

Desperately she stared round her as the footsteps came hurrying along the landing. She remembered the attic stairs, and headed for them, deciding to hide the cloak in one of the lumber-rooms. But even as she reached the foot of the stairs a door opened suddenly, and a hand seized her by the shoulder.

"Got him, sir!" shouted Arnold Trent's triumphant voice. "I've caught the trickster!"

Someone switched on the light—and Jill stood there, white-faced and panting in the dazzling glare, confronting Uncle Norman and an angry crowd of guests.

"Jill!" exclaimed Uncle Norman. "Great Scott!" came Arnold Trent's amazed tones, as he released his hand on her arm. "Miss Bentley!"

"There was a moment's stupefied silence. Then: "Jill! What does this mean? What are you doing with that robe?" Uncle Norman's voice was very stern as he pointed to the crumpled garment under Jill's arm.

Unflinchingly she faced him, her hands tightly clenched, determined not to betray Vic.

"I—I found it, uncle," she replied truthfully. "Found it?" Uncle Norman repeated, with a searching glance.

"Excuse me," interrupted Arnold Trent smoothly, "but isn't it rather peculiar that when I caught sight of Miss Bentley she was running away from you—as though intending to conceal the costume?"

"Jill," said Uncle Norman, in evident distress, "kindly hand me that robe."

Jill obeyed; she had no option. Sternly Uncle Norman examined it. "The retailer's name is here—Cliffords, of Ashgate. Does anyone know it?"

"I do, sir!" declared Arnold Trent, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "That's the theatrical and conjuring store. I heard your nephew speaking on the phone to them yesterday."

Jill's heart sank as she saw her uncle's grim expression. "I might have known it! I gave Vic his final chance, but the young trickster has chosen deliberately to defy me—to continue with his mad-brained pranks. I've finished with him! I'll not have him in my house after this—"

"Uncle!" burst out Jill appealingly. Uncle Norman turned on her, his eyes filled with reproach. "And you, Jill—I'm forced to the conclusion that you intended to cover up your cousin's disgraceful trick. I sent for you both to give you a fresh start in life—but it seems that you are almost as bad as he is. I shall have more to say to you later."

The words seemed to pound in Jill's numbed mind as he turned away. "Meanwhile, we must find that young scamp before he gets up to any more mischief! Trent, I'd like you to help me. You might ask Holmes to bring my coat and torch, as we may have to search the grounds."

Arnold departed on his errand, while Uncle Norman, without another glance at Jill, descended the stairs, followed by the little group of indignant guests.

For a long time Jill stood there, in the moonlight, a choking lump in her throat.

This was a shattering blow to all her cherished hopes. Vic was in disgrace, and someone else would get his job. And after this Uncle Norman

would never trust her to help him in the exciting task that had been planned for them both.

Jill gulped, pluckily fighting back the smarting tears that welled into her eyes. One thought was uppermost in her mind. She must find Vic! Even now her loyalty to her cousin was unshaken. Whatever had prompted his mad prank, he was still Vic—the cheery companion of her schooldays—who had so often stood by her in the past.

She could hear the tramp of feet in the house; the voices of the searchers. But after a while the sounds died away, and she guessed they were scouring the grounds.

Where was Vic hiding? After a brief, fruitless quest in the attics, Jill hurried downstairs. There was no one in the hall, and her footsteps led her to the library. That was where she had last seen Vic, before the sinister apparition appeared. And even now she could not guess what ingenious trick had enabled him to elude her.

The library was bathed in pale moonlight that shone through the tall windows, falling aslant the quaintly carved cabinet where she had found Vic's handkerchief.

Almost instinctively she crossed over to the cabinet, opening the door and peering inside. It was empty, of course; she had not really expected to find anything there. Yet there was something curiously familiar about that quaint piece of furniture—something that awakened memories—

"Jill!" From the empty cabinet a voice had spoken—a muffled, choked voice. "Jill!" it repeated. "For goodness' sake let me out!"

### CAUGHT IN THE CABINET

It was Vic's voice! Her mind almost numb with amazement, Jill started forward, peering incredulously into the empty cabinet.

"Vic—where are you?" she gasped. "Listen!" came the muffled voice. "I'm in here! There's a secret spring just inside, by the hinge. Press it quickly and get me out of this!"

Jill groped for her torch, flashing its brilliant gleam inside the cabinet. It still seemed to be empty—no trace of a hidden door. Then, just by the hinge, she found a small metal knob. Anxiously she pressed it.

There was a faint whirr. What she had supposed to be the back of the cabinet swung out suddenly, and there emerged a dusty, dishevelled figure.

"Vic!" Jill caught at his arm, clinging to him in relief and bewilderment. "Vic, what does it mean? How long have you been there?"

"All the time!" jerked Vic, with a twisted smile. "I tried to tell you last time you came in, but what with that girl's scream, and all the commotion, I couldn't make myself heard."

Jill stared at him, her mind in a whirl. "Then—Vic—you weren't the Black Monk!"

Vic gave a short, unsteady laugh, but his blue eyes were a shade reproachful as he met her gaze. "Jill—I promised."

"I—I know," gulped Jill. "But you disappeared, and then the Monk came and I thought—"

Vic chuckled grimly; then his expression became serious.

"Listen, Jill," he said. "The Black Monk was the rival trickster—the fellow I'm out to catch! I had an idea he was up to fresh mischief this evening, and I hid in this cabinet to keep watch. It's one of my old trick-cabinets—Uncle Norman let me bring it along when I came. But the spring's faulty and, like a chump, I got myself caught by my own invention!"

His expression was so rueful that Jill had to laugh. "Never mind, Vic!" she said eagerly. "We've only to explain to

Uncle Norman, and everything will be all right—"

"Will it?" Vic shook his head grimly. "Don't you bank on it, Jill. After what's happened, d'you suppose that uncle will believe either of us? He'll imagine that we made up the yarn between us—and I can hardly blame him."

Jill's face fell. "Then—then what are we going to do?"

"I've an idea," muttered Vic. "That trickster—whatever he may be—is playing a pretty deep game. He's not just out for a lark. To-night, Jill, I'm going to keep watch, and you're going to help me."

"But, Vic, uncle has practically threatened to turn you out of the house when he finds you!" Jill gulped.

"He won't find me!" said Vic grimly. "I'll hide in one of the out-buildings, and you can let me in after the others have gone to bed—"

"Vic—hark!" Jill caught anxiously at his arm. "They—they're coming back now!"

Footsteps and voices sounded on the drive outside.

Vic drew a quick breath. "Give 'em time to come in, Jill," he muttered, "and then I'll slip out of the window. Listen for me round about midnight, at the conservatory door. I know you won't let me down!"

Jill assisted her cousin to climb from the window, and closed it quickly after him. Trying desperately to compose herself, she hurried out into the hall—to come face to face with Uncle Norman, accompanied by Arnold Trent and Holmes, who was carrying a lantern.

The butler looked at her pityingly as Uncle Norman beckoned her. Her uncle's expression was graver than ever, and his voice shook with emotion.

"Your young scamp of a cousin appears to have left you to face the music, Jill," he said grimly. "He knew what he was about!"

"Uncle, what do you mean?" Jill faltered, startled by his manner.

"I mean, Jill," said Uncle Norman gravely, "that not content with scaring my guests, he had the effrontery to rifle my desk as a last act of defiance. Fortunately I had locked by papers and valuables in the library safe before dinner, but this is the last straw. If he dares to show his face in my house again I will have him thrown out!"

Jill's heart stood still. The indignant protest that rose to her lips remained unspoken. She was staring at the polished floor—at a muddy footprint—and the mark of a broken rubber heel.

The mark of the unknown trickster!

"ALL clear Jill?"

"All clear, Vic!" A distant clock was booming midnight as Jill unlocked the conservatory door to admit her cousin.

"Heard anyone moving about?" he whispered.

In the library, Vic—just now," Jill replied. "I think someone must have got in through the inner door leading to uncle's study."

An excited gleam came into Vic's eyes.

"Leave this to me, Jill!" he muttered. "I don't know what the blighter's game is—but I'll soon find out!"

"Vic, be careful!"

He grinned reassuringly as he led the way towards the library door. Jill handed him the key.

"I borrowed it from uncle's room, after he locked up for the night," she whispered.

"Good for you!" Vic said. "Now stand by to switch on the light as soon as the door's opened. I want my hands free." Jill heard the faint click of the

(Please turn to the back page.)



# Detective June's STRANGEST CASE

By PETER LANGLEY

## JUNE'S BRAIN-WAVE

UNDER the name of Carolyn Stuart, June Gaynor, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous detective, joined a film company staying at lonely Knoll Castle. A mysterious figure known as the Green Archer was plotting to drive the film company out of the castle.

Also staying there was a man who was masquerading as June's uncle, and the girl detective discovered that the impostor was also the Green Archer.

June was forced to become a fugitive by the Green Archer, and learnt of a great coup he was planning which he called Operation Van Dyke. She believed that the solution to the mystery lay hidden behind a locked door underneath the castle.

The girl detective decided that at all costs she must return to the castle and find some way of remaining there.

Stealing back, she overheard the bogus Noel Raymond talking to the butler. Instantly a daring idea occurred to her.

"GOT it!"

Her blue eyes agleam, June Gaynor tiptoed out of the alcove. The conversation she had heard between Bromley, the butler, and the bogus Noel Raymond had suggested a daring plan to enable her to stay on at the castle in secret. But to put it into operation she must visit Lerwick, the nearby town, as quickly as possible.

Anxious to escape unseen, she began to creep down the corridor leading to the forbidden West Wing, but suddenly she received a shock. From behind her came a startled shout, and, swinging round, she saw that a boyish figure had emerged from a side passage beyond the stairs and was regarding her with wide, incredulous eyes.

It was Bob Staines, and it was no wonder that the curly-headed member of the Tweenies was amazed, for only an hour or so ago he had seen the girl he knew as Carolyn Stuart led away under arrest.

"Carolyn!" he exclaimed. "Great pip, where have you sprung from?"

Desperately June-gestured as he came running forward.

"Sh! Don't give me away!" she urged, her eyes eloquent with pleading. "I haven't really broken away from arrest. It was a trick. That wasn't a genuine police inspector who took me off in the car."

"Not a real inspector!" Bob ruffled his black hair in astonishment. "What do you mean, Carolyn?" "Fraid I don't get it. Look here, is this some queer kind of a leg-pull?"

"No, it's the truth—honestly, it is," June said. "Oh, I know it must sound fantastic to you, but—"

She broke off, and her heart gave an apprehensive leap, for from nearby had come a sharp cry:

"Hallo! What's going on up there?"

It was the bogus Noel Raymond, and next moment his footsteps sounded on the stairs. June knew something like panic as she realised that the impostor was on his way to investigate. It would be disastrous to all her hopes if he found her here. Imploringly she gazed across at the bewildered Bob.

"Please don't give me away!" she urged again, then took to her heels and fled, leaving the boy film actor staring more amazedly than ever.

In the nick of time the girl detective disappeared round a bend in the corridor, for next moment the bogus Noel Raymond appeared at the top of the staircase. With a frown, he looked across at Bob.

"Who was that you were talking to?" he demanded.

Round the corner June held her breath. If the boy gave her away, then nothing could prevent her recapture, and that would mean the end of her audacious plan.

There was a second or two of awful suspense, then came Bob's voice, sounding puzzled and a little indignant.

"No one in particular, Mr. Raymond. I was just chatting to a girl friend."

"Who was it?" The impostor's tones were brusque and commanding.

"Hear, steady on!" The boy actor's voice sounded more indignant than ever. "I don't see what business it is of yours. I suppose Vera March and I can have a chat together if we want to."

June gave a sigh of relief. Good old Bob! He was playing up nobly.

Not staying to hear any more, she hurried on. Gaining the West Wing, she crossed to the wall where was situated the secret panel. After running her hand over the woodwork, pressing and probing at the carved beading, she managed to gain entrance to the hidden stairs. At their foot was a slab of rock, but this also presented little difficulty. Beside it was an out-jutting knob, and on twisting it she set in motion the ancient mechanism.

Creakingly the slab swung open, and thankfully she entered Rainbow Cave. There she paused anxiously. Suppose Captain Kummel and his rascally men were still on the beach searching for her?

She tiptoed forward, to peer nervously out into the rocky cove.

**This Week June Gaynor Returns To The Haunted Castle—In Disguise**

there was no need for alarm. The beach was deserted.

The tide had receded far enough to uncover the narrow path which wound round the great headland on which Knoll Castle stood, so there was nothing to prevent the girl detective from walking along the coast to Lerwick.

A church clock was chiming out twelve o'clock as she gained the little fishing port, and she smiled with satisfaction.

"Bromley said Milly Haytor's train is booked to arrive at twenty past," she murmured to herself, "so I'll be in plenty of time."

And briskly she set off up the road which led to the railway station.

"SAY, Bromley, there's a girl wanting to see you. Guess it must be that new maid the agency promised to send along."

Theodore Cronberg made the announcement as he entered the banquetting-hall where the rest of the film company were already at lunch.

The grey-haired butler put down the coffee-pot from which he had been serving and straightened up with relief.

"That is good news, sir," he declared. "I was beginning to fear that she didn't intend to turn up. Now that the newspapers have begun to print stories about the Green Archer I am afraid there are very few people willing to take service at the castle."

He shook his head sadly at the memory of all the recent alarming happenings and went out into the hall. Standing there, suitcase grasped in one hand, was a nervous figure. It was a girl, rather poorly dressed, with black hair which emphasised her pallid cheeks, and horn-rimmed spectacles shading her eyes.

The butler regarded her with a pleasant smile.

"Are you Miss Haytor?" he asked.

The girl nodded.

"Yessir. I'm from the agency. I don't know whether I've done right to come. All those stories I've heard about the Green Archer are very scaring."

Bromley gave her shoulder a soothing pat.

"Don't you worry your head about them, my dear," he urged. "They are all grossly exaggerated. There's no reason to be frightened. I can assure you you will be very happy here."

"I'm sure I hope so, sir," was the response.

The butler gave her shoulder another paternal pat, then began to ask questions about her home, her domestic experience, and other personal details. The newly arrived maid answered slowly, hesitantly. Bromley



put her uncertainty down to nervousness. Not for a moment did he guess the truth—that the girl's hesitant replies were caused by a lack of knowledge.

For it was not the real Milly Haytor who stood there, but—June Gaynor! To return to the castle disguised as the new maid—that had been June's audacious plan, and it seemed to be working well.

On meeting the real Milly Haytor at the railway station, the girl detective had had no difficulty in persuading her to catch the next train home. Owing to the disturbing rumours about the Green Archer, Milly had not been very keen on coming to the castle, and it was almost with relief that she had learnt that her services were not, after all, required—especially as June had given her two pounds by way of compensation.

Having no suspicion as to the maid's real identity, the butler brought his friendly cross-examination to an end.

"If you will come along with me, Milly," he said, "I will show you to your room; then, no doubt, you would like some lunch. Apart from helping to serve at dinner, you need not start work until to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir," June eyed him gratefully. This was grand news. Now she would have all afternoon to look for the "iron glove" curio, and also to keep a watchful eye on the bogus Noel Raymond.

"Let me have your suitcase," went on Bromley, then stopped, for the door behind them had opened and a tall, athletic figure entered the hall.

June's heart gave a nervous laugh, for it was the impostor who stood there!

"Who's this girl?" demanded the bogus Noel Raymond. "Where's she come from?"

### THE CURIO KEY

**K**NOWING how alert and clever the impostor was, June knew an awful fear.

Suppose he had got wind of her plan! Suppose his keen eyes had pierced her disguise!

On tenterhooks of anxiety, she stood there, but Bromley, at least, was smiling.

"This is the new maid, sir," he explained. "Miss Milly Haytor. You will remember we were discussing her before lunch."

The bogus detective nodded, but his probing gaze did not leave June's face.

"Are you absolutely satisfied as to her credentials?" he asked the butler. "We've had one confederate of the Green Archer masquerading here, so we can't be too careful, especially as we're expecting the jewels this afternoon."

Bromley gave a respectful bow. "Quite, sir, but you need have no apprehension. The agency have vouched for this young lady."

The impostor gave June another searching look, then, to her relief, he gave another nod.

"All right," he said, and turned away.

When he had gone the butler took charge of the suitcase and led the way upstairs. Thoughtfully June followed. The impostor's cryptic reference to jewels had intrigued her.

"Was that Mr. Raymond, the famous detective?" she asked innocently, and when Bromley inclined his head she pretended to be thrilled. "Coo, fancy that, now! And those jewels he spoke of, I suppose they'll belong to one of the film stars staying here?"

The butler smiled. "Hardly. They are real heirlooms," he said. "They belong to the family who own this castle, and they are being specially lent for use in the filming to-morrow. Miss Selwyn, one of the stars you referred to, is to wear them."

Behind her spectacles June's eyes gleamed.

"Coo, I should think that's risky with this awful Green Archer about!" she exclaimed.

Bromley frowned.

"Nonsense! There is no risk at all.

Mr. Raymond is taking special pre-

cautions. Now, stop chattering, my girl, and get unpacked, then go down to the kitchen and have your lunch."

As he spoke the butler opened a bedroom door and handed June her suitcase. More thoughtfully than ever, she entered the room. The news that valuable jewels were expected this afternoon was disturbing. Suppose the Green Archer was planning to steal them! Suppose that this was the way he meant to strike at the film company!

"Golly, there'd certainly be ructions if they were lost!" the girl detective told herself as she hung up the few garments she had hastily bought in the town at the same time as her disguise. "The film company would be bound to be blamed, and they might be forced to leave the castle."

Now, more than ever, she decided to keep a strict watch on the bogus Noel Raymond. Not if she could help it should he get away with his treacherous plot, no matter what it should prove to be.

"But my first job is to find out where that iron-glove curio is kept," she told herself.

Her pulses raced as she thought of the strangely shaped key which could open the door of the secret room under the castle. In that room, she was convinced, lay hidden the solution to the whole mystery. If only she could get inside, search around and—

She drew in a thrilled breath.

"Then I'll know exactly what Operation Van Dyke is," she murmured. "Know why the Green Archer and his men are so desperately anxious to drive the film unit from the castle."

She made her way downstairs, and when she entered the main kitchen she saw the other two maids already seated around the table, being served by the plump Mrs. Bromley. The butler's wife greeted the disguised girl detective with a motherly smile, and when she had introduced her to Susie Binks and Emily Hall, the other two servants, she set down a heaped-up plate of steak pie and vegetables in front of her.

"There, make a start on that, my dear," she bade. "I expect you're hungry after your journey."

As June ate she made friends with the other maids. They proved only too willing to gossip, and she found it easy to turn the conversation into the channel she wanted.

"Treasures?" ejaculated Susie in response to a sudden question from June. "Golly, you won't find any in this old dump!"

"Not likely!" agreed Emily. "Why, the castle was practically empty when the film folks took over. It hadn't been lived in for years."

"But surely there was something of interest kept here," pressed June—"a few old relics or something of that kind?"

"Relics? Oh, you mean curios!" Susie sniffed. "Oh, yes, there's lots of them! The film folks are using them in their film, though what they see in them beats me."

"Oh, I think old things are wonderfully interesting!" declared June. "I'd love to have a look at these curios. D'you know where they are kept?"

To her delight, both girls nodded. "In the library," said Susie.

At that moment Mrs. Bromley came bustling forward, to beckon to June's companions.

"Now, then, my girls," she called, "don't sit dawdling there! If you're finished get on with the washing-up. No, not you, my dear," she added, with a smile at June. "You're free until dinner to-night. If I were you, I'd take a stroll around and get your bearings."

The girl detective was only too glad of the opportunity to leave the kitchen. Now that she had discovered where the curios were kept, she was anxious to search amongst them.

Opening the baize-covered doorway, she passed out into the main hall. Technicians and cameramen were busy preparing for the afternoon's filming, and several of the actors and

actresses sat around, studying their

parts. June could not resist a wistful sigh.

She had revelled in being a member of the unit and would have loved to take part in the rehearsal. But that was impossible. Carolyn Stuart was in disgrace, and no doubt Theodore Cronberg was already making arrangements to fill her place.

Stepping over the trailing cables, June made her way down a long corridor, and her eyes gleamed as she saw the library door before her.

Was the curio she wanted so urgently lying behind that closed door?

After a quick glance around she crossed over to the door, and, seizing the handle, she quickly turned it.

The door swung open and eagerly she looked around.

In the centre of the book-lined room was a great mahogany table, and her eyes shone as she saw the intriguing array of ancient curios spread out on its polished surface.

Bows and arrows and other mediæval weapons; carved wooden crests; tattered flags; pieces of armour; objects of every size and description.

Her heart pounding, she took a step nearer, and then a triumphant cry escaped her lips.

For there, lying between two embossed copper shields, was the object she sought.

The iron glove! In appearance it looked like a man's clenched fist. The metalwork was engraved so that it looked as if the hand was clothed in a chain-mail glove, and sticking out at right angles from its back was a short, sharp spike.

Wonderingly June gazed at the strange curio.

What an extraordinary object to be used as a key! How could it possibly operate the door of the secret room?

She picked up the curio—to drop it on to the table again next moment as from behind her came a sharp cry.

"What are you doing in here?" Round June whirled, her arm dropping hurriedly to her side. Even before she saw that athletic figure in the doorway she knew who stood there, for there could be no mistaking that voice.

It belonged to the bogus Noel Raymond. Sternly disapproving, he strode forward.

"Well, my girl, why don't you answer?" he demanded. "Why—"

And then he stopped. His gaze had gone to the table, and as he saw the iron-glove curio, which had fallen on to one of the copper shields, his whole manner changed.

He gave a startled shout, and furiously he seized June by the arm. "You little spy, what's your game?"

he shouted. "Why were you trying to steal that curio?"

### AN AMAZING DISCOVERY

**J**UNE caught in her breath. She realised that her secret was in danger of being found out.

But it would be disastrous if her interest in the vital model of the mailed fist were discovered—if her real identity were to become known.

At all costs she must allay the impostor's suspicions.

Remembering the role she was playing, she gave a frightened sob.

"Oh, sir, don't go for me!" she gulped. "I wasn't doing any harm—honest, I wasn't!"

He glared at her. "Don't lie! You came in here to steal that curio!"

"Oh, I didn't, sir! I—I only picked it up out of curiosity. Mrs. Bromley said I could look around, so I didn't think anyone would mind me looking at all these funny things. Please let me go, sir!"

"Not until—"

The impostor broke off, his manner undergoing another swift change, for the door had swung open again, and a thick-set man almost as wide as he was tall had entered.

It was Theodore Cronberg, the film producer, and he frowned at the unexpected scene.

"Hey, what's going on here?" he demanded, chewing aggressively at the end of his inevitable cigar.

Instantly the impostor was very much the dignified detective. He let go of June's arm and shook his head disapprovingly.

"I'm afraid all my precautions will be useless if people are careless enough to leave doors unlocked," he declared. "Despite my strict instructions, this door was open, and when I came in I found this girl about to steal one of the curios."

June gave a convulsive sob, and appealingly she looked across at the producer.

"Oh, I never, sir! I was only looking. I didn't mean any harm!" she cried.

Her acting this time found a quick response. Theodore Cronberg patted her arm.

"Sure you didn't," he agreed. "Guess a girl like you wouldn't have any interest in pocketing any of these old relics. Still, you shouldn't have come in here without permission. See that it doesn't happen again."

And he gave her a nod of dismissal. Only too glad to escape so lightly, June hurried from the room, though she was acutely conscious of the angry, suspicious way the impostor was still regarding her. Obviously, he was far from satisfied.

On reaching the end of the corridor the girl detective paused and cast a quick look over her shoulder.

She was just in time to see the bogus Noel Raymond lock the door with a queerly shaped brass key that dangled, with half a dozen other keys, from a silver ring.

If the library was to be kept locked, how was she to get in and secure the vital iron-glove curio?

That problem occupied her mind all the afternoon. It was not until nearly dinner-time that a possible solution occurred to her.

When the rehearsal was over all the film gear was carried back up into the West Wing. With it went wickerwork baskets containing a collection of lovely costumes which were required for the filming of the masked ball scene on the following day. Theodore Cronberg and Noel Raymond superintended the storing away of the gear, and June, still determined to keep a watchful eye on the impostor, covertly watched from the corridor.

The producer looked unusually harassed, and he frowned worriedly as he produced an oblong, plush-covered box from his jacket pocket.

"Are you absolutely certain, Raymond, that there's no chance of that pesky Green Archer getting hold of this?" he asked, holding out the box. "Suffering mackerel, but I'd be ruined if these jewels went astray!"

The bogus detective smiled. "No chance at all," he declared. "There are special burglar alarms at the windows and the door will be double-locked. Here, you had better lock up and keep the keys yourself."

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, and the watching June gave an excited start as she saw that amongst the keys was the one which fitted the library door.

Feasted, the producer took them. The jewel-case containing the valuable castle heirlooms—borrowed specially for the film—was placed on top of one of the hampers, and then Mr. Cronberg led the way out of the room. Carefully he double-locked the door, dropped the bunch of keys into the right-hand pocket of his jacket.

Frightened of being seen, June stole away. She was certain the impostor had designs on the contents of that jewel-case. She felt certain that tonight, inside that locked room, would be struck the blow which he was confident would drive the film company out of the castle. Somehow she must prevent its being successful, but that was not her main worry at the moment.

How could she gain possession of the bunch of keys Theodore Cronberg had put in his pocket?

As she walked down the stairs an audacious idea occurred to her; and after dinner, when the film company was seated in the lounge, smoking, chatting, as they waited for coffee to be served, she put it into operation.

The girl detective was helping Bromley, and, a steaming pot of milk in one hand, a pot of coffee in the other, she went from chair to chair.

The producer sat beside the bogus Noel Raymond. Between them was a low table, on which stood two cups.

"Black or white, sir?" June asked.

"White, please," said the impostor.

"Same for me, I guess," said Mr. Cronberg.

June bent to fill the cups, and then it happened.

To the onlookers she seemed to slip on the polished floor. The coffee-pot clattered to the ground, while the milk-jug tilted dangerously in one outflung hand.

Next moment a white stream of hot liquid poured out—right over the film producer's jacket!

"Suffering mackerel!" With a howl, he bounded to his feet, nearly swallowing his cigar in his agitation. Tearfully June surveyed him.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir, but I couldn't help it!" she gulped. "I kind of slipped. Here, let me have your coat,

along the corridor leading to the library.

She would never get a better opportunity to secure the iron glove than this.

Almost trembling with excitement, she unlocked the library door and entered. To her relief, the vital curio still lay on the table. She snatched it up, pocketed it, then hurried back down the corridor. An overwhelming desire to lose no time in investigating the secret room seized her, and, letting herself out of the castle, she went racing across the courtyard.

Of course, there would be trouble if her absence were discovered. But against that risk was an even greater one—the danger that Theodore Cronberg might discover the key he had gone and report his loss to the bogus detective. Vaguely suspicious of the supposed new maid already, the impostor would quickly guess the truth.

Breathlessly June made her way down the steep path to the beach. It was twilight now, and great black shadows patterned the sand and rocks.

Would the iron-glove curio open the door? And, if so, what would she find in the secret room? Would this exploit reveal the truth about the mysterious Operation Van Dyke which



June became anxious as she saw how keenly the bogus detective was surveying her. Would he pierce her disguise?

sir. Let me clean it before the stain dries."

And almost before the agitated producer realised what was happening, the jacket was off and, with another distressed gasp, June rushed off to the kitchen with it.

Once behind the baize-covered door, however, her mood was transformed. She straightened up and gave a triumphant chuckle.

"Done it!" she exclaimed. "It was a bit tough on Mr. Cronberg, but if he knew the reason for my clumsiness he'd thank me—not grouse."

Eagerly she thrust a hand into the right-hand pocket and drew out the bunch of keys. Extracting the curiously shaped one she knew fitted the library door, she returned the rest of the bunch to the pocket—and only just in time. For at that moment the green-baize door opened and in hurried the butler.

"Why haven't you started to clean off that stain?" he demanded sharply. "Here, give it to me! Martha will do it."

And, as his plump wife came in from the scullery, he almost snatched the jacket from June and held it out, explaining to Mrs. Bromley what had happened.

June tiptoed to the door leading to the servants' parlour. The sooner she made herself scarce the better, she decided. Unnoticed, she slipped into the adjoining room. Once there, she took off her apron, donned a warm coat, and made her way into the hall and

the Green Archer and his men were planning? Would it enable her to expose them?

Her pulses racing, she gained the entrance to Rainbow Cave, and was about to dart through when suddenly she paused.

What was that? It sounded like feet crunching on the pebbly sand.

In alarm, she whirled, and then an icy hand seemed to clutch her, for coming up from the water's edge, making straight for her, was a tall, athletic figure she had come to know too well.

The bogus Noel Raymond! For a moment the shock left her incapable of movement.

In consternation, she stood there, and then suddenly she frowned. There was something strangely different about the impostor. He wore flannels and a dark sports coat instead of a lounge suit. His face seemed thinner; his hair was dishevelled, and he was stumbling up the beach rather than walking.

Wide-eyed, she stared, then her heart gave a leap.

"Nunky!" she gasped. "It's nunky!"

For all at once the truth was clear. This was not the impostor. It was—the real Noel Raymond!

Her uncle on the scene! Events are now sure to move swiftly and dramatically, so on no account miss next week's exciting chapters.



# The MERRYMAKERS' Island College



## THE RIVAL COOKS

"HALLO, boys! Come to learn all about cookery?" asked Sally Warner, a smile on her face and a dab of flour on her nose.

A cookery class was in progress, and Sally, Fay Manners, and a number of other girl students were busy in one of the large kitchens at the International College on Waloorie Island, Australia.

The door had just opened, and peering in were the cheery faces of Don Weston, Johnny Briggs, Slick Kaplin, and Tubby Winwood.

"Just come to give you the benefit of our expert advice, you mean," grinned Johnny.

"What's cooking?" Don wanted to know.

"Jam tarts!"

"Gee!" Tubby's eyes lit up. "I always like a snack of jam tarts before lunch," he added hopefully.

"Oh, do you? Well, you can have just one— Goodness!" gasped Fay.

For her words had been taken by the boys as an open invitation. There was a rush, a dive of hands, and in a twinkling the batch of tarts made by Sally and Fay had vanished.

"Golly!" exclaimed Sally. "There's none left, and Miss Mills hasn't inspected them yet. Fortunately, we've got some more in the oven—"

"Bring them out," said Tubby, munching happily. "These are jolly good! Super, in fact!"

The girls were mollified. For praise from Tubby was praise indeed; even they admitted that he was a cook among cooks.

But Don and Johnny, ready for some fun, were not prepared to be so lavish with their praise.

"H'm! Not so bad for beginners," mumbled Johnny. "Might have had a little more jam in them!"

"I suppose you think you could have done better," said Sally.

"Sure," said Don. "Tell you what—we'll make some for you, and when Miss Mills says how wonderful they are, you girls can take the credit!"

For a moment the girls were speechless.

"Just listen to them!" expostulated Sally at last. "I believe they really think they can cook. Tubby can, of course, but he's the only one. Johnny can't even fry chips without turning them into cinders. As for making pastry or cakes—"

"Hopeless!" agreed Fay.

Don and Johnny looked at each other. Sally and Fay were their girl chums, and the four of them were known as the Merry-makers. But there were times when rivalry

was strong between them—and this was such a time.

"Hopeless, are we?" said Don. "Johnny, that's a challenge."

"And we hereby accept said, challenge!" snorted Johnny. "We'll make some real jam tarts. We'll show the girls how pastry really should be made."

And, ignoring the girls' smiles, they donned caps and aprons.

Tubby Winwood, expert that he was, was soon rolling out some lovely-looking pastry. But Don and Johnny, for all their boasting, were not so sure of themselves.

"Queer!" muttered Johnny, eyeing the oozy conglomeration in the mixing-bowl. "It doesn't seem quite right for a cake. Gosh, I've left out the flour! Where's the flour? Can't cook, eh— Hallo, whose is this?"

He had gone across to the big bin of flour. Just above it, resting on a shelf, was a small, leather-covered box, and, opening it, Johnny was surprised to see that it contained a gleaming diamond ring.

"That," explained Sally, "is Miss Mills' engagement ring. She put it up there when she was showing us how to mix some pastry— Hem! Here is Miss Mills."

Johnny hastily replaced the ring in the box and turned.

"What are all you boys doing in here?" asked a pleasant voice. For Miss Edna Mills, the junior cookery mistress, was a pleasant person and popular. She was in her early twenties, attractive, and very happy because of her recent engagement. "But you shouldn't be here, you know—"

"Indeed they should not!"

The boys jumped as they heard that second voice. It was the reverse of pleasant, and Miss Louise Meredith, senior lecturer on domestic science at the island college, was the opposite of easy-going Miss Mills.

"Take off those caps and aprons and go immediately!" rapped Miss Meredith. "You know you have no right in here, hindering the girls. And don't let me find you here

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

again unless I have given you permission."

Hastily the boys departed, but when they were out in the corridor Don came to a halt.

"That challenge still stands," he declared firmly. "The girls have said we can't cook, and we're going to prove that we can. I've got an idea. This afternoon we'll invite them to a slap-up tea—prepared and cooked by ourselves. We'll have sausage-rolls, cakes, tarts, and turnovers—"

"I'm in on this!" declared Slick.

"Same here," beamed Tubby, "and I'll do the cooking for you—"

"No; you can supervise, Tubby, but Johnny, Slick and I have got to do most of the actual cooking. And we'll keep it a secret—we'll make it a big surprise for the girls."

"Rather! Gee, it's a whizzing wheeze. But"—Johnny suddenly saw one or two snags—"we're barred from the kitchen. Where do we get the ingredients, and where do we do the cooking?"

"Easy," said Don. "We'll sneak into the kitchen when no one's there and get everything we want. And we can cook over at the clubhouse."

The Merry-makers and their friends had taken over a bungalow by the lake, and it was fitted with an electric cooker. Johnny had forgotten that, and now everything seemed plain sailing.

"Good-o!" he said. "Let's hang around until the cookery class is over, and then we'll nip in. Everyone will be going along to lunch."

Some twenty minutes later the girls trooped out of the kitchen with Miss Mills. Miss Meredith followed a minute or two later.

"Now for it!" whispered Don.

Cautiously the boys went into the kitchen, standing just inside to make sure no one was there. It was empty, as they had hoped, but suddenly—

Crash!

The door had slammed shut, blown to by a draught from one of the windows.

"Phew!" Don mopped his brow. "I should think that was heard all over the college. If we're caught in here by the Dragon after what she said there'll be ructions. We'd better get a move on."

They rustled around for the various ingredients, which weren't likely to be missed from the ample stocks available. Johnny, scooping into a tin, suddenly spotted the cake-mixture which he had prepared

**To Prove That Boys Can Cook As Well As Girls, Don & Co. Planned A Surprise Tea For Their Girl Chums**

just before they were evicted from the kitchen, and promptly turned it out into a baking-tin and took possession of it.

"O.K.?" asked Don at last. "Then let's smuggle this stuff across to the clubhouse."

Off they went, reaching the clubhouse without mishap. The cake was put into the oven straight away, since it would take the longest to cook, and then gleefully the boys set off in the direction of the dining-hall.

"We'll come back afterwards and prepare the pastry," said Don. "But, remember, not a word about this to the girls."

"Not a word," echoed Johnny.

"We'll give 'em a shock—" "A snook?" Don frowned. "A pleasant surprise, you mean. We've got to prove that we can cook. I say, old man, we can cook, can't we?"

"Of course we can."  
"That cake you made looked a bit queer."

"Rats! It will turn out a treat, especially when— But careful! Here's Sally."

Johnny tried to look nonchalant, causing Sally immediately to raise her eyebrows.

"Come on, boys!" she greeted them. "We shall be late for lunch. Where have you been?"

"Oh, just—just knocking around, you know," said Don airily.

"Fay said she thought she saw you coming from the direction of the kitchen."

"Eh? Us? We've been barred from the kitchen, haven't we?"

"You certainly have!" Miss Meredith was very cross. "You'd better not be caught in the kitchen again without permission—"

"Sally!" And Miss Meredith herself strode up at that moment, looking even grimmer than usual. "Did I hear you talking about the kitchen, Sally? Do you happen to know of anyone who has been there in the last half-hour?"

The boys started, and Sally did not miss the startled looks they gave each other.

"Well, no, Miss Meredith," she replied. "There—there's nothing wrong, is there?"

"There certainly is!" snapped the cookery mistress. "Poor Miss Mills' engagement ring has completely vanished, and I myself know for a certainty that it was in the kitchen when I left a minute or two after you girls! Someone must have been in there since, and I intend to find out who!"

"I intend to find out who!"

"I intend to find out who!"

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may have become lodged somewhere. I'll search round for it, and the boys can help me—"

"Miss Mills and I have already searched," broke in the mistress. "And it cannot have become mislaid. I myself saw it on the ledge as I left the kitchen."

"I wish now I had picked it up, but I decided at the time to tell Miss Mills. Unfortunately I did not see her for some twenty minutes. When she returned to the kitchen the ring had gone. Someone had been in there in the meantime—and that someone must be found. Perhaps you will help me make inquiries, Sally."

"Of course, Miss Meredith."

"Then come."

"Now?" Sally was anxious to question the boys.

"If you please, Sally."

So Sally had to go off with the mistress. The boys, left on their own, looked at each other with growing uneasiness.

"Guess I don't like this," said Slick.

"Nor me," declared Tubby.

"I saw the ring on the shelf when we were first in the kitchen," put in



"What are you boys doing here?" demanded the senior mistress, then she gave a startled gasp as she saw what Don was holding. It was the box which had contained Miss Mills' missing engagement ring.

Johnny, "but I don't know whether or not it was there the second time."

"Must have been," pointed out Don. "We went in as soon as Miss Meredith came out. That means it must have vanished after we left. Safest to say nothing. We know nothing about the ring, and we haven't a clue as to what's happened to it."

"No sense in asking for trouble when we can't help in any way. And I suggest we steer clear of these inquiries. We'll go across to the clubhouse and stay there—"

"And miss lunch?" bleated Tubby. "I'm hungry!"

"Wouldn't you rather miss lunch than have the Dragon on your track?"

"Eh? Um! I suppose so. But it's a bit thick having to starve—"

"We'll rustle up some cakes and sandwiches from the tuckshop. And don't forget we've a lot to do. There's all the cooking and this slap-up spread to prepare."

Some quarter of an hour later the four boys were entering the clubhouse, carrying bags of cakes and sandwiches to sustain them during the afternoon.

Johnny sniffed appreciatively. "That cake smells good," he said. "What do we do now, Tubby—stick pins in it to see if it's ready?"

"Not yet, chump! Don't you dare open that oven door!" snorted Tubby. "It'll sink if you do."

"What? The oven door?"

"No; the cake!"

"Knowing Johnny's cooking, I hope it doesn't sink us," said Slick, with a chuckle.

"That's going to be a jolly good cake," declared the indignant Johnny. "I hope we shall be able to say the same for your pastry."

"Gosh, yes, so do I," said Don fervently. "The girls will laugh their heads off if we flop. But we'll show 'em!"

Supervised by Tubby, Don, Johnny, and Slick spread out all the various ingredients on the table.

"Puff!" said Don. Johnny blew out his cheeks and puffed.

"What was that for?" he wanted to know.

"Idiot! I mean we'll have puff pastry."

"Puff, eh? I was going to suggest flake."

"Simple," beamed Don. "I'll do puff, and you do flake. I say, Tubby, how much flour do you think I ought to use? I can ask questions like that—it's the actual mixing and the actual cooking that really count, of course."

"Yes, just what I was going to say," nodded Johnny. "This butter business. A big chunk, Tubby, or a little chunk—"

### THE LOST ENGAGEMENT RING

IF the boys had started before, they now positively jumped.

They had paid a surreptitious visit to the kitchen.

They knew nothing about the missing engagement-ring; but the fact that it had disappeared meant inquiries, and if Miss Meredith discovered they had defied her ban there would be trouble.

"Indeed I intend to find out who!" repeated the cookery mistress grimly.

"Y-yes, Miss Meredith—of course," said Sally.

Sally, too, was startled.

She had noticed the boys' agitation; and noticed traces of what looked like flour on Johnny's shirt. He had been wearing the chef's apron when he had been in the kitchen with the girls, so how had flour got on to his shirt?

Sally shrewdly guessed something of the truth—that the boys had been to the kitchen again. Why had they been there? Something was in the wind, Sally knew that. Johnny's nonchalance and Don's airiness were symptoms of it.

Hastily she moved in front of Miss Meredith, so that the mistress would not spot those traces of flour. Whatever the boys' mysterious game, she knew it could have nothing to do with the missing ring.

"Perhaps the ring is only temporarily mislaid," she suggested. "It



"Gee, we've found it!" whooped Tubby. "What a bit of luck!" "It was under the cabinet. It must have fallen down and lodged in that crack there—"

Don broke off, looking up with a start as the door suddenly opened. Standing there on the threshold were Miss Meredith and Miss Mills.

"What are you three boys doing in here without permission?" rapped the senior mistress. "And what is that you are holding?"

"My ring!" cried Miss Mills joyously, and ran across to Don as he held out the box. "Oh, how wonderful! It's been found—" And then her voice trailed away as she opened the box. "But—but—the ring isn't here. The box is empty! Empty!" exclaimed Miss Meredith in a terrifying voice, and her gaze swept grimly to Don, Slick, and Tubby. "What are you boys doing with this box—and where is the ring?"

### JOHNNY'S BURNT CAKE

"WHERE is the—the ring?" stut-tered Don, quailing before that gimlet glare. "W-we don't know—do we, boys?"

"I should sus-say we don't!" quavered Tubby. "Guess we haven't seen it," added Slick.

Miss Meredith drew a deep breath. "Then what were you doing with the box?" "We found it under the cabinet here, Miss Meredith," Don explained. "I only just picked it up when you came in. We didn't know the ring wasn't inside it."

Miss Meredith pursed her lips. It was clear she was by no means satisfied.

Miss Mills, pale and upset, was peering under the cabinet. The boys, too, searched frantically. As the box had been under the cabinet, the ring also might be there. But it wasn't.

"I shall report the matter to Professor Willard," Miss Meredith decided. "You boys will remain within college bounds. No doubt the headmaster will wish to question you."

"I assure you we know nothing about the ring," Don told her. "Then what are you doing in here when I had expressly forbidden you to enter?"

Don gulped, realising that in the circumstances it would not be wise to keep anything back.

"We—we came in for a little dried fruit and a few other things, Miss Meredith. We've heard that you don't mind students occasionally taking such items in small quantities—"

"That is so—when I have given permission. And strictly for culinary purposes. I like to encourage students to do their own cooking—"

Crash! Everybody started. Once again the open door had slammed shut as the breeze, coming in through the window, sent it swinging. And a second later, like a very faint echo, there was a dull plop as a small pepper-pot, dislodged by the reverberation of the slamming door, fell to the floor from the cabinet.

Don stared at it, and suddenly a look of excitement crossed his face. "Gee, I've just thought of something!" he exclaimed. "The slam of the door knocked over that pepper-pot. And the door slammed when we were here before—"

"When you were what?" rumbled Miss Meredith. "How many times have you boys been here?"

"Oh, corks! This—is this the third time," admitted Don, and then rushed on: "But what I want to say is that the slamming door might have knocked this box off the shelf, and the ring may have fallen out."

"We have just searched the floor, and there is no sign of the ring," Miss Meredith said coldly.

"But maybe it didn't fall on to the floor. Johnny's cake mixture

was directly underneath, and it may have fallen into that!" Don said in glowing excitement.

"Gosh!" chorused Tubby and Slick. The two mistresses were looking at each other.

"It is quite possible, Miss Meredith," said Edna Mills eagerly.

"Yes—yes, I see that. Where is the cake mixture now?" asked Miss Meredith.

"Over at our clubhouse in the oven there—" began Don.

"I hope not!" cried Tubby. "Johnny should have taken it out by now."

"You are actually cooking the cake in which there might be a ring?" gasped Miss Meredith. "Good gracious! Come, we must investigate. And I hope," she added, her tone becoming grim again, "that your theory is the right one. The disappearance of this ring is a very serious matter, and I am far from satisfied. However—"

She swept out through the doorway, followed by Miss Mills, and after the mistresses hurried the three boys.

They turned in the direction of the lake, almost colliding with Sally and Fay as they rounded an angle of the college building.

"Hallo! Where have you boys been to all this time?" asked Sally, not realising for a moment that Don and Tubby and Slick were with the mistresses. "You weren't in to lunch, and you've been missing ever since. We've been looking everywhere—"

"I think we may have tracked down Miss Mills' ring!" Don panted.

"You do? Where? Where are you going now?"

"Over to the clubhouse—to have a look in Johnny's cake. The ring may have fallen into it."

"Golly! Then we're coming with you."

Sally and Fay hurried alongside the boys, and Don told them what they had been doing, and all about the spread they had been preparing for them.

"So that's why you've been so jolly mysterious!" exclaimed Fay. "Cooking in secret. You really took what we said as a challenge. But I do hope you're right about the ring, boys."

"So do we!" echoed Don & Co. "Fervently they hoped so. If the ring wasn't found in the cake then they knew they were going to be in trouble. Miss Meredith's suspicions had been temporarily lulled; but they would return if Don's theory wasn't proved to be the right one.

The clubhouse was reached, and there in front of the cooker was Johnny, perspiring and red and looking very flustered. He swung round with a guilty start as the crowd streamed in; stared in surprise as he saw the mistresses.

"Johnny, where's your cake?" asked Don.

Johnny gave another guilty start. He groaned and looked sheepish.

"I—I— Oh corks!"

"Say, what's the matter?" demanded Slick.

"It—it turned out like a lump of lead," Johnny said with a gulp.

"And to make matters worse I—I burnt it!"

"Burnt it!" cried Tubby. "Why, you ass, I told you to take it out of the oven—"

"Never mind that!" broke in Miss Meredith impatiently. "Whether you've burnt the cake or not doesn't matter. Where is it?"

"Yes, we must have it," Don said urgently. "We think Miss Mills' ring might have dropped into it."

"What? Crikey—"

"The cake, man! Where have you put it?"

"I—I've thrown it away!" Johnny groaned.

"Th-throw it away? Oh, my giddy aunt! But we can get it back, can't we? Where have you put it?"

"In the lake!"

Boys and girls stared at Johnny in horror. Miss Mills gave a choked

little cry. Miss Meredith's face became furiously angry.

"All you boys will come with me to the headmaster!" she said grimly. "I hold you responsible for the loss of Miss Mills' ring—whether it was in the cake or not. You deliberately entered the kitchen in defiance of my instructions, since, when the ring has disappeared—"

"Briggs!" came another voice, equally angry, equally thunderous.

And into the clubhouse strode Mr. Horace Gruley, the portly, pompous housemaster, his mortar-board set at an unusually rakish angle on his head.

"How dare you, Briggs!" he cried furiously.

"H-how dud-dare I what, sir?" stuttered Johnny.

"Throw at me what I imagined to be a lump of coal, and what I have since discovered to be a burnt cake!" fumed the irate master.

"The cake!" shouted Don, excitement flaming once again. "Where is it, sir? Is it in the lake?"

"How can it be in the lake, Weston, when it struck my mortar-board? I was not in the lake. I was enjoying a quiet stroll, when over a bush by the boathouse came this missile, hurled in a most dangerous manner by Briggs—"

Bless my soul!"

Horace Gruley was talking to himself. Mistresses, boys and girls had vanished, heading for the boathouse.

And there, on the towpath, they found Johnny's burnt cake. It had broken into rock-like pieces, and amid the crumbs, winking and flashing in the glaring sunlight, was—

"My ring!" cried Miss Mills, and joyfully she stooped and picked it up.

"Phew!" went up a relieved chorus from the boys and girls, and even Miss Meredith smiled.

"I am glad the ring has been found," she said. "The matter is now cleared up satisfactorily, and I will say no more. But perhaps Briggs, I had better put in a word for you to Mr. Gruley. You really should be more careful when throwing away things, but doubtless he will take a different view of the matter when I explain what has transpired. Come, Miss Mills!"

With a nod, Miss Meredith swept away. With a smile for the students, Miss Mills followed her.

"And now for our spread!" grinned Don. "All our own cooking! Are you coming, girls?"

"Rather," said the girls.

Half an hour later that spread was being enjoyed in the clubhouse lounge.

On the table were cakes, tarts, sausage-rolls, turnovers, and a variety of other things cooked by the boys.

It looked a magnificent display—and, for the most part, it tasted as good as it looked.

"Try my puff pastry!" invited Don.

"Say, get a taster of these scones!" drawled Slick.

"And my sausage-rolls!" urged Tubby.

Laughingly the girls tried everything.

Some were delicious; some not quite so delicious; some good; some a little hard—and one batch of tarts definitely hard.

Sally took a bite—and then hastily, surreptitiously dropped it into a plant pot. She believed it was Johnny's, but not for the world would she have let him know what she had done.

"Well?" beamed Johnny. "What's the verdict?"

"We take back what we said," smiled Fay.

"Having eaten your pastry," laughed Sally, "we're now willing to eat our words. Well done, boys!"

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will contain another enthralling adventure of Sally & Co. Make certain of reading it by ordering your copy in advance.



# JOY—The Girl With a 100 Voices

By IDA MELBOURNE

## ROBBED

"COME on, Mavis!" cried Joy Oliver. "This is going to be good. A waxworks! Let's go in, shall we?"

Joy was on holiday at the seaside with her aunt, and there she had met Mavis, and the two girls had become very friendly.

"Yes, rather!" said Mavis eagerly. "I've got some change. Only sixpence each," added Joy as she looked across at the large tent in which a waxworks exhibition was being held.

"Don't pay in silver—I want to change this note," said Mavis, opening her bag.

Mavis had the note in her hand, and they were just turning towards the tent when a man came along behind them.

"Look—look!" the man exclaimed, pointing up to the sky.

Joy and Mavis, shading their eyes, stared at the sky eagerly. But they could see nothing remarkable at all, and the man himself, after that brief glance, walked on.

It seemed a silly trick to play and Joy looked back sharply. She was just in time to see the man putting something into his pocket, and at that same moment she saw that Mavis stood there with her right hand held up oddly, finger and thumb pressed together, as if she were holding something. It was the hand that had held the pound note—but now it was empty.

"Mavis, the pound note!" cried Joy, aghast.

"Oh!" wailed Mavis. "It's gone! It's blown away! Oh, quick—where is it?"

But Joy did not look on the ground. She looked after the man in the blue suit who had gone hurrying into the waxworks tent. And all at once she understood why he had made them look at the sky!

"Why, the rascal!" she gasped. "Mavis, that man stole your note!"

"Oh, Joy, what shall we do?" cried Mavis tearfully.

Joy went across to the tent and, snatching a shilling from her pocket, gave it to the girl at the desk. Then she hurried in after the man in the blue suit.

There he was, talking to another man.

"Pardon me," Joy said. "I think you took my friend's pound note."

The man in blue frowned at her, but Joy saw a furtive shiftiness in his eye.

"Your friend's pound note? I don't know what you're talking about," he blustered, and turned to the other man. "This gentleman is the manager of the waxworks," he went on. "I am an agent and salesman. If

you think I'd do anything dishonest—"

The manager looked quite angry and obviously believed the other man's denial.

"I think you've made a mistake," he said to Joy. "You ought to apologise. You've no right to go about recklessly making such serious charges. I should think your friend dropped the note. Go and look for it. If you come back here making a scene I shall ask you to leave."

Dismayed, Joy turned away. Argument was on her tongue-tip, but she checked it, for she had no evidence at all.

But Joy had ways of her own for defeating rogues.

Near by was a figure of Henry VIII. "Give the girl back her pound note!" he seemed to say. "I saw him take it!"

Never had a man looked so startled as the manager, and Joy, angry though she was still because of the thief's cunning, nearly laughed aloud.

For Joy, of course, was using her wonderful gifts of mimicry and ventriloquism.

But the manager naturally did not suspect that, nor did the thief, and even Mavis, who was very pale and scared, didn't know the truth.

"My goodness, someone saw him take the note!" she exclaimed.

"That's proof!" said another voice, and this time it was Richard II who appeared to speak.

Joy hoped that the thief would be scared into giving the money back, for there were several people looking at the waxworks, and they could all hear what was going on.

"Someone's playing a trick!" cried the manager in fury. "I won't have foolery in this place. All these are genuine waxworks figures. Call me a liar if they're not—"

"You're a liar!" said a kingly voice. The manager went red and then white with rage.

"Who spoke?" he demanded angrily.

"Sounded like King John," said Joy.

The manager ignored her and paced up and down the figures. He was naturally baffled, for he knew that all the figures were genuine waxworks. It was very odd indeed, and

the only solution that occurred to him was that someone in the crowd standing near the figures had spoken and that the sound had been deceptive.

"Cheer up," whispered Joy to Mavis. "We'll get that note back. Just look at the crook. Look at his face. Was ever a man scared? His guilty conscience is making him jumpy."

"But—but who is speaking?" asked Mavis, baffled.

Joy was not giving her secret away! "I daresay it's a trick," smiled Joy.

Suddenly the manager turned back and faced the man in blue.

"Look here, do you know anything about this?" he asked in a stage whisper. "How about these foreign models you got me to buy? Have any got some loudspeakers in them?"

"No; certainly not."

"Huh!" frowned the manager. "Some practical joker must have fitted a loudspeaker in one of these figures and is speaking through a microphone."

That was Joy's chance for some more of her ventriloquism.

"So I am," she made a figure of Queen Elizabeth say in a high-pitched female voice. "And I demand that that rascal in the blue suit gives back the pound note. He's making me waxy!"

Joy saw the thief's face pale. He could only believe that the manager was right. Someone outside had seen his theft, and was now broadcasting through figures fitted with loudspeakers.

It was a moment of triumph for Joy. Her ventriloquism had done the trick again. She had got through the man's conscience; she had scared him.

But Joy had succeeded even better than she knew; someone else had been deceived—Mavis.

Mavis suddenly jumped at the figure of Queen Elizabeth.

"She's not a waxwork, but real!" she cried. "I saw her lips move. Please, if you saw that awful man steal my pound note, come and tell the manager!"

To Joy's alarm, Mavis took Queen Elizabeth by the arm to drag her forward. So well had Joy succeeded that, as often happens at waxworks, Mavis' imagination had got the better of her; she had actually supposed that she had seen the queen's lips move.

But it was only a waxworks figure, and when Mavis pulled it down the queen came, landing on the floor with a crash.

Joy, horrified, fell back. Mavis nearly fainted.

The manager, white with rage, gave a shout of fury.

"Out of this place, both of you! Now—at once!"

When Ventriloquist Joy Visited The Waxworks The Dummy Figures Began To Talk



## MYSTERY AT THE WAXWORKS

JOY was absolutely determined not to leave this tent, not until she had got back that pound note. There was not a shred or shadow of doubt that the man in the blue suit was the thief. His guilt was shown in his face.

But the manager was equally determined that Mavis and Joy should go. The waxen figure was ruined. "Look at it!" he groaned. "The face is smashed in! An arm broken off!"

The man in blue sprang forward. "It's all right. You won't lose. Didn't I tell you I'd come to collect the six foreign figures we delivered here this week? This is one of them. It's faulty, as I told you. The wax will melt. I'm delivering some others to replace it."

"You are?" said the manager. "Good—good! That's fine! As long as I'm not the loser by it. All the same, I'm not going to give you girls a second chance," he added in fury. "The manager had his hand on Mavis' arm and Joy knew that she had to act quickly.

She could imitate almost any voice, and now she saw one way of gaining time by delay.

The voice she used was that of the man in blue. It was gruff and seemed to come from him.

"Hey—quick—look inside here!" he shouted to the manager. "The manager released Mavis' arm. That was what Joy wanted.

"Dodge round behind one of the figures," she whispered to Mavis.

It was easy enough for Mavis to do that, for there was excitement amongst the crowd, almost everyone in the tent being eager to see what was in the wax figure.

The manager was already peering inside the waxwork figure through the broken head.

"There's nothing to see," snapped the man in blue.

"But you said there was."

"I didn't."

"I heard you."

"We all did," added Joy. "What is there inside that figure?"

The thief was wild with rage. "Absolutely nothing—nothing!" he shouted.

He started to drag the figure away, and actually fended off the manager. Joy dodged behind him to avoid the manager, in case he should try to take her by the shoulder and force her out.

From that position Joy could see into the hollow waxworks figure. She peeped out of curiosity, and then gasped aloud.

There was something inside the figure! Suspended from the inner side of the dummy was a small net or string bag, and in that bag was a small metal box!

"I'm taking this figure and the other foreign figures out," the man in blue was saying to the manager. "I told you I've got some others outside. These are duds. Ought not to have been delivered."

Suddenly Joy realised that she had stumbled on to something far bigger than the mere theft of Mavis' pound note—something that the rascal wanted to hide from the manager!

Joy could hardly breathe for excitement. The man had had a lorry outside, and already he was snatching up the dummy figure, stuffing part of the robes to hide the damage.

"Well, it's still a mystery to me," muttered the manager.

"I can tell you how the figures speak," Joy said.

"Psha! How could you know?"

"She does know!" Henry VIII seemed to say.

The manager goggled.

"This can't be true," he muttered. "This—" He turned to Joy. "You have a microphone hidden somewhere."

Joy held up her hand and moved away so that other people near by couldn't hear.

"Listen!" she said. "I think there is something crooked going on here. That man in blue took my friend's pound note—"

"Rubbish!"

"All right. But I can prove I know the secret of these mystery voices. Tell me anything you'd like Henry the Eighth to say."

"Get out, you annoying girl!"

From Henry VIII came those very words.

"Get out, you annoying girl!"

The manager stared from him to Joy. This was proof; but he did not understand yet how she had worked her trick.

"Don't you understand?" asked Joy softly, smiling at him. "I'm a ventriloquist."

The manager gaped at her. Then his brow contracted.

"You—you've been saying these things? You called me a liar! And you told the agent to give the money back! Why, you're a swindler! You're a menace!"

Joy fell back, amazed.

He grabbed her by the shoulder and forced her to the exit.

"Miss Smithers," he said to the girl at the paydesk, "this girl is not to enter here again. If she does, telephone the police!"

## JOY HAS FUN

JOY staggered back, baffled, and—it seemed—beaten. And if anything could have made her plight worse, it was the sight of the two men—the thief and another—carrying out the model of Queen Elizabeth.

"Two more only, George," said the thief.

Two more! They would soon be taken out—then the men would go, and the pound note would go with them.

Joy refused to admit defeat. But how was she to get into the show again?

Behind her appeared two women, one of them in a suit of mannish cut and carrying a walking-stick.

"Now we will inspect this place," she was saying to her companion.

"As president of the local Society for the Protection of the Public from Rogues and Vagabonds, it is my duty to make sure that this place is honestly run!"

Suddenly Joy's heart leaped; her hopes soared.

"It isn't!" said a voice.

"What?" The woman turned and stared about her. "Who spoke?"

The thief and his comrade were inside the tent; but now they emerged, carrying a wax model of Queen Victoria.

"Help!" came a squeak from the dummy. Joy was ventriloquising once again.

The woman spun round.

"Stop!" she commanded. She confronted the men and they had no choice but to stop.

"Mind out of the way, lady," said the thief.

"This figure spoke!" exclaimed the woman.

"It's a waxwork. It can't speak."

"Of course I spoke! Help—help! I'm being kidnapped!" came a shrill squeal from the dummy.

The men lowered the figure and looked completely nonplussed. The manager, angry and impatient, hurried out, too.

"Now what is it?" he snapped.

## YOU MUST READ

the two April volumes of the

### SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY

Both are now on sale, price 7d. each.

No. 85.—"Her Strange Role In Egypt," by Gail Western.

No. 86.—"That Exciting First Term," by Jane Preston.

"This figure spoke," said the woman. "I am president of the local Society for the Protection of the Public from Rogues and Vagabonds."

The manager frowned.

"I think there's someone with a microphone here. Or else—" He saw Joy and started. "You—of course!" he exclaimed.

"I tell you I'm being kidnapped!" came an insistent voice from the waxwork.

The manager looked at Joy and then at the figure of Queen Victoria; his brain was seething.

"Are you speaking those words?" he asked Joy.

"Don't be silly!" shrieked the voice from Queen Victoria. "Call the police—"

Even the manager did not believe that Joy really could be doing this, and yet the alternative that there was someone concealed in the waxworks figure was almost unthinkable.

The mannish woman thought otherwise.

"Have no fear," she cried. "I will free you!" And she raised her walking-stick.

"You dare hit that model!" cried the manager.

"Stop her!" shouted the thief. And he and his companion grabbed up the dummy figure.

In the midst of the confusion the girl from the paydesk called out to the manager:

"I've telephoned for the police, sir. It's all right. Here comes the car."

The thief heard that and looked down the road. Sure enough, a police patrol car was hurrying to the scene.

Joy nearly danced with glee. It was obvious that these men desperately wanted to take that model and were reluctant to leave without it.

But the woman was just as determined that they should not take it, and again she brandished her stick.

"Stand back!" shouted the thief, and turned to run.

Crash!

He tripped over the woman's stick, and as he fell the figure was smashed open, revealing its hollow interior.

"There, where's the person inside it?" cried the manager. "I told you there wasn't anyone."

Joy sprang forward, with a cry, and seized a metal box.

"No—but look at this!" she shouted.

In the final crash the box had been burst open, and now into view came flashing jewels.

The manager fell back in horror.

"Smuggling! The jewels were smuggled into the country in these models. So—so that's why the rascal is taking them away to change—"

The thief did not wait to hear any more; he bolted. He bolted straight into the arms of the police.

"Let me go!" he panted. And then he seemed to add a startling confession—which really came from Joy, ventriloquising again, because she thought he might not make it himself. "I'll give back the pound note I stole!"

"There!" said Joy in her own voice as she ran forward. "I knew he had it."

"So—so you did steal the pound note!" said the shame-faced, alarmed manager. "Why, you—you rascal!"

The thief wriggled.

"It was a joke," he muttered. He pulled out the note from his pocket and tossed it at Mavis, who came hurrying up in a state of great excitement.

"Hurrah! I've got my money back!" she cried happily.

Joy looked at the manager and smiled; he looked back at her in perplexity.

"Did you really ventriloquise?" he asked.

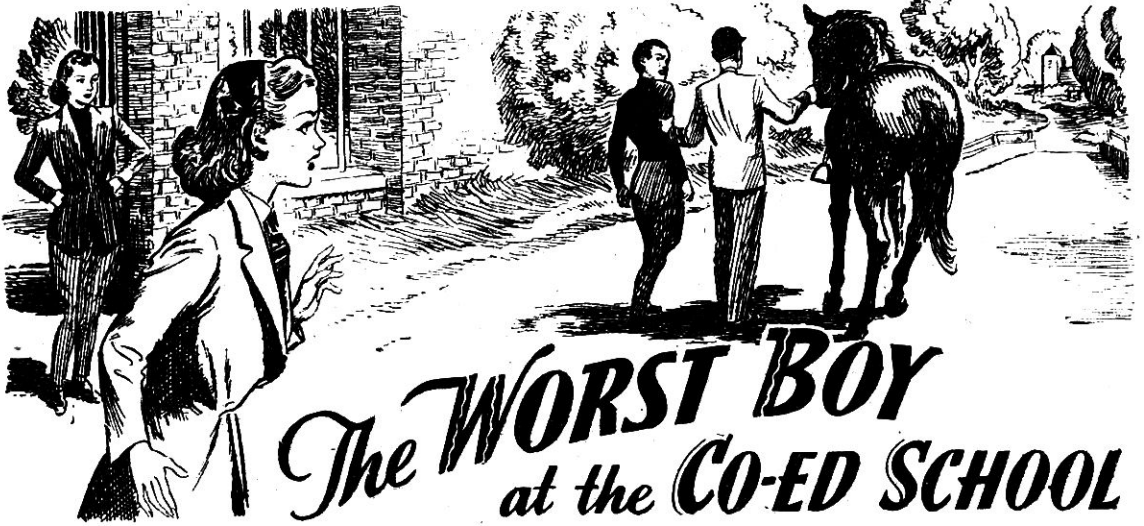
"Ssh!" said Joy.

"Shall I let the young lady in again?" asked the girl at the paydesk. The manager smiled.

"Certainly!" he said. "Free!"

(End of this week's story.)

Joy the ventriloquist will be featured in another amusing adventure next week.



# The Worst Boy at the Co-Ed School

By DOROTHY PAGE

## A SHOCK FOR PADDY

**PADDY DARE**, leader of the riding team at Mallington Co-Ed College, befriended Vincent Conrad, known to the rest of the school as the Outsider. She was convinced that Vincent was not the rascal he was reputed to be, and she promised him a place in the riding team.

As the result of an argument between Vincent and Ron Bullton, another member of the riding team, Paddy declared at a meeting that if Vincent did anything to prove she was wrong to trust him she would resign the captaincy.

Isabella saw a photograph which she told the riding team showed Vincent entering the garden of a bookmaker's house.

Paddy could not believe her, and told the team that she would prove Isabella was wrong. But when she met Vincent he dropped a piece of paper, and, picking it up, Paddy saw that it was a betting slip!

**PADDY** stared blankly at the slip of paper Vincent had dropped. She felt stunned.

"I'll take that," said Vincent sharply.

He jerked the paper from her fingers and slipped it into his blazer pocket.

But Paddy had seen. She raised her head.

"Vincent," she said shakily, "that was a betting slip."

"Yes."

Paddy caught her breath. His admission shocked her just as badly as sight of the betting slip.

"Vincent," she found herself asking, "what was that betting slip doing in your pocket? It—it had that bookmaker's name on it."

He parted his lips, then closed them again. Paddy watched him, her heart sinking strangely.

"Then"—and suddenly she stared at him in dismay—"that photograph showing a boy entering the bookmaker's house—was it you in that photograph, and not a faked snap as I've been telling everyone? Vincent, answer me—you've got to!"

His lean face was rather white.

"Yes, I was the boy in the photograph. I've never denied it, Paddy."

"Vincent! But—but you said—"

"I merely asked you if you believed I was the boy," he cut in. "You said you didn't, and I thought it best to leave it like that."

"You thought it best!" exclaimed Paddy, aghast. A surge of anger swept over her dismay. "Thought it best to fool me, I suppose—as you've fooled me all along! Oh gosh, and to think—"

She broke off, feeling tears stinging at the back of her eyes. Even now it seemed incredible that she

had been so wrong about Vincent Conrad.

"Paddy—no!" he said fiercely. "That wasn't the reason. I did go to the bookmaker's house, but I didn't want you to know—"

"Do you really mean," Paddy asked, "that your promise meant nothing—that you've been up to your—your shady tricks all the time?"

That seemed to hit him. It seemed for a moment that he was going to burst out in answer. Then he relaxed, kicking at the ground. His expression was hard to fathom. Finally he shrugged.

"Call it that, if you like," he said calmly.

Paddy felt as if she was dreaming—a bad dream.

"And—and you've nothing else to say?"

"No. It's better to leave it like that."

Paddy bit her lower lip hard.

"They all said you were playing some deep, cunning game, Vincent Conrad," she muttered. "Gosh, I just wouldn't believe them—I just couldn't! And now—"

Suddenly anger swept over her.

"Well, you can jolly well be pleased with yourself," she flashed. "I promised Isabella I'd resign from the riding team captaincy if you did one shady thing! O.K. If that's what you've been after, you've succeeded! I—I—"

She turned away, determined not to show humiliation and hurt.

"Paddy, wait—stop!" His voice rang out sharp and swift. He caught her arm. "You say you'll lose the captaincy? Dash it, I didn't know this! I had no idea—"

Scornful words rose to Paddy's lips. They were never uttered. His expression startled her. The cynical, don't-care look was gone. He looked aghast and concerned.

"Look here," he said fiercely, "if I prove that I haven't done anything shady, that'll put you O.K. with the team, won't it?"

That took Paddy's breath away.

"But—but you have! You've just told me. That betting slip—visiting that awful bookmaker—"

He checked her, speaking swiftly and earnestly.

"Listen, Paddy! You may think this is crazy—just another rotten trick of the Outsider—but on my honour I deliberately wanted you to think I was no good—for your sake!"

"For my sake!"

He nodded bitterly.

"Yes! You've been a grand sport

to stick by me, but look at the trouble it's caused you! That's been worrying me, believe it or not!"

Paddy stared at him in deep wonder.

"Oh, I know it was rotten to make you think I'd let you down," he continued. "But it wasn't easy for me, either, and in the long run I thought it would save you more trouble. You see," he added, "I couldn't explain about this betting slip and the bookmaker—just couldn't! In face of that, I couldn't expect you to go on trusting me. Now, I'm not going to let you be hit because of me," he went on. "So I'm going to try to prove to you I haven't been up to anything shady. Listen, Paddy! That betting slip was an old one. It had a message to me on the back. I can't show it to you; I can't tell you why I went to the bookmaker's—not yet. But if you'll trust me, give me time—"

He paused, watching her face. Paddy stared back, her brain in a whirl. If Vincent had allowed her to think the worst of him just for her own sake—why, that was a fine thing—a jolly fine thing! But—

"You see, Paddy," he continued earnestly, "I made a promise to someone, so I can't explain fully—yet."

"A promise? Vincent—to whom?"

He shook his red head.

"Can't tell you that, either. But suppose I can arrange for you to meet this chap—early on the next half-holiday, say—and hear the whole story? Will you trust me until then?"

That was a question Paddy did not immediately answer, because other questions were rushing into her mind. Who was this mysterious friend of Vincent's? How was he linked with this affair of the betting slip and the visit to the bookmaker's?

"I know it sounds a tall story," said Vincent rather bitterly. "I don't blame you if you doubt it—but honestly I'm thinking of you, Paddy."

Paddy drew a deep breath.

"Where should we meet?" she asked suddenly.

He seemed to take fresh hope.

"Why, it would have to be the other side of Balton Wood," he said quickly. "That's nearly out of bounds, but it's the safest place for—him. I'll contact him somehow, then leave a message in the letter-rack for you, giving the exact time

Who Was The Mysterious Whisperer Who Was Plotting Vincent's Downfall? How Paddy Wished That She Knew



and place. Paddy, will you come? Do you still trust me?"

Paddy looked at him long and searchingly.

"Vincent," she said, "I don't want you to think I'm just worried about losing the captaincy. I want like anything for you to be proved O.K.—in everyone's eyes!"

"I know," he said with unusual quietness. "You're tops, Paddy! I don't really deserve your friendship, but—what's your answer?"

She did not hesitate any longer. Cold common sense told her that perhaps she was being a fool, trusting Vincent without good cause. And yet, looking at him now, and reading only sincerity and frankness in his lean features, she felt suddenly a deep conviction.

She held out her hand with an impulsive smile.

"I'll be there, Vincent!"

### THE WHISPERER AGAIN

PADDY strolled slowly and thoughtfully towards Girls' Side.

The ringing of first lesson bell had broken up her conversation with Vincent Conrad. Now, alone, she was thinking back of that rather dramatic conversation with the boy.

She had to confess to herself that his evasive replies about the book-maker and the betting slip, his reference to someone to whom he had made a promise, were strange and puzzling indeed. "Who was this friend? Why the secrecy about him?"

"Gosh, Vincent's a strange boy!" she muttered. "He—he certainly shook me just then, but even now I still trust him—" She paused. "But this bookmaker business will have to be closed up soon. Then if I can convince the rest of the team—"

She broke off there, suddenly remembering, and grimaced.

Paddy had promised the rest of the riding team that she would investigate the photograph business with Vincent, and prove to them that he had not been up to anything shady!

"Wow, not so good," she told herself ruefully. "No good telling them what Vincent said—Vincent wouldn't want that, anyway. They'd never believe him—"

"Paddy! Hi, Paddy!"

She turned sharply. From the direction of the school stables a little crowd of girls and boys came hurrying towards her. The members of the junior riding team, less Jo Winter and Isabella Rocco.

"Paddy, we saw you with Conrad!" Jimmy Court panted breathlessly. "What happened? What about that photograph? What did he say?"

The rest joined them—burly Ron Bullton, Dot Nelson, hard-of-hearing Bette Grindle, Max Milden, and others. They all looked expectant.

Paddy knew she would have to think fast. If she could not satisfy them about Vincent, that boy's last chance to make good with the riding team was gone. Apart from that, her captaincy of the team was in danger.

"Hallo, everybody!" she said cheerily. "Yes, I've talked with Vincent!"

"Well?" demanded Ron Bullton in his aggressive way. "What did he have to say about that photograph? That's what we all want to know!"

"It's all right," Paddy said quickly. "You can take it from me—honestly—that Vincent hasn't been doing anything shady, and in—in a little while I'll be able to prove it!"

A silence fell. The boys and girls exchanged glances.

"All very well!" growled Ron. "How long have we got to wait for this so-called proof? And does that mean that Outsider still stays in the riding team until we get it—which I bet we don't!"

It was a tricky moment; Paddy knew it.

"Look here," she said quickly, "the next practice will be on the next halfer. O.K. I'll have the proof before that practice, or I may come to the practice with it. If—if I fail,

then Vincent's out, and I'm out, too. What about it?"

That told. Ron looked a little mollified; Jimmy Court looked rather anxious. He did not like this talk of Paddy being out of the captaincy. "Sounds fair, Paddy," he said instantly. "Eh, everybody?"

A pause. Slow nods came. Paddy relaxed.

"Thanks!" she exclaimed. "I won't let you down—Vincent won't let you down! You'll see. But let's dash, or we'll be late for first lesson!"

She welcomed the chance to get away before the team started asking more questions, especially about that photograph.

During afternoon lessons she remembered the lines Vincent had given her for Jo, and at the first opportunity she joined her chum in Study B. With a twinkle in her eyes she placed the lines on the table.

"Your lines, Jo—all ready and complete," she said. "Guess who did them?"

Jo stared at the sheets of foolscap, and then at Paddy.

"Paddy, you did!"

"Wrong, Jo! It was Vincent! He gave them to me after lunch. He did them for you because he'd heard you got lined over that photograph business. Now, Jo, doesn't that prove you're wrong about him?"

She watched her chum eagerly. But a shadow had crossed Jo's sweet face. She turned away from the foolscap sheets.

"I can't use those, Paddy," she said quietly. "In any case I started my lines after lunch—"

"Jo, please!" Paddy caught her arm and spoke rather pleadingly. "Whether you use them or not, you must admit that an outsider wouldn't be as thoughtful as that!"

Jo flushed a little, but shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Paddy, but it doesn't convince me. I—I think Vincent Conrad is a cunning boy; one never knows why he does things. And tell me! How did he explain that photograph?"

Paddy bit her lip. She did so want Jo to believe in Vincent. Then her face brightened. She decided to tell Jo about her talk with Vincent: she knew Jo would not let it go any farther.

"That's going to be all right, Jo," she said eagerly. "Just is! Listen! It's all a bit queer, but this is the set-up—"

She told the story of the proposed meeting.

Jo heard, and stared at her aghast. "Paddy—no!" she burst out. "You mustn't go—you mustn't!"

"But, Jo, you old chump, don't you see—"

"All I see," Jo said with unusual fierceness, "is that Balton Woods is out of bounds—that this is probably some trick! Paddy, you can't! Think of what would happen if you were caught there!"

"Don't worry, Jo—don't worry!" Paddy implored with a smile. "There's no risk! And," she added just a little warmly, "there's no trick! You'll see. I know you don't think much of Vincent, but you will after next halfer. Now let's forget it, have tea—and wait until next halfer!"

And thus the next half-holiday became a day of great significance indeed—for Paddy, for Vincent, for the riding team. In the interval Paddy had time to think of one other vital factor—Vincent's secret enemy—the unknown Whisperer.

Vincent himself had refused to listen to the idea of one, single deadly enemy, plotting against him. Embittered as he was, he felt that the whole college was against him, and that was that.

Not so Paddy. She knew. Further than that, she had the faint suspicion that the Whisperer might be Isabella Rocco, the South American girl, who had shown her dislike of Vincent from the start.

But she had no proof, and in the days that passed there was no further sign of the Whisperer's activities. Neither was there a note from Vincent about the meeting.

On the day before the half-holiday, however, she met him going into breakfast, and he whispered:

"Think I've managed to arrange the meeting, Paddy. Look out for a note giving you time and place some time to-morrow."

"Whizzo, Vincent!" breathed back Paddy. "I'll watch for it!"

On the following morning she visited the letter-rack in Central Hall more than once. But there was no note from Vincent. Paddy did not get anxious then. There was still time.

After lunch she and the other girls went up to change into riding kit. Paddy saw Jo watching her once or twice rather anxiously; but Jo had not, and did not, refer again to Paddy's proposed trip to Balton Woods.

"Get my horse from the town stables, will you, Jo?" Paddy called to her chum. "I'll follow on my cycle. There's plenty of time, but—there's something I have to do."

She hurried from the dormitory, shot downstairs, and across to Central Hall.

A glance at the letter-rack made her heart sink a little. No note from Vincent. She wandered out into the sunshine.

"But he won't let me down, I know," she told herself. "Perhaps he's writing the note now. There's quite a bit of time to get to Balton Woods before the practice begins. Or perhaps he's at the stables, and means to give me the note. Gosh, yes, that may be it!"

She turned. Her thoughtful stroll had taken her into the trees not far from the Junior Playing Fields. And as she turned towards the distant stables—

"You poor fool, Paddy Dare!"

A strangely hollow, mocking voice came from somewhere in the trees.

Paddy halted as if shot, tensed, alert.

The voice of the unknown Whisperer!

"Didn't you know Vincent Conrad's making a fool of you?" it continued. "Didn't you know he's trying to make you lose your captaincy? What a stupid idiot you are not to see through him!"

Paddy's face flamed scarlet with anger. For one second, hands clenched, she listened intently, trying to place that queer hollow voice. Whose voice? From where?

A twig snapped somewhere in the trees. She sprinted forward.

"By gosh, I'll—I'll get you now!" she gritted furiously. "Of all the mean, horrible things—"

She flashed through the trees, hearing running footsteps some distance ahead until, bursting from cover, she saw before her the old Junior pavilion, now not in use.

There was no one in sight, but the door of the pavilion was slightly ajar. Paddy saw that with an exclamation of triumph.

"Now, you trickster!" she panted, and pounded up the wooden steps, running into the pavilion. "You've been too clever this time—"

Too late she heard a step behind her. Too late she heard the door slam. Too late she realised that the unknown Whisperer had been hiding round the back of the pavilion and deliberately lured her inside!

The bolt outside banged home. A hollow voice called:

"Poor, stupid Paddy Dare!"

Footsteps receded rapidly.

### VINCENT'S ACCUSATION

PADDY'S first reaction was fierce and rapid.

She rushed to the door, tugged in vain, then turned to one of the boarded windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the unknown. But her vision through cracks in the boards was limited. She saw no one.

"You ass, Paddy!" she reviled herself furiously. "To be tricked like that! But—but—" She calmed a little and knew a sense of wonder. "But what the dickens is the game? It's crazy!"

Baffling indeed, for it was not as

if she could be held prisoner for long. She only had to shout to attract the attention of someone near Junior Side—and shout Paddy did, and bang on the door!

As she did so, her mind whirled with questions.

"Gosh, could it have been Isabella?" she panted. "But why—"

She paused, listening. Her shouts and banging had been heard. Footsteps were approaching rapidly. She called again. Abruptly the bolt was shot back outside. The door opened.

There, darkly beautiful in brown riding kit, her thin eyebrows raised in surprise, stood Isabella Rocco herself!

It startled Paddy. She was so unprepared to see the very girl who might well be the Whisperer!

Isabella's full lips curved into a slight smile.

"Paddy looks angry—yes!" she murmured. "It was fortunate that I heard her. So silly to be locked in the pavilion!"

Paddy's blue eyes clashed with the other girl's brown.

"Isabella," she flashed, half suspicious, half uncertain. "do you know who locked me in?"

Isabella's gently malicious smile broadened.

"But yes—I think so," she said. "I saw a boy hurrying from this direction. I think he had red hair. I think it was Vincent Conrad!"

"Vincent! What bosh!" Paddy burst out. "Look here, Isabella, if you did see a boy, you know it wasn't Vincent!"

The South American girl shrugged. "Naturally you would not want to believe that, Paddy!" she taunted. "But I just say what I saw. Think what you like. Me—I am going to the practice. And don't forget, Paddy, you are going to bring proof to the team about the Outsider—or else!"

She turned and walked away. Paddy stared after her. The implied threat in Isabella's last sentence hardly registered; Paddy felt so bewildered.

If by any chance Isabella was the Whisperer, then why on earth lock her up, only to release her a little later? It did not make sense. Not for one second did Paddy think seriously that Vincent himself had trapped her in the pavilion.

But thought of Vincent suddenly made her start violently. Time was passing; she still had not received that note from him.

"Oh, my gosh!" exclaimed Paddy, lips parted. The possible truth had struck home. "Was I locked up because the Whisperer knew somehow that Vincent was going to send me a note, and meant to get it herself?"

She broke into a sudden run towards Central Hall.

"Then Isabella jolly well is the Whisperer!" she gasped. "She locked me up, then went to Central Hall. Vincent had delivered the note by then, so she coolly bags it, and comes and lets me out again!"

Paddy felt convinced. That was it! The Whisperer did not intend her to meet Vincent and get proof that he was on the level!

Paddy's eyes were blazing as she sprinted.

She reached Central Hall and shot inside. One anxious glance at the letter-rack showed that there was no note for her.

In a window seat nearby lounged Guy Quist of the Fifth.

"Oh, Guy," panted Paddy, "have you been here long? Did you see Isabella Rocco take a note from the letter-rack?"

The boy, unpoplar and ill-mannered, looked up.

"Been here the last half-hour!" he grunted. "But Isabella hasn't come in!"

"You're sure of that?"

"Of course I'm sure!"

Paddy muttered her thanks and turned blankly and dazedly away.

So Isabella could not have taken the note!

Then what was the answer, unless there had been no note to take?

Suppose Vincent had let her down? Paddy wouldn't believe that. On

impulse she rushed outside, thinking that perhaps Vincent was still in the school. But a visit to the stables proved that Whitey, Vincent's black horse, was gone from its loose box.

Paddy stood in the deserted quad, staring round, deeply anxious now.

She was faced with arriving at the practice with nothing to tell the riding team. It meant "finish" for Vincent as a member! It meant, too, finish for her as captain!

She had one slender ray of hope—that perhaps Vincent had had to change his plans and would be awaiting her at the practice. So she crossed to the cycle sheds and three minutes later was pedalling hard towards Mallington Park.

Reaching the lane that ran alongside the park, she was able to glance over the hedge inside. Her anxious gaze picked out a group of boys and girls and horses. She saw her chum, Jo, Jimmy, Isabella—

But there was no sign of Vincent Conrad.

Paddy slowed, her heart sinking.

"I've got to face them!" she muttered, "without the proof I promised. Vincent's lost his chance! You're licked, Paddy—beaten—"

She was almost level with the gate leading into the park when round a bend in the lane ahead she saw a boy approaching, leading a horse.

Footsteps rang out on the sunny, dusty lane. She whirled.

Vincent Conrad himself was striding up.

"Vincent—" Impulsively she hurried to meet him. "Oh gosh, I—I don't know what to say!"

The Outsider stopped. He was white. His green-grey eyes were blazing.

"Why say anything?" he bit out. "You've got what you wanted—though I didn't think you would play such a trick!"

It was like a blow in the face. Paddy went crimson.

"I—I don't understand!"

He laughed shortly, bitterly.

"No? Oh, don't act, Paddy Dare! S'pose I can't blame you for changing your mind about me—but you needn't have sent the information in my note to Voster like that!"

Paddy's lips parted.

Vincent thought she had sneaked on him! Vincent had left a note for her. And it was equally certain that the Whisperer had taken that note—after looking her up—and passed on the information it contained to Mr. Voster! Where Paddy had tripped was in being so certain that the Whisperer was Isabella Rocco.

Words of horrified protest leapt to Paddy's lips. She could not blame Vincent for thinking as he did.



Suspiciously Paddy regarded the girl who had unlocked the door. Was it possible that she was the unknown Whisperer?

Paddy gasped, and leapt from her cycle.

The horse was Vincent's fine black, Whitey.

But the boy leading it was not Vincent. It was Derek Mallard, captain of Boys' Side. Amazed, Paddy hurried forward.

"Derek! What are you doing with that horse?" she blurted. "Where's Vincent Conrad?"

Derek Mallard, tall, handsome, came up with Whitey.

"Conrad's behind," he said briefly.

"I'm taking him back to Mr. Voster."

"To—Mr. Voster! Derek, what's happened? Please tell me!"

The captain shrugged.

"Someone shoved a note under Voster's study door not long ago," he explained, "saying that Conrad was breaking bounds in Balton Woods this afternoon. So Voster sent me out there. Sure enough I caught Conrad snooping through the woods with his horse!" He frowned. "Can't say I like people sneaking on the fellow, but he's been asking for big trouble—and now he's going to get it!"

Paddy was stunned, staggered. So Vincent had gone to Balton Woods as he said he would! And someone had known that. Someone had sneaked to Mr. Voster, and Vincent had been trapped!

What else could he think? But before she could speak, a sudden, excited murmur of voices checked her. She turned her head.

The riding team was clustered at the gates of the park, staring at the scene in the lane. Vincent saw them.

"You'll all be glad to know," he called savagely, "that I'm going to get it in the neck—and that Paddy Dare now thinks as you do! What a laugh for you if I'm expelled! Well, O.K. A fat lot I care. You can all go to the dickens! It—it doesn't matter now!"

He shot Paddy one glance—a glance that showed deep hurt beneath his bitterness—then abruptly whirled as Derek Mallard grasped him by the arm.

"Come on," ordered the captain of Boys' Side, and with Whitey on one side of him and Vincent on the other he led the way forward.

And from the park gateway Isabella Rocco's soft voice added the final touch:

"So much for Paddy's proof—yes? The Outsider has been caught in another shady trick! He is finished with the riding team—he may be expelled—and Paddy loses the captaincy!"

More dramatic developments in next week's chapters of this gripping school story.



## LOYAL TO THE BOY JOKER

(Continued from page 48.)

key in the lock as Vic turned it. The next moment the door opened softly. Jill's heart missed a beat.

In the pale moonlight, a figure was standing by her uncle's big safe, his back towards them. The door of the safe was open, throwing the intruder's face into shadow.

"So that's the game, you blighter!" shouted Vic, throwing all caution aside. He leaped across the room as Jill fumbled frantically for the switch. There came a stifled, angry shout, the sound of a breathless struggle, and then the lights blazed up.

A broken cry escaped Jill's lips. "Uncle Norman!"

His face crimson with anger, Uncle Norman stood there in his dressing-gown, glaring at the petrified Vic.

"Why—you young scoundrel!" he thundered. "Not content with coming back to rob me—you had the audacity to attack me in my own house!"

"Uncle—wait!" Jill started forward, her face pale with excitement. "You—you don't understand—"

"Ha!" Uncle Norman stared at her. "So you're mixed up in this? Aiding and abetting your rascally cousin! It's fortunate that I am a bad sleeper. I heard suspicious sounds, and came down to investigate. Where is the deed-box you took from my safe, you young scoundrel?" he added, gripping Vic's arm.

"Vic hasn't got it!" exclaimed Jill breathlessly. "It was stolen by the unknown trickster—the same person who started the Black Monk scare in order to riddle your study, and who tried to throw the blame on Vic."

Uncle Norman was staring at her in blank amazement, and there was a strange expression in Vic's blue eyes.

"I guess you've hit the truth, Jill," said Vic, nodding glumly. "But

we're too late. The thief's got away."

"Oh, no, he hasn't, Vic. You've caught him!"

"I—I have?" echoed Vic blankly, while Uncle Norman stared from one to the other like a man in a dream.

"Listen!" said Jill, her heart beating quickly. "Do you hear that?" From somewhere in the study came a muffled thumping sound.

"The cabinet!" shouted Vic, starting towards it.

"Be careful!" warned Jill. "You'd better help him, uncle! You see—I thought of that faulty trick door in the cabinet after you'd gone, Vic. And I crept back, later, to prop it open with a piece of stick. I felt certain, by then, who the trickster was—thanks to his muddy footprints on the hall floor. And I guessed he'd try to hide somewhere if he was taken by surprise."

Vic was staring at her in open admiration.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated. "Come on, sir! I'll open the door, you grab him."

He threw open the cabinet as he spoke, while Uncle Norman stood by with the poker.

"But—but there's no one there!" stuttered Uncle Norman. "If this is another trick, young man—"

"Uncle—watch!" breathed Jill excitedly, as Vic pressed the secret spring—the spring that only operated from outside the cabinet.

The hidden door swung open, and both Vic and Uncle Norman sprang forward as a burly figure made a dash to escape.

Before they could recognise him he was racing across the room towards the door, which was still open. The deed box was clutched in his arms, his head was down.

"Quick! Don't let him get away!" gasped Vic, rushing after him.

But Jill, fleet of foot, was before him. Almost before anyone realised it, she was at the door. One foot shot out and—crash! With a cry the man tripped and fell to the floor, the deed

box flying from his hands and sliding to Uncle Norman's feet.

In a moment Vic was upon him as he struggled to his feet, and only then did they realise who he was.

"Holmes!" thundered Uncle Norman, seizing the scowling butler by the collar, while Vic imprisoned his arms. "So you were after the plans, you scoundrel—and it's only thanks to my niece's wits that you don't get away with them!"

"Not my wits, uncle," said Jill. "It was Vic's invention—and he taught me all the tricks I know!"

The boy grinned.

"If I had a cap, Jill," he retorted admiringly, "I'd take it off to you. The Joker has met his match!"

THE END.

"The Mystery Which Came Between Them"—that is the title of next week's intriguing long complete story.

## HER DANCING DAYS IN MEXICO

(Continued from page 41.)

The dance! Lesley went pale with dismay. She recalled the dancing-class Kirk had told her about—the one Don Ramon had so specially arranged.

"Lesley, you're late. Wherever have you been?" Bitter disappointment showed in the old rancher's voice. "My friends have been waiting here for you. Kirk couldn't you have brought her back sooner than this?"

The last question made Lesley start up. She realised Kirk had known these people were waiting—he had been sent by Don Ramon to find her.

"And he didn't say—he took me sightseeing," she breathed. "Kirk made me late—he must have done it deliberately."

Lesley wheeled to Kirk furiously, indignation heightening her colour. But the young rider was already speaking.

"I'm sorry, uncle, but I'm afraid it's partly my fault," he apologised. "You see, I found Lesley approaching the Bad Lands, and I guess I had to lecture her some. I tried to point out how dangerous it is to ride alone near the hills."

"Kirk, but—but you took me sightseeing," Lesley burst out amazedly. "You didn't say—"

She broke off when she saw Kirk smile to his uncle and shrug. He had lied! He had given the wrong impression on purpose.

"Lesley, you will not ride that way again unless Kirk is with you," Don Ramon said sternly.

"She was lost—it could have been pretty bad," Kirk went on. "I'll see it doesn't happen again."

With a feeling of horror Lesley realised the truth Kirk had planned this—had arranged it so she could never go riding alone. All his earlier hints suddenly made sense.

"He knows something—perhaps the secret of Bare Pine. And he's against Jim—he doesn't want me to find out what it is!"

Lesley thought of the mysterious message; the secret so important to Jim. Almost despairingly, she turned to Don Ramon.

"Lesley, you haven't answered," the rancher repeated. "I want you to understand you are never to ride that way again unless Kirk, my nephew, is with you."

Then how could she discover that secret? Discover it without Kirk knowing, too! All at once the young rider had become a figure of menace.

What is the secret of the mystery surrounding her brother? What is there to be discovered at Bare Pine—and will Lesley find some way of getting there? Be sure to continue reading this thrilling new serial in next Friday's issue of **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

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