

FUN & THRILLS FOR SCHOOLGIRLS

**SIX GRAND
STORIES INSIDE**

No. 771. Vol. 30.

EVERY FRIDAY.

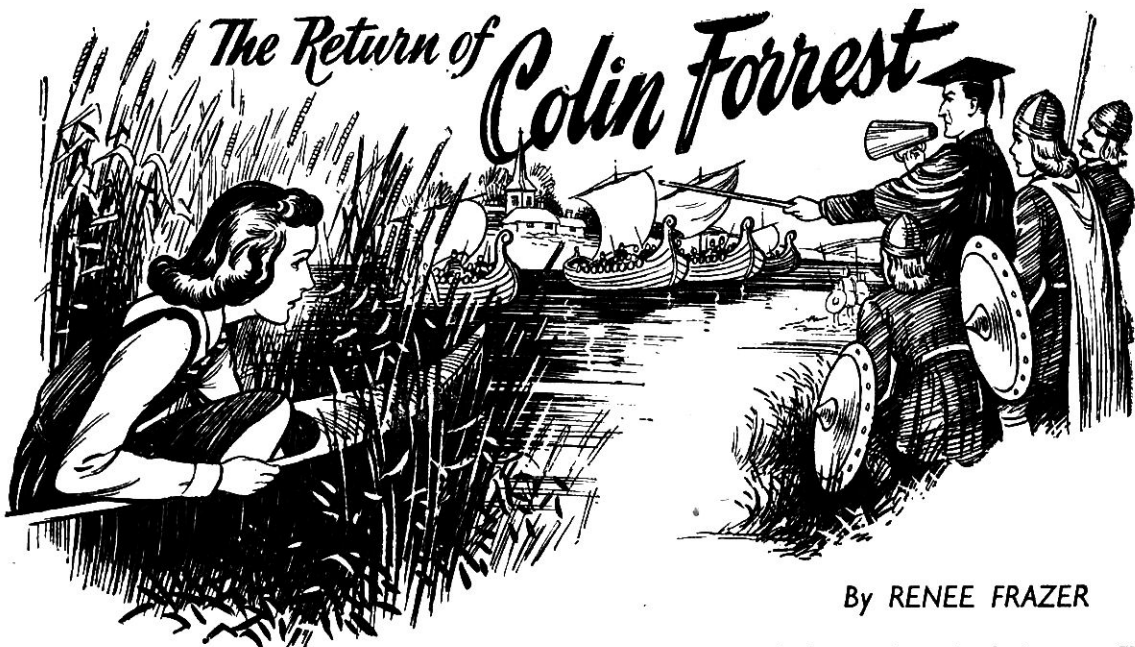
Week Ending July 29th, 1950.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3¢}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



**"THE RETURN OF
COLIN FORREST"**



By RENEE FRAZER

WHERE WAS COLIN FORREST?

GWYNNE ARNOLD and her chums of Riversdale Co-Ed School were keen on entering a team for the local regatta.

Mr. Kestrel, the senior master, did not approve of the idea, however. But with the help of Colin Forrest, a surprising new master, they were able to persuade the Head, Dr. Roxford, to allow them to enter.

Later, Gwynne discovered that the senior master was plotting against them.

Mr. Kestrel forbade Gwynne to take part in a rehearsal, and Gwynne, believing that he meant to strike again, crept along the terrace to Mr. Forrest's study, intending to consult the cheery young master.

But when she went in, she discovered that the figure seated at his desk was only a dummy!

A DUMMY of Colin Forrest!

Gwynne's thoughts were whirling as she stared at the cleverly-contrived figure—cushions tied together by string, with rolls of stiff paper for the arms, and the cardboard face skilfully tinted in flesh-colour.

The gown and mortar-board lent a finishing touch to the lifelike model which had fallen from the chair at Colin Forrest's desk and was now huddled forlornly on the study carpet.

She dropped to her knees beside it, a chuckle escaping her lips as she thought how she had been taken in. But the next moment she became serious.

What did it mean? she asked herself. Where was the young master? Why had Mr. Forrest erected this dummy replica of himself?

There could only be one explanation—and Gwynne's eyes shone as she thought of it. A boy at heart, despite his degrees and position, Mr. Forrest was literally "playing truant"!

Detailed by Mr. Kestrel to correct tedious French exam-papers—robbed of an opportunity to take part in the river pageant he had helped to plan—Mr. Forrest had fallen back on a schoolboy ruse in order not to miss the rehearsal which meant so much to Gwynne and her chums.

And more than that! Remembering his message, Gwynne felt convinced that he had taken this big risk—the risk of a severe reprimand, and the possible loss of his job—in order to be at hand should the mysterious enemy strike against her chums!

Gwynne's heart quickened at the thought, and she felt a little lump in her throat.

Mr. Forrest was prepared to run this risk for the juniors—though, till recently, many of them had been openly critical of him, making fun of his apparent eccentricities.

"He—he's a gilt-edged sport!" Gwynne whispered. "Just wait till I tell the others about this!"

Then she bit her lip anxiously. Of course, she could not breathe a word to anyone—not even to Maureen, Peter, or Derek. She had made this surprising discovery by sheer accident. The dummy had been intended to deceive any spying, ill-intentioned person who might be sent by Mr. Kestrel to check that Mr. Forrest was obeying his orders.

The thought galvanised Gwynne into sudden action. With a hurried glance towards the window, she lifted the dummy, replacing it in the chair at the desk—leaning its head on its hand, the roll of stiff paper acting as a support. Rearranging the gown and mortar-board, she stood back and surveyed the figure with a little smile.

It was really convincingly lifelike from the back, even if a trifle droopy; and that slightly weary posture helped rather than hindered the illusion.

And as she gazed at it, thinking smilingly of Mr. Forrest, a sudden resolve flashed into Gwynne's eyes. If the young master could take this risk for her chums, then she was not going to be outdone!

Two pairs of eyes were better than one. Mr. Forrest would hardly dare to show himself on the tow-path. He would have to keep watch secretly, from a distance—and the enemy might well strike from another direction.

Gwynne decided to take a chance. Even if Miss Primley awoke from her afternoon nap and discovered her charge's absence, the mistress was not

.....

**Quickly Gwynne Arranged
The Dummy Figure Of
Colin Forrest At The Desk.
But Would It Deceive
Mr. Kestrel And The Head-
master?**

.....

to know where she had gone. She might have taken a walk in the extensive grounds, or even returned to the school. Anyway, it was a risk that had to be faced.

Gwynne's pulses were racing. The rehearsal would have started by now, so there was no time to lose!

By an oversight, Mr. Forrest had left the french-windows unlocked, relying on the stiff catch. But Gwynne was more cautious, removed the key from the inside, and locked the windows securely behind her when she had stepped out on to the terrace. Then she went off across the grounds at a run.

Gwynne had been gone for some ten minutes when another figure appeared, walking rather stealthily among the bushes till he reached the terrace. It was Lester Wayne, the day-boy.

Lester stepped cautiously towards the window of Mr. Forrest's study, and peeped in. He grinned unpleasantly when he saw the figure apparently hard at work at his desk, and turned to move away.

Then suddenly he stiffened, his eyes widening. In her anxious haste Gwynne had forgotten one thing. Originally the dummy-master's elbow had been supported by the heavy ink-stand, but in replacing the figure Gwynne had overlooked that point.

Lester was in time to see the figure give a sudden lurch, its head sagging, while the mortar-board fell off, revealing the broom handle on which it had been perched.

"Gosh, it's a dummy!" he murmured. "Wait till Mr. Kestrel hears about this!"

With a trembling hand he shook the window, to find it locked. Then, a glitter of excitement in his narrow eyes, he turned and hurried back across the grounds by the way he had come.

THE pageant rehearsal was in full swing, and Mr. Kestrel's voice boomed through the megaphone, echoing along the sunlit tow-path to where Gwynne was crouched in a small canoe among the rushes, out of sight of the rehearsal squad.

"Boys and girls—attention! The Saxons, led by Derek Martin, will now line up on the tow-path to await the invaders. The Vikings, in their war-canoes, will approach from the opposite bank. They will swarm aboard the floating landing-stage, and that will be the signal for the Saxons to attack in a body, driving the invaders back to their boats. Is that quite clear?"

Gwynne, leaning forward in her canoe, listened breathlessly, a puzzled gleam in her eyes.

"But that's different from what we planned!" she murmured.

Why had Mr. Kestrel altered the script? There was to have been no mass charge of the Saxons on to the floating landing-stage. That ornamental structure, made to resemble an old Saxon raft, was to have been used as a set piece for the Grand Finale.

From the raft the heroine of the pageant—the daughter of the Saxon king—was to have presented laurelwreaths to the victors.

The boys had been responsible for making the raft, but Gwynne doubted if it had been constructed strongly enough to withstand the weight of an excited crowd.

If anything went wrong, the boys would be blamed, and Gwynne dreaded to think what might happen then.

She frowned anxiously and parted the rushes.

It was a colourful, exciting scene that greeted her. The painted "galleys" of the invaders were drawn up by the opposite bank, their crews looking very war-like in their gilded cardboard helmets, and carrying wooden swords and shields.

On the tow-path itself were assembled the "Saxons"—boys and girls, the former with spears and swords, the latter wielding bows-and-arrows.

The colourful set-up had been planned by Mr. Forrest, and carried out in detail by Gwynne and her chums. But now the young master was officially banned from taking part, and Gwynne looked in vain for his tall, familiar figure.

"If only Mr. Forrest were taking charge—and not Mr. Kestrel!" she sighed.

But no doubt he was a hidden on-looker, like herself, watching from a distance—unable to help in any way or to proffer his advice.

Mr. Kestrel had taken full control of the rehearsal. A megaphone in one hand, a silver-knobbed cane in the other with which to emphasise his orders, the senior master stood on the tow-path, directing operations.

In a group of interested spectators nearby stood the headmaster, Dr. Roxford, with several friends.

"When I give the word," Mr. Kestrel's booming voice reached Gwynne's ears, "the Vikings will commence their attack. When I raise my cane the Saxons will counter-charge, driving the invaders back into their canoes in a general mêlée." He paused, his eyes travelling swiftly over the assembled crowd. "Now then! Vikings—ready! Attack!"

With a gleeful shout from the armoured crews, the boats shot out from the opposite bank, swiftly crossing the river, paddles splashing, making the water sparkle in the sunlight.

Gwynne watched, her pulses racing, momentarily forgetting her own disappointment and her secret fears.

The boys were rowing magnificently, and Gwynne could not help feeling proud of them.

But it was on their leader that her gaze suddenly fastened. His painted canoe, of which he was the sole occupant, had shot out at the last minute from the bushes fringing the opposite bank—and had swiftly gained the lead.

His powerful arms wielded the flashing paddles. His cardboard helmet, with its eye-shield, completely shadowed his face. Thrust through his belt was a great wooden sword.

"That—that ought to be Peter," mused Gwynne, "but Peter's not as tall as that! The boys must have altered their plans in some way—"

And then her heart missed a beat, and for a moment all thought of the Vikings and their leader was swept from her mind.

She happened to glance down—to catch sight of something that brought a horrified gasp to her lips.

It was a length of tarred rope

caught up among the rushes—the rope which she knew the boys had used to secure the planks of the raft; and the end dangling in the water had obviously been cut with a sharp knife!

In a flash, Gwynne saw the dastardly plot—the plot that she had secretly feared. The raft had been tampered with—and when that spectacular charge was made, girls as well as boys crowding on to the floating structure, the planks would give way, falling apart. Both invaders and defenders would be flung into the river!

The blood drained from Gwynne's face as the awful realisation came to her. Her chums were in peril—and she was too far off to warn them, let alone avert the disaster.

But she could try! She made a grab for the paddle, sending the light canoe shooting out from the rushes into mid-stream. No one saw her, for all eyes were turned towards the scene of the exciting mock-invasion.

The Vikings were nearing the floating raft. The boys had ceased rowing and were standing up, waving

With a commanding gesture to the bewildered crews in the boats, he advanced on the equally astounded defenders who had halted in their charge.

It was clear that the headmaster and other onlookers thought this was part of the pageant, for they applauded loudly. But Mr. Kestrel, his thin face crimson, strode angrily towards the audacious Viking.

"Who—who are you?" he cried. "What right have you to interfere? Out of the way with you, or—"

"Ah—well met, Hawk-eye the Terrible, villain and traitor!" retorted the swordsman. "Advance at your peril. I am ready for you!"

And even as Mr. Kestrel, almost lost for words, glared at that amazing figure, Gwynne, with a terrific sense of shock, realised the astounding truth.

She stared incredulously at the tall Viking, her eyes wide.

"Oh, no—it—surely can't be!" she gasped.

But there was little doubt. The audacious intruder was Colin Forrest himself!



Gwynne saw Mr. Kestrel's expression change as he listened to the sneak. She caught in her breath. What was Lester telling the unpopular master?

their swords, ready to board the landing-stage.

"Oh, no, they mustn't! Stop! Stop!"

Gwynne shouted, and paddled desperately, but her distant call was drowned by the excited clamour of voices.

Mr. Kestrel's voice boomed again through the megaphone, reaching her clearly.

"Saxons—ready! Charge!" "No—stop—stop!" Gwynne shouted again anxiously, paddling as never before.

She saw the boys and girls on the tow-path send off a shower of arrows, following it with an enthusiastic charge towards the anchored raft.

"Oh, golly, I must stop them before they reach the raft!" Gwynne panted, plying her paddles with all the energy she could muster.

But just then another voice rang out—husky, yet commanding.

"Stand back!" it shouted. "Let no one advance as he values his safety! I, Colinnwulf, the Dane, will engage your chief in single combat!"

There was a sudden, startled silence. Gwynne drew in her paddles, allowing the boat to float gently along on its own, while she stared towards the rehearsal scene, her eyes wide with amazement.

A single canoe had reached the bank, and from it leaped a tall figure in a Viking helmet and eye-shield, flourishing a great wooden sword.

THE "MYSTERY" VIKING

As yet, no one else suspected that incredible fact. The headmaster and his guests were still applauding. The amazed juniors thunderstruck at first, now entered into the spirit of the thing—evidently suspecting that the boys had secretly enlisted one of the seniors on their side.

"They crowded forward, shouting excitedly, and waving their wooden swords.

"Up the Vikings!" bellowed Peter's voice, from the leading boat.

"Saxons for ever!" shouted Derek. "Take him at his word, Mr. Kestrel—show us some real sword-play!"

The senior master spluttered. "This—this is preposterous—" he began, shaking his stick angrily at the intruder.

The next moment it was almost knocked from his hand as the tall Viking, with a challenging cry, made a skilful parry with his wooden sword.

Then Mr. Kestrel lost his temper. The joke—if a joke it was—had gone too far for his liking. Taller and more powerfully-built than the intruder, he bore down on him, with the evident intention of discovering the other's identity by snatching off his helmet and eye-shield.

But he counted without his opponent. Skilfully evading him, the tall Viking side-stepped—and Mr.

Kestrel found himself on the river's edge, close to the anchored raft.

Gwynne, watching tensely from the distance, was quick to notice the hurried way in which the senior master drew back. But the Viking was approaching, making playful feints with his wooden sword, forcing the furious master closer to the raft.

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Kestrel, his rasping voice quavering for once.

"Desist, you—you scoundrel!" He dodged to evade a skilful thrust—and stepped back unwarily on to the raft.

There was a sudden snapping sound as the final fragment of rope parted. The water welled up suddenly between the boards—and Mr. Kestrel's foot went down with a squealing sound into the muddy shallows, while he waved his arms wildly and grabbed at the bank to save himself.

"Oh, my hat!"

Gwynne was almost crying with mingled laughter and dismay. She alone knew how well Mr. Kestrel deserved to be caught in his own cunning trap, but she feared for the consequences to his audacious opponent.

Mr. Kestrel's alarmed shout brought the boys rushing, and it was Derek who grabbed the master's shoulder, while other hands helped to drag him to safety, one trouser leg dripping with muddy water.

By now the amazed onlookers had grasped the fact that something was wrong. The headmaster shouldered his way through the excited crush.

"Kestrel—bless my soul—what has happened?" he demanded, staring at the discomfited senior master.

The senior master made an effort to regain his lost dignity, but there was an ugly expression in his eyes as he removed a piece of clinging weed from his trousers.

"Dr. Roxford," he spluttered, somehow controlling his fury, "that—that audacious ruffian deliberately—"

He broke off, staring blankly, as he turned to the spot where his opponent had been standing. In the general excitement the tall Viking had disappeared among the dense bushes—leaving his helmet and sword lying on the ground!

"After him!" shouted Mr. Kestrel. "Catch him! Unmask him! Find out who he is!"

There was no immediate move. The boys exchanged glances. It was beginning to dawn on Derek, Peter & Co. that someone had played an amazing practical-joke on the unpopular senior master—and they were not anxious that the audacious joker should be brought to book.

"Boys, do you hear me?" cried Mr. Kestrel, angry and humiliated. "Find that scoundrel at once, and bring him back."

Then Gwynne's heart gave an anxious jump, for she saw a breathless figure running along the tow-path towards the group. She recognised Lester Wayne, the day-boy—Mr. Kestrel's toady.

And from Lester's flushed face and excited expression he was obviously the bearer of news.

He rushed up to the senior master, catching his arm in his excitement.

"Mr. Kestrel—sir," he gulped, "can—can I have a word with you?"

Mr. Kestrel glared. At the moment he was in no mood for distractions. He was bent on revenge.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped, and stepped aside. "And be quick! I can't waste time—"

Gwynne, who had paddled close to the bank, saw Lester talking rapidly—excitedly. And she saw Mr. Kestrel's expression gradually changing. Amazement gave place to fury—and that, in turn, changed to a look of malignant triumph.

Anxious to hear what the toady said, Gwynne climbed on to the bank, and hid behind a tree. But Lester was speaking too low to be audible to her.

Gwynne held her breath anxiously. What news could the toady possibly have brought to affect Mr. Kestrel like this?

She was not left long in doubt. Mr. Kestrel turned suddenly to the headmaster, his thin face flushed.

"Sir—you saw what took place just now! You saw that—that crazy trickster doing his best to upset the rehearsal and make a laughing-stock of me? Now—he drew a deep breath—"now I have more than a shrewd suspicion who that—that person really was."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Head, while a murmur of interest arose from the group.

Mr. Kestrel's eyes glittered.

"I will make no statement without further evidence, Head," he went on. "But the information I have received convinces me that the culprit has left sufficient proof to expose the audacious plot! It was a deliberate attempt to undermine my authority, and if you will accompany me to the school I will show you something that will open your eyes!"

At those words Gwynne suddenly shivered. She knew, now—knew beyond a shadow of doubt—that Lester Wayne must have seen that dummy in Mr. Forrest's study, and tumbled to the truth!

If the headmaster found it there, it would be conclusive proof against Colin. For an assistant master to leave a dummy in his study, in order to engage in an undignified escapade, would be bad enough, and questions were bound to follow—stern questions that the young master could not hope to evade.

His audacious action in taking part in the pageant—in engaging Mr. Kestrel in a mock battle—would look very much like revenge.

It would mean dismissal—in disgrace!

At that moment, Gwynne had no thought for herself—for the pageant—for anything save Mr. Forrest's danger.

He had run the risk for her chums and herself. The least she could do was to try to help!

The next moment Gwynne had stolen away from the scene, escaping to the shelter of the trees and bushes.

She must get back to the school before the others—at all costs, and move that dummy!

A BID TO SAVE COLIN

FORTUNATELY, in the general excitement and questioning, there was some delay before the headmaster set out. Gwynne, taking a short cut through the spinney, was able to snatch at the momentary advantage.

She ran desperately, her heart pounding; and even as she ran she wondered what she was going to do.

She could not find Mr. Forrest to warn him; and the young master, as yet, did not realise his danger!

He had left the tow-path before Lester Wayne arrived with the news, and would probably make a long detour back to the school, anticipating a general search for the mystery Viking.

BOOK-LENGTH STORIES YOU WILL ENJOY

Both these July volumes of the
SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY

Are now on sale, price 7d. each.

No. 91.

"Judy of Whispering Valley"

By Sheila Austin.

No. 92.

"Co-Eds On Trial"

By Evelyn Day.

With his ready wits, he was probably quite confident of being able to talk his way out of the situation should his absence be discovered later.

But at all costs that tell-tale dummy must be hidden.

Not even Mr. Forrest could talk his way out of that!

Out of breath and dishevelled, she reached the school at last, and hurried round the terrace.

She peeped through the window of Mr. Forrest's study, and her worst fears were confirmed. The dummy lay slumped across the desk, the mortar-board on the floor, revealing what Lester Wayne had seen.

With a shaking hand Gwynne unlocked the window, entered quickly, locking it behind her.

She darted across to the dummy and lifted it in her arms, looking round desperately for some place to hide it.

There was a locked cupboard, and another filled with books. But by the time she had pulled them out she realised it might be too late.

"Oh, golly, what can I do?" she asked herself desperately, feeling utterly helpless as she stood there, the dummy lolting grotesquely in her arms.

And while she stood thus a sound of hurrying footsteps in the corridor reached her ears—and someone knocked loudly on the door.

"Forrest!" It was the headmaster's deep voice. "Please open this door—I want a word with you!"

Gwynne held her breath, her heart standing still as she heard Mr. Kestrel's suave tones.

"It is useless to knock, sir! If my suspicions are correct, Forrest has not been in his study all the afternoon. He has been engaged on other activities!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the headmaster. "Are you suggesting that it was Forrest who dared to masquerade—but, no! I cannot credit it!"

"If you will come round to the window, sir," put in Mr. Kestrel smoothly, "you may change your mind!"

Gwynne groaned despairingly as the footsteps receded. The window was her only way of escape. For a moment she thought wildly of making a dash out on to the terrace, and across the grounds, carrying the tell-tale dummy.

But even as the crazy idea entered her mind, she heard the footsteps of the two masters hurrying along the terrace outside, and Lester Wayne's breathless voice:

"If you'll look across at his desk, sir, you'll see what I mean!"

Gwynne's heart turned cold, but she knew there was only one thing to do. Swiftly she replaced the dummy in its chair, slipping the mortar-board back into position, and ducking down in the front of the desk, where she was concealed from direct view from the window.

She heard the footsteps halt outside—heard the headmaster's relieved voice.

"Why, Kestrel—Mr. Forrest is there after all, at his desk!"

Gwynne held her breath as she heard Mr. Kestrel's unpleasant laugh, and his quick reply.

"So it would appear, sir. But that figure is not Forrest, though I'll admit it is cunningly contrived. That is nothing more than a stuffed dummy!"

The blood drained from Gwynne's face, but her eyes were shining desperately.

She must save Mr. Forrest—somehow. She racked her brains—and then the idea came.

Without a moment's hesitation—hardly pausing to think of the consequences—Gwynne reached out her hand and, grasping the dummy's arm, raised it in a weary, yet lifelike, fashion, sweeping a pile of papers on to the floor!

Has Gwynne saved the situation? There are thrilling developments in next Friday's instalment of this grand serial.



The RIVAL REPORTERS ON THE RIVIERA

By RHODA FLEMING

A STRANGE LEGEND

"I SAY, this sounds intriguing!" murmured Julie Wilson.

Julie, star girl reporter of the French Riviera, was on holiday on the Riviera.

With a dainty wrap over her chic swim-suit, and an iced drink beside her, she was lazing on the sun-drenched beach.

She had just bought a copy of "Le Journal Midi"—the English edition—and she had been scanning the headlines with an expert eye.

"YOUNG ENGLISH VISITOR TO DEFEY FAMILY LEGEND.

"The Secret of the Sealed Room."

Julie read on, with quickened interest.

"Miss Diane Farley, charming English claimant to the ancient Chateau Blanc, at Vignon, is to defy the local superstition connected with her family and will visit the forbidden room in the turret."

Swiftly Julie gathered the details of the intriguing story. The Chateau Blanc—a picturesque mansion situated some miles along the coast—had been closed for many years, while lawyers sought to trace the last descendant of the old family.

The claimant turned out to be a young Londoner—an orphan—who had arrived at Vignon in time to celebrate her twenty-first birthday at the chateau.

"Now this," breathed Julie, "is the really thrilling part!"

Eagerly she re-read the last paragraph. According to an ancient tradition, the heir to the chateau, on coming of age, was supposed to unlock a sealed chamber in the turret, the contents of which were shrouded in mystery.

This romantic, age-old ceremony was supposed to bring good fortune to the neighbourhood; but in the event of the heir being a girl, the room was to remain sealed, or disaster would befall the venturesome opener.

"What a smashing story for the 'Echo'—if only I could be there at the opening!" Julie told herself excitedly. "It would turn Barry green with envy!"

Barry Doyle was star reporter on the "Comet," the "Echo's" most go-ahead rival. And Julie's fiery news editor, Mr. McCraig, had recently urged on her the necessity for getting a "scoop" that would put their rival in the shade.

"I'll—I'll do it," whispered Julie, her eyes shining, her fingers already itching to get at her notebook and pencil. "The holiday's up, Julie, my girl—"

At that moment someone passing almost tripped over her bare feet which were just protruding from the sand.

"Un mille pardons, mademoiselle!" exclaimed a flustered, boyish voice, speaking in French with an unmistakable English accent. "Er—I'm fearfully sorry—"

Julie whirled on her elbow, and the speaker broke off, his good-looking face blank with amazement.

"Why, if it's not Julie Wilson, of the 'Echo'!" he exclaimed, his startled expression giving place to a broad grin as he thrust out his hand. "What in the world brings you here, Julie?"

"Barry Doyle!" gasped Julie, recovering from her own amazement.

Then her practised eye saw two things at a glance. Barry, though looking very holidayish in cool flannels and white shoes, had a businesslike notebook protruding from his pocket. And under his arm he carried a neatly-folded copy of "Le Journal Midi"—the paper she had been reading!

Of course, it might be just a coincidence—but Julie was on her guard.

"Oh, I'm on holiday, Barry!" she said sweetly. "Taking things easy, for a change!"

"Same here!" grinned Barry. "Not a care in the world! Grand feeling, isn't it? Not having to chase up stories, and all that!" He glanced at the paper she was clutching, and raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Got a copy of the local, I see. Anything of interest?"

He spoke casually—almost too casually, Julie thought. She replied in the same manner, with a disarming smile:

"I haven't really had time to glance at the news, Barry, but there are some topping fashion adverts!"

Barry chuckled, his expression almost relieved.

"News is too much like work when you're on holiday," he agreed. "I only bought a copy to keep the sun off my face while I was snoozing! By the way, doing anything special at the moment? How about a strawberry ice?"

Julie's eyes sparkled. She was quite prepared to play for time, for the reception at the Chateau Blanc was not till six that evening. The afternoon was in front of her—and a strawberry ice, with Barry, would be a pleasant interlude while she found

out more about the boy reporter's movements.

"Thanks, Barry—I'd love one!" she declared.

Together they crossed the sunlit beach with its colourful crowds, to an open-air café beneath a gay awning. On the promenade beyond a long blue motor-coach was drawn up, and Barry saw Julie's glance steal towards it.

"Thinking of going anywhere by coach this afternoon, Julie?" he asked carelessly.

Julie laughed, though her heart missed a beat.

"Oh, I don't know—it's hard to tear oneself away from the sea!" she countered.

"Just how I feel," nodded Barry. "How about this table? I'll slip along and order your ice."

Julie sank gratefully into a cushioned chair under the awning. Barry was quite a dear, really—though a determined rival. It seemed a shame to have to deceive him. But when there was an exciting story in the offing, she dared not take any chance.

He returned at that moment with a delicious-looking ice topped with real strawberries and whipped cream.

"See what you can do with that, Julie!" he grinned. "I've ordered iced coffee, but I forgot to tell the waiter where we were sitting. I won't be a jiff!"

He strode away, and Julie sampled the scrumptious ice, while her mind was busily planning. She would have to give Barry the slip, of course. There would be a chance when she went to change from her bathing costume—

"Oh!" Julie gave a little exclamation of surprise. She was staring at something on her spoon—something that was not ice-cream. It was a neatly-folded slip of paper, slightly stained by strawberry juice.

Puzzled—just a shade concerned—Julie unfolded it. Then a gasp escaped her lips, and her grey eyes blazed with indignation.

"Sorry, Julie, old thing," she read, "but I've just remembered an urgent appointment! As you're strictly on holiday, I thought I'd better not worry you. If you want to read all about it, send for to—"

Those Popular Characters Julie Wilson And Barry Doyle
Return This Week In A Grand Long Complete Story Of
Adventure In The South Of France.

morrow's issue of the 'Comet.' All the best.—BARRY.
"P.S.—I'll buy you another ice when I get back, to celebrate."

"Oh!" Julie almost choked as she crushed the slip of paper in her hand. "And to think—to think I was feeling sorry about hoodwinking him! He—he won't get away with this!" She started to her feet, struck by a sudden uneasy thought.

The blue motor-coach! Darting from under the awning, she stared anxiously towards the promenade, and her heart sank. The coach had gone!

A uniformed official, standing near by, answered her breathless inquiry. "Ze coach for Vignon, ma'mselle? It has departed but a few minutes ago. Ze next is not for two hours."

Julie stood there, fuming. Barry must have had everything worked out to a nicety! He was on his way to the chateau—while she would probably arrive too late for the reception, and the breathlessly exciting moment when the locked room would be opened by the spirited young English girl!

"Oh, it's too bad!" she breathed. "If I had Barry here now, I'd—I'd—"

"Pardon, ma'mselle?" asked the polite official.

Julie flushed. "Isn't there some other way of reaching Vignon quickly?" she asked.

"A taxi—"
"Not at this time in the afternoon, ma'mselle. But wait!" The official referred to a list. "Zere is the—how you say?—speedboat. It leave for a trip across the bay to Vignon in half an hour."

"Speedboat!" Julie's dejection vanished, her heart giving a bound. "Oh, but that's wonderful! I may beat him to it yet, and I'll just have time to change!"

Half an hour later, eyes sparkling, dark, wavy hair tossed in the wind, Julie clung to her seat in the speedboat as it raced across the bay, leaving a frothing track in its wake.

"Wait till Barry sees me!" she breathed. "He'll get the shock of his life!"

Her pulses were racing when, at last, she disembarked at a wavelapped beach, and commenced the steep, picturesque climb through the olive groves to the Chateau Blanc.

She caught in her breath as she came in sight of the old chateau, seeming perilously balanced on the cliff edge, its mellow grey stone overhung by luxuriant vines and creeper. The late afternoon sunlight, slanting through the poplar trees, reflected on its tall, narrow windows.

Julie could not help wondering which of those windows gave light to the mysterious sealed room, and what strange, forgotten secret that room might contain!

A few minutes later she was peering through the great iron gates, set in the crumbling grey stone walls that surrounded the picturesque grounds. The gates were securely locked, though the sound of voices and laughter drifted on the soft breeze.

Footsteps crunched on the drive, and a burly figure—evidently a gardener—approached the gate, eyeing Julie suspiciously.

With a winning smile, Julie produced her Press card, explaining her mission in her best French.

The man gesticulated, his frown deepening.

"No one is permitted from the newspapers, ma'mselle!" Julie's heart sank.

"But—but there is a reception, isn't there? Couldn't I just speak to—she hastily consulted the newspaper—" to Miss Diane Farley?"

"It is impossible, ma'mselle! My orders are not to admit any but invited guests!"

Just then Julie caught a glimpse of a little group crossing the spacious lawn towards the chateau. One was a charming, auburn-haired girl whose gay laugh had already reached Julie's ears. Her companions were a silver-haired old lady in a bath-chair, and

a young man, apparently a servant, who was pushing the chair.

Julie started, gripped by a sudden, incredible suspicion.

"Who—who is that?" she gasped. "That is the young English lady—Mademoiselle Diane Farley—and her companion is Madame Celeste, an old retainer of the family."

"I mean that young man in the beret and blue blouse?" gulped Julie.

"How should I know?" growled the gardener. "He has been here only half an hour. He applied by phone for the job of temporary manservant advertised in 'Le Journal.' His name, I think, is Marcel."

But Julie was not listening. The young man had turned, flashing a smile at the auburn-haired girl, and Julie almost cried aloud.

It was Barry!

How the astute boy reporter had wangled his way into the job at such short notice she could not imagine, but he must have fixed it up that morning, by telephone, though he had given no hint when they met on the beach. And now here he was, no doubt getting all the details of the story, and—if she knew Barry—he would be well to the fore at the opening of the sealed room!

He was wheeling the bath-chair towards the chateau, while the auburn-haired girl made her way through the rose garden, carrying a basket on her arm.

Julie drew a deep breath, her grey eyes gleaming. If Barry imagined that he had her beaten, he would have to think again!

All she wanted was a word with the charming Diane Farley, and she could rely on her girlish wits to see her through!

Farther down the winding road she had noticed a gap in the crumbling stone wall. To scale the wall and climb through the gap was a simple matter to Julie, even though her smart white costume became a little soiled in the process.

A few minutes later, her heart beating quickly, she was hurrying across the gracious old garden, with its shady lawns and tall green poplars.

And just then, from among the trees on her right, she heard a sound that momentarily chilled her blood. It was a girl's scream of fear.

BARRY'S WARNING

FOR a moment Julie stood as though frozen. The sound, startling and unexpected in the peaceful old garden of the chateau, was almost like a blow.

But her inaction lasted only for a second. Then she was racing down the path in the direction from which the cry had come.

A gap in the trees brought her in sight of the ancient west wall of the castle, crimsoned by the setting sun and flush with the precipitous cliff below.

Then her heart tightened, and a gasp of dismay and pity escaped her lips. A crumbling flight of steps led part of the way up the wall, where there was a sudden gap in the masonry; and just below the gap, clinging desperately to the creeper, was the auburn-haired girl she had seen in the grounds!

Even as Julie sped for the steps, she realised what had happened. The venturesome girl must have been exploring her new home—and had unwarily ventured too far up the treacherous steps.

Julie did not stop to think of the risk to herself—and even her mission as a reporter was momentarily swept aside. The girl was in terrible danger, for at any moment the creeper might give way.

The ancient steps were worn and slippery with moss, but Julie scrambled up them with barely a pause for breath. Her progress became slower as she neared the gap, and it was with difficulty that she managed to find a foothold.

Below her she could see the girl's face, deathly white against the green foliage, as she clung to the creeper for dear life.

"Hold on, Miss Farley!" Julie

called, panting for breath. "You'll be all right. I think—I think I can reach you."

She was lying full length on the mossy steps, reaching down into the creeper with one hand, while she held on with the other. Her fingers closed round the girl's slender wrist, and she heard the other's little gasp of relief as some of the weight was relieved from her numbed fingers.

"Listen!" said Julie, whose quick, observant glance had taken in the extent of the other's perilous predicament. "There's a kind of ledge in the wall just to your right. See if you can reach it with your foot. I've got a tight hold of you."

The girl nodded, clinging to the creeper with one hand while she sought for a foothold. Julie tensed herself, taking as much of the girl's weight as she could manage. Luckily the other was slightly built, and she still had all her senses about her.

Obedying Julie's instructions, and aided by the girl reporter's own efforts, she managed to climb painfully back on to the steps.

Her lips were trembling, and her charming face was pale beneath her unruly auburn hair, but she pluckily forced a smile.

"I say, thanks no end," she gulped. "I guess I was crazy to try this lark, and if it hadn't been for you—"

She looked at Julie in some perplexity, as though trying to place her. The girl reporter hastened to change the subject.

"But why ever did you want to climb up here?" she asked.

The girl laughed a little unsteadily; she had vivacious, gold-flecked eyes that were beginning to regain their sparkle.

"They say that curiosity nearly killed the cat, and I suppose that must be me! I wanted to take a squint at the forbidden room—from the outside!"

And she pointed to a narrow, barred window set high in the wall of the chateau, half hidden by the creeper.

Julie's pulses leaped.

"You are Diane Farley?" she asked. The girl nodded, smiling tremulously.

"And I bet you're wondering what all this is about! Well, I'll tell you. I'm English, of course, though my mother's ancestors were French, and they owned this chateau. I was told about the sealed room when I was a child, and I've often thought about the legend—though I never dreamt I'd ever have a chance to—she drew a quick breath—" to break the spell."

"Spell?" asked Julie eagerly, her fingers groping instinctively for her notebook.

Diane's attractive face was suddenly serious.

"There is a spell, you know—a kind of curse. You may have read about it in the paper? An ancestress of mine once defied it, and—and she was never seen again."

Julie caught in her breath as the other gave a little shiver.

"But, of course, that's just a tale," Diane Farley went on quickly.

"Though the villagers round here believe it. And they believe that a curse was put on the chateau estates after that, for they've been through some very hard times. The legend goes that the spell will only be lifted if another girl should dare to defy the curse. I—I thought it would be rather a lark—though our dear old family governess, Madame Celeste, nearly cried before she would agree to the plan. It was she who helped the lawyers to trace me, and who made all arrangements for the reception, in spite of her bad health."

Julie looked at the charming girl with a new, warm liking. Diane might speak of her daring venture as a "lark"—but Julie believed that she had taken on this strange task from a quixotic desire to convince the villagers that the ancient spell had been broken!

"Good for you!" she declared impulsively. "But you haven't told me why you wanted to look through that window—as you will be opening the room to-night."

A faint smile crossed the girl's vivacious face.

"Well, wouldn't you be curious?" she countered. "I mean, I rather wanted to know, beforehand, what—what was in store for me!"

For an instant, Julie was conscious of a little chill as she followed the other's glance to the barred window. Then she laughed.

"I say, you're not serious?" she challenged. "But—goodness!—I wish I could be there when you unlock that door!"

"Well, why not?" The girl glanced at her quickly. "Aren't you one of the guests? There are so many I haven't met. Madame Celeste issued the invitations."

Julie determined to test her belief in this sporting girl. Quite frankly she admitted her identity—and the reason for her presence at the chateau—though, loyally, she made no mention of Barry.

The girl gave a merry laugh. "I like you, Julie!" she said. "And, what's more, you jolly well saved my life! I'll tell madame—but, no, I won't! The poor dear's on tenterhooks because we've so many distinguished guests here—countesses, barons, and goodness knows who. And she's read reports that some audacious girl crook is in the neighbourhood. I've a better plan. You and I, Julie, are old school chums." "What?" gasped Julie, her heart giving a bound. "You don't mean

"I do!" Diane laughed, linking a hand through Julie's arm. "Who's to know? I've been out of touch with the family for years. Why shouldn't I invite an old school friend to my twenty-first birthday party? We'll go in now and I'll introduce you!"

Julie's pulses were racing triumphantly as she assisted her vivacious companion to scramble down the steep flight of steps. Diane had hurt her ankle in her fall, and was limping slightly, but she begged Julie not to mention her escapade.

The spacious hall of the chateau was filled with guests when the two girls entered, arm-in-arm. Julie, looking round quickly, could hardly contain her laughter as she caught sight of Barry, a tray balanced on his hand, gravely carrying round refreshments.

The astute boy reporter was due for a shock—and it served him right! As yet, Barry had not noticed her, and Julie took care to keep her face averted as she walked on the other side of her young companion.

Diane introduced her to the silver-haired Madame Celeste, who, seated in her wheel-chair, was talking to the family lawyer. Madame's shrewd eyes looked up at the girl reporter from a kindly, wrinkled face, and she held out a frail, lace-gloved hand.

"I am so pleased to meet an English friend of Diane's," she said, with a gracious smile.

Julie was conscious of a momentary twinge of guilt; but just then Diane gave a merry laugh.

"Come," she said, "we must celebrate this occasion! Marcel!" She beckoned the young waiter. "An iced drink for my dear school chum, Julie Wilson!"

Barry whirled, the glasses rattling on his tray. His eyes goggled incredulously as he encountered Julie's disarming smile.

The next moment there was a splintering crash, as tray and glasses descended to the floor.

"Oh, Marcel, how clumsy!" murmured Julie in reproachful tones.

Barry, his good-looking face crimson, stammered a hurried apology in broken French as he bent to pick up the scattered fragments. But while his hand fumbled with the tray, his smouldering gaze was on Julie.

As plainly as words, his glance demanded:

"How on earth did you get in here?"

Julie's eyes twinkled roguishly as she heard Madame Celeste reproving the new manservant. She could not help feeling sorry for him, despite the trick he had played on her.

"Perhaps, madame," she suggested, "it was partly my fault for flustering the poor boy!"

Barry glared at her speechlessly as he straightened himself, carrying the tray stiffly out to the kitchen. But he was back again in a few minutes, while the French lawyer was explaining the important event of the evening—the young heiress' visit to the sealed room.

Julie became conscious that her boy rival was standing behind her, balancing another tray.

"Coffee, ma'mselle. Black or white?" he asked politely. Then, in a hissing undertone: "What's the game, Julie?"

"Black, please, Marcel!" said Julie firmly. Then, dropping her voice to a whisper: "Same as yours, Barry. But this is my trick! Next move to you."

His face expressionless, Barry moved on to serve some more guests, but he returned by way of Julie's chair.

"Is the coffee to your liking, ma'mselle?" he asked, bending over her. "You may find it rather hot—and you'll find this place still hotter!" he added huskily. "You're playing with fire, Julie!"

Julie was momentarily startled by

Barry was staring at her, too—rather intently, Julie thought.

The lawyer went on to explain that, by old tradition, Diane was to wear the gown this evening.

At twilight, while the guests were assembled in the hall, the daring girl would mount the stairs to the minstrel's gallery, where all eyes could see her. From there she would make her way alone to the sealed room in the turret. She would break the seals, and unlock the door with the key that was in the lawyer's possession.

What she saw in the turret-room she need never disclose unless she wished. For an hour she would be expected to remain there, undisturbed, and when the time was up she would bring back the broken seals as proof that she had carried out her task.

It was all very eerie and impressive; and though one or two of the younger guests stifled nervous giggles, Julie had a feeling that the same thought was in the minds of everyone present.

What would Diane Farley see when she entered the turret-room? And would she come back safely at the end of the hour?

Impatiently Julie dismissed her



Julie sat bolt upright, staring indignantly at Barry. "Diane—a crook?" she gasped. "I don't believe it!"

his urgent tone as much as by his words; but she decided that Barry was merely feeling piqued, and trying to scare her.

"I'm feeling quite cool, thank you," she murmured, stirring her coffee. "Wait till you read my story: 'Nervous Waiter Drops Tray as Young Heiress Prepares to Defy Her Fate!'"

"Once again the cups rattled precariously on Barry's tray and he hastily put it down.

"Listen, Julie!" he breathed earnestly. "Diane Farley doesn't know what she's letting herself in for. Take my tip, and get out of here while the going's good!"

"Not on your life, Barry!" whispered Julie. "You can't frighten me like that!"

"Messdames! Messieurs!" The family lawyer was calling for silence. "I wish now to explain the exact procedure of Mademoiselle Diane's visit to the sealed chamber."

There was a tense, expectant hush as, at the lawyer's request, Madame Celeste, the old governess, produced from a parcel an exquisite satin gown, with a veiled headdress.

"This," announced the lawyer, holding it up "is a replica of the very robe the ill-fated young Countess Mathilde was wearing on the night that she ventured into the sealed room."

There was a murmur of interest, and Julie, glancing across at Diane Farley, saw a flush of nervous excitement on that girl's attractive face.

fanciful thoughts, reminding herself firmly that she was here on a plain job of reporting for her paper.

The daylight was already fading as Diane Farley, flashing a tremulous smile at the girl reporter, collected the satin gown and the ancient key, and went to her room to change.

And it was at that moment that Julie overheard Barry talking respectfully to the grey-haired lawyer.

"Forgive me, monsieur, but wouldn't it be wise if one of the—ahem!—the servants was posted on the stairs to the turret-room to prevent any unauthorised person from following Miss Farley?"

The lawyer nodded thoughtfully, rubbing his chin.

"I would be delighted to undertake the task," Barry said. "You see—"

But he did not have time to complete his sentence. Grey eyes gleaming, Julie swept towards them. If Barry thought he was going to steal a march on her—and get a close-up view for his story—she would put a stop to his little game!

"Er—Marcel!" she said sweetly. Barry turned, his manner suavely polite.

"Marcel," said Julie, as she scribbled a hasty line on a sheet of paper from her notebook, "I want you to send off this wire for me from the village before the post office closes!"

Barry's expression changed; he grinned at the scribbled wording.

"McCraig, 'Echo,' London. Hold

front-page to-morrow for big story.—
"JULIE."

"Not on your sweet life, Julie!" he whispered. "You can send it yourself. I'll be much too busy—hem!—collecting my own story!"

Julie's eyes flashed as she turned appealingly to old Madame Celeste. "Please, madame, can Marcel take an important telegram for me?" she asked.

"But certainly!" declared the old lady, nodding emphatically. "You will go at once, Marcel! And on your way tell Pierre, the gardener, that I wish him to take me for my evening ride in the grounds."

Barry bit his lip, glaring at Julie; but it was as much as his job was worth to refuse.

Julie smiled at him sweetly as he strode away, and gave a little sigh of relief. Poor old Barry! But in the reporting game ready wits counted for everything, and she was taking no chances with her astute rival.

The rest of the party settled themselves for their strange vigil, and Julie hurried in search of Diane. As she tapped on that girl's door she heard a little sob. Anxiously she entered the room.

Diane Farley was seated on her bed, tears in her eyes. Her vivacious face was pale and her lips were trembling. The satin gown and veiled head-dress lay beside her. She had removed one of her stockings, and Julie could see that her slim ankle was red and swollen.

"Diane, what is it?" Julie gasped. "It's—my ankle!" The girl hastily dabbed her eyes, forcing a tremulous little smile. "I didn't dream it was so bad. I can hardly walk across the room. I doubt if I could even reach the turret stair, let alone climb them."

"Oh, Diane!" exclaimed Julie, for the distress in the other's eyes was unmistakable, despite her plucky smile.

"The worst of it is," said Diane, "they'll all think it's an excuse—that I'm funking the task! That room's just got to be opened to-night. Everyone in the village is waiting to hear that the old spell has been broken by a girl, and I just can't bear to let them down!"

A sudden, daring thought caused Julie to catch in her breath. If only she could persuade Diane to let her take her place! It would be the scoop of the year!

"But, Julie," gasped Diane, as the girl reporter breathlessly outlined her plan, "it—it wouldn't be the same thing! I'd feel I was deceiving everyone!"

"But you wouldn't be—not really," Julie argued. "I'd just take your place to-night for the appearance of the thing, and to-morrow you can spend an hour in the room yourself to make everything fair."

Diane hesitated, biting her lip, plainly torn between her natural shrinking from deception—and her anxiety not to disappoint the villagers.

"But when your report is published, Julie—"

"I'll have it printed as an interview!" Julie smiled. "After all, you're not actually forbidden to tell what you've seen."

In the end Diane gave in, and she assisted the girl reporter to don the exquisite satin gown and veiled head-dress.

A few minutes later, her heart beating rather quickly, Julie left the room, carrying a flickering candle in a brass holder. The long satin gown rustled on the floor as she walked, and the veil completely concealed her tense, excited face.

Slowly she mounted the stairs to the minstrel's gallery, aware of the rippling murmur that arose from the guests assembled in the dimly-lit hall below.

Next moment she had pushed open the small door that led to the turret stairs, and a cold draught made the candle flame leap and flicker. The unnerving part of her strange task had begun!

The girl reporter was quite alone now, and her footsteps on the stairs

gave out hollow echoes. She clutched the heavy key in a moist hand and climbed on, forcing herself to think of exciting headlines—and of Barry's envy. Of everything, in fact, except what might lurk behind the door of the sealed room!

But now she had come in sight of the door—dark oak, studded with rusty nails. Great black seals were affixed in three places. Plucking up her courage Julie broke them by striking them with the great key.

Then, holding her breath, she slid the key into the rusty lock, turning it with an effort. The harsh grating sound made her heart jump, but she forced a smile.

"Remember the 'Echo, Julie!' she breathed. "You don't want Barry to get the laugh of you!"

Grasping the massive iron knob, she twisted it slowly, and with a complaining creak the ancient door commenced to open. The candle flame flickered wildly—and Julie's blood ran suddenly cold.

From somewhere in the shadows came a soft, yet malignant chuckle!

IN THE SEALED ROOM

JULIE stood as though rooted to the spot. The door swung wider. But no one—nothing—came out; "You're crazy! You imagined it!" she whispered, though her hair felt as though it were standing on end. "Nothing—alive—could have been locked in the room for all those years!"

The sound might have been caused by the creaking hinges, magnified and distorted by the echoes. Julie tried to still the pounding of her heart as she peered into the room, holding out the candle.

Fantastic cobwebs swung in the candlelight; something fluttered from the shadows, and the girl reporter stifled a scream as a colony of bats, aroused by her entry, swooped from the rafters.

But there was nothing else there. Julie gave an unsteady laugh. Nothing to be afraid of!

But what was the secret of the turret-room?

Boldly now, the girl reporter stepped into the room, her lively imagination quickening at the thought of the story she would wire to her paper.

And as she did so she heard that laugh again—close this time, and behind her. White-faced, Julie turned—in time to see the massive door swing back into place with a hollow clang.

The draught it caused blew out the candle, plunging her into darkness.

For a moment Julie was conscious of something almost like panic. She flung herself at the door, tugging at it desperately; but it refused to budge.

The girl reporter drew back, her hands clenched, forcing her numbed mind to think clearly.

"Steady, Julie!" she breathed. "Take it easy. Probably the door slammed in the draught and got jammed. Nothing to worry about!"

But when she knelt down to peer at the lock she realised, with an unpleasant shock, that the key had been turned—from the outside!

But who could have locked her in? And why?

Julie's fears gave place to swift indignation. There was some kind of trickery afoot in the old chateau!

She could hardly imagine that any of the guests she had seen would have played a trick like this on their charming young hostess; for no one but Diane herself knew of the last-minute change that had been made.

Yet someone—someone with a sinister purpose—had locked her in that room!

Julie's first impulse was to hammer on the door and call for help, but she checked herself in time. Not only was it unlikely that her cries would be heard from the turret, but if this got to Barry's ears, what a story he would wire to the "Comet"!

For a fraction of a moment a horrid idea occurred to Julie. Could Barry himself have locked her in the room—to pay her back for her innocent

trick and to get a good story for himself?

Loyally she dismissed the thought, Barry was up to all kinds of amusing dodges, but his natural chivalry would be up in arms against a trick of this kind. Besides, not even Barry could have suspected the secret change of costumes.

Yet the trickster—whoever it might be—must have had some purpose, other than scaring her, for locking her in that room.

The girl reporter tensed at the thought. Supposing—supposing it was some enemy of the charming Diane? And supposing that enemy found out his mistake and went to Diane's room?

All thought of her own predicament was banished from Julie's mind.

"I've got to get out of here!" she whispered, her face pale.

Then she remembered that, under the terms of the vigil, no one would visit the turret-room for an hour. Desperately Julie stared round her. By the pale, grey light that crept through the barred window she could just make out her surroundings.

If there had ever been a secret attached to the turret-room, it was certainly not here now. It was a bare, cobweb-clustered attic, without a scrap of furniture. In one corner lay a coil of mildewed rope, left there for goodness knew what purpose.

Despairingly Julie crossed to the barred window, which was just within her reach. Grasping the bars, she attempted to draw herself level with the window, in the forlorn hope of being able to attract attention.

But she fell back with a little gasp, one of the ancient iron bars in her hand. Eaten through by rust, it had snapped beneath her weight.

Rising painfully to her feet, Julie stared at the gap that remained. Her heart quickened, and a reckless gleam crept into her eyes. The gap was just wide enough for her to squeeze through—and there was that rope lying in the corner.

The girl reporter had undertaken more than one perilous task when hot on the trail of a story, but nothing quite as dangerous as this.

Knocking the rope to the stoutest of the remaining bars, she managed with an effort to squeeze through the narrow gap. Then, holding on tightly, she ventured to look down.

A cold shiver ran down her spine. She was looking at the stark face of the cliff below the walls of the chateau, and at the sea, far below, shimmering in the pale light of the rising moon.

One false move—a slip—

But Julie dared not let her mind dwell on that. She thought of Diane Farley, the charming girl who trusted her; she thought of Barry, who was probably wondering where on earth she had got to.

Swiftly averting her gaze, she took a firm hold on the rope and commenced to lower herself, hand under hand.

If only she could reach those broken steps where she had first encountered Diane, everything would be well.

Once again Julie ventured to look down. She was within a few yards of the steps now—a steepish drop—and she had come to the end of the rope!

Desperately Julie clutched at a stone gargoye that protruded from the wall, intending to steady herself, but her fingers slipped. Or was it the gargoye that moved?

With a choking sob, she felt the stone ornament rock in her grasp. The next moment she was falling, slithering down the creeper-covered wall, trying desperately to gain a hold.

For a moment her fingers got a grip on the tough creeper, temporarily checking her fall. But her arms felt almost wrenched from their sockets and her mind was numbed.

Below her she heard a confused shouting as her nerveless fingers released their hold. A despairing cry was torn from her lips as she fell—to be caught in someone's arms.

(Please turn to the back page.)



The HOLIDAY-CAMP REVELLERS

By ELISE PROBYN

JULIE'S PERIL

JULIE DELMAR received an invitation from a Miss Paget to spend a holiday at Haley Holiday Camp.

But when she arrived she discovered there was no booking for her, and Miss Paget had not arrived. It was only thanks to the generosity of her chums, Wendy Rayland and Kay and Gerry Briscoe, that she was able to stay at the camp.

She learnt that a mysterious man and his unknown girl confederate in the camp were after the secret of a fan which Miss Paget had sent her.

Miss Paget, Julie discovered, had gone to St. Malo, in France, so Julie flew there in an excursion plane.

Before she could find her benefactress, however, she was kidnapped by the mystery man, disguised as a taxi driver. He made her prisoner in a tower, and left her while he went in search of the fan, which she had had the presence of mind to throw out of the taxi window.

"**H**ELP! Help! Help!" Julie shouted.

Furiously she tore at the necktie which bound her wrists behind her back as she tottered to the locked door. But she knew, even as she uttered the words, that she was crying vainly.

For what hope was there of help, stranded here, miles from St. Malo, in the topmost chamber of the lonely tower?

How bitterly she reviled herself, in that moment, for having allowed herself to be so completely taken in by the disguised taxi-driver who was her enemy!

"But I've got to escape—I must!" she told herself desperately. "I've got to get away and find the fan before he does. Oh, if only Wendy, Gerry and Kay were here!"

But that was a useless hope. The English Channel divided her from her jolly chums at Haley Holiday Camp. She was on her own now, and must rely on her own efforts to find some way out of this place as quickly as possible.

Every instant counted if she was to foil the mystery man who was so intent on robbing her of the precious secret which Miss Jennifer Paget had given to her to guard.

More frenziedly she struggled. Suddenly, with a snap, the necktie came loose on her wrists. And at that moment she heard the car outside start up. A second later her hands were free.

Frantically she rushed to the one small window the room contained. Peering through it—it seemed that the ground was miles below—she saw the car speeding away on the road back towards Monks Bridge.

Monks Bridge where, in her desperation, she had flung the fan from

the taxi window into the rushes at the side of the stream!

Was there any hope of getting that fan back now—of breaking out of this prison and foiling her unknown enemy before he succeeded in finding it?

"I've got to," Julie told herself grimly.

She gazed round, then sped to the door. Frantically she pulled at the handle, but she knew, even as she did so, that there would be no escape that way.

The door was stout in spite of its age. Its lock was firm and held like a band of steel. There was only one possible way out—through the window!

"Oh, quickly!" she almost sobbed.

She rushed back to the window. Then with a gasp of dismay she saw that there was no fastening—no framework, either. The window was a solid piece of strong, thick glass, cemented into the wall itself.

"I'll have to break it!" she thought frantically. "But what with?"

She turned back helplessly, her gaze roving round the room in search of some implement. The room was unfurnished, however, except for a small collapsible iron bed in one corner.

And, her gaze alighting on that, Julie had an idea. Eagerly she rushed forward, and with a strength born of desperation she pulled it from the wall and, with a push, upended it.

At once the coverings flew off. There came a terrific clatter as the loose-fitting iron lathes which formed the bottom of the bed crashed to the floor. With a gasp Julie wrenched out one of the heavy metal side-pieces which formed the framework.

"And now—" she panted. She juggled the weapon into position like a lance. Then she took one measuring look at the window. Gritting her teeth she charged forward. With all her strength she tilted at the window. The glass gave with a splintering crash, and irresistibly Julie shot forward, almost colliding with the wall before she was able to check herself.

She paused only to regain her breath. Then feverishly she was hacking away the sharp pieces of glass still lodged in the cement.

The next moment she was climbing on to the window's stone sill.

Just for an instant her heart failed her as she gazed down at the earth

below. It seemed so far away. Sheer and straight the wall of the tower ran down to meet it, its creeper-covered sides rusting in the breeze that blew across the marshy flats. Dare she risk it?

"You've got to risk it! You've got to get that fan!" she told herself fiercely. "Out you get, Julie!"

She allowed no further delaying thought to restrain her. Out of the window she clambered. Clutching a gnarled branch of the creeper, she found a foothold. Then, with heart thumping, she began the descent, feeling her way with her feet as she went. Would she succeed?

She was gasping before she had completed half the journey. Her hands were bleeding and black, and now and again she felt the branches give and crack beneath her feet. Once there came a frightening moment when her foot failed to find the creeper at all, but just scraped at the bare wall.

"Oh, golly, what now?" she groaned.

She worked her way sideways where the creeper was thicker, and managed to find a safe foothold, and there for a while she clung, steadying her nerves for the next descent. Now, inspired by the thought that the mystery man would already have arrived at the bridge, she began to climb more quickly.

Down, down, down! Would she never reach the bottom?

She risked a look. It still seemed terribly far to the ground. Quickly, more agilely, she went, until—

Crack! She did not realize that she had reached a dead patch of creeper until, with a snap like a whiplash, the branch beneath her feet broke and went hurtling earthwards. Convulsively her fingers tightened on her handhold and, with her feet threshing the air, searched frantically for a hold. Below she heard a thud as the rotten creeper hit the ground.

Then she looked down. Her face paled. The smooth side of the wall met her gaze. In kicking away the rotten branch she had dislodged a great patch of creeper. She could not swing to the right because there, also, the wall was bare. She dare not swing to the left because there the creeper was as decayed as that which now lay below.

"What was she to do?" "Oh, help! Help!" she called desperately.

And then, to her horror, she felt the creeper in her hand beginning to give. Above her came a rustling and crashing which told its own ominous story. The creeper was coming away from the wall.

She raised her voice. "Help! Oh, help!" she shouted again.

Despite The Desperate Risks Involved, Julie Was Determined At All Costs To Escape From The Tower.

This time, to her dazed, incredulous joy, there was an answer. Below sounded the screech of brakes, the bang of a car's door. A voice which thrilled Julie came floating up. "Hold on, Julie! We're here—"

And Julie, gazing down, wondered if she was dreaming. For there, scrambling frantically from a French car, were Wendy, Kay and Gerry! Her friends from the holiday camp—and just in time!

THE CLUE IN THE CAR

OR were they? For at that moment the branch came away from the wall altogether. With a cry of horror Julie helplessly swooped downwards until, with a jerk she was brought up, to find herself still hanging on to the end of the trailing branch which had parted company with the wall. For a moment it seemed firm, however, although there was still no foothold.

She swayed jerkily in mid-air, her head beginning to swim.

"Hold on a jiffy, Julie!" shouted Wendy. "Oh, Julie, do hold on! We'll be with you!"

Julie clung, her arms almost wrenched from their sockets. There came the sound of running footsteps. She heard Gerry's voice—a great crashing and rustling. Then, to her sobbing joy, she saw the end of a ladder bob up at her side and thud against the wall.

Unable to speak, she caught at the side of the ladder and swung on to it, shaking now in the reaction of her terrible ordeal. Nimbly as a monkey Gerry came rushing up, to catch her round the waist.

"Julie, are you all right?"

"Gerry, thanks—yes. There were tears in Julie's eyes. "I still can't believe you're all really here—it seems too good to be true. I—"

She swayed a little and would have slipped had not Gerry caught her.

"Let's get down," he said practically, "and then we can explain. But—see!—am I glad we were able to come over in that second plane. Now—hold on to me, Julie, and you'll be O.K."

Confidently he grasped her. Submissively Julie relaxed. While Wendy and Kay, from below, cheered, Gerry commenced a careful descent.

They reached the ground, and Wendy and Kay almost fell upon the exhausted and still incredulous Julie.

"But what happened?" Wendy asked, when Julie began to feel better.

Quickly and concisely Julie told them. Wendy jumped.

"A French taxi-cab? We saw one at the bridge as we came by. And there was a man quizzing about in the rushes below the bridge. Gosh, that must have been the mystery man."

"And we never guessed," Gerry groaned. "But then we never saw his face. He had his back turned towards us—"

"Come on!" Wendy cried. "There's still a jolly good chance he hasn't spotted the fan! Get in, Julie!"

She thrust Julie towards the car. Julie reeled in. The white-coated driver at the wheel nodded as Wendy gave him instructions in French, and almost before they had seated themselves the car was off.

They were all tense with excitement now. With Gerry leaning out of the window on one side, and Kay on the other, they jolted along the bump road. As they did so Wendy explained the lucky chance which had brought them here.

"Gee, it was just amazing," she said. "Apparently a party of Frenchmen at Haley had an urgent call back to St. Malo. They tackled the plane people and it was decided to fly the second plane—"

"And that's how you got over," Julie said. "Bless those Frenchmen—wherever they are! But how did you know where to find me?"

"Amateur detectives—that's us!" Wendy chuckled. "We guessed you'd made for the nearest Rue de Val and so we went and inquired. And we were right, of course. The woman there told us you had been and we guessed then that you'd go to the

next nearest Rue—the brick wall street. I'll own we were a bit flabbergasted then—"

She went on joyfully to tell Julie how some helpful townsman who had noticed their anxiety had asked if he could help. When they had described Julie he had been able to tell them at once that she had taken a taxi.

"And so we hired this car," Wendy went on. "We followed. Half a dozen people had seen the car shoot out of St. Malo across the Sillon. When we got to the crossroads we saw its skid-marks going round the corner and so followed them up the road to the tower. And then—but if it had only dawned on us that the fellow in the rushes was your enemy, Julie—"

She was interrupted by an excited cry from Gerry.

"There he is—climbing up the bank, and—gosh, yes! He's found the fan. He's got it in his hand, Julie."

Julie was at the window in a flash. Her hands clenched as she saw, a hundred yards away, the little bridge which spanned the stream, the mystery man's taxi perched at its foot. And there, sure enough, was the mystery enemy, climbing up the bank from the rushes, some black object in his hand.

"Oh, quick, quick!" she cried. The car rushed on at an accelerated pace. But the mystery man had seen. Now frantically he was rushing back up the bank. While Julie helplessly watched, she saw him jump into the taxi; heard the slam of the car's door. He was about fifty yards ahead then. "Faster, faster!" Wendy cried. "Oh, look! He's off!"

Gallantly their driver responded. On the car sped, Gerry, leaning out at an angle which threatened to shoot him through the window if the car gave a sudden lurch, cheered. "We're gaining! We're gaining! We'll have him yet!

They were overhauling their quarry—rapidly. Julie's heart lightened a little as she saw it. Then Wendy shouted out.

"Driver, pass him on the left and block the lane—"

"Oh, good move!" Gerry cheered. The car shot on, all of them breathlessly hanging through the window. Nearer, nearer! Now they were on the mystery man's tail. Now in the widest part of the lane they were running alongside, catching a glimpse of his furious face as they passed.

Then they had cleared and were shooting on into the narrow part of the lane. And suddenly their driver pulled round the wheel. In a bone-jarring half circle they wheeled and then stopped dead.

"Got him!" Gerry whooped. The car was across the lane, completely blocking it. There was only one alternative for the mystery man. With an angry cry he pulled on his brakes, at the same time flinging open the door at his side. But Gerry was even quicker than he was.

"No, you don't!" he cried. With a rush, he flung the door open and leapt out. After him came the driver, followed by Julie, Wendy and Kay. For a moment the fugitive turned and then ran to the edge of the bank. And in that moment—

Gerry, in a flying rugger tackle, had recklessly hurled himself at the man. Just as he put one foot over the edge of the bank Gerry flung both his arms round his legs. With a crash the two came down on the ground, the man striking out furiously as they rolled over the brink.

"Gerry—Gerry—Oh, my goodness!" Julie ran to the edge, gazing down at the two frantically fighting figures, now at the bottom of the bank. Then the driver came rushing past her; went running down the bank to join in the struggle.

For a moment the mystery man looked up and saw him coming. There came a sudden furious shout from Gerry. Then the mystery man was up; was running as fast as he could across the field. After him pelted the chums' driver.

"Gerry!" Julie gasped as, with Wendy and Kay on either side of her, she rushed down the bank. "Gerry, are you—"

"Hurt? Not on your life!" Rumped, dishevelled but grinning, Gerry sat up. He groped in the grass, and with a whoop held up the fan. "I thought I made him drop it! Take it, Julie!"

"Oh, Gerry, you—you wonder!" Julie said unsteadily.

Overwhelmed with gratitude she took the fan—again, thanks to Gerry, restored. It was closed, but still intact, she noticed with a gulp of profound relief. In that moment she could have hugged Gerry.

But Gerry had another thought. He turned, gazing across the field where the figures of pursued and pursuer were mere specks now. Then he nodded swiftly.

"Quick! Back to his taxi. We may find a clue or two there!"

"Gosh! That's a brainwave!" Wendy cheered.

They turned excitedly. Back up the bank they ran. Gerry at once plunged into the driving cab of the stranded taxi, while Julie and Wendy dived into the rear portion.

Feverishly they rummaged in the pockets on the doors and in the upholstery. Except for a few pieces of old newspaper, however, there was nothing.

But suddenly Gerry, who had been diligently exploring the pockets of the driving cab without success, gave a cry.

"Ass me, why didn't I spot this before! I say, he's left his mac behind."

The mac—it was really a rather smart raincoat of blue gabardine—had been slung over the back of the seat next to Gerry. Now he grabbed it. With no compunction at all he explored the pockets. Another cry came from him as, fumbling in the inner pocket, he drew out a thick leather pocket wallet.

"A find!" he said excitedly. "There's something in it, too. It

—yellow-looking paper. "Corks, what's this? It's in Chinese—"

"Chinese!" Julie cried, and immediately she thought of the Oriental nature of her fan. "Gerry, let me see"

With a grimace Gerry passed the slip over to her. Eagerly Julie took it and, with Kay peering over her shoulder, examined it. The paper was stiff and hard—parchment of some sort, Julie guessed—and was covered in quaint Asiatic characters.

"Well, and where are we?" Wendy said. "Looks like the bits of a Hampton Court Maze jig-saw to me. But—whoo, half a ticker!" she added in excitement as she took the slip from Julie and turned it over. "Hallo, there's something modern here; something written with a ball-point pen. And—oh, gosh, Julie!"

"What?" Julie cried, peering forward.

"Don't you see?" Wendy whooped. "This is a translation of the Chinese characters. Julie, it—it refers to the fan!"

Almost tremblingly she handed the paper back to Julie; and Julie, with her chums leaning close around her, began to read:

"Let the fan of Fl Chu tell the story. That and the dragon's key will unlock the secret of the island at Haley. Vast is the treasure which awaits the finder."

A LINK WITH MISS PAGET

"TREASURE!" breathed Julie, and with incredulous eyes she stared at the writing. "Treasure! Treasure on the island—that's where Peter's Folly is."

The chums stared at each other, overwhelmed with terrific excitement. "Treasure! So that was the secret to which the mysterious fan referred. And treasure on the island at Haley itself!"

"And so we know—at last!" Wendy said. "That's why that man is so anxious to get hold of this fan. It's the big clue. He must, of course, know all about the treasure—except where to find it. The fan, apparently, tells us that—or does it? What's that reference to the dragon's key? What dragon's key?"

Julie shook her head. Until this moment she had never heard of any sort of key. But at last she knew something, and in the knowledge she felt the blood rushing more quickly through her veins.

"Vast is the treasure which awaits the finder," the note had said. Was this what Miss Paget had meant when in the fragments of the letter she had written she had said the fan was vitally important?

The fan took on a new, more intense significance as that thought crossed her mind. Now she found herself echoing Wendy's question. If they were reading the message rightly, the fan was no good without the "dragon's key" to which the document referred. To what was the dragon's key? Where was it?

"One person can tell us—and one only," Julie said rapidly. "Miss Paget herself. And as Miss Paget is somewhere in St. Malo—"

"Get cracking and find her!" Gerry finished. "And here comes our chauffeur. I say, what about that paper, Julie? Shall we bag it or put it back—or what?"

Julie hesitated only a moment. "Put it back," she decided. "We know what we want to know. It probably won't dawn on our mystery man that we've had a look at it and that may help us later on. But—aha!" she added as she stepped out of the car to greet the chauffeur, who now came panting up the bank. "You did not catch him?" she asked sympathetically.

"Non, non, mademoiselle. Ze man—he run like ze March hare" the chauffeur returned ruefully. "I chase him—but I fall. Almost I catch him—but not quite. Ze next I see is—voilà!—he is running like ze mad hatter for ze main road and jumping on a lorry—"

"Tough luck," Gerry sympathised. "Still jolly bon for you," he added. "Cheer up. We'll have a special whip-round for you when we get back to St. Malo. Meantime—Julie, which is the next Rue?"

"Rue de Valbourde," Julie said at once. "No. 26, Rue de Valbourde. Know it, driver?"

The man nodded, smiling broadly. "There lives an English lady—Madame Langham," he informed them. "Madame Langham very ill. She has a sistaire—Mam'selle Paget—"

"Paget?" Julie almost jumped. "She lives there?"

"Mais oui! She look after ze sistaire."

"Oh, gee!" Wendy cried. "Then we've hit on the right one! Driver, out to No. 26, the Rue de Valbourde, tout de suite! Tumble in, trackers!"

Excitedly they bundled into the car. Off it jerked, with Julie quivering with excitement. Now they were getting to grips with the mystery in real style, she thought. They knew at last to what the fan referred. They knew that some great treasure was concealed on the island at Haley.

It seemed only a matter of minutes before they would at last be face to face with her unknown benefactress, Miss Paget; then at last they would learn the whole truth from her lips. But would she know anything about the dragon's key?

The car whirled them on, back towards St. Malo. But though Julie talked and laughed with the rest, her mind was not fully on the conversation. She felt that she could concentrate on nothing now except the thrilling prospect of meeting Miss Paget.

At last, to her great joy, they were crossing the Sillon again. Now they were shooting through St. Malo on the Dinard side of the town. And presently, in front of a tall, imposing-looking house, the chauffeur brought the car to a standstill.

"We here," he announced. "I wait!"

They scrambled out. Julie, almost racing across the pavement, pulled the bell-rope. Almost at once the door was opened, and a trim, maid-servant smiled at them. But she frowned in a way that immediately

stified Julie's joy when that girl asked if they could see Miss Paget.

"Miss Paget—she leave for England—"

"Oh, no!" Julie cried sharply.

"She catch ze boat—last evening. But you would perhaps like to see her sister—Madame Langham, Madame Langham has been very ill, but now is much recovered."

"Oh, please, if we might!" Julie said.

The maid ushered them in. Then she went off, while the chums looked at each other, their spirits a little dashed.

"What a sell!" exclaimed Gerry, glumly thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets.

His sister nodded. "It certainly is disappointing," she agreed. "I made certain that all our troubles were over and that now the mystery would be solved."

Julie bit her lip and gave a rather tearful sigh.

"So did I," she faltered. "After all that hectic excitement I thought we were at journey's end. But now—"

Wendy darted forward and put a soothing arm around her, regarding her sympathetically.

"Cheer up," she urged. "I've got

the holiday-camp at Haley so hurriedly. You know, of course, that she intended to meet you there?"

"Yes—"

"And while she was there, I had an attack. My heart." The woman smiled wanly. "They thought it was the end and wired for Jennifer right away. Jennifer had to drop everything in order to catch the next plane, but she did write as soon as she got here. You received her letter, my dear?"

Julie nodded, feeling that this was no time to describe how the letter had been stolen by her mysterious enemy in the camp, and then torn into fragments. She broke in eagerly.

"Mrs. Langham, did Miss Paget ever tell you anything about the fan—"

"Fan?" The other's eyes opened.

"Why, yes, she did. But I'm sure, my dear, I don't understand one little bit of it. I only know that she was very anxious to find you. Your father apparently once did her some good turn that she has never forgotten, and when she found out that he was dead, and that you were an orphan—"

She checked herself. "But, my dear, she had better tell you all about that herself. As for the fan—you have it?" she questioned.



Excitedly Julie stretched out her hand for the key, for with its help she and her chums might locate the treasure hidden near the holiday-camp.

a feeling that Miss Paget's sister may be able to put us wise to things. Miss Paget is sure to have told her everything about—"

She broke off, for the door had opened, and there stood the maid, a smile on her face.

"Madame Langham—she will see you now," she declared. "Please to follow me."

She led the way up a flight of stairs into a sunny bedroom. Sitting in an armchair near the window, with a travelling rug wrapped around her knees, was a sweet-faced lady who greeted them with a pallid smile.

"Come in, my dears," she said. "It is such a pleasure to see such fresh young English faces. I am, Madame Langham, sister of Jennifer Paget. I understand from my maid that you know Jennifer."

The chums nodded and Julie took an eager step forward.

"Yes—we came to St. Malo specially to see her," she cried.

"You see, Miss Paget is a kind of benefactress of Julie's," put in Wendy. "It was she who arranged for her to go to the holiday-camp at Haley."

Madame Langham gave an astonished gasp, and she regarded Julie with eager interest.

"So you are the girl Jennifer told me about!" she exclaimed. "Sit down, my dear, and your friends as well."

The chums did so, and Madame Langham leaned forward in her chair, her gaze centred on Julie.

"I am afraid, Julie, I have a lot to apologise for," she said. "You see, it was on my account my sister left

"Yes, Mrs. Langham. Here."

"I am glad. And that brings me to a point," the woman said. "My sister, as perhaps you know—or didn't you?—is a rather excitable and flurried little person. She is always forgetting things. Last night when she left—in the usual hurry—she forgot something which I know she was particularly anxious not to leave behind. It was—a key."

"Key?" breathed Julie—and Wendy and Kay and Gerry sat bolt upright. "It is a key which has some connection with the fan—what, I don't know," Mrs. Langham smiled. "But as you are bound to meet my sister when you get back, I wonder if you would mind taking it with you? It is here," she said.

She put a hand in her pocket. Then she withdrew the key. And Julie, looking at it, felt herself suddenly tingle with excitement. For it was a key cut into the shape of a dragon's mouth, and for a handle it had—

A replica of the fan! A beautifully enamelled replica with a tiny hole in the centre.

Julie drew a deep, deep breath. She knew then that she was looking at the mysterious key to which the Chinese writing on the parchment referred. That key—and the fan—were the two great clues required to reveal the hidden riches near the holiday-camp.

More chapters of this exciting serial will appear in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Be sure not to miss your copy.

June and the Masked Jester



By PETER LANGLEY

ON MONK'S ISLE

JUNE GAYNOR, the girl detective, and her famous uncle, Noel Raymond, were out to track down the Masked Jester, who was after the Six Scarabs of Ka. Four of these scarabs, each shaped like a cat's head, were already in his possession.

June and Noel believed that Stephen Kerr, the owner of the fifth scarab, had been kidnapped by the Masked Jester.

The girl detective found a clue which convinced her that Stephen Kerr had hidden his scarab on nearby Monk's Isle, and at dusk she hired a rowing boat and set out for the island.

"HERE it is at last, Monk's Isle!" With a sigh of relief, June Gaynor rested on her oars and let the incoming tide carry the skiff to where, nestling between beetling cliffs, was a sandy shore.

It had been a long, hard row from the mainland, and the girl detective's arms ached, but there was a sparkle in her eyes, a glow in her heart.

Very soon now she would be able to begin her search for the mysterious Sphinx under which was hidden the vital Egyptian scarab!

Caught in the surge of the white-topped rollers, the light skiff went bounding forward until at last the keel grounded in the sand.

Leaping out into the shallows, too excited to think of soaked shoes and stockings, the girl detective grabbed the bows, and after a struggle managed to beach the boat.

Now to start her quest!

Eagerly she looked about her. A flight of steps, carved out of the solid rock, led to the cliff-top, and there, looking very eerie and ghostly in the twilight, were the monastery ruins, their crumbling walls surmounted by the great clock tower.

Remembering the instructions on the piece of letter she had captured from the Masked Jester, June climbed the steps and entered the ruins.

Here all was in pitch darkness, and there was something strange and almost frightening about the still, clammy atmosphere.

As she paused, groping in her sling handbag for a torch, she became conscious of a stealthy rustling sound. It was as if someone were creeping through the darkness towards her, and suddenly she glimpsed what looked like a pair of eyes glowing balefully at her.

Her heart pounding, she recoiled, frantically clicking on the torch. But its bright beam revealed only musty stone walls and a dusty floor,

through the crevices of which grew tall, rank grass.

The uncomfortable feeling that she was being spied upon persisted, but fiercely she fought it.

"It was only the grass I heard rustling," June told herself. "As for those eyes—"

Abruptly she laughed.

In one carved pillar were two jagged holes. It was the fading light shining through those which she had mistaken for eyes.

Reassured, she began her investigations. What form the mysterious Sphinx would take she had no idea, but she hunted for it methodically, persistently, turning her torchlight not only on the walls and floor, but even up to the bat-infested roof.

From room to room she went, then down the ghostly cloisters, her heels echoing eerily as she went.

But she failed to find anything which even remotely resembled a Sphinx.

Despite herself, June was beginning to despair. Had she made the long trip to Riverside in vain? But that was impossible. Stephen Kerr had been insistent that the Sphinx was to be found on the island.

Reaching the end of the cloisters, she saw another ancient building looming before her. The clock tower! Her eyes lit up. Suppose what she sought was in there!

Breaking into a run, June darted across to the arched doorway, pressed down the rusty iron catch, and thrust all her weight against the massive oak door.

Creaking and squeaking, it swung open, revealing a flight of wooden stairs which went winding round and round. As she started to ascend she heard a harsh, threatening clicking which seemed to reverberate until the noise filled the whole tower. Louder and louder it became, and then, as the girl detective rounded a bend, her torchlight revealed its origin.

Before her loomed a large, circular chamber with a massive piece of mechanism set at one side. A clock!

Recklessly The Girl Detective Rowed For Dark, Forbidding Monk's Isle—In A Bid To Find The Mystery Scarab Before The Masked Jester Could Track It Down.

And instantly her keyed-up nerves relaxed.

"Well, of all the chumps!" June exclaimed. "It was the ticking of the clock I heard, and I bet—"

She broke off, a triumphant whoop escaping her lips, for, as she let the beam of light rove around the walls, she suddenly saw that inset between the blocks of stones was a row of tiles—tiles which bore Egyptian designs.

Excitedly she rushed forward, and another whoop left her as the torchlight became concentrated on the end tile. Painted on it in fading colours was something which at first glance looked like a queer-shaped head.

"A Sphinx! It's the Sphinx Alona's uncle mentioned in his letter!" the girl detective exclaimed.

Setting her torch down on a fallen lump of masonry, she fingered the tile. It was loose, and under her eager probing it came away from the wall, revealing a small cavity. She pushed in her hand, then her heart gave a wild, tumultuous leap.

For hidden there was a small, strangely shaped piece of stone—a stone which glowed and shimmered as she drew it out into the light.

A scarab—carved into the shape of a cat's head.

With thrilled, wondering eyes she gazed down at it.

This must be one of the Six Scarabs of Ka—the scarabs which the Masked Jester was so desperately anxious to secure.

Already the master-crook had succeeded in stealing four of them, but, thanks to June, he had been foiled in his efforts to secure Stephen Kerr's.

But what could be the secret of the cat-headed scarabs? They must be of some tremendous significance, otherwise the Masked Jester would not have kidnapped five men in order to secure them.

"There doesn't seem anything carved on it—except a tiny figure '5,'" the girl detective told herself, after she had keenly examined the redly glowing piece of stone.

She frowned, disappointed that the scarab did not seem to possess a clue which would enable her to solve the mystery, then abruptly she brightened up.

"But I've found it before the Masked Jester—that's something," she murmured. "Golly, but won't nunky be pleased when he learns of what I've done! When—"

Abruptly her excited voice trailed away, and she stiffened.

What was that?

Above the clicking of the clock had come another sound—a sound which

sent an icy shiver running down her spine.

Footsteps on the wooden stairs, mingled with a faint, eerie, tinkling noise.

Her face suddenly pale, June crept across to the doorway and peered down the winding stairs. There was nothing to be seen, and for a moment she thought her imagination had again been playing her tricks.

Then—

She caught in her breath.

On the wall a shadow had begun to appear—a distorted shadow of a broad-shouldered man, whose hands were thrust out, the fingers curling as if in readiness to seize.

And on the head was a queer-shaped cap with protruding horns.

Nearer and nearer the elongated shadow crept threateningly along the wall, and again June heard that faint, eerie, tinkling noise.

Involuntarily she shrank back, her heart hammering.

She knew now whence that bell-like sound came—from the unseen man's cap; and obvious was the identity of the figure slowly, grimly ascending those winding stairs.

The Masked Jester!

He had followed her across to Monk's Isle—must have been watching her every move—and now he had her trapped at the top of the clock tower!

AN UNCANNY OCCURRENCE

THE girl detective's fingers tightened their hold on the cat-headed scarab, and her eyes grew desperate as she gazed down at the queer little Egyptian curlo.

At all costs she must prevent the Masked Jester from getting hold of it. But how?

Wildly she looked around the dark clock tower. To her dismay, there seemed no escape from it—except by way of the stairs up which the master-crook was ascending.

In one wall was a small window, but that was barred. Opposite was a narrow doorway, but that led only into a tiny, cupboard-like room.

Creak, creak!

Very close and very ominous came that sound. Another moment and the Masked Jester would be in sight.

Clicking off her torch, June did the only thing possible—tiptoed across to the great, box-like structure in which were housed the clock works and crouched behind it.

Another second of agonising suspense, and then she sensed rather than saw the masked figure with its absurd belled cap looming in the doorway.

"Where are you, June Gaynor? It is useless to hide. I know you are here."

As ugly and as discordant as a croaking frog was that harsh voice, and next moment the darkness was gashed by a searing band of white. The Masked Jester had switched on a torch.

June hardly dared breathe. Fearfully she flattened herself against the clock case. Trailing cobwebs wafted in her face, causing her to shudder and making her nose tickle. Desperately she fought back the temptation to sneeze.

Those cold eyes behind the mask hardened as the master-crook saw that the circular chamber was apparently empty. His gaze went across to the doorway of the small inner room, and he laughed, an ugly sound which set the girl detective's teeth on edge.

"So you have taken refuge in here, have you?" he commented. "Well, you may as well show yourself. You little fool! As if you could escape the Masked Jester! Five men have already pitted their puny brains against me, and what has become of them, eh, June Gaynor? What has

That harsh, mocking voice came to a sudden end. The "master-crook's" attention had been attracted by the Sphinx-decorated tile which June had laid on the floor. Then, as he glimpsed the cavity in the wall, the Masked Jester went striding forward.

"The Scarab of Ka!" he hissed. "So she has found its hiding-place!"

His back to the clock, he thrust an eager hand into the hole, as if hoping against hope that the mystery scarab might still be there.

Instantly June acted.

Emerging from behind the clock, she started to creep towards the head of the stairs.

Could she possibly reach them without the man in the mask hearing?

Inch by inch she edged her way forward. The strain brought the perspiration beading to her brow. Tightly grasped in her clenched hand was the scarab.

The door was only ten feet away—nine—eight. And then—

Creak!

A groan of horror rose to June's lips.

She had stepped on a loose floor-board.

Instantly the Masked Jester whirled round. The sight of the girl detective standing there in front of him instead of in the inner room, as he had thought, momentarily held him spell-

when she rounded a bend and found herself bathed in a soft, silvery light.

The moon had risen, and its light was flooding in through the entrance to the tower.

Fanting, almost exhausted, she pounded down the last of the steps and rushed out into the open, still clutching the precious scarab.

By now the Masked Jester had crashed open the door, and she could hear his feet clattering on the stairs. Remembering the gun he carried, she shivered but she could not give in now. She must escape with the scarab.

On across the cliff-top she sprinted, to go stumbling down the stone steps which gave access to the tiny cove. To her surprise, there came no more shouts, and when she cast an apprehensive glance over her shoulder she was astonished to find that the Masked Jester was not in sight.

What did it mean? Had he given up the chase? Surely not. Such a ruthless crook would not admit defeat so easily. Yet even when she gained the beach there was still no pursuit.



In consternation Noel gazed at the capsized boat. Some instinct seemed to tell him that it was the one which June had hired. But what had become of its occupant?

bound with surprise. Then an angry roar broke from him.

"You little trickster! I'll teach you to try to bluff me!" he shouted, and his hand flew to his coat pocket.

Madly June broke into a run. There came another furious bellow, then a revolver gleamed in the torch-light.

"Stop! I warn you, the Masked Jester is not to be thwarted!"

But June ignored the command. Panic had gripped her completely. She hardly raised her danger. Blindly she plunged through the archway, slamming the massive oaken door behind her.

Crack!

The sound of the gun echoing in that confined place was like thunder, and June nearly collapsed as she heard a bullet tearing through the wood and go smacking into the stone wall just above her head.

But still she did not pull up. She was powerless to do so. Only one thought was in her terrified mind—to escape from the ruthless man in the mask.

Down the stairs she went clattering. From behind her came a furious banging. The ancient door had become jammed, and for the moment it was resisting all the Masked Jester's savage efforts to force it open.

Gulping with relief, June tore on. Down and down she raced in the inky darkness, and it was quite a shock

Anxiously June looked across the sand, and her heart leapt with delight as she saw that her light skiff still stood where she had beached it. It would not take a moment to launch.

Stopping only to thrust the precious scarab into her sling handbag, she dragged the boat into the water, clambered aboard, and unshipped the oars.

The wind had grown stronger and the sea was a heaving, white-flecked mass. It would not be an easy row back to the mainland. But June was used to the water. She cared nothing for the choppy waves. All that frightened her was that ruthless figure that still lurked somewhere on Monk's Isle.

Eagerly she pulled on the oars, skilfully turning the bows of her boat into the waves.

Dark clouds were scudding across the sky, now hiding the moon, now revealing it. Very desolate looked the sea, with not a vessel in sight, and very far away seemed the lights of Riverside.

Yet there was a glow in June's eyes. For she had won—had once again outwitted the Masked Jester.

She had escaped with the mystery scarab, and now there was no chance of the master-crook overhauling her.

Confidently, triumphantly she rowed on.

"Won't nunky be surprised when I tell him what's happened?" she

chuckled. "And when he sees the scarab—"

Breaking off, she rested on the oars and cast an excited glance back at the stern where she had placed her handbag.

"But I wonder what its secret can be?" she speculated. "And who is the Masked Jester?"

She frowned as she resumed her rowing, seeing once again in her mind's eyes that short, broad-shouldered figure in the mask and jester's cap.

In size and shape it might very well be Philip Manners or Julius Streiner, the two suspects at Palm Bay Hotel.

Thinking of them made her wonder how Noel Raymond had got on in London. He had gone there in order to make inquiries about Manners and Streiner. Had he discovered anything to confirm their suspicions?

Lost in thought, the girl detective rowed on. She was half-way across the bay before something happened which abruptly shattered all her idle ruminations.

It was a slight scraping noise which attracted her attention. It seemed to be coming from the stern of the boat. Puzzled, she turned her head.

"What on earth can it be?" she asked herself. "What—"

And then her voice rose shrilly. For the handbag she had placed on the back seat was moving. Incredible though it was, some strange force had swept the long leather sling over the stern of the boat, and now it was tautening, causing the boat to jerk up and down.

It was just as if some phantom hand were striving to drag the handbag down into the sea!

THE DRIFTING BOAT

FOR a moment June sat as if petrified, convinced that her lively imagination was playing her tricks.

Then, suddenly remembering the mystery scarab, she let go of the oars and bounded to her feet. An alarming thought had occurred to her. Suppose the Masked Jester were a powerful swimmer! Suppose all this time he had been silently pursuing her!

"Perhaps he's just behind the skiff—snatching at the bag!" she gasped, and recklessly plunged forward.

The boat rocked alarmingly, but the girl detective was hardly conscious of the fact. Frantically she grabbed at the handbag. Was it only imagination or did it really seem to resist her tug, as if someone in the water was hanging on to the down-trailing sling? She hardly knew, but a sob of relief escaped her lips as she found it safely in her grasp.

Hugging it to her, she peered fearfully over the back of the dangerously tossing skiff, but, to her relief, nothing was to be seen but the white-topped, heaving water.

She stood there for several minutes, never taking her gaze from the moonlit sea, but no one rose to the surface, and she gave a rather shamefaced laugh.

"I'm being absurd," she told herself. "It was just the pitching of the skiff which caused the bag to move. The Masked Jester couldn't possibly have tried to snatch it. No one could remain under water so long."

Though she was convinced that her imagination had got the better of her, yet she could not suppress an uneasy shiver as she resettled herself, tucking the handbag between her feet on the floor of the boat. She could not forget the inexplicable, mysterious way the Masked Jester had caused Alona's skiff to upset—and that had been in broad daylight, with thousands looking on. But now—

June gave another uneasy shiver as she looked around and saw how desolate the sea was. She was far from help, and if by any chance an "accident" should overtake her—

Almost angrily she drove away the frightening thought.

"I'm just being silly," she murmured. "The Masked Jester's back on the island. There's no possibility of any accident."

And impatiently she gripped the oars and resumed her rowing, but all at once the skiff seemed strangely heavy and, to her surprise, she seemed to make little progress. She pulled more vigorously, but the boat hardly moved. It was as if some unseen force were seeking to hold it back.

"But that's absurd!" she gasped. "Really, I don't know what's come over me, to-night. I seem to have had—"

And then she stopped, her heart giving another uneasy leap.

What was that? From behind her had come a slight, almost imperceptible sound, and at the same moment the skiff rocked violently. To her overstrung nerves it was just as if some denizen of the ocean were climbing up into the boat.

But that was impossible, fantastic. Fearfully she sat there, her hands falling away from the oars.

Again, the skiff rocked, and there came a thudding sound from the stern, as if someone—or something—had landed there heavily.

June went rigid. For a moment she felt powerless to move. Then slowly her head began to turn. Round it went until at last she could see behind her, then her eyes dilated and the blood ebbed from her cheeks.

Too paralysed even to shout out, she sat there, staring—staring.

"HALLO, June, my dear! And how goes it?"

Noel Raymond called a cheery greeting as he entered the private suite he and his niece shared on the top floor of the Palm Bay Hotel at Riversea. But there came no response, and he grimaced a little disappointedly as he saw that the lounge was unoccupied.

"Gone for an after-dinner stroll, I suppose," he commented, and divested himself of his hat and raincoat.

Sinking down into an easy-chair, he reached out for the evening paper on the table. As he lifted it up something fluttered to the ground. It was a sheet of notepaper, and his eyes lit up with pleasure as he saw that it was a message from June.

"Expect it's to tell me not to sit up," he grinned. "Maybe she's found someone to take her to the theatre, or—"

He paused, his grin fading, for the contents of the note were not what he had expected:

"Dear Nunky.—Had a marvelously exciting day. Had a brush with the Masked Jester, and have now gone across to Monk's Isle to follow up an important clue. Expect to have some thrilling news for you when I return. Love, "JUNE."

Noel stared uneasily at that message. Knowing how impulsive and reckless his niece could be, he felt a little worried. Monk's Isle was a lonely, desolate place, and if this clue June spoke of was connected with the Masked Jester—

Jumping to his feet, the famous detective crossed to the window and stared out across the moonlit sea. At the mouth of the estuary the rocky island showed stark and bleak. His frown deepened.

What exactly was it which had caused June to row out there? And was she still out there now? She must be, he told himself, for he could see no sign of any boat approaching the mainland.

For a moment or two longer Noel stood there, uneasily staring across at the island; then, coming to an abrupt decision, he went striking to the door.

He would go to Monk's Isle—satisfy himself that June was not running herself into any danger.

When he reached the beach he had no difficulty in hiring a motor-boat and, despite the choppy sea, was soon making good speed. As the tiny cove—the one landing-place on the island—was neared he cupped a hand to his lips and sent out a ringing call:

"June! Ahoy, there! June!"

The stiff breeze carried his voice

landwards, but though he strained his ears, there came no response. He shouted again; still no reply. His boyish face became a little grim, and, throwing the throttle wide open, he headed for the beach at top speed.

By now the clouds had scudded by and brilliant moonlight flooded the smooth sand and the bleak cliffs on which stood the monastery ruins.

Once he had anchored the motor-boat and waded through the shallows Noel's gaze went downward. To his skilled eyes the sands were full of information.

Over there was clearly where a light boat had been recently beached. A trail of footprints led away from the spot. Examining them, the detective nodded.

"They are June's footprints right enough," he commented. "By the look of it, she was making for—"

He drew in his breath in a surprised hiss, for suddenly he had noticed a second line of footprints. They led back from the cliff steps to the place where the beached boat had lain—and they also had been made by girlish shoes.

Then his niece had left the island. There could be no mistaking the story of that double track of prints. But how was it he had not seen anything of her boat on the way out? Had she already landed before he had found her note, or—

Noel shook his head, more worried than he dared confess to himself.

"She'd have returned straight to the hotel," he murmured, and a little irresolutely stood there. "It seems pointless to search the island," he muttered, "but—"

He broke off, staring across the strip of water which separated Monk's Isle from a great, barren headland which jutted out from the mainland just behind the Palm Bay Hotel.

What was that object bobbing up and down on the waves?

"Great Scott, it looks like an overturned boat!" he exclaimed, and suddenly his heart knew an awful fear. "Oh, goodness, surely there hasn't been an accident! Surely—"

His face white and strained, he dashed to the water's edge, waded back through the shallows, and fairly hurried himself into the motor-boat.

Starting the engine, he crouched over the wheel, sending the motor-boat plunging recklessly over the waves.

The drifting object was now unmistakable, and Noel gave a cry of real alarm.

"It is a boat! There must have been an accident!"

Feverishly his gaze swept the water all around the capsized boat, but, to his consternation, there was no sign of any swimming figure. If the boat had had an occupant, then he—or she—had vanished without trace.

"June! June!"

Hoarse with concern, Noel shouted, but only the mournful murmur of the wind answered him.

Steering the motor-boat until it was alongside the other craft, he leaned over and peered at it keenly. It was a light skiff, and from the name painted on the bows he knew that it had been hired from the stand just in front of the hotel where he and June were staying.

His throat seemed to constrict, and, rigid with horror, he sat there. Some instinct seemed to be telling him definitely that this was the boat which his niece had hired.

But what could have happened? June was an experienced oarsman. She had rowed on rougher seas than this.

He shook his head impatiently. What did it matter what had caused the accident? All that concerned him was—what had become of June?

"June! June!"

He called again and again, but still there was no response. Except for himself—and the drifting, overturned boat—the heaving, desolate sea was empty.

Where is June—what has happened to her? More dramatic chapters of this thrilling detective story in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.



JOY - The Girl With a 100 Voices

By IDA MELBOURNE

THE HAUNTED CAFÉ

SO this in the haunted café, Joy." "This is it, Sidney," said Joy Oliver.

Joy was alone, and speaking to herself; but she sounded like two people.

Joy liked to give herself practice in ventriloquism, and one easy way of doing that was to carry on a conversation with an imaginary boy-friend Sidney.

"Might as well go in, Sidney," said Joy.

"Yes, Joy. I'll stand you a treat." "With my money. Trust you."

"Well, I shan't eat anything." Joy opened the door of the attractive café, and walked in. It had polished, honey-coloured oak furniture, with gleaming brass ornaments and gay rugs.

As Joy opened the door a young waitress, who had been sitting at a table jumped up, and turned to her eagerly. But when Joy closed the door she seemed surprised—and Joy guessed why.

Joy had been a little unguarded in her use of "Sidney's" voice; for the girl had evidently heard it and was now looking for "Sidney."

"I'm alone," said Joy. "Oh! I—I thought I heard a boy."

Joy opened the door. "You're not coming in then, Sidney?" she asked, and then used her ventriloquism again.

"No, Joy; some other time. Cheerio!"

But still the young waitress had a rather worried anxious expression, as though she was not quite satisfied with "Sidney's" departure. Joy noticed. She seemed a little pale, too. "I—I didn't see him go," she said. "Oh, perhaps you didn't notice," said Joy. "Perhaps it's just the effect of the haunting," she added smilingly.

The waitress' eyes flashed. "The café is not haunted," she said angrily. "There's no ghost. I know there isn't. It's just a mean horrid trick to put us out of business!"

Joy coloured and was filled with remorse; for she could see that the girl was deeply affected. There were tears in her eyes and her lip trembled.

"Oh, dear, I'm ever so sorry," Joy faltered. "It was only a joke—"

The pretty young waitress managed to control her emotion.

"I'm sorry too—sorry I spoke like that," she said apologetically. "It was silly of me. Only I'm rather worked up. Mother and I have put all we have in this café, and we've worked so hard to make it a success, but—but now—"

Joy's warm heart was touched. "It's not going well?" she asked tenderly.

"We shall have to close. This is our last week. The people just aren't coming," said the girl. "And I know what's keeping them away—the ghost."

Joy blinked. "But you said there wasn't one?"

"There isn't—it's a trick. Oh, I'm sure of it, and what's more," said the girl passionately. "I know who is spreading the rumours to keep people away—that awful Mr. Hicking; that horrid, sneaking man, who's trying to get us out of the place to buy it himself. He—oh!"

She broke off abruptly, and turned away.

"Does he live near here?" asked Joy.

"Shush! Here he comes with the reporter from the local newspaper," whispered the girl. "What can I get you, please?" she added in a waitress-like tone.

Joy ordered tea and cake, and then turned as the door opened to admit a portly man and a younger one who had a brisk, alert expression.

"This is the place—the nice-looking little joint," said the fat man, stomping in. "Of course, it's twaddle about a ghost, in my opinion; but all the people can't be wrong."

"Interesting," said the young reporter. "I should like to hear the sounds if there are any—"

"Well, we'll have tea. The sounds are supposed to be groans—enough to put anyone off their tea—I hope!"

He started with surprise, and the reporter gave him a sharp look.

"You hope?" he said in surprise. "I didn't say I hoped!" gasped the fat man.

"But I heard you." The fat man blinked. "H'm! Perhaps the ghost is playing tricks, eh?" he said in a jocular but not humorous tone.

Joy's eyes glimmered. Only she could have told him who had said "I hope"—because she had uttered the words herself, mimicking his voice and using her ventriloquism.

"Not many people here," the fat man said to the waitress.

"No, Mr. Hicking. And considering

all these stories of ghosts—it isn't surprising," she retorted with spirit.

"Ah, well, we've come to lay the ghost," said Mr. Hicking.

"Or advertise it," said the girl sharply.

The young reporter shook his head. "You can rely on me to be fair," he said in a kindly tone.

Joy sat just behind them as they ordered tea. She had taken Mr. Hicking's measure, and Joy did not remain a moment in doubt as to whose side she was on.

This pretty café; the excellent cakes on the side-stands, and the general atmosphere spoke of endeavour and faithful work which deserved success. If there was not a ghost, then the rumours were really shameful. And Joy did not believe in ghostly hauntings.

"Of course," said the young reporter. "I think it's nonsense really. I can't believe that—"

He broke off, and his expression changed. From nearby had come a groan.

Mr. Hicking gave a gasp of horror and drew back. The reporter, with puckered brow, stared down at the floor.

"There! Did you hear?" said Mr. Hicking in triumph.

"It—it certainly was a groan," admitted the reporter. "But who groaned? It seemed to come from the floor—the cellar perhaps?"

The waitress, who stood in the doorway to the kitchen, was white as a sheet, Joy saw.

"There is no cellar," she protested.

"And the floor was taken up and completely re-laid just before we opened. I—I don't understand it. It can't be a ghost. It can't be."

Joy's heart sank. What could the explanation be?

If this voice groaned when there were customers she could well understand that the café was empty. No wonder people were staying away and the business was being ruined.

Joy looked from the pale, stricken face of the girl to the frowning, perplexed one of the reporter—and then at Mr. Hicking.

On the fat man's face she read cunning and triumph.

Was he a cheat? Was the groaning a trick?

Joy could not believe that it was ghostly; therefore it was due to trickery. But how to expose it?

Joy looked at Mr. Hicking's smirking face, and a sudden idea came.

Now was the chance to use her ventriloquism!

With her eyes on Mr. Hicking's face, Joy threw her voice.

"Ooooo!" she groaned in imitation

This Week Ventriloquist Joy Has Fun Playing Ghost In A Haunted Café.

of the ghostly voice, making the sound come from the same direction. "Shall I be glad when this haunting job's over!"

JOY PLAYS GHOST

JOY was watching Mr. Hicking, and never had she seen a man so utterly amazed. The ghostly groan had caused him to give sounds of agitation—but they could have been acting. There was no acting now in his surprise.

"Th—this is truly amazing," commented the reporter. "The ghost is doing more than groan. It's speaking."

"Perhaps you could interview it for your paper," said Joy merrily.

"Interview a—ghost. Nonsense," snapped Mr. Hicking.

"Well, it's probably only a microphone under the floorboards," scoffed Joy.

"A microphone under the floorboards," said the reporter. "Great goodness—but why should the café people want to do that? It keeps customers away."

"Perhaps someone does want to keep customers away," said Joy grimly. "It might be someone who wants to buy the café."

A touch of colour showed in Mr. Hicking's cheeks.

"Ridiculous—utter nonsense," he cried.

But Joy believed she was on the right track. Yet supposing there was a loudspeaker under the boards—where was the microphone?

As that thought came, Joy guessed the answer. Once the small loudspeaker was fitted in position under the boards, a length of wire would be enough to connect it to the microphone which could be in an adjoining building, where a confederate could do the groaning.

Joy spoke to the waitress.

"Why not pull the floorboards up?" she suggested. "I know you say the floor has been re-laid, but a loudspeaker could easily have been put there afterwards."

"Tosh!" exclaimed Mr. Hicking. "But all the same—try it."

He went to the spot on the floor where the groaning sounds had come and listened. The groan came again.

"How'm I doing?" asked a voice softly, following the groan.

Joy's ventriloquism was responsible for the question, and she saw Mr. Hicking's eyebrows go up.

"That's no ghost," said the reporter sharply.

"No—that's certainly no ghost!" exclaimed Mr. Hicking. "That is obviously reproduced over a loudspeaker."

"You agree?" asked Joy.

"Of course. No ghost ever spoke sense in that way," he snapped.

"The girl is right. Someone has put a loudspeaker under these boards. We must have them up!"

Joy was baffled. If he said that, and if he wanted it examined, then he could not have put the apparatus there!

Mr. Hicking turned to the waitress, who stood back puzzled, biting her lip.

"Have you any objection?" he asked.

"I'll have to ask mother," she murmured. "And she's out."

Joy thought swiftly. Mr. Hicking might be bluffing—knowing that the mother was out, and that the floorboards could not easily be lifted.

"This is a mere trick to make the ghost seem a stunt," he said. "And is cover for the real groans. It wouldn't surprise me if the ghost started to sing a comic song—"

"Tosh!" said the ghostly voice.

Mr. Hicking's eyes bulged.

"There! It answers," he snapped.

"Of course I answer," said the ghost. "I'm not going to be insulted. Ghosts don't sing comic songs, only dirges. Our job, as you ought to know, is to scare people out of cafés so that they can be bought for a song."

As Mr. Hicking stood staring, a

deep groan came from the floorboards again.

He looked at the reporter, and Joy looked at them all in turn. She had not groaned. Her ventriloquism had been responsible for the ghostly voice—but not for the ghostly groans!

As they stood there, a tall woman entered the café, and the young waitress ran to her.

"Mother!" she cried. "The ghostly groaning has started again, and we think there might be a loudspeaker under the floor. Oh, please may we pull up some of the boards and have a look?"

Joy brought her ventriloquism into use again, still suspecting Mr. Hicking and trying to get him to betray himself.

"O.K. Have a look—I don't mind," she said in that ghostly voice.

"Better make sure Mr. Hicking doesn't, though."

Mr. Hicking ground his teeth.

"Of course I don't mind. You can lift every board in the place for all I care. That voice we're hearing now is a human voice through a loudspeaker—and I believe it's being done to cover up the fact that this place is haunted!" he ended, glaring at the worried looking café owner.

Joy glanced across at the waitress' mother, who was looking startled.

"By all means lift the boards," she said. "Oh, is only it is a loudspeaker. If only we can prove there really isn't a ghost."

The strain of worry was clearly lined upon her face, but now she looked excited at this possibility of solving the mystery.

But would it be solved? Joy was asking herself. If there was indeed a loudspeaker under the floor who had put it there? Certainly not this woman, and not Mr. Hicking—unless he was a clever bluffer.

"Let's get the boards up," murmured Joy.

A screwdriver was brought, and within a few minutes a board was lifted. The flooring was new, and there was no sign of any apparatus.

Another board was moved, but with the same result.

Although this was the spot from whence the groaning had come there was no sign at all of a loudspeaker, wires or mechanism of any kind.

"H'm! Strange," commented Mr. Hicking, frowning. "But there must be one here somewhere."

"There must be," agreed the café owner worriedly. "Oh, we must find it, too. This ghost will ruin us."

Mr. Hicking held up his hand.

"Hark!" he murmured.

They all listened; and from the very spot where the floors had been bared came a deep groan.

Joy nearly jumped out of her skin. This voice came without mechanical aid! It was as though she had made it ventriloquially—in fact, it was so ventriloquial now to her expert ear that a startling explanation came.

There was only one explanation possible.

Mr. Hicking was a ventriloquist!

Joy stared at his lips as the groan came again—and then she knew. There could be no mistake.

Mr. Hicking was a ventriloquist. And the young waitress was right. He was using his gift to drive her and her mother from the café. For now the reporter was convinced, and awed by the groaning. The news of this ghostly groan would spread.

But Joy braced herself. Not if she knew it.

Mr. Hicking must be exposed. She must defeat him. Ventriloquist should battle with ventriloquist—and the better ventriloquist would win.

THE RIVAL VENTRILOQUISTS

AT that moment yet another groan seemed to come from under the floor.

The café owner and her daughter stood silent and appalled. Mr. Hicking smiled grimly in triumph.

"You see?" he said. "It's real enough. The place is haunted."

And then Joy went into action.

Joy herself threw a shuddering groan that out-groaned his!

Mr. Hicking paled. He stared at the floor round-eyed. For as that groan was one he had not made, and as he had already convinced himself that there was no loudspeaker device there, it seemed inexplicable.

"That—that's strange," he muttered.

Joy gave a loud gasp as though an idea had just struck her.

"I know who's the cause of these groans!" she cried. "It's you, Mr. Hicking!"

Mr. Hicking wheeled on her.

"Me? What on earth do you mean?" he cried sharply, but badly shaken.

"I mean that it's not really the café the ghost is haunting, but you," said Joy. "I bet the ghost has never been heard except when you're here."

The café owner spoke up quickly in agreement.

"That is certainly true," she said. "I hadn't thought of it before."

"Then it's haunting him," said Joy. "It may even leave the café and go to his house."

"I wish it would," said the woman.

"Ridiculous," muttered Mr. Hicking. "I don't believe—"

He broke off abruptly.

Joy realised that he had been about to say that he did not believe in the ghost or any ghost—but he could hardly say that in the circumstances.

"Oooooo!" came another groan as Mr. Hicking started to speak again.

Joy had made the sound, and the reporter gave a soft whistle.

"That's ghostly enough for anyone," he said.

"Oh dear! How awful!" sighed the café owner, and Joy felt a little anxious and guilty. But, after all, she was only doing this for the woman's sake.

"It—it certainly is eerie," muttered Mr. Hicking, perplexed. "But it—it must be a loudspeaker of some kind—or a trick."

"I don't see how you can be sure one groan is a trick, and another isn't," protested Joy. "Unless some of them you make yourself, and others you don't."

"What! How can I make a ghostly groan?" he snapped.

"You might be a ventriloquist," argued Joy, daringly.

She saw his change of expression, but he quickly scoffed at the absurd suggestion.

"You don't suppose a ventriloquist could make that groaning?" he asked.

"Seems hardly likely," objected the reporter.

"All the same, I say the ghost is haunting Mr. Hicking," insisted Joy. "And it can soon be proved."

"How?" sneered Mr. Hicking.

"Because," explained Joy, "I think it will follow you when you leave the shop."

She saw Mr. Hicking's face clear. He was relieved. He almost chuckled, because this sounded silly.

"Well, that's soon put to the test," he said jauntily. "I'll walk out of the shop—and you'd better come, too," he told the reporter.

"And I'll come as well," said Joy.

"Certainly. You're the one with this crazy idea," said the artful man.

"Come along. Let's get this settled."

He marched out of the café, and the reporter and Joy went with him.

"We'll walk towards my garage. As you know, I keep a repair garage," said Mr. Hicking.

They walked along and not a sound came.

Mr. Hicking was now smirking.

"Well, if proof were needed, here it is," he said. "Not a sound—"

A deep hollow groan came from just in front of him.

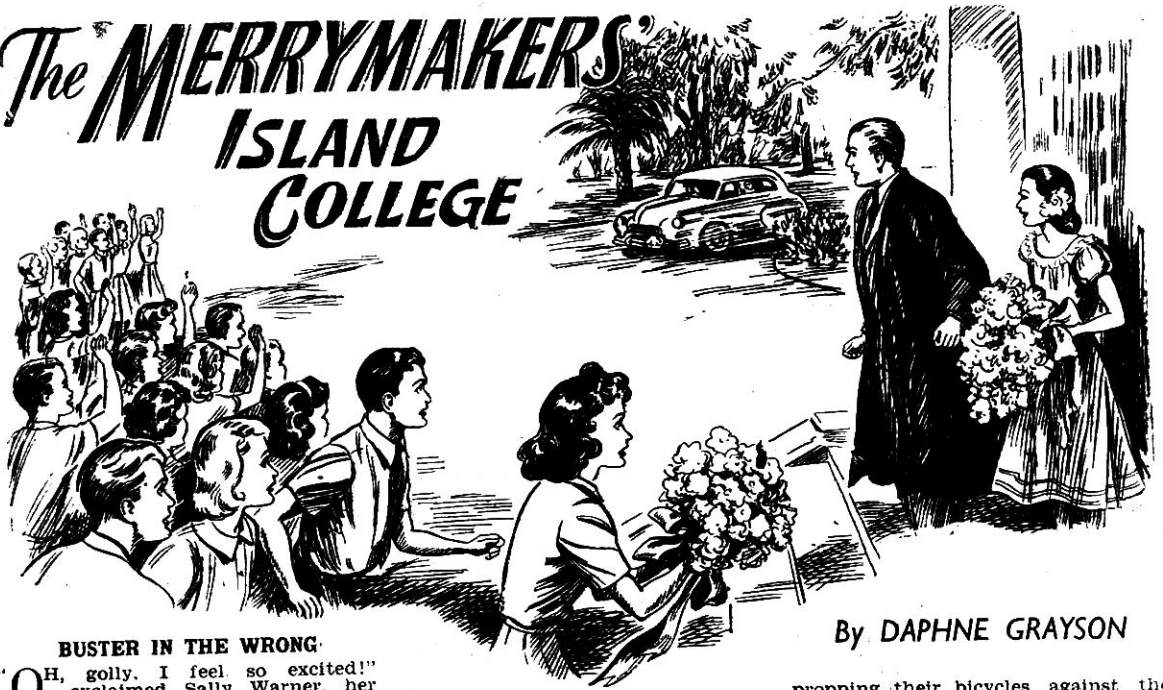
"I say!" gasped the reporter, rearing like a frightened horse. "There it is again."

Mr. Hicking stopped short, and paled.

"This—this is certainly remarkable," he confessed. "That was a groan."

(Please turn to the back page.)

The MERRYMAKERS' ISLAND COLLEGE



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

BUSTER IN THE WRONG

"Oh, golly, I feel so excited!" exclaimed Sally Warner, her pretty face flushed, her blue eyes asparkle. "But you're sure you didn't leave the bouquet in the sun, Don?"

"It can't droop, can it, Don?" asked fair-haired Fay Manners anxiously.

"To both questions the answer is definitely 'no!'" replied Don Weston decisively. "Anyway, you'll see in a minute!"

"You should know us better than to ask questions like that," Johnny Briggs grinned.

The four chums—known as the Merry-makers—were excited indeed. For in a very short time Lolita Marquese, the famous Mexican film star who was holidaying in Australia, would be arriving at the International College on Waloore Island, where the chums were students.

And to the four Merry-makers had fallen the honour of presenting to Lolita a bouquet of exquisite blooms from the college gardens—a bouquet on which Mr. Gruley, the fussy, pompous science master, had lavished much care and attention.

The bouquet, tied with wide green and white ribbons—the college colours—now lay on a table in a shady corner of the boys' chalet, and Sally & Co. were on their way to collect it.

"I hope she's as friendly as she seems to be on the screen," said Sally, "and that she'll agree to act that small part in our play for the concert after tea."

"She will—especially after she gets that gorgeous bunch of flowers," said Johnny, ever optimistic.

"Well, here's hoping you're right," said Sally. "If not—Johnny!" she exclaimed next moment. "Buster's in your chalet!"

"Eh? Rot!" replied Johnny.

"I heard him bark just now—didn't you hear it?"

"You imagined it. You don't think I'd be chump enough to shut him in the chalet with those flowers lying around, do you?" Johnny asked scathingly. "He's in his kennel, and couldn't have got out on his own. And, anyway," he added triumphantly, "I closed the chalet door and he couldn't—"

But there his voice trailed away, for Sally, startled, filled with apprehension, had darted up the steps of the chalet and flung open the door. And all the chums stared in horror at the sight which met their eyes.

Buster, Johnny's enormous, lovable Great Dane, was there, looking up at them innocently from the wreckage of that once lovely bouquet. From

one corner of his mouth dangled the remains of the satin ribbon, while the floor around was liberally strewn with petals.

"Oh, Buster!" Dismay filled Sally. She thought of Mr. Gruley's rage when he heard about it. And Lolita—however sweet she was—would hardly grant favours after being presented with this mess. "Somebody must have put Buster in here," she cried. "But who could be so horrid—"

Even as she spoke she saw something else on the floor—a fragment of lace-edged linen. It was torn and chewed, but as Sally grabbed it up it still exuded a whiff of perfume—a perfume used by one girl only.

"Carmenita!" exclaimed Fay. Sally nodded. Of course, it was obvious now.

Carmenita, Pasqual, the fiery Mexican student, always Sally & Co.'s most bitter rival, had been furious when they were chosen to present the bouquet to Lolita. She had stormed and raved, declaring that, since Lolita was of her nationality, she was the obvious one to present the bouquet and entertain the star.

Carmenita had been over-ruled, and in her jealous rage she had thought of this revenge. Probably she already had a bouquet of her own ready so that she could step into the breach when the chums arrived empty-handed.

"We can't let her get away with this!" exploded Johnny. "We'll make another bouquet. But, gosh!" he added in dismay, "Gruley took all the best flowers."

Don, his face set and grim, took a quick glance at his watch.

"We've still got half an hour before Lolita arrives," he said quickly, "even if she's dead on time. If we get our bikes and dash into Sarneville we can get a bouquet at the florist's there. We'll tackle Carmenita afterwards."

It meant a rush, but anything was better than letting Carmenita get away with her trick. And in an amazingly short time the chums were

propping their bicycles against the kerb outside The Rose Bowl in Sarneville.

While Fay hurried along to the draper for more green and white ribbon, Sally, Don and Johnny chose the flowers, and waited for the bouquet to be made up—an almost exact replica of the one destroyed.

The chums grinned at each other, picturing Carmenita's rage when she discovered that her mean trick had not had the result she hoped for; that she would not, after all, be basking in the limelight for which she always craved.

But this was not yet the moment for jubilation. They still had to get back to college, and time was getting short.

It was that anxiety which made Johnny, a blunderer at the best of times, grab the bouquet and rush out of the shop so hastily without looking where he was going. The smartly-dressed girl just leaving the optician's next door, fumblingly donning a pair of tinted spectacles she had just bought, also stepped forward blindly.

Fay, waiting by the bicycles with the ribbon she had bought, gave a warning cry. But not in time.

Quite violently Johnny and the girl collided, the flowers flying from Johnny's grasp to be neatly caught by Don, the spectacles jerking from the girl's hand, clattering to the pavement.

"Oh, gosh! I say, I am sorry," blurted Johnny, making a dive for the spectacles. "Phew! Lucky they're not broken—"

With an exclamation, the girl grabbed the spectacles, hastily dusted them and thrust them on her nose. Then, with the red flush of anger mantling her cheeks, she swung round and glared at Johnny.

"No thanks to you!" she rapped. "Why don't you look where you're going?"

"Eh?" The unfairness of the attack momentarily robbed Johnny of speech. Not so Fay, who had witnessed the whole scene.

The Students Were Thrilled When It Was Learnt That A Glamorous Young Film Star Was To Visit The College —But What A Shock Sally & Co. Received When She Arrived!

"That's rather unreasonable, isn't it?" she asked indignantly. "I know Johnny wasn't looking where he was going, but then neither were you, and he did apologise for what wasn't altogether his fault, which was more than you did."

The girl gave a gasp. A frown marred her pretty face; her full red lips drew into a thin, straight line. "I refuse to stand here bandying words," she snapped, and stalked off along the road.

"Well!" exclaimed Don. "She's got a sweet temper—and I don't think! But, never mind her—let's get going! Come on, Sally!"

Sally, who had been staring after the girl, a puzzled frown on her face, turned at Don's call and mounted her bike.

"Funny," she mused, "I'm sure I've never seen her before, and yet there seemed to be something familiar about her."

Still feeling ruffled by that unpleasant encounter—and in Sally's case queerly perturbed—they hurried back to college, smuggling their bicycles in through the hedge at the back of Sally's chalet. Then, after a hasty tidying up, they snatched up the bouquet and dashed across to the college. Even as they approached the building the chums heard a sudden roar of cheering which grew in volume.

"Golly! Quick!" gasped Sally. "I can see her car coming down the drive. Gruley will be furious with us."

They put on an extra burst of speed, pushing their way through the crowd to the steps of the college.

Mr. Gruley was standing there, alternately casting angry glances into the crowd in search of Sally & Co., and beaming a welcome towards the oncoming car. They saw Carmentita just behind him, a triumphant smile on her beautiful face, a bouquet of overpowering magnificence clutched in her arms.

The smile changed to a look of quivering rage as the chums panted up.

"Tough luck, Carmentita!" whispered Sally sweetly, neatly elbowing that girl aside. "Your nasty little trick didn't quite come off—"

"Where have you been?" hissed Mr. Gruley furiously. "How dare you— Ah! Miss Marquese," he added in honeyed tones, as the large car drew to a halt at the foot of the steps, and, as the chauffeur swung open the door, a smiling figure stepped out. "How pleasant it is for me to welcome you here."

He made a beckoning gesture to the four chums, and stepped aside. And as he did so the chums, for the first time, saw the girlish figure which had stepped from the car. Their faces dropped in dismay, while the film star, drawing herself upright, glared at them with disdain.

For Lolita Marquese was none other than the girl with whom Johnny had collided in Sarneville a short while before!

MAKING AMENDS

In utter dismay, the four chums stared at each other, the bouquet hanging limply in Sally's grasp.

It was plain to Sally now why there had been a haunting familiarity about that face—she had seen it on the screen and in the film magazines. And yet she was conscious of a feeling of deep and bitter disappointment.

Lolita Marquese, she thought, must possess a wizard of a make-up man, for, though the features and the hair were the same, the sweetness of expression, the bubbling good nature was lacking. Perhaps the dark glasses accounted for the difference—and yet Lolita had already proved herself to be bad-tempered and petulant.

And, in those circumstances, it was hardly likely that she would demean herself by taking such a small role in Sally's play!

"Er-r-m! Miss Warner—" Mr. Gruley's voice broke in on Sally's thoughts, making her start violently. She glanced around, crimsoning as

she saw the circle of puzzled, expectant faces turned towards her. They were waiting, of course, for the charming little speech which Sally had prepared to welcome Miss Marquese—the speech which preceded the handing over of the bouquet by the four chums.

Sally cleared her throat, forced a smile to her lips, and stepped forward.

And then she stopped short, a gasp coming from her lips. For deliberately Lolita half-turned her back upon Sally and her chums, with a charming smile upon her face glanced towards Carmentita.

Carmentita needed no more encouragement than that. Like a flash she darted forward, with a dainty curtsy uttered her own speech of welcome and placed her luxurious bouquet into the star's outstretched arms.

Before Sally & Co. could get their breath, Lolita, her face all radiant charm now, had replied to the speech of welcome, and asked permission for Carmentita and her friends to show her around the college.

Mr. Gruley, completely taken aback by this strange turn of events, could do nothing but agree. Accompanied by Lolita and the sparkling Carmentita and her cronies, he drifted off, followed by half the college, his last glare at the chums telling them that they would have some explaining to do about this curious state of affairs when he had time to listen.

As the party disappeared into the college the chums, still holding the bouquet, heard Carmentita eagerly inviting the film star to the special tea she had ordered at the college café, and Lolita's laughing acceptance.

Then they were gone, and Sally & Co., puzzled and unhappy, turned to see the other members of the Merry-makers' Club regarding them in astonishment and resentment.

"Gee, what happened, Sally?" asked Linda Powell, the American girl, bluntly.

"And what about the spread we got ready?" asked Tubby Winwood disappointedly. "I was going to ask Miss Marquese for her autograph while—"

"I'm sorry—terribly sorry!" Sally's lip quivered a little. "You see—" She hesitated, glancing appealingly at her chums.

How could she explain—what could she say to make them realise that Lolita was as much to blame as the chums? That it was her petulant, unforgiving nature which had made her turn her back upon Sally & Co. and smile upon Carmentita?

"Don't blame Sally," said Johnny staunchly. "It's not her fault. If anybody's to blame, I am. Anyway," he added grimly, "Carmentita's not getting away with this. We'll bring Lolita Marquese to tea at the club-room if we have to tie her up and carry her there."

Johnny looked grim enough in that moment to carry out that threat, and, looking somewhat startled, the rest of the club members drifted off.

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Fay disconsolately. "We've got to get round Lolita somehow so that we don't disappoint the club—and there's your play, Sally. Its success depends on the surprise part played by Lolita."

Sally nodded gloomily. She realised that. This seemed to be a day of fiasco, instead of the thrill to which they had all looked forward so much.

"Listen!" said Johnny excitedly.

"We'll get Buster in on this—"

"Gosh—no!" disagreed Don. "Hasn't he done enough damage for one day—"

"Lolita loves dogs," continued Johnny, ignoring Don's comment. "In an old film magazine I've got there's an article about her—it says she breeds 'em—and apparently she always trails umpteen dogs around with her when she's at home in Hollywood. And the bigger they are the better she likes 'em."

"So what?" asked Fay, interested in spite of her disappointment.

"So we write a note saying how sorry we are about everything," enthused Johnny, "then we get Buster to present it to her. That should please her."

It sounded like a good idea, and straightway the chums decided on action.

While Sally and Fay wrote the note, Don and Johnny collected Buster, and a few minutes later they were off in search of Lolita.

She was, they were informed by Alec Burt, Carmentita's crony, in one of the visitors' rooms in the college, freshening up before joining Carmentita and her friends for tea in the café. But the chums, refusing to be downcast by that news, hurried towards the college.

Lolita, however, as Fay and Sally discovered, was not in any of the visitors' rooms. Neither, declared Don and Johnny, had she come out of the main entrance of the college.

"Queer!" murmured Sally. "Maybe she wandered out of the back way by mistake. Anyway, let's take a look!"

At first glance Lolita did not seem to be there, either. Then a movement behind the wattle hedge, near which Lolita's car was parked, caught Sally's eye.

"She's over there—talking to her chauffeur," she said excitedly. "Come on!"

They hurried forward, Buster gaily bounding along beside them. Then Sally, a little ahead of the others, frowned.

Lolita's chauffeur was acting strangely, surely, for he was holding the star by the wrist, seemed to be pressing some object into her hand, and was staring at her intently whilst he seemed to be giving her some instructions.

At the sound of Sally's footsteps he smartly straightened up, saluted, and returned to the car. Lolita, suddenly wary-looking, thrust her hand behind her back and glanced at Sally.

The glance was cold, and far from encouraging, but Sally was not daunted.

"Miss Marquese," she said quietly. "I can see you are still annoyed with us, but here's someone I know you'll like, to offer an apology."

With a smile she waved to Johnny, who had been concealed by the hedge. Johnny stepped forward, holding by the collar an amazingly sedate Buster with a note held carefully between his teeth.

It had been Johnny's intention to persuade Buster to place the note in the star's hand, but Lolita, obviously, had other views. At sight of the huge dog she shrank back, clutching to her the bouquet which she still held.

Buster, thinking this was some new game, made a playful lunge forward, and as he did so a frightened scream issued from Lolita's lips.

"Take him away!" she cried in panic-stricken tones. "Keep him off! Oh, help me, somebody—help me!"

There was no mistaking the very real terror in her voice. This was no act—this was the real thing.

As Sally & Co. stared, stricken into immobility by this strange turn of events, there was a sound of rushing feet. On to the scene hurried Mr. Gruley, closely followed by Carmentita & Co.

"Oh, please keep him away!" pleaded the star, cowering behind Mr. Gruley. "I am terrified of dogs—these students are frightening me so—"

"It's their jealousy," burst out Carmentita spitefully, as Johnny grabbed the excitable Buster by the collar and held him back. "Just because Miss Marquese preferred to have tea with me—"

"Silence, Carmentita!" snapped Mr. Gruley. "Miss Marquese, I don't understand. Miss Warner, what is happening?"

"It is the second time to-day that these students have upset me," cried Lolita. "In Sarneville, when they were buying flowers—"

"To replace the bouquet which that dog destroyed," put in Carmentita.

"Which you allowed him to destroy," retorted Don hotly.

"Silence—all of you!" roared Mr. Gruley. "So," he rapped, turning to Sally & Co., "I'm beginning to see the reason for your strange behaviour earlier on—and for the difference in the bouquet which you should have presented to Miss Marquese. And you dare to try and blame Carmentita for your carelessness! I think she is right—jealousy is at the bottom of this! As I have said before, that dog is a menace. And now you will go to your chalets at once," he ordered sternly. "At once! And stay there until I have a chance to get to the bottom of this matter."

"B—but, Mr. Gruley," cried Fay in horror. "The—concert—"

"By your inexcusable behaviour towards our guest you have forfeited your right to appear at the concert!"

SALLY MAKES A DISCOVERY

HUMILIATED, sickened at the failure of their plan, and utterly bewildered by the star's amazing reaction to Buster, the chums sat on the veranda of Sally's chalet, Buster at their feet.

"I just don't understand it," muttered Johnny for the tenth time. "Lolita wasn't fooling—she was terrified. But, dash it—here's her photograph in the film magazine surrounded by dogs. It shows her romping with them and thoroughly enjoying herself. It doesn't make sense." He glanced at the magazine and gave a short laugh.

"Lovely Lolita Marquese, of the laughing brown eyes," he read out. Sally who had been sitting in unhappy silence, suddenly straightened. "What did you say?" she asked incredulously. "Brown eyes—" Her own eyes opened wide as her chums nodded. "But—but they're not," she blurted shakily. "I—I saw them when she dropped her glasses in Sarneville. Her eyes are as blue as mine!"

For a moment the chums stared at each other in consternation, then Johnny gave a low whistle.

"Gosh, are you thinking what I'm thinking?" he asked dazedly. "She looks the same, yet somehow she's different! She's terrified of dogs when she's supposed to love them! And her eyes are blue when they're supposed to be brown! There's something very, very fishy about Miss Marquese."

"If," said Sally with slow deliberation, "she is Miss Marquese! Listen," she said eagerly to her stupefied chums. "Supposing she's an impostor? Supposing she came here for some underhand reason—perhaps something to do with that package the chauffeur passed to her—" And quickly she told the chums what she had seen.

"She might think we were suspicious of her, and that's why she wanted to get us in disgrace," put in Don eagerly. "But what can we do about it?"

"Now, let me see," said Sally thoughtfully. "If she is an impostor, then where's the real Lolita? She's been staying at the Royal Hotel in Sarneville. Don, supposing you do some telephoning and see what you can find out?"

"Right!" said Don instantly. "And you others—"

"We're going to try to find out where Lolita's hidden that mysterious package—and what's in it," said Sally thoughtfully. "She hasn't any pockets in her dress, and her bag is a flat pochette. As a matter of fact I can think of only one place," she finished excitedly, "where she can have hidden anything. And we'll need Buster's help to unearth it. Listen, this is what we'll do."

A quarter of an hour later, Sally, Fay and Johnny, accompanied by Buster, cautiously approached the café where Carmentita's party was in full swing.

And there was Carmentita, brilliant with triumph in her role of hostess. There was Lolita beside her, still, surprisingly, with her bouquet carefully dropped on her lap.

Nearer and nearer crept the chums, and then Johnny held a handkerchief to Buster's quivering nose.

The Great Dane sniffed, made a pounce. Like a flash, Johnny rolled it into a ball, and tossed it swiftly and accurately right into the centre of Lolita's bouquet.

"Get it, boy!" he ordered sharply. With a sharp woof of delight, Buster bounded forward. Lolita saw him coming, and, with a piercing scream, she jumped to her feet. With the bouquet clutched convulsively to her, she attempted to run away. "Keep him off! Keep him off!" she screamed. "My bouquet—oh, no—no!"

Ashen-faced, she gave a last despairing scream as Buster pulled the bouquet from her grasp. Shouts of anger and alarm rose from the other members of the tea party.

Mr. Gruley and several other masters who had been walking in the grounds rushed on to the scene—just in time to see Buster flinging the bouquet into the air in sheer high spirits.

"That dog again!" Mr. Gruley roared. His furious gaze alighted on Sally, Fay and Johnny, but just then Sally gave a cry.

"Look!" Once again Buster flung up the bouquet, and from the middle of it bounced a paper-wrapped object. As



"Oh, please keep him away," the film star begged Mr. Gruley. "I am terrified of dogs." Sally and Co. were staggered, for they had always believed Lolita to be fond of animals.

it touched the ground the paper came open, and from the folds rolled the beautiful and very valuable ancient Egyptian bracelet which had recently been presented to the college museum.

In the stricken silence which followed, as every eye was turned incredulously upon that glittering object, Lolita gave a strangled cry, and turned to run, making for her car, which had suddenly swung up the drive alongside the café.

But as she did so Johnny firmly gripped her arm, and as she struggled to fight him off, another car, with Don on the running-board, whizzed down the drive, to draw up just in front of Lolita's car, barring its getaway.

From the car leapt two policemen, grabbing the chauffeur as he tried to run. And then, from the same car, stepped another figure—at sight of whom Sally gave a loud cry of delight. "Miss Marquese!" she cried ringingly.

The newcomer dimpled, then her face grew stern as she looked towards the girl in Johnny's grasp—a girl so like her and yet so unlike. The same features, the same hair, but without her sunny smile, her happy disposition. And while Carmentita stood glowering in stupefaction, she explained to the dumbstruck Mr. Gruley just what had happened.

The other girl—Brenda Ross—was her stand-in and secretary. She had sent her to the college with a note explaining that she—the real Lolita—

would not be able to arrive until some hours later than she intended. It was just the chance Brenda and the rascally chauffeur had waited for. They had read about the bracelet in the paper, and knew they would find a ready sale for it in America, where they were returning to-morrow.

They had phoned Lolita, telling her that the concert had been cancelled and she was not now expected at the college.

"I believed them," said Lolita, "and it was not until Don here telephoned to me at my hotel that I realised that anything was wrong. I came straight away, and I'm very glad I did. The students who discovered this plot deserve the highest praise. And as for this darling dog," she added, rubbing her cheek against Buster's head, "he deserves a diamond-studded bone."

Mr. Gruley, very red and uncomfortable, glanced at Sally & Co.

"But—but how did you guess the girl was an impostor?" he asked.

"Because of her fear of dogs," replied Sally. "And because her eyes were blue instead of brown. We guessed she and the chauffeur had stolen something, though we didn't

know what. And we also knew that the supposed Lolita would have to conceal it somewhere, because if the theft had been discovered before she left the chauffeur and the car might have been searched, but the famous film star—never! And the bouquet, which she hung on to so tightly, was the only possible place of concealment."

Mr. Gruley nodded. "We are all very grateful to you," he said graciously to the chums. "But, Miss Marquese—this is not at all the welcome we planned for you. We have no bouquet—no tea—"

"But that's just what we have got," laughed Sally. "Our bouquet is still perfect, and our tea is still waiting to be eaten in the Merry-makers' Club. And we'd be delighted, Miss Marquese, to have you as our guest."

"And I," smiled Lolita, "will be proud and happy to accept—providing Buster can sit at my right-hand."

Laughing, happy arm-in-arm with Sally and Fay, and with the rest of the Merry-makers crowding around, the real Lolita strolled off, leaving Carmentita white and shaking with fury amidst the wreckage of her tea party and the wreckage of her plans to triumph over the chums.

(End of this week's story.)

There will be another fine complete story featuring the ever-popular Merry-makers in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

THE RIVAL REPORTERS ON THE RIVIERA

(Continued from page 328.)

"Diane Farley!" gasped a boy's husky voice. "Gosh, inspector, she must have been mad to try to escape this way!"

"Julie's mind was reeling as she recognised Barry's voice.

Then came another stern voice—a voice she did not know. A hand fell heavily on her shoulder.

"Mademoiselle Diane, you are under arrest! I charge you with being a notorious girl crook, and responsible for robbing the guests at the chateau this evening!"

It was at that point that Julie fainted.

A DRAMATIC UNMASKING

WHEN Julie came round she was lying on a couch in the chateau. Barry was bending over her, his face pale, and beside him stood a uniformed police inspector.

"Gosh, Julie," exclaimed Barry, his voice shaking with relief. "Thank goodness you're okay! That girl took us all in properly, and it's no thanks to her that you weren't killed!"

Julie stared at him dazedly, her mind in a whirl.

"But—but I don't understand—" she faltered.

It was the inspector who cut in, his voice brusque:

"It is quite simple, ma'mselle. We have reason to believe that Mademoiselle Diane Farley was none other than the audacious girl crook, Yvonne Lefarge, for whom the police have been searching for so long. It was a cunning ruse to assemble so many wealthy guests at the chateau this evening—on the pretext of witnessing an ancient ceremony."

"All poppycock, of course!" put in Barry. "I never believed it from the first. She played on the credulity of old Madame Celeste and the good nature of the family lawyer. While she tricked you into playing her part in the ceremony, and while all the guests were waiting expectantly in the darkened hall, she robbed them of their handbags, jewellery, wallets, and goodness knows what and made a clean getaway!"

Julie sat bolt upright, her faintness leaving her.

"Diane—a crook! I—I don't believe it!" she gasped. "That charming, sporting girl—"

"Oh, she's a good actress," admitted

Barry, with a knowing grin. "She nearly took me in at first, but I got suspicious and phoned the police. Gosh, Julie"—his excitement was unmistakable—"what a story this is going to make for the 'Comet'! I've got her photo—everything! This is going to be splashed across the front page to-morrow!"

"Barry, wait!" Julie was thinking of a charming, vivacious face—a pair of merry, dancing eyes; eyes that she had late seen filled with tears. "You just can't write that story!" she breathed. "If Diane was a crook, then—then so am I! It was I who persuaded her to let me play her part—she was all against it!"

"Oh, she's smooth-tongued enough, when she likes," said Barry, "and smooth-fingered, too! The way she lifted those jewels from under the very eyes of their owners—"

Julie gave a sudden gasp, a gleam of incredulous excitement flashing into her eyes.

"Smooth-fingered—smooth hands!" she breathed. "Why didn't I think of it before?"

"I say, Julie, do you feel all right?" asked Barry anxiously.

But Julie was already struggling to her feet.

"Quickly, have the guests all gone?" she asked, turning to the bewildered inspector.

"Not yet, ma'mselle. I gave my men orders that they were all to remain till I could question them. Only the lawyer has permission to depart, and he has offered to drive the invalid Madame Celeste in his car—"

"Then there's still time!" gasped Julie. "I—I want to ask Madame Celeste if she would recognise one of Diane's trinkets."

"Why?" asked Barry, staring. "You'll see!" Julie breathed. "Come on!"

Followed by the perplexed inspector, the two young reporters hurried out into the hall. Madame Celeste's wheeled chair was already at the door, and the lawyer's car was waiting on the drive.

The old lady was obviously distressed by what had happened, but she smiled tremulously in reply to Julie's question.

"What trinket, my dear?" she asked.

"This," said Julie, producing a dainty chain bracelet. "I found it close to the door of the turret-room."

The old lady held out a frail, lace-gloved hand to examine it.

"But yes!" She nodded. "This is certainly Diane's!"

"That's funny," said Julie. "You see, it happens to be mine! And it's funny, too, madam, that your hand is so smooth—and girlish!"

As she spoke, she tore the dainty lace glove from the old lady's hand, revealing smooth, slender fingers, unmarked by the wrinkles of age.

Madame's expression changed. With a sharp intake of breath, she started up from her wheel-chair. But Barry was quicker.

He seized her wrist, forcing her to drop the small, glittering revolver she had snatched from under the cushions. At the same moment the inspector stepped forward, snatching off the trickster's silver-grey wig, revealing a close-cropped head of dark hair and a lovely face convulsed with fury beneath its skillful make-up.

"Tiens! It is Yvonne Lefarge!" he exclaimed.

"And here," added Barry excitedly, as he jerked back the cushions, "are the missing jewels, inspector! Gosh, Julie"—he glanced admiringly at his girl rival—"this is your 'scoop' right enough!"

AND it was Julie who discovered Diane Farley—bound and gagged in a cupboard in Madame Celeste's room. The "old lady" had come to Diane's room, sympathised with the girl about her sprained ankle, and promised to keep her's and Julie's secret. She had offered to treat the injured ankle, and had taken Diane by surprise as that girl's back was turned.

The legend of the sealed room appeared to be just another old family myth, so Barry declared in his story to the "Comet."

But Julie had other ideas. She took Diane Farley into her confidence, and with the aid of the gardener and a ladder, the girl reporter investigated the stone gargoyle that had rocked so curiously during her dangerous descent.

She found that the gargoyle moved on a pivot, and in a cavity behind it was a lead casket containing a quantity of priceless old gems—the forgotten treasure of the chateau, which had probably been removed from the turret-room by a previous owner.

And even Barry admitted that Julie's own story in the "Echo" knocked his into a cocked hat!

THE END.

"Pam Was Rusty's Only Friend!" that is the title of next week's appealing long complete story about a dog that you will all love.

JOY—THE GIRL WITH A 100 VOICES

(Continued from page 336.)

Joy, who had been ventriloquising, hid a smile and looked suspiciously at the reporter.

"You haven't a loudspeaker on you?" she asked.

"I certainly haven't," retorted the reporter in wrath.

"Well, I haven't," snapped Mr. Hicking, baffled. "And anyway, the sound came from the ground."

Joy stooped low and listened.

A deep growling sound was heard again.

"My goodness! Let's dig the pavement up," she said excitedly. "Let's get a permit."

"Pah! It cannot be there. It cannot be underground. It—it's uncanny," muttered Mr. Hicking, puzzled.

"I suppose you—you aren't pulling my leg, sir?" asked the young reporter suspiciously. "These aren't ventriloquial noises?"

"Of course not," snapped Mr. Hicking indignantly. "Can't you see—I'm bit shaken myself?"

And he was, too!

"You mean you think the ghost of the café is haunting us?" asked Joy.

"Yes, I think that woman had a loudspeaker rigged up so as to pass the whole thing off as a joke, but I think also there really was a ghost—and now it's following us," said Mr. Hicking worriedly. "The ghost of the café is real!"

Then he jumped, for as he moved forward, a hollow voice sounded just from behind him.

"Take heed—take heed, wretched deceiver!" said the voice eerily.

"You have made a mock of ghosts. Now you shall be haunted. The ghost has left the café. I am the ghost, and I am now coming to your garage."

"Mum—mum—my garage? You can't do that!"

"I shall no longer haunt the café, I will groan under and around the cars in your garage until people are scared to come to the place," said the ghostly voice. "I am going ahead. I am going there now—"

The voice—which was Joy ventriloquising, of course—grew fainter. Mr. Hicking put on speed, arriving at his garage just as a woman customer came driving out.

"Mr. Hicking—the ghost!" this woman seemed to wail in a scared tone—and once again Joy was throw-

ing her voice. "The ghost from the café must have come here!"

The car sped away.

"Golly—what a story for your newspaper!" said Joy to the reporter.

"Ghost leaves café for garage."

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Hicking in fury and alarm. "Don't you print that! There is no ghost. I—I—the ghost at the café is a fake. It was just—just a joke. As a matter of fact," he said with a short, unnatural laugh, "I—er—played the prank. This girl is right. I used ventriloquism."

"You heard?" Joy said, looking at the reporter. "The café isn't haunted. And now that Mr. Hicking has confessed, I'll own up. I'm a ventriloquist, too. That's how I spotted you."

Mr. Hicking's eyes goggled.

"You? You tricked me—"

"The same as you tricked that lady at the café. It was a match between two ventriloquists, and I won—and the café has won, too; for now the newspapers can tell the truth about that ghost—and the café will do a roaring trade as a result of the publicity."

And so it proved to be.

(End of this week's story.)
More fun with Joy and her ventriloquism in another lively story next week.