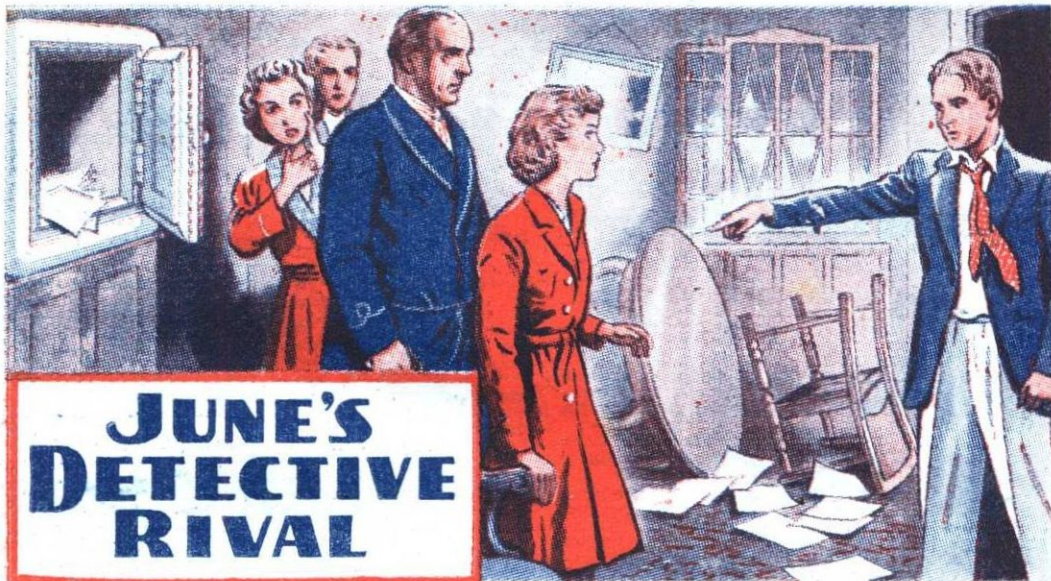


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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

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JUNE'S DETECTIVE RIVAL

June Gaynor, Girl Detective, Returns In This Long Complete Mystery Story—
Written By PETER LANGLEY

THE CLUE OF THE SPIKED SHOES

"GOODNESS, what a climb—but what a glorious view!" panted June Gaynor, the girl detective, as she halted at the gates of the old, grey stone mansion set on the slopes of Glen Fell.

June—niece and partner of the famous Noel Raymond—had come in answer to an urgent letter from Avril Deacon, whose father owned the Glen View Guest House.

The letter had been addressed to Noel, but as he was engaged on an important inquiry in London, June had volunteered to come in his stead.

For the letter had intrigued her—and aroused her impulsive sympathy. The writer, she was convinced, was a frank, warm-hearted girl, in genuine distress.

June glanced with keen interest at the guest house and its picturesque surroundings. Far below lay the tranquil, old-world village of Tarnmere—and above the mansion, throwing the house in its shadow, loomed an overhanging cliff known locally as the "Eagle's Nest."

Her pulses quickened as she walked briskly up the drive, for this was her first independent case for several months—and she was anxious to prove to her uncle that she had lost none of her old skill.

She rang the bell, and a few moments later the door was opened by a rather flustered-looking maid. The girl's eyes widened as she glanced at June's professional card.

"Scuse me, miss—but isn't there some mistake?" she asked. "We weren't expecting two of you!"

June wondered for a moment if the maid was joking, but with a quick smile she decided that

her uncle's name on the card must have confused the girl.

"That's all right," she said briskly. "I'm on my own. Miss Deacon is expecting me."

"Yes, miss." The maid still looked at her doubtfully, then recollecting her manners she held open the door. "Will you come this way, miss, please? I'll inform Miss Deacon."

She escorted June to a charming, spacious room with french windows overlooking the terraced grounds, and departed on her errand.

June smiled, glancing round her keenly, her shrewd grey eyes missing nothing of importance. She noticed that the french windows stood ajar, and from the garden came a distant buzz of voices.

Probably Avril Deacon had not expected her as soon as this, for June had caught the overnight train from London, immediately on receiving the letter.

She re-read it again swiftly as she waited, skipping the opening paragraphs till she came to the gist of the message:

"I am at my wits' end! These inexplicable thefts are ruining my father—and suspicion has been thrown on to someone very dear to me. If you could clear up the hateful mystery, I should be indebted to you for life—"

The words, written in obvious fear and desperation, read strangely on this sunlit morning—a morning that followed a wild night of wind and rain.

The silken curtains at the windows fluttered in the light breeze, and June, who had a domestic eye for neatness, stepped forward to straighten them.

As she did so, her keen eyes noticed something lying on the polished floor behind the curtains—something green, and glistening with moisture. She bent curiously to pick it up.

"Moss!" she whispered. "Unusual moss, too—and it's been growing on red mould."

She glanced quickly out of the window, noting that the gravel paths were devoid of moss or weeds—and the mould on the flower-beds was of a darker hue.

June had been trained by her famous uncle in the observation of tiny details. She shook the curtains and glanced up at the valance before wrapping the scrap of moss carefully in her hanky.

"You never know!" she murmured, with a thoughtful smile, then looked up sharply as footsteps crunched on the path outside and a figure loomed in the open window—a rather good-looking young man, wearing immaculate flannels and carrying, of all things, a magnifying-glass!

"Hallo!" said the newcomer, staring at her keenly. "Who are you—and what are you doing here?"

June stiffened slightly at his peremptory tone, and her grey eyes held a challenging gleam.

"If it really concerns you," she rejoined pleasantly, "I'm waiting for Miss Deacon."

The young man frowned.

"Miss Deacon didn't tell me she was expecting anyone!"

"Does Miss Deacon tell you everything?" countered June curiously.

The youth coloured slightly.

"Under the circumstances," he rejoined loftily, "I naturally expect to be consulted. I can't have crowds of visitors popping in and disturbing everything." He looked at her suspiciously. "Have you been in the garden?" he demanded.

"Not yet," replied June, with admirable restraint. "I was just thinking of taking a stroll—"

"Well, please don't!" interrupted the young man, barring her way. "You'll only mess up the clues—and I've spent the last hour checking up on 'em. It's as clear as daylight that the thief came this way! I've traced his footprints—spiked shoes, mind you—from the cliff at the bottom of the garden, across the lawn and flower-beds, and up to the terrace here—"

"Excuse me," ventured June, her grey eyes widening with increased puzzlement, "but—is this a kind of hobby of yours—"

"Hobby be dashed!" exclaimed the other indignantly. "But, of course, you wouldn't know." Loftily he produced a card, handing it to her. June glanced at it and gave a little gasp.

"HORACE CLAYTON—Private Investigator," she read, and her lips trembled in mingled amusement and dismay.

A rival detective! No wonder the maid had been surprised by her arrival! With an effort she composed herself, holding out her own card.

The youth stared at it and his jaw dropped slightly.

"June Gaynor—detective-partner to Noel Raymond, London!" he gulped. "Here, there must be some mistake! There can't be two of us on the job—and a slip of a girl at that—"

"It's the results that count!" put in June sweetly, aroused by his slighting tone.

"I was here first—got a phone message early this morning and came straight up by car—"

began the youth.

"And I," interposed June coolly, "received a letter yesterday evening and travelled all night—and here I am!"

She spoke with some spirit, mastering her disappointment, and with no intention of being brow-beaten by this self-assured young man.

She turned as the door opened to admit the grey-haired owner of the guest-house, his attractive daughter, and several guests.

June recognised Avril Deacon immediately by her pale, worried face and the tragic look in her dark eyes. It was the face of a girl suffering under almost unbearable stress—and June's quick sympathy went out to her at once.

But her detective rival was the first to get in

his complaint, and Mr. Deacon listened with a puzzled frown.

"I do not recollect engaging you, Miss Gaynor—" he began.

"No, father—but I did!" interrupted Avril quickly. "It means a lot to me, as you know. I—I wrote to Noel Raymond, and his partner has come instead. It was awfully sweet of you to come so promptly, Miss Gaynor!"

And she took June's hand, with a tremulous, friendly smile that touched the girl detective's heart and strengthened her determination.

"I will do all I can to help you!" whispered June softly.

"This is very awkward," Mr. Deacon murmured, "but—it can't be helped. Horace Clayton was recommended to me by an old friend, and Miss Gaynor's reputation, of course, is well known. I—er—suppose you two young detectives would not agree to pool your abilities and sort out this distressing mystery between you?"

"Of course"—June smiled forgivingly, holding out her hand to the rival sleuth—"that is, if Mr. Clayton agrees?"

The rival detective coolly ignored her friendly gesture.

"I've practically solved the mystery, Mr. Deacon," he said carelessly. "But I've no objections, of course, if Miss Gaynor wishes to stay to observe my methods."

There came a little murmur of excitement from the guests, and June bit her lip, concealing her own feelings as she saw the sudden frightened look in Avril's dark eyes.

"You say you've solved the mystery, young man?" asked Mr. Deacon eagerly. "You know who's been robbing my guests—and how it was done?"

The guests crowded round eagerly.

"I hope so!" exclaimed a distinguished woman guest. "I've not been able to sleep the last few nights for the thought of the dreadful, unknown thief in our midst. Thank goodness I asked Mr. Deacon to lock my diamond and sapphire necklace in his safe—"

"Very wise of you, Mrs. Frinton!" interposed a grey-haired, scholarly-looking gentleman who had been wheeled into the room in an invalid-chair. "I haven't much to lose, myself, but Deacon was kind enough to take charge of my pearl tiara and my gold hunter."

"I am very grateful to you both for staying," interposed Mr. Deacon gruffly. "Especially you, Doctor Benny. I hardly expected any of my guests to stand by me after what has happened. As it is, I have lost scores of potential clients owing to these dastardly attacks—and I may be forced to close down unless the unknown scoundrel is quickly caught—"

"Don't worry, sir," put in Horace Clayton airily, with a glance at June. "I've discovered that the thefts were committed from outside—by someone who knows the house intimately, and the movements of the guests."

"And the name of the scoundrel?" demanded Mr. Deacon.

The boy detective shrugged, and June felt Avril's hand tremble as it gripped her arm.

"The thief, sir," announced Horace meaningly, "was a young man of athletic build, who wore spiked shoes, and entered the grounds by way of the steep cliff that overlooks the valley. I believe you mentioned that your late secretary, David Brent, was something of an amateur mountaineer—"

"No!" gasped Avril, starting forward suddenly. "That—that's not fair! You're all prejudiced against David because—because he left after a scene with father—"

"Avril—that is enough!" interrupted Mr. Deacon sternly.

But the girl turned appealingly to June.

"Miss Gaynor, please try to show them that David is innocent!" she begged. "He isn't a thief! He—he left after a quarrel with father over—over another matter"—a slight flush crossed her face—and he hasn't been near the house since. I know he couldn't have come here last night, because—because—"

She broke off, biting her lip hastily, and June came to her rescue.

The girl detective's agile mind was picking up the threads.

"Will you show us those footprints?" she asked, turning to her rival with a disarming smile.

"Certainly," replied the young man confidently, and promptly led the way out on to the terrace, followed by everyone except the invalid Dr. Benny and Avril. "There you are!" he added, with a patronising smile at June.

They all crowded round as the girl detective bent to examine the clearly-marked trail on the flower-bed—an unmistakable trail of spiked shoes, deeply impressed in the soft mould.

June's grey eyes narrowed slightly as she touched the marks with her finger-tips.

"Well?" inquired Horace tentantly. "Aren't those clear enough for you?"

"Just a little too clear," murmured June, standing up.

"What—what do you mean?" Her rival stared. "Too clear? I don't get you—"

"It rained heavily last night," said June softly. "In fact, it didn't stop raining till early this morning."

"Well?" countered Horace. "What of it?"

"If these tracks had been left by someone who broke into the house last night," said June, "they'd have been blurred by the rain—and muddy. They're so fresh and clean-cut that they might almost have been made deliberately this morning—"

"Oh, rot!" cut in Horace, frowning, though several of the guests looked impressed. "I tell you I've followed that trail across the grounds—and the chap forced an entry through the french windows. All the other windows were shattered."

"That's quite right," put in Mr. Deacon, nodding. "It's clear that the scoundrel knew the plan of the house—as young Clayton said." Horace smiled triumphantly.

"But if he forced an entry through this window," said June pleasantly, "why didn't the burglar-alarm ring?"

"Burg—burglar-alarm?" echoed Horace.

June nodded, and smiling, stepped to the window and pulled back the curtain, pointing to an arrangement of wires behind the valance.

"Didn't you see that, Horace?" she asked reproachfully. "But, of course, you're not a slip of a girl—untidy curtains wouldn't worry you!"

The young man flushed, encountering the gleam in her grey eyes.

"Well, the chap knew about that alarm—he must have fixed it somehow from outside," he retorted defensively. "There's no getting away from that trail! Shall I show you where it starts, Mr. Deacon?" he asked, eager to change the subject.

They all trooped after him, leaving June momentarily alone on the terrace. There was a worried expression on her attractive face as she took another look at the incriminating trail.

Her feminine intuition convinced her that there was more behind this strange affair than appeared on the surface—a clever and sinister plot! But how could she prove it?

Those footprints baffled her. They were too clear to be convincing, yet they had convinced the self-assured Horace Clayton and most of the guests.

If the thief had entered this way, how had he left? A swift search disclosed another, similar trail, leading from the terrace into the shrubbery.

June followed it quickly, to find herself close to a rustic summerhouse almost hidden by the bushes. The door was closed and the key was in the padlock outside.

June's sharp ears detected a faint movement—or had she imagined it? At the same instant she heard the excited voices and footsteps of the returning guests, and Horace Clayton's didactic tones.

The girl detective acted swiftly before hurrying back to rejoin the guests on the terrace. She followed them as they trooped through the french windows to join Avril and the invalid Dr. Benny.

"Well, sir, are you satisfied?" demanded Horace, turning to Mr. Deacon.

"Absolutely," declared the host. "You're right, young man—and Miss Gaynor is wrong. The thief certainly entered this way, after climbing from the village. He knew that the gates would be padlocked, and that he might be seen from the front of the house. Thank goodness I took the precaution of double-locking my study, or the scoundrel might have got at my safe."

"If the thief was your secretary, sir," ventured Horace meaningly, "he might easily have obtained a duplicate key—and discovered the combination of your safe."

"I hadn't thought of that!" Mr. Deacon paled slightly as he led the way hurriedly to an inner door, and taking his keys from his pocket, unlocked the door, threw it wide, and entered.

June glanced around as she and the other guests followed Mr. Deacon into the study—a lofty, oak-beamed room with heavily barred windows. Its gloom was relieved by the cream-distempred walls and a small skylight in the roof.

As they crossed towards the safe June's sharp eyes spotted something lying on the floor near the table. She made to pick it up, but Horace, who had noticed her movement, was before her and snatched it up.

"A man's glove!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "And there are initials inside—D. B.—David Brent, for a cert!"

There came a broken cry from Avril and a grim ejaculation from her father.

"So—it was that young scoundrel, after all!"

"It must have been!" declared Horace. "Only your secretary could have obtained a duplicate key, and there's no other way into this room. It's clear as daylight—"

"Is it?" exclaimed June, snatching at the telltale clue. "Then why is this an old glove, and the ink still fresh on the lining? Would David mark it purposely before leaving it behind?"

But no one was listening to her. Mr. Deacon, his hand trembling, was opening the safe. A hollow groan escaped his lips as he jerked out an empty drawer.

"They've gone!" he exclaimed huskily. "The necklace—Dr. Benny's tiepin—everything that was left in my charge! And young Brent knew the combination—"

A horrified gasp arose from the guests, and even Dr. Benny's scholarly face turned pale as he clutched at the arm of his wheel-chair.

"This is terrible!" he exclaimed. "Surely—surely there is some mistake—"

"I'll pick up his trail, sir!" declared Horace confidently. "He may even be hiding somewhere in the grounds. Come with me!"

He brushed unceremoniously past June and made for the door, Mr. Deacon and several of the others at his heels.

June caught at Avril's arm, a strange gleam in her eyes.

"Come on!" she whispered. "And whatever happens—keep quiet!"

She hurried the anxious girl on to the terrace even as an excited shout from Horace announced that he had picked up the trail.

He led the way at a run through the shrubbery, halting breathlessly outside the old summerhouse. His face fell as he stared at the padlocked door.

"This is the way he came," he panted. "The footprints lead here—but the door's padlocked and the key's gone. Let's try farther on!"

June gave a little sigh of relief as the search party sped after her enthusiastic rival. Her fingers tightened warningly on Avril's arm.

She waited till the footsteps had died away, then slipping a hand into her pocket she took

out a rusted key and inserted it in the padlock, turning it swiftly.

"All right," she breathed softly, "you'd better come out now—Mr. Brent!"

FOOTPRINTS ON THE WALL!



A BROKEN cry escaped Avril's lips as a tall, rather dishevelled young man appeared from the gloom.

"David!" she gasped. "You—you here?"

"S'sh!" breathed June warningly, with a hurried glance over her shoulder. "They'll be back

in a minute. I want to talk to you both—somewhere safe. Where shall we go?"

"I know—the grotto!" Avril breathed. "They won't think of looking there!"

She led the way at a run through the trees to a dark, cave-like hollow at the foot of the overhanging cliff known as the Eagle's Nest.

June faced the young couple, her shrewd grey eyes passing from David Brent's frank, rugged features to his brogue shoes, guiltless of any spikes.

Her mind was working swiftly as she paused to recover her breath.

"To start with," she said softly, "I locked you in the summerhouse, Mr. Brent, because I didn't want the others to find you. I guessed you were there, because that trail of spiked shoes had been laid deliberately to trap you."

"I say," cut in the bewildered young man, "I don't get the hang of all this! I came in answer to Avril's message. She asked me to meet her in the summerhouse—"

"But I haven't sent you any message, David!" declared Avril in amazement.

"Then—what's this?" demanded the young man, producing a crumpled note from his pocket.

June took it quickly, and her grey eyes gleamed as she smoothed it out, comparing it with Avril's letter. She held it up to the light.

"It's a clever forgery," she explained softly, "and if you look at it closely you can see that it was written backwards! The up strokes are thick and the down strokes thin—it's always a sure test."

"But—what does it mean?" faltered Avril. "Who is the real thief—and why is he hitting at David?"

"Come to that," put in the young man, "how does the blighter manage to get into the house without being seen or heard? Avril tells me that all the doors are kept locked at night and the downstairs windows shuttered. Yet jewellery is being stolen from the bedrooms—"

"And even from the safe in uncle's double-locked study!" breathed Avril. "They—they say you've got a duplicate key, David—"

"Who says so?" demanded the young secretary, his frank face clouding.

"My enthusiastic rival, Detective Horace Clayton," murmured June, with a faint flicker of a smile. "I'm afraid he's hot on your trail!"

"Could he—could he arrest David?" breathed Avril anxiously.

June shook her head.

"Hardly—without more proof. After all, anyone can wear spiked shoes—and even that glove—that reminds me!" She pulled the old leather glove from her pocket. "Is this yours, David?"

The young man stared at it.

"Why, yes!" he admitted. "It's one of an old pair I left behind when—when I had that row with the gov'nor—I mean Mr. Deacon."

"And someone's recently touched up your initials," breathed June. "Horace might be able to make use of that—especially if you were caught near the house. You'd better keep away, for safety." Her grey eyes became suddenly serious. "We're up against a dangerous trickster—and, honestly, I'm afraid—"

"Well, I'm not!" declared David bluntly. "If I catch the blighter I'll give him something to remember."

"David—please!" Avril, rather pale, caught at her fiance's arm. "June knows what she's talking about. You must stay away—till this hateful business is cleared up. Do you—you think the mystery thief will strike again?" She looked anxiously at the girl detective.

June nodded thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid so. He probably feels safe—especially now that everyone suspects David. Of course, Horace will take precautions and he might trap the wrong person! That's what's worrying me. There are other things, too—"

She glanced from the old leather glove to David's hand.

"You're not wearing your ring," she said.

"I never wear one," rejoined the young man in surprise.

June pursed her lips.

"The last person to wear this glove had a ring on his second finger—a ring with a sharp stone," she murmured. "It's just a tiny tear in the leather—but uncle always says that it's the little things that count. Which reminds me—do either of you know anything about moss?"

They both stared at her blankly, and June smiled.

"Never mind—it's just an idea of mine, and"—her fingers tightened suddenly on Avril's arm—"they're coming back!" she whispered.

"Get David out of the grounds—quickly. I must go back to the house!"

Cool and smiling, June was waiting by the french windows as the search party returned, led by her disgruntled rival.

"Any luck?" she inquired pleasantly.

Horace glared at her.

"The scoundrel got away," he said, "but it's plain as a pikestaff that it's young Brent. Don't worry, Mr. Deacon! If he makes another attempt, I'll nab him—in the act!"

Mr. Deacon's face was pale and worried.

"I can't afford any more trouble," he said. "Mrs. Frinton has threatened to send for the police unless the thief is caught by to-morrow—and that would start a scandal, just as a wealthy client has phoned to say that he is coming. Baron Duprez—you have heard of him, Dr. Benny?"

"You mean the diamond merchant?" murmured the invalid guest. "I shouldn't take any risks, if I were you, Deacon! Perhaps it would be best to call in the police to assist our young detectives—"

He glanced smilingly from June to her rival, but Horace bridled indignantly.

"It's quite unnecessary!" he declared. "I'll be keeping watch, and if the scoundrel makes an attempt to break in I'll catch him. I don't really think," he added patronisingly, "that it'll be necessary for Miss Gaynor to stay."

June started. She had been looking thoughtfully at several smudgy marks on the cream-distempred walls—marks that puzzled her and disturbed her domestic eye.

"Oh, but I'd like to stay!" she declared, looking disarmingly at her host. "If you don't mind, Mr. Deacon. You see, I want to study Horace Clayton's methods! I realise I've a lot to learn."

Horace glanced at her sharply, but, meeting her serious gaze, he was obviously flattered.

"Of course, in that case," he said airily, "if you don't mind, Mr. Deacon, it's O.K. by me."

June's lips were smiling, but her eyes were puzzled as she left the others and made her way to the pleasant bedroom that had been set aside for her.

Her agile mind was at work as she unpacked her case, taking out a powerful magnifying-glass—her uncle's present.

Through this she studied the scrap of moss she had found near the french windows.

"Moss growing on red soil," she whispered.

"And there are marks of red soil on the study

(Please turn to page 357.)

The Merry-makers at College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

NAT PIGGOT STARTS A RUMOUR

"GOOD-AFTERNOON, Mr. Baynes!" chorused Sally Warner & Co.

The four chums—Sally, Fay Manners, Don Weston and Johnny Briggs—were strolling towards the cafeteria at Roxburgh Co-Ed College when they met Mr. Howard Baynes coming towards them.

He was young and good-looking, with the broad shoulders of an athlete. Howard Baynes hadn't long been at Roxburgh, where he was an assistant master, but he was popular with everyone, and always had a cheery word for Sally & Co.

But on this occasion he had almost passed by them before he seemed aware that they had spoken to him.

"Oh, hallo, Sally! Hallo, everybody!" he said, and just for a moment the usual cheery smile flashed into his good-looking face. "Lovely afternoon, isn't it?"

And he strode on down the drive, looking unusually preoccupied and thoughtful. Naturally, there were comments from Sally & Co.

"Never seen him look like that before," murmured Fay Manners. "He's always so bright and cheery."

"Perhaps he's had a tiff with Miss Ledbury," said Johnny Briggs.

Sally's blue eyes clouded for a moment. "Oh, I hope not," she said. "They've always struck me as being so happy together—so much in love with each other."

Roxburgh had been watching with interest and approval the romance between Howard Baynes and Dulcia Ledbury. Dulcia was slim and very attractive; her home was in Chicago, where he had met her, but for the past three weeks she had been staying in Roxburgh City, and was a frequent visitor to the college.

"Expect they'll soon be getting engaged," Fay said with a smile. "And perhaps they'll have a party— Oh, thank you, Johnny!"

They'd reached the cafeteria, and Johnny held the door open while the two girls and Don went in. Mrs. Barwell beamed at them from behind the counter, and immediately began filling four tall glasses.

"Yes, please, Mrs. Barwell," Sally laughed. "You know our order—four strawberry sundaes"

They were seated at their favourite table by

the window, enjoying the sundaes, when Nat Piggot, from J House, came over and sat at the next table. Sally & Co. happened to be discussing Mr. Baynes and Miss Ledbury again. "I've just seen him," Nat said, evidently feeling in a conversational mood with his rivals from K House.

"Seen who?" asked Sally, at once on her guard. She knew from past experience that Nat Piggot was ever on the look-out to bring off one of his practical jokes or leg-pulls.

"Howard Baynes," Nat explained, leaning across in a secretive sort of way. "Saw him in the woods—with a girl. And it wasn't Dulcia Ledbury, either!"

"Oh?" Sally got on with her sundaes. "I've seen you heaps of times, Nat—with a different girl every time."

"This is different," Nat went on unabashed. "I heard you saying how fond they seemed of each other. Maybe Miss Ledbury is fond of Mr. Baynes—but I'm not so sure about him. He's a dark horse, if you ask me. This is the second time I've seen him with this other girl. And he had her in his arms before, and was kissing her—"

"Nat Piggot, that's not at all funny," Sally broke in disapprovingly. "That kind of joking is in bad taste—"

"But it's true, Sally," Nat protested. "I've seen them, I tell you. They're together in the woods now."

Sally rose to her feet. "Let's be going," she said to her chums and, still annoyed with Nat, she went out of the cafeteria.

Even as they got outside, a smart car pulled up opposite the main lecture hall. The chums immediately recognised the car and the very attractive girl who jumped out.

"It's Dulcia Ledbury!" Fay exclaimed. "Shall we go across and speak to her?"

Earlier in the week the chums had been invited to tea by Howard Baynes. Dulcia had been there, and she'd been very charming and friendly.

"Yes let's," said Johnny. "Gee, she's a peach, isn't she? Howard Baynes is a lucky chap!"

Dulcia hadn't seen the chums, for she was talking to Andy Ruggles.

"Do you know where Mr. Baynes is?", she was asking him.

"Why, yes, Miss Ledbury," replied Andy, eager to be of assistance. "I saw him taking

that footpath through the woods—about twenty minutes ago."

"Thank you. I'll stroll that way myself when I've parked the car," Dulcia said.

Sally came to a dead stop as she heard that. "Oh, goodness!"

"What's the matter, Sally?" asked Fay in surprise.

"I—I was just wondering if there was anything in what Nat Piggot said," Sally answered, a troubled look coming into her eyes. "About Mr. Baynes being with another girl—"

"Gosh—yes!" said Johnny in a startled voice. "If Miss Ledbury found them together it might cause trouble. Do you think we ought to do something about it?"

Sally came to a decision then on the spur of the moment. It was a decision which, in the light of subsequent events, she was to regret; but she made it with the best of intentions.

"Keep Dulcia talking," she said swiftly to her chums. "I'll race ahead and see if I can find Mr. Baynes."

And Sally slipped away, making for the little gateway which led to the footpath through the woods.

She had wanted to ignore Nat Piggot's gossip about Howard Baynes; she was sure that, even if it were true, there was a harmless explanation to it.

But even so, if Dulcia saw what Nat had seen—well, it might easily lead to an awkward situation between the young lovers. Sally, liking both Dulcia and Howard Baynes, didn't want that to happen.

She hurried along the path, looking around her as she went. Ahead, in a small clearing among the trees, stood a rather tumbledown shack which at one time had been used by a party of lumbermen.

Sally came in sight of that shack, and then she gave a smile of relief. For standing outside it was Howard Baynes. But before Sally could hail him, and before he had seen her, the young master turned and went into the hut.

Sally ran across to the half-open door. And then she saw something that made her stop dead.

"Ellie darling, it's wonderful to see you again!" Howard Baynes was saying, and he moved forward towards a girl who stood there.

"My sweet, I have waited so long for you," the girl responded, drawing him into an embrace.

Sally watched that scene with a kind of fascinated horror. So what Nat Piggot had said was only too true. And she had believed that Howard Baynes was in love with Dulcia Ledbury!

"Howard, we have an audience!" the girl inside the shack said.

Mr. Baynes spun swiftly round. He looked startled as he saw Sally.

"Sally!"

"I'm sorry," Sally was crimson. "I—I didn't mean to spy on you, Mr. Baynes. I'll be going. But I—I just came to tell you that Miss Ledbury is looking for you."

"Dulcia!" Howard started. "I wasn't expecting her until this evening. She mustn't find out! Moira, we'll have to call it off."

Sally gave a start. A few moments before Howard had called this girl Ellie. Sally looked across at her, noticing that she was quite a few years older than the young master.

"Howard," the girl said now, in a pleasantly amused voice, "don't you think you should explain to your young friend? She is looking at me most disapprovingly and, after all, she did find us in an extremely awkward situation! And you're playing your part so convincingly now after all my coaching. You see, my dear," she added, smiling across at Sally, "Howard is rehearsing his part in a play."

"A—a play!" Sally stammered, and in that moment a great relief flooded through her. So that was the explanation!

"Moira, you shouldn't have told Sally that—the young master began agitatedly, and then he shrugged. "But she'll have to know now, I suppose. Oh, what a tangle I'm getting myself into. All this secrecy—Sally, it's true that I'm appearing in a play, but Dulcia doesn't know—and she mustn't know! That's why I haven't told anyone. And, Sally, I must ask you not to breathe a word about it—you understand?"

"Of course, Mr. Baynes," Sally responded readily.

"Moira Graham is an old friend of mine—an actress," Howard went on. "She's not appearing in the play with me, but she's been marvellous, coaching me for this part."

"I think I'd better be getting on my way," broke in Moira. "Good luck, Howard—and this is good-bye, you know."

"Yes, you're starting out on tour to-morrow, aren't you? Thanks for everything, Moira," Howard said gratefully. "I'm going to miss your help. But won't you have tea with Dulcia and me?"

"I think it would be better if Dulcia doesn't see me," Moira said, shaking her head. "Then there can't be any misunderstanding."

"Miss Ledbury said she was coming to look for you, Mr. Baynes," Sally put in anxiously. "She'll be along any minute now."

"Then I'm off!" And with a wave of the hand, Moira hurried away from the shack and disappeared through the trees.

"I'd better be going, too," Sally said.

She still felt a little bewildered by what she had heard. It was a relief to know that the young master had not been deceiving Dulcia; but she was puzzled because Howard Baynes seemed so desperate that Dulcia shouldn't know he was acting in a play. Why keep that a secret from the girl he loved?

"Right-ho, Sally!" the young master said now. "Dulcia's coming to meet me, is she? There's this script; she mustn't see that. Look after it for me, Sally, will you—and remember, not a word about the play."

Sally nodded and took the bulky script.

"It's going to be awkward, having no one to rehearse with," Howard Baynes was saying, and then he gave a sudden exclamation. "Sally, I've been watching you at rehearsals in the college play. You're quite a clever little actress. I say, perhaps you could help me—take Moira's place, and help me practise. What do you say, Sally?"

Sally's eyes sparkled.

"I'd love to, Mr. Baynes, if you think I can help you."

"We'll talk it over later. You can read through the script." He held the shack door open for her.

It had been Sally's intention to slip off in the same direction that Moira Graham had taken. But now, as she emerged from the shack with Howard Baynes, a figure came down the footpath towards them. It was Dulcia Ledbury.

"Howard!" Dulcia exclaimed, and her voice was vexed and sharp with suspicion. "And you, Sally! Really, I didn't expect to find both of you here like this!"

EMBARRASSING FOR SALLY



DULCIA LEDBURY had certainly appeared on the scene at an awkward and embarrassing moment. And there could be no mistaking the suspicion in her words and her expression.

For a moment Mr. Baynes was as startled as Sally; then he hurried forward, a smile of welcome on his face.

"Hallo, Dulcia! I didn't expect you this afternoon, so this is a delightful surprise!"

"Is it?" Dulcia asked.

"Dulcia, you know it is!" the young master assured her. "Sally here came along to tell me that you had arrived."

"Indeed? I didn't ask her to. Why did she have to do that?"

And she looked at Sally as she spoke. Sally bit her lip. For the life of her she didn't know what to say. To explain why was right out of the question. But Mr. Baynes came to her rescue.

"Sally knows these woods better than you or I, Dulcia," he said lightly. "I expect she wanted to save you trailing around looking for me. She was doing both of us a good turn. Come on, smile, dear. Really, you don't look the least bit pleased to see me. Let's go along to my room for tea." He had his arm linked in hers now. "And perhaps Sally would like to join us—"

"I want to see you alone," Dulcia broke in, and now Sally noticed that she was looking worried and upset. "About something I've heard."

"You sound most mysterious, Dulcia. What have you heard?"

"I'll tell you over tea, Howard." Sally coughed, aware that Dulcia was still regarding her strangely; aware, too, that she wanted to be alone with the young master.

"I—I'll be getting along, Mr. Baynes," she said hurriedly. "Good-bye, Miss Ledbury."

"Good-bye, Sally!" Sally walked swiftly along the footpath. She felt unhappy and miserable. Oh, if only that situation hadn't cropped up! If only Dulcia hadn't appeared at that moment, just when she and Howard Baynes were emerging from the shack. She liked the master; she liked Dulcia, and she wanted them to be happy together, with no suspicion that anything underhand was going on. It was most unfortunate.

Don and Johnny and Fay were waiting for her when she arrived back at the college.

"We couldn't keep her any longer," Fay said. "Is—is everything all right?"

"Nat was talking out of the back of his head!" Sally replied. "Don't take any notice of what he said."

"Just as I thought," Don grinned. "Trying to pull our legs, the old ass! What's that under your arm, Sally?"

He had spotted the bulky script she was carrying. Sally, remembering her promise to the young master, realised she would have to be guarded in her reply.

"Oh, something Mr. Baynes asked me to look after for him until he collects it later," she said. "Nearly time for tea, isn't it?" she added. "Then let's eat."

Over tea and during the early part of the evening Sally had much to think about. She couldn't forget that look that had come to Dulcia's face when that girl had seen her with Howard Baynes. Even now Sally felt her cheeks colour at the recollection. It hurt that Dulcia should even suspect such a thing. Sally, liking Dulcia so much, had never thought she was the type of girl to jump to such hasty conclusions.

And then there was all this secrecy about Mr. Baynes acting in a play. Why did it have to be a secret from the girl he loved?

That caused Sally to shake her head in bewilderment; but she couldn't help feeling thrilled that he had asked her to help him rehearse, that the young master should repose such confidence in her.

But, in the circumstances, had she been wise to agree to his proposal? Was it for the best for her to become involved in all this secrecy?

And then there was the play itself. Even that gave Sally cause for much thought.

The script was typewritten; not a printed and published copy such as the Merrymakers' Dramatic Society used when they were putting on a play. And it bore the name of a famous playwright whose works were very well known to Sally. In fact, she had thought she knew

all the plays written by him; but she had never heard of this one.

Could it be that this was a new play, one being produced for the first time?

It was all very mysterious. There was so much she didn't understand.

And then, later that evening, came the message which Sally had been expecting. Would she please be good enough to go and see Mr. Baynes in his room?

Sally went, taking the script with her. Howard Baynes was alone and greeted her with a smile. Dulcia, as Sally knew, had gone earlier.

"Come in, Sally, and sit down," the young master said, and then eyed her steadily. "I've been thinking things over, and I feel that explanations are due to you. I asked you to keep a secret for me. I asked you to help me. You gave me your promise, but on reflection I wouldn't presume to keep you to that promise if, after hearing what I have to say you don't wish to."

Sally nodded, waiting for him to continue. But now she felt really intrigued.

"First of all, Sally," he went on, "I think you should know that Dulcia was—er—upset at seeing you and I together this afternoon. But no doubt you sensed her suspicion. Ridiculous, of course, and I told her so. But Dulcia, you see, has received an anonymous letter, saying that I have been meeting another girl—a reference, of course, to my meetings with Moira Graham."

Sally gave a start. An anonymous letter—oh, how horrid!

"I realise that I've been very indiscreet in my efforts to keep the secret of my appearing on the stage from Dulcia," Howard Baynes went on. "You see, Sally— Oh, it's a long, somewhat tangled story!"

But it was a story that he told her frankly, without keeping anything back. He had wanted to become engaged to Dulcia, but her guardian—for both her parents were dead—had opposed it on the grounds that Howard hadn't the prospects that would enable him to support Dulcia.

"Old Keith Carlton, her guardian, is a successful man," Howard said. "He wants his son-in-law to be a successful man—someone with a name, not a struggling young master. And I don't want to remain a master, Sally. This isn't the life for me. I want to get on the stage. And my chance has come. This new play is opening at the Roxburgh Theatre next week. It's having a fortnight's run out here and then going to New York—to Broadway. I'll be on Broadway, Sally! I've got the lead, and this is my great chance to become a star-hit!"

Sally felt a thrill of excitement run through her. No wonder Howard Baynes was so terrifically enthusiastic.

"It sounds marvellous," she exclaimed. "But—goodness, then why all this secrecy? Surely Miss Ledbury—"

"Dulcia hates the stage and everything connected with it!" Mr. Baynes said flatly, and ran his fingers through his crinkly fair hair in a despairing gesture. "Her mother was on the stage, and—and she died on the stage. An accident which Dulcia saw and which so filled her with horror that she's hated it ever since. She knows I'm keen on the stage, but she's said that if ever I have anything to do with it she'll give me up."

He paused in his pacing of the room, drew a deep breath and then turned to regard Sally.

"But I'm going on with it, Sally. I'm going to take that risk. Because I know that Dulcia does love me very deeply. She knows why her guardian won't allow us to become engaged, and I do believe that if I make a name for myself, even if it is on the stage, she will relent. Well, Sally, now you know everything; will you help me—will you keep my secret? And Sally, stirred by his story, infected by

his enthusiasm, had no hesitation in answering.

"I'll be proud to, Mr. Baynes," she said simply.

"Thank you, Sally, you're swell!"

And so Sally began rehearsing with Howard Baynes in secret. She had said she would be proud to help him, and she was. How could it be otherwise when she realised that she was playing a part in shaping the destiny of a young actor who perhaps one day soon would attain the dizzy heights of stardom and fame?

She loved doing it, and she watched him with increasing admiration. He was throwing himself heart and soul into the part. He was his own severest critic, and he never seemed satisfied.

Even the tiniest details he rehearsed again and again, striving for the utmost effect and perfection.

Sally hadn't realised that helping him would entail such exacting efforts from herself. But she enjoyed every moment of it. It was an experience from which she learned much. And if, in his enthusiasm for perfection, he expected much from her, he was relentless with himself.

He had his school work. He had his rehearsals at the Roxburgh Theatre, having obtained special permission from the Dean—who was the only person other than Sally in his confidence—for the necessary time off.

Then back from the theatre for more rehearsals at the college. The days passed. The dress rehearsal took place, and Howard Baynes returned from it in a state of despair.

"Dreadful—dreadful!" he told Sally, when she asked how it had gone. "I bungled half a dozen times. Nothing went right—"

Sally smiled.

"Nothing ever does at a dress rehearsal!" she said knowingly. "That's a lucky omen in the theatre, isn't it?"

"I hope so!" His mood changed; an eager, boyish smile came to his face. "I saw Dulcia to-day. She wants us to be engaged soon, in spite of what her guardian says."

"Oh, I'm glad," Sally said happily.

"And here are half a dozen tickets for the opening to-morrow night, Sally. I expect you can find a use for them. Here they are, with my compliments and sincere thanks for all you've done. You've been swell!"

Elatedly Sally went off to join her chums. She had been neglecting them these last few days owing to her secret rehearsals with Howard Baynes. They had been inclined to ask awkward questions, but Sally had managed to put them off. There were more awkward questions, as well as excitement, when she showed them the tickets.

"Who gave them to me?" Sally laughed. "Oh, a friend of mine. Now, don't ask questions—yet!"

Sally felt on top of the world. Dulcia and Mr. Baynes would soon be engaged. That must mean that Dulcia had forgotten all her suspicions; though Sally had to admit that on the one occasion when she had seen her since that incident in the woods Dulcia had been quite cool towards her. No matter. All was well between the young lovers—and Howard Baynes was on the threshold of success.

The following evening she went along to wish him luck. She expected him to be in a state of nerves—but not so jittery as she did find him.

"Sally, I'm worried, scared, frantic!" he said in a distracted voice. "I can't remember my lines. Especially in that big love scene in the second act. Sally, will you run through it with me?"

"Of course," Sally said. "But have we time—"

"We must find time. I must get it right!"

And so, there in his room, they once more rehearsed that difficult and emotional scene which was one of the high-spots in the play. Sally knew the lines by heart now, and she responded gamely to his acting.

His brilliance showed up her limitations. She realised it. He was a born actor. He was magnificent. All his confidence came back as he played the scene.

"Darling, we'll face the world together! You and I. No one else matters. The world may change, the lives of its people may change, but our hearts—yours and mine, darling—they shall be changeless—" Howard Baynes broke off, his face flushed and aglow. "Sally, I'm happy about it now! And you've been splendid," he rushed on enthusiastically. "I think you deserve a real kiss!"

Sally laughed. Her cheeks went pink. His arm was still around her, and lightly he brushed her lips—his boyish way of showing his gratitude to a friend.

And at that very moment the door burst open, and there on the threshold stood—

Dulcia Ledbury!

"Howard! How could you!" she cried. "And you, Sally. So it has been you, going behind my back like this all the time! You and Howard—"

Sally stood dumb and horror-stricken. Mr. Baynes, with a cry, sprang forward. But Dulcia drew back, drew away from him.

"Dulcia—"

"Don't speak to me! Don't ever speak to me again!" Dulcia sobbed. "I—I heard it all. Forget what I said yesterday—"

"But, Dulcia! Great Scott, you don't understand!" Howard cried. "We—we were only acting!"

"Acting! It sounded like it! I'm going home—going home! I never want to see you again!"

And with a sob Dulcia turned and rushed from the room.

"Dulcia—"

He made to rush after her, but Sally quickly caught his arm.

"No!" she said. "No, don't tell her—not yet, Mr. Baynes!"

THE BROKEN ENGAGEMENT



"DON'T tell her!" echoed Howard Baynes. "But I must! Sally, don't you realise what she is thinking? That you and I—"

Sally had recovered, and now she had a clear-cut grasp of the situation that amazed even herself.

"No!" she said again. "Tell her later, after the show!"

"But she's going home—she meant that! She'll never see me again. Sally, this has brought it home to me. Dulcia must know the truth."

Sally shook her head.

"I still say no," she insisted. "To-night is your big night, Mr. Baynes. Don't lose this marvelous opportunity. And—leave Dulcia to me. I—I think I can see a way to put everything right."

Howard Baynes stared at her in amazement. "You can, Sally? Dulcia means an awful lot to me. She means—everything. Yes, I realise that now! I'll give up the stage for Dulcia."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Sally told him. "You'll have your stage career and Dulcia if—if my idea works out as I hope it will."

"But what is this idea?"

"Never mind. Just leave it to me, Mr. Baynes—and keep your fingers crossed. Now get ready for the theatre, and the very best of luck!"

Sally went swiftly out of the room, even before he could murmur his thanks. She was quivering with excitement now. Oh, could she bring it off?

She rushed on, out of the masters' quarters and across to the Merrymakers' club-room. There she had promised to meet Don and Fay and Johnny. They would have to help.

Only half-formed, her idea was, but her brain worked swiftly, desperately as she ran.

Dulcia Ledbury was going home. She mustn't be allowed to go home! That was the thought hammering in Sally's mind.

She burst into the Merry-makers' club-room. There were her chums, all dressed in their best, ready for the theatre.

"Come on," Sally cried. "Johnny, have you got the car out?"

"Eh? Well, no, not yet—"

"Then get it out now—quickly!"

Johnny blinked in astonishment, but he didn't argue any further. Five minutes later he had his car out of the garage and the four chums were climbing into it.

"Well, what now, Sally?" Johnny asked, and he gave her a searching look. "And I'd still like to know why we're chasing round like firemen going to a fire!"

"Roxburgh, Johnny—as fast as you can make it!" Sally cut in urgently. "Mr. Baynes and Miss Ledbury have quarrelled. She's going home—and we've got to try to stop her!"

Now Sally felt that the time had come when she could reveal all that had been going on. Shouting above the roar of the engine, she told her chums everything.

They listened in amazement and then in growing excitement. And by that time the outskirts of Roxburgh City had been reached.

"Where to?" Johnny asked.

"Dulcia's hotel—the Wardonla," Sally told him.

The Wardonla was reached. Outside it stood the car which Dulcia had been using during her stay in Roxburgh. Sally jumped out and went into the hotel.

"Good-evening," she said to the reception clerk. "Has Miss Ledbury returned, please?"

"About ten minutes ago, miss."

"And—did she give any instructions about leaving?" Sally asked.

"Yes, Miss Ledbury is checking out almost immediately."

"I thought so," Sally gave the clerk her sweetest smile. "Some friends of hers want to give her a nice send-off. If you could tell me what her movements are, and say nothing about my inquiring, of course—" She paused.

"I understand." And the reception clerk thought he did. "Miss Ledbury is driving to the airport and catching the nine o'clock plane for Chicago. We made a reservation for her."

Sally thanked him and hurried back to her chums.

"Going by plane, eh?" Don whistled. "She's certainly not wasting any time. What now, Sally? What's the next move?"

"We've got to find some way—" Sally paused, a gleam of excitement coming into her eyes. "Yes, that might do the trick. Make it intriguing, appealing—"

She suddenly darted away towards the nearest kiosk. There her bewildered chums saw her buy a packet of envelopes, a writing pad.

"Sally, what are you going to do?" asked Fay eagerly.

"Write a little note—an anonymous note!" Sally replied, opening her handbag and taking out her fountain pen.

The note was written and put in an envelope. Then Sally moved across to Dulcia's car and placed the letter under the windshield wiper, where she would be sure to see it.

IT was a glittering scene, that opening night at the Roxy Theatre. Socialites were there, for the first performance of a new Lester Mantock play was always a big event.

Fay Manners, Don Weston and Johnny Briggs were there.

But Sally Warner was missing. The three chums, already in their seats in the stalls, looked round expectantly. In a few

minutes now the lights would dim and the curtain would go up.

A string orchestra played in the pit. Then the lights began to go down, the hubbub of voices died away.

The figure of a girl came rustling down the aisle. Don turned.

"Here she is!" he hissed.

And he rose in his seat as the programme girl ushered someone to the row in which the chums were seated.

It was Dulcia Ledbury!

She looked very pale, though there was a trace of redness about the rims of her eyes. In one clenched hand, all screwed up, was a piece of paper—and the chums guessed that it was the anonymous letter which Sally had written and which—as Sally had hoped—would bring her here. And enclosed with the note had been one of the tickets given Sally by Howard Baynes.

There was a complete hush in the auditorium as the curtain went up.

The play had begun—that play which was to have a sensationally long run in New York and which was to cause the critics and all theatre-goers to rave about a certain young actor whose name was David Howard—the stage name of Howard Baynes, and the name under which he was to win fame.

It was a costume play of the nineteenth century, and Howard Baynes, wearing side-locks and a small beard, was unrecognisable as the young master from Roxburgh College.

Don and Fay and Johnny wouldn't have recognised him but for the fact that they were in the know. And nor did Dulcia Ledbury realise who it was.

Impatiently she sat there, tense and on edge, as if waiting for something to happen. She, who had hated the stage ever since her mother had died, sitting here in a theatre!

In spite of herself the play began to grip her. And already people were beginning to murmur the name of David Howard.

"Isn't he marvellous?" It was Dulcia who suddenly said that, leaning over towards Fay.

Fay nudged Johnny, who nudged Don, and the three of them looked at each other delightedly. But they didn't tell Dulcia who David Howard really was. Let Sally do that when she came.

And Sally slipped unobtrusively into the vacant seat next to Dulcia just when the second act was working up to its climax.

And then—

There on the stage was Howard Baynes brilliantly putting over the scene in which he returned to his beloved Ellie.

The words rang out, clear and superbly delivered. And as Dulcia heard them she gave a violent start.

Beside her, Sally smiled.

"Those lines—do you remember them, Miss Ledbury?" she whispered softly.

And now Dulcia knew. Knew the truth of that scene in Howard Baynes' room at Roxburgh College—knew, too, that he was the brilliant actor on that stage before her.

"Sally!" she breathed. "So it was you who wrote that note telling me that I must come here and be sure to wait until the end of the second act if I wanted to learn the truth and find happiness. Oh, Sally!"

And she sat there content and happy—happy in the knowledge that her efforts to bring together Dulcia and Howard Baynes had not failed. The glow in Dulcia's eyes, the radiance of her face, told Sally that the other girl's prejudice against her sweetheart making a career for himself on the stage was gone.

"You'll have your stage career—and Dulcia," Sally had told him.

That had been her hope, and it was a hope fulfilled.

(End of this week's story.)

Sally & Co. will be here again in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL. Don't miss their latest adventures.



GIRL RIDER of the ROCKIES

A NIGHT ALARM

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

WYNNE COMPTON, who lived with her uncle at Silvertops Ranch, hoped to become a champion horse-rider. Her magnificent horse, Wonderlad, once belonged to Brock Barton, whose father owned the neighbouring V.B. Ranch.

Brock hated Wynne's uncle, declaring that he was responsible for his father being thrown into prison as an outlaw. Nevertheless, Wynne, liking Brock and wanting to help him, persuaded him to come to the ranch to train Wonderlad for her first big race. Wynne won the race and afterwards had the thrilling chance of entering herself and Wonderlad for the Rocky Mountains Championship, only to discover that one of the qualifying races was a steeplechase—and the only person who could train Wonderlad to jump for her was Brock. Wynne managed to persuade Brock to stay on at the ranch, but he accepted in such a way that she suspected he had another, mysterious reason for coming back.

"I'll come back to Silvertops Ranch!" said Brock Barton.

Wynne thrilled to his words. Brock was vitally necessary to the success of her horse-riding ambitions. She knew she could never train Wonderlad alone and unaided.

But she had not liked that steely glitter in Brock's grey eyes when the sheriff had mentioned the key. She could not help but recall Brock's thinly veiled threats against her uncle. And his mysterious visit to his father's forbidden ranch that morning was an affair not yet explained.

Had that—and the fact that the sheriff had mentioned evidence still to be gleaned from his father's ranch—anything to do with his decision to stop on at Silvertops?

"Oh, stuff," she told herself. "You're just worrying about things that may never happen. Brock might be stubborn. He might believe all sorts of things of uncle, but you know he'd never deliberately play a dirty trick. Give up worrying—"

Meantime, she would rejoice in the fact that Brock was staying on. That Brock was to be her helper in the training of Wonderlad.

The sheriff, with a wave of the hand, was trotting on his way. John Morton stood

thoughtfully looking after him for a moment and then turned and looked at Brock. His face was a little softer now.

"O.K.," he said gruffly. "I sure hope you'll make a do of it, Brock. But, as I said—no nonsense. I guess you'll be carrying straight on, eh?"

"No, not quite. I prefer to start to-morrow, if you don't mind. You see, I've got to go back to the railroad station and collect the things I left there this morning."

John Morton remembered and nodded, understanding.

"I guess that's right—sure! O.K., then. Expect you at Silvertops to-morrow."

"Early," Brock emphasised.

"Please yourself. Coming with me, Wynne?" Wynne hesitated a moment. She looked at Brock. He was gently patting Wonderlad's glossy neck. Then, with just the briefest glance at her, he raised his hat and turned to go.

She flashed him a smile.

"Oh, Brock, I'm so glad—"

"I'll be catching my bus," he returned, his face giving no hint of his feelings. Then, turning abruptly on his heel, he swung off along the road.

Wynne sighed a little. She wished wistfully that Brock would be more friendly. But she'd win him round, she resolved.

With her uncle she trotted back to the collecting ring, and there she saw Wonderlad put into the horse-box which was to carry him back to Silvertops. But, as John Morton was travelling back with Mack Glenthorne, Wynne, to her secret disgust, had to share Ted Hyam's buggy with Irma Glenthorne.

It was a long ride, with Ted Hyams perched stolidly on the driving-seat, and Irma, whose company Wynne was not fond of even at the best of times, slyly hinting that disaster was bound to overtake Silvertops Ranch if Brock was allowed to stay in it. Wynne, trying to think of other things, found herself becoming irritated with the manager's daughter.

"Will you please leave Brock Barton's name out of it?" she asked at last. "Uncle knows what he's doing!"

"Does he?" Irma smiled. "I wonder. If you ask me—"

"Please!" Wynne said shortly. "I don't want to hear any more."

Irma subsided with a sulky scowl. Then, to Wynne's profound relief, Silvertops came into view—Silvertops, she thought with a new rush of pleasure, which in future was to be Brock Barton's home as well as her own.

Her thoughts were all of Brock for the rest of that evening. They were joyous in the main, for she was visualising now the qualifying races before her for the Rocky Mountains Gold Cup, looking ahead with a tremendous thrill of anticipation to turning Wonderlad into a jumper and finally riding him in the qualifying steeplechase.

But underlying those happy thoughts was the conviction that Brock had his own secret reasons for being at the ranch.

She was thinking about that long after she had gone to bed that night, when the ranch was in darkness.

With Brock still in her mind, she heard a sound—a soft, shuffling sound, as of someone creeping past her door and on down the corridor towards the room which her uncle used as an office. Who? At this time of night?

Wynne sat up in bed, straining her ears. Unbidden, came the memory of the queer look which had lit up Brock's face when that afternoon the sheriff had mentioned the key to the office in the V.B. Ranch—that key which was now in her uncle's room—towards which those stealthy footsteps were heading.

But this could not be Brock. Brock was miles away, at the railroad station.

In a flash she was out of bed, paused just one moment to fling on her dressing-gown, and then had wrenched open her own door.

In the falling moonlight which filtered through the skylight she saw a figure outside the door of her uncle's room.

Wynne did not pause to think in the shock of that moment. She just opened her lips and let out a shout.

"Help! Burglar!"

The figure jumped round. Just for a second Wynne saw the grey, unrecognisable blob which was its face. Then it had turned; was running.

"Quick!" Wynne shouted. "Help—"

Doors opened, inquiring voices were suddenly raised. Wynne shot in pursuit of the unknown figure.

From the corridor opposite there came a cry. She saw Irma, dressing-gown billowing around her, rushing to head the intruder off—but too late. The unknown went leaping down the stairs three at a time.

"It's Brock!" screamed Irma. "It—"

Even in the desperate excitement of the moment Wynne found the voice to snap back, "Rubbish!" and flew on.

Now the fugitive had reached the bottom of the stairs; now was rushing along the passage that led to the back door. For a moment he became swallowed in the darkness. Then the door was wrenched open, and there came an unexpected crash, and Wynne and Irma saw the figure bolting into the yard.

The next minute they saw something else, too. Saw a great stream of water rushing back into the passage from outside; saw dimly the overturned water butt which now blocked the doorway.

The intruder had heaved over the water butt so as to block the doorway and delay the pursuit.

"Gosh!" Wynne gasped as she felt her feet in the water.

"We'll be flooded!" Irma shrieked. Wynne plunged forward. She caught the butt. With a great effort she got it twisted upright, and pushed it clear of the doorway. Outside, she looked excitedly around. But of the intruder there was no sign.

But there were several other figures on the scene—her uncle was one; Ted Hyams, the foreman, another. Ranchmen from the shacks

were turning out, and the whole place seemed alive now with scurrying figures. And then Mack Glenthorpe came up.

"Looks as if he got away, sir!" he told John Morton.

"Who? What on earth's happened?"

"The thief. The man who broke in," Glenthorpe said.

"But what man broke in?" John Morton demanded.

"Brock Barton," Irma said at once. "Wynne saw him, and I saw him—"

"I saw somebody. But neither of us saw Brock Barton," Wynne retorted. "For one thing it was too dark to see his face. For another, Brock Barton isn't here to-night. But someone did try to get into your office, uncle—perhaps had been in the office. Don't you think we'd better look in there first?"

Her uncle nodded. They hurried upstairs again. In the office, however, everything was intact; nothing had been touched. But there was one thing which nobody noticed except Wynne.

Outside the door, just where the intruder had stood, a slip of pasteboard gleamed palely in the moonlight, just before someone thought of switching on the electric light. Wynne hardly knew what impelled her to stoop and pick that paper up, and, without saying a word, stuff it in her pocket.

"Durned funny," John Morton growled. "What could the guy have been after in this room? Wynne, you're sure it wasn't Brock?"

"Positive!" Wynne said, but she was aware that she felt a wavering doubt. It could have been Brock. Except that Brock was miles away.

"But I think it was," Irma insisted. "I didn't see his face properly, but you couldn't make a mistake."

"Well, one of you's making one," John Morton decided. "O.K., let it rest. To-morrow morning I'll have a word with Brock if he does turn up, and if I find out it was him—well, I guess the sheriff's going to have another crook on his hands."

And there, after the most hectic ten minutes Silvertops had known since the arrest of Brock's father, the matter was left. And Wynne, telling herself that it couldn't have been Brock—that Brock wasn't a sneak thief—went back to her own bedroom.

There she looked at the slip of paper she had picked up outside her uncle's door—a slip which she knew the thief had dropped.

And her heart leapt painfully.

For it was the torn-off corner of an enclosure ticket which had been issued that morning to competitors and assistants in the Snakeriver Sweepstake. Each one of those tickets bore, in typed capitals, the name of its owner. Most of the name was on this ticket, but the rest was in the possession of the thief, presumably. But what she read on the strip in her hand told Wynne who that thief was.

For BROCK was typed on top of the fragment of ticket, and that could only stand for one name—Brock Barton! Then—then Brock had been here, Brock had broken into the ranch, had intended to steal something—the key!—from her uncle's room that night. Brock was the unknown intruder!

BROCK CONVINCES WYNNE



THE key!

She felt that she understood now why Brock had so abruptly changed his mind about coming to Silvertops Ranch—understood the meaning of that queer flash in his eyes when the sheriff had mentioned the key to her uncle.

That was why Brock had come back! Brock was after that key.

"But no," she fiercely contradicted herself next moment. "No! He didn't! He wouldn't! He's not that sort. There's some other explanation—must be some other explanation!"

After all, did this bit of ticket—which might have been picked up and dropped again by anybody—prove anything? Of course it didn't, she told herself, but she was very disturbed.

What would Brock say or do when John Morton tackled him on the subject on the morrow?

With the first golden dawn rays which stabbed between the jagged peaks of the nearby Rockies, Wynne was up, and washed and dressed, and down to the stables before the earliest riser was astir.

Wonderlad, standing placidly in his stall, gave a little jerk of the head as he sensed her. Catching up a brush, she began to groom him, one eye on the stable gate outside, through which Brock would have to come.

Suddenly she saw him, case in hand, as he fumbled with the catches of the gate. Eagerly she flew to meet him.

"Brock!"
"Good-morning!" he said curtly.
"Brock, where—where have you come from?"
"The Station Shack," he said. "Stopped there for the night. But why do you always ask questions as soon as you see me?"

"Because I've got to. Something happened last night—something serious. Brock, you—you didn't come to Silvertops during the night?"

His stare of astonishment gladdened her heart.

"Why should I come to the ranch?" he retorted. "What happened?"

"Somebody came. A—a burglar!" Wynne said. "He broke into the house and tried to get into uncle's office. And uncle's mad about it. He says he's going to call in the sheriff as soon as he finds out who the burglar was."

Brock stared at her strangely.
"A visit from the thief, eh? But why are you telling me all this?"

"Because—because—" she stumbled for words. "Brock, you—you don't know anything about it?"

"I? Why should I sneak in like a thief to burgle your ranch when I could have slept here and burgled in comfort from inside if I'd wanted to?"

She felt momentarily floored by the simple logic of that argument. But she was glad. She felt the mist of suspicion which had haunted her through the night dispelling as at the touch of a warming sun.

"And what should I want to steal from your uncle's office?" Brock challenged.

She hesitated, wondering if she dared voice her thoughts. Then, feeling that the air must be completely cleared, she came out with it.

"That key, Brock—the key you heard the sheriff mention to my uncle yesterday, the key that opens the office in your father's old ranch. You—you know now that it's in my uncle's room."

"Yes," he said without hesitation.
"Didn't you want to get hold of that key?" she challenged him.

Again his answer was immediate.
"No."

"But, Brock, it's the key of your father's office in your old ranch. I knew you were interested because—well, because you visited the ranch the other day, even though it's been locked up—"

"And shall visit the ranch again—when I wish," he answered disdainfully. "My father may be in prison, he may be called an outlaw, but he was framed by others—and therefore to me the V.B. Ranch still belongs to the Bartons."

She bit her lip, knowing that he thought her uncle had been behind the downfall of Vic Barton.

But she no longer doubted Brock. He had

not broken into the ranch the previous night. Her uncle appeared from the ranch house. He cast one swift look from her to Brock and then curtly nodded.

"Morning, Brock! So you've turned up. I confess I had my doubts. I want to talk to you."

"Yes?"
"Come along to the ranch house."

Obediently Brock went off, without a further glance at Wynne. But she laughed now—laughed in sheer lightheartedness because her every doubt had flown. At the same time she found herself wondering. For if Brock was not the mystery intruder of the night, who was?

For what purpose had he intended to burgle her uncle's room?

She felt suddenly that here was a bigger mystery.

She carried on with her grooming. The minutes quickly passed until she saw Brock come striding out of the ranch house.

He looked a little bitter.
"Is—is everything all right?" she asked anxiously.

"If you mean is your uncle satisfied that I am not a burglar—yes," he said disdainfully. "Guess he had only to phone the Station Shack to prove that I was there all night."

"Oh, Brock, I'm glad—so glad!" Then she noticed he no longer carried his bag. "And—and you have got your quarters in the ranch?"

"Yes. And, look here, if people would only stop asking questions I'd like to start work. Now, let me saddle up Wonderlad and see what you can do in the way of jumping."

And Wynne, strangely happy, her mind again completely at ease, nodded eagerly.

EXCITING TRAINING



"JUMPING," said Brock, "is our problem. That is what we have to practise—and practise—and practise. Wonderlad can run on the flat, and you can ride him on the flat. So we've no need to worry about that."

They had ridden out—she on Wonderlad, he on Ranger—to

the foothills of the Rockies, abounding here in clumps of bushes, rivulets and streams and flat, sandy patches that combined to make an ideal mixed training ground.

And Brock, now that he was wholly absorbed in horse training, now that he was concentrating on the task he loved so well, seemed to her to be a different boy altogether.

She felt now that she was seeing the real Brock—the unembittered Brock who could forget the wrongs he vowed had been done to his father for the moment, the Brock who was interested in one thing only—to make the best of his job. His utter sincerity in that direction somehow thrilled Wynne.

"Wonderlad is sure a fine horse. He'll live up to his name—the name I gave him," Brock said. "But he must be coaxed. First we'll try him across the smaller stream, paced by Ranger, who is a natural jumper."

"Yes," Wynne humbly agreed.

And so the first lesson was taken—but not with success for Wynne. Ranger jumped the stream with ease, but when Wynne put Wonderlad at the same obstacle he planted his forelegs hard, gave a furious snort, and just refused to jump. Three times they attempted the task, each time with Wynne feeling more crestfallen and humiliated.

"You must give him complete confidence in you," Brock said, always taking the horse's part. "He's not like other horses. He won't jump with just anyone on his back. Now let me try him."

He tried him. Wynne did not know whether

(Please turn to page 356.)



The Holiday-Maker WITHOUT A MEMORY

THE MASKED MAN'S TRICKERY!

DOROTHY MASTERS, who had lost her memory, was one of the guests at South-Ward Ho Holiday Camp. There she met Basil Kerr, whose uncle owned the camp.

Basil and Stephen Wilkins, the manager, were worried about some recent thefts of war trophies from the Manor House in the grounds of the camp.

When later Dorothy secretly visited the Manor House she found something which made it seem that she was the unknown thief, and later Esme Young, a spiteful girl who was jealous because Dorothy had been selected for the camp swimming team in preference to herself, accused her of being the culprit. Archie Speller, who fancied himself as a detective, declared, however, that the thief was a man—the owner of a burglar's kit, bearing the initials "J. S.," which had been found in Smugglers' Cove.

Dorothy received a message from a masked man signing himself "J. S.," ordering her to meet him in the old watch-tower on the cliff-top. She did so, and the mystery man told her that before losing her memory she had committed the thefts at the Manor House, and he declared he had a confession proving her guilt. Horrified, Dorothy determined to get back the confession, and later that night returned to the watch-tower. The door was locked, so she began to climb up the wall to a window.

HER heart in her mouth, expecting every moment that the ivy would tear away under her weight, Dorothy climbed her way up the stone wall of the watch-tower.

Far below her the incoming tide thundered and splashed, and she shuddered as she thought of the jagged rocks lying there. To look down she knew would be fatal, so resolutely she kept her gaze glued on the narrow window above her.

How high up and far away it seemed. Would she never reach it? Already her arms were aching under the strain.

Dust, shaken from the tangled ivy, set her sneezing, and, suddenly, came the danger which she had feared.

As she reached up to get a new hold with her right hand, there was an ominous rending sound. Under her feet the ivy had snapped and broken. She was saved from falling only by her frenziedly clutching left hand.

By GAIL WESTERN

For one sickening moment she hung there, swinging dizzily to and fro, then she got a second hold with her other hand, and frantically groped for a foothold.

Shaken by the narrowness of her escape, she rested for a second or two, then, screwing up her courage, resumed her dangerous climb.

Once or twice there came again those ominous creaks which sent her heart jumping up to her throat, but, fortunately, the ivy did not entirely break away, and at last her head and shoulders rose above the window-sill, and she found herself gazing into the circular chamber in which had been enacted that dramatic encounter between herself and the man in the mask.

Thankfully she clambered through the glassless window, and with a gasp of relief dropped down on to the stone floor. Pulling the torch from her pocket, she switched it on and let its bright rays sweep over the bare walls.

"Now for the confession," she whispered. "I simply must find it, otherwise—"

She finished with a shiver. Grim would be the prospect then. While he had that confession in his possession the man in the mask held her securely in his power. Unless she wanted to face the humiliation of exposure and the possibility of being sent to prison, she would have to obey his every order.

Oh, what a fool she had been, she told herself wretchedly. What on earth had possessed her ever to enter into league with the villainous "J. S."? What possible circumstance had made her commit those thefts from the Manor House?

"I must have been mad—completely crazy!" she muttered fiercely. "But it's all over now. I'm going to make amends. Once I've found and destroyed that confession, I'll defy him to do his worst!"

But where was the secret hiding-place in the walls?

To her dismay she found no trace of it. Every square of stone seemed alike and immovably embedded.

Oblivious of the passing of time, she searched on, and suddenly a gleam of hope entered her eyes. In one corner was a small carving in the shape of a rose. Was it just an ornament, or—

Hardly daring to breathe, she pulled at the stone decoration, then pressed. Instantly there came a faint whirring sound, and a cry of triumph left her lips.

For one of the blocks of stone had swung outward, like a door, revealing a black cavity, and lying there, glistening white in the light of her torch, was a heavily-sealed foolscap envelope.

Her confession!

Almost quivering with delight, she snatched it up and with eager hands ripped open the envelope. Inside was a folded sheet of paper. That must be the incriminating document itself, she decided, and, drawing it out, smoothed it open.

The smile faded from her face and she gave a horrified gasp of bewilderment.

The sheet of paper was blank!

What did it mean? Had the man in the mask been too cunning for her? Guessing that she might attempt to get hold of the vital document, had he substituted this worthless scrap of paper for the real confession?

Dazedly, Dorothy examined the envelope.

Her name was written on the front, and in one corner was the blob of fallen wax she had noticed when the man in the mask had mockingly brandished the envelope before her horrified eyes.

"This is the same envelope—I'm positive it is!" she whispered wonderingly. "And the seals haven't been tampered with. Then—then—"

Suppose the man in the mask had lied! Suppose she had never signed a confession! Suppose this dummy envelope had just been a trick to frighten her into handing over the mystery map she had found in her possession?

The more she thought about it, the more certain she became that that was the truth.

But if the villainous "J. S." had lied about the confession, he might also have lied about her being his partner!

Her heart seemed to glow and swell; a great wave of tumultuous joy swept over her.

"I don't believe it was I who broke into the Manor House!" she whispered. "I don't believe I am a thief. It was all lies he told me!"

Trembling, feeling as if she were standing on air, she gazed about her with eyes in which glistened tears of joy.

Oh, if only she could be assured of that! If only she could prove it beyond all doubt! What a difference it would make to her whole life!

No longer then need she fear the man in the mask. No longer need she flinch beneath Esme Young's spiteful accusations. No longer would there be anything to mar her friendship with Basil Kerr.

Desperately she racked her brains, striving to pierce that horrible black curtain which divided her from the past. Never had the loss of her memory caused her so much anguish as it did now.

"It's no use," she told herself. "I don't remember a thing. Everything that happened before I came to the holiday camp is blotted out. I don't—"

A sudden sound made her break off her thoughts. Her heart gave an alarmed leap and she stiffened.

What was that?

Footsteps pattering on the spiral staircase which led up to the top of the tower!

Someone was hurrying up to this very room. But who could it be?

Dorothy did not know, but some instinct warned her that it would be very dangerous for her to be discovered here.

Only stopping long enough to replace the envelope in the secret cavity and to swing to the stone door, she darted across to the rickety wooden ladder which gave access to the flat roof.

Ascending it, she pushed up the trapdoor, climbed through the opening, and crouched there, holding the trapdoor open just an inch

or two, so that she could peep down into the room below.

Only just in time.

Next moment a girlish figure entered the circular chamber—a greyish figure, the sight of which made Dorothy gasp. A figure dressed like an old-time fisher-girl, with a shawl shading her face.

It was as if Jess Stornaway, the once notorious girl smuggler, had arisen from the grave in order to return to her former haunts!

THE THIEF AT LAST



FASCINATED, momentarily held in the grip of superstitious fear, Dorothy could not take her eyes from that figure. It had such an uncanny appearance, and it seemed to float rather than walk across the room.

Surely it could not be a real ghost!

Even as Dorothy tried to smother the fantastic fancy there came a very human sound from down below, and she knew that the fisher-girl was very much alive.

A queer-looking bundle clutched in her arms, the unknown had halted by the window, and as she gazed through she gave a gasp of alarm.

"They are still on my track by the sound of it," she muttered. "The quicker I make myself scarce the better."

As she spoke she glided across to the far wall, and there came a muffled whir as the secret door swung open.

Dorothy's eyes gleamed excitedly.

"That's the man in the mask's confederate—not me," she told herself, and a thrill ran through her as she knew that her dazzling theory of a minute ago was correct.

Wonderingly she watched the fisher-girl place her bundle into the cavity in the wall, close the stone block, then disappear from the room as swiftly as she had entered.

Throwing back the trapdoor, Dorothy hurried down the ladder and re-opened the secret cavity.

What had the unknown hidden there?

With eager fingers she untied the bundle, then a gasp escaped her lips, for the gleam of metal was reflected from her torchlight. The metal of an old German steel helmet and a swastika-ornamented copper vase.

"War trophies!" she exclaimed. "These have come from the Manor House! Then—then this settles it. I'm not the thief. It's that girl who's been causing all the trouble—not me!"

Her eyes flashed fiercely as she thought of the masked man's treachery, and then, as she remembered the strange-torn map she had in her possession, glanced down at the seemingly valueless war trophies, her brow furrowed in bafflement.

Why was "J. S.'s" unknown confederate robbing the Manor House of its trophies? What connection could they have with the torn map the man in the mask had ordered her to hand over?

Though she had proved her own innocence, yet the mystery had become even more intriguing and bewildering.

And who could be the ghostly Jess Stornaway—the girl for whose misdeeds Dorothy was in danger of getting the blame?

Was Archie Speller's theory correct? Did she belong to the holiday camp? Dorothy shrank from the thought. It was horrible to suspect that there was a traitor amongst those light-hearted holiday-makers. And then, as she retied the bundle, she gave a gasp.

For she recognised the cloth in which the trophies had been wrapped. It was a face towel, and plainly embroidered on it in red silk were the words: "Southward Ho Holiday Camp."

"Then—then it's true," Dorothy whispered. "She does belong to the camp. There is a traitor!"

But who could she be? Involuntarily her mind fastened on Esme Young's name. Certainly that girl had shown herself to be unscrupulously malicious, but was she also a thief?

Dorothy did not know—but she meant to find out.

Putting the bundle on the floor she groped in her pocket for a pencil, and, with a chuckle, scribbled a few words on the back of the sealed envelope.

"I am wise to your trickery now—and you can threaten until you're black in the face as far as I am concerned."

She placed the envelope back in the cavity, reclosed the stone block, then chuckled again as she picked up the bundle containing the war trophies.

"I'd like to see his face when he reads my message—and finds his booty's vanished into the bargain!"

Feeling happier than she had done for days, she went racing down the spiral staircase. Possibly the ghostly Jess Stornaway had left the door unlocked, she thought, but in that she was mistaken. Not only was the door secured, but her torchlight revealed no trace of fresh footsteps on the dusty floor.

How, then, had the fisher-girl managed to make her escape?

"She must have vanished in the same way as the man in the mask," Dorothy told herself, disappointed, she climbed the stone steps again. "That means there is a secret exit. Good! One of these days I'll have another search for it."

Feeling satisfied with the result of her night's mission, she re-entered the circular room and, too pleased to think greatly about the risk, swung her legs over the window-sill.

The bundle dangling from her clenched teeth, she began to clamber down the ivy, but suddenly she paused.

What was that?
To her ears came angry, excited shouts, and she gave a startled gasp as she remembered what the fisher-girl had exclaimed. Something about someone still being on her track! That suggested that her latest daring coup had been discovered and that she had been pursued. But could her pursuers still be on her track?

Uneasily Dorothy turned her head, and she nearly slipped and fell headlong as she saw the number of angrily gesticulating figures which were scrambling over the wet, slippery rocks far below.

Archie Speller, the would-be detective, and half a dozen other young holiday-makers!

"There she is! There's that thief of a girl!"

Clearly the boy detective's shout reached the petrified Dorothy, and plainly she saw his pointing hand.

She gave a horrified gulp.

What could she say if they caught her? Thanks to the spiteful work of Esme Young, some of them already suspected her. If they saw her with the stolen war trophies in her possession they would never believe her story. They would think she was the mystery thief.

"Golly, I've got to make myself scarce!" Dorothy gulped.

Careless of the creaking ivy, she continued the perilous descent at frantic speed. Gasping, she at last dropped down on the cliff-top, but by then Archie & Co. were half way up the winding path that led up from the beach, and suddenly there came a shrill shout in Esme Young's voice.

"I'll bet it's Dorothy Masters!" she asserted. "Come on—after her! She mustn't escape!"

Led by Archie, the crowd of boys and girls came pelting up the steep path, and at sight of them Dorothy's nerve utterly failed her. The incriminating bundle swinging from one hand, she broke into a wild run across the springy turf, heading for the near-by holiday camp.

But, despite her feeling of desperation, one thought kept nagging at her brain. If Archie & Co. had been chasing the real thief, what had

they been doing down on the beach? Like a lightning flash the answer came.

"The secret exit from the tower must lead down to the seashore," Dorothy told herself, then gave another gasp as she remembered their early discoveries in the Smugglers' Cove. "That's where it leads to—I'll bet it is!"

But this was no time to speculate on the mystery. The whole crowd was in hot pursuit, spreading across the cliff-top like a pack of hounds after a fox.

Owing to the faint moonlight they caught only a shadowy glimpse of Dorothy, as they had done of the real thief. Therefore, there was nothing to tell them that they were chasing the wrong girl.

"If they catch me—oh dear!" Dorothy panted, as frantically she ran on.

Before her loomed the trees which screened the boundary of the holiday camp. Through them she dashed, the dry twigs cracking underfoot. And from behind came fresh shouts. Blindly she tore on, hardly aware of the fact that she was heading straight for the Manor House itself until, suddenly, she saw its black shape confronting her.

Involuntarily she swerved, tearing round to the back, but the pursuit was gaining every minute. At the foot of the garden she glimpsed a toolshed, piles of empty packing-cases piled against one wall. One frantic glance she flung behind her. For a moment her pursuers were out of sight.

"Now's my chance to dodge them!" she gasped, and went running round behind the shed.

"Oh—"
Too late she became aware of the tall, boyish figure standing there. Colliding with him, she recoiled with a startled cry, and the bundle, dropping from her grasp, clattered to the ground and burst open.

"Dorothy!" came in an amazed cry. "What are you doing here?"

And she found herself confronted by the last person she had expected to encounter here—Basil Kerr, the boy host!

WOULD BASIL EXPOSE HER?



EXHAUSTED by that frantic sprint through the grounds, Dorothy could only stand there, staring helplessly.

At her silence Basil's expression underwent a change, then he gave a sharp cry as suddenly his gaze was attracted by the bundle at his feet.

As if unable to believe his own eyes, he dropped to one knee and examined the contents of the bundle, and another startled gasp escaped him as he saw what they were.

"The trophies that were stolen from the Manor House to-night!" he exclaimed. "The ones taken by that girl," Archie & Co. were chasing. But surely—

He broke off, and they both stiffened as from near by came the sound of excited voices. The boy detective and his companions, having burst through the trees to find their quarry gone, were scurrying to and fro, hunting her.

Basil's eyes were wide and horrified.

"It's—it's you they're hunting," he stated, his voice little more than a whisper.

Mutely Dorothy nodded.

"Then—then—"
He stopped. It was as if he could not bring himself to voice his suspicions, but the gesture he made towards the trophies on the ground was eloquent enough.

An icy hand seemed to clutch at Dorothy's heart. The knowledge that the boy she liked so much believed she had betrayed him came like a knife thrust.

Agitatedly she raised her hand protestingly. "I know what you're thinking," she gulped. "Because Archie & Co. are hunting me you

GIRL RIDER OF THE ROCKIES

(Continued from page 352.)

think I'm the thief, but it isn't true. If you'll only let me explain—"

"Explain?" His eyes were hurt. "What is there to explain? You admit it's you everyone's been chasing, and these"—he indicated the trophies with a grim hand—"these speak for themselves."

Before Dorothy could attempt to say anything else there arose a sudden shout from the front of the Manor House:

"What price that old shed over there? That would make a likely hiding-place. Come on, let's look in there!"

There was a shout of assent, then the thud of hurrying feet.

Dorothy shrank back in despair. At that moment there was only one thought in her mind. At all costs she must not be found here. It was bad enough having to face Basil, but to be caught apparently red-handed by all the rest was simply unbearable. After all the shocks she had received, she felt she couldn't bear the one which now impended.

"I—I can't face them," she whispered. Basil paid no attention. He seemed to be oblivious of her shrinking figure. Bent over the fallen war trophies, he was engaged in bundling them together again.

Her face paled in the gloom, Dorothy faced him appealingly.

"Basil—please," she breathed. "Keep them off until I've had a chance to explain. Don't let them—"

She finished with a frantic gasp as she heard the searchers reach the front of the shed, and, in the grip of a wild panic, she plunged amongst the piled-up packing-cases, there to crouch out of sight, her heart pounding madly.

From the other side of the packing-cases came a chorus of startled cries. Archie & Co., rounding the corner of the shed, had suddenly glimpsed the boy host.

"Basil!"

"Golly, how long have you been here?" added Archie Speller eagerly.

Basil made a vague gesture.

"Oh, about ten minutes. When you went off chasing that girl I stayed behind, thinking I might take a leaf from your book, Archie, and pick up a clue or two."

"Ten minutes!" Behind his horn-rimmed spectacles the boy detective's eyes gleamed. "Then you must have spotted her! That girl thief, I mean! We followed her to the beach, then she turned tail and came running—But, I say!" he finished with a wondering cry. "What's that you've got there?"

He pointed to the bundle which Basil was still clutching.

Hidden behind the packing-cases, Dorothy's heart sank. It looked as if nothing could save her now, and with horror she realised how foolish she had been to hide like this. Her panic-stricken act would seem to them like the prompting of a guilty conscience.

"It contains the stolen trophies," Basil replied. "She—she dropped it when she collided with me in her hurry to get away."

"Collided with you!" Archie gave a triumphant yell. "Then you actually saw her face to face! That means you must have recognised her. Come on, don't keep us in suspense, old man. Who was she?"

Those icy fingers seemed to be clutching again at Dorothy's heart. She found it difficult to breathe. In an agony of suspense she waited for Basil's reply—the reply which must seal her doom at the holiday camp; the reply which must shatter completely all her newly conceived plans.

And as she waited, from the excited group which had gathered around the boy host there sounded a shrill, familiar laugh.

"No need to tell us," asserted Esme Young. "We know already. It's that trickster Dorothy Masters!"

Only Basil can save Dorothy, but can she expect him to help her now? Next Friday's instalment brings tense thrills. Don't miss it.

to be utterly ashamed of herself or more amazed than ever of Brock's horsemanship as Wonderlad sailed over the stream as though it was a mere ditch to be taken in his stride. She was full of praise as Brock handed him back.

"Encourage him," he said. "The normal aids for making a horse jump are not of first importance with Wonderlad. You've got to convince him that you're good, too—that you know what he can do and are trusting him to do it. I'll stand on the other side of the stream this time. We've got to make Wonderlad happy to jump with you on his back."

Hoping for the best, she put Wonderlad at the jump, while Brock stood on the opposite side of the stream, snicking his fingers in encouragement.

It was obvious at once to Wynne that Wonderlad had his eyes on the boy; she felt the eager tremble that ran through the horse's frame. And this time, to her delight, Wonderlad did jump—magnificently. But when she looked at Brock for approval he shook his head.

"You tried to jump him too high," he said. "This isn't a hurdle, I guess, it's just a ground jump. Try again, I think he'll come over so long as I'm here. Loosen rein this time. Wonderlad hates a pull on his mouth, however slight, when jumping."

Wynne listened intelligently and made a better jump. She tried a third time, and at last Brock nodded approval.

Wynne began to feel happier, more confident, but at times during that first exercise she had felt like a raw novice, despite her extensive training in England.

Oh, there was no doubt that Brock was a wizard with horses. No doubt that he was just the very best helper she could have obtained for the task she had undertaken. But she knew she had a long way to go before she could expect Wonderlad to jump for her as he did for his old master. And she knew, too, that without Brock at her side every inch of the way, she would fail.

"You're getting on," Brock said, and there was the nearest thing to a smile on his face that Wynne had ever seen. "Now, once more before breakfast. You haven't much time to train before the steeplechase. It's next week, remember."

"Next week?" she asked with a start.

He nodded.

"I heard about it last night at the Station Shack. Guess you'll receive your notification by this morning's post."

Once more she was thrilled. Once more her hopes went soaring and a new eagerness filled her. She had had no idea that the steeplechase, second in the qualifying races for the Gold Cup, was so near at hand. Again she prepared to mount Wonderlad, but before she could do so she saw another horseman approaching. It was her uncle.

She paused, apprehension seizing her as he came up. The look on her uncle's face told her that trouble was in the air. The quick, suspicious glance he flung towards Brock told her that he was connecting the boy with that trouble.

"Uncle, what is it?" She went towards him. "What's the matter?"

Her uncle's eyes glinted beneath the broad brim of his hat.

"Matter enough," he snapped. "My office has been broken into during the last two hours and the key I was taking over to the V.B. Ranch this morning has been stolen!"

It is obvious that Wynne's uncle has suspicions of Brock. Are they well-founded suspicions? Next Friday's exciting chapters will tell you.



June's DETECTIVE RIVAL

(Continued
from
page 341.)

wall! Footprints on a wall! It doesn't make sense, unless—

She caught in her breath quickly as a strange theory flashed into her mind—strange and startling. It would explain everything, except the identity of the daring thief. If only she could put it to the test—

After lunch, June strolled out into the grounds carrying a book.

As several of the guests were in sight, she sat down on a rustic seat, awaiting a chance to slip away unnoticed. The book lay open on her lap, as a scoffing voice spoke suddenly behind her.

"Botany—my hat! Is this how you earn your living as a detective, Miss Gaynor?"

June turned with a slight start, flushing a little as she encountered Horace Clayton's mocking stare. Then a curious gleam crept into her eyes.

"I'm reading about moss," she said artlessly. "It's awfully interesting. There's a kind that grows mostly on rocks and high peaks."

"Really?" drawled Horace. "And there's a kind of daisy that grows mostly on lawns—though I prefer to look for footprints, and if you'll take my tip, you'll do the same!" He grinned knowingly. "I've an idea that scoundrel David Brent is still lurking in the grounds—and I'm out to catch him!"

June's heart missed a beat, though she forced a smile.

"I wish you luck!" she murmured. "It's much too hot to be so strenuous."

With a scornful grunt Horace strode on his way. June looked round quickly and rose to her feet. The garden was almost deserted now, except for the invalid Dr. Benny, who gave her a kindly smile as she paused for a moment by his chair.

"I like your spirit, my dear," he declared. "That young Clayton needs taking down a peg or two!"

June smiled gratefully, and offered to adjust the invalid's rug that had slipped from his chair. She watched him as he wheeled himself towards the house—then, turning quickly, she darted into the shrubbery, emerging close to the grotto.

Behind the grotto she had seen a flight of rough, precipitous steps leading to the Eagle's Nest. The next moment she was climbing them, her heart beating quickly, her pulses racing. She was determined to put her startling theory to the test without delay.

It was clear that the rough-hewn steps were rarely used, for they were slippery with moss and lichen, and more than once June stumbled.

But at length, out of breath and dishevelled, she reached the summit, and looked down from her lofty perch on to the roof of Gien View Guest House.

The hurried peep she took made her feel rather giddy, but she held tightly to a stunted bush as she stepped nearer to the edge.

If her startling theory was correct, the mystery thief was an athlete of unusual daring—a mountaineer, or—

June hastily put aside the thought, for in spite of herself she found her mind turning to the likeable David Brent.

She shivered slightly as a cloud momentarily blotted out the warm sunshine, and she remembered those sinister marks on the wall of the barred study.

Impatiently the girl detective shook off her uneasiness, and tried to decide what her famous uncle would have done in her place. She had come here to test her theory—and she would not allow imaginary fears to deter her!

A few yards below her was a sloping ledge, covered with bright green moss. A stunted tree-stump protruded from the cliff at that point, and June's sharp eyes detected something white fluttering in the faint breeze.

Dropping to her knees, she tested the sinewy creeper that trailed thickly over the rock. It was as strong as cord and would easily support her light weight.

Taking a firm hold on the creeper, June slid over the edge, lowering herself cautiously on to the mossy platform. Her heart thumped excitedly as, holding on with one hand, she examined the moss. It was identical with the scrap she had found by the french windows—and there were several grazes where it had been bruised by the heels of a climber!

Her pulses racing, she turned her attention to the tree-stump. The bark was deeply cut by a rope or grappling-iron—and caught in a splinter of wood was a man's torn handkerchief, with the woven initial "B."

June bit her lip as she stared at the incriminating clue. "B" stood for "Brent"—but no, that was impossible! David was innocent! She began almost to wish that she had not followed this sinister trail.

A faint sound from above caused her to glance up sharply—and the girl detective's blood ran cold as a stifled cry was torn from her lips.

Peering at her over the edge was a face hidden by a black cowl—and a gloved hand was reaching towards the creeper on which she clung.

A BATTLE OF WITS



FOR a moment June's heart froze as the creeper trembled in her grasp. She stole one swift, horrified glance below her, and her free hand clutched instinctively at the tree-stump.

The hooded enemy above was trying either to shake her from her precarious hold, or to drag her up towards him. Both alternatives were terrifying enough, but June determined to keep her head.

Below her the rock sloped steeply, with only a few precarious footholds among the crevices and stunted bushes. If the worst came to the worst, she would make a desperate bid to escape—but meanwhile she clung on for dear life as the creeper jerked and twisted between her clutching fingers.

With a sharp snapping sound it parted, and with her weight thrown suddenly on to one arm June's free hand was torn from its hold on the tree-stump.

She felt a sickening sensation of falling. She made a desperate grab, clutching at a stunted bush. A sharp pain stabbed through her arm and she felt suddenly faint as her grip slackened.

Distantly she heard a shout, and was conscious of a breath-taking, agonising jolt, then—her senses left her.

June opened her eyes dazedly a few minutes later, to stare in bewilderment into a rugged, anxious face.

"David—David Brent!" she gasped, and sat up, trying to collect her thoughts.

She was sitting on the coarse grass at the foot of the Eagle's Nest. David was bending over her, and behind him she could see the dark opening of the grotto.

The young man's face was pale, but June looked instinctively at his hand, and gave a little sigh of relief. He was not wearing gloves, though by the state of his clothes he looked as though he had been climbing.

"What—what happened?" breathed June. "Goodness knows—but you had a narrow shave," muttered David, mopping his forehead. "I heard you cry out, and saw you falling. You caught at a bush and swung there, holding on by some miracle till I was able to climb up to you."

June stared at him, memory slowly coming back to her.

"Then—you saved my life," she declared simply.

"You're doing as much for Avril—and me," retorted David gruffly.

"But you shouldn't be here!" declared June, suddenly uneasy.

"Dash it, I couldn't slink away and leave Avril to face the music!" protested David stubbornly.

June was thinking of the cowed figure, and the handkerchief still clutched in her hand—the handkerchief with the incriminating initial.

She wondered whether to mention it, but just then her sharp ears heard a sound of cautious footsteps on the garden path.

"Quickly!" she breathed, grabbing David's arm. "Get back—in there—and don't make a sound!"

She pushed him into the grotto, and swiftly arranged the creeper that hung over it—only in the nick of time.

A tall, immaculate figure stepped from the bushes as she turned, hastily smoothing her ruffled hair.

"You!" exclaimed Horace, a frown crossing his good-looking face as he caught sight of her. "What have you been up to now?"

June smiled at her persistent rival, though her heart was thumping quickly.

"Looking for clues," she said. "We're both doing that—aren't we?"

"Umph," remarked Horace suspiciously. "You've got yourself into a pretty mess, I must say. Been climbing, or something?"

"Just a little exercise," agreed June guardedly.

"H'm!" he snorted. "Well, don't get into mischief, that's all." He paused, then went on: "I'm on young Brent's trail, y'know. I've discovered that he's been in the habit of meeting Miss Deacon in the grounds. Thought I heard voices as I came along here just now." He eyed her sharply. "You've not seen anyone lurking around?"

June's heart missed a beat as she heard a faint movement within the grotto.

"Oh, yes—lots of people," she rejoined carelessly. "There was old Dr. Benny in his wheelchair, and Mrs. Frinton—"

"Don't talk rot!" cut in the other huffily. "I mean anyone suspicious. The voices seemed to come from about here."

He took a step towards the grotto and June clenched her hands. If David was caught, it would lead to worse disaster! The secret enemy was bound to strike again—

Quick as thought, June snatched up a stone as the boy sleuth's back was momentarily turned.

There was a tinkling crash behind a near-by clump of bushes and Horace spun round, one foot in the grotto.

"What—what was that?" he demanded sharply.

June was shading her eyes with her hand. "It looked—it looked, like someone running towards the house," she breathed.

"Come on!" rapped Horace eagerly. "I'll get him this time!"

June allowed the active youth to outdistance her, and hurried back to the grotto.

Cutting short David's muttered thanks, she gripped his arm.

"You want to help Avril," she breathed, "and we'll need your help—to-night. Keep watch on the Eagle's Nest! If you see anything suspicious, flash a message to the house. Morse. I'll be watching out for it. Will you do that?"

"You bet!" declared David, gripping her hand. "Glad Avril's got you for a friend, Miss Gaynor—"

"Don't waste time now," interrupted June tersely. "Slip out of the grounds, before Horace guesses he's been tricked. I'll be relying on you to-night!"

June encountered Avril as she hurried back to the house. The girl caught her anxiously by the arm.

"Have you seen David?" she breathed.

June glanced at her warningly, for there were other guests around. Slipping her hand through the girl's arm she led her to her room.

Quickly she described her encounter with David, but allowed the other to think that it was an accident, making no mention of the hooded figure or her narrow escape.

"He's promised to keep watch at the foot of the Eagle's Nest—and flash a signal if he sees anything suspicious," she explained.

"You—you think something might happen to-night?" whispered Avril, her face paling slightly.

June nodded thoughtfully.

"The new guest is expected this evening. Your father spoke of locking his jewels in the study—"

"He's arrived," put in Avril quickly, "and his valuables have been locked away. The locksmiths have been here this afternoon, and the study's burglar-proof, father says."

June glanced out of the window at the rugged cliff silhouetted against the setting sun, its shadow falling across the house.

"Perhaps," she breathed. "Anyway, I'm taking no chances, Avril. I'll keep watch for David's signal."

"Where?" breathed Avril.

"On the terrace," murmured June. "After the others are in bed. Someone must be ready—to give the alarm."

"Can I join you?" whispered the other girl eagerly.

"Of course, if you like. But"—she hesitated—"it might be dangerous."

"Then I will join you!" declared Avril, squeezing her hand.

June made her preparations composedly after dinner that evening, but her heart was beating rather quickly. Her terrifying encounter on the Eagle's Nest had left her more shaken than she cared to admit.

Horace, too, was making his preparations. June could see that by the self-important way he moved among the guests, making himself particularly pleasant to his host and to the wealthy new visitor.

"Don't worry about your jewels, sir," he declared. "If the thief tries to get in, he'll find me ready for him! He'll hardly waste time on the barred study window—and the skylight's out of the question, unless he's got wings. The door opening into the lounge is his only chance, and that's where I'll be waiting to nab him!" He looked across at June with a patronising smile. "You'll be able to sleep safely in your bed to-night, Miss Gaynor," he added meaningfully.

"Thank you," murmured June, with a disarming smile. But she was puzzled by his manner—puzzled and a trifle uneasy. How much did Horace know, or suspect?

June put through a mysterious phone-call before retiring to her room to complete her preparations. It was a dark, sultry night, with low clouds that practically blotted out the moon.

The big house was silent as she donned a

light coat and, slipping a torch and a whistle into her pocket, crept softly downstairs.

In the darkened hall she encountered Avril. June felt the other girl trembling as she gripped her arm.

"Sure you wouldn't rather stay indoors?" June breathed.

"No—please—I want to come out with you!" whispered Avril.

"Come on, then!"

Together the two girls crept out of the conservatory door on to the terrace, and June carefully locked the door behind them.

"How do you think he—the thief—will try to get in?" breathed Avril.

June shook her head, with an anxious glance at the lowering sky.

"I wish I knew for certain. I've got a strange theory, but it mayn't be right. In any case, we can rely on David's signal to put us on our guard!"

She led the way round the house to the heavily barred window of the study. They would be sheltered there by the bushes, and at the same time they could look out for the expected signal.

She peered through the bars, but the locked study was silent and in darkness.

Avril shivered slightly, groping over her shoulder.

"My scarf," she whispered. "I—I must have dropped it in the shrubbery as we came through."

June looked round quickly.

"Wait here," she breathed. "I'll fetch it for you."

She hurried back through the shrubbery, looking round for the scarf. It was lying on the ground near the old summerhouse, but as she bent to snatch it up her heart gave a violent jump.

A light was flashing through the trees—short and long flashes, in swift, urgent succession.

David's signal!

Her pulses racing, June watched, reading the terse, jerky message—and as she deciphered it her face turned a shade paler.

"Danger—immediate—warn Avril—now a minute to lose—"

Abruptly the message ceased, leaving the darkness more intense.

"Avril!" whispered June.

With a sharp stab of anxiety, she turned to run—but at the same instant a figure stepped softly from the shadows and a hand closed tightly on her shoulder.

"Got you!" rapped a familiar, aggressive voice. "I begin to see through your little plan, Miss Gaynor. You're in league with the thief!"

A SURPRISE FOR HORACE



PALE and startled, June stared into the determined features of Horace Clayton.

"Are you crazy?" she gasped.

"Let me go—please—" She struggled to free herself. "There's danger—"

"No, you don't!" rapped Horace, tightening his hold.

"Once bitten, twice shy, Miss Gaynor. I saw through your little game this afternoon. Young Brent was hiding in that grotto—you can't deny it. I found traces there, after you'd gone—and I'm not taking any more chances with you."

June stared at him desperately, realising that the self-assured young detective fully believed what he was saying.

"Please—you don't understand!" she gasped. "David isn't the thief. The mystery thief's on his way here now—and Avril's alone—"

"Very clever," sneered Horace, "but you won't hoodwink me a second time, young lady. I'll arrest young Brent when he shows up—and meanwhile I'll lock you up safely—"

June was desperate. She saw that it was

useless to argue with the determined youth—and every moment, wasted spells peril. Her mind worked swiftly.

She glanced towards the open door of the summerhouse and a convincing cry escaped her lips.

"David—look out!" she gasped.

Horace spun on his heel, following the direction of her frightened stare.

"So!" he muttered, and releasing her abruptly he leaped towards the summerhouse, torch in hand.

"Come out of there, you scoundrel!" he rapped, stepping through the doorway. "I warn you—"

His words trailed away in a startled shout as the door slammed behind him and the key grated in the padlock.

Too late he realised June's clever ruse, as he hammered frantically at the door.

"Let me out!" he shouted.

But his voice came distant and muffled to June's ears as she sped desperately through the shrubbery towards the study window.

But even as she came in sight of it she heard a girl's terrified scream, and saw something that looked like a giant bat swoop from the overhanging gables, vanishing into the darkness.

Avril was huddled beneath the barred window, half fainting, as June reached her.

"Avril—what happened?" gasped the girl detective, slipping an arm round the other's trembling shoulders.

Avril looked at her dazedly, clutching to her arm.

"There was something—someone in the study!" she breathed. "I saw a white face on the other side of the bars—then there was a sound of breaking glass, and something seemed to fly from the roof—"

She broke off with a shudder as June snatched something from her pocket, and the shrill, urgent blast of a whistle cut through the night air.

"Quickly!" she breathed, assisting the shaken girl to her feet. "We must get back into the house—"

As they burst in through the door of the conservatory they saw the agitated guests streaming downstairs and into the hall, headed by Mr. Deacon, revolver in hand.

"Avril—Miss Gaynor!" he exclaimed as he caught sight of them. "Where have you been—and what's happened?"

"The mystery thief!" gasped June. "He's broken into the study!"

"Impossible!" rapped Mr. Deacon, paling. "The door's still locked. Where's your young Clayton? He was supposed to be keeping guard."

June bit her lip, retaining a tactful silence on that point. His hand shaking slightly, Mr. Deacon unlocked the study door and switched on the light.

Then June's heart sank, and a horrified gasp went up from the onlookers. For the locked study was in a state of wild confusion. A table had been overturned in the middle of the room, the safe was wide open and papers and valuables were scattered on the carpet.

"The baron's jewels—they've gone!" exclaimed Mr. Deacon brokenly. "The thief—"

"The thief's escaped—thanks to Miss Gaynor!" exclaimed an angry voice from the doorway.

Everyone turned. Horace Clayton stood there, breathless and dishevelled, the torn state of his clothes showing that he had broken out of the summerhouse.

He pointed an accusing finger at June. "I suspected her from the first, sir," he declared. "She's been aiding and abetting young Brent, while pretending to study my methods. She was receiving a signal from the scoundrel when I caught her just now, but she got away by a trick and prevented my catching the thief red-handed!"

Almost stunned by the amazing accusation,

June encountered the accusing stares of the host and his guests.

"Well, Miss Gaynor?" demanded Mr. Deacon coldly. "What have you to say?"

With an effort, June pulled herself together. "Horace missed his vocation," she said. "He really ought to write stories. How does he think that David Brent got into the locked study?"

For a moment the astute youth looked baffled. He glared at June.

"You ought to know," he retorted. "How did he get in?"

June pointed up at the lofty ceiling and the broken skylight dimly visible against the night sky.

"That's the only way," she declared simply. "He flew!"

Horace face crimsoned.

"She's making fun of us now, sir!" he hooted. Mr. Deacon's face clouded.

"Miss Gaynor," he said grimly, "you will kindly pack your things and leave this house first thing in the morning. Meanwhile I'll get in touch with the police, and have young Brent arrested on Clayton's evidence. I'm satisfied that he is the thief!"

There came a broken cry from Avril, and June's hand tightened on the girl's arm.

"Don't worry," she breathed. "Horace hasn't had the last word. That's a lady's privilege!"

JUNE breakfasted alone the next morning, and was ready to depart, with her suitcase packed, when the other guests assembled.

Horace encountered her in the hall and smiled pitifully.

"Better hurry—or you'll miss your train, Miss Gaynor," he said. "I'm just going down to the village to arrange for a warrant for young Brent's arrest!"

"You ought to catch your bird before you cook it, Horace," she murmured sweetly, as she turned away.

The youth glared, and then his eyes narrowed. As June picked up her case a scrap of paper fluttered to the floor. Quickly the rival sleuth put his foot on it, and waited till June had left the hall before examining his find.

A triumphant smile curved his lips as he scanned the brief message—in a handwriting very like David Brent's.

"Must see you before you go. Will be waiting in the grotto.—D."

Thrusting the note into his pocket, Horace hurried to find his host.

June, meanwhile, walked pensively out into the sunlit grounds, followed by the suspicious stares of several of the guests. Only one kindly smile greeted her.

Old Dr. Benny, basking in the sunlight in his wheel-chair, held out his hand.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said. "I still think young Clayton is wrong and you are right. But I'm afraid you'll never prove it."

"You never know, Dr. Benny," replied June, smiling mysteriously. "The thief was clever—but there was one little thing he forgot! It's in my handbag now, and I'm meeting a friend at the grotto who'll take the matter up for me. Good-bye and thank you so much!"

Her head held high, she walked down the drive, out of sight of the house. Then, turning quickly into a side path, she made her way to the grotto.

Her heart was beating quickly as she approached it. Everything depended on what happened in the next few minutes—to prove or disprove her startling theory.

There was no one in the grotto, but June had expected that. The note she had dropped for Horace's benefit had been purely imaginary.

But she had barely stepped inside the dim, cave-like opening when a shadowy figure loomed behind her—a figure whose head and shoulders were concealed by a black cowl.

The mystery thief had come sooner than June had expected!

An involuntary cry was torn from her lips as he sprang at her—and her scream was unexpectedly answered.

A figure leaped from the bushes, landing on the shoulders of the hooded enemy.

"Got you, you scoundrel!" panted Horace. "It's no use struggling, young Brent!"

A pair of handcuffs snapped on the wrists of the cowed enemy as Mr. Deacon and several of the guests emerged from the bushes.

"Here you are, sir," panted Horace. "I've caught the thief—thanks to Miss Gaynor. It's young Brent, right enough."

"Does anyone want me?" inquired a cheery voice, and David Brent stepped into view, Avril holding tightly to his arm.

An amazed shout went up from the onlookers.

"Brent!" gasped Mr. Deacon, while Horace's mouth dropped open incredulously. "Then who—who is that?"

And he pointed to the handcuffed figure.

With a smile, June stepped forward, whipping off the scoundrel's enveloping hood and revealing the chagrined features of the invalid Dr. Benny!

In the sensation that followed, June took an envelope from her pocket, producing a newspaper cutting she had received that morning in reply to her urgent phone message to her uncle.

"Dr. Benny—alias Kenneth Benton, ex-trapeze artiste and jewel thief, wanted by the police for a number of daring burglaries," she explained coolly. "The rope he used for his descent from the Eagle's Nest on to the roof of the house is coiled under the seat of his wheel-chair—with most of the stolen jewels. Your disguise was clever, Dr. Benny, but you forgot that mark on your second finger on which you usually wear a diamond ring—mentioned in the police report!"

The trickster smiled wryly as he struggled to his feet.

"I never thought that I'd be beaten by a girl!" he remarked.

The abashed Horace found his voice.

"Neither did I," he declared. "I say, Miss Gaynor, I owe you an apology—"

June laughed, her eyes twinkling as she held out her hand.

"Never mind, Horace," she said. "It was a smart arrest on your part—and some day I really must study your methods!"

THE END.

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