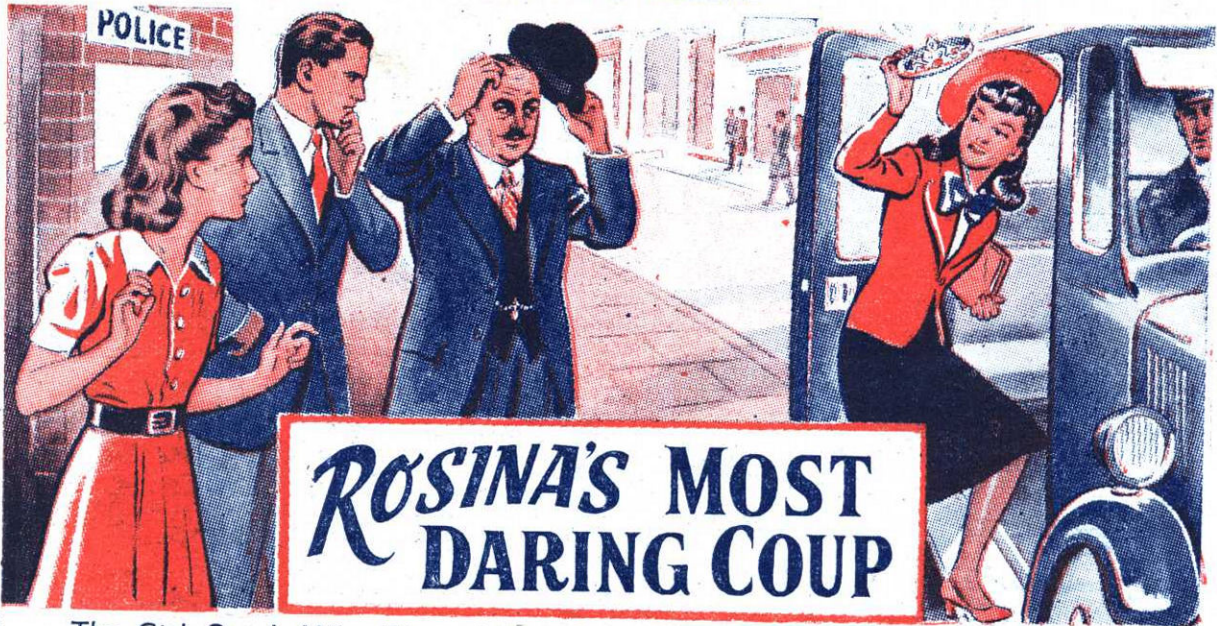


GIRLS' CRYSTAL^{3D}

Week
Ending
Sept. 11th,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



ROSINA'S MOST DARING COUP

The Girl Crook Who Planned Her Own Arrest—Written by PETER LANGLEY

NOT GUILTY

"SEEN the headlines, June?" inquired Noel Raymond, with a grim smile, as he pushed the newspaper across to his youthful partner. "Rosina's got off scot-free—once again!"

June gasped, her glance turning from the bold heading to the picture in the centre of the page—the portrait of a lovely, dark-haired girl, a taunting smile on her lips.

"One-time girl crook found not guilty," read the caption. "Sensational case falls through owing to insufficient evidence."

"Well," gasped June, pushing back her chair from the table and staring at her famous detective uncle, "to think that she's got the laugh of us—after all the trouble you took—"

She broke off, at a loss for words, as she looked once more at those mocking eyes in the photograph—the eyes of Rosina Fontaine, the most audacious girl trickster who had ever eluded justice.

Noel shrugged, a rueful expression on his boyish face.

"There's more behind that report than the public are aware," he commented dryly. "Inspector Finch rang me up this morning. The dossier containing full details of Rosina's misdeeds vanished inexplicably from the court-room while she was actually awaiting her trial. The police were handicapped, and Rosina swayed the jury by her clever acting."

"Nunky!" exclaimed June. "Then—then somehow a confederate of Rosina's got hold of the dossier."

Noel nodded. "A messenger-boy who vanished is suspect, June. The fact remains—Rosina's at liberty, though the police are keeping a wary eye on her—"

He broke off as the phone-bell trilled loudly. June, who was nearest, reached for the hand-set. "Hallo?" she called.

Noel saw her grey eyes widen suddenly.

"Nunky, it's—Rosina!" she gasped. With an incredulous ejaculation, Noel started to his feet, taking the hand-set.

"Mr. Raymond?" inquired a cool, amused voice. "Why, Noel, how nice to speak to you again! Have you seen the papers?"

"I have, Rosina," said Noel grimly. "Why have you rung me?"

"Dear Noel," came Rosina's soft, reproachful tones, "how cross you sound! I thought that you, as one of my oldest friends, might like to know my future plans."

"I should very much like to know what game you are really playing," said Noel dryly. "Not that you are likely to tell me."

"On the contrary," replied Rosina. "I'm going to confide in you—and make a little wager. You were always a good sportsman, Noel. I've taken a fancy to that lovely diamond tiara in the window of Cartels, the jewellers—and I mean to help myself!"

Noel's eyes narrowed. "Even you, Rosina, daren't risk—"

He was interrupted by a soft, amused laugh.

"Listen, Noel! I bet you a hundred of your favourite cigarettes against a bottle of my special perfume that the tiara will be in my hands in the next twelve hours! Because you're an old friend, I'll give you a hint. I intend to make my first attempt at precisely eleven o'clock this morning. Wish me luck, Noel!"

"Just a minute—" jerked Noel, but the tantalising caller had rung off.

"Nunky, what did she say?" asked June, and caught in her breath disbelievingly as he tersely outlined the conversation. "It must be a trick."

"Possibly," agreed Noel, with a thoughtful frown, "but we can't afford to take any risks where

Rosina's concerned. It's nearly ten to eleven now. I suggest you call a taxi, June, while I contact the police and put them on their guard. They can get a man round to the jeweller's right away, and we'll join him there."

A few minutes later a taxi was at the door, and Noel and June sprang in, leaving the hall-porter in charge of the flat.

In a few minutes they reached the big jeweller's. A uniformed constable approached as they alighted, saluting the young detective. He had been sent with instructions to give Noel any aid he required.

"Inspector Finch believes that message was a hoax, sir," he confided.

"That remains to be seen," replied Noel. "It's five to eleven, so Rosina hasn't much time. I want you to mount guard on the door opening into the side-street, while Miss Gaynor and I keep watch here. You'd recognise Rosina if you saw her?"

"I was at her trial—and once seen, never forgotten, sir!" declared the constable, with a grin.

"Don't be too sure," warned Noel. "Remember, she's a past-misress at disguise. If you see anyone acting suspiciously, stop them or give the alarm."

The constable departed. Noel and June re-entered the taxi, and Noel instructed the driver to stop at the island opposite the jeweller's front window. From their vantage-point they could keep watch on all in-going customers while within sight of the precious tiara, sparkling in its velvet-lined case behind the burglar-proof bars.

"Rosina can't possibly bring off her coup now," whispered June. "It's almost eleven o'clock— Oh, look, nunky! Do you think—"

A grey-haired, distinguished-looking woman had descended from a taxi and was approaching the jeweller's, leaning on an ebony stick.

"That's not our quarry, June," Noel

murmured. "See that hand grasping the stick—broad, short-fingered? Even Rosina couldn't disguise her slender hands."

The door swung to behind the customer.

"We'll give her another five minutes," Noel added, "and then—"

"Nunky—look!" whispered June. "An assistant's taking the tiara out of the window!"

Noel leant forward. "Possibly for a genuine customer," he said. "But it would be a chance for Rosina if she turned up now. Better slip into the shop, June, and warn the manager, while I contact the constable."

June nodded quickly, and a moment later they parted on the crowded pavement, Noel hurrying towards the corner.

At that instant, cutting above the muffled roar of the traffic, came the shrill blast of a police-whistle from the side-turning.

The young detective broke into a run, pushing his way through the crowds. He reached the corner in time to see the burly constable in hot pursuit of a slender, girlish figure, who was clutching a leather jewel-case.

Noel's eyes gleamed, for even at distance he recognised that slim, agile form. He cut across the road, guessing her purpose. With amazing swiftness, the girl evaded the pursuing constable and dived into a subway—to find Noel waiting for her.

"Sorry, Rosina!" said the young detective, his hand falling on her shoulder.

The girl turned with a little cry. "Noel!" she breathed, her slender hands cleaving. "I thought—I thought I'd given you the slip! That blundering policeman would never have caught me. In another minute I'd have won that little bet."

Noel regarded her narrowly. He was wondering what crazy impulse had prompted the girl to warn him of her purpose.

An excited crowd had gathered round, and the constable hurried up, breathless and red in the face.

"Good work, Mr. Raymond!" he panted. "She's as slippery as an eel, but we've caught her red-handed this time!" He twisted the jewel-case from Rosina's grasp, snapping it open to reveal its glittering contents. "Inspector Finch will thank you for this, sir!"

"It's my unlucky day, Noel!" sighed Rosina, while the policeman whistled the waiting taxi. "And I've a very special engagement this afternoon."

"Afraid your engagement will have to wait, Rosina," said Noel dryly, as he took charge of the jewel-case. "Inspector Finch will be anxious to see you! Constable, I'll take Miss Fontaine along to the police station. Will you ask my young partner to join us there, with the manager of the jeweller's? There will have to be an official charge."

The taxi swung to the kerb at that moment, and Noel assisted the girl to enter, keeping a firm hold on her arm.

"Was it really worth the risk, Rosina?" he asked, eyeing her curiously as the taxi threaded its way along the busy streets.

"It was fun," murmured Rosina softly, "and—you know I love to take a chance! By the way—she raised her dark eyes questioningly—"what time is it?"

Surprised by the question, Noel glanced at his watch.

"Ten past eleven exactly."

"Thank you!" said Rosina, smiling slightly. "Ah, I see we've arrived!"

The taxi drew up outside the police station, and Noel escorted his lovely prisoner into the inspector's office. Inspector Finch sat bolt upright.

"So you've caught her, Raymond?" he exclaimed. "That's smart work! I never dreamt that she'd actually keep her crazy appointment."

"Appointment, inspector?" asked Rosina, raising her eyebrows. "But I don't understand. Mr. Raymond

stopped me while I was shopping and insisted that you wanted to see me."

The inspector stared at Noel, and the young detective smiled grimly. Trust Rosina to bluff to the end!

He laid the jewel-case on the inspector's desk.

"Your constable caught her red-handed, leaving the shop with that tiara," he said dryly. "The manager will be here in a moment to explain how she came by it."

"But I can explain—now," said Rosina, with a tantalising smile at the young detective. "I bought it from Cartels' this morning. It's only paste, of course—I couldn't afford a real one like that beauty in the window. But I think it'll suit me—don't you, Noel?"

Noel started forward incredulously. "B-bought it!" exploded the inspector.

"But, of course!" said Rosina. "You surely don't think I would have stolen it, inspector? I've got the receipt somewhere. Ah, here it is!"

Noel snatched the slip of paper from her hand, his boyish face clouding in bewilderment. It was a genuine receipt for a paste tiara purchased that morning, and, encountering Rosina's gentle smile, he knew that she was speaking the truth.

For some reason of her own, the audacious girl had tricked him into arresting her—on a false charge!



JUNE THWARTS ROSINA

Rosina was the first to break the silence with a soft yawn.

"May I go now, inspector?" she asked.

"Mr. Raymond has de- layed me as it is, and I've got a most important appointment!"

The inspector gulped, fixing a smouldering stare on Noel.

"This is your pigeon, Raymond!" he snapped. "The constable was acting under your orders. I wash my hands of the whole affair!"

"Of course, it was all a mistake, Noel," said Rosina, with a forgiving smile. "I do understand. And now I must go."

"Just a minute, Rosina!" put in Noel, controlling his momentary chagrin. "The manager of the jeweller's is on his way with the constable, and we'll check your story—as a matter of form."

Rosina sank back with an impatient sigh, while Noel examined the tiara under his magnifying-glass. It was undoubtedly paste.

A minute later the manager was ushered into the office, accompanied by the constable and June, who flashed an excited glance at Rosina.

The manager confirmed Rosina's statement about the purchase; he had served the attractive young customer himself and given her a receipt. Rosina explained that she had been in a hurry to catch a train, and that the constable had mistaken her haste!

Noel, though baffled and suspicious, had no excuse for detaining her further. They escorted her to the door.

"You haven't forgotten our little wager, Noel?" she murmured, as they stepped outside. "I must let you have the name of my favourite perfume."

"I don't think I'll need it, Rosina," said Noel. "You'll never lay hands on the real tiara."

"Won't I?" inquired Rosina softly.

"You'd be surprised!"

And she sprang laughingly down the steps and into the waiting taxi.

With a thoughtful frown, Noel returned slowly to the inspector's office. The latter had reached there first, and he greeted Noel excitedly.

"While Rosina's been wasting our time," he snapped, "an attempt has been made on the real tiara! It's only thanks to Miss Gaynor that it failed."

"What's that?" demanded Noel quickly.

It was the manager who explained, while June turned rather pink. During the excitement following Rosina's escape, one of the assistants

had been approached by a customer closely resembling a wealthy client.

"Mrs. Sharman is known to all my assistants," explained the manager, "and when this lady explained that she had called for the tiara that she had ordered and paid for, it was handed to her without question. Only when Miss Gaynor tried to detain her did she become flustered and drop the case, hurrying from the shop and disappearing in the crowd."

"It was the white-haired lady with the ebony stick, nunky!" put in June excitedly, meeting his questioning glance. "I had reason to suspect her. In spite of what you said, I thought—I thought she might be a crook."

Noel looked at her keenly. There was an expression in June's grey eyes that convinced him she was anxious to tell him more when they were on their own.

"Good work, June! At what time was this?" he added, struck by a sudden thought.

The manager frowned. "Let me see! It must have been exactly ten minutes past eleven."

Noel drew in his breath sharply. It had been at ten minutes past eleven that Rosina had asked him the time in the taxi! Could that be a mere coincidence?

"I contacted Mrs. Sharman by phone at once," explained the manager, "but she assured me she had not left the house. She asked me to send the tiara along by special messenger, but, frankly, I'm feeling uneasy. I have it here now," he added, taking the case from his pocket, and opening it to reveal its precious contents.

"If you'll entrust the tiara to me," Noel said quietly, "I'll undertake to deliver it to Mrs. Sharman. I'll be glad to guarantee its safety."

The manager's face cleared, and he thanked the young detective warmly.

"And while you're about it, Raymond, you might keep an eye open for that white-haired trickster!" cut in the inspector. "Rosina may be smart, but she's not the only crook around by a long chalk. It's quite clear that she isn't mixed up in this business."

"Possibly you're right, inspector," said Noel. "I'll see what I can do for you. Come along, June!"

Not till they were safely in a taxi did Noel break his silence.

"Out with it, June!" he said, turning a quizzical glance on his young partner. "I've an idea that you've got the key to this affair."

June flushed. "Nunky, I could have sworn that the old lady in the shop was—Rosina!"

Noel started.

"Why were you so sure?"

"Because," said June eagerly, "Rosina has little tricks of make-up that I've come to recognise—especially with her old-lady parts. That's why I challenged the bogus Mrs. Sharman."

Noel whistled softly.

"But it's impossible, June. Rosina was with me in the taxi at the time. She has a perfect alibi—" He broke off, snapping his fingers, an excited glint in his eyes. "June," he added, "you've given me the missing link! Rosina knew what she was about when she made that wager."

"But—but even Rosina couldn't have been in two places at once, nunky!"

Noel smiled grimly.

"Possibly not, June; but she's playing a more daring game than I imagined, and it's up to us to nip it in the bud. The first move is to take the tiara to Mrs. Sharman."

"IT'S very kind of you to take this trouble, Mr. Raymond," said Mrs. Sharman, leaning on her ebony cane and regarding the detective and his youthful partner shrewdly. "I should be very distressed if anything happened to that tiara. My niece fell in love with it when she saw it in

(Please turn to the back page.)

The Fourth GREY GHOST

By DOROTHY PAGE



OUTWITTING SMEEKE

PENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, sympathised with a secret society calling themselves the Grey Ghosts. They were out to fight against the tyranny of the bullying senior master, Mr. Aspell, and for a mysterious boy named Glynn Tracy.

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

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

Determined to warn them and find out more about Glynn Tracy, Penelope set off for the Abbot's Room.

AWAY from the Head's private house, through the dusk-shrouded school grounds, Penelope fled.

"I've got to save the Grey Ghosts—got to!" she told herself.

Grey and dim, the mellow mass of the school loomed ahead. Lights showed in the windows of Senior and Junior Houses, but the ancient East Wing was in darkness.

On crepe-soled shoes Penelope fled on, a darting, active shadow.

Round Clock Tower, and now she paused, panting hard, brown eyes flicking here and there to pierce the gloom.

"Steady now, Penny!" she counselled tensely. "Ware Harold Smeeke!"

She knew that Smeeke, that burly Fifth Former, Mr. Aspell's toady and sneak, was somewhere about, hiding by East Wing, waiting to trap the daring Grey Ghosts when they entered the building.

Penelope crouched a little, moving more cautiously now, hearing her heart bumping fast in her ears. Forward, step by step—alert for danger.

What was that? There, flattened against a creeper-covered buttress!

Penelope froze, breathing hard, staring.

Then she crouched lower, almost flat to the dewy grass.

It was Smeeke! He was there, behind the buttress, not twenty feet from a small arched doorway—a doorway that must lead to Abbot's Room.

"Then—the Grey Ghosts haven't come yet!" breathed Penelope. "Thank goodness! But—what now?"

She knew Mr. Aspell's plan; she had heard him tell it to her father over in Head's House. Smeeke was to wait until the Grey Ghosts entered East Wing. Once in, he was to close and lock the door and, with the three daring Fourth Formers hopelessly trapped, he would then await for Mr. Aspell to return!

Penelope crouched motionless, frantically forcing her brain to work clearly and at top speed. Suddenly an idea came to her and, retreating round the corner of Clock Tower, she opened her music-case and took out the long grey robe it contained. Quietly she donned it, adjusting the hood around

her head. Then she moved from cover.

Smeeke was moving restlessly in the shadow of the buttress.

Penelope spoke in a low, hissing whisper.

"Steady now, chaps—"

The dim-seen youth went rigid. He had heard, as Penelope meant him to. Watching him, her heart in her mouth, she spoke again.

"Abbot's Room no good. To Small Chapel instead—quick now—"

And deliberately she stepped for a second well clear of Clock Tower, straightening so that even in the gloom she must be seen!

It was a terrible risk she took, but she was banking on the fact that Smeeke, toady and sneak, was also a coward. That Smeeke, thinking all the Grey Ghosts were there, would not relish tackling them single-handed!

Her spine crawling unpleasantly, she turned back round the corner of the Clock Tower. A soft, stealthy rustle sounded behind her. It brought a fierce grin to her lips. Her character-reading had been correct.

Smeeke was not attacking. He was trailing—just as she had daringly planned!

And now, quickly, to draw him away from East Wing.

Penelope fled on tiptoe through the gloom, heading for the bushes adjoining the school gardens. Once in their semi-cover she crouched, swerved and hurled herself flat under a privet bush, pressing with pounding heart against the damp grass.

Seconds passed. There came a rustling, drawing nearer. She heard Smeeke's heavy breathing, his furtive movements. A second of quivering suspense—

Then he had gone by, not seeing her, not suspecting.

"Oh zimmy—done it!"

Penny sat up, grinning.

She had no fears about Smeeke now. He would certainly carry on to the ruins of Small Chapel—and Small Chapel was hundreds of yards away against the outer school wall. She had tricked the sneak all right!

"But don't sit patting yourself on the back, Penny!" she reproved herself. "Quick, now! Warn the Grey Ghosts before the Wasp—and perhaps daddy—arrives on the scene!"

She leapt up and became a whirlwind figure, fleeting back to East Wing, robe flapping. Excitement really claimed her now, for—daring thought!—she would warn the Grey Ghosts when they arrived in her role as No. 4!

She rounded the dark bulk of Clock Tower just in time to see the last of three robed shapes melt silently through the little arched doorway that led to the mysterious Abbot's Room. She ran on and, passing through the doorway, stopped and looked about her. Before her, dark and dim, stretched a long, stone-flagged passage. Doors showed on each side, but the passage ended in a blank wall.

What a deadly trap it would have been, had Smeeke been here to close the outer door on the Grey Ghosts! What a deadly trap it still might be unless she could warn them—get them out quickly!

Peering through the eyeholes of the grey hood, she heard a door softly click at the end of the passage. Soundlessly, Penelope sped down towards it, past a door marked "Laboratory," past a door marked "Music Room I.," reached the last door and breathlessly pushed it open.

Dim light from a high, lead-paned window allowed her to make out a grand piano in the centre of the room.

But where were the Grey Ghosts? Why had they come in here?

Startled, her gaze flickered round—and lit up as she saw a very low, oak door, half-concealed by a curtain. That was it. That door must lead to Abbot's Room! That's where the Grey Ghosts had gone on their strange mission—

She took five excited steps—then halted. From behind her, in the stone-flagged passage, footsteps suddenly rang out!

Footsteps—and the voices of Mr. Aspell—and her father!

MORE SHOCKS FOR PENELOPE



For perhaps three seconds Penelope was held frozen in the grip of blind panic.

Her father would walk in on her, catch her in the robes of the Secret Society! What would follow she did not dare to think—the vision was too awful.

A wild impulse came to dash to the low doorway which must lead to Abbot's Room.

But if she did that, exposure must still inevitably follow—and into the bargain she would ensure the capture of Hugh, Harvey and Bob.

"No, I'll face it alone—"

As the courageous words quivered on her lips, as she had almost resigned herself to disaster, Penelope saw the slimmest of fighting chances.

She wrenched frantically at the robe, whirling it up over her head. Fingers that seemed all thumbs in the effort to gain speed crammed it into her music-case—

It was in, and the flap was closed. Footsteps outside were but a few yards away.

She hurled herself to the grand piano, dropped the case on top, flicked on the shaded electric light, and slumped down on the seat—just as the door opened.

A tense, almost unbearable pause.

Penelope dared not look up. She felt that the mad race of her heart must be clearly audible in the room. A tiny frown as if of concentration between her brows, her fingers were laid on the keys, as if pondering a series of chords—

"Penelope!"

Breaking the silence, the Head's deep voice, rising on a note of sheer amazement.

Penelope gave a start, whisked round her head.

"Daddy! Oh, you—you did startle me!"

John Cartwright, B.A., stood just inside the doorway, a tall, awe-inspiring figure. His heavy eyebrows were raised; incredulity showed on his stern features. Peering over his shoulder was the thin, startled face of Mr. Aspell.

"Penelope—you here! What does this mean?"

The Head stepped quickly into the room, gown rustling.

"Mean, daddy?" Penelope rose, clenching her hands to keep them steady. "Why, daddy, I told you I was going to sort my music, and then—with no one to be bothered, isn't it really the best time to practise, isn't it?"

The Head relaxed a little. He looked at the music-case.

"Practise—as late as this!" He frowned. "Penelope, you should not have come out without first asking my permission!"

Penelope meekly dropped her eyes. "I'm sorry, daddy, but—" She paused. "Why are you here?" she asked. "Mr. Aspell looks so excited. Is anything wrong?"

"A good deal, Miss Cartwright!" snapped Mr. Aspell. "I suspect that scandalous Secret Society are about! Have you seen—?"

"Mr. Aspell—please!" cut in the Head sharply. "Miss Cartwright can hardly know anything of this. Indeed, we have no real proof that these so-called Grey Ghosts have been active to-night."

"But, Head, Smecke has vanished, and I suspect it possible that—"

He paused, giving another darting look at the low doorway—behind which, virtually trapped, Penelope knew the Grey Ghosts to be, thinking goodness knows what!

Her knees felt weak. But she must do something—quickly.

"Did you say Smecke, the Fifth Former, Mr. Aspell?" she asked hastily. The Head's frown returned.

"Penelope! What do you know of this affair?"

Her eyes widened innocently.

"Why, daddy, only that as I came over here I saw this boy Smecke creeping past Clock Tower—"

Mr. Aspell started.

"Past Clock Tower! Miss Cartwright, what was he doing? Where was he going? This is important!"

"I really could not say, Mr. Aspell! He appeared to be following someone and making in the direction of Small Chapel. But as school matters do not concern me, I naturally did not think that—"

"Yes—yes, of course," cut in the senior master impatiently. He turned and rushed on with harsh eagerness.

"Head, it is obvious that these young scoundrels have made a change of plan, and Smecke is on their trail. With your permission I will hurry after Smecke."

The Head nodded curtly.

"Very well, Aspell. I leave this to you. Report to me here."

His words made her go hot and cold. She hardly noticed Mr. Aspell rustle quickly from the room, for John Cartwright had turned and was regarding her sternly.

"Penelope!"

"Yes—yes, daddy?"

"I am not pleased, Penelope. Since you have been here, and up to this moment, you have comported yourself as a young lady should—befitting to your quiet, rather nervous temperament."

Penelope gulped. If her father only knew!

"You have always been rather frail and physically weak—"

"Daddy, that was ages ago, when I was a kiddy!" she protested.

"Do not interrupt, Penelope!" He frowned heavily. "Allow me to know best. As I say, for a nervous child like yourself, it is most annoying that you should so many times have become involved—if only slightly and indirectly—with the activities of these Grey Ghosts!"

Penelope's heart almost stood still. He could not suspect—but he was much too near the truth for her peace of mind!

"Therefore," he continued, "I cannot approve of your action in coming over here at this hour without my permission! Come, my dear," he added, his stern expression relaxing, "you must not be upset. I am thinking only of you—of your health, your nerves."

"I—I know, daddy, but—but—"

Penelope stopped. What could she say? How could she possibly ever put her viewpoint about the Grey Ghosts, and try to convince him that Mr. Aspell, the master he so implicitly trusted, was not what he appeared to be?

She gulped at the thought of what his reaction would be. No, she must continue to play her daring role—try to help the Grey Ghosts to show the tyrannical senior master up in his true colours.

"Penelope, do not look so upset—"

He patted her shoulder, mistaking her silence.

"And as you are here, my dear," he added with a slight, rare smile, "you may play one more piece. It is a long time since I heard you play."

Penelope almost groaned. The last thing she wanted was to stay with her father here—virtually imprisoning the Grey Ghosts.

Her heart went out to them. She could visualise them listening to all this, waiting to see what had happened with nerves stretched. The suspense must be awful. But she could only say:

"Thank you, daddy."

On pins and needles, she seated herself at the piano. He nodded.

"While you are playing, my dear, I think I will have a look in Abbot's Room. I cannot conceive what possible reason these unknown boys could have for going there."

And, while Penelope nearly screamed in sheer horror, he turned and walked heavily towards the low doorway!



THE GREY GHOSTS VANISH

It was almost too much for Penelope. The last five minutes had tested her acting ability and daring to the utmost. And now—she watched him cross, hand outstretched to lift the heavy latch.

And—was it her imagination, or did she hear a faint movement on the far side of that oak door?

In sheer, blind desperation she brought her fingers crashing down on the keys, rippling them in swinging chords of rhythm.

Her father jerked round.

"Penelope!" His brows were hard together. "Surely you do not play this—this awful stuff called swing!"

He was checked—momentarily.

"Oh, no, daddy!" gasped Penelope. "It—it was a sort of introductory chords. Please listen to this, daddy," she rushed on. "It's the latest thing I've practised. Please, look—I'm not sure about the fingering. Can you tell me—"

Without waiting, she swept into the opening bars of that sweet melody "Claire de Lune," desperately watching him from the corner of her eyes.

He had paused, standing near the low doorway. He tilted his head; he listened. Slowly, a smile of pleasure touched his stern lips.

To her unbounded relief he moved quietly forward and stood at her side, watching the deft movement of her fingers.

Penelope played well, and she put all she knew into this rendering. And somehow, when she felt she had averted the danger, she was glad that he was standing there, silently appreciative.

The last pianissimo chords, and he patted her shoulder.

"Well done, Penelope! I am pleasantly surprised. The fingering was sure, but there was one phrase—have you the score with you?"

His hand wandered to the music-case on the piano—the case that concealed the grey robe!

And in that heart-stopping second

Fate at last played a trick on Penelope's side.

Rapid footsteps in the passage checked the Head's hand. He turned as Mr. Aspell, high cheek bones flushed, a glitter in his eyes, swept in.

"Head, we have found traces of those boys!" he exclaimed. "A half-burnt candle—footprints—under the ruins of Small Chapel, in the cellar. Smecke is keeping watch. They must be somewhere near there, hiding. Will you come?"

Penelope's heart had jumped. Now it steadied, for she knew—if Mr. Aspell didn't—that those signs of the Grey Ghosts had been left at a previous meeting.

"Very well, Aspell!" The Head nodded grimly. "Penelope, you may have another fifteen minutes. Put out the light and close the door when you come out."

"Yes, daddy—"

The two masters hurried from the room. The door closed, and she gave a deep, deep sigh and rested her forehead on the piano lid.

"Penny, my love," she murmured faintly, "remember to look in the mirror for grey hairs to-night! You must have got hundreds now!"

Reaction set in a little, but slowly, irrepressibly, a grin curved her lips. She had played a daring, audacious game—and won!

"And now—"

She jerked upright, darting a glance towards the low doorway leading to Abbot's Room. "Gosh, poor old Hugh & Co.! They must have grey hairs too, by now!"

She thought quickly. The Grey Ghosts would naturally lie low until they heard her go. Well, then, the obvious thing was to make a noisy departure. Then they would come out and flee to safety.

"Yes, that's the obvious thing to do," murmured Penelope, "but—"

Her eyes sparkled with determination.

She was thinking of the reason for the Grey Ghosts' visit to Abbot's Room. Somehow, inexplicably, it was connected, she knew, with the boy Glynn Tracy.

She bit her lip. What the Grey Ghosts were doing in the Abbot's Room she had no idea, but they were definitely acting in the interest of Glynn Tracy—and only that evening, to her horror, Penelope had discovered that Tracy was a boy who had been expelled in disgrace from the school last term.

She could not believe that Hugh & Co. would consciously aid a rotter, and therefore she would know no peace of mind until she had tackled the Grey Ghosts on the question.

"And now's my chance," she decided breathlessly. "But not as the Head's daughter! Oh, no! The coast is clear now, so—No. 4 of the Grey Ghosts comes to life!"

Softly she drew the grey robe from her music-case. Again she knew that thrill of excitement as she slipped it over her head and drew it down about her.

"Now—heavy footsteps to the door. Close the door—"

She suited the action to the words—and waited, motionless.

The Grey Ghosts would wait, too, to give her time to get clear, and during that time it would be feasible that No. 4 had slipped into the building!

One minute—two—then she moved forward across the music-room, conscious of a tremendous anticipatory thrill.

She was going into Abbot's Room! She was going to find out why the Grey Ghosts were there! She was going to tackle them face to face as No. 4—and challenge them about Glynn Tracy!

She brushed aside the curtain in front of the low doorway. Slowly, breath held, she lifted the heavy latch—and pulled.

The old oak swung open with a creak.

From the shaded piano light a soft radiance was cast over her shoulder

(Please turn to page 275.)



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

By GAIL WESTERN

THE MYSTERY PLOTTER

MERLE WAS ON believed that a secret, vital to the future of her home, Happy Valley Ranch, was hidden in a trophy called the Gold Rider, to be raced for at Red Hill Rodeo.

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

Slim Harris, the ranch foreman, believed Larry to be the traitor, as he had once worked for Merle's enemy, Nathaniel Garsten, a neighboring rancher.

Merle refused to believe him. But that night she overheard voices in the yard. One of them she recognized as Nathaniel Garsten's. But whose was the other?

WHO could it be talking down in the yard with Nathaniel Garsten?

Anxiously, Merle asked herself the question, as she stood by the open window, staring down at the two figures below—one on horseback, the other on foot.

There could be no mistaking Garsten's harsh laugh. He was the man in the saddle, but it was too dark to identify his companion. Obviously he must be a member of the Happy Valley staff, but was he Larry or the mysterious traitor of whom the young cowboy had spoken?

Either alternative made Merle shrink.

The thought that Larry—the boy she had come to trust and admire—was secretly meeting the rascally owner of the rival ranch was too awful to contemplate. On the other hand, she found it incredible that any of her cowboys could be plotting against her. They had always been so loyal; so trustworthy.

Desperately worried, she craned through the window, straining her ears to catch every word. Again Garsten's voice reached her.

"Reckon you're right," he was declaring. "It wasn't wise for me to come here. If we were seen together it would be mighty awkward for you. In future we'll communicate with each other by letter. Tell you what I—"

He paused, leaning forward in the saddle.

"You know that hollow oak in the woods just off the trail through the hills?" he asked. "Waal, that would make a very convenient letterbox. If you want to get in touch with me just drop a note in there, and I'll do the same. Okay?"

His unknown companion nodded, but did not speak. There was a moment's silence, then the owner of the V-Bar-V gave another harsh laugh.

"Waal, if you've done your part o' the work there's nothin' to keep me here. Guess I'll think about gettin' back home, and—gee, I'll sleep

sounder for knowin' that soon Merle Wason'll find herself in queer street. The boundary water-hole is absolutely vital to Happy Valley. There's no alternative water supply, and so the—"

The rest of the rancher's words were drowned by the thud of hoofs and the jingle of harness as his horse, becoming restive, capered up and down.

Merle stood there as if petrified. What she had just heard sent an icy shiver down her spine.

If anything should happen to the boundary water-hole then disaster would overtake the ranch, for Garsten had been right when he had declared it to be vital to Happy Valley. Without ample supplies of water it would be impossible to keep a large number of cattle on the range.

But what exactly were the rancher and his mysterious confederate plotting?

Eagerly Merle strained her ears again, but though Garsten had succeeded in quietening his horse, he was now positioned right by the yard gate and the other man had joined him there. Only a vague mumble of voices reached the bed-room window.

For a moment Merle stood there, that feeling of frightening anxiety deepening, then, quickly turning, she snatched up her clothes.

It was vital that she should learn the truth—equally important that she should discover the identity of Nathaniel Garsten's rascally companion before he and Garsten parted.

With feverish haste Merle dressed and raced from her bed-room, down the stairs. There was a few moments' delay while she wrestled with the stiff bolts of the side door, but at last she managed to force them back. The door swung open and she darted out, forgetting in her hurry the bucket of kitchen scraps which Mammie always put out every night for one of the cowboys to feed to the pigs in the morning.

Over went the pail with a clanking rattle, and over went Merle with a startled gasp.

From the darkness came a sharp exclamation of alarm. There was the sound of a riding crop thwacking down, then the rat-a-plan of galloping hoofs. Dazed and shaken, Merle sat up.

"Oh, gee, they've taken fright!" she exclaimed. "Garsten's riding for home!"

But if all hope of overhearing the plotters' conversation had gone, she could still catch the rancher's mysterious companion. On foot he could not have gone far.

Up she scrambled, to go plunging blindly forward, only once again to hit trouble in the shape of a wheelbarrow that had carelessly been left out in the yard.

Colliding with it, she went reeling and several more precious moments were lost while she picked herself up. Then abruptly her feeling of annoyance vanished. From ahead came the

sound of footsteps, and dimly she glimpsed a man's shape.

"Stop! It's no good you trying to escape!" she panted. "I've seen you!" And she fairly hurled herself forward.

From the unknown there came a surprised cry, and next moment Merle was blinded by the dazzling light of a torch.

"Why, Miss Merle, if it isn't you!" exclaimed a familiar voice, and Merle found herself confronted by Jake Binns, the horse-breaker.

Despite the fact that she had always had implicit trust in Jake, she regarded him sharply.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Waal, Miss Merle, I couldn't sleep so I was sittin' up in bed, readin', when I fancied I heard voices outside. Thinkin' it queer, I started to dress. Then there came the most doggoned clatter, so I rushed out, never dreamin' it was you I'd find here."

Before Merle could comment on Jake's explanation the door of a nearby hut was flung open and a slim figure appeared.

"Say, what's goin' on?" it demanded, and Slim Harris came striding forward, buttoning up his shirt. He stared in astonishment from Merle to the bandy-legged horse-breaker. "So it was you I heard talkin'!" he exclaimed.

Merle shook her head. "No—it wasn't us," she said. "It was those voices that roused us, too and I caught sight of one of the talkers. It was Nathaniel Garsten."

"Garsten!"

"That rascally hoodlum!"

Blankly the two men regarded her, then the young foreman frowned grimly.

"What was Garsten doin' here, Miss Merle?" he demanded.

"Plotting?"

"Plottin'?"

"Yes," Merle nodded. "I couldn't catch the details, but it was something to do with the boundary water-hole."

She related all she knew, and Jake Binns' rugged face went scarlet with anger.

"The tricky coyote, what's his game now?" he muttered, while Slim caught Merle by the arm.

"Who was the galoot with him?" he asked quickly.

Merle shook her head. "It was too dark to see his face, but he hadn't a horse, so he couldn't have come far away."

The foreman drew in his breath in an angry hiss.

"That clinches it. It must have been Larry Denvers—that guy I warned you about," he declared.

Merle shrank back as if struck.

"No—no! I can't believe it!" she cried. "Larry's my friend—he wouldn't plot with Garsten!"

"Then who could it have been?" cut in the horse-breaker. "If you're sure the feller hadn't a hoss—"

He broke off, a look of dismay spreading over his weather-beaten face. "Say, Miss Merle, surely you don't think there's a traitor on the ranch! Surely you don't think it was one of the boys!"

Hurriedly Merle shook her head.

She found it impossible to believe that anyone at Happy Valley could be a secret enemy.

"If it wasn't one of us, then it must have been Denvers," Slim pointed out. "And I can't say I'm surprised. Remember, I warned you that he'd been seen leavin' Garsten's place this mornin'. Anyway, we'll soon find out. He won't have had time to get into bed. Come on!"

And, turning, the foreman led the way across the yard and down through the orchard.



JUST TOO LATE

It was confidently that Merle followed Slim and the horse-breaker through the trees. Trusting Larry as she did, she was certain they were mistaken.

"We'll find Larry fast asleep," she told herself, "and that will prove he—"

She left the sentence unfinished, for if Larry's innocence were proved then there must be a traitor on the ranch. The realization stabbed her like a knife.

Slim Harris' long legs left the other two behind. Grimly he emerged from the orchard and advanced on the little tent pitched in the meadow beyond. He disappeared inside it; there was a moment's pause, then he reappeared.

"Well?" asked Merle.

To her horrified surprise the foreman shook his head.

"The tent's empty, Miss Merle."

"Empty! You mean—"

Breaking off, Merle rushed forward. With agitated hands she swept aside the canvas flap and peered in—just as the moon emerged from the black clouds. Shining through the thin walls it revealed the tent to be unoccupied; more, it was obvious that the bed had not been slept in.

Merle stood there as if petrified, icy fingers seeming to clutch her heart.

"What did it mean? Where had Larry gone?"

With an effort she smothered the ugly suspicion that came rushing into her brain. No—she wouldn't believe it. Larry couldn't have been Garsten's rascally companion. There must be some other explanation of his strange disappearance.

She stepped out of the tent to find Slim and the burly horse-breaker peering down at something that lay in the thick grass. They looked up as, white-faced, she came stumbling towards them. The foreman's face was sympathetic.

"Guess I know how you feel, Miss Merle, but it's no use blinkin' your eyes at the truth. Denvers never was any good and never will be."

Solemnly Jake nodded.

"Reck'n Slim's right, Miss Merle," he said gruffly. "There can be no goin' against the evidence o' that tent. It was Denvers you heard."

"Fraid so," agreed the foreman. "And it's pretty clear what his scoundrelly game is."

With an effort Merle found her voice.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"That Garsten's paid him to blow up the water-hole," was the startling reply.

"What!"

The blood drained from Merle's face. She stared at the young foreman, as if convinced that this must be some monstrous joke, but Slim's face was grim, and suddenly he thrust out one hand, opening his fingers.

"Take a look at this, Miss Merle," he said.

Merle gazed down at the empty carton that lay on the foreman's palm and her eyes dilated with horror.

"Dynamite," she whispered. "It's a carton to hold dynamite sticks!"

Slim nodded grimly.

"Yep—and me an' Jake just found it lyin' in the grass outside that no-good's tent," he declared. "So I

guess that clinches it. After talkin' to Garsten, Denvers set off for the boundary to fire the explosive he'd already fixed, and that means we've got to hurry. Come on!"

And he set off back to the ranch at a run. Jake went plunging after him, and more slowly Merle followed. This last discovery had stunned her. Surely it could not be true? Surely Larry was not after all, really her enemy?

She shook her head helplessly, and then another icy shiver ran down her spine as she remembered Slim's last words. Whether Larry was innocent or guilty, it seemed certain that the all-important boundary water-hole was in deadly danger.

If that were blown up then she would be forced to sell most of the stock, and that would mean ruin. Without water she could not hope to carry on.

"Uncle and I would have to give up the ranch," she told herself as she broke into a stumbling run.

Bursting through the trees, she saw that Slim and Jake had already led their horses from out of the stable and were engaged in saddling them. The young foreman gave Merle's shoulder a soothing pat, as he realised how distressed she was.

"Don't fret too much," he urged. "Maybe we'll be able to scotch that coyote's plans yet."

"Aye—mebbe we'll be able to get to the boundary afore he blows up the water-hole," growled the horse-breaker.

Merle made no comment. She felt weak and dazed, and it seemed almost an effort to saddle Pommie and swing up. Leaping astride his own horse, Slim gave a grim nod.

"Let's be goin'!"

At a furious gallop they rode from the ranch. With the moonlight streaming down, they pounded across the range, heading for the hilly boundary that divided Happy Valley from the V-Bar-V.

Disgruntled bellows sounded from all around, and the tears sprang to Merle's eyes as she saw the steers, disturbed by the clatter of hoofs, lumbering to their feet. What a fine herd they made, and how wonderfully they had progressed since they had been transferred from the sun-baked home range to these rich pastures fed by the boundary water-hole. But if that were blown up—

Catching in her breath, she urged on Pommie.

"Oh, we must get there in time!" she gasped. "We must prevent the water-hole from being destroyed."

And then there came an excited shout from Jake Binns, riding savagely on her right.

"There he is! There's the young coyote!"

Merle strained her eyes in the direction of his pointing finger, but she could see only trees ahead.

"Where?" she panted.

"Runnin' through that copse. He's gone now, but I'm certain it was Denvers."

"Oh, it couldn't have been!" cut in Merle, clinging desperately to her faith in the young cowboy. "You must have been mistaken. I can't believe—"

"I tell you, it was him, right enough," declared Jake, "but we'll soon see. Come on. We've just got to stop him from firin' that dynamite!"

More furiously than ever they plunged on. They reached the copse,

IT'S WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

That may be an exaggeration, but it is true that waste paper is very valuable, for it can be turned into all kinds of badly needed articles that are in short supply. So you will carry on saving every scrap you can, won't you?

went galloping through the trees. At last they could glimpse the open range again, and suddenly they saw the water-hole glimmering in the moonlight barely a hundred yards away. There was no sign of any human figure near it and Harris gave an excited shout.

"Maybe we've scared him away," he suggested. "Maybe—"

And then it happened. From ahead there crashed the sound of a monstrous explosion, and up from the ground rose a sheet of scarlet flame.



LARRY IS FOUND

Cr-ump! Cr-ump! The hills rumbled and reverberated as thunderclap after thunderclap went rolling around them, and the trio's horses reared with fright. Even Pommie momentarily lost control and danced wildly, nearly throwing his mistress.

"It's all right, honey—no need to panic," she cried, and after a moment or two managed to calm him.

Then, as he stood there, quivering, with his silky ears drawn back, she turned her fearful gaze towards the water-hole. But it was impossible to see it. A great curtain of smoke and whirling dust and stones had blotted it out. She gave a horrified gasp.

"It's gone—been destroyed," she whispered.

Slim, still busy trying to control his restive steed, gave a savage nod.

"Yep—we were too late. Denvers beat us, after all."

But even in that dismaying moment, Merle clung to her trust in the young cowboy.

"No—not Larry," she cried. "Whoever the scoundrel was, it wasn't Larry."

And, desperately anxious to know the worst, she went riding on into the drifting smoke. In the dynamite-made darkness she lost all sense of direction and, instead of the water-hole, she found the rocky gulch that separated the two ranges looming up before her.

The explosion had blown away great masses of rock, widening the gap in the hills, and she was engaged in steering her way through the fallen debris when suddenly Pommie shied and came to an abrupt halt.

"What's the matter now, honey?"

Peering over her horse's head, she glimpsed something through the smoke—a limp figure lying on the ground.

Slim and Jake, riding alongside at that moment, saw it also, and they gave a grim shout.

"It's the coyote who blew up the water-hole!" exclaimed the horse-breaker.

"Guess it looks as if he's got his deserts, after all," added Slim, jumping from the saddle. "Must ha' misjudged the force of the explosion and was knocked out when he tried to run for it."

Crossing to the dim-seen figure, he bent over it.

"Is he dead?" asked Jake.

The foreman shook his head.

"Nope—only stunned. He'll come round long before we can get him to gaol."

"But who is he?" asked Merle, hurriedly swinging down to the ground.

"Who is he?" Slim turned. "Why, who do you think it can be, Miss Merle—who but the no-good I've warned you against all along!"

"You mean—"

Grimly the foreman nodded and stood aside so that Merle could see for herself. She took one look at that smoke-grimed face, then her cheeks whitened.

For it was Larry who lay there—Larry who still grasped a length of dynamite fuse in one hand.

What a bitter shock for Merle. You will be held enthralled by the continuation of this dramatic incident — in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.



DOLORES

The Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

TRAPPED IN THE GUN TURRET

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westonsmouth Holiday Camp, discovered that a secret connected with Chris' dead uncle was hidden in Spy Tower on near-by Dartfleet Island.

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl, staying at the camp, was also after the secret.

Spy Tower belonged to Admiral Hardacre, who owned the island. He told the chums that he would only allow the person who took the part of empress in the forthcoming regatta to enter the tower, and then only on regatta day.

A diving competition at a near-by Martello Tower was arranged between Dolores and Pat to decide which of them should be empress.

On the morning of the competition, the chums saw Dolores stealing off towards the Martello Tower, and curiously they followed.

Little did they realise that the mischief-maker was leading them into a trap.

"**COME** on—she's heading straight for the Martello Tower," whispered Pat, and excitedly she led the way through the bushes on the cliff top.

Ahead could be seen Dolores' slender figure; and, utterly ignorant of the fact that she knew she was being followed, the two chums continued to trail her.

Before reaching the old tower that was such a conspicuous landmark, however, the mischief-maker darted off at a tangent. Reaching the edge of the cliff, she cast another quick look over her shoulder, and, clambering over the edge, quickly disappeared.

"Hallo, where's she gone to?" asked Chris in surprise.

She and Pat broke into a run. When they reached the cliff edge and cautiously peeped over they saw six feet below them a great sandbank jutting out, and on it was a concrete gun-turret, a relic of the war. There was no sign of Dolores, but footprints in the sand led straight to the concrete platform on which the gun-turret had been built.

"She's gone into the turret!" exclaimed Pat. "But what can be her game?"

More and more intrigued, the chums clambered down to the bank, then tip-toed towards the square concrete structure. The wooden door stood open, and the turret was dark. All they could see were piles of old ammunition boxes.

"She must be behind them," Pat whispered, and tip-toed through the doorway.

Chris followed, but hardly had they stepped inside than they received a startling surprise. The

door slammed behind them and there came a mocking laugh from Dolores.

"Tricked you! You didn't guess that I was really hiding outside, did you?"

"Why, you rotter!"

With a furious shout Pat hurled herself at the door, but already the mischief-maker had pushed home the heavy bolt. There came another tinkling laugh.

"So long! Hope you don't get out too late to miss the diving test," called Dolores, then came the sound of receding footsteps.

Helplessly the chums surveyed one another. What had their rival's object been in decoying them into the turret and imprisoning them there?

"This is her scheme to wangle out of the diving test," declared Pat.

"Must be," agreed Chris. "When we don't turn up, she will claim the role of empress by default. Oh, golly, we must get out of here! We can't let her become empress."

Desperately they both gazed around. The only possible means of escape was through a jagged hole in one corner of the roof, but that was far too high up for them to reach. Then, as Pat's gaze settled on the empty ammunition boxes, she gave a whoop.

"Dolores hasn't been quite clever enough," she cried. "She forgot those old boxes."

Rushing forward, she seized one of them and planted it down by the wall, under the hole. Getting the idea, Chris rushed to help, and soon they had built the boxes up into a rough kind of stairway. Mounting it, Pat grasped the edge of the hole and pulled herself up through it. Once on the roof, she turned and gave a helping hand to Chris.

A few minutes later both girls were clambering back up to the top of the cliff.

"We'll beat her yet!" panted Pat. "The diving contest won't have started yet. Come on—leg it for the Martello Tower!"

And off they went at a run, but on reaching their objective they pulled up in surprise. There was not a single soul there.

"Golly, where can everyone have got to?" Chris gasped. "Pat, it was seven o'clock Bruce said, wasn't it?"

"It was," Pat replied, and gazed around in bewilderment. "Gosh, where's Bruce? Where's Willis Green? Where's anybody? Come on, let's look round."

They explored the building from end to end. But the tower was utterly deserted. In utter bewilderment the two chums stared at each other.

"Well, if this doesn't beat the band!" Chris exclaimed. "Only thing I can think of is, something may have happened to delay them!"

"That must be the explanation," Pat nodded. So they settled down

to wait. The minutes sped by, but there was still no sign of the missing holiday-campers. Pat began to get uneasy.

"This is jolly suspicious!" she declared. "Chris, I've got a feeling that this is another of Dolores' tricks. Look here, I'm going back! If they are on their way we're bound to meet them coming along—"

"Gee, why didn't we think of that before?" Chris said. "Let's scam—"

And urgently now they set off for the camp. Breathless and furious, they reached it at last. Determined now to have a showdown with Dolores, they hurried through the line of chalets. And as they did so there came a sudden cheer from the camp cafe.

"They're in there!" Chris gasped. For a moment they hesitated. And then, as the cheering broke out again, they stiffened. For distinctly now they heard the words that accompanied the cheer. And those words, voiced in an enthusiastic uproar, were:

"Dolores! Good old Dolores! Three cheers for Dolores!"



THE CLEVEREST STROKE OF ALL

Pat quivered as she heard that. Chris' eyes flashed. The campers were cheering Dolores—cheering the girl who had cunningly locked

them up.

"Come on!" Pat urged. The chums rushed towards the cafe, but in the open doorway they pulled up.

By the counter stood Dolores, looking radiant and charming. Gazing at her admiringly, lemonade glasses in hand, were Bruce Feltham, the young sports master, and several campers, while around the walls stood a crowd of cheering boys and girls.

"What a sport!" cried Lucy Day at that moment. "What a brick!"

Pat felt she could bear no more. Quivering with anger, she darted into the cafe.

"What a double-dyed schemer, you mean!" she panted.

"What a trickster!" put in Chris. The cheering died away as if by magic, and in startled consternation everyone turned and gazed at the chums while Dolores shook her head sadly, as if utterly at a loss. For a moment there was silence, then Bruce, looking unusually stern, stepped forward.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Have you two girls taken leave of your senses?"

"No, we haven't—it's you who must have done that, otherwise you wouldn't be cheering this cheat!" And scornfully Pat surveyed Dolores. There came another horrified gasp.

"Oh, Pat, what do you mean?" gulped Dolores, as if terribly shocked. Pat glared at her.

"You know without my telling you, you trickster!" she snapped, and whirled on the rest of the crowd. "I don't know how Dolores wangled it, but she's completely pulled the wool over your eyes," she asserted. "She

never intended to take part in the diving contest. She schemed to trick her way into the role of empress right from the start."

"I'll say she did," gasped Chris. "That's why she shut us up in the gun-turret."

"Gun-turret?" It was Lucy Day who cried out. "What on earth are you talking about? Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves! Considering that—"

She broke off as Bruce held up his hand, and sternly the young sports-master turned to Pat.

"You had better say all that is in your mind," he said quietly.

Pat didn't need bidding twice. Stormily she poured out the whole story. In silence the campers listened while Dolores pretended to look first bewildered, then shocked.

"Oh, Pat, how can you say such awful things about me!" she gulped at last, and tears actually came to her eyes. "It's all so absurd. Why should I trick you into following me? Why should I want to shut you up?"

"Because you meant to cheat Pat out of being appointed empress," flashed back Chris.

There came an indignant shout from Lucy and Dolores' other supporters, and to the chums' dismay they saw that even Willis Green and his chums were looking frankly incredulous. Then, as the hubbub was at its height, Bruce raised his hand again.

"Quiet, please. It's about time I said something. I don't know what motive Pat and Chris have for telling this fantastic story, but it's about time they heard the truth."

"We know it already," Chris cried. "You don't. Listen." And Bruce gestured impatiently. "The truth is," he added quietly, "that Dolores, whom you are accusing now of all sorts of meanness, has just resigned her claims in your favour, Pat."

"What?" Pat stared, completely flabbergasted, while Chris blinked incredulously across at the mischief-maker, too startled to speak.

"Dolores," repeated Bruce sternly, "came to me this morning, just as we were about to set out for the Martello Tower. Dolores was ready to go through with the dive, but she said she had been thinking over things. As you were so keen—as you had set your heart on being empress—"

"Oh, please, Bruce," Dolores murmured in hypocritical protest.

"I'm going on," Bruce said determinedly. "Dolores then said that as the idea was yours in the first place she'd step down in your favour, Pat. That," Bruce added bitingly, "was the most sporting thing I've ever heard of, and that was why we were all cheering Dolores when you barged in with this idiotic and insulting charge of having been plotted against."

"They both ought to be ashamed of themselves," declared Lucy Day indignantly.

"Hear, hear!"

From all around there came a shout of agreement. Dazedly Pat and Chris stood there, not knowing what to say, hardly knowing what to think.

"Now," Bruce said, "it's Dolores' turn. I don't know if you want to say anything, Dolores—"

"Yes, please," Dolores came forward. "I'm sorry," she said, a realistic quiver on her lips. "I thought Pat had finished hating me. But—but after this—she shook her head sadly—"friendly rivalry is one thing, but this—this beastly slander—is entirely another. I've changed my mind now. I would like to stand for empress, after all."

"Oh, goodie!" cried Lucy Day, and there a delighted cheer rose from many of those present. It was followed by a hiss and a hostile shout:

"Down with Pat!"

"After this bit of spite she doesn't deserve to be appointed!"

"It's for you boys and girls to decide," declared Bruce. "Practically the whole camp is here, so we will

settle this matter once and for all. Who says now that Dolores should be empress? Show hands—"

And all, except half a dozen, shot up. There could be no mistaking the feeling of the crowd. All but a few had turned against the chums.

"Then that decides it," Bruce said. "Pat, you're out of it. I hope," he added bitingly, "that you've learned your lesson."

There was another cheer, and while Pat and Chris stood there, dazed and bewildered, the campers rushed forward, hoisted Dolores up on high, and carried her in triumph from the cafe.



ONLY ONE WAY OUT

Overwhelmed by their humiliation and defeat of all their hopes, the chums did not speak for a minute or so. Then Chris, her face white and strained, looked agonisedly across at Pat.

"Oh, Pat!" she whispered. "Oh, Pat, what can we do now? She's going to be empress. That—that means she'll be put in the Spy Tower, that means she'll find my uncle's secret—"

"She won't!" Pat muttered. She was trying to think—desperately, frantically. But her mind at that moment was still grappling with what Dolores had done and the cunning, hypocritical way in which she had done it. Now, too late, she saw clearly the whole scheme.

Dolores, of course, having lured the chums into the turret, had artfully imprisoned them there, and then raced back to the camp to play out her sweet and self-sacrificing game with Bruce & Co.

"And we," Pat thought bitterly—"we barged in and played right into her hands. And now, without any diving test, she's got exactly what she schemed for. Oh golly, there must be some way out of this!"

"But what?" Chris asked despairingly. "Oh, Pat, what can we do?"

"I don't know at the moment, but don't worry, I'll think of something," Pat said soothingly. "After all, the regatta's still a day or two off. And there's one comfort—she can't do anything until the actual day of the event. That leaves us with a day or two to think up something. Anyway, what about breakfast?" she added. "Are we going?"

"Why not?" Chris asked, but she shook her head. It was obvious that Chris was utterly depressed.

They went into breakfast. A stone-like silence greeted them. After the meal everybody flocked to Dolores and, leaving Pat and Chris entirely on their own, went out with their empress. Having finished breakfast, the chums went down to the boathouse where the finishing touches to the Roman galley were now being put. But when they appeared on the deck—

"Well, what are you doing here?" Lucy Day demanded, with a hostile glare. "Don't you know you're out of it? We don't want either of you in the regatta," she added bluntly.

"Hear, hear!" went up at once from her cronies around her.

Pat flushed. Chris immediately began to glare. Then Bruce came along, his handsome face rather strained.

"It would help, Pat, if—if you would sheer off," he said. "I'm sorry, but—well, you can't say you haven't brought it on yourselves—"

"Brought it on my foot!" Chris furiously exclaimed. "If you weren't all blind—"

But Pat anxiously checked her outburst by a pull at her sleeve. She could see that insistence now would only make matters worse. Defiantness and stubbornness obviously was not going to get them anywhere at the moment, when feelings were running so high against them.

They went away, Pat desperately racking her brain. Lunch came, but in the restaurant the same cold

hostility greeted them. Dolores, at Bruce's table, glanced across at them once or twice, a mocking triumph in her eyes which made Pat burn.

"Oh, Pat, what are we to do?" Chris despairingly asked again, when, after lunch, they went for a walk on their own.

Pat shook her head. She had toyed with, and rejected, a dozen ideas during the course of the morning.

"Just wait," she said. "We've still got time. Dolores can't get to the island until regatta day, and until then she can do nothing. In the meantime, we'll think up something. Whatever happens, we must—and will—be in Spy Tower first. And—and if the worst comes to the worst—"

"Well?" Chris asked.

"Well"—Pat drew a deep breath—"we'll just have to pole over to the island secretly. I know we can't get in through the door of the tower, but one of us, at least, can slip up the creeper and get through the window. But, as I say, that is if only the worst does come to the worst. Nothing can happen yet—"

But couldn't it? When they arrived back in camp and entered the cafe for a drink before dinner, they received an electrifying shock. For in the cafe everybody was talking animatedly about the latest regatta developments.

Dolores, apparently, was not resting on her laurels. Dolores, not satisfied with her victory, was now taking charge. Dolores was insistent they should use the figurehead of Captain Kirabee for the galley. Dolores had suggested getting advance publicity in the local press, with descriptions and photographs of Dartfleet Island, and all that had been passed on by phone to the admiral. And the chums learned to their consternation that the admiral, now as keen as anybody to make the regatta a success, had agreed to all this.

And to-morrow morning, at eight o'clock, Bruce and Dolores were rowing over to see the admiral to talk things over, to take photographs, and to make their final regatta plans. The admiral had even relaxed to the extent of promising the empress the key of Spy Tower so that she could have a preview of the prison which was to hold her for half an hour on regatta day.

From snatches here and there Pat and Chris gathered all that information. The effect on them was one of utter dismay.

"She—she's worked it," Chris said, drawing a deep breath. "Dolores doesn't intend to wait for the regatta and the dive she'll have to make. She'll push everything ahead to make her coup beforehand. Pat, you see what it means if she does get into that tower to-morrow morning?"

"As she will," Pat said, her eyes glimmering. "Oh, yes, that's her game right enough. Well—she drew a deep breath—"things can't be any worse for us, whatever happens, Chris, so—"

"So?" Chris echoed. "So," Pat said, "to-night—when the admiral and everybody is in bed—we go to Dartfleet Island. And we've got to find that secret, Chris, before Dolores and Bruce arrive at the island to-morrow morning."

"It'll be jolly risky," muttered Chris. "If we're caught—"

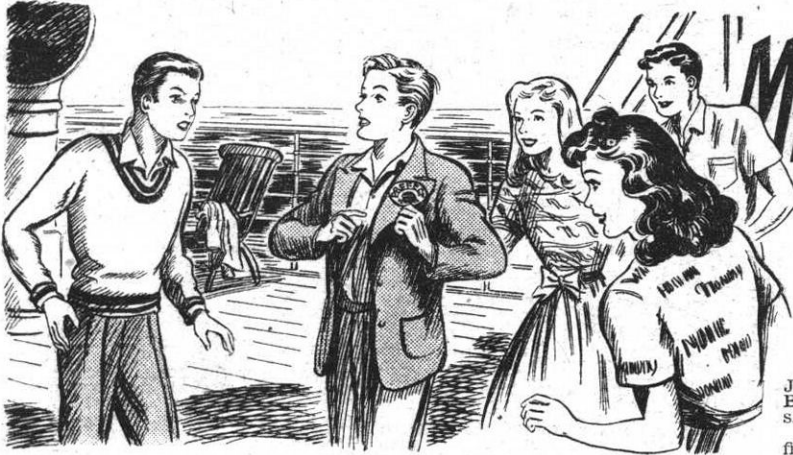
"Dolores isn't going to beat us," cut in Pat. "Risk or no risk—we've got to do it."

At which Chris nodded grimly. "It's the only way," she said. "Yes, Pat, we'll do it!"

And to that resolve the chums firmly held. It was not until nearly two o'clock in the morning that they ventured out of their chalet and stole through the silent camp to the misty water's edge.

And there, embarking in one of the camp's boats, they set a course straight ahead for Dartfleet Island.

Will Pat and Chris discover the secret of the Spy Tower? Look out for surprising developments when they reach the island in next week's grand instalment.



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

A BLOW FOR BURT

"COME on, shipmates! We'll be able to put in half an hour's work on our rug before lectures begin. I'll just slip down and get it."

Sally Warner, merry and bright, was speaking to her chums, Fay Manners and Don Weston. It was early morning on board the liner Ocean Star—known as the Floating College by all the students who were travelling on her to Australia.

An arts and crafts exhibition was being held in a few days' time, and Sally & Co. were busily engaged in making a rug. It was going to be a rush to get it finished in time.

"Just a moment!" Alec Burt, the weedy sneak of the Floating College, came sauntering up, eating peanuts and throwing the shells over the deck as he did so. "Say, Sally, am I going to be allowed to show my model ship in the exhibition?"

"I've already told you it's not eligible because you didn't make it," replied Sally, who was one of the organisers of the affair as well as a prospective exhibitor.

She made to move on, but Burt planted himself in front of her.

"Just a moment," he said again. "Going down to your cabin to get that rug, are you? I suppose you know the cabins are out of bounds while the stewards clean up? I shall have to inform Phineas you're breaking a regulation—unless you change your mind about my model ship, that is!"

Sally flushed indignantly. It was true that students were not allowed down in their cabins at this time of the morning, but it would not have taken a moment to get the rug, and she knew the stewards wouldn't have minded. But rules were rules to Edgar T. Phineas, the bustling, efficient head prefect, and he would certainly refuse to allow Sally down on B deck if Burt sneaked on her.

She had no intention of letting him force her hand—but it meant that she and her chums would not be able to get on with their rug.

"I'm not changing my mind, Burt," she told that boy contemptuously.

"Okay!" Burt went on chewing peanuts. "No ship for me—no rug for you!"

"You little worm!" snorted Don angrily.

"And no names, either, or I'll report you for that!" snapped Burt.

"I'll soon tell a prefect—"

"Hallo, what's this about a prefect?"

And on to the scene came Johnny Briggs. Johnny was the fourth member of the cheery Co. led by Sally. His chums knew that he had been summoned to see Professor Willard, the headmaster, immediately after breakfast. Evidently it had not been an unpleasant interview, for Johnny was looking very pleased with himself.

"Is Burt bothering you, Sally?" he asked.

Sally told him what had happened. Johnny flipped a hand through the air with a nonchalant gesture.

"I'll deal with this," he said. "Sally, you have my permission to fetch the rug."

Sally grinned. She wished it was as easy as that.

"Your permission?" jeered Burt, emptying a handful of peanut shells on the deck. "Look at her rushing—"

"And pick up those nutshells, Burt!" Johnny said commandingly.

The chums blinked. Johnny ought to know that Burt wasn't likely to be at all impressed by these tactics. Sally caught hold of his arm.

"Oh, come on, Johnny," she said. "Forget Burt. And we'll have to forget the rug for the time being—"

"Eh? I said you could go and fetch it, Sally! And that's an order, too!"

"Golly!" Sally didn't know whether to laugh or feel exasperated. The trouble with Johnny was that he never knew when to stop. "Yes, but—"

"If Sally goes," threatened Burt, "then I'm telling Phineas straight away!"

But even that didn't seem to disconcert Johnny.

"Not so fast, Burt! Before you see Phineas, perhaps you'd better have a look at this!"

He took something out of his pocket and gave it a polish. It was a large badge, and now, ostentatiously he pinned it to the lapel of his coat. He stood back, as if expecting a sensation. And a sensation there was. For on the badge were the words:

"Temporary Prefect."

Sally stared in goggling amazement, and so did Don and Fay. Burt looked as if he was going to collapse.

"Johnny!" yelled his chums incredulously.

Johnny patted the badge.

"Temporary prefect—that's me!" he said, with an expansive beam.

"This is what the Head wanted to see me about. A new idea of his. Trying out some of the chaps as temporary prefects for a day. I'm first, and I'm a prefect until lights out to-night. What do you think about that, eh?"

He puffed out his chest. His chums were still trying to recover from the shock of learning that Johnny had been promoted to the dignity of a prefect. Then Sally held out her hand, while a twinkle came into her blue eyes.

"Congrats!" she exclaimed delightedly. "Oh, golly, our Johnny a full-blown prefect! Then I really can go and fetch the rug?"

"I have given my permission," Johnny said importantly.

"Thank you, sir—"
"Gee, there's no need to 'sir' me," Johnny said benevolently. "Hey, Burt! Get busy picking up those shells!"

Burt's face was a study of discomfiture.

"But—but I didn't know you were a prefect," he whined.

"You shouldn't have been cheeky. Jump to it!"

Burt's eyes glittered; but a look at that badge of authority was enough. With a scowl he "jumped to it."

Just then Edgar T. Phineas came hustling up. Sally, about to go off to collect the rug, saw Johnny greet him with a hefty slap on the back.

"Hallo, old man!" he said heartily. "Having a look round? Don't worry. Everything's under control."

Phineas grunted. He wasn't looking too pleased. He had just heard about this idea of temporary prefects, and he didn't share the Head's enthusiasm.

"Say, Briggs—"

"Call me Johnny—as one prefect to another, you know! You'll be able to leave things to me, Edgar old chap! I'm just the man for this job—"

Sally chuckled as she slipped away with Fay and Don. Johnny had given them permission to go below; and as Johnny was now a prefect, that was good enough for them.

They collected the rug, wool, and hooks. Then returning to the upper deck once more, they soon became busy, the rug draped over their knees as they sat side by side in steamer-chairs.

It would be a lovely rug when finished. But the chums had been rather ambitious, for it was large and the design complicated—hence their having to rush now to get it finished in time for the exhibition.

"Two blue, one green—wonder how Johnny's getting on?" murmured Sally, as expertly she hooked wool into the canvas backing.

"I bet he'll want to start umpteen reforms and turn the college ship inside out all in the space of a day!" chuckled Don. "Hallo, here he comes."

Johnny came up, looked at them with solemn intensity.

"Oh dear! Do you think he'll mix with us now?" teased Fay. "Johnny, we think you ought to get us excused from lectures, so that we can finish our rug."

"You're excused from lectures, all right," said Johnny.

"What? Johnny, you're a marvel!" whooped Sally joyfully. "Oh, I say, how wonderful! But how on earth did you manage it—"

"Wait a minute." Johnny, strangely enough, wasn't looking at all jubilant. "You're excused lectures because lectures have been cancelled."

"That's all right—same thing! We'll get the rug finished now."

"I hope so," Johnny mumbled. "But first you've got to shift some furniture—"

"Sh-shift f-furniture?" stuttered Don.

"Yes. And then you've got to get one of the lecture-rooms tidied up ready for an important inspection!"

Johnny went on with an uneasy blink. "That's why lectures have been cancelled—for this inspection."

"But what about our rug?" demanded Sally in dismay. "This is just our opportunity to get it finished. Oh, no, we can't shift Johnny! If you got us this job, Johnny, you'll have to get us out of it again. You're a prefect—"

"Y-yes," mumbled Johnny unhappily. "I'm a prefect, but Phineas happens to be head prefect! And he says you've got to do this job—now—right away—at once!"



JOHNNY'S HELPING HAND

Gone now were the chums' glad smiles—their elation at the prospect of having plenty of time to finish their precious rug. Gone, too, was some of their faith in Johnny as a prefect!

They could guess what had happened. Johnny had overdone things as usual. His hearty affability, and all his talk of what he had done, was doing, and intended doing, had rubbed Phineas up the wrong way—with the result that they had been landed with the worst job of all in connection with the forthcoming inspection.

And that was indeed the case. Johnny himself realised it—now it was too late. He winced as he saw three pairs of eyes glaring in his direction.

"Gee, don't look at me like that," he mumbled. "I did give you permission to fetch the rug—"

"Fat lot of good that is now!" Don pointed out.

"Eh? Umm!" Johnny stared uneasily along the deck. "Phineas said we've got to get busy right away. And—and I said we would. Gee, you want me to be a success as a prefect, don't you? You—you won't let me down?"

Sally's blue eyes softened. Johnny was looking so miserably that she forgave him instantly. His chums always did.

"Of course we won't let you down, Johnny," she smiled, and jumped to her feet. "Come on, Merrymakers! Let's get the job done in record time, and then we can come back to our rug!"

The treasured rug was put in a place of safety. Then Johnny led his chums along the deck—this being D Deck, specially reserved for the students.

Johnny had cheered up immediately, and he was already regaining something of a strut by the time they reached the scene of operations.

"Apparently the news has just come through that Senor Pedro Gonzalez, from Brazil, has been nominated a governor of the International College," Johnny explained. That was the new college, to be opened in Australia, where all the students were going. "And as Senor Gonzalez happens to be a passenger on board this ship, the Head decided there must be an inspection in his honour."

"The queer ideas these headmasters do have," murmured Sally. "Oh, well, what do we do now that we're here, Johnny?"

They had entered one of the lecture-rooms, and Johnny flapped his arms around.

"This has got to be swept, dusted, and polished. That cupboard over there has got to be moved here, and this table has got to be moved out and the chairs arranged. Well, off you go!"

"Go? Oh good!" Sally's eyes twinkled. "You mean we come back later?"

"Eh? I didn't say anything of the sort. I mean, get busy—sweeping, dusting, moving stuff. You'll soon get it done—"

"We will?" interrupted Don. "What about you? Aren't you here?"

"Well, as prefect in charge—hem! But I'll give you a hand."

"Big of you," murmured Sally

gravely. "Now pile in, shipmates. The sooner we get this done, the sooner we get back to rug-making."

But they had reckoned without Johnny. Johnny was taking his duties very seriously. First, he wanted everyone to start sweeping; then he decided that the cupboard ought to be moved first; then he thought it better if the table was got out—

Sally, Fay, and Don looked at each other hopelessly.

"Look, Johnny," suggested Sally, with a wink at Fay and Don, "hadn't you better see about your other duties? You're a prefect now, you know. Lots of responsibilities. We'll manage somehow without your leadership. You've given us—er—a good start!"

"Well, perhaps you're right," Johnny frowned. "But no larks, mind. I'll be back in about half an hour."

Importantly he strode off; and free now to go their own sweet way, his chums set to with a will, working swiftly and efficiently. In less than half an hour the job was done, with the floor polished and the lecture-room looking a credit to their efforts.

"That's that!" smiled Sally. "We've done Johnny proud. And now all hands to the hooks again on our rug!"

The chums hurried away. Meanwhile, Johnny, having toured the two decks specially reserved for the Floating College, and having been amazed to discover that he had no other duties, was on his way back.

"Gee, I hope they've made a job of it," he muttered, and then broke off, aware that two figures were standing outside the lecture-room which had been delegated to his charge. One was Professor Willard, the headmaster, and with him was Phineas. Johnny hurried forward, confident that his chums wouldn't let him down.

"Everything all right, sir?" he beamed, waiting for words of praise.

"Briggs!" the headmaster rounded on him angrily. "What is the meaning of this? Phineas tells me you were put in charge of this room, and now I find it in this disgraceful state half an hour before the inspection!"

"But-but-but—" stammered Johnny.

"Look at it—look at it!" exclaimed Professor Willard furiously.

Johnny looked, and then he rocked on his heels.

The lecture-room was in a terrible state of chaos. White footmarks were everywhere on the polished floor. The cupboard stood askew from the wall; desks had been shifted topsy-turvy.

"I appoint you a temporary prefect. I give you responsibility, and this is the result!"

Johnny stood dumb with the shock of it. It was not the Head's anger that made him wince so much as the thought that he had left his chums here to put the room in order for inspection. He had relied on them; and now, in these moments of stress, he could only believe that they had played this trick on him as a joke.



THE FACE POWDER BLUFF

Johnny felt himself tremble. He was angry—but he was wounded, too. He really thought that Sally and Fay and Don

had done this to him. They hadn't meant any harm, of course, for they hadn't known that Professor Willard would discover it before he did. But harm had been done, and he would have to bear the brunt of it.

"Well, Briggs, haven't you anything to say?" demanded the headmaster.

Johnny gulped. His chums had let him down; but the Head wouldn't know that.

"I—I'm sorry, sir. I'll put the room to rights straight away—"

"Indeed you will! And then you will report to me. I can see that I

have made a mistake in giving you a position of responsibility and trust!"

Professor Willard stalked off, accompanied by Phineas.

Johnny shook his head dazedly. Then his eyes glinted indignantly.

"Gosh, where are they?" he muttered. "If this is their idea of a joke it's not mine!"

And Johnny, angry and offended, went off to find his chums. He had to get this off his chest before he tackled the job of making order out of chaos in the lecture-room.

But even as he went looking for them, Sally went another way looking for him. From the other side of the lecture-room—on the port side of the deck—she had heard everything.

Busy working on the rug—she was there by herself, for Fay had gone below to get some more wool, and Don was scouting round to find out the time of the inspection—she had heard Professor Willard calling Johnny over the coals.

Sally had listened in amazement, then in consternation as she realised there was something wrong with the lecture-room which she and her chums had left in such perfect order.

At once Sally leapt to her feet. Once again work on the rug was abandoned as she rushed round to discover the details.

And so it was that she arrived on the starboard side of the deck just as a figure slunk furtively out of the lecture-room.

It was the figure of Alec Burt—a very scared-looking Burt, for he had nearly been caught inside the room by the headmaster and Phineas. Just in time he had concealed himself in the cupboard.

Then it had looked as if Briggs would come in; but Briggs had gone chasing off somewhere, and Burt had quickly emerged, leaving a fresh trail of white footmarks across the room from his chalk-covered shoes.

Carefully he dusted the powder off the bottom of his shoes. Then, emerging on to the deck, he had another shock, as Sally suddenly pounced on him.

Sally had seen him removing the chalk powder; with horrified eyes she saw the state of the lecture-room.

"Burt, you've done this!" she accused angrily.

"Oh, yeah?" Burt, recovering himself, gave a crafty grin. "Don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do! You messed up this room so that Johnny would be blamed—"

"Serve him right, too!" Burt sneered. "But you can't blame it on to me, Sally Warner. It'll be my word against yours—and that won't get you anywhere, will it?"

And Burt scuttled away, leaving Sally seething with anger, but realising she was helpless at the moment. How could she prove that the sneak had done this damage out of spite against Johnny?

For a moment she stood there, and then a gleam came into her blue eyes. She darted off, to see Johnny coming towards her. He looked at her with injured reproach.

"Gee, Sally, that wasn't playing the game—"

"You're telling me! It was a beastly trick!" Sally couldn't understand why Johnny was staring at her so offensively; while he was somewhat shaken by what he believed to be her self-condemnation of what had happened. "But we'll put matters right," she rushed on. "Johnny, you get cracking and tidy up the room again—"

"Me? Look here, I think you—" "I'll send Fay and Don along to help you."

"Huh! I should jolly well think so—"

Sally was gone. She met Don and Fay, quickly explained what had happened, and asked them to rally round Johnny, then herself raced on. Whereupon things began to happen. "Turn out! Line up!" shouted Sally to all the students.

"What's the idea?" went up a chorus.

"An inspection of the students before the inspection," said Sally breathlessly, an audacious light in her eyes.

"My hat! Whose idea is this?" "Johnny Briggs!" Sally announced calmly.

"Then it's a rotten idea! We're not turning out for him—," "Johnny is a prefect, with full powers of responsibility!" urged Sally. "Come on, there—come on!"

Grumblingly the students lined up. Sally saw that Alec Burt was among them. Placing herself at the head of the line, she marched them down the deck towards the main lounge, where a few moments before she had seen Professor Willard with all the masters—no doubt holding a conference in connection with the imminent arrival of Senor Pedro Gonzalez, the new governor.

"Smarten yourselves up and then file past the Head!" cried Sally recklessly.

She stood aside. The line of students proceeded to march through the lounge—a very spick-and-span lounge, with polished floors and everything in apple-pie order in readiness for the inspection.

Professor Willard stared in surprise.

"Good gracious! What is this—" "Inspection for the inspection, sir!" said the leading student, faithfully repeating what Sally had said. "Briggs' idea, sir!"

The line marched on. Professor Willard looked dazed. Outside, Sally fumbled in her handbag. At the same time she was watching Burt.

"Burt, what's that behind you?" she asked suddenly.

The sneak stopped, looked behind him, scowled as he saw nothing, and trooped on. Sally herself now tagged on immediately after him.

On marched the students. On marched Burt, approaching the still astonished headmaster. But suddenly Professor Willard seemed to come out of his trance.

"Burt! Stop! Look what you are doing, boy!" he exclaimed angrily. "Your footmarks on the floor!"

Alec Burt stared down at his feet; and all across the floor where he had trodden were white footmarks. Even as he swivelled round some more of the marks appeared.

He gave a frightened gasp. He saw Sally standing there, smiling—Sally, who had sprinkled some of her face powder on the deck outside

when she had told the unsuspecting Burt to look behind him!

"Goodness! They're just like the marks in the untidy lecture-room!" she exclaimed innocently. "Just the same pattern of a rubber heel!"

Professor Willard gave a start. "You're right, Sally—"

"I didn't do it—I didn't!" whined Burt, trembling now. "I didn't go in there—"

"Burt, you didn't go where?" demanded Professor Willard, fixing a gimlet gaze on the sneak. "What do you know about the lecture-room? Did you have anything to do with the disorder there?"

"No—no, not me, sir!" But Burt's expression denied his words. His gaze was shifting frantically about the lounge, seeking some avenue of escape.

Professor Willard drew himself up to his full height. His expression became more thunderous than ever.

"Boy!" he roared. "What do you know about those footprints that were left behind in the lecture-room? Do not try to tell me you did not go there. I have the evidence before my eyes."

"Bib-but it couldn't be," stammered Burt. "It can't be chalk—I mean, I—I'm sure I brushed it—"

"Well?" demanded the professor, as the agitated Burt faltered, realising how he had given himself away. "Are you going to deny it after you have convicted yourself actually out of your own mouth?"

But the sneak of the Floating College could not stand up to a cross-examination, and in a few moments the angry headmaster had got the truth out of him.

"Wretched boy!" Professor Willard exclaimed. "And I was ready to hold Briggs responsible—"

"Great Scott, professor, that must have been why Briggs ordered this parade!" put in Mr. Wilf Hammer, the sports and classics master. "He wanted Burt to give himself away in front of us!"

Sally stood contentedly by, chuckling to herself.

"You're right, Hammer!" nodded the headmaster. "I was going to deprive Briggs of his prefectship, but this makes all the difference. I must go along and see him. Burt, take off your shoes and go down to my study in your socks. I shall deal with you when I return!"

Off went the Head. After him trailed Sally. They reached the lecture-room—once again shipshape

after the frantic endeavours of Fay and Don and Johnny—Johnny, who knew that his chums had not been responsible.

Johnny gave a little gulp as he saw the headmaster. Professor Willard beamed.

"A brilliant idea, Briggs!" he said. Johnny stared.

"I congratulate you on your cleverness, Briggs!"

Johnny's mouth gaped open.

"It is such initiative that I admire in a boy!" went on the headmaster. "You will stay as temporary prefect for the day, Briggs, and I shall bear you in mind when I come to appoint a new permanent prefect. Ah, the room is splendid now. Well done, well done!"

Johnny puffed out his chest, convinced now that he really had done something brilliant, but completely vague as to what it was.

The Head went out. Phineas was beckoning frantically from the doorway that Senor Pedro Gonzalez was approaching.

Sally burst out into a peal of laughter.

"Silence!" hissed Phineas. "Get ready for the inspection!"

"Silence!" echoed Johnny, drawing himself up. "Stand to attention for the inspection!"

Senor Gonzalez appeared, accompanied by the headmaster. Once again Johnny came in for praise.

"A splendid show!" said the governor genially. "I really am most impressed by what I have already seen, Senor Willard. It is my wish that the Floating College should be given a holiday for the rest of the day!"

So everybody was happy—with the exception of Alec Burt. The students because they were given a holiday; Sally & Co. because they would now be able to finish their precious rug in time for the exhibition; and Johnny because his day as a temporary prefect had ended in such a blaze of glory.

For the rest of that day he strutted round proud as a turkey. He became somewhat deflated when, laughing, Sally told him what she had done, but even then he managed to get in the last word.

"Gosh, thanks, Sally, but—well, it's the sort of thing I'd have thought of anyway, isn't it?"

(End of this week's story.)

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

THE FOURTH GREY GHOST

(Continued from page 268.)

into the tiny, windowless room before her.

It was empty. Penelope stood very still, staring through the eyeholes in her hood.

She could not believe it. It was incredible. Wonderingly, a little dazed, she stepped forward, gaze roving.

The room was tiny, oak panelled. At the far end stood a heavy desk; in front of it a praying-stool. On one wall was fastened a fairly modern glass case, containing tall silver candlesticks and the ancient habit of an abbess. On the opposite wall was a large oil painting.

Abbot's Room contained nothing else.

Bewildered, quite incredulous, Penelope turned, staring back towards the music-room. Her hand rose shakily towards her hood.

It was then that she had the uncanny feeling that someone was standing behind her in Abbot's Room. There couldn't be, of course. But the feeling grew. Instinctively she started to turn.

"Grab him!" hissed a voice.

A hand flashed round her, pressing the hood against her mouth. Before she could move or struggle, she found herself being dragged back—back, until, amazingly, the glow from the

piano light vanished, and she found herself in impenetrable blackness.

Once the first shock was over Penelope began to struggle, but instantly a youthful voice hissed warningly near the hood of her grey robe.

"Keep still—unless you want trouble!"

Penelope gave a startled gasp, then relaxed.

For she knew those cool, commanding tones. They belonged to Hugh Mason, the leader of the Grey Ghosts!

Then it had been the daring Secret Society who had appeared seemingly from nowhere in Abbot's Room, and who had dragged her back into complete darkness.

But where was she? What was happening?

After a few moments the hands grasping her loosened their grip, and Penelope sank down on to hard stone.

"Light, No. 3," came Hugh's whispered command.

A match flared up, and Penelope tensed. Yellow light flickered on grey robes as a candle stump was lit, and thankfully Penelope saw that her own long robe concealed her stockings legs.

They must never know that she was a girl; was the headmaster's daughter. At all costs she must keep her real identity a secret.

Breath held, she looked up, gazing about her. Intense curiosity and excitement had replaced her first alarm.

The air was strangely musty and dry.

With a wondering thrill she realised that this place must be a narrow, secret bolt-hole in the massive outer wall of East Wing.

So that explained it! There must be a secret panel in Abbot's Room. The Grey Ghosts had been hidden in this bolt-hole and—

Her excited conjectures faded away. Beyond the pale-burning candle crouched the three hooded figures. Through the holes in their hoods their eyes gleamed with angry suspicion, and suddenly their leader leaned grimly forward.

"So you're the fellow who calls himself No. 4!" he snapped. "Well, what's your game? Who are you?"

Penelope's heart began to pound. She could feel the stern determination of the three figures that hemmed her in, yet she dared not reveal her identity.

"Who are you?" demanded No. 1 again. "Answer! I warn you, the Grey Ghosts are not to be trifled with."

Penelope licked lips that had suddenly gone dry.

"I—I can't tell you," she whispered. There came an angry snort from the sturdy figure she knew was Bob Gower.

"Can't? You mean won't! Well, if you won't talk, then we'll have to adopt other means."

And stretching out his hand, he stepped forward grimly. Penelope shrank back. His intention was clear. He meant to rip off her hood!

Thrill succeeds thrill in next Friday's grand instalment. Don't miss it.

ROSINA'S MOST DARING COUP

(Continued from page 266.)

Cartels' window, and I promised to give it to her for her twenty-first birthday."

"I take it that no one would be aware of this, apart from members of your household and the manager of the jeweller's?" asked Noel keenly.

"No one," agreed the old lady. "I cannot imagine who dared to disguise as myself. I should be most grateful if you would be present at the little party I am giving for my niece's birthday this evening, when I shall hand her my gift. Till then I shall take your advice and lock it in my safe."

Noel asked permission to interview the servants, and his request was instantly granted. As they left the room he glanced at his young partner.

"Well, June?" he murmured. "I saw you watching our hostess closely. Do you suspect that she's our old friend Rosina—in disguise?"

"Not this time, nunky! That's the real Mrs. Sharman."

They had a word with the three servants—an elderly cook and manservant who had been in Mrs. Sharman's service for years, and were beyond suspicion; and the parlour-maid, Louise—a plain, sallow-faced girl, who had been employed only recently.

"Well, nunky?" whispered June, as they left the kitchen.

Noel shook his head.

"Not one of those could be Rosina!" he affirmed. "But I'm convinced she's still after the tiara. So that only leaves us with the guests, June—and, of course, Mrs. Sharman's niece!"

When they reached the house that evening, June wearing her gayest frock, they found Joyce Sharman and her youthful guests already assembled.

It was clear that none of the young people was aware of the real purpose behind Noel and June's visit.

June's heart beat quickly as Mrs. Sharman introduced them. Any one of these guests might be Rosina in disguise! But as she made her way round the group, chatting casually, she became convinced that the daring girl-crook was not present.

With a little sigh of relief, she joined her uncle at the far end of the room.

"She's not here, nunky!" she declared. "She must have given up her plan."

"I wish I could think so, June; but I know Rosina. I'm convinced that she isn't far away!"

While June joined the youthful guests at supper, Noel excused himself and made a swift patrol of the house. He checked the doors and windows, and put the servants on their guard.

Returning to the dining-room, he found an excited group gathered round Mrs. Sharman. The old lady was in the act of opening her safe.

Noel looked on keenly as Mrs. Sharman took out the jewel-case.

But at that instant there came a stifled cry from June, and Noel saw her horrified gaze fastened on the french windows that opened on to the terrace.

Even as he whirled, he caught a fleeting glimpse of an enchanting face, pale in the moonlight, and a pair of red lips parted in a mocking smile.

"Rosina!" cried Noel.

THE RESULT OF THE WAGER

The young detective rushed to the french windows, opened them, and sped out on to the terrace. It was deserted. For a moment he thought he heard a scuffling sound among the bushes. But a swift search revealed no sign

of the lurking intruder—and the grounds of the house were of considerable extent.

Noel returned to the dining-room, his boyish face grave, to confront his startled hostess and her agitated young guests.

"Mrs. Sharman—there is a daring thief hiding in your grounds," he announced tersely. "I am going to phone the police and organise a search. I advise you to keep the tiara locked in your safe until we have caught the girl. Rosina will stick at nothing to gain her ends!"

While the youthful guests gathered in an excited, whispering group, Noel hurried out into the hall, followed by June. A minute later he was speaking on the phone to Inspector Finch.

"What?" barked the inspector incredulously. "Rosina—again? All right, Raymond—I'll come along myself."

Noel replaced the receiver. June was pulling on her velvet wrap and dainty silk scarf.

"Can I help in the search, nunky?" "I'd rather you kept watch on the young guests, June," said Noel. "We can't afford to take any risks. I'm going to meet Inspector Finch."

He hurried out on to the drive, and in a few minutes saw a police car swing round the bend. Inspector Finch clambered out, followed by a sergeant and several men.

"You can leave me to handle this, Raymond," he said curtly. "If Rosina's here, we'll find her."

He rapped out his orders, and his men spread out among the bushes, their torches flashing.

Noel accompanied the inspector on a tour of the grounds, as the latter directed the search. The young detective was convinced that Rosina had not escaped. She had come here for a purpose—and she would not leave without making a daring effort to lay hands on the tiara.

But how—and when—would she act?

They were retracing their steps towards the house, the inspector leading, when a startled ejaculation escaped that officer's lips.

"Raymond—look! Over by the terrace steps. That's a girl lying there—and she looks like Rosina!"

Noel followed the inspector. A slim, girlish figure lay huddled at the foot of the terrace steps—her dark hair dishevelled.

The inspector blew his whistle, bringing the other searchers on the scene.

"She must have slipped as she was trying to escape," he declared, bending over the fallen girl. "Yes—she's Rosina, right enough! There's an ugly bruise on her head—but she's still breathing. Hudson—he turned to the sergeant—"better phone for the ambulance; and while you're about it, tell Mrs. Sharman there's no more need to worry. Rosina's made her last bid for some time to come!"

The sergeant saluted and hurried away as Noel dropped to his knee beside the unconscious girl. Gently he raised her limp hand—to draw in his breath sharply.

"Inspector—there's something wrong!" he snapped. "Come with me—quickly!"

Leaving the unconscious girl in charge of the two constables, the surprised inspector followed Noel into the house.

"We've got Rosina," he panted. "What more do you want?"

Noel did not reply. His expression suddenly grim, he flung open the dining-room door. Mrs. Sharman stood chatting with her youthful guests, while the safe stood open behind them.

Joyce Sharman was gazing delightedly at the sparkling tiara.

"Nothing wrong here," grunted the inspector, nodding to the smiling company. "Evening, Miss Gaynor! Evening, Mrs. Sharman. Everything all right now, I hope—"

"Not quite!" rapped Noel, and he

sprang forward. "Hold that girl, inspector—she's Rosina!"

"Are you crazy?" shouted the bewildered inspector, for Noel was pointing to the slender girl, wearing June's wrap and scarf, who was standing in the shadows near the window.

"We've got Rosina—"

He broke off with a strangled ejaculation. The girl had whipped a revolver from her dress—at the same time making a snatch at the priceless tiara.

"Stand back, all of you!" she breathed—and though her face was strikingly like June's, her voice was cold and mocking.

Noel ducked, leaping across the room, but with a challenging laugh the girl switched out the lights.

There was the sound of a scuffle—a crash of breaking glass. When the lights blazed on again Noel stood by the broken window, his face very pale, the tiara clutched in his hand.

"I got the tiara—but she's clear. Send your men after her, inspector, and take charge of the tiara. I've got to find June!"

Noel soon located his niece, who had been locked in the hall cupboard.

She had been attacked suddenly in the darkened hall after Noel had left her—and a chloroformed pad clasped over her mouth. Quickly Noel ascertained that she was unhurt, and far more indignant than scared.

"But this is crazy!" burst out the inspector. "Rosina can't be in two places at once—and she's out in the garden, unconscious."

"Let's go and see," said Noel quietly, and led the way.

June gasped as she saw the slender figure lying there in the moonlight, now recovering consciousness.

"Rosina!" she exclaimed.

But, with a grim smile, Noel bent down, whipping off the girl's dark wig and rubbing the skillfully applied grease-paint from her face—to reveal the sallow, frightened features of Louise, the parlour-maid!

"Rosina's latest accomplice, inspector!" said Noel. "Coached by the audacious crook to help her in her thefts. I think you'll find that it was Louise who acted as the messenger boy and stole those documents from the court—working on a previously arranged plan."

"And—the tiara plot?" gasped June. "Louise was that old lady—"

"Precisely," nodded Noel. "She was made up by Rosina—in her own imitable fashion, and instructed to masquerade as Mrs. Sharman. Rosina, meanwhile, daringly established an alibi for herself and caused a diversion to distract attention from her accomplice. Her phone message to me was typical of her audacity—for she knew she was quite safe."

"But Louise lost her nerve momentarily when you challenged her, June, and Rosina had to make fresh plans. This time she made up Louise to resemble herself—and arranged for the girl to cause a diversion while she slipped into the house disguised as June. But Louise had an unrehearsed fall, and one look at her hands gave her away."

At that moment one of the constables returned, out of breath and carrying a small package.

"Afraid Rosina got away, sir," he panted. "But I found this on the drive."

"Why, it's addressed to you, Raymond!" exclaimed the inspector.

Noel opened the package and a little gleam entered his eyes. Enclosed was a box of his favourite cigarettes, and a note:

"I thought I'd hoodwinked you, Noel, this time—but you were just too quick for me. You'll see that I haven't forgotten our little wager. It was great fun while it lasted. —Yours—until the next time—"

"ROSINA."

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday Noel and June are faced by THE MYSTERY OF THE BRONZE LEOPARD.



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