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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ³

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

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MYSTERY AT THE HAUNTED SCHOOL

No One In The Fifth Suspected That The New Girl Was Really Detective
June Gaynor—By PETER LANGLEY

THE BLACK ABBOT STRIKES

"HERE you are, miss—Mosscourt School!"

The slim girl seated in the station taxi looked up as the driver jerked open the door.

"Oh, thank you!" she murmured, with a smile. "I'll take my case—my other luggage was sent in advance."

Quickly she collected her few belongings—slipping a letter, several snapshots, and a small magnifying-glass into her case before alighting and paying her fare.

Her shrewd grey eyes scanned the ivy-grown buildings, with their mullioned windows and overhanging eaves.

In the mellow sunlight of the late afternoon there was no hint of anything sinister or frightening about the peaceful view. But June Gaynor, the girl detective, had come to investigate the secret terror that lurked behind those walls!

A casual acquaintance of June's would probably not have recognised her, for she had made small, but skilful, alterations in her appearance.

No one at the school had been informed of her real identity—not even the headmistress. Private arrangements had been made between Noel and the school governors—and June had been officially enrolled as a new girl, under an assumed name, that of Judy Graham.

June drew a deep breath, conscious of a slight nostalgic quickening at her heart at the thought of recapturing, for a brief spell, the memory of her own carefree school days. And just then she heard a light footstep on the drive, and an auburn-haired, vivacious girl hurried to greet her.

"I bet you're Judy Graham!" declared the other breathlessly. "We heard you were coming into the

Fifth, and I've been looking out for you. I'm Terry—Terry Vernon."

June's slim hand grasped Terry's, a twinkle in her keen eyes.

"It's nice to meet you, Terry! I see you've been writing lines—by the ink on your fingers. Too bad on a Wednesday afternoon!"

Terry laughed, rather taken aback. "You don't miss much, Judy!" she said. "I think you and I will get on swimmingly. We need someone refreshing around. Things have been going from bad to worse since—"

She hesitated, and June casually completed her sentence: "You mean—since the Black Abbot appeared in the school?"

Terry started. "So—you've heard about it?" "Rumours get round," replied June, smiling faintly. "Not that I believe in ghosts, Terry! But they say that this one is different—that it's terrifying the girls?"

Terry nodded, biting her lip. "Some girls have written home, asking their parents to take them away. Most of them are in for the Dorothy Gray Memorial Prize—"

"Ah!" murmured June, with sudden interest. "That's the prize for the school's best artist—and there's an old legend about its founder, who was cursed by the Black Abbot—"

Terry shivered. "Legends aren't much in my line, Judy—but there's no getting away from the scares. Girls taking part in the exam have been frightened in the corridors after dark; books and papers have been destroyed or vanished; easels and desks overturned. Miss Rolfe, the art-mistress, is at her wits' end—"

"A prankster?" suggested June keenly. "That's what most of us thought—at first," said Terry; "but things have been getting too serious—"

She gave a quick, impatient laugh. "But

don't let's talk about it on your first day here, Judy! Come and meet my chum, Esther. She's in for the art exam—and you'll like her!"

With forced gaiety she changed the subject, prattling about other, more lively topics as she led the way through the great Gothic doorway into the school, and bustled June towards her study.

"Esther and I were gated this afternoon for talking about the Black Abbot in class," she confided. "By a prefect, of course! You know what prefects are, Judy—and Doreen Parker is one of the worst!"

June chuckled sympathetically. Terry pushed open the door of her study.

"Esther," she began gaily, "here's Judy—" then she broke off, for the pleasantly-furnished study was deserted, though the table was littered with art books and drawings.

"Oh, bother—I expect she'll be back in a minute," she said. "Make yourself at home, Judy—while I go and scrounge some cakes and things for tea!"

As her cheery companion breezed away, June crossed to the lattice window to glance out across the quadrangle, quiet and deserted at this time of the afternoon. Beyond a clump of trees, she caught a glimpse of a ruined building.

"Those must be the old abbey cloisters," she murmured, referring to her uncle's letter and the snapshots he had enclosed with it. "And the wing on the left of the quadrangle is probably the haunted picture-gallery, now used as the art-school. I might as well make a start, there!"

Taking a note-book from her pocket, June made her way briskly down a corridor, following a rough plan sketched by Noel. At the end of the corridor she pushed open a massive oak door.

It groaned complainingly on its hinges—and June heard a startled

gasp as she stepped into a long, panelled room, lit by a skylight in the raftered ceiling, through which the late afternoon sunlight was striking now.

Ranged round a curtained dais were a number of stools and easels, bearing partly-completed paintings; and the slim, attractive girl who had been standing moodily near the dais whirled swiftly.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I thought—I thought for a minute that you—"

"That I was the Black Abbot?" suggested June softly. Then she laughed, holding out her hand. "I'm Judy Graham, the new girl—and I bet you're Esther Wayne!"

Esther took June's hand.

"I—I'm sorry I was so jumpy. But I expect Terry's told you—"

"About the Mosscourt ghost," nodded June. "By the way—have you ever seen him?"

The other girl caught in her breath, and shook her head.

"That's his picture!" she whispered, pointing.

June stared at a picture that peered down at her from a dim alcove in a corner of the long room.

It was of a tall, gaunt figure in monkish cowl and robes, hood partly drawn back to reveal a thin, sardonic face and a pair of glittering eyes.

The only relief to his sombre attire was the ring on his finger and the dull metal buckle on his shoes.

"Mosscourt School was built on the site of the old abbey," explained Esther, in a low voice. "The Black Abbot put a curse on the school and its founder—Dorothy Gray. We're copying her portrait as part of the art exam, and the results are to be judged by a famous art critic."

She glanced at the nearest easel, with a slightly self-conscious expression—and June's eyes shone admiringly as she looked at the clever painting, representing a charming girl in a Tudor gown.

"Your work, Esther?" she asked. A flush crossed the other's face.

"It's not good, really—wait till you see the original! Miss Falconer, the headmistress, had a special curtain made to screen it from the dust and light—as it's absolutely priceless."

She crossed quickly to the dais, and pulled aside the curtain.

The girl detective caught in her breath, as the fading sunlight slanted on the exquisite picture—the portrait of the school's young founder—as fresh, almost, as though it had been painted yesterday.

Before she could remark on it, a sharp, domineering voice sounded from the doorway.

"Esther Wayne! What are you doing loitering in the picture-gallery? You know that the headmistress put it strictly out-of-bounds, after classes."

June whirled, to confront a lanky, dark-haired senior, who eyed her and her companion with suspicion.

"I'm sorry, Doreen—" began Esther.

"It's my fault, I'm afraid," intervened June promptly, meeting the prefect's glare with a disarming smile. "I'm a new girl, you see, and I didn't know my way around. Esther was just directing me."

She was rewarded by a grateful glance from that girl while the prefect bit her lip.

"Well—get out of here, both of you," she snapped. "I've had trouble with you before, Esther—and next time I shall report you to Miss Falconer."

Bustling forward officiously she commenced to remove the half-finished paintings from the easels.

"What are you doing with those?" demanded Esther, a little truculently.

"That's my business," retorted the prefect. "If you insist on knowing," she added, "Miss Rolfe asked me to lock them in the art-cupboard for safety. There's someone in this school who's bent on mischief—"

"You mean—the Black Abbot?" breathed Esther.

Doreen sniffed meaningly.

"Some people may believe that rot about the school being haunted," she retorted, "but I've got my own ideas!

And turning her back on the two girls, she proceeded to lock the collected paintings in a massive oak cupboard.

"Doreen's a tartar!" said Esther defiantly as June accompanied her from the gallery. "Things are bad enough, just now, without her picking on every little thing—"

"Cheer up, Esther!" put in June, smiling. "Mustn't let prefects get you down. Terry will be waiting tea for us—aren't you coming?" she added, as the other girl drew back.

"I'm sorry," said Esther. "I've got to hunt up some books in the library. Tell Terry I'll be coming later."

Just then June heard Terry's lively voice calling—and, her expression thoughtful, she retraced her steps to the study.

She found herself surrounded by a cheery group of girls whom Terry had brought along to introduce to the newcomer.

"I say—where's Esther?" demanded Beryl Franklin the outspoken captain of the Fifth, as they sat down to tea in the firelit study.

June, meeting Terry's questioning smile, was about to describe her meeting with the schoolgirl artist when, without warning, the merry chatter in the study was silenced by a girl's piercing scream.

Terry started to her feet overturning her cup with a crash. The others stared, white-faced and transfixed. Only June retained her composure.

The girl detective reached the door in a bound, and threw it open. As she ran down the corridor the others followed. The door of the art-gallery stood ajar—and a gasp arose as June dropped to her knees beside the slender figure who lay huddled just inside the door, near the portrait of the Black Abbot.

"It's Esther!" cried Terry. "Something—something has happened to her—"

June's cool unfustered tones calmed the agitated group.

"She's fainted—apparently from shock. We'll soon bring her round."

From her pocket she took a leather case, from which she extracted a small bottle of smelling-salts. With a little, choking gasp Esther opened her eyes as June applied the powerful restorative.

"The Black Abbot!" she faltered, holding tightly to June's arm. "He—it sprang at me—when I came back to fetch something I'd dropped—"

"The Black Abbot!" came a horrified whisper from the girls.

June's eyes narrowed as she stared up at the sinister picture, and just then there came a warning exclamation from Beryl:

"Cave!"

The whispers were hushed by a sound of quick footsteps. A dark-haired young mistress appeared on the scene, accompanied by the sharp-featured Doreen Parker.

"What has happened?" asked the mistress, her pleasant voice rather tense with anxiety. "Has anyone been hurt—"

"It's Esther, Miss Rolfe," put in Terry. "She's been scared—by something—"

"By the Black Abbot, apparently," said June.

Miss Rolfe glanced at the new girl in some surprise, but she nodded as Doreen whispered something to her.

"Of course—you are Judy Graham," she said. "Miss Falconer told me you would be arriving to-day. But—what is all this about Esther being scared?"

A clamour of voices added their version of the affair, while Esther shakily repeated her story. June seized the opportunity to detach herself from the group, for her keen eyes had noticed something gleaming dully on the floor near the big cupboard.

She bent quickly to pick up the object, and a startled expression crossed her face.

"This is a scandalous affair!" she heard Miss Rolfe saying. "I can hardly believe that any girl could be guilty of such a heartless trick on a schoolfellow—"

"Unless Esther imagined it," put in Doreen, with a significant sniff. "She had no right to return to the gallery, after I ordered her out. There was no one here when I locked up the paintings—"

"But someone's been here, since!" exclaimed June, unexpectedly. "The cupboard isn't locked now, Doreen. The door has been forced, and—"

A sudden, horrified gasp arose as June pulled open the splintered door. In a tangled mass on the floor of the cupboard lay the girls' precious paintings—slashed almost out of recognition by an unknown, vindictive hand.



JUNE LEADS THE GHOST HUNTERS

"The Black Abbot has struck again!"

"Miss Rolfe—what does it mean? Who can it be?"

June had dropped to her knees, examining one of the ruined paintings under her magnifying-glass. Her thoughts were racing.

There was far more behind this than the work of a girlish prankster.

Her fingers closed on the strange metal object she had found on the floor, and in spite of herself a little shiver ran down her spine.

Miss Rolfe's grave tones silenced the agitated clamour.

"This is dreadful!" exclaimed the young art-mistress. "Miss Falconer will have to be informed, at once. Meanwhile, Doreen, you will ask the school porter to fasten a padlock to the door of the gallery, and hand the headmistress the key."

"Certainly, Miss Rolfe," said the prefect. "And perhaps I'd better take charge of these torn paintings—Judy!" she added sharply, staring suspiciously at the new girl. "What do you think you are doing with that canvas?"

June looked up innocently. "I was just wondering, Doreen," she murmured, "if a ghost could leave finger-prints. These paintings are still damp, and there ought to be some marks—"

"Who asked you to meddle?" snapped the prefect, snatching the canvas from June's hand. "Miss Rolfe—she turned to the mistress—"

"I ought to report that I found Judy and Esther loitering in the gallery, half an hour ago—and I wasn't satisfied with their explanations then. It's pretty suspicious that Esther should come back and that this should happen—"

"Are you suggesting that Esther scared herself—and ruined her own painting?" asked June calmly.

Doreen crimsoned, but her angry retort was silenced by Miss Rolfe.

"Come, Doreen—we mustn't permit these scares to affect our nerves, and our tempers," she said quietly. "And, Judy—"

she looked at June with grave kindness—"though you are new to Mosscourt, you must learn to obey rules and respect authority. You girls will please leave the gallery as quietly as possible. Esther, dear—will you come with me to the headmistress to make your report?"

With a nod to the girls, she led the way from the gallery.

June contrived to linger till the last, stooping as though to tie her shoe-lace. Her fingers closed over a small rubber bulb she took from her pocket, and a cloud of greyish powder was wafted over the polished floor. Then she hurried after the other girls.

"I guess I've put my foot in it with Doreen," she murmured thoughtfully, "but Miss Rolfe seems a sport."

"She's one of the best!" said Beryl. "But these scares are worrying her more than she'll admit. It looks as though the art-exam will have to be cancelled, unless—"

"Unless—we could catch the trickster!" blurted out Terry. "Of course, it must be one of the girls. I mean—she laughed a trifle unsteadily—there's not such a thing as a real ghost—is there, Judy?"

Thus appealed to, June shook her head with a strange smile.

"No," she murmured. "But we're

up against something—someone more dangerous than a mere joker, Terry. Look at this!"

The three girls had drawn aside from the others, as June cautiously opened her hand. Terry started, her blue eyes widening.

"Why, it—it's a buckle! An old shoe-buckle—"

"Don't you recognise it?" asked June softly. "I found it by the art-cupboard—and it's identical with the buckle in the Black Abbot's portrait!"

The blood drained from Terry's face, and Beryl gasped.

"Judy! You don't mean—you don't think—"

"I don't know what to think—yet," put in June. "But we've got to trap the ghost, between us—before anything worse happens in the school!"

THE school clock was booming midnight as three stealthy figures descended the moonlit stairs.

June was leading, torch in hand. Terry followed her with a candle, in case of emergency, and Beryl, the Form captain, brought up the rear.

The school was eerily silent, for the prefects and mistresses had long-since retired—and the duty-mistress, Miss Rolfe, had made her final rounds over half an hour ago.

The three girls assembled in the main corridor, and June raised a warning hand.

"You've not told any of the others of our purpose?" she whispered.

"Not a soul!" breathed Terry. "Not even Esther—though I've never kept a secret from her before. Anyway, it would only have worried her—and she's worried enough about this exam."

June nodded, flashing her torch. The girl detective's pulse was racing. Once again she fancied herself back in her schooldays—engaged on some perilous prank. Though this time the "prank" was in deadly earnest.

The honour of the school was at stake—and perhaps the safety of her new chums.

Cautiously she led the way to the haunted gallery, mounting the stairs. The door was padlocked, as she had expected. Doreen had carried out her orders.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Terry.

June took a length of stout wire from her pocket. Wonderingly the others stared, as the girl detective manipulated it in the lock in the way her famous uncle had taught her.

At length there was a faint click, and she pushed open the door, flashing her torch.

Terry stifled a scream, grabbing June's arm.

"I thought—I thought I saw someone standing over there, in the shadows at the end of the gallery!" she hissed. "He—it vanished as you flashed your torch."

June's sharp ears had heard a faint rustle, and instinctively she turned the torch-light on the portrait of the sinister Abbot.

"Well—he's still here," she murmured. "You must have seen a shadow, Terry, unless—"

She caught in her breath sharply, and pointed at the polished floor.

"Terry, you were right!" she declared. "Someone was here—just now. Look!"

White-faced, the other two craned forward, and Beryl gave a gasp.

"Footprints! Grey footprints! But how—where!"

June smiled rather grimly, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

"The ghost has walked into my trap!" she whispered. "I sprinkled that grey powder on the floor this evening, just before Doreen locked up!"

"But perhaps those are her footprints—" ventured Terry.

"Doreen didn't go into the gallery," said June. "I was watching her, though she wasn't aware of it. She stood by while the porter secured the padlock, and then took the keys straight to the headmistress."

"But"—Beryl's voice shook—"that doesn't make sense! If the gallery

was locked no one could have got in."

June did not answer that. She took a box of matches from her pocket and lit the candle.

"Hold the torch, Terry," she said, "and wait at the door with Beryl. I'm going to follow those footprints. Keep an eye on the corridor, in case anyone comes."

"Judy—be careful!" begged Terry anxiously.

June smiled, as, candle in hand, she made her way slowly down the gallery, scrutinising the blurred footprints on the polished floor.

The flickering candlelight threw eerie shadows on the walls, and on the portraits looking down from their frames.

The footprints grew fainter, and finally disappeared completely as the effect of the grey powder wore off.

June halted. She was standing almost directly opposite the curtained dais, where hung the portrait of Dorothy Gray.

The curtain now hung fully across the platform, screening the picture from view. It might have been her fancy, but June imagined that it was swaying slightly as though in a draught.

Quickly she stepped forward, to jerk it aside. There was a swift movement in the shadows—and in spite of her steady nerve, June felt her blood run cold.

Standing by the picture of Dorothy Gray was a tall, black-robed figure, its eyes seeming to glow with a malevolent light as it turned its head towards June.

The Black Abbot! The girl detective mastered her momentary terror.

"Who—who are you?" she gasped.

"What—?" The figure sprang at her, dashing the candle from her hands and plunging the gallery into darkness.



WHOSE GLOVE?

With a courage born of desperation, June struggled with the phantom figure, calling to her chums. She heard their answering splintering crash that must have awakened half the school.

The next moment she was flung to the ground, to lie there, half dazed.

There came the sound of hurrying footsteps—excited voices. Then she heard an ominous voice, raised in sharp questioning.

"Terry—Beryl! What are you girls doing in the gallery, at this hour of night? What is the meaning of this scandalous conduct—"

The mist cleared from June's brain. She struggled to her feet, as the lights in the gallery blazed up. She stared round her, but there was no sign of the phantom figure.

Crowding in the doorway was a little group of startled seniors—and at the head of them stood the grey-haired, austere figure of Miss Falconer, the headmistress.

Sternly Miss Falconer confronted the two white-faced Fifth Formers.

"Terry—answer me!" she ordered.

"What are you and Beryl doing in the picture-gallery, at this hour—and what was the meaning of that noise?"

June hurried forward, a determined gleam in her grey eyes. In the general agitation, no one had been aware of her presence till now.

"Miss Falconer—it was my fault!" she declared. "It was I who planned the whole thing."

The headmistress turned and an expression of shocked amazement crossed her face as she recognised the new girl.

"Judy Graham!" she exclaimed. "Good gracious, I can hardly credit it. Why, you only arrived at school this afternoon—"

"Time enough to cause trouble, Miss Falconer," put in a meaning voice as Doreen Parker stepped from the group of prefects, an unpleasant gleam in her eyes. "I've already re-

ported Judy to Miss Rolfe, for loitering in the picture-gallery this afternoon—just before the girls' pictures were destroyed!"

The headmistress frowned. "I cannot believe that you, Judy—a new girl—had anything to do with that disgraceful affair," she declared. "But what explanation can you give for your present senseless prank?"

June thought quickly. The situation might have been amusing had it not been so serious. The headmistress was completely unaware of the new girl's real identity—and June could not reveal the truth without jeopardising her entire plan.

If the unknown enemy in the school became aware that Noel Raymond's celebrated young partner was among the pupils, he—or she—would take extra precautions to avoid discovery!

It was vital that she should retain her secret—at whatever cost to herself.

June smiled wryly. "It was not exactly a prank, Miss Falconer. I suggested this ghost-hunt in the hope of catching the Black Abbot—and we nearly did catch him," she added simply.

The headmistress started, and there came an incredulous murmur from the prefects.

"But this is fantastic, Judy," she exclaimed. "There is no one in the gallery, apart from ourselves—and no one has passed us. By the way—how did you manage to open the door, when I gave strict orders that it was to be locked?"

June's lips twitched. "I'm afraid I opened it with a piece of wire, Miss Falconer," she admitted. "It was quite simple, really—"

"Indeed?" said the Head icily. "I trust you realise, Judith, that you are making a very serious admission. You broke into the gallery, late at night, knowing full well that it was out-of-bounds. In addition, you persuaded two of your Form-fellows to accompany you—and all without a vestige of excuse. There was no one in the gallery at the time—nothing to justify your conduct—"

"But there was someone here!" protested June. "The Black Abbot was here—a few minutes ago. I caught him on the dais, behind that curtain—"

Then a gasp of horror went up, and June caught in her breath.

Lying splintered on the floor was the framed portrait of Dorothy Gray, the school founder—the canvas badly gashed by the broken glass.

June started forward, snatching up a girl's torn glove that lay near the broken frame, before the others had a chance to see it.

The headmistress, her face white with anger, was staring at the ruined picture.

"So—this is the result of your reckless folly, Judy!" she exclaimed. "By your disobedient meddling into matters that were not your concern, you have caused this picture to fall—ruining one of the school's most priceless paintings!"

"I did not!" cried June. "It was the Black Abbot—"

"I will hear no more of that nonsense!" snapped the headmistress. "It is quite clear that an unprincipled trickster has been causing the scares in the school—but that trickster could not have been in the locked gallery, to-night. You alone are responsible for this damage—and you will be detained until I have gone into the whole disgraceful affair. Doreen, please take Judy to the detention-room!"

"Yes, Miss Falconer!"

June met the pitying, distressed glances of her two Fifth Form chums. The headmistress' order might spell disaster to all her plans.

Miss Falconer was perfectly within her rights—and there was nothing June could say, without revealing her identity to the school.

That she dared not do, for the mystery of the Black Abbot had taken a startling and unexpected turn.

Her fingers closed on the torn glove in her pocket.

It bore the initials "E.W."—initials standing for Esther Wayne—Terry's study-mate and chum!



A DETECTIVE IN DETENTION

The last rays of the setting sun crept through the barred windows of the detention-room at Moss court School.

At the small table sat the new girl known as Judy Graham. Spread out in front of her was a curious array of objects, which she examined intently, one by one, under her magnifying-glass.

First, there was the torn glove she had found in the gallery last night; then the old-fashioned buckle. Finally she turned her attention to a little pile of glossy snapshots—views of the school and grounds, taken by an old pupil.

These snapshots were her final hope, now, of solving the eerie mystery of the haunted school.

A whole day had passed for June, in solitary confinement—a day that seemed interminable to the girl detective's active brain.

But she had not been idle. Working on a startling theory, she had completed her notes for her uncle—and made certain private arrangements of her own.

With her breakfast-tray, collected by a good-natured maid, had gone a little note for Terry, and her lunch-tray had brought a reply, together with the packet of photos.

Smiling faintly, June unfolded the message:

"Cheers, old thing! What's the big idea? I got your note—and did as you asked. The snapshots were passed round during art class, and everyone admired them, including Miss Rolfe. She's a sport, and has promised to intercede for you with the Head. This hateful business is getting us all down. Esther's been excused lessons, owing to a headache, and is mooning about the grounds. Let me know if there's anything else I can do!

"Yours—Terry."

June's grey eyes were troubled, as she folded the note. She had scribbled a brief reply, and was now awaiting the answer. It should come with her supper tray—though there was always the risk of discovery.

At all costs she wanted to avoid her chums running into fresh trouble. But she needed their help, if she was to put her theory to the test.

And time was getting short! Once again she turned her attention to the snap-shots; and now, beneath the powerful magnifying-glass, she made the discovery that sent her pulse racing.

Among the blurred finger-prints on the glossy surface of the photos was a clearly-marked whorl, identical with the one she had found on the broken glass of the ill-fated portrait!

"Then," she muttered, "that means the Black Abbot is a member of the class! My little trick worked! Now, if only—"

Just then a key rattled in the lock, and the door opened. June looked up eagerly, in the hope of seeing the friendly maid. Instead, however, she encountered Doreen Parker's unpleasant smile.

"Your supper, Judy," said the prefect, as she placed the tray on a chair. "A roll, cheese and cocoa—more than you deserve. Terry Vernon was in the kitchen, trying to persuade cook to let her bring it up to you—but I nipped her little game in the bud!"

June bit her lip, her eyes glinting. "You must have been popular when you were young, Doreen," she murmured.

"And no cheek from you, Judy," snapped the prefect, her face reddening. "Don't forget that you're in disgrace—and you're not the only one of your crowd, either. There's your crony, Esther Wayne!"

"Esther? What do you mean?"

Doreen shrugged.

"Esther's vanished!" she retorted.

"No one's seen her all the afternoon—and she was absent from roll-call this evening. The girls are saying that she met the Black Abbot—you've heard that rot about the curse. But it's my belief that both she and you know more about those scares than you'll admit!"

June caught in her breath, biting back the swift, angry retort that rose to her lips.

"I shouldn't listen to rumours, Doreen," she said quietly. "Esther will turn up. And if the Abbot's curse is still working, I've an idea that it will bring the real trickster to book!"

Doreen backed towards the door, rather startled by the angry vehemence of the new girl's tones. Then, with a shrug, she left the room, locking the door behind her.

June started to her feet. "Esther—disappeared!" she whispered. "I don't like this! I've got to get into action. I wonder if Terry was able to do what I asked."

She crossed to the supper-tray and picked up the roll. Her eyes shone as she felt its weight, and noticed that it had been slit at one side.

Breaking open the roll, she took out the spare key to the detention-room!

"Good old Terry!" she whispered. "I bet she had a job to get that."

In a moment she had the door open, and was listening intently in the corridor. Most of the girls were at supper, at this hour, and the school was silent and almost deserted.

June crept downstairs, fearful of running into one of the mistresses or prefects. Esther's disappearance made it more vital than ever that she should solve the mystery without delay—and she could only solve it while she remained free.

Unless the Black Abbot was run to earth, to-night, it might be too late!

A few minutes later she tapped gently on the door of a study, and pushed it open. There came a little gasp of delight as Terry and Beryl whirled to greet her.

Their faces were pale, and Terry looked almost tearful.

"Oh, Judy—thank goodness you've come!" she cried. "You found the key all right—Doreen didn't suspect?"

"She was hoodwinked completely—thanks to you," said June. "But what's this about Esther?"

They told her. The whole school had been searched, and Miss Falconer had even made inquiries in the village—but there was no sign of their missing chum.

"What can have happened to her?" asked Terry. "There are all kinds of hateful rumours. They—they are saying—"

June pressed her arm reassuringly. "Forget them, Terry. We are going to find Esther—and trap the Black Abbot into the bargain! And we've got to act quickly. Are any of the mistresses or prefects about?"

"Miss Rolfe is in her study," said Beryl, "and the headmistress is inspecting dormitories. But I saw Doreen crossing the quadrangle just now."

June's eyes glinted. Taking out her note-book she hastily scribbled a message in an assumed hand, slipping it into an envelope and addressing it to the headmistress.

"Terry, please hand this to Miss Rolfe," she said. "Tell her that a stranger gave it to you, and you believe it is urgent. That it's something to do with the Black Abbot."

"But, Judy, whatever—"

"No questions, now!" said June tersely. "Fetch your torch, Beryl—and both of you meet me in the quadrangle in a quarter of an hour."

Obediently the two girls darted away. A few minutes later June slipped out into the darkened quadrangle.

Eventually, her two chums joined her, breathless with excitement.

"Where are we going?" whispered Terry.

"You'll see in a minute," said June. "Keep your torch covered, Beryl. Whatever happens, we mustn't be seen!"

Like stealthy conspirators, they darted across the quadrangle to

plunge into the shadow of the trees. A moment later they emerged in a clearing—and Terry gave a little gasp as they came in sight of the gaunt, grey ruins of the old abbey.

"We're not going in there?" "We are!" breathed June. "And we've no time to lose. Someone's been here before us! Saw her come this way."

She hurried to an oak door, standing ajar in one of the ancient turrets.

"Your torch, Beryl—quickly!" She led the way at a run, pushing open the creaking door, and flashing the torch ahead. It illuminated a dark opening in the tiled floor.

"Follow me," said June. Down a flight of narrow stairs the chums stumbled, at their leader's heels.

June gave them no time to ask questions, but over her shoulder she said softly:

"A subterranean passage, leading from the abbey ruins to the school. I thought there must be something of the kind. Mind how you go, here—another flight of steps."

After a swift run they were climbing again. Suddenly Terry gave a stifled cry, and pointed.

Ahead in the gloom, staring at them like eyes, were two tiny pin-pricks of light.

June raised a cautioning hand.

"It's all right!" she whispered. "Don't you recognise it? We're looking at the reverse of the Black Abbot's portrait. Someone made holes in the eyes to spy through. And that someone is on the other side, with a torch! Get ready, girls!"

As she spoke she fumbled on the wall behind the picture. Her fingers touched a lever. There was a faint whir as the canvas swung back—and they were staring into the haunted picture gallery.

June's gaze flashed round and became fixed.

There, farther down the gallery, in the act of removing one of the school paintings from the wall, was a hooded figure.

The Black Abbot! "Quick, girls!" June hissed. "We've got the trickster this time. Move quietly. She hasn't heard us."

Cautiously, eyes agham, she slipped out through the frame. Her two chums followed. But Beryl, in her trembling eagerness, was clumsy. Her shoe caught the edge of the frame.

The resultant little click sounded clearly in the silent gallery. The hooded figure heard, gasped and whirled, crouched.

Instantly June rushed forward.

"Grab her, girls!" For a moment the hooded figure seemed too stunned, too surprised to move. Then, with a hiss of fury, she made a bolt for it.

Too late. June's outstretched hand caught her shoulder. The unknown swung round her arm furiously, trying to break the girl detective's grasp. She was strong, and in her desperation she nearly got free.

But in the nick of time Terry and Beryl arrived to help June.

During the struggle that ensued, there came the sound of running footsteps and excited voices.

Abruptly the door of the picture gallery was flung open, to admit the headmistress herself, followed by Doreen Parker and a crowd of excited seniors and juniors.

"What—what does this mean?" gasped Miss Falconer, as the lights blazed up. "Judy—you! And—"

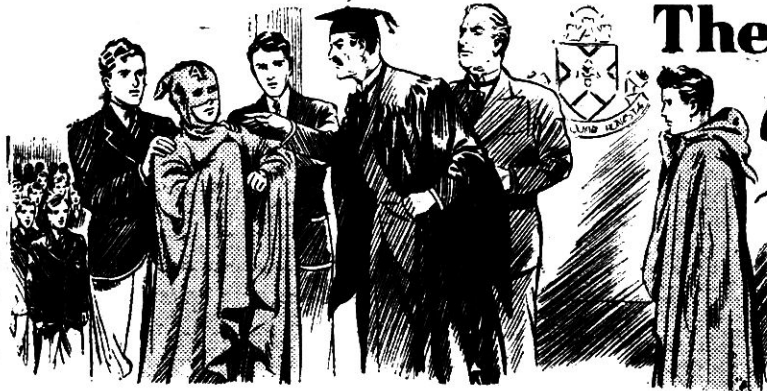
"Miss Falconer, we've caught the Black Abbot!" cried June. "The trickster who's been robbing the school of its priceless pictures—and substituting worthless fakes!"

As she spoke, she jerked back the robbed figure's hood, and an incredulous gasp went up.

"Miss Rolfe!"

Her attractive face twisted with baffled fury, the art mistress struggled in the hands of her school-girl captors. Several of the prefects,

(Please turn to the back page.)



The FOURTH Grey Ghost

By DOROTHY PAGE

"There they are—the four of them! The young scoundrels! They set the belfry alight—but we have them now! Come on, everyone—close in!"

THE BELFRY IN FLAMES

PENELOPE CARTWRIGHT, daughter of the headmaster of Harcourt Abbey Boys' School, joined a secret society known as the Grey Ghosts, the members of which were Hugh Mason, Harvey Doane, and Bob Gower.

The society was out to prove the innocence of Glynn Tracy, a boy who had been unjustly expelled. They believed that Mr. Aspell, the bullying senior master, was responsible for Glynn's expulsion, and that a book published under Mr. Aspell's name had really been written by Glynn Tracy.

One evening Penelope met Glynn Tracy and found he had lost his memory. She decided that the only way to expose Mr. Aspell was to take Glynn to a secret room in the old belfry, where he might find something to help him regain his memory.

Hugh, who had been caught and unmasked, escaped from the detention-room and joined Glynn, Penelope, and the other Grey Ghosts. But on the way to the old belfry they pulled up in consternation. For ahead a red glow had appeared. It seemed that the old belfry was on fire.

THE faint night breeze rustled the robes of the Four Grey Ghosts as they stood, statuesque, staring through the eyeholes of their cowls towards the distant belfry.

"It—it can't be," muttered Bob Gower hoarsely. "Penny, you must be mistaken—"

His voice trailed away. The glow through the trees was suddenly pierced by a leaping tongue of red.

"Look!" gasped Penny. "Flames! The belfry really is on fire!"

In consternation they eyed one another. This was a shattering blow to their plan to take Glynn Tracy to the secret room, in the hope that the expelled boy would regain his memory and find the rest of the vital, missing manuscript.

"But who can have started the fire?" asked Hugh. "It can't be an accident—"

"No!" Penelope cried fiercely. "No accident! Oh, boys, don't you see? Who has tried to prevent us getting into the belfry all along? Who will be shown up as a villain and trickster if we find that missing manuscript?"

Hugh started. "Great guns, Penny, you mean—"

"Yes, Hugh. The Wasp!" She almost choked. "It must be. Somehow he may have learnt what we planned! Perhaps he knows the old belfry holds the truth. He's done this to stop us proving Glynn's innocence."

Again they regarded one another in dismay. Then Hugh took a determined step forward.

"Come on," he said. "There's only one chance. We must try to get that fire out—"

"But what about Glynn?" asked Harvey. "We arranged to meet him here at eight; and, Hugh, if those flames are seen—"

"That's why we've got to act fast!" rejoined the leader of the Grey Ghosts. "It's the only hope. We must chance contacting Glynn later—"

"Hugh's right!" cried Penelope. "Come on!"

And she broke into a run. The others followed. At top speed they moved through the school grounds. When they had clambered over the wall that separated them from the belfry they found the red glow more intense, and they saw that the ancient tower was alight near the bottom. Tongues of flame leapt up round the grey stone, and in the air was the tang of petrol, revealing how the fire had been started.

Hugh, brushing through tall weeds and rank bushes, shouted over his shoulder:

"Bob, have you got the rope from the gym?"

"Yes, Hugh." Bob slung it from his shoulder as he ran. "What's the plan?"

But Penelope suddenly guessed, and her heart chilled. Hugh had some reckless plan of entering the belfry, alight or not, and descending from the bell loft to the secret room.

"Hugh—no!" she cried. "You can't—"

He paused, whirling, facing them, breathing hard, but as cool-headed as ever.

"I must," he panted. "Bob—Harvey—you two try to beat out the flames—use some of those small bushes. Penny, you go back to the chapel and wait for Glynn. Bring him here. If there's any sign of alarm, bolt—and save yourself!"

For one tense second Penelope and Hugh faced each other, his robed figure silhouetted against the glow of the flames. Some impulse made her touch his hand.

"And—all right, Hugh," she breathed. "Good luck—and be careful. Remember the pivot stone is half-way—"

She cut short, her heart seeming to leap into her throat. From somewhere to their left, in the direction of the gateway set in the wall, a stone had clattered and rolled.

Penelope's hand clenched convulsively on Hugh's.

"Someone—someone's there!" The Grey Ghosts whirled, tensed, every nerve alert.

And then, as if a signal had been given, the gloom was cut from all sides by a battery of blinding torch rays!

The glow from the fire was as nothing against the fierce, concentrated beams of light. They impinged as one on the four, grey-robed figures, dazzling them, showing them up in sharp relief.

And as they stood in startled dismay, a harsh, triumphant voice rang piercingly through the night—the voice of Mr. Aspell!



HUNTING THE GREY GHOSTS

Blinded by the dazzling light, Penelope stood as if petrified.

A trap! She knew it now—

they all knew. Mr. Aspell had fired the belfry, to ensure that any secret it held was gone for ever. But he had done more!

Somehow he had known they would be there, and had laid this trap from which there was no escape.

"Penny—bolt!" Those two words from Hugh at her side penetrated her whirling brain. As she heard it, she heard, too, footsteps running from the gateway. The net was closing in.

"Quick, Penny! We'll try to check them. Over the wall—"

Hugh's hand was urgently on her robed arm. Even at the end his first thought was for her safety.

"But you, Hugh—" she sobbed.

"Go, Penny! Get out of those lights! We'll scatter later. Penny, I order it. Go—"

He thrust at her shoulder. Uncertain, bewildered, she hesitated, and then above the shout of many voices, the high-pitched command of Mr. Aspell, she heard one steely voice.

Her father's! The headmaster was here, too. He would witness her capture—her unmasking.

The courage seemed to seep from Penelope's bones. Suddenly she found she was running, stumblingly, towards the surrounding wall, her robe brushing through weeds, thick grass catching at her feet.

Torch beams flickered over her—then lost her—and found her again as she made a leap at the wall, her fingers clutching desperately at the top. She pulled herself up.

"There—on the wall! Don't let him escape! Be on the alert outside!"

Mr. Aspell's voice reached her above the crackle of the fire as she sprawled for a second atop the wall. She cast a wild look back, seeing the three robed figures stretched in a line to check the rush from the gateway.

Such self-sacrifice made her pause, her heart going out to the three boys. She could not desert them! Panting for breath, she hesitated. In that second the boys split and scattered. The matter was settled for her. It was each for himself now!

She dropped from the wall into the sudden darkness in the lee of the crumbling bricks.

To right and left torches were flashing, footsteps rushing. It was all too plain that the trap was well-laid; practically every senior boy in the school had been called in by Mr. Aspell. They were everywhere, some half-dozen even now closing in on her.

With her heart thudding painfully, Penelope broke into a desperate run.

Instinctively she turned in the direction of the rhododendron shrubbery and the belt of trees inside the outer school wall. Anything to find cover. A torch beam flickered across her. "There!" came an excited shout. "There's one of them!"

Penelope gasped, ducked, and stumbled on. From somewhere behind, distantly, there arose another shout:

"Got one! Here he is!"
"Hold him! There goes another—"

A great despair settled on Penelope. One of those grand boy chums of hers had been caught. It seemed an ill omen, the beginning of the end. She hurled herself forward, crashed through the leaves, dropping to the cool grass, her heart thundering in her ears.

But even as she leapt, a torch beam flashed blindingly across the bushes, and excited voices sounded:

"See that! He's in the bushes—"
"Surround him! Torches on! He can't escape—"

Footsteps thudded from all sides, drew nearer and nearer. Desperately Penelope blundered on through the bushes, but suddenly a hand closed tightly on her shoulder.

"WE have them, Head! We have them at last!"

The glow from the burning belfry played on Mr. Aspell's face, revealing the thin features flushed with a triumph he did not attempt to conceal.

"One caught already!" he cried. "Did you hear the shout, Head? And for the rest it is just a matter of minutes! We have them. The young scoundrels shall pay—all of them—"

He broke off, breathing hard, cruel-faced, confident, darting a look at the headmaster. They had not moved from their original position by the gateway leading to the belfry.

"Your plan was well-laid and executed, Aspell," said the headmaster quietly. His face was pale and very stern. "This deliberate firing of the belfry—this last dastardly act—can mean only expulsion for every one of them—when we know who they are!"

A strange, cold smile touched Mr. Aspell's lips.

"That won't be long, Head," he said softly. "One is obviously that ruffian Mason. As I told you—he was helped to escape from the detention-room. The others—"

He touched his moustache, hand trembling with excitement.

"One of the others at least may prove a surprise—a very great surprise," he purred, darting another look at the Head's scandalised face. "And now, Head, if you will excuse me, I will direct the rounding-up of the other three—"

"Wait, Aspell!" The Head was staring towards the burning belfry. "You have sent someone to warn the fire brigade? The belfry was a danger—but it will burn slowly, and we must save it if we can."

"Naturally," said Mr. Aspell quickly. "I—I have already sent one of the boys to phone. Now excuse me—"

He turned sharply and hurried away with long, eager strides. On each side and to his front the darkened grounds were split by torch beams, weaving, darting. Outlined against them were running senior boys. Shouts echoed in the chill night air.

The senior master hesitated a second, darting a glance back at the belfry. The flames were getting a firm hold; smoke and smuts flurried to the sky. He smiled sneeringly, for he had lied to the headmaster. He had sent no boy—yet—to phone for the fire brigade.

"And no boy will be sent," he muttered, "until it is too late to save the tower! Until any evidence is utterly destroyed! You win, Aspell—you win! And now—the Grey Ghosts—that girl—"

He turned. A figure came panting up, torch waving. From its glow

Mr. Aspell saw the pasty features of Harold Smecke, now ablaze with spiteful glee.

"Sir—sir—" he gasped. "We've got three of them! One had his hood off—it's Mason!"

Mr. Aspell smiled. It was his moment.

"Good—good! Warn the head prefect that the others are not yet to be unmasked. Tell him that there will be an assembly in Big Hall." He drew a deep breath. "There I, personally, shall unmask the remainder before the whole school!"

Smecke grinned.

"Right, sir, but there's still one more to grab. We've got Numbers one, two, and three—"

The master exclaimed furiously.

"The fourth! I must have the fourth—"

He checked, lifted his head, and stared. Smecke turned. Away to their left a blaze of torch beams were concentrated on the shrubbery. Suddenly a group of figures came from the rhododendrons, marching a slim, robed, struggling figure in their midst, a figure with "4" clearly marked on its cowl.

Mr. Aspell relaxed, a slow, cruel smile curving his lips. Harold Smecke gave a yell.

"The last one, sir—"

"Yes, Smecke—the last one! The Fourth Grey Ghost—caught at last!"



SENSATION IN BIG HALL

Every light was on in Big Hall, glowing down upon a scene of unprecedented excitement. The big double doors were open, and

boys were still streaming in. The air hummed with talk. Prefects and masters in vain tried to obtain some sort of order.

It was too much to expect. The whole school was agog. Like lightning the news had swept round. The Grey Ghosts had been caught! They had set fire to the belfry. One of them was Hugh Mason—he had escaped daringly from Detention-room. They were to be unmasked publicly and then expelled!

It was a sensation Harcourt had never before known.

The door at the back of the platform suddenly opened. Heads turned quickly, intent. A murmur swept the hall.

"Mr. Aspell!"

"The Wasp! Now for it!"

The senior master turned and beckoned towards the doorway.

Like a knife an uncanny hush fell on Big Hall. Every eye became fixed on that doorway. Smaller boys stood on tiptoe and craned their heads to see who was coming in.

First was Nicholas Bentley, head prefect of Harcourt, his face very serious, a little troubled. Then came three robed figures in the grip of other prefects. Hugh's cowl was back, but Numbers two and three still had their cowls in position. They marched to a position near the headmaster's desk. A slight pause, then the school stirred again as more prefects came through on to the platform.

In their midst was a slim, robed figure, and Hugh's face paled as he saw the last of the Grey Ghosts led forward.

"They—they got her, chaps!" he muttered huskily.

For the first time his face showed fear—fear for Penelope. This was the end, Hugh thought, the end of their great mission for Glynn Tracy, the end of the Grey Ghosts—and disaster for the girl he so admired.

Silence abruptly fell on the ranks of staring faces. Through the doorway had appeared John Cartwright, the headmaster.

He glanced briefly at the four robed figures, his angry gaze resting momentarily on Hugh. Then he crossed swiftly to Mr. Aspell.

"Aspell," he said very quietly and coldly. "I did not order this assembly."

The senior master smiled suavely, apologetically.

"I'm sorry, Head. I thought you would wish it—a public denouncement—after all these young scoundrels have done."

The Head eyed him steadily, then turned to his desk. His grey eyes roved round the school.

"Boys," he said abruptly, "you have heard of the activities of these four reckless, rebellious boys; you had doubtless heard that to-night they set the seal on their lawlessness by deliberately firing the old belfry. The identity of one of them you know—"

His gaze flitted grimly to Hugh.

"The rest—thanks to the effort of Mr. Aspell—have been caught, and when unmasked they will face expulsion!"

He was stern, purposeful, but there was not one among the gathering who did not realise how he was feeling at his moment.

Rarely was a boy expelled from Harcourt, for the shadow of the sentence would overhang his whole life from then on. But, to-day, three—no, perhaps four juniors were to pay the penalty for their misdeeds, and it was not an easy task for the Head, despite the seriousness of their misdeeds.

"You realise," the Head went on, "what this will mean to us. I hesitate to take this step, and yet it cannot be said that these boys, by their activities, have brought anything but dishonour to our school. And so there is no other penalty severe enough to meet the case."

Still no sound from the school as he paused. The senior master seemed to take it as a signal. It was clear to all that he was under the press of great excitement. Abruptly he stepped to the boy at Hugh's side and wrenched back the cowl.

"Gower! Bob Gower—"

The whisper came from the ranks of the Fourth. It was a murmur that grew to a great hum of wonderment as Number two's hood went back in Mr. Aspell's fingers, revealing the bespectacled, dreamy features of Harvey Doane, the last fellow any of them there would have suspected of belonging to the daring quartette.

"And now—and now—"

Mr. Aspell's voice was a little husky as he stepped to the last, slim-robed figure. His eyes were bright, blazing. This was the final cruel triumph. It made him reckless. He whirled to the Head.

"Now, Head," he cried, "for the Fourth Grey Ghost—the one who has perhaps more than any other plotted against me, against discipline, the one whose identity I have long suspected!"

His hand moved out, clutching—and abruptly Hugh's voice rang desperately through Big Hall.

"Head—sir—don't let him—don't let him!" Pale-faced, he sprang forward. "Number four is not to blame! Number four had nothing to do with it! Don't let Mr. Aspell—"

Breaking off, he leapt towards the Wasp, but two seniors grasped his arm, dragging him back as he struggled furiously.

The watching school gasped in breathless excitement. The Head, white and angry, brought his hand down on the desk.

"Silence! Mason, how dare you! Stand back, boy!"

He was held. Seniors hastily stepped closer to Bob and Harvey, watchful and alert. Hugh relaxed, dishevelled, knowing there was no hope.

"Oh, Penny!" he whispered. "Oh, Penny—"

Mr. Aspell had grasped Number four's arm. His free hand darted to the cowl.

"And this," he cried, "is the Fourth Grey Ghost!"

The hood came back, revealing a white, tense face—and a great gasp of wonder swept through Big Hall!

Prepare for a tremendous surprise next Friday when you read the thrilling conclusion of this great serial.



LEADER of the ALPINE REVELLERS

By ENID BOYTEN

THE SECRET OF THE WARDROBE

JILL GARDINER and her cheery girl chums, who were staying in Switzerland for the winter sports, were being coached for the difficult Havensburg Test by Hans Peterson, an ex-guide. Jill believed that he had been unjustly accused of cowardice.

Jill had in her possession a half-sheet of manuscript music which she believed contained a secret. Hans possessed the other half, but it was stolen from him. He accused Jill of taking it, and refused to remain coach to the Revellers.

Jill learnt that Magda Beaumont had the stolen music. She tried to prove her innocence to Hans, but, as a result of Magda's trickery, Hans was branded a thief, and she herself was forbidden to have anything more to do with the boy coach.

"JILL, you've been tricked—out-witted! You're in a frightful jam, and you've got to get out of it!"

Such were Jill's thoughts as she made her way back to her room at High Gables Hotel.

If Magda's crimson ski-tunic had been found in her wardrobe, with the stolen paper sewn up in the lining, all would have been well. Hans would have been convinced that it wasn't Jill who had stolen his secret, and Mr. Walsh would never have suspected that the Swiss boy had entered the hotel for dishonest purposes.

But now—
"Everything's gone wrong!" Jill whispered, her lips trembling a little. "Hans thinks worse of me than ever, and Mr. Walsh has forbidden us to speak to him again!"

How had it happened? How had Magda spirited the tunic, with its vital evidence, out of the locked wardrobe at the last moment?

"Think, Jill! Think!" murmured Jill, sinking down on the bed, face pale, hands clenched.

From the ballroom drifted lively dance music, for the fancy-dress dance was now in full swing.

Jill loved dancing, and she had been looking forward eagerly to the evening's festivities, but now she never even heard the rhythm of that lively quick-step.

In imagination, she saw Hans Peterson's rugged face, and heard his sombre voice bidding her good-bye.

"I must win him back," she breathed. "We haven't the ghost of a chance of passing the Havensburg Test without his help—and the test is getting near now."

There was little sleep for Jill that night, and even when she dropped off, it was only to dream that she was chasing Magda Beaumont up and down dizzy mountain slopes to the haunting strains of the mystery waltz!

She was up again before the light of dawn had flushed the Alpine peaks, and as she dressed a lump came to her throat.

"No special winter sports programme for us to-day!" she sighed.

Up till now, every day had been full of thrill and fun for Jill and her Alpine Revellers as they practised for the Havensburg Test with Hans as their trainer. Each day he had thought up some special, exciting stunt for them to try. Moody and difficult as he was in some ways, he had made a grand coach.

"He was wizard!" Jill told herself. "Not only as a coach, but as a chum."

That lump was still in her throat when she opened the large, built-in wardrobe, which was just like the one in Magda's room. And as she reached to lift down a gaily coloured sweater that hung at the back, she noticed a curious thing.

A tiny draught of air!
"That's strange!" she thought absent-mindedly. "It comes between those two panels, so there can't be a dividing wall between this room and the next just here."

Probably the built-in wardrobe in the next room backed on to this one with only those panels between, and if the door of the other wardrobe had been left open, that would account for the tiny draught.

It didn't seem a very important fact, and Jill almost forgot it as she slipped on the gaily striped sweater, her thoughts returning to her own vital problem.

How to win back Hans' friendship? How to prove to him that—

Suddenly a little gasp came from her.

Her brown eyes flashed as she looked back at the wardrobe, and she felt herself trembling with a strange excitement.

"What about Magda's wardrobe?" Jill asked herself. "Is that the same?"

She took a quick step across the room, her pulses racing.

"Golly, I believe I've hit on a clue!" she exclaimed. "A clue as to how Magda might have made something disappear from her locked wardrobe!"

Suppose Magda, knowing that Hans was trying to open her wardrobe, had slipped into the next room. And suppose she had already found out that there was a loose panel at the back of the wardrobes which could be removed!

"She could reach through and grab that tunic from the other room while Hans was still trying to break the lock," Jill's thoughts raced on.

She remembered now that the room next to Magda was empty. It had been booked by somebody who hadn't turned up.

Impetuously Jill darted for the door.

"I'll find out," she thought. "At least I shall know how Magda tricked us."

She could hear hotel servants on the move downstairs, but all was quiet in this corridor, and Jill's footsteps made no sound on the thick carpet.

Breathlessly she turned the handle of the empty room next to Magda's.

"Good! It's unlocked!" she whispered.

Next moment she was inside, darting across to the wardrobe, flicking on the torch she had brought with her.

A swift examination of the panelled back of the wardrobe, and then—
"I was right!" she cried.

One of those panels was loose and could be easily removed. Jill did so, her torchlight shining through on to the fashionable, expensive clothing that hung in Magda's wardrobe. She noted the faint, exotic perfume that always hung about that girl's frocks.

But no crimson ski-tunic!
"For a moment I almost hoped she'd put it back again," Jill murmured. "But no such luck. She's not taking any chances of a second raid on her wardrobe."

Then where was it?
After removing the tunic with its vital evidence, Magda had rushed in and accused Hans of trying to steal her jewels. She hadn't had the tunic with her then, of course; she must have left it in this empty room.

Where was it now? What fresh hiding-place had she found for it?

Heart thudding, Jill moved round the empty room, peering into cupboards, searching every possible hiding-place.

As she paused near a large settee, Jill leant forward suddenly, sniffing.

Again she detected that expensive perfume that only Magda used.

Did it mean that some garment of Magda's was close at hand?

Excitedly Jill threw the settee cushions aside. Nothing hidden there. She grabbed the settee itself, pushing it away from the wall.

Her heart almost stopped beating as she glimpsed a crimson object tucked away behind it.

"It—it's the tunic!"
She almost shouted the words. For there it was! Magda had evidently decided it would be safer hidden in the empty room than in her own apartment for the time being.

With trembling fingers, Jill examined the lining, and the colour flooded her cheeks as she heard the soft rustle of paper under the torn part.

What should she do? Rush in and confront Magda with this evidence? Seek out Mr. Walsh and prove to him that both she and Hans were telling the truth last night?

"No, no! I must go to Hans first," she told herself. "That's the most important thing. With this evidence I can clear myself. I can prove I never betrayed him!"

She could have sung for joy as she sped away, the tunic under her arm. There had been a fall of snow during the night, and the quickest way of getting through the pinewood to Hans' cottage would be on skis—and she was already dressed for skiing.

A few minutes later she was gliding, in the grey light of dawn, between the tall pine-trunks, the tunic slung over her shoulder.

"Hurry, Jill! Hurry!" she told herself.

She would drive that look of suspicion and anger from the Swiss boy's eyes. Very soon now they would be back on the old friendly footing, planning new training for the Alpine

Revellers—the final coaching that would make all the difference.

Cheeks flushed, eyes aglow, she shot out from the pinewood into the clearing where stood Hans' little cottage.

Then a cry of utter dismay left her lips.

The wonderful Alpine dawn was already flushing the mountain snows. But the cottage was shuttered, dark, barred, padlocked!

And nailed to one of the wooden pillars of the porch was a card with two words written on it:

"GONE AWAY."



A PERILOUS JUMP

The two words drummed in Jill's brain as, with pale face, she stared at the shuttered cottage.

"He's—gone!" she

whispered. "But why?"

Even as she asked herself the question, the answer came to her.

Hans Peterson, as she knew, had many sterling qualities. But he was sensitive and moody. It must have been a terrible shock to discover that the girl he had trusted had apparently let him down badly. So he had closed his cottage and gone away, not wishing to meet Jill or her chums in the valley, even by chance.

"I might have guessed it," Jill told herself. "But where has he gone? When did he start?"

Eagerly she gazed around, her quick eyes noting something that brought a little excited cry from her.

Ski tracks! She could see them plainly, leading away from the cottage porch towards the long, winding valley beyond the pinewood.

"They must be fresh," she murmured, "because there was a fall of snow in the night which would have covered any old tracks. Hans must have made that trail not so long ago. Perhaps I can follow and catch him."

Impulsively she was turning away when a voice made her pause.

"Mam'selle! If it ees Hans Peterson you seek, nevaire will you catch him," said that slow voice. "It ees too late."

With a throb of dismay, Jill whirled round, finding herself facing an old Swiss shepherd, with his dog at his heels.

"Too late?" she faltered.

He nodded.

"I saw 'im go, mam'selle," he explained. "He told me he was catching ze Berne train from ze railway station at ze end of ze valley. However fast you ski on 'is trail, mam'selle, nevaire could you catch up wiz 'im in time."

Jill's face fell, and the shepherd gazed at her sympathetically.

"Why worry, mam'selle?" he said. "Zat boy Peterson, he was no good. Ze valley is well rid of him!"

So even, this kindly shepherd was prejudiced against Hans, as they all were! The thought brought a lump to Jill's throat, as, despairingly, she gazed around her.

And suddenly her glance fell on a signpost pointing northwards with four words on it:

"To the Vallhof Jump."

The famous ski jump. It wasn't so very far away, at the top of that steep, snow-covered pathway.

"And it's a short cut!" she quiveringly told herself. "It saves miles!"

By this time Jill had a good idea of the lay-out of the valley and surrounding mountains. It dawned on her with startling force that the straight cut over the ski jump was the only possible chance of catching up with Hans, who was going round by the long, winding valley trail.

She didn't stop to think or count the risk as she glided towards the pathway pointed out by that signpost.

The old shepherd, gazing after her, suddenly realised what she meant to do.

"Mam'selle! Stop!" His tone was full of alarm. "Ze ski jump—it ees only for men! Girls nevaire go over

zere! Mam'selle, you must not take such a terrible risk! Stop!"

She never even heard him.

The crimson tunic slung over her shoulder, she pressed on breathlessly.

"I can do it!" she told herself. "I must!"

She knew the risk, of course. Only experienced ski-ers ever shot over that breath-taking leap.

"Stop, mam'selle!"

The old shepherd's voice echoed faintly behind her as she climbed up and up.

It was worth any risk, she told herself, to intercept Hans before he left the valley for good.

Yet her cheeks paled as she reached the top and stared down the steep approach to the jump. It was too early for anyone to be about, but there were notice-boards warning beginners against attempting the difficult jump. The approach dipped down like a switchback.

And then it ended. It stopped just as at the brink of a cliff, and nothing could be seen beyond but the empty sky.

And Jill would have to shoot over that dizzy brink, whizzing through the air to the snowy slope far below.

"Don't think, Jill!" she whispered, her throat strangely dry. "Just go!"

She threw her ski-sticks away, braced herself for a moment, and then shot downwards towards the brink—

Along the valley trail below Hans Peterson was skiing steadily, a well-filled rucksack on his back.

His thoughts were moody ones, judging by the frown on his rugged face as he pressed on with steady strides. The breeze ruffled his brown hair. His mouth was grim and set.

Perhaps, as he skied along, he was picturing a girl with a tip-tilted nose and laughing brown eyes, who he believed had betrayed him. His expression became still more sombre as he rounded a sharp bend in the trail.

Then, suddenly, a slight sound made him pause.

To his left rose the steep, snowy slope at the base of the Vallhof Jump. Often it was crowded with cheering spectators, when world-famous ski-jumpers took part in the competitions. Now, at this early hour, it was lonely, deserted, silent.

Until—

A small figure shot out suddenly over the jumping platform far above. In a breath-taking curve it swooped downwards through the air.

"It's early for a ski jump," Hans muttered.

Then he stiffened, staring amazedly.

"Why, it's—it's a girl!" he cried.

He had noted the wind-blown hair, the gaily coloured sweater, the slim form of the jumper.

The moodiness left the Swiss boy's face and a look of anxiety took its place.

"She must be crazy!" he muttered. "Never has a girl taken that jump before. She'll crash—hopelessly!"

At dizzy speed that slim figure swooped downwards, waving her arms in a desperate effort to keep her balance, trying frantically to keep her skis parallel with the slope towards which she was falling, so as to make a better landing.

With a breath-stopping swish at last she hit the snow. Her skis out of control, she shot forward like an arrow, then veered giddily to one side, swaying and swerving till finally

she collapsed and fell in a crumpled heap on the snow.

Hans was skiing swiftly forward. Never did he travel in the mountains without a first-aid kit, and he was feeling for it now.

"She may be injured," he told himself anxiously. "Who on earth can it be? What girl could do such a reckless, foolhardy thing?"

On the snow beside her lay a piece of crimson material, which she had evidently dropped as she fell.

Limp, motionless, she sprawled there, her head pillowed on her arm, brown curls lying against the snow. And from Hans, as he drew near, broke a hoarse cry of amazement and concern:

"It's Jill!"



THE ENDING OF A QUARREL

For a moment he seemed frozen by the shock of it. Then, his face working strangely, he knelt beside her.

"Jill!" The word

broke from his lips again. "Jill! Are you hurt?"

Forgotten was his resentment against her. He only knew that she was lying there, limp and dazed and perhaps injured.

"Jill!"

A gasp of relief broke from him as, suddenly, she looked up, raising herself on one arm, tossing back the tumbled brown curls and gazing at him, not yet realising where she was.

"Why, it's Hans!" she whispered. "But how—where—"

Gently he stopped her.

"Not another word, Jill, until you've drunk this," he said.

From his first-aid kit he brought a phial of restorative, pouring it into a small drinking-cup and holding it to her lips. It brought the colour creeping back into her pale cheeks, and it brought memory back, too.

"Of course! I took the jump," she murmured, and, in spite of herself, a tiny shudder passed through her. "It was a bit frightening, Hans!"

He drew a deep breath.

"Frightening! I should think it was for a girl who has never jumped before!" he muttered. "I can't imagine why you—" He broke off, his lips tightening. "But, first, we must see whether you've any broken bones, or sprains, or—"

She flashed him a gleam of her old smile, then rose rather shakily to her feet, holding his shoulder to steady herself.

"I'm still all in one piece, Hans!" she said, with a quivering little chuckle. "Nothing broken, or even bent! And, thank goodness, I've caught you!"

His deep-set eyes regarded her amazedly.

"Caught me?" he echoed.

"To give you this!" she whispered.

She picked up the object lying on the snow and handed it to him, and for the first time he realised it was a ski-tunic.

"It's Magda's," she breathed. "It was locked in her wardrobe, just as I told you—until she fished it out through a loose panel at the back. And tucked away in the lining you'll find the missing paper, Hans. Your half of the 'Gondolier's Waltz' which Magda stole."

She had certainly given Hans a shock.

As one in a dream, he examined the lining of the tunic. She saw him break a few stitches, extract the folded paper hidden there. He tossed the tunic on a tree-stump behind him and opened the paper.

On that half-sheet of paper, with its torn edge, were a few bars of haunting, lifting melody. The second half of a waltz tune.

It had been in Hans' possession ever since he could remember, and always he had understood that it had some vital importance for him.

The Swiss boy's face was a study as he gazed at the paper.

(Please turn to the back page.)

Save
All your old paper,
Letters, cardboard, etc. Their
Value as salvage is really
All-important in the
Great Prosperity drive.
Every little helps!



The Merry-makers Afloat

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

RALLYING ROUND PHINEAS

"YOU look tired, Edgar—and pale, too," said Sally Warner, a note of concern in her voice. "Doesn't he, Merry-makers?"

"Sally's right!" chorused her three chums—Fay Manners, Don Weston, and Johnny Briggs.

Sally & Co.—known as the Merry-makers—all seemed most concerned. Edgar T. Phineas, the tall, bespectacled head prefect of the students on board the College Ship, looked a little surprised at this interest in his welfare.

The scene was D Deck on the liner Ocean Star. The time was shortly after breakfast, and Sally & Co. had waylaid Phineas as he was on his way from the dining-hall to his little office.

"Shucks!" said Edgar T. "Guess I feel fine. Got a lot of work to do." Sally wagged an admonishing forefinger.

"Work!" she said. "That's the trouble, Edgar. You'll overdo it if you're not careful."

It was a fact that the American boy had an extraordinary zest for work. He rushed round like a whirlwind, and his responsibilities as head prefect were many. He also considered himself to be an efficiency expert, and had evolved an elaborate filing system in which it was his boast that he recorded everything that happened on board the College Ship.

"You don't want to overdo it, Edgar," said fair-haired Fay, carrying on where Sally had left off. "You ought to relax a little sometimes. Come and join us in a game of golf."

It wasn't proper golf, of course, within the confines of a ship. But nets had been fixed up on the after part of D Deck, and the students could practise driving with a special sort of ball which, however hard it was hit, only travelled a few yards.

Phineas shook his head. "Golf? Don't play it—don't want to play it!" he said flatly.

But Sally & Co. wanted him to play it. At least, they wanted to divert him away from his office for a while so that Sally could slip in and search for something.

For it had come to the Merry-makers' knowledge that Alec Burt, the sneak of the Floating College, had been up to his tricks again. Burt, unpleasant as he was vindictive, was always trying to make trouble for the chums.

A chance remark which Burt had let slip in an unguarded moment had put Sally & Co. on the track of his latest trick. They suspected that he had filled in some of Phineas' forms, making it appear that the Merry-makers had been breaking college

regulations, and those forms had been slipped in among the head prefect's filing system.

Exactly what Burt had put on the forms Sally & Co. did not know; but, being well aware of his spiteful ways from past experience, they realised it would be something which would bring punishment down upon their heads, and were, therefore, anxious and apprehensive.

Those forms had to be found and destroyed before Phineas made his nightly check-up. Hence the chums' efforts to interest Edgar T. in some sort of diversion which would keep him away from his office. And as golf was the latest craze among the students, Sally & Co. were using that activity as a bait.

"Don't play golf?" said Johnny Briggs boisterously. "Then now's your chance to learn, Phineas. Do you good. Fine exercise."

"Bring that sparkle back into your eyes," said Sally coaxingly.

"I tell you I'm all right," Phineas protested obstinately.

But Sally & Co. set out to convince him that he was far from right. He was looking jaded; he was jumpy, they said. And had he seen his tongue? Phineas hadn't, but he made efforts to see it now, only it wasn't quite long enough for him to get a good view of it. And while this was going on he was being gently, but firmly, propelled towards the end of the deck where the nets had been set up.

By which time Phineas, still arguing, was beginning to feel a little weak.

"There's the ball—and you can borrow my club," said Fay.

"Just swing it, and hit the ball," explained Don.

"Hub! Easy," granted Phineas, and took Fay's club.

Sally, with a wink at her chums, prepared to dart away. She saw Edgar T. swing the club, and next moment—

Cr-r-rack!

Phineas missed the ball—but he didn't miss the deck. There was a thud and then a cracking sound as the wooden handle of the club snapped.

Fay's mouth dropped open in dismay. Phineas frowned.

"Guess I miscalculated," he said. "Do it next time. Give me your club, Weston."

"Eh? Oh, yes, another club. Lend him yours, Johnny—"

"He said yours, old man!"

Sally hurried away. They had got Phineas interested in golf, and now was her opportunity to slip into his office.

She reached it and went in. A battery of filing cabinets surrounded his table. Everything was very neat,

as befitted the methods of an efficiency expert.

Sally crossed over to a cabinet marked "Current: To be dealt with." Into this particular cabinet went all the forms of the current date, awaiting Phineas' nightly check-up. Burt, aware of this, would have put the spuriously filled-in forms here, of course.

She smiled grimly. Burt was going to be disappointed. It would only take her a minute or two to find those forms and dispose of them.

But it was Sally who was disappointed. Searching through the cabinet she couldn't find any forms relating to herself or her chums.

"Golly, then where are they?" Sally gasped anxiously. "They're in here somewhere because we overheard Burt say they were."

She was crossing over to another cabinet when footsteps sounded along the deck outside. Sally spun round. Surely Phineas wasn't coming back already? Then she smiled in relief as she saw Don appear in the doorway.

"Have you found them yet, Sally?" he asked urgently.

"No—"

"Then buck up! This idea isn't so good after all. Phineas hasn't hit the ball yet. But he's broken Fay's club, and mine, too. He's got Johnny's now, and I bet that goes the same way!"

"Gosh! I'll be as quick as I can!"

"Be quicker than that, or we won't have any clubs left," Don said apprehensively. "I'd better slip back in case he smells a rat."

Don hurried away. Sally continued her quest, opening cabinets and drawers, becoming more and more anxious as she still failed to find the forms.

She was just flinging open another drawer, when once again footsteps sounded. And this time it was Phineas. Hastily Sally shut the drawer and tried to look nonchalant.

"Sure is a dandy game," Edgar T. was muttering to himself, and then he spotted Sally. "Say, what are you doing here?" he added a little suspiciously.

"Hem! Thought I'd—er—keep an eye on things while you played golf," Sally said brightly. "How's it going?"

"Fine. I can nearly hit the ball now—"

"Gig-golly!" spluttered Sally. "Haven't you hit it yet? You need more practice. You want to treat golf mathematically!"

"Never heard that before," said Phineas.

Nor had Sally. But she knew Phineas was a keen student of mathematics, and she hoped he would be intrigued.

"Mathematically," she repeated in her most impressive manner. "The curve of the swing, the angle of impact in relation to the velocity and—and all that, you know. Try it out—now," she added, with emphasis on the last word.

"Sounds interesting. But guess I'm

too busy. I'm starting a new filing system, and it's a full-time job. Work before pleasure—"

"Make it pleasure before work for a change," broke in Sally swiftly. He had surely given her just the right lead. "I'll help! I'll start this new system for you."

She was being rash, but she didn't mind doing a bit of work if only she could be left alone in here for a while to continue the search.

Phineas beamed. "Gee, that's a swell idea. You mean it, Sally?"

"Of course., As long as you keep up your golf—"

"Sure! Thanks, Sally. This new system is going to be a wow—bigger and better altogether. You shall be my assistant. You can be temporarily in charge of the new office—"

"New office?" inquired Sally. "Sure! The Head's giving me a larger office, with more cabinets and equipment," said Phineas enthusiastically. "I'll take you along there now, Sally, and you can get started right away. Might as well lock this one up. No reason at all why you should stay here!"



AN HONOUR SALLY DIDN'T WANT

Sally gave a startled jump. An expression of almost comical dismay spread over her pretty face.

"Golly!" she gulped. She had every reason for wanting to stay here. This news about another office had come as a shock.

She wasn't interested in the new office. She was only interested in the old one, so that she could search for those forms. If Phineas was starting a new system, and changing offices, then he would have a complete clear-out, and he would be bound to come across the forms Alec Burt had planted in here.

It became more vital than ever that she should find them first and destroy them.

"Come on, Sally, I'll show you where to go!"

"But—but—" Sally broke off. Professor Willard, the headmaster of the Floating College, appeared in the doorway at that moment.

"Good-morning, Sally," he said affably. "Everything all right, Phineas?"

"Yes, sir. Sally has just offered to help me with my new filing system," said the prefect.

"Splendid!" approved the headmaster.

Sally smiled feebly.

"There's just one matter to report," Phineas drew a form out of his pocket and consulted it. "Rita Locke has got to go into sick ward with a rising temperature. That means she will not be available as temporary prefect for the day. I suggest," he added, as if with a flash of inspiration, "that Sally Warner takes over her duties."

Sally made a queer, gurgling noise in her throat. Phineas, of course, really bucked with her because she had offered to help him, had suggested this elevation to the rank of temporary prefect out of gratitude.

But to Sally herself it was just another complication in her efforts to retrieve those forms. Being temporary prefect would entail many duties, meaning she would have less opportunity to carry out her search.

"An excellent idea," said Professor Willard. "I shall watch your progress as temporary prefect with interest, Sally."

He went out of the office. Phineas, pausing only to fill in one or two forms to record what had just transpired, then picked up a key.

"Right!" he said. "We'll lock up and get along to the new office, Sally."

Sally remained where she was.

"I don't think you ought to lock up, Edgar," she demurred. "I—I'm sure to want to come in here—to see how you do things, you know."

Phineas pondered that point. "Maybe you're right, Sally. Very well, I won't lock up this office."

Sally breathed a sigh of relief. That was one snag overcome. And now it was about time that the head prefect had his interest in golf revived!

"Well, Edgar, hadn't you better try out that mathematics theory of mine?" she said hopefully. "You go along while you've got the chance. I'll soon find your new office."

"O.K., Sally. Guess I'm going to like this golf game. Say"—he hesitated—"d'you think I could borrow your club?"

Sally made a rueful grimace. She could guess that Johnny's club had suffered the same fate as those belonging to Fay and Don; and hers, too, would probably go the same way. But Sally didn't mind that—it was all in a good cause!

She handed him her club. Phineas made for the door, and Sally began to smile. Everything was working out all right, after all. She would be alone, and she could continue the search—

Phineas, about to stride off down the deck, suddenly popped his head in the doorway again.

"Sally, it's time for cabin inspection, and as temporary prefect that's one of your duties. Get hustling—"

"Bother!" exclaimed Sally.

"What did you say—"

"Oh, rather!" Sally hastily amended.

Another delay! She'd have to make the inspection. But she would do it in record time.

Sally did, too, eager to get back to the office and hunt for those forms. She was on her way back when she saw her chums farther along the deck.

She was a little surprised to see them there, having expected they would be busy at golf practice. For, as a result of the interest which had recently been aroused in that sport, a number of competitions had been arranged.

One of them was due to take place on the morrow—a match between five teams of students. Sally was leading one of them, consisting of herself and her chums. Alec Burt was leading another.

There were to be prizes for the winning team. The scoring was to be done with the aid of an electrical gadget which photographed the flight of the ball and recorded the distance it travelled. The team gaining the highest aggregate would be the winners.

It was nothing like proper golf, of course; but at least it would provide plenty of excitement. Sally was looking forward to it; and she intended to get in some more practice as soon as she had completed the task of finding those forms—and she'd jolly well see that her chums joined in, too.

"The slackers!" she murmured. "They ought to be keeping an eye on Phineas, anyway—"

She broke off, for suddenly a rumpus had started. It began with the appearance of Alec Burt. Her chums spoke to him, voices were raised, and then Johnny, obviously in one of his aggressive moods, caught hold of the sneak. Blows seemed likely to be exchanged at any moment.

At that moment up behind Sally came Phineas.

Sally stared. The head prefect had changed into a suit of plus fours, and he was swinging a golf club—not hers, Sally noticed with a grimace. Hers, no doubt, had gone the way of all the others.

The sounds of commotion increased. Phineas jabbed his club in the direction from which it was coming.

"You handle it, Sally!" he said.

Sally blinked uneasily. "You mean the club—"

"No; that disgraceful scene going on along there. You're temporary prefect, remember—find the students responsible."

"Oh dear—hem! Er—of course!" She mustn't upset him—not at this stage, when those forms had still to be located. And if she didn't act—he would!

Sally hurried forward. "Johnny!" She put on her most authoritative voice for the head prefect's benefit. "Stop this brawling at once!"

Johnny started. He didn't see Phineas.

"Cheese it, Sally! Now look here, Burt—"

"Stop!" cried Sally again, and added in a hissing undertone: "Stop, you chump. I'm a prefect now—"

Her chums laughed. Obviously they thought she was kidding in order to stop Johnny fighting.

"Ho, ho!" guffawed Johnny. "Tell me that again when I've finished with this rotter."

Sally drew a deep breath. "Johnny, take fifty lines!" she exclaimed for Phineas' benefit, and again lowered her voice. "I tell you I'm a prefect. Phineas made me—"

"Phineas! That fathead!" Don's grin faded and he let out an indignant roar. "That—that breaker of golf clubs! That pain in the neck—"

Sally groaned. "Fifty lines, Don!" she sighed. "Now, for goodness sake, listen, she added in a whisper. "I really am temporary prefect, and Phineas is watching—"

That had the desired effect. For the first time they became aware of the lurking head prefect, and peace was immediately restored. But hastily began to slink away.

"Fifty lines, Burt!" Sally rapped, and was tempted to make it five hundred. She had no regrets about that!

Phineas was walking away, nodding in satisfaction.

Sally sighed in relief. But her chums were clamouring round indignantly.

"You're a prefect!" snorted Johnny. "Why didn't you tell us—"

"Golly, I like that. I did tell you—"

"Eh? Well, you're a fine one, anyway, lining us—"

"I had to, with Phineas listening," Sally defended herself. "Now cool down, Merrymakers. I'll help with the lines. The point is, I haven't found those forms yet—"

"You haven't?" echoed Don in a dismayed voice. "Things are getting sticky, Sally. Burt's beginning to rumble our game. He's tried to hint to Phineas about the forms!"

Sally gave a start. "Golly, then I've got to work fast! Try to keep Phineas interested in golf while I carry on the search—"

"Try to keep him interested!" broke in Fay. "He's crazy on the game now. So much so that he's insisting on playing in our team in the contest to-morrow. That's Burt's fault. He told Phineas that I said I'd drop out to make way for him—"

"And that's why I was rowing with Burt. I was just giving him a piece of my mind!" Johnny said indignantly.

Sally's mind whirled under the impact of these items of information. Phineas wanting to play in their golf team, when all he could do was break clubs! Burt openly hinting to him about those forms!

More than ever, it had become vital that they should be found.

"Come on, Merrymakers!" said Sally, her blue eyes gleaming with a light of desperate determination.

"Y-you mean we're all going to search Phineas' office?" gasped Fay.

"I mean just that," Sally said grimly. "Those forms must be somewhere about, and they must be in his old office. Where else?"

And with sudden purpose she turned and led the rush along the deck.



TIME TRICKS A TRICKSTER

Straight to the head prefect's office Sally led the way — his original office in which those trouble-making forms had been left by the crafty Alec Burt.

"All hands to the pumps—all eyes to the search!" Sally instructed. "On second thoughts, Johnny, you'd better keep watch on deck and give us a warning if you see Phineas. He mustn't spot us searching—and, anyway, I'm supposed to be working in the new office. And keep an eye open for Burt, too."

"O.K., Sally!"

Johnny took up a position close to the office. While inside the office, Sally and Fay and Don began a combined assault on the filing cabinets. With the three of them on the job now, those forms would soon be discovered.

But hardly had they started than Johnny's voice was heard in a warning hiss:

"Cave! Phineas in the office!"

Three groans—and the scampering of three pairs of feet. Fay and Don made a dive for the rail and appeared to be scanning the vast expanse of the Pacific, sparkling in the morning sunshine. Sally, grabbing up a pile of index cards, dived in the direction of Edgar T.'s new office.

She had just reached it, settling herself down in a brand new chair at a brand new desk, when Phineas peered in through the open porthole.

"How's it going, Sally?"

"Fine," said Sally, making a great show of shuffling through the index cards. "Finished my tour of inspection and just starting. How's the golf?"

"Fine!" beamed Phineas. "You watch my swing!"

He stepped back, his eyes glowing with enthusiasm behind his spectacles. He still wore the plus four suit, and he had another club—evidently borrowed from some luckless, unsuspecting student.

He took up a stance. Round and round swung the club—swish!—and he actually missed the deck.

"Marvelous!" praised Sally. "Now you want to get in some practice hitting the ball, Edgar," she added brightly, getting ready to make a dash out of the office as soon as he moved on.

But Phineas didn't move on. "Sure, sure," he said. "But I'll do that later. First, I want to get this swing perfect."

Swish—swish—swish! And Sally's heart went thud—thud—thud! As long as Phineas remained here she would have to stay in the office. Once again she was being frustrated in her attempts to search for the forms that threatened trouble to herself and her chums. But then the smile returned to her face.

Peering out through the porthole, she had seen Fay and Don—taking advantage of Phineas' preoccupation—slip into the other office. They were carrying on the search.

Sally made a hasty change of tactics.

"Keep it up, Edgar!" she called sweetly. "You stay there, and I'll watch through the porthole!"

Swish—swish—swish!

Phineas was keeping it up. Phineas had become a golf fiend—and even his precious new filing system was forgotten.

Sally chuckled. In getting the head prefect interested in golf she had certainly started something. In fact, it was rebounding on her own head if Phineas had decided that he was going to play in the Merry-makers' team in the tournament. But as soon as those forms were found she would find a way of gently dissuading him from that ambition. The Merry-makers wanted to win, and Phineas—even though he had passed the club-breaking stage—would be no asset.

Had Fay and Don been successful yet? At any moment she expected them to appear, signaling that all was well.

She heard footsteps along the deck. Eagerly she peered out through the porthole again—and then she frowned. The newcomer was Alec Burt.

There was a sly look on Burt's face. "Gee, you're going great guns, aren't you, Phineas?" he smirked. "I bet you're getting a bit behind with your filing."

Sally's heart gave an apprehensive lurch. Burt obviously intended leading up to the subject of those forms!

"What"—swish—"was that you"—swish—"said, Burt?" mumbled Phineas, still intent on swinging the club.

"I said you must be getting behind with your filing," bawled Burt. "Especially that 'current' cabinet of yours? Must be a lot of forms piling up there."

Sally's eyes widened in amazement. Burt was drawing attention to the "current" cabinet, as if it were there that he had put the forms. But they hadn't been there. She had already looked in that particular cabinet. A sense of uneasy wonderment gripped her. There was something peculiar here, something she didn't understand.

"I shall be checking them later, Burt," said Phineas. "Now, don't bother me. Watch me hit that screwed up bit of paper there—"

Swish! Tl-ling!

Something flew through the air. It wasn't the ball of paper, but a tin which somebody had carelessly left lying on the deck.

Straight through the open porthole of Phineas' new office that tin whizzed. Sally ducked. Then:

Crash!

The tin had struck the electric clock on the wall, smashing the glass. Phineas stood as if petrified. Sally jumped, but she was still thinking about the mystery of those forms. Obviously Burt had left them in a cabinet which she had already searched. Then where were they?

Phineas came charging into the office.

"Goshsakes, I didn't hit you, did I, Sally?" he panted. "But I've smashed that clock. I shouldn't have done it. I was making myself a danger to the public. I should have known better—me, the head prefect. I'll have to give myself a black mark. I'll give myself a thousand lines for this! Where's a form—"

Phineas was appalled by his own action. Phineas, conscience-stricken, intended to punish himself as he would have punished anybody else if they had been guilty of such a dangerous action.

He crossed over to a cabinet to look for a form on which he could record his own offence. He pulled out a drawer and drew out some sheets of paper. And then he stopped, staring.

"Say, what are these?" he muttered. "Filled-in forms dated yesterday? They shouldn't be here. I changed over this drawer last night, and I must have missed these. Jumping snakes!" he added with a bellow. "Here's your name, Sally. And Weston, too—and Briggs—and Fay Manners. So you were all mixed up in that disgraceful rumpus yesterday morning, when the Head thought there was a riot going on."

Sally had gone limp with horror. She remembered that unruly scene among some of the students, when an incident which had begun as a joke had ended up in a first-class row, and the Head had come down heavily on the culprits. But the Merry-makers had not been involved in it.

They were now, however, thanks to Burt's trickery. And no wonder, Sally was thinking in dismay, she had not been able to find these forms in the other office. They had been here all the time, because Phineas had happened to change over a couple of drawers in his filing system.

Phineas was looking grim. "Lucky I found these," he said.

"You'd have dodged punishment if I hadn't."

"But we weren't mixed up in that scene," Sally protested desperately.

"You must have been. It says so here," rapped Phineas, and he thrust the forms under Sally's nose so that she could see them for herself. "Can't say I actually remember catching you four, but that's not to be wondered at when there were so many of you milling around. That's where my system comes in."

Sally's hands clenched. How crafty Alec Burt had been to choose that particular scene for scoring against the Merry-makers! He had reckoned on Phineas not remembering everybody who was involved, and the head prefect had complete faith in the infallibility of his system.

"Listen, Edgar—" began Sally.

"You can't wangle out of it, Sally," Phineas interrupted, and then gave a start. His expression grew grimmer.

"Goshsakes, that's what you were trying to do! I see it now. This is why you were so keen to help me with my system—so that you could look for these and destroy 'em, eh? And that's why you got me interested in this golf. You've been stringing me along all the time, eh? Well, there won't be any golf tournament for you tomorrow. I shall have to report this to the Head, of course, and you'll be confined to your cabins."

Sally stood there, stricken into silence. In the doorway she saw her chums, consternation pictured on their faces. They had arrived just in time to hear the worst. Burt, staring in through the porthole, was grinning triumphantly.

At that moment a student strolled past, accompanied by a passenger.

"I'm sorry I didn't come at the time we arranged," the passenger was saying, "but I clean forgot to alter my watch last night. This changing of ship's time every day is most confusing."

Sally was thinking of her own troubles. She was looking at those incriminating forms. The details were false, but how were she and her chums going to prove that?

Then suddenly she gave a violent start. She grabbed at the forms.

"Edgar, it says here that you took our names at eight o'clock yesterday morning!" she exclaimed. "But all four of us were with you and Professor Willard at that time. Do you remember?"

"Say, that's right!" Phineas nodded, frowning puzzledly. "I remember because the Head was ticking off Burt for being down to breakfast at the wrong time, and telling him he should have remembered to alter his watch to new ship's time. I don't get this—"

"Ask Burt," said Sally grimly. "But you're satisfied now, aren't you, that we couldn't have been mixed up in that rumpus?"

"Sure! But what do you mean, ask Burt—"

Then, looking at Burt, seeing his frightened, guilty face, Phineas began to get ideas. And after he had collared Burt and questioned him the truth came out. Burt had slipped up badly. In forgetting to change to new ship's time—for the time was changed daily as the Ocean Star crossed the Pacific—he had miscalculated when filling up the forms.

He had had hopes of winning the golf tournament, reckoning that either Sally & Co. would be out of it as a result of his trickery, or that, by encouraging Phineas to play for them, they wouldn't stand a chance.

Burt didn't win because, under-going punishment, he didn't play. Nor did Phineas insist on playing in the Merry-makers' team. He had completely lost his craze for golf, condemning himself for allowing it to interfere with his responsibilities as head prefect. Sally & Co. won the team prize, and just to celebrate they helped Edgar T. to get his new filing system under way.

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's story, the Ocean Star puts in at the Fiji Isles, with surprising results for Sally & Co.

MYSTERY AT THE HAUNTED SCHOOL

(Continued from page 112.)

recovering from their amazement, hurried to aid the Fifth Formers.

"Miss—Miss Rolfe!" faltered the headmistress dazedly. "I don't understand—"

"Miss Rolfe is probably not her real name," put in June breathlessly. "I suspected her when I found a glove in the gallery—a glove with Esther Wayne's initials. But I could see that the initials had been freshly put on, to cover some others—and there was a tiny gash in one finger, caused by a sharp ring. Esther doesn't wear a ring, but Miss Rolfe does—an unusual ring, with a very sharp stone, used for cutting pictures out of their frames."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the horrified Miss Falconer. "But how did you—a mere schoolgirl, Judy—come to guess all this? And why should that unprincipled young woman deliberately set out to scare the girls and ruin their art exam?"

June smiled faintly. "To answer your last question first: Miss Rolfe was anxious to delay the

exam, in order to gain time. She knew that if the famous art critic arrived to judge the students' work, he would immediately detect the substitution of the valuable portraits—including the portrait of Dorothy Gray—and the art mistress would be the first person to be questioned!

"As for how I guessed all this—it wasn't exactly a guess, Miss Falconer. It was really a matter of putting two and two together."

Her grey eyes twinkled as she handed the headmistress her card.

"Once I suspected the identity of the Black Abbot," she went on, "I wrote you a little note, purporting to come from a stranger—stating that I was calling to-morrow to give you some information about your art mistress. Miss Rolfe opened the note, as I hoped, and took flight. She decided to collect the last of the pictures to-night, instead of waiting for the fake substitutes to arrive from her artist confederate. We'll know more about her when my uncle turns up with the police."

"Your—your uncle, Judy?" echoed the headmistress, staring dazedly at the card. "Noel Raymond—the detective! Then—then you must be—"

"June Gaynor, the girl detective!" cried Terry excitedly. "Golly, I knew

there was something different about you, Judy—I ought to have guessed!"

June smiled at the excited murmur that went up. Then her expression became grave.

"And now," she said, "with your permission, Miss Falconer, I suggest that we organise a search of the abbey ruins. I've an idea that we'll find Esther Wayne locked up there. It's possible that she stumbled accidentally on Miss Rolfe's secret while wandering in the grounds."

June's theory proved correct. Esther was found locked in the crypt beneath the abbey ruins—badly scared, but unhurt. And in the same dark cell was found a pile of valuable canvases—including the original, unscarred portrait of Dorothy Gray.

And some days later, at a little celebration party given by the Fifth to mark Esther's success in winning the Dorothy Gray Memorial prize, the guests of the evening were Noel Raymond, the famous detective, and June Gaynor, his equally famous young partner.

(End of this week's story.)

OUTLAW FOR AN HOUR is the title of next Friday's long complete story, in which you will read of a girl's daring role to save her brother.

LEADER OF THE ALPINE REVELLERS

(Continued from page 116.)

"I accused you of stealing this," he said slowly. "And you took that terrible risk—to convince me—"

Words seemed to fall him as he looked up and met Jill's frank brown eyes.

"Jill! Can you forgive me," he murmured, "for being such a block-head—such an obstinate doer?"

She knew a glow of happiness. So she had convinced him at last! She had won him over! There was no barrier between them now, no misunderstanding.

"There's nothing to forgive, Hans—really." Her voice shook a little. "We were both the victims of a cunning trick, but—it's over now. And, Hans—look!"

She stepped close beside him, taking from her pocket a half-sheet of paper, with a jagged edge similar to the one he was holding.

On it was written the first half of the mystery waltz.

"You see, they fit exactly," she whispered. "You had the second half and some unknown person sent me the first half. It's like a link between us."

Quickly she pressed her half of the tune into his hand.

"I want you to keep them both," she said, "until we've solved the mystery; until we find how the 'Gondolier's Waltz' links up with the winter-sports test and our visit to Havensburg Castle!"

That impulsive gesture, surely, proved how she trusted him.

The sun rose higher. The valley was flooded with clear Alpine light as they stood side by side in the stillness.

"Hans," she said softly, after a pause, "you won't go to Bernc—now?"

He shook his head.

"No. Not now, Jill."

Her brown eyes danced.

"And you're back again as our coach?" she questioned. "As trainer to the Alpine Revellers in these last vital days before the test?"

He hesitated, frowning slightly.

"I'd like to," he replied. "But you remember, Jill, it's forbidden. Mr. Walsh forbade you so much as to speak to me again."

She saw his hands clench at the memory of that angry scene at the hotel.

"Surely," she cried, "we can convince Mr. Walsh now! That ski-tunic will convince him, Hans. It's the one

definite piece of proof we've got, because Magda swore she sent it to the village shop to be repaired, and we can prove she was lying, and—"

Her words broke off in a startled gasp.

"It's gone!" she exclaimed. The crimson tunic, which Hans had tossed on to the tree-stump some minutes before, had vanished!

Hans swung round, too, a startled frown on his face as he strode to the stump. Close behind it grew a mass of bushes and fir-trees—a tangled wilderness.

"Someone must have crept up while we were talking!" he exclaimed.

"Someone who was perhaps shadowing me—to make sure I was leaving the valley for good. No use trying to follow them in those tangled thickets, Jill. The snow's frozen so hard in there that not a footstep will show."

The evidence—which might have convinced Mr. Walsh—had gone!

Had it been Magda who had taken it? Or Magda's unknown ally at the hotel?

There was a thoughtful frown on Hans' rugged face.

"We've got to face one fact, Jill," he said slowly. "Mr. Walsh thinks I'm a ne'er-do-well—a rascal—and we can't convince him otherwise. That means his ban against me will still stand. You'll still be forbidden to speak to me."

Jill caught her breath.

"But, Hans, you simply must go on training us," she whispered. "It's this last bit of coaching that will make all the difference."

All the difference as to whether they passed the test and took that thrilling ski tour to Havensburg Castle at carnival time, where perhaps the mystery of the 'Gondolier's Waltz' might be solved.

For that Havensburg Castle was some link in this mystery she no longer doubted—it was too clear.

Why, otherwise, should Magda and her confederate try to prevent Hans coaching Jill & Co. for the all-important test?

"I'm certain," Jill said aloud, "that if we win the test and get to the castle, we'll find some clue there. But winning that test is going to be difficult—and we must be coached, Hans."

He nodded seriously.

"I must think," he said. "In some way we will have to meet, without there being a possibility of Mr. Walsh discovering it—"

"Can you think of a way, Hans?"

breathed Jill. She waited breathlessly for his reply.

His deep-set eyes met hers. "There is a way," he murmured—"a possible way by which I can give you more coaching without anyone knowing."

She knew a throb of excitement. "Hans, you mean—"

He was still frowning.

"I must think it out," he replied quietly. "I'll send you a message, Jill, to let you know just how I'm planning it. And now—"

He lifted his head, listening.

The valley was no longer silent. Voices and laughter came to their ears round the near-by bend, for holiday-makers were now on the move and soon winter sports would be in full swing.

"Better not be seen talking together, Jill," Hans said, "in view of Mr. Walsh's ban. But are you perfectly fit again?" he asked, with sudden concern. "Can you make your way back to the hotel alone?"

Gaily she nodded.

"I'm as right as rain. Silly of me to faint like that," she assured him.

"But, Hans—"

She caught his arm.

"We're friends again?" she questioned softly. "For sure?"

That rare smile flitted across his rugged face.

"Friends again, Jill," he echoed—"for certain and for always!"

Those words sang in Jill's heart as she skied back to the hotel.

In spite of all the difficulties that lay ahead, she had won back Hans' friendship. Once more the Alpine Revellers had their trusted boy coach.

"But what," she asked herself, "is Hans' plan for training us in secret? How could he possibly do that in a district swarming with holiday folk?"

And then, as the green-tiled roof of the hotel came into sight, she heard a quick rush of footsteps.

It was her chum, Rosemary Walsh.

"Jill! Thank goodness! I've been hunting for you everywhere!" she burst out.

There was an anxious look in her blue eyes.

"Have you been talking to Hans, Jill, or seeing him?" she asked.

Jill looked startled.

"Why, yes! But—but how did you know?"

"Uncle Gavin knows," replied Rosemary. "Somebody must have been spying on you, Jill—somebody has told him. He wants to see us both right away. He—he's simply furious!"

Don't miss the continuation of this enthralling serial in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.