

No. 679.
Vol. 27.
EVERY
FRIDAY.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3rd}

Week
Ending
Oct. 23rd,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



LEADER of the ALPINE REVELLERS

You Will Vote This Grand Story As Good As A Winter Sports Holiday—
Written by ENID BOYTEN

THE MYSTERY PLOTTERS

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

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

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

Jill met Hans Peterson, a strange, moody ex-guide, whom she was convinced had been unjustly accused of cowardice. She persuaded him to help her by coaching herself and her girl chums.

Jill left her handbag at the hotel skating rink, and when she returned for it late that night she overheard two people plotting against herself and Hans. Determined to discover their identity, she felt for the electric light switch.

STANDING in the dark skating rink, Jill's hand closed over the master switch on the wall near the entrance. Now to discover the identity of the two mystery plotters!

Down she dragged the switch. There was a sharp click, but—nothing else. No blaze of light! With a sinking heart she realised that, although dim lights burned in the corridors of the hotel all night, the current here must be turned off at the main.

From the direction of the band platform Jill's straining ears caught a sudden movement. There was no more whispering now. The plotters had heard that click and taken alarm. There came the sound of stealthy footsteps, and they seemed to be coming towards her.

"They're trying to creep past!" she told herself. "But they shan't!" Impetuously she acted, diving for-

ward with outstretched arms in the darkness to grab one of the plotters. If possible, even in that pitch blackness, to find some clue to their identity.

Her fingers brushed a girl's frock, closed over a scrap of fragile material, and then—

Strong hands gripped her, whirling her sideways so that she staggered and almost fell. There was a swift, stealthy rush of footsteps dying away.

The moon swam out from behind the clouds, flooding through the glass roof of the rink just as Jill recovered herself.

"They've gone!" she panted.

Their footsteps had died away through the entrance, and it would be useless to follow them into the maze of corridors and staircases in the hotel.

Yet they had left one clue behind them! A dainty scrap of chiffon—a girl's handkerchief, which Jill had grasped when she touched that unknown figure in the darkness.

"It may help to trace one of them," she breathed. "I'll have a good look at it up in my room. Golly! If only I'd seen them!"

Almost, in the excitement, she had forgotten why she had crept down to the ice rink in the first place, but now that the moonlight was flooding the rink, it was easy to find the evening bag she had left in a niche during that evening's dance.

A few minutes later she was back in her room, eagerly examining the chiffon handkerchief.

It was crimson in colour. And from it arose a faint, subtle perfume which seemed vaguely familiar.

Whose favourite colour was crimson? And who used that expensive brand of perfume?

Into her mind's eye flashed a picture of the black-haired member of the Alpine Revellers.

"Magda Beaumont!" she breathed. Of course, the handkerchief might not belong to Magda, but Jill decided

that from now on she would keep a close eye on that girl.

Despite the disturbing happening in the rink, it was happily that Jill went down to breakfast next morning, and even more happily that, afterwards, she led Rosemary Walsh, Brenda Curtis, and the other Alpine Revellers out of the hotel.

As they made their way through the pine trees to the foot of the bob run, where they had arranged to meet Hans, Jill's heart beat anxiously. She had remembered the whispered threats she had heard last night.

Surely nothing could go wrong? she thought, and involuntarily her gaze went across to Magda. That girl was smiling, and there was a queer look in her eyes that made Jill feel suddenly uneasy.



THE SKI-ING PRACTICE

"There he is! There's Hans!"

Jill forgot her vague fears as she saw a sturdy, boyish figure standing at the foot

of the bob run.

She ran to greet him, and it seemed to her that his rugged, sombre face lit up a little as he recognised her.

"Hans, meet the Alpine Revellers!" she cried. "The girls who are going to pass the Havensburg Test, thanks to your coaching. Here's Rosemary, and Brenda, and Prue—"

One by one she introduced them. "We've all done quite a bit of skiing, of course," she explained.

"Mostly on the nursery slopes near the hotel. But for the Havensburg Test you have to know how to ski across difficult country, and that's where Hans is going to help us."

With sparkling eyes she turned to the Swiss boy.

"It's all yours from now on, Hans!" she chuckled. "Lead the way and the Revellers will follow!"

And she glowed as she caught the answering gleam of a smile in his deep-set eyes.

He was coming out of his shell—just a little way! Moody and difficult he might be, but he was going to like this job of coaching her team.

"Right! We'll get along!" he exclaimed in a business-like way. "Skis on, everybody, please."

They were beginning to put on their skis when suddenly Magda strolled forward, darting a glance at Hans from under her long lashes.

"I do hope," she murmured in her silky tones, "that Hans won't misunderstand what I'm going to say."

They all looked at her. "It's just this," Magda drawled. "We all know that Hans has been very unlucky lately. He lost his guide's badge through—er—an unlucky accident, shall I say? I don't suppose he's had much work to do lately, as a result. So, apart from the usual charges, I want him to accept this from me right away, as a little mark of appreciation of what he's doing for us."

With a flourish she took a fifty-franc note from her pocket and offered it to the Swiss boy.

That dawning smile died from Hans' face. The old grim look came back as pointedly he ignored the note that Magda was flourishing in her slim fingers.

And Jill started forward, her cheeks burning.

What on earth was Magda up to? Why make that tactless reference to Hans losing his badge—a point on which he was extremely sensitive? And then to follow it up by offering him a tip in that patronising way!

"Magda! For goodness' sake put that note away and leave all the arrangements to me!" she cried. "And get your skis on. It's high time we were moving!"

Magda shrugged and pouted, shooting a mocking glance at Jill.

With a rush Jill's suspicions of last night deepened.

She couldn't believe that Magda had been just stupidly tactless. It was more like an attempt to provoke the Swiss boy into an angry outburst that might have led to him throwing up his job as coach.

If that had been her plan it hadn't succeeded—thanks to Jill's quick intervention.

After that first angry gesture Hans had walked across to help Prue Denham with her ski bindings.

Jill drew a breath of relief.

"But, golly, I'll have to watch Magda from now on!" she breathed.

Not that, even now, there was definite proof against Magda. But certainly there was reason for suspicion and watchfulness, even though she couldn't imagine why Magda should be plotting to ruin her winter sports ambition.

And then, at last, they were off! Jill forgot her problems and knew a joyous thrill as they started up the slope.

Not that it was easy going at first.

"Crumbs! I'm slipping back more than I'm going up!" puffed plump Suzie Millard. "I'm going forward backwards, if you know what I mean. Whoops!"

And suddenly Suzie found herself on her back, giggling helplessly, her legs waving in the air.

They certainly wouldn't have made much progress if it hadn't been for Hans. Jill's eyes shone as she saw he was settling down to his job as coach, his sturdy figure moving from one to the other of them with help and advice.

"He's giving us just the kind of hints we need," she thought happily.

Showing them how to dig their ski-sticks into the snow close to the skis when going uphill, so as to get a good forward push. Explaining how strips of sealskin could be fixed to the skis to prevent slipping back on difficult slopes.

Glowing and breathless, they paused for a rest.

"How are we doing, Hans?" laughed Jill. "Don't tell us we're quite hopeless!"

"And don't blame me for slipping

back so much," puffed Suzie. "I had too much breakfast, Hans. Tomorrow I'll have nothing but dry toast and tea!"

The Swiss boy's eyes were fixed on Jill. Again she noted the hint of a smile on his rugged face.

"Not bad for a start—Jill!" "For the first time he had called her Jill! Her brown eyes danced as she watched him point to a still higher wooded slope beyond.

"We'll try a little test of our own up there," he suggested. "We'll climb up beside the wood, then ski down the twisting trail through the pines. It will be good practice for sharp turns and dodging trees."

"Sounds thrilling!" "O.K., chief! Lead on!"

And then suddenly came a little cry of dismay from Magda.

"Oh dear! On botneration!"

And they saw she was standing with her gloved hands over her eyes.

"Magda! What's wrong?" exclaimed Suzie.

"Oh, but it's so stupid of me!" drawled the black-haired girl. "I've forgotten to bring the special glasses I have to wear to protect my eyes when they're affected by the snow glare. And the trouble's coming on now."

Regretfully she turned to her boy coach.

"I know you'll excuse me from this first practice, Hans," she said sweetly. "But there's only one thing to do when I get like this—go straight back to the hotel and lie in a darkened room till sunset. Then, to-morrow, I'll be as right as a trivet."

Almost before they realised it, she was moving gracefully away.

"Sure you'll be all right, Magda?" Jill called.

"Shall one of us come back with you?"

"Goodness, no! I'd never forgive myself for spoiling your fun!" Magda waved a graceful hand.

"Cheeri-bye! See you all later!"

And she vanished behind the tall pine trunks.

"I say! What bad luck!" cried Suzie.

Jill said nothing as they turned to climb up beside the pinewood.

She had never known Magda to suffer from snow glare before. Never known her wear special glasses. She felt vaguely uneasy, she scarcely knew why.

Then, as they climbed higher and the glorious Alpine views unfolded around them, she shook her brown curls.

"Bother Magda!" she told herself. "I've been worrying about her all morning, and I'm jolly well going to forget her now."

Steadily they mounted on their skis, making much better progress now, till at last they halted on the snow crest above the pinewood.

"And now," Jill cried, "for your special little stunt, Hans!"

They could all see the narrow trail dipping down between the pines.

"But there's one thing to remember," the Swiss boy warned them. "The trail forks half-way down and there's a signpost with a single arm pointing down the left-hand fork. It says 'To the Hotel.' That's the fork we have to take—the other leads to broken country that is dangerous. Is that clear to you all?"

"Sure!" nodded Brenda.

"Even I couldn't make a mistake there!" giggled plump Suzie. "Follow the signpost arm and you can't go wrong!"

Already Hans was bending forward, grasping his ski-sticks.

"I'll go first," he told them. "The rest of you follow at intervals of two minutes. And try to shoot clear of the wood and finish up in fine style where I shall be standing."

He swooped away, the fine snow whirling behind his skis, zig-zagging round the first bend and vanishing from view.

"Gee whiz! What a skier!" cried Rosemary.

"You've sure picked a dandy coach for us, Jill!" agreed Brenda.

Jill glowed at their words. Hans had made a good impression on the

Alpine Revellers. She guessed they were looking forward to the skating and ski-joring and other practices they would have with their boy coach before the final test.

And then, as she gazed down beyond the pinewood, she caught her breath.

"Look! I'm sure that's the boys skiing down there with Max Kildare, the hotel sports coach!" she exclaimed. "It'll be a feather in our caps if we ski down out of the wood without a spill, just as they're passing. Do your best, everybody!"

No need to ask them that! They were all on their toes, eager to be off.

"I'll go next," Jill suggested, glancing at her watch. "Then Rosemary, Brenda, Suzie, and Prue. O.K.?"

"Sure!"

"Off you go, Jill!"

Down between the tall pines Jill swooped, making a skilful turn at the first bend. Then a quick zig-zag round a tree-stump. Then a breathless swoop as the trail dipped more steeply.

It wasn't so easy as straightforward skiing down a clear slope, but she loved the thrill of it.

"Ah! There's the fork!" she panted. "And there's the signpost, plain enough."

Follow the signpost arm, Hans had said. You couldn't possibly miss it. Her skis hissing over the crisp snow, she whizzed past the signpost and sped on down the steep fork to which its arm had pointed.

And then suddenly she forced the points of her skis together, braking furiously to a standstill amid the dark, closely growing pines.

For something had dawned on her mind as her keen brown eyes scanned the narrow trail ahead.

A warning of danger!



THE CHANGED SIGNPOST

"Where," Jill asked herself breathlessly, "are the marks of Hans' skis?"

That was the simple question that had caused her to brake so recklessly to a halt.

Hans had ski-ed down the pinewood trail ahead of them. Therefore the marks of his skis should be plainly showing.

But they weren't! There were one or two old tracks that had obviously been there for days, but not a single fresh one.

"He couldn't possibly have taken the wrong fork," Jill mused bewilderedly. "He warned us so carefully to follow the signpost arm."

Follow the single arm of the signpost pointing down the left-hand fork. That was what he had said. So why—

And then suddenly Jill caught her breath.

"The left-hand fork!" she panted.

"That was what Hans told us, I'm sure. But, now I come to think of it, the signpost arm was pointing to the right. I followed it without thinking, but it must have pointed down the dangerous trail. The one Hans warned us about!"

She wasted no time. A grim suspicion dawning on her mind, she turned and ski-ed up the trail again to the spot where it forked. And there, plainly to be seen, were the fresh marks of Hans' skis down the left-hand bend.

She grasped the signpost. It was loose—quite loose enough to have been twisted round after Hans had shot by.

She swung it round, pointing its single arm down the safe trail, just as Rosemary came into view, her eyes wide with surprise at sight of Jill standing there.

"Carry on!" Jill shouted. "I'm staying here for awhile. On you go, Rosemary!"

Her chum shot safely down the left-hand trail, and Jill gazed at the crisp snow around the signpost.

(Please turn to the back page.)



The COWBOY Who Mystified Merle

By GAIL WESTERN

THE PRISONER IN THE LOG CABIN

MERLE WASON was anxious to win the Gold Rider trophy, to be raced for at Red Hill Rodeo. She believed the trophy contained a secret vital to the future of her home, Happy Valley Ranch.

Larry Denvers, a strange young cowboy who was helping Merle, told her there was a traitor at the ranch. As a result of the scheming of Nathaniel Garsten, a rascally neighbouring rancher, Larry was wanted by the police.

Merle was imprisoned on the eve of the vital race by the traitor, and Larry, in a desperate attempt to discover what had become of her, went to Happy Valley Ranch and kidnapped the traitor.

IGNORANT of the sensational scene which had been enacted at Happy Valley Ranch, Merle tossed restlessly on a bed of straw.

She had lain there ever since the mystery traitor had brought her to this lonely cabin in the hills and locked her in.

From the adjoining stable came an occasional plaintive whinny, showing that Pommie and Prince were finding imprisonment just as irksome as Merle herself.

As she heard the horses, Merle gave a groan, and stared helplessly up at the lamp-blackened ceiling.

This was the end of all her hopes.

Futile now to think of ever competing—let alone winning—the Gold Rider race.

"Even if a search is made for me, no one will ever find me in time," she told herself miserably. "Not even Larry. It looks as if the Garstens have won after all."

It was with that bitter thought hammering on her mind that she at last fell into a troubled sleep. When she awoke it was morning and the sun was streaming in through the solitary barred window.

For a moment or two she lay there, confused by the unusual surroundings, and then, as memory came flooding back, she stumbled to her feet and crossed to the window.

Through the bars she saw a wide clearing, with a sandy trail winding down steeply through the trees. There was not a sound to be heard; nothing to be seen but that massed array of pines, through which the sun filtered in golden streaks.

And then the clatter of restive hoofs on the nearby stable floor made her think of the relay race. She glanced at her wrist-watch.

Eight o'clock!
In under two hours the competitors for the Gold Rider trophy would be assembling in the rodeo stadium at Red Hill. Amongst them would be Celia Garsten, and Merle groaned.

The thought that Celia might win the race—might at last secure the vital clue to old Crogan's secret that was hidden in the trophy—was unbearable.

In sudden desperation she flung herself at the door, banged and tugged furiously at the heavy wooden latch.

But all in vain. The door was securely barred from outside.

And then she ceased her efforts, her body tensing.

What was that?
A faint clop-clop. Horse's hoofs, and steadily getting louder. Someone was riding this way. She dashed to the window and stared through. At last the horseman came into sight. Bent low in the saddle, he was riding up the steep trail at furious speed.

Merle caught a glimpse of woolly chaps, of a bright shirt, and then a wild, incredulous shout broke from her lips.

"Larry! It's Larry!"
The rider seemed to hear that shrill, tremulous cry, for he lifted one arm and waved. And Larry it was. There could be no mistake about that now—Larry riding to her rescue.

In her delight Merle felt weak and faint. It was only when she heard the crash of a bar going down that she roused herself and turned. It was to see that the heavy door had been flung open; to see a dishevelled, boyish figure come striding into the cabin.

"Larry!" she gulped. "Oh, Larry!"
Darting forward, she clung to him, trembling with the reaction. Soothingly he patted her shoulder.

"Now, now, honey, everything's goin' to be okay," he said, his voice unusually gentle.

"But—but however did you discover where I was?"

He shrugged, that old sardonic gleam she knew so well back in his eyes.

"Oh, I kinda persuaded that traitor to confide in me," he replied.

"The—the traitor?" Merle caught in her breath, then, as suddenly she saw that the hand on her shoulder was bruised and bleeding, she gave a gasp of concern. "Larry, your hand!" she exclaimed. "It's hurt! You've been fighting!"

He shrugged again.
"I'd hardly say that, honey. Just had a difference of opinion, that's all. You see, I thought that traitor knew what had become of you; he swore he didn't, so I kinda persuaded him to come along to a nice peaceful spot I know so that we could settle the argument."

Though Merle knew nothing about the daring way Larry had kidnapped the mystery traitor from Happy Valley Ranch, she sensed the dangerous ordeal the young cowboy had been through, and her eyes shone with admiration.

"And you won the—the argument?" she breathed.

He grinned.
"Yep. But we mustn't stop here talkin' honey. You've got to get to Red Hill for the race."

As he spoke he went striding out of the cabin and across to the stable. Her mind in a turmoil, Merle watched him unfasten the door, and Pommie and Prince came trotting out into the clearing.

Larry fed them oats from his own saddle bag, then led Pommie forward. "Up you get, honey," he said. "The

relay race doesn't start until about nine-thirty, so I guess—"

"He stopped, listening.
"What is it—what's wrong, Larry?" He did not reply. Instead, he went racing across the clearing. For what to Merle seemed an interminable age, he stood peering down the steep trail, then he came running back.

"Well?" she asked, her heart thudding as she saw how grim and white he looked.

He made a rueful gesture.
"Guess I ought to be horse-whipped for not bringin' that traitor with me," he muttered. "Instead of leavin' him tied up—"

"You mean he's escaped?" cut in Merle.

Larry nodded.
"Yep. And now he's bringin' a whole hornet's nest to buzz around our ears. Garsten and his men!"



THE RISK LARRY TOOK

An icy shiver ran down Merle's spine. Had Larry's daring rescue been all in vain? Were they both to be captured just when her

hopes of competing in the vital race had been so excitedly re-born?

Then she realised that Larry had thrust Pommie's reins into her hand; was gesturing fiercely.

"Up into the saddle, honey. Get away while the going's good. That side trail beyond the cabin leads straight to Red Hill."

"But what about you? Aren't you coming, too?" she gasped, as she leapt astride her chestnut's back.

To her consternation Larry shook his head.

"Nope! Guess I've got to decoy Garsten and his men away."

"But—"
"Now don't argue, honey. All that matters is that you win the Gold Rider trophy. Anyway, I can look after myself."

"But what about Prince?"
"Guess I'll need him. If Garsten sees me ridin' him, then he'll be more likely to chase me and not you, for if he captures Prince he'll know you can't win the race."

"No more can I!" cried Merle, and agitatedly she regarded the young cowboy. "Oh, Larry, I can't desert you!" she gulped. "Let's try to escape together."

"No, I've got to decoy them away. Now off you go, honey, and don't worry about Prince. I'll see you get him when you want him."

He cut short any further protest by bringing one hand smacking down on Pommie's flanks. The chestnut gave a surprised squeal, then tossed up his head and went rocketing forward. Merle, looking back, saw Larry waving nonchalantly to her, then the trees hid him from view.

Headlong Pommie went plunging down the steep side trail, slithering and clattering. Merle, clinging desperately to the reins, heard shots and shouts.

Larry had been seen—was being chased!

More revolver shots, louder and more fierce grew the shouting. Then gradually the alarming din receded and grew less. The young cowboy had kept to his resolve: successfully he

had lured his pursuers away from the side trail.

Her thoughts on Larry, Merle allowed Pommie to whirl her away, lower and lower, until at last the wide main road to Red Hill was reached.

Oh, what a sterling friend he was! Thanks to him she had escaped; could, after all, take part in the relay race.

But what about Prince?

Her feeling of satisfaction faded as she remembered the gruelling nature of the race. First competitors had to gallop round the stadium. Next they had to cover a ten-mile course across rocky, difficult country, and finally they had to return to the stadium, to lap it again before reaching the winning-post.

No wonder each entrant was allowed two horses. Without changing mounts half-way, no one could hope to last the course at speed. Prince was absolutely vital to her, but would Larry be able to keep his promise to get him to her in time?

The thought made her instinctively slow Pommie a little.

If Larry did not arrive in time she would be forced to take the whole course on Pommie, if it were allowed.

The idea did not appeal to her in the least, for she knew how tired the gallant horse would be before they reached the half-way post. Probably, anyway, they would be forced to change horses. Either way, it would not do to tire her mount now.

"Better just amble along for a bit, Pommie," she said. "I know time's short, but you've been splendid and there's a long way to go yet."

Pommie's ears twitched. He seemed to understand what she meant, and was grateful for the little rest.

Merle bit her lips as she glanced around her. How much everything depended on Larry. Where was he now? Was he safe?

Instinctively her eyes sought the dark smudge on the skyline which was the pine-wood. And then she stiffened.

Reining in Pommie, she shaded her eyes with her hands. What was that she had seen back there, so faint and distant? It looked rather like a moving speck of bright colour.

She caught in her breath as she remembered the brightly hued shirt Larry had been wearing.

Was it Larry? Had he escaped from his pursuers and was he riding to join her, or was he still pursued, and—worse—a prisoner?

But now, though she strained her eyes, there was nothing to be seen.

With a little sigh, she resumed the ride, urging Pommie into a trot now.

Where was Larry now? She asked herself again. Would she be able to ride in the race if he did not bring Prince in time?

Again she knew an awful fear, not for herself or for her racing hopes, but for Larry. She could not forget that he had been branded an outlaw—was a fugitive from justice.

Then, as ahead she saw the white walls of the stadium, she forced herself to forget her fears. Larry had taken this big risk in order that she could race. She must not let him down. From now on she must try to concentrate on beating Celia Garsten.

She snatched an anxious glance at her wrist-watch.

"Oh, gee, I've only a minute or so!" she gulped, and urged Pommie on.

The main entrance gates stood wide open. Through them she galloped. Spectators turned and gaped as she went flying by. Ahead was the green sward of the track. Desperately she rode for it. An official shouted angrily. Another made to grab Pommie's bridle, but the horse sped by. He was on the track now, and fifty yards away—

Merle raised her voice in a frantic shout.

"Wait! Wait!"

For lined up there were eleven slim figures on horseback. The competitors for the Gold Rider trophy, and beside them, flag upraised, was the starter.

"Wait!" shouted Merle again.

She saw Celia Garsten turn in the saddle; sensed the look of startled

surprise on his face. Then—

The flag flashed down. There came the thunder of hoofs and the eleven horses went rocketing past the grandstands.

The race had started, and Merle was still twenty yards from the starting-post!



NO SIGN OF PRINCE

"Is it all right for me to go on?"

Merle shouted the anxious words as she came galloping up. She did not know what the

starter shouted back, but she saw him wave his flag and took that for a signal of assent.

"On, Pommie!" she panted. "We've got to make up for lost time!"

Nobly the chestnut lengthened his stride. At astonishing speed he swept past the grandstands, packed with spectators who were all staring excitedly at this surprising last minute entry.

On to the first of the hurdle jumps. Skilfully Pommie cleared it. Round the bend he plunged. Over another hurdle. On past the terraces. And now the tail of the field was only a few yards away.

"On, Pommie, on!" cried Merle again.

But her magnificent horse needed no urging. Glossy neck outstretched, he seemed to fly over the springy turf, and Merle gave a jubilant shout as two of her rivals were left behind.

Only nine in front now.

Another jump, and two horses collided. To the accompaniment of an alarmed roar from the watching crowd, they tumbled, their riders shooting over their heads. A third horse, startled, jibbed and ran out off the course.

Skilfully Merle steered Pommie past, then braced herself for the leap. Like a bird Pommie took it, to race past yet another competitor.

Only five ahead now, and all of them were bunched together, straining for the leadership.

Merle caught a glimpse of Celia Garsten riding in the centre. People were beginning to shout Merle's name now. Never had they seen such magnificent riding as this. Despite his late start, Pommie was forging nearer, ever nearer to the five leaders.

One last jump—a formidable pile of logs at which two more horses jibbed—and then Merle was level with Garsten's rascally daughter.

Celia could hardly believe her eyes as she saw Merle come racing alongside, then furiously she scowled, and savagely she lashed at her straining mount with her whip.

Past the grandstands, then galloping on to the narrow gateway that led out of the stadium and on to the difficult course across hilly country.

Pommie had his nose in front now. It seemed that he must shoot first through that narrow gateway, but Celia, ablaze with fury, slyly swung her whip.

Down it thudded, but it was Pommie's neck that caught the blow. He squealed, reared, and lost ground. Next moment, with a shout of triumph, Celia had gone plunging through the gateway.

With stormy eyes Merle gazed after her.

"The spiteful cat!" she panted. "But we'll pay her out, won't we, Pommie?"

The chestnut regained his smooth stride, shot through the gateway and out on to the dusty road, leaving after the rancher's daughter.

Excited shouts arose from the streets as the two horses were seen plunging through the town. More cheers greeted the other competitors as they went galloping in hot pursuit.

Up a long, winding track, through a narrow woodland path, then a mad dash across a rocky hillside. And still Celia Garsten was in front, but her horse was tiring. The gruelling pace was too much for it, and Merle's eyes gleamed with fierce satisfaction as she saw herself draw nearer and nearer.

"Stick it, Pommie!" she whispered.

"One more burst'll do the trick!"

Gallantly the chestnut responded, and Celia glared and shouted as she was left behind.

Merle was in the lead now, and she did not mean to lose it.

On along another woodland track, with the furious Celia thwacking savagely at her flagging mount in a desperate effort to force him level again. Then as Merle galloped from out of the trees she saw a man brandishing a large flag leap out into the centre of the wide, level road ahead.

In surprise she checked her horse.

"What's the matter?" she cried.

The man gestured to a side road where were gathered a group of horses and a crowd of officials and stable boys.

"This is where you change mounts," he shouted.

Merle cast one quick look at the waiting horses, then her heart sank, for Prince was not among them. Evidently Larry had found it impossible to keep his promise. Possibly—and her cheeks went white at the thought—he was still being chased by Garsten and his men.

She cast the official an appealing look.

"Can't I change later on?" she asked. "My mount's still pretty fresh."

But to her dismay he shook his head.

"Nope! All changes have to be made here. That's what the rules say."

"But—"

"No arguments, please, missy, and—out of the way. You're blockin' the road."

Reluctantly Merle trotted Pommie across to the side road, and at that moment there came a jeering laugh from beside her.

"Reckon you're not so smart after all!" cried a malicious voice, and there was Celia Garsten.

As the rancher's daughter leapt from the saddle and ran across to where a stable boy was holding her new mount in readiness, Merle gazed desperately around.

Oh, where was Larry? Where was Prince?

There was no sign of either of them, but through the trees came galloping two more competitors. Merle's heart sank. It looked as if all Pommie's gallant efforts had been in vain. And then, as she stood there in despair, footsteps sounded on the gravelly road, and a tall, gaunt figure stepped forward.

Merle gave a gasp of surprise.

"Nathaniel Garsten!" she exclaimed. "Then you're not still chasing Larry!"

He shook his head and scowled.

"Nope—the trickster soon gave us the slip. But don't worry, he won't be free much longer!"

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

He showed his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Guess I wasn't born yesterday. I know what his game is. He aims to ride here with that horse of his so that you can continue the race. Waal, I sure hope he does show up. So does Johnson."

And he nodded to where a big, burly man was talking to the officials. Merle gave a startled gasp. It was the sheriff.

Seeing her consternation, the rancher laughed.

"Yep, if your precious friend turns up he'll be arrested," he said. "As for his hoss—waal, I reck'n that'll be impounded. So you may as well pack up an' go home, Merle Wason. There won't be any more racin' for you today!"

His jeering words sounded the knell of all Merle's hopes, for she knew that he spoke the truth.

With Garsten and the sheriff on the spot it would be madness for Larry to try to keep his promise.

Black despair engulfed Merle, and as she stood there helplessly there came the clatter of hoofs and yet another of the competitors changed mounts and went galloping on.

Don't miss the next exciting chapters of this fine serial—in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

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

By DOROTHY PAGE



SMEEKE KNEW HER SECRET

PENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, joined a secret society known as the Grey Ghosts.

The society was out to fight the bullying senior master, Mr. Spell, also known as the "Wasp," and to prove the innocence of Glynn Tracy, a boy who had been expelled.

Only Hugh Mason, leader of the Grey Ghosts, knew Penelope's real identity, the other two members, Bob Gower and Harvey Doane, knowing her simply as the "Fourth Grey Ghost."

After helping the boys to escape from the ambushed clock tower, Penelope returned to her father's house. There she was visited by Harold Smeeke, a Fifth Form spy of Mr. Spell's. He told her he believed the Grey Ghosts had an accomplice—and had an idea who it was!

"YOU'RE talking in riddles," declared Penelope. "How should I know who might be helping the Grey Ghosts?"

Harold Smeeke grinned slyly. "Because," he answered, "of what I found in the Clock Tower. You did say, didn't you, that the Grey Ghosts bolted after they locked you up?"

Penelope hid her apprehension only with a great effort. For some reason the burly, sneaking Fifth Former suspected she had a connection with the school secret society. Yet he couldn't have found anything conclusive, or he wouldn't be hedging like this. She must try to bluff him.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "If you keep asking the same silly questions I shall go inside. I am getting cold—"

"Just a minute!" He caught hastily at her arm. When he continued there was a faint hint of uncertainty in his voice.

"Miss Cartwright, you'd be wise to listen to me!"

Penelope produced a weary sigh. "Really, Harold Smeeke, why you should think I'd be interested I can't imagine—"

"Can't you? Suppose—suppose I tell you that I found evidence that the Grey Ghosts didn't bolt—but held a meeting inside the tower!"

Penelope's heart lurched. What had he found?

"Evidence?" she repeated, as if perplexed. "But how absurd. If those boys had remained in the tower I should have seen them, wouldn't I? Really, you are a dull boy!"

And thus Penelope audaciously threw down the gauntlet, trusting that her acting—the sheer nerve of it—would throw Smeeke off his balance and create uncertainty.

She heard him grit his teeth, breathing hard. Smeeke was a coward; accusing words trembled on his lips; vindictively he longed to blurt them out, and yet—he wasn't sure: he wasn't absolutely sure.

And this girl, standing so coolly

and primly before him, was the headmaster's daughter. To accuse her of helping the Grey Ghosts—

He gulped. His courage was oozing, but he stuck bravely to the amazing conclusion he had come to.

"Dull, am I?" he said thickly.

"Then—look!" He jerked something from his pocket and thrust it out, peering eagerly to catch her reaction.

It was a brown paper package, containing crumpled cakes—the cakes Penelope herself had made for the Grey Ghosts!

"What about those?" he sneered. "Know where I found them? On the top floor after the others had given up the search. I found something else, too—footprints in the dust that I'm jolly sure weren't made by us seniors!"

"Really?" murmured Penelope, dry-lipped.

"Yes, really!" There was something of renewed courage, an eager insolence in his voice again. "And all that proves that the Grey Ghosts didn't bolt at all. And if they didn't bolt it means—it means—"

There he paused, lacking the nerve to say what he thought—that Penelope had helped the Grey Ghosts to escape that night!

She knew what he thought; but she possessed the sparkling courage he would never have.

"Why—?" She laughed a scornful little laugh, and amazingly it held no tremor. "Why, Harold Smeeke, I do think you're the most obtuse boy!"

"What!" He crimsoned in rage. "You look here—"

"Why, it should be perfectly obvious that the Grey Ghosts have used the tower before as a meeting-place, and it was on some other occasion they left the cakes there. Fancy not thinking of that!"

For a second Smeeke hesitated. "No! I'm jolly certain," he burst out savagely, "they were left there to-night. I'm not a fool—"

"I fear you are behaving like one," interrupted Penelope severely. "And really, I think your tone to me, the headmaster's daughter, is quite objectionable. If—"

She paused for a fraction of a second, nerving herself. She sensed that a faint, uneasy uncertainty was in Smeeke's mind.

"If, however," she finished serenely, "you feel that your discovery is of some importance, then you had better wait and see my father. I am expecting him back any moment now."

He stiffened, startled by that seemingly airy offer—and at that moment there was a distant, sharp footsteps. Penelope knew it: it was her father's. Her face paling with tension, she continued steadily.

"Ah! My father is coming now. I suggest you tell him exactly what is in your mind. Doubtless he will be more interested than I am."

He did not answer. Seconds of agonised waiting for Penelope. The footsteps grew nearer. Smeeke

gulped. Burning suspicion was in his mind, but not absolute certainty, for Penelope's coolness unnerved him. And he was too scared of the Head to make a statement that was tantamount to an accusation against his daughter.

"I'll—I'll think about it—" he muttered thickly. "I'll—"

He turned abruptly and sped out of the garden gate

Penelope slumped back against the door jamb. Something like a shaky grin touched her lips. She had out-matched Smeeke. He suspected—yes, but he was not sure, he was afraid to speak out—

"Penelope! My dear, are you all right!"

She hastily collected herself as her father strode towards her. He anxiously took her arm.

"You should not be out here, Penelope. Spell has just told me what happened. You were hurt—"

The concern that softened his usually severe level tones touched Penelope deeply, and her cheeks crimsoned. It was hateful to have to play a part with her father in such circumstances, yet there was no alternative.

"Daddy, it—it was nothing, honestly. My leg's all right."

He drew her inside and closed the door.

"My dear," he said gravely, "you forget how frail and nervous you are. It must have been a considerable shock. But those scoundrelly boys shall pay dearly for their escapades—"

"Daddy, it really wasn't their fault—"

"They were responsible, Penelope; and I am deeply disturbed at the way you have again become involved in their activities. "But," he added, to her overwhelming relief, "you must be tired and upset after all this. I insist that you go to bed now and have a good night's rest."

"Y—yes, daddy, I will. Thank you. Good-night!"

She kissed him with real warmth and sped upstairs. There was a little lump in her throat. Because of her father's concern for her, she had escaped what might have been an extremely awkward interview.

"Dear daddy," she murmured in the seclusion of her bedroom. "How sweet he can be. I wish I could tell him everything." She sighed. "But, Penny, you got through safely. You saved Hugh—and now what?"

Her eyes danced as she thought of what she had learnt that night. The Grey Ghosts were hot on the track of the secret room, so vital to their mission. They suspected it was in the old school belfry.

That was a tremendous thrill. But, thanks to her promise to Hugh, she could not act on that knowledge until she met him again.

"Then the sooner I contact him the better," she told herself excitedly. "With that hateful Smeeke suspicious of me—"

She paused. Another thought had suddenly come, one that shook her rather badly. If Smeeke suspected her—then he would also suspect Hugh. And Hugh, as yet, did not know that!

Penelope stared blankly across her bedroom, having an alarming vision of the sneaking Fifth Former dogging Hugh's footsteps, spying on him, hoping to find evidence—

Here was another reason for contacting Hugh quickly.



A BATTLE OF WITS

Bright morning sunshine bathed the school, casting dappled shadows from the elms down on the quadrangle. First lesson

bell had not yet rung, and one or two juniors were making the most of the short respite before going in to their class-rooms.

A slim figure walked primly from Head's House. It was Penelope. She was on her way to contact Hugh. Guessing that at this time he would be in his study, she entered Junior House.

There were a few boys in the cool, shady hall. They looked at her curiously, some sniggering, some a little hostile, but they made way as she primly stepped up the wide staircase. Once on the landing she quickened her pace, sped up another flight, and turned left, towards the start of the Fourth Form corridor.

She slowed then, breathing fast. Which was Hugh's study?

As she hesitated, she experienced an uncanny feeling of being watched. It persisted. She flashed a glance behind her.

Next second, with a startled gasp, she dropped to one knee and began to fiddle with her shoelace. For she had gained a glimpse of a figure stepping back swiftly into a curtained alcove—and, of all people, that watchful figure was Mr. W. Aspell!

Penelope was badly shaken. The Wasp—spying on her. But why? She experienced an uneasy twinge. There was something strange here. It was not as if the tyrannical master could possibly have any suspicion of the daring double role she was playing.

Or—Penelope caught her breath—or could he? The possible truth burst upon her like a gush of ice-cold water.

Supposing Harold Smeeke had dared to report his suspicion of her! Smeeke was The Wasp's toady; he might have done so. And Mr. Aspell was the sort of man to consider the suspicion from every angle, incredible though it might appear.

Penelope slowly straightened. Thank goodness she had seen him before searching out Hugh.

"Oh, Jimmy," she muttered. "Things are getting hot! Steady, Penny!"

A gleam of fighting spirit stole into her eyes. She looked vaguely about, frowning, as if uncertain of her way—and then drifted back the way she had come, until she was level with the alcove.

The curtains were slightly apart. As if accidentally, she caught them with her elbow and flipped them wide, and Mr. Aspell stood revealed, a spot of colour surging into his high cheekbones.

Penelope stared at him. "Why, goodness, what are you doing there, Mr. Aspell?" She giggled. "It looks almost as if you were hiding."

With an obvious effort he controlled his furious embarrassment and stepped into the corridor.

"It is more to the point, Miss Cartwright," he snapped, "for you to tell me what you are doing in Junior House. You know as well as I that your father has forbidden you the main school buildings."

"Oh, yes," nodded Penelope brightly. "But I'm sure daddy won't mind me going to the library. I believe there are some new books in—"

"But this," he said, glittering-eyed, "is not the way to the library. Surely you are aware of that, Miss Cartwright? Curiously enough, this

corridor leads only to the Fourth Form studies."

"Oh, does it?"
"It does!" He was under control now, a very peculiar, watchful look on his thin, moustached face. "But perhaps," he added softly, "you intended to pay a visit first—on Hugh Mason, for instance?" he shot out.

Penelope was half waiting for it. So Smeeke had spoken! Her heart quickened.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "Why should I want to see Hugh Mason?"

"Why?" he asked suavely. "Now, let me see—perhaps to thank him for—er—rescuing you last night. Or, maybe—he watched her like a cat watching a mouse—or maybe he might want to thank you for your part in the affair."

Penelope did not quiver an eyelid. "Why, how funny you are this morning, Mr. Aspell," she said demurely. "I see no reason for Hugh Mason to thank me. I did nothing."

He bit his thin lower lip, searching her demure expression.

"Perhaps not, Miss Cartwright—perhaps not! So many strange things occurred last night that possibly I'm unaddled. Of one thing you may be assured: these scoundrelly Grey Ghosts—and anyone connected with them—shall not escape me!"

"Oh, I'm sure they won't, Mr. Aspell. You'll be too clever for them."

A darting, almost venomous glance he gave her; then he regained something of his unpleasant suaveness.

"Meanwhile, I must regretfully ask you to leave Junior House. I am sure you would not like to break your father's orders. Oh, and incidentally, Miss Cartwright, it is quite fortunate that you do not wish to see the boy Mason."

"Indeed?" murmured Penelope.

"Yes, indeed. Because lessons are just due to begin, and he will be quite busy in his spare time for the rest of the day." His bright, hard eyes never left her face. "You see," he purred, "I have several small jobs to be executed, and I have decided to ask Mason to do them."

Penelope looked perfectly indifferent, but now her heart sank.

It was patently clear that Mr. Aspell was taking no chances where she was concerned. But more than that—he meant to ensure she had no chance of seeing Hugh. Why?—unless it was because he suspected she meant to warn him: because he had some plot in mind for the downfall of Hugh and the Grey Ghosts!

"And just in case you should—er—get lost again, Miss Cartwright," he purred, "I shall be delighted to escort you from Junior House myself! Come!"



MR. ASPELL'S MYSTERIOUS BEHAVIOUR

Penelope sat knitting on a stone seat on the fringe of the school gardens. Though her attention was apparently concentrated upon nothing but her flying needles, actually she was waiting—and watching.

It was nearly dusk, and many rather anxious and uneasy hours separated her from that battle of wits with Mr. Aspell.

"What tense moments those had been!"

She was worried, anxious—but characteristically not on her own account.

"What's that scheming Wasp up to?" she muttered for at least the tenth time. "Why's he out to prevent me from seeing Hugh? I—I don't like it."

Her mind went back on the day. At morning break there had been no sign of Hugh—but Mr. Aspell had appeared on the Junior School steps and remained there, almost on guard, it had seemed, until the end of break.

Thwarted, Penelope had suddenly thought of the old fountain in the Cloisters, preciously used by the Grey

Ghosts as a secret letter-box. Surely if she left a warning message there one of the other Grey Ghosts would pick it up and contact Hugh?

And so she had written a note at lunch—only to find when she reached the Cloisters that Harold Smeeke was there, obviously keeping a watchful eye on the fountain. And Smeeke, she knew, was aware of the existence of the secret letter-box.

It had been checkmate again. Penelope had torn up the note, her uneasiness increasing, and also her determination to contact Hugh—somehow.

Then she had remembered what Harvey had said—that Hugh would lock up the Junior sports pavilion after school. Surely Mr. Aspell would not prevent that? Thus Penelope now held her present position, one eye always on the rear entrance of Junior House.

Again and again she pondered Mr. Aspell's actions.

"I don't get it," she muttered restlessly. "That hateful Wasp can't prevent me seeing Hugh some time! Or is he trying to make me show my hand, do something rather desperate that'll prove his suspicions against me conclusively?"

It was a disturbing possibility, and yet somehow she did not feel it was the true explanation; for if Mr. Aspell really did believe she had some connection with the Grey Ghosts—then he would expect her to be very much on her guard.

She gulped and cast another glance towards the Junior House.

"If only Hugh would come," she muttered. "And there hasn't been any sign of Harvey, or Bob, either. I wonder if the Wasp—"

She broke short with a little, eager exclamation and rose to her feet. A figure had just left the rear entrance of Junior House.

Seeing that figure more clearly, her face dropped.

It was Mr. Aspell himself. And there was distinctly something odd about his movements. He reached the hedge bounding one side of Junior Side, then, with a swift, almost furtive glance around, stepped quickly into the shrubbery on his right.

Penelope saw him stoop, pick something up, and whisk it under his flowing gown.

Her eyes widened. From that distance it was hard to be sure, but the object had looked very much like a long, metal bar.

"What on earth—"

Suddenly aquiver with eager interest, she stole forward and watched. Mr. Aspell had moved on, his long stride even more cat-like and stealthy than before. Ever and anon he glanced swiftly over his shoulder.

Penelope frowned in bewilderment. What was he up to? Why had he got that metal bar, and—where on earth was he going with it?

She craned her head. By his present direction he appeared to be making roughly in the direction of the ruined Small Chapel, or—

Penelope gasped, suddenly remembering what lay near Small Chapel. "The old belfry!" she exclaimed, and the thought made her brain race afresh with new and astounding possibilities.

Suppose Mr. Aspell knew or suspected in some strange way the Grey Ghosts' interest in the old belfry! Suppose that was why he had kept Hugh busy, so that the Grey Ghosts could not meet and act—so that he could get there first!

She glanced back towards Junior House. There was no sign of Hugh. She looked in the other direction. Mr. Aspell was almost from sight.

"Fenny, it's up to you, and—here goes!"

And, drawing a deep, excited breath, she stole off in the tracks of the senior master.

What is Mr. Aspell up to? Next Friday's thrilling instalment will tell you. Look out for more dramatic surprises.

The Disappearing Mannequin

A STRANGE APPEAL

"NUNKY—what simply gorgeous frocks!" June Gaynor's grey eyes sparkled with enthusiasm as she gazed across the softly-lit dress salon in the big departmental store in Hengtown.

Noel Raymond followed the direction of his young partner's glance towards the revolving stage, on which attractive mannequins were displaying some of the latest model gowns.

"I'll take your word for it, June," he said smilingly. "I'm not much of a judge when it comes to ladies' fashions. Mr. Sharman, the proprietor, thought you might like to wait here while he and I have a chat about those jewel thefts that have been taking place upstairs. That is—unless you'd like to come round with us?"

June shook her head, her eyes dancing.

"You can tell me all about it later, nunky," she said. "These 'New Look' models just won't let me go!"

Noel chuckled, and just then he caught sight of Mr. Sharman crossing the salon towards them.

The afternoon dress-show had just commenced. Only a few prospective customers were seated on the rows of comfortable chairs set round the dais, while the soft strains of a dance band came over the loud-speaker.

The circular stage was divided into separate, numbered cubicles, in each of which stood a charmingly gowned mannequin, perfectly poised and statuesque.

June caught in her breath suddenly, leaning forward, as one model attracted her admiration. It was a "New Look" gown of particular charm, with a stylish hat to match. The slender, dark-haired mannequin who wore it held a white suede bag in her hand.

June, quick to observe details, saw that the girl's hand trembled slightly, as though she was nervous.

"Why—I do believe she's scared!" thought the girl detective. "I wonder if it's simply stage-fright, or—"

Abruptly, startlingly, her thoughts were answered, as the slowly-revolving dais brought the dark-haired mannequin abreast of her. A ripple of laughter among the customers had caused a momentary diversion; and just then the girl raised her hand with a kind of desperate urgency.

June gasped, staring at the white hand-bag, which, now reversed, bore two words scrawled across its suede surface:

"Help me!"

The stage moved on, and June started to her feet, flashing a glance at the number in the cubicle as the model was carried out of view. "No. 13."

"Wait—stop!" she gasped, almost without thinking.

Her surprising exclamation silenced the murmurs. Everyone stared at her. Noel, who was talking to the



By PETER LANGLEY

proprietor, raised his eyebrows in swift inquiry.

"Why, Miss Gaynor—is anything wrong?" asked Mr. Sharman.

"Yes—no—that is—" June pulled herself together with an effort, forcing an unsteady smile. She believed that what she had seen had been meant for her eyes alone. In any case, she was anxious not to cause a false alarm.

"That is—I'd like to see Model 13 again, please!" she added, a trifle confusedly, as she encountered the proprietor's perplexed stare.

"Why, certainly, Miss Gaynor, I will bring it round again."

June thanked him, scarcely daring to meet her uncle's quizzical glance as she crossed quickly towards the revolving stage. Noel strolled after her, while Mr. Sharman signalled to the attendant operating the control-switch.

Drowned by a sudden blare of the dance music, June imagined that she heard a stifled cry, but it might have been her fancy.

"Nunky," she whispered, "something amazing happened. The thirteenth mannequin, she's in some kind of trouble—and appealed for help—"

Noel glanced at her in swift surprise, but there was no time for questions. The revolving stage had completed its circuit, and was coming round again.

June's heart beat quickly as she watched the numbered cubicles with their charming occupants.

"Ten," she whispered, "eleven—nunky! Let me speak to her."

She stepped forward, as the graceful figure came slowly into view. The attendant in charge touched a lever, and the stage slowed down, stopping as No. 13 came level with June.

The girl detective bent forward, and made a pretence of examining the charming gown.

"I saw your message!" she whispered. "What is it you want me to do?"

There came no reply. The dark-haired mannequin stood stiffly, staring over June's head, as though frightened to move or speak. Noel had moved forward, a strange expression in his eyes.

"It's all right," whispered June urgently. "This is my uncle—Noel Raymond, the famous detective. There's no one else listening."

She gripped the other's gloved hand reassuringly as she spoke—and then her blood ran cold.

For the slim figure lurched forward, and would have pitched to the ground if Noel had not sprung to June's aid in the nick of time.

With a stifled cry, the girl detective released the model's cold, unyielding

fingers. Her grey eyes were wide with bewilderment and horror as she stared up into the fixed, smiling features.

She realised that she was staring at a wax dummy!

THE SUSPECT MANNEQUIN FOUND



June's thoughts were reeling as she heard her uncle's terse, amazed whisper:

"A wax model! But—what's all this you were telling me, June? You said that she appealed for help—"

"Nunky, she—it—I don't understand!" gasped June. "She was a live girl when she passed me a few minutes ago—and there was a message, written on the hand-bag—"

Noel grasped the suede hand-bag, quickly reversing it. There was nothing written on the other side—but the white leather appeared darkly smudged.

"You were right, June!" he declared. "This bag is still warm from someone's grasp—and there are curious scratches on the floor of the cubicle that suggest a struggle—"

Soft footsteps sounded on the carpet behind them, as Mr. Sharman approached, accompanied by the fair-haired, attractive young manageress of the gowns department.

"What do you think of model thirteen, Miss Gaynor?" asked the latter.

June looked appealingly at Noel. The young detective smiled composedly.

"My niece feels that the style is a trifle too stiff, Miss Revele," he rejoined. "Perhaps that is because it is being shown on a wax dummy, instead of by one of the mannequins—"

Mr. Sharman frowned with sudden annoyance, and the young manageress flushed.

"I've already explained about that, Mr. Sharman," she said apologetically. "The trouble is the girls' stupid superstition about No. 13. They all fight shy of this particular cubicle—and we were compelled to use a wax model instead."

"Then"—June caught in her breath—"you mean that a live mannequin has never worn this particular gown?"

"Only on two occasions, Miss Gaynor," replied the manageress, "and both were unlucky. The first girl slipped on the stairs and is now

in hospital. The other was Karen Harvey— She hesitated, glancing at the proprietor.

"Miss Harvey was dismissed yesterday—for dishonesty," put in Mr. Sharman briefly. "She was found loitering in the jewellery department, after one of the recent thefts—and refused to give an account of herself."

Noel pursed his lips, glancing significantly at his young partner, as the revolving stage was restarted.

"I should be glad to hear more about those mysterious thefts, Mr. Sharman," he murmured. "Perhaps my niece could amuse herself by looking at some of the other models while we are talking?"

June's eyes lit up.

"Of course, nunky!" she declared. It was clear to her that her uncle was giving her a chance to do a little investigation on her own!

Waiting for a moment when she was unobserved, she quickly slipped behind the curtain that hung near the revolving stage, to find herself in a passage connecting with the mannequins' dressing-room.

It was this way that the girl must have come, to take her place on the stage! But if she had been wearing the fateful gown at the time, someone would have been bound to notice her. Unless—her dress was covered—

The girl detective drew in her breath quickly, as she caught sight of one of the other mannequins hurrying past, wearing a light wrap over her gown to protect it from the dust.

That was it! The mystery girl must have been dressed for her part in a copy of the model gown, and wearing a wrap. The passage was dimly lit, and among the other hurrying mannequins she would not have been particularly observed.

The wax dummy must have been all ready on the stage, wearing the real gown; and it would have been the work of an instant to change places.

But—the mystery still remained: why had she signalled so desperately for help—and what had happened to her after that?

June remembered that stifled cry—the cry that had been drowned by the music. And her uncle had noticed signs of a struggle.

It seemed that in some way the mystery mannequin had been spirited away from the revolving stage—and the dummy replaced. But—how, why?

June stiffened suddenly as her keen eyes noticed a zigzag mark on the polished floor, as though something had been dragged across the line—perhaps the dummy model!

In the dim light she found that she was standing near a cupboard, obviously used for clothes. June glanced quickly towards the dressing-room to make sure she was unobserved, then she ventured to open the cupboard.

At first glance it seemed empty, then, as she flashed her torch, she saw a light dust-wrap on one of the shelves. June examined it eagerly. She found a tape, bearing initials:

"K. H."

"Karen Harvey!" gasped June. "The girl who was dismissed for theft! I—I wonder if she was Model 13!"

If she were Karen—why had she come back? And where was she now?

June searched the cupboard, hoping to find some further clue—but she discovered nothing except a small scrap of velvet material bearing a red stain.

Just then she heard the voices of the mannequins as they returned to their dressing-rooms. She mustn't be caught here! She darted through the curtain into the salon—to run full into the arms of her uncle.

"Hallo!" murmured Noel. "What's the excitement now? Don't tell me that you've found the thirteenth mannequin?"

June shook her head, breathing quickly.

"Not yet, nunky—but I'm getting warmer! I've discovered that the mystery girl was Karen—the girl accused of theft."

Noel whistled softly, as June described her discovery.

"Any clues beyond the wrap, June?"

"Only this, nunky—and I can't make anything of it."

Noel raised his eyebrows sharply at the sight of the scrap of stained velvet.

"You've found something more significant than you imagine, June," he declared. "This is a jeweller's cloth used for polishing precious stones! It may have been wrapped round the stolen jewellery. And the red stain—I'm not quite sure, but—"

Noel had no chance to continue. At that moment there came a startling commotion in the salon, as a uniformed messenger raced in, calling for Mr. Sharman.

"Well, Jenkins—what's wrong?" demanded the proprietor.

"More trouble upstairs, sir!" panted the excited messenger. "Mr. Lester sent me down to tell you—"

"Not another of those dreadful thefts!" gasped Miss Revelle.

Noel's eyes glinted as he stepped forward with June, while Mr. Sharman questioned the messenger. The proprietor's face went white.

"Raymond—this is disastrous," he declared huskily. "A diamond necklace worth a thousand pounds has vanished from the jewellery department—stolen under the very noses of the assistants. And the thief's got clean away!"

"When was this?" demanded Noel. "It happened less than ten minutes ago—while we were watching the dress parade! Lester, the manager, has stopped all the customers from leaving pending further orders."

Noel flashed a significant glance at June.

"We'll go up right away, Mr. Sharman," he said briskly. "Perhaps Miss Revelle would come with us, in case it is necessary to question any of the women customers?"

"I'd be glad to help in any way," declared Miss Revelle. "We are closing the salon for tea, and the next dress parade will not take place till six o'clock."

A lift carried them swiftly to the jewellery department on the first floor—where they were met by Mr. Lester, the grey-haired manager.

"This is terrible, Mr. Sharman," he declared. "I actually caught sight of the thief—but she managed to evade us all—"

"Then—the thief was a girl?" gasped Miss Revelle, and June caught in her breath sharply, as she encountered Noel's meaning glance.

Mr. Lester nodded, and led them to the counter where the daring robbery had actually taken place.

The white-faced young salesman in charge of the counter told his story. The priceless necklace had been displayed in a showcase behind the counter, near the manager's office. He had been serving a customer when Mr. Lester came running from the office. From his open door the manager had caught sight of a veiled girl slipping under the counter-flap while the salesman's attention was distracted. The girl had escaped—and when they turned to the showcase they found that the priceless necklace had vanished.

"Could you describe the girl?" asked Noel.

The manager shook his head agitatedly.

"She was wearing a veil, Mr. Raymond—and I believe she had dark hair. But I was too concerned, at the time, about the necklace."

June's thoughts were racing, as Noel carried out a thorough search behind the counter, and questioned the other assistants about the veiled girl.

What did he suspect? How were

these mysterious thefts linked with the uncanny disappearance of the thirteenth mannequin?

Just then Noel returned.

"Mr. Sharman," he said abruptly, "I'm convinced that the thief is still in the building! I want you to give orders that no members of the staff shall be permitted to leave, without my instructions. Miss Revelle, I'd like you particularly to keep a close check on the girls in your department."

The manager looked alarmed. "Mr. Raymond—you surely don't suspect—"

"I suspect no one—yet," cut in Noel gravely, "but we must take precautions. With Mr. Sharman's permission, I'd be glad if you'd arrange for all the mannequins to be present for the six o'clock dress parade."

The flustered manager departed, and Noel turned to Mr. Sharman.

"Is there any way by which the thief could have entered the department without being seen by the public?" he asked.

"Only by the staff staircase," replied the latter, staring. "But the commissionaire on duty swears that no one passed him."

Noel nodded. "The trickster we're after has means of acting without being seen," he said. "But I think we'll make a search."

They descended the staff staircase, passing the watchful commissionaire on duty, and finally reached the basement. Noel suddenly halted, pointing to a door.

"Where does that lead?"

"To a disused store-room," said the proprietor. "The door is always kept locked, as the builders left the place unfinished, and there is danger from falling brickwork. I have a master-key, if—"

"I'd like to take a look inside," said Noel. He took the key from Mr. Sharman, and inserted it in the lock. It turned with difficulty, proving that the door had not been used for some time.

As it opened creakingly, Noel flashed his torch. June, peering over her uncle's shoulder, gave a horrified cry.

Lying huddled at the foot of a flight of stone steps was a girlish figure, in a New Look gown. On the stone floor beside her was an empty jewel-case.

"Karen Harvey!" exclaimed Mr. Sharman.

"The thirteenth mannequin—it's she!" whispered June. "She's unconscious, nunky. It looks—it looks as though—" She paused, staring at the empty jewel-case.

"She is the thief!" cried Mr. Sharman.

"On the contrary," cut in Noel unexpectedly, as he flashed his torch on the girl's outstretched hand. "Karen Harvey is innocent!"



THE CUBICLE OF DANGER

"It's no use, nunky!" said June, as she and Noel made their way to the dress salon after tea. "Mr. Sharman refuses to listen.

Karen's been taken to hospital under police escort—and she will be arrested when she recovers."

"Perhaps," rejoined Noel grimly. "It'll be an hour or two before she is well enough to speak—and a lot may happen by then. You've convinced me that Karen Harvey could not be responsible for those thefts—and we've got to catch the real trickster!"

"I've convinced you, nunky? What do you mean?"

Noel smiled faintly. "Your sharp eyes, June, and quick wits. Let's look back. You saw Karen Harvey on the revolving stage, and read her desperate message. Karen vanished. By your investigation you

(Please turn to the back page.)



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE MERRYMAKERS MAKE WISHES

"GOLLY! Every one a winner!"
"Gosh! How did you manage it, Slick?"

Sally Warner and Don Weston asked those questions in amazement. Fay Manners and Johnny Briggs were so flabbergasted that for a moment they stood speechless.

The four cheery chums, known as the Merry-makers on board the College Ship, had come strolling along D Deck, which was specially reserved for students on the liner Ocean Star. And they had been just in time to witness an amazing exhibition of deck quoits.

The performer was Samuel Leander Kaplin, otherwise known as Slick. He had casually tossed half a dozen rope rings, and every one of them had dropped with uncanny accuracy over the peg which was placed on the deck.

The astounding part about it was that Slick wasn't usually much good at this sort of thing. He was always too busy working on his varied inventions to have any time for sports.

Slick grinned expansively and rubbed his hands.

"Hot stuff, eh?" he said, and peered at Sally & Co. through his thick, horn-rimmed spectacles. "I know the secret. I just make a wish—and the wish is granted. Guess old Tutti-tooma did his stuff O.K.!"

"Tut-tutti-tut-tooma?" stuttered Sally. "What on earth are you babbling about, Slick?"

"He's my lucky talisman," said the boy inventor. "I bought him just before we left Taniki."

The liner had sailed from the South Seas island of Taniki early that morning, continuing its voyage to Australia, and the natives had swarmed round in their frail craft, selling fruit and curios, which the students had eagerly bought.

Slick dived a hand into his jacket pocket and now produced a small idol, crudely fashioned out of wood.

"Here it is," he said. "All you have to do is rub it and say the magic words, and then make a wish. Old Tutti—"

"You're nutty!" snorted Johnny. "You surely don't expect us to believe that, Slick," laughed Sally.

"But it works!" persisted Slick. "Here, you try it, Sally. You're good at this quoits game, but you don't reckon to get more than four out of six over the peg from this distance. Give the talisman a rub, say 'Oolah' three times and then wish you could get all six on the mark same as I did."

Sally chuckled. The American boy, of course, just wanted to have a bit of fun at her expense. Solemnly she took the idol and obeyed instructions. Then, as Slick handed her the quoits, she threw them one by one. Whereupon Sally got the surprise of her life.

For all six dropped over the peg as clean as a whistle—a feat she had never succeeded before in performing.

"What did I say?" whooped Slick. "Your wish has come true, Sally. Old Tutti is a sure-fire talisman. Now do you believe he can bring you luck?"

Sally was still feeling breathless after her surprising feat.

"Of course she doesn't!" scoffed Johnny. "Sally just happened to be bang at the top of her form, that's all. Huh! It's a lot of rot, and you know it, Slick. You're trying to kid us—"

"Say, don't you Merry-makers want a lot of convincing!" Slick waived.

"O.K., Johnny, you have a shot. I heard you grumbling at breakfast because lectures start again this afternoon. Here's the Head coming along, and now's your chance to wish that lectures will be postponed!"

Johnny chortled as he took the idol.

"Gosh, what a hope! O.K., I jolly well wish it, and here's where old Tutti comes unstuck!"

And Johnny made the wish, and his chums grinned at each other. A postponement of lectures on such a hot day would suit them nicely, but for Professor Willard to do such a thing just wasn't remotely possible. "Sing small, Slick!" grinned Johnny. "The Head's letting you down. Look at him rushing to tell us there aren't any lectures!"

Professor Willard was leaning over the rail, his gown rustling in the gentle breeze. He was staring out over the sparkling blue sea, deep in concentration.

Slick mopped his brow.

"Phew! I could do with a cool drink—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He wants to cool off his enthusiasm!"

"Don't hedge, Slick! Admit that Tutti is just a chunk of wood—"

"He's a lucky talisman, I tell you," howled Slick. "Give him a rub, Don, and make a wish for some drinks."

"Poor old Slick! He hasn't learnt his lesson yet," grinned Don, grabbing the idol. "Oolah, oolah, oolah! Do your stuff, Tutti, and bring us some drinks! Hallo, I can't see any drinks whizzing through the air on a magic carpet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about me?" asked Fay, spluttering with mirth. "Let me have a rub to rub it in, Slick! Now what can I wish, knowing it won't wash—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sally & Co. were doubled up with laughter.

"Pipe down, you grinning gazookas!" protested Slick. "Sure, have a go, Fay. Lost a brooch, haven't you? Then make a wish, and Tutti will bring it back to you!"

Fay had lost a brooch that morning—one Sally had given her, and she did want to find it. Not that an ugly piece of wood was likely to be of any help. But, just to keep up the fun, she made her wish.

And then the laughter subsided as

Professor Willard was seen coming towards them.

"Good morning, boys and girls," he greeted them affably. "I am glad to observe you are all in a happy frame of mind. A contented student works far better than a discontented one. Oh, Sally, will you please make it known to everyone that I have decided that lectures will commence to-morrow morning instead of this afternoon!"

There were gasps of astonishment—hastily suppressed in case the Head changed his mind. Professor Willard walked away. Sally blinked incredulously, so astounded by the headmaster's unexpected decision that she just stood there speechless. Not so Slick, however.

Slick let out a jubilant whoop.

"Another wish come true!" he exclaimed. "Now who says this isn't a lucky talisman?"

"Mum-my hat!" stuttered Johnny feebly. "It—it's just a coincidence that—"

"Five drinks coming up!"

Sally & Co. spun round. Standing beside them was a diminutive, uniformed figure. It was young Jimmy Bowles, one of the ship's bell-boys, and balanced on his hand was a tray containing five tall glasses of a sparkling cherry drink.

"I—I'm sus-seeing things!" stammered Don, his mouth gaping open.

"Of course you are!" whooped Slick excitedly. "You're seeing the drinks you wished for. Old Tutti's done it again!"

Sally's blue eyes were large and bright with wonderment. She stared at the bell-boy.

"How did you know those drinks were for us?" she gasped. "Who told you to bring them?"

Young Jimmy looked a little surprised.

"They are for you, aren't they?" he asked. "I heard a voice—"

"A voice?" went up a chorus.

"Sure," said Jimmy. "Dunno who it was. I was standing there, waiting for orders, when a low voice suddenly said, 'Mr. Weston wishes for five cherry drinks—'"

"W-wishes for them?" Sally exclaimed.

"Those were the exact words," Jimmy affirmed. "I looked to see who it was speaking, but couldn't see anyone. Then when I turned to pick up my tray—there was the money. Appeared there as if by magic—"

"M-magic?" stuttered Don.

"Well, it was queer, wasn't it?" Jimmy said, staring curiously at the chums, and even more curiously at the idol which Fay still held in her hands. "And so here I am with the drinks—you look as if you need them!" he added brightly.

Sally & Co. did. But Slick was in high fettle.

"Here's to Tutti!" he exclaimed jubilantly, taking a glass and taking a long swig. "Ah, that was good. Now what have you got to say?" he chortled, grinning at the still-dazed Merrymakers. "You've all had your wishes granted."

"I haven't," said Fay. "I haven't got my brooch back yet."

"That's right!" Johnny came out of his trance, seizing on this chance to strengthen his conviction that a chunk of wood couldn't have magic powers—and seizing one of the drinks at the same time. "I still say—" Johnny left it unsaid as he took a long, much-needed drink.

"All a lot of boloney!" he added. "I think—" He uplited the glass again. "Urrrrgh!" he suddenly spluttered in wild alarm, spilling the liquid down his trousers. "What's this in my drink? I nearly swallowed it."

He fished something out of the glass. From Fay came an amazed and delighted cry.

"My brooch!"

"Fuf-Fay's br-brooch!" spluttered Sally, and felt herself sway. "Oh, golly! I can't believe it—"

"But seeing is believing—you can't deny that!" Slick was doing a solo jitterbug in his excitement. "All boloney huh? The final wish comes true. Tutti never fails. What'd you think about it now?"

The Merrymakers did not know what to think. Four wishes had been made—and uncannily all four wishes had been fulfilled. Even obstinate, doubting Johnny couldn't help being impressed now. And someone else was impressed, too.

"Gee! Does that idol really make your wishes come true?" asked young Jimmy Bowles breathlessly.

"It—it seems to, Jimmy" replied Sally in a faint, incredulous voice. "I—I still can't understand it—"

"Golly! Then—then could I make a wish!" Jimmy looked excited, then indignant. "I haven't had the rise in wages I'm due for," he went on aggrievedly. "I've told the chief steward, but he won't do anything about it. I'm due for more money, and I jolly well ought to get it."

"Of course you did," agreed Sally sympathetically. "Have you seen the captain about it—"

"A bell-boy see the skipper?" Jimmy laughed bitterly. "That just can't be done. Skippers don't see bell-boys. It has to be done through the chief steward, only he's got a grudge against me and won't listen or lift a finger to help. But if that's really a magic idol—"

"Better make a wish, Jimmy, and see if it brings you luck," smiled Sally. "Pass him old Tutti-ooma, Fay! Slick, you don't mind, do you?"

But Slick was no longer there. Full of excitement, he had no doubt gone off to read the news about his lucky talisman.

Jimmy took the idol and, as Sally told him what to do, solemnly rubbed it between his hands and then uttered the magic words.

"Oolah, oolah, oolah!" he said in a fervent voice. "I wish to get my rise in wages what I'm due for, and I'm going straight to the skipper himself to ask for it. Gee, thanks!" went on Jimmy, gazing round at Sally & Co. "That's what I'm going to do. Blow the chief steward! The skipper will be in his cabin, and I'm going to beard him in his own den right now!"

And Jimmy, giving the idol an extra rub to bolster up his confidence and courage, went hurrying off along the deck.

"Better tell Slick that Jimmy's borrowed the idol," murmured Sally. "Golly, I still feel in a daze. Let's find Slick."

That wasn't difficult, for as they rounded the near corner they heard a roar of laughter—and there was Slick, grinning all over his face at them.

"Ever been spoofed, Merrymakers?" he chortled. "I took you in properly with old Tutti, eh? You didn't know that inside the quoits peg was a magnet—and that the quoits themselves were wired to act on the

magnet. And I sure wangled all those other stunts, too!"

Slick roared again with laughter, while Sally & Co. stood stock-still, stunned as they now realized the truth.

"But how did you—" started Sally, and then broke off in dismay.

She was thinking of young Jimmy Bowles who, believing in the magical powers of Slick's idol, had gone charging off with the declared intention of forcing an interview with the captain of the ship!



JIMMY IN THE LION'S DEN

Sally gasped—then groaned.

Young Jimmy hoped to get a rise. More likely he would get the sack!

"Slick—" she began in a state of great agitation.

"The trouble is he's been too jolly sick!" hooted Johnny. "The japing spoofer! He wants taking down a peg—"

"Fax!" gurgled Slick, still spluttering with mirth at the success of his hoax. "And talking about pegs, watch this!"

He had with him the quoits peg and the rings which he had used to put over his jape. He dropped the peg on the deck, and the clatter it made proved that it was an iron one, cleverly painted to represent wood.

The peg rolled along the deck, and then Slick bowled one of the quoits, aiming to one side of the peg. But suddenly the quoit swerved and, as if jerked along by some invisible cord, whizzed up to the peg and clung there.

"See that?" grinned Slick. "All done with a concealed magnet."

"There's no time for that!" cried Sally, still thinking of Jimmy. "Listen to—"

"But what about my trousers?" demanded Johnny. "I split some of that drink down them when I nearly swallowed Fay's brooch. Slick's to blame! Look at the stain—"

"Soon remove that!" said Slick, diving a hand into his pocket and bringing out what looked like a water-pistol. "My latest patent stain remover. The 'Slick Clean-it Gun—one puff and it's done!' " he added, quoting a catch-phrase which he always dubbed to his many and varied inventions.

He pressed the small rubber bulb at the barrel end of the pistol, and a cloud of powder shot over the stain on Johnny's trousers. Quickly Slick flicked his handkerchief over it, dusted away the power—and the stain had gone.

"Gee, that's pretty good," said Johnny, some of his wrath evaporating.

"Listen!" exclaimed Sally again. "Have you forgotten about Jimmy and—"

"What about Jimmy?"

Sally's chums looked as startled as she when they suddenly realized what she was driving at, and why she was looking so worried. Slick, hearing all about it, whistled in dismay.

"Jimmy—gone to demand a rise from the skipper himself?" he echoed. "Jumping gophers, that's bad—"

"It's terrible!" said Sally with a shudder. "I didn't think so at the time, but I do now. We've got to stop him—"

"Rather!"

"Before he gets to the captain!"

"Come on!"

"Now you see what's happened because of your fat-headed hoax, Slick!"

"Goshakes! I didn't mean anybody to get into a jam," said Slick, no longer laughing and now looking alarmed. "But this is really your fault—"

"Ours! Look here—"

"Well, you gave him old Tutti and told him to wish—"

"You started it—"

"Oh, come on!" gasped Sally, leading the way at a run towards a companionway which would take them up to the promenade deck. "We're all a bit to blame, and we've got to prevent

poor Jimmy running his head into the lion's den!"

She felt that remark alarmingly appropriate. She had a mental picture of Captain Thorne, a stickler for discipline, suddenly confronted in the privacy of his own cabin by an impetuous little bell-boy recklessly demanding a rise.

Along the promenade deck Sally & Co. rushed, hoping to overtake the boy. Passengers and students—for students were allowed on this deck out of college hours—stared in surprise at the sight of those five figures rushing around in the tropical heat.

"Hallo, there!" came a cheery hail from Linda Powell, the girl from Chicago, who was taking it easy in a steamer chair under a shady awning. "Looking for something?"

"For somebody," Sally puffed. "Have you seen young Jimmy Bowles?"

"Say, he was in a hurry, too," observed Linda. "Saw him streaking up towards the bridge a few seconds ago—"

The American girl broke off and stared. Sally & Co. were already streaking off in the same direction.

Fast as they had come, young Jimmy had been even faster. Jimmy was hot and hopefully on the quest for the rise he had wished for—little realizing that he was heading for trouble.

"Sally, Slick's just admitted that he already knew the Head was going to postpone lectures until to-morrow," panted Johnny, coming up alongside. "And he'd found Fay's brooch, and he ordered those drinks."

Sally nodded. She had already guessed as much after discovering that the whole thing was a hoax. She remembered how Slick had cleverly done all the talking, getting them to make the "wishes" which he had known would appear to be "magically" fulfilled.

He had spoofed them properly, and the Merrymakers bore him no grudge because of that. But unfortunately the matter hadn't ended there. Young Jimmy Bowles had unwittingly become involved, and that was a different matter. Jimmy had got to be stopped before he got himself into a jam.

Sally put on a spurt, leaping up a companionway to the deck where she knew Captain Thorne's cabin was situated. It was out of bounds to students and passengers, except by special permission, but recklessly the chums charged on.

Rounding a corner, they suddenly saw the little bell-boy. But they were just a second too late. Evidently Jimmy didn't hear their shouts. They saw him tap on the door and then, a pugnacious expression on his normally perky face, he thrust his way inside. "Jimmy, come back!" shouted Sally.

She rushed towards the cabin, expecting to hear a furious exclamation from Captain Thorne. But all she heard was a startled cry from Jimmy.

He stood just inside the cabin, peering round the door and staring in dismay at something on the other side of it.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?" gasped Sally.

"The skipper isn't here—"

"Thank goodness for that! But—but—"

"But his uniform is—and look at it!" Jimmy said in a scared voice.

They all looked. On a table behind the door was one of Captain Thorne's tropical uniforms—snowy white and resplendent with the rings of his rank. At least, it had looked resplendent; but now, on the white jacket, was a large blue ink-stain. And nearby, also on the table, was an overturned bottle of ink.

"Gosh, did you do that, Jimmy?" asked Don in consternation.

"I—I don't know," faltered Jimmy. "I did rather crash open the door—"

"No, Jimmy couldn't have done it," put in Sally swiftly. "The stain's too dry for it to have been done just now. But, golly, he might get the blame for it if he's caught here. Is the coast clear, Slick? Have a look round, will you?"

Slick stood nearest the door. He darted out of the cabin, which stood on the corner of two corridors.

"Come on, Jimmy, we've got to scoot!" added Sally.

"Eh? But I want to see the skipper about my rise," objected Jimmy, his courage returning, and taking a tighter grasp of the talisman, which he still held in one hand.

"Leave it!" said Sally hastily. "We've got something to tell you, Jimmy—"

"Cave! Captain's coming!" hissed Slick's voice through a porthole.

Footsteps sounded along the corridor immediately outside the door. Sally gave a gasp. They couldn't possibly escape now without being seen. And that uniform—

Trouble was inevitable. But there would be bigger trouble if they were blamed for damaging the uniform. Sally acted on the spur of the moment. She grabbed up the hanger on which the uniform hung and whisked it through the porthole.

"Take it, Slick!" she hissed.

Even as the uniform vanished from sight through the porthole, Captain Thorne strode in through the doorway.



GOOD-BYE TO THE IDOL

Sally's heart fluttered. They had been caught in the skipper's cabin without permission, and he wasn't going to be pleased about it.

Then her spirits sank to zero as she saw the expression on his face.

Captain Thorne was obviously in a bad mood. She realised it even as he came stamping into the cabin. He was already frowning; and the frown became a glare as he saw those five figures congregated there.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Hem!" Sally coughed. "I—I—we—er—"

For once she was tongue-tied. She couldn't say they had come chasing after young Jimmy Bowles to prevent him asking for a rise.

"Huh! Are you supposed to be here?" demanded the skipper. "Did you have an appointment with me?"

"Nun-do—"
"What? You haven't? Then what's the reason for this invasion— He broke off, for the first time seeing young Jimmy, whom Don and Johnny had been trying to conceal.

But Jimmy hadn't wanted to be concealed. Jimmy rashly stepped forward.

"Please, sir—"

"Who are you?" barked Captain Thorne.

"Bowles is the name, sir. I'm a bell-boy—"

"I can see that! Did I send for you?"

"No sir. I came to see you, sir, about a—"

Jimmy paused, staring in surprise at Sally, who was flapping her hand wildly.

"Jimmy, don't—" she began.

But Jimmy had already done it.

"I came to see you about a rise, sir," the bell-boy rushed on impetuously. "I'm due for one, and it has been overlooked, sir—"

"You've come to see me about a rise?" Captain Thorne's eyes glistened. "Have you, by ginger! D'you know who I am?"

"Yes, sir. You're the captain."

"Then don't you know you're not allowed in here unless I send for you? Don't you know that such matters should be submitted through the usual channels? Have you learned no discipline since you've been on this boat?" The skipper's face was getting redder and redder as his voice grew louder and louder. "You want a rise, eh? You'll get one on the end of my foot if you dare come in here again like this, my boy! Now clear out! I shall make a point of asking the chief steward for a report about you."

Jimmy's lips quivered. Still believing in the magical powers of the talisman he clutched in his trembling fingers because he had seen all those other wishes come true—or so he thought—he was now crushed and humiliated by the captain's anger.

Sally sprang forward with a little gulp. She couldn't bear to see the bell-boy looking so heartbroken.

"Captain Thorne, it's my fault," she said. "I encouraged Jimmy to come to see you—"

"You did, eh? Then you had no right to, Miss Warner. And you've no right to be in here either. Don't you realise this deck is out of bounds to you students? How dare you invade my private cabin in this outrageous fashion? Clear out, all of you! Professor Willard shall hear about this." "Oh, golly!"

"Gee, Sally, this lucky ju-ju has let us down!" gulped young Jimmy.

"It's not a lucky ju-ju," groaned Sally. "That's what we came tearing after you to tell you, Jimmy—"

"Get out!" thundered Captain Thorne. He could be the most genial and affable of men; but he could also be the most irascible man on board when caught in the wrong mood. "And where's that uniform of mine? Where is it? Is this Friday the thirteenth? First I spill ink over my brand-new uniform, and now I'm pestered by students and bell-boys. Get out before I become angry!"

But Sally didn't get out. So the captain himself had spilt the ink over his uniform. Thank goodness she and her chums and Jimmy couldn't be blamed for that! But they were in serious enough trouble as it was. Jimmy would never get his rise, and they would be reported to Professor Willard. Unless—

Sally's eyes suddenly gleamed with a reckless light.

"Where's that uniform?" Captain Thorne was still raging. "It's got to be cleaned, and I want it for to-night. Are you still here, Miss Warner? I told you to go—"

"Please, captain—" Sally began in a breathless voice.

"Go! Or do you want me to have you thrown out? By ginger, can't a man look for his uniform in peace?" He stamped around the cabin.

But Sally, ignoring the startled looks of her chums, still stood her ground.

"Tuttitooma will find your uniform, captain!" she said loudly and distinctly.

"Eh? By James, haven't you gone yet?" The skipper glared. "What are you talking about now—"

"Tuttitooma," explained Sally. "He'll find your uniform."

"Who's he? Never heard of him. He's not on this ship."

"But he is, captain. He's here in this cabin. He's our lucky ju-ju!"

"Your—your what?"

Captain Thorne appeared to choke. Sally's chums gasped.

They tried to drag Sally away, but Sally refused to be dragged.

"My ju-ju," she repeated firmly.

"Ju-ju!" snorted the skipper. "By jingo—"

"Jolly good ju-ju!" persisted Sally. "If you make a wish, captain, your uniform will appear—all bright and clean again."

"Ridiculous!"

"But it isn't," Sally said, turning a blind eye to the skipper's glare. "Show him the ju-ju, Jimmy!"

Tremblingly, Jimmy held out the idol. Sally took it, dangling it in front of Captain Thorne's purpling face.

"All you have to do—"

"What I intend to do, Miss Warner, is to eject you forcibly! I've had more than enough. Lucky ju-ju, indeed!"

"But he is lucky—isn't he?" Sally asked, appealing to her open-mouthed chums, and gave them a surreptitious wink as she spoke.

"Is he—I mum-mean—oh, sure!" mumbled Johnny.

"He found my brooch for me, anyway," put in Fay, realising that Sally

must have some wheeze in mind, and loyally backing her up.

"Found your brooch for you?" echoed Captain Thorne, staring helplessly.

"Yes, sir!" chorused Don and Johnny.

"The same as he'll find your uniform for you, captain!" Sally asserted, seeing that the skipper was interested in spite of himself and quick to take advantage of the situation.

"Impossible! Fantastic!" snorted Captain Thorne. But he took another look at the idol.

"Try it, sir," suggested Don. "Give it a rub, say 'Oolah' three times, and—"

"Say what? Bosh! Absurd!" The skipper's glare returned, more fierce than ever. "If you think I'm going to stand here and make a fool of myself—Get out!" he thundered.

But now Sally's blue eyes were gleaming, and she seemed to be suppressing her excitement with difficulty.

"Then I'll make the wish for you!" Sally hurried on, still speaking loudly. "You really do want the uniform, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Then if I produce it for you, all spick and span and ready to wear, will you—your promise to say nothing to our headmaster, and—give Jimmy his rise?"

Captain Thorne choked. Then he gave a bellow of scoffing laughter.

"You produce my uniform ready to wear, Miss Warner, with the ink stain completely removed, then you really will be a magician and I'll keep my part of the bargain."

"Oolah, oolah, oolah!" chanted Sally, giving the talisman a rub. "It's my wish that the captain's uniform shall be delivered here clean and—"

There was a tap at the door. A steward came in, a surprised look on his face, and Captain Thorne's uniform held over his outstretched arms.

"Your uniform, sir!" said the steward. "I was just coming to fetch it to take it to the cleaners when—there it was! Almost dropped into my arms like magic, you would say. Queer! But somebody's made a fine job of it, sir—no trace of the stain now."

Captain Thorne snatched at the uniform, and indeed it was spotless. Sally smiled.

"You see?" she said sweetly.

The skipper peered at her suspiciously. Then he burst out laughing, his mood completely changed.

"I smell a rat," he said, his eyes twinkling now. "I don't know how you managed it, Miss Warner—but fair enough. You induced me to make a bargain, and I'll stand by it."

"Then—then you won't report us to the headmaster?" Johnny whooped.

"I shall not."

"And—and I'll get my rise, sir?" burst out Jimmy.

"You will, my boy. Now be off, all of you!"

And Sally & Co. went, accompanied by Jimmy. Jimmy was looking at Sally as if she were indeed a magician.

"Gee, how did you manage it, Miss Warner?" he asked, wide-eyed.

"Slick got us into that jam, and Slick got us out of it," chuckled Sally. "Through the porthole I saw him working on the uniform with his patent 'Clean-it Gun,' and when I made that wish I knew he'd hear and turn up trumps and deliver the goods. Phew! But I still think he's a japing chump, and don't ever want to see old Tutti again—whoops!"

Slick, eager to learn if everything had worked out all right, came rushing up. There was a collision; Sally went staggering, and the talisman, slipping out of her hand, sailed over the rail and fell into the sea. "Golly!" spluttered Sally. "That wish came true of its own accord. I say, I wonder if it was really a lucky ju-ju after all!"

(End of this week's story.)

Look out for a very appealing story about Sally & Co. in next Friday's

GIRLS' CRYSTAL.

THE DISAPPEARING MANNEQUIN

(Continued from page 32.)

proved that she could not have left the stage of her own accord."

"Well?"
"The next thing that happened," went on Noel, "was a dramatic theft in the jewellery department upstairs. But Karen could not have walked upstairs, or ascended in the lift, without being noticed by someone, and no one saw her!"

"And—no one saw her go down to the basement!" breathed June.

"Exactly," said Noel. "The police believe that she met with an accident while trying to escape—but I'm certain that she had been unconscious for some time—from the time that she disappeared from the revolving stage!"

June gasped, but she had not time to ask further questions. Just then they reached the salon, to be met by Miss Revelle, pale and agitated, accompanied by Mr. Sharman.

"The news of Karen's arrest, has upset all the girls, Mr. Raymond," declared the manageress. "I can't persuade them to go on to the stage; they're more certain than ever now that it is unlucky."

"They must be reassured!" declared Noel. "I'm certain that my young partner would set them a good example. June, would you be willing to take the place of the model in the unlucky cubicle—No. 13?"

June gasped, her grey eyes widening, as she encountered her uncle's meaning glance.

"Why, nunky—of course!" she exclaimed.

"That is very splendid of you, Miss Gaynor!" beamed Mr. Sharman.

"My dear Miss Gaynor," exclaimed Miss Revelle, flushing slightly. "I couldn't dream of letting you take the trouble. If it comes to that, I'd be only too glad to set the girls an example myself. I used to be a mannequin," she added with a smile.

Mr. Sharman heartily approved the suggestion, though June felt a twinge of disappointment as Noel drew her aside.

"I rather liked the idea, nunky," she admitted. "I was hoping that—that something might happen—"

"Something may happen, June!" said Noel, a strange expression in his eyes as he thrust a slip of paper into her hand. "I've had a good look at the stage, and Miss Revelle is taking a bigger risk than she imagines. I want you to follow the instructions

I've written if anything goes wrong."

June's pulses quickened as she stared at him.

"But—where are you going, nunky?"

"To the jewellery department!" said Noel. "It will be closed now—the salon is the last department to remain open."

After Noel had gone, June glanced at the message he had given her. Her eyes widened in wonder. Then, pulling herself together, she joined the other customers who were filing into the salon, and waited with breathless anxiety for the dress parade to commence.

THE lively music of the radio dance band mingled with a murmur of voices, as the revolving stage moved slowly round with its attractively-gowned mannequins.

June waited tensely, her fingers clutched on Noel's scribbled message.

Cubicle No. 13 came slowly into view. Miss Revelle, wearing an enchanting evening gown, looked pale and nervous in spite of her professional poise.

At that moment, with startling unexpectedness, the lights in the salon were extinguished.

Amid the bewildered cries that arose, June started to her feet, torch in hand, and raced towards the stage.

As the torch-light flickered on the ill-fated cubicle, a cry escaped her lips.

For cubicle 13 was empty. Miss Revelle had vanished.

June sprang on to the stage following her uncle's instructions. Her hand flew to the ornamental carvings on the wooden partition at the back—and there came a bewildered shout from Mr. Sharman as the partition swung open, to reveal the dark interior of a ventilating shaft running up through the core of the stage.

A slender figure, clinging to the rungs of a rope-ladder, whirled, a revolver flashing in her hand, just as the lights in the salon came on.

There was a scream from the on-lookers. But a powerful hand seized the girl's wrist, as a second figure appeared on the ladder—and Noel Raymond stepped out on to the stage, holding his struggling captive.

"The game's up, Miss Revelle!" he said sternly. "Your accomplice, Lester, was caught red-handed as he dropped the stolen necklace with his other jewels into the ventilating-shaft that communicates with his office above."

"So that's how the jewellery was smuggled out!" exclaimed Mr. Sharman, his voice shaking. "And Miss Revelle—"

"Was the brains behind the dastardly plot," said Noel, "though I imagine that Lester, the jewellery manager, was actually responsible for fitting up this ladder that emerges behind the panelling in his office."

"As the valuables were always locked in your strong-room at night, the scoundrels had to carry out their thefts during working hours. Lester stole the jewellery—and Miss Revelle collected it by means of the opening behind Cubicle 13. The only danger was that it might be discovered by one of the mannequins—in spite of the superstitious nonsense cleverly fostered by Miss Revelle."

"And—Karen Harvey guessed the truth!" exclaimed June. "She came back to prove her innocence, and took the place of the wax model. But she realised there was danger, and that's why she signalled to me—"

"But the scoundrels were too quick for her," put in Noel. "Lester was waiting on the rope-ladder—and he grabbed her while the cubicle was passing the dim corridor behind the stage. The sound of the loud-speaker drowned her cry—and Miss Revelle was ready with the wax model which Karen had removed. Owing to the partitions between the cubicles, none of the other mannequins saw what actually happened."

Mr. Sharman mopped his forehead as the white-faced, defiant trickster was led away.

"I suppose the lower end of the shaft comes out into the disused basement room," he said, "and the scoundrels simply lowered their unfortunate victim there. But it beats me, Mr. Raymond, how you tumbled to Miss Revelle's guilt."

Noel smiled, with a glance at June. "My young partner gave me the first clue," he said. "A jeweller's polishing-rag with a trace of red nail-varnish—the identical shade affected by Miss Revelle! That—and some footprints on the floor of the manager's office leading me to the secret panel in the wall finally set me on the trail."

"And the thirteenth mannequin was innocent, after all!" breathed June. "I'm going to the hospital to see her, nunky—to tell her the good news!"

(End of this week's story.)

Noel and June are up against two masters of disguise in next Friday's exciting story.

LEADER OF THE ALPINE REVELLERS

(Continued from page 26.)

"Footprints!" she whispered. "Freshly made footprints close to the post!"

Suspicion became certainty! Someone had altered that signpost. Someone had crept up and hidden behind the bushes till Hans had gone by, and then twisted the post round.

And if it hadn't been for Jill's quick wits, she and her team would have been bogged down in the treacherous snow at the end of the dangerous trail.

"Just as Max and the boys are passing!" she told herself, going hot all over at the thought. "It would have looked as if Hans had led us into danger. Max might have reported it to Rosemary's uncle. It might have stopped our whole plan."

And then into Jill's mind sprang another thought:

Had it been Magda who had changed the signpost? Was that the reason why she had made an excuse to leave the party? Had she taken off her skis and crept up here to play that cunning trick?

And while Jill stood there with

whirling thoughts, a clear yodelling call echoed between the tall pines.

"Jill!"
It was Hans. The others had successfully completed their first forest run, and the Swiss boy had come in search of her, wondering why she hadn't turned up.

She saw his sturdy figure striding between the tree trunks.

Should she tell him just what had happened?

"Yes, but I won't mention Magda," she decided swiftly. "I'm pretty sure in my own mind that Magda is one of the plotters, but there's still no definite proof. And I'll warn him not to tell the others. I don't want to upset them just as we've made such a grand start."

It didn't take her long to explain to Hans just what had delayed her.

Almost she expected an angry outburst from that queer-tempered, moody boy whom she was beginning to know so well. But it wasn't anger that gleamed in his deep-set eyes.

"That was good, Jill!" How different his voice sounded now from that sombre tone he had used when she first met him. "You saved us from disaster. There are many in the valley who would be pleased if Hans Peterson failed in his first job since he lost his badge."

His hand shot out, gripping hers. "I thank you, Jill!"

Jill laughed. "You're welcome, sir!" she said. "But come on! Let's rejoin the others!"

For the rest of their practice Jill felt as if she was skiing on air.

Yet a sense of mystery crowded back on her when they returned to the hotel, having made arrangements to meet Hans next day.

"Golly! I've got to find out what it all means!" Jill vowed, as she changed in her own room. "I've got to know why Magda's plotting."

She moved to the window.

Then she caught her breath. A slim, elegant figure in fur-lined coat and hood was slipping stealthily away from a side door of the hotel.

It was Magda! Magda who had declared her intention of staying in-doors.

And suddenly Jill came to an impetuous decision.

"I'll follow her!" she exclaimed, grabbing up her own coat. "She's creeping away so stealthily, I'm sure it means further plotting. I'll trail her and try to find out the truth of it all!"

Another enthralling instalment of this grand serial will appear in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.