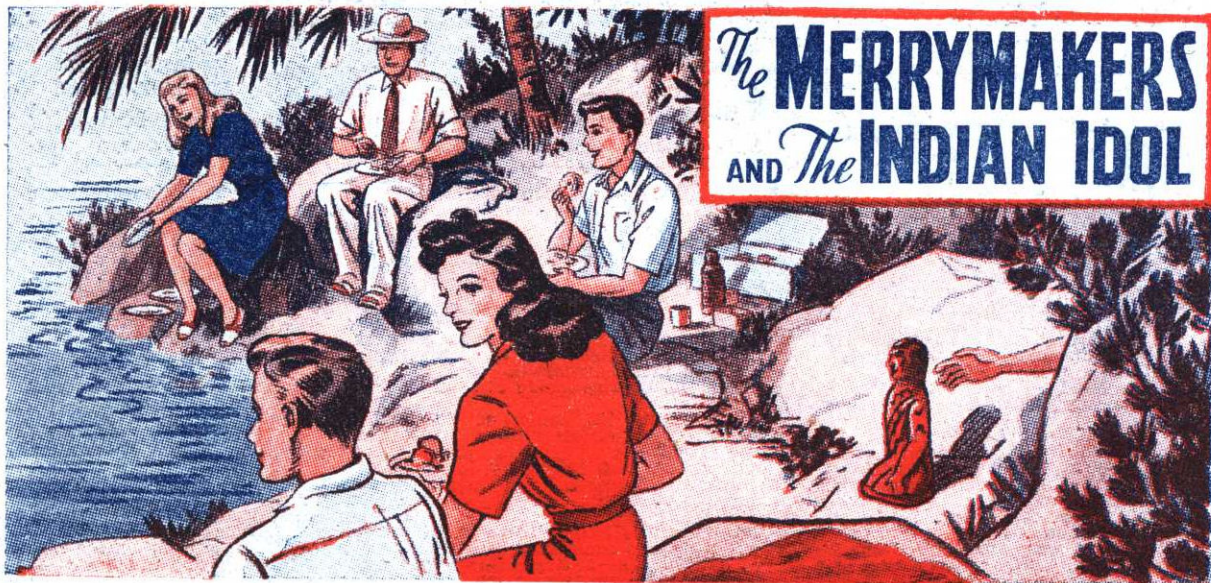


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EVERY
FRIDAY.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^d}

Week
Ending
Feb. 28th,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The MERRYMAKERS AND The INDIAN IDOL

Another Exciting Story Of Sally & Co.'s Adventures In South America—
By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE THIEF IN THE JUNGLE

"AN idol! So that's what Anita's package contained!" Sally Warner & Co. watched excitedly as Emilio Pesharo displayed the contents of the parcel which his daughter had entrusted to them in far-off Rio and which, after many adventures, they had safely delivered.

The idol was carved out of wood and seemed to be of Indian origin. But why had Anita been so anxious that her father should secure it? The chums asked themselves wonderingly as they stood there beside the river from which Senor Pesharo had rescued them a few minutes earlier.

They quickly discovered, for as the South American pressed his thumb on the base of the idol there came a faint clicking sound, and the head swung back on a tiny hinge.

"Why, it's hollow!" exclaimed Don Weston.

"And there's something inside it!" cried Fay Manners.

"Papers, by the look of them," added Johnny Briggs.

With fingers that trembled, Senor Pesharo extracted several tightly rolled sheets of paper from the idol.

"Yes, here they are!" he said. "Anita has not failed me. Now I need no longer hide from the police."

"Hide from the police?" echoed Sally in surprise.

Anita's father nodded. "I have been the victim of a wicked conspiracy, and— But you shall hear the whole story."

And quickly he related it to Sally & Co.

Unjustly accused of fraud in connection with a mining company in which Senor Pesharo had been interested, he had become a fugitive from the police, hiding in the wilds until his daughter could find the documents which would prove his innocence—and expose his rascally partner who was the real culprit.

"Petgrew! I bet it was Petgrew!" exclaimed Johnny.

"Si, senor—Martin Petgrew. You know him?"

The chums nodded grimly. They had bitter cause to know of that rascal. Already he had made two attempts to steal the idol, and it was thanks to him that their plane had had to make a crash landing in these South American wilds.

"What are your plans now?" Sally asked Senor Pesharo. "We must get to Monsarta—"

"And I will take you there, senorita," Anita's father replied. "There I shall hand myself over to the police, for these papers will prove my innocence. You have your two canoes, which are undamaged, and I have a boat moored a little way beyond the falls."

"Gosh, this calls for a celebration!" whooped Johnny jubilantly. "But what are we going to celebrate with? And where's that pilot of ours?"

"Say, I've been busy instead of chinning!" came a cheery voice. And Jerry Bates emerged from the jungle-like forest. "Did I hear something about a celebration? Then here's some wood to start a fire with, and I reckon we can rustle up some tinned odds and ends from the canoes!"

The pilot dumped a pile of dried brushwood on the ground. Sally's eyes sparkled.

"Let's get cracking!" she exclaimed.

Ten minutes later they had a fire going. Tinned bacon and beans followed by tinned peaches, were to be on the menu. Everybody was in high spirits.

Senor Emilio Pesharo had replaced the precious papers in the idol, and it now stood in a place of honour on a near-by boulder.

The chums knew that once they reached Monsarta they would be able to travel on to the airfield where they were to have stopped for refuelling. Jerry Bates told them that another plane would be available to take them on to Buenos Aires.

"Looks like the end of the adventure, Merry-makers!" said Sally. "Golly, won't we have an exciting story to tell—!" She broke off, suddenly going rigid, petrified for a moment. Then: "Look out! The idol!"

For in that moment, happening to glance round, she had seen an arm stretched out from beside a boulder. The hand closed round the idol. Then the figure of a man, who had been concealed behind the boulder, leapt to his feet and went rushing away into the forest.

"Petgrew!" roared Johnny. "He's pinched the idol!"

"That scoundrel! After him!" shouted Emilio Pesharo in a frantic voice.

Everything else became forgotten as the chums rushed in pursuit.

Evidently Martin Petgrew had seen their plane crash-land; had been trailing them ever since, desperate to get hold of the papers which revealed his villainy. Unsuspected, he had caught the whole party napping and got away with the idol.

Anita's father, so elated and full of plans for the future, now looked a stricken man. Once those vital documents were destroyed all hope of proving his innocence would be gone. He would remain a hunted, wanted man.

The thought spurred on Sally & Co. They plunged through the trees, desperately giving chase.

"We're gaming on him!" cried Don.

"He won't get away as long as we can keep him in sight!" panted Sally.

She felt confident that in the long run they would overtake the rascal, and there were six of them to deal with him. But again Sally's confidence was to be shattered.

For suddenly other figures appeared in the forest—lithe, brown-skinned figures who uttered fierce yells at sight of the chums.

Sally pulled up dead, a look of alarm on her face.

"The tribesmen!" she gasped. "Oh

golly, what are we going to do now?"

For these were the warriors from whom they had been escaping when they had been nearly swept over the waterfall.

"Leave it to me!" yelled Johnny. "They're my buddies! They look on me as their medicine-man—"

"But that was before you tricked them and bolted!" Sally said anxiously. "They thought you were such a marvellous medicine-man that they wanted you to stay on. They were friendly then—yes! But will they be friendly now?"

That was the big question. Un- easily the chums stood there, aware that the tribesmen were closing in on them—and aware, too, that Martin Petgrew, taking advantage of the situation, had gone racing on through the jungle-like forest and was now out of sight!



THE FORBIDDEN JU-JU

"Wah! Johnny medicine-man!" "White boy not die! Much magic save him from Thundering Falls! Wah!"

Sally's heart leapt with hope. She could sense from the awed tones in which the tribesmen spoke that they regarded Johnny as even more wonderful than before because they thought his "magic" had saved him from the waterfall.

They lined up before him, bowing low. Johnny puffed out his chest and beamed.

"It's O.K., Sally! They're friendly. I'm still their medicine-man! Wah! Greetings, my faithful warriors—"

"Greetings, Johnny medicine-man!" said their spokesman. "You come longa us. You come back. No let you go again. You stay!"

The grin was wiped off Johnny's face. Sally, vastly relieved that the tribesmen were still friendly, again felt startled and anxious.

This was an alarming situation. The warriors wanted Johnny back as their medicine-man, and now they would watch him more closely than ever. Already they had surrounded him, as if to make sure that he did not elude them again. In the meantime, Petgrew was escaping deeper and deeper into the forest.

Sally had one of her brain-waves. At least Johnny's dilemma could be used to advantage.

"We'll sort out this tangle later," she muttered. "But we've got to catch Petgrew before he destroys those papers—"

"It is a mercy that he will not easily find the secret spring which opens the idol!" Emilio Pesharo breathed. "But now we have lost the trail—"

"These tribesmen will soon find it again!" Sally said excitedly. "Johnny, tell them to search for Petgrew and capture him!"

"Say, Sally's sure the girl for bright ideas!" exclaimed Jerry Bates admiringly.

"You're telling us!" grinned Johnny. "Whoops—that is to say, wah!" He turned to the waiting warriors and pointed through the trees. "Find white man. Plenty evil spirits—plenty bad man! Find—make prisoner!"

"We obey, O Johnny medicine-man! But you come longa us!"

The superstitious tribesmen were ready to obey; but they were determined not to let Johnny out of their sight.

Johnny, however, was only too eager to accompany them, and so were the rest of the party.

Once again the chase was on, this time with expert trackers leading the way. Martin Petgrew, with a lead of some minutes, had completely vanished from sight.

It would have taken Sally & Co. hours to pick up and follow the faint trail left by him. But those warriors followed it at non-stop run; so fast that the white people found themselves dropping behind, unable to keep up such a pace in the humid heat of the jungle-like forest. Half a

dozen of the tribesmen went racing on ahead, the others slowed up, keeping close to Johnny. They were certainly making sure that he did not dodge them!

Suddenly yells rang out through the trees ahead.

"They must have spotted him!" said Don excitedly.

The chums put on a spurt. "Yes, look—there he is!" Fay gasped breathlessly.

Beyond was a clearing, with the river glinting in the sunlight at the far end of it. And across that clearing rushed Martin Petgrew. He reeled as he ran, and quickly the tribesmen overhauled him and rolled him to the ground.

"Jolly good—I mean, plenty much heap fine!" cried Johnny, grinning at the triumphant tribesmen.

"Keep 'em off! Don't let 'em touch me!" whined Petgrew in a terrified voice.

"Huh! Hand back that idol to Senor Pesharo, you rotter!" Johnny said fiercely.

Hate and fury glittered in Petgrew's eyes. But he knew he was beaten. He dragged the idol out from inside his coat, and, with a glad cry, Sally took it and passed it to Anita's father.

"Are the papers safe, senor?" she asked anxiously.

Swiftly Emilio Pesharo operated the secret spring, and the head of the idol swung back on its tiny hinge. Sally let out a cheer as she saw the vital papers, still intact within the cavity. And then she became aware of something else.

A dead silence had fallen on the tribesmen. They were standing there, stiff and motionless as statues. Then a loud wailing and jabbering broke out, finally changing to a fierce, vibrant chant which echoed across the clearing.

"Tis M'Gobo! M'Gobo come back! Big ju-ju M'Gobo come back to us!"

The chief's son—a fine, strapping young warrior who had been the natives' spokesman—sprang forward. In a flash he had snatched the idol from Senor Pesharo's grasp.

The head clicked shut again, the vital papers still inside. But Sally was staring in amazement and consternation.

"Johnny, they say it's their ju-ju!" she gasped. "But you're their medicine-man. Get it back again, for goodness' sake!"

"Leave it to me! Johnny medicine-man say hand back ju-ju!" he commanded.

But the spokesman shook his head. "No have!"

"Eh? Yes have! Johnny medicine-man say so!"

Johnny put on his fiercest glare, but again the spokesman shook his head. He went in awe of Johnny, but he was even more awed by the idol, which he clutched in his hands.

"No have!" he repeated. "You medicine-man, much magic, plenty powerful. But you white boy. This M'Gobo, long-lost ju-ju. Vanish much time ago. Big chief, my father, tell me. Big chief tell me more. Him say only men of tribe touch M'Gobo when him come back. So! Ju-ju come back, but you not of our blood. So! No touch. Wah!"

"Wow!" groaned Johnny, and looked at Sally.

"Oh golly!" Sally echoed that groan.

This was a dismaying complication. They had prevented Martin Petgrew from getting away with the idol. But now they themselves couldn't have it because it had turned out to be the tribe's long-lost ju-ju!

"Tell them it isn't the idol we want, but the papers inside it," said Anita's father desperately.

Johnny passed on this message with sundry grunts and glares. But the result was even more shattering to their hopes.

"No do—no do!" The chief's son rolled his eyes in superstitious fear. "Writings inside M'Gogo? Then 'tis a message from the spirits. M'Gogo pass them on when ready. M'Gogo not ready now. No touch!"

He turned away, joining in the dance of triumph which the other tribes-

men were executing to celebrate the return of their long-lost ju-ju. And then, above the thud of their feet and the din of their chanting, came a stricken cry from Anita's father.

"Look! Look who comes!"

He was pointing to the river. And Sally & Co., following the direction of that quivering finger, saw in the far distance, a launch nosing its way up the river.

"The police!" panted Emilio Pesharo in a hoarse voice. "They must have seen me when I went to Monsarta to watch for your plane and pick up the idol. Now they have trailed me back here. Without those papers I shall be arrested, and nothing can save me then!"



MORE SHOCKS FOR THE CHUMS

Nearer drew that police launch. Anita's father, his face haggard, looked at the chums.

"They must not see me," he said. "But you—this is your chance to get to Monsarta. Good-bye, my friends, and my blessings upon you for all you have done!"

He made to dart off into the forest, but quickly Sally caught at his arm.

"Golly, we're going to see this through together!" she cried. "We're going to help you get those papers somehow."

"Hear, hear!" chorused her chums.

"Reckon that goes for me, too," grinned Jerry Bates, the pilot. "Guess the cops may have come looking for us and not you, senor, but I get your point that you don't want to be seen. Say, couldn't the cops force these tribesmen to hand over the papers?"

But Emilio Pesharo shook his head. "You have seen how superstitious they are, my American friend. You have heard them say that no white man must touch their ju-ju now that it has been returned to them. They mean that. They would destroy the idol rather than let any outsider handle it. I know, because I have worked among natives such as these and seen it happen."

"Gee! Then how are we going to get hold of the papers?" asked Don in dismay.

"That is what worries me," Senor Pesharo admitted. "One false move and all will be lost. We must use guile. Certainly they must not see us touch the idol."

Sally had stood silently by, her brow wrinkled in thought. But now, an excited gleam shot into her blue eyes.

"We can do it—at least, I think we can. It's going to be up to Johnny!"

"What's the wheeze?" asked Johnny. "I'm ready for anything!"

"To do some more of your super magic! But first tell the tribesmen that you want to go back to the village—and hurry, before the police get too near!"

Johnny nodded, and addressed the warriors. Sally knew a moment's anxiety, fearing that her boy chum may have lost his influence over the tribesmen now that their ju-ju had returned. But they obeyed at once. Johnny was still their medicine-man, the maker of magic.

The dancing stopped, and then came a fresh shock. During all the excitement Martin Petgrew had been forgotten, and he had made the most of his opportunity. Creeping away, he had escaped and was now nowhere to be seen.

"He may have gone to meet the police," said Sally, with a worried frown. "He may intend to tell them all about Senor Pesharo. Or he may even make another attempt to get the papers. We've got to hurry—and we mustn't fail."

As they followed the natives through the forest Sally turned to Johnny.

"You remember that wireless equipment we left at the village?" she asked.

"Do I! Much magic! That's how we managed to dodge away this morning, when we left them all sit-

(Please turn to page 299.)



The Girl Who Put Flame First

By ENID BOYTEN

JOCK GIVES WAY

SO that she could enter a Fourth Form team in the forthcoming riding carnival, Silver Dawson was given permission by Miss Wynford, the headmistress, to bring her beloved horse, Flame, and her pet ponies to Lowchester School.

Silver's great ambition was for Flame to win the Gaylord Trophy. First of all, however, it was necessary for her to enter him in the Camberley Steeplechase.

Silver suspected that Ross Buckley, whose daughter, Muriel, was at Lowchester, was working against her.

Silver defied Miss Hatch, the stern Form-mistress, and went to Brookfield to enter Flame in the steeplechase.

As a result of the Buckley's scheming, however, Miss Wynford told Silver that Flame must leave the school.

AMID tense silence Silver grasped Flame's halter. Then she turned to make one last desperate appeal to the headmistress.

"Miss Wynford! Please—" "That will do, Silver!" The headmistress cut her short instantly. "I will inform Miss Hatch that you are excused first lesson, so that you may take your horse back to Hawthorn Stables. Please lead him away—at once!"

There was no more to be said, as Silver realised with a throb of dismay.

Once again she caught that quick glance of triumph between Muriel Buckley and her father. Vaguely she heard sympathetic murmurs from many of the Fourth Formers.

Next moment she was leading Flame towards the school gates.

So the Buckley's had triumphed! They'd succeeded in getting her magnificent chestnut horse sent away from Lowchester!

"It must be because they're plotting to harm him—or steal him!" she told herself. "And they think it will be easier at Hawthorn Stables with only old Jock in charge!"

Her first wild impulse was that she'd never leave Flame. She would refuse to return to school!

"Flame, I'm not leaving you!" she choked out. "I won't!"

But as she led her horse along the winding lanes towards Hawthorn Stables she began to see the dangers of such a defiant act.

If she left school altogether, there would be terrible trouble. Her guardian would be sent for, and very likely would refuse to let her ride in the Camberley Ladies' Steeplechase, in three days' time. And that would ruin all her plans for Flame!

Then what could she do? An idea flashed into her mind, just as she came in sight of the clock on the stable roof.

"That's it!" she thought, her blue eyes glowing. "That's the solution!" She saw Jock as she turned in at the stable yard, and she flew to him,

while the old Scots groom gazed at her with a start of surprise.

"Wisht! I thought ye were at your studies, Miss Silver!" he exclaimed. "And ye've brought yon chestnut!"

"I had to, Jock!" she panted. "The Head won't let him stay at Lowchester any more, and— Jock, I want you to do something for me! I want you to engage a stable-lad, to help you—a strong, trustworthy chap!"

Jock put down the bucket he was carrying with a snort of indignation. He was a dear old fellow, but rather queer-tempered and obstinate at times.

"So that's it!" he snorted. "Ye're thinking poor ould Jock is getting past his work!"

Jock, silly, it isn't that!" Silver cried. "But we need an extra guard for Flame—someone who can be here while you're away. For Flame's in danger, Jock! Ross Buckley means to harm him!"

The old groom shook his head rather grumpily.

"Och! Ye're anxious without reason, lassie!" he muttered. "I'm quite capable o' doing the work o' the stables myself!"

Silver breathed hard. How could she wheedle dear old Jock into doing what she wanted? For she was convinced that an extra guard would make all the difference to Flame's safety.

Frantically she gazed around, until suddenly she noticed something beyond the low fence that separated the yard from the paddock.

At the far end of the grassy paddock a brook gurgled and splashed, and on its bank an obstacle had been erected—a mass of furze between stout wooden posts, with a hurdle in front. Certainly it hadn't been there the last time she had visited the stables.

Jock's eyes twinkled as he followed her glance.

"So ye've spotted it! 'Tis a copy o' the water-jump on the Camberley course—fence, hedge, and brook. But I'm thinkin' yon chestnut will never manage it!" he added, glancing doubtfully at Flame.

Silver's eyes flashed. "But he will!" she cried. "He'll take any jump I put him at!"

Suddenly she seized Jock's arm. "It was sweet of you to erect the jump to help in Flame's training, Jock!" she exclaimed. "And—and I'll strike a bargain with you! If Flame can jump it first try, without brushing a twig with his hoofs or putting a foot wrong, will you find a good stable-boy to help guard him?"

The old groom chuckled. "Och ay! No man can say Jock ever refused a sporting offer!" he grinned. "But remember, no jump—no stable-lad!"

Silver's blue eyes were sparkling now. She'd found a way to humour Jock, and not for one moment did she fear that her horse would fail.

Leaving the groom to saddle and

bride Flame, she darted into Hawthorn Lodge, slipped off her gym tunic, and pulled on a pair of old jodhpurs. A few minutes later she was in the yard again, swinging into the saddle.

Never once did she glance at the stable clock. She forgot that she had only been excused first lesson, and that she ought already to be on her way back to school.

Only one thing mattered now! "Flame, this isn't just ordinary practice!" she whispered in the chestnut's ear, as she turned him into the paddock. "It's—something special!"

He stood like a gleaming statue while she measured the jump with her eye.

"Take care, lassie," Jock warned her.

Silver hardly heard him. A light tap with her heels, and Flame was cantering towards the jump.

The wall of furze loomed ahead of them. And beyond was the brook, with its crumbling edges.

"It's difficult!" she cried. "But you'll do it, boy!"

He swept forward and soared into the air.

Even old Jock couldn't keep back a gasp of admiration at the effortless way Flame sailed over the hedge and the water, to land without the slightest stumble on the farther bank of the brook.

Delightedly, Silver swung him round and came galloping back to where Jock was standing.

She slipped from the saddle, cheeks flushed.

"The stable lad, Jock!" she said. "You'll keep the bargain?"

"Aye! I'll no' break my word!" Jock promised.

She flashed him a radiant smile. She and Flame, between them, had gained their point! Of course, she'd still feel anxious about him, but at least the stable-lad would be an extra safeguard.

"And I'll be here every minute I can spare from school," she hurried on. "We've only three days before the race to finish his training, and—oh, golly!" she ended up in dismay.

For at last her gaze had fallen on the stable clock.

"I must fly!" She squeezed Jock's arm, pressed a fleeting kiss on Flame's velvety muzzle, and raced for the rusty old bike she often used for trips to and from the stable.

FLAME'S STRANGE BEHAVIOUR



"Silver Dawson! This is disgraceful!"

It was Miss Hatch's furious voice.

For Silver, though she'd pedalled as

never before, was six minutes late for second lesson. She had left her cycle in the quad and raced for the classroom, and now she faced the irate gaze of the Fourth Form mistress.

Miss Hatch pointed an accusing finger.

"Not only are you late," she uttered, her voice trembling with indignation, "but you have dared to

come to class in that outlandish garb!"

There was a loud titter from Muriel Buckley. And Silver, glancing down at herself, felt her cheeks redden.

Her brain was in such a whirl that she'd forgotten she was still wearing her jodhpurs. They looked quite neat with the white school blouse, but, of course, such a costume roused the sharp-featured Miss Hatch to fury.

"I—I'm terribly sorry, Miss Hatch," stammered Silver. "I didn't mean to be impolite coming to class like this, but, you see, I had to take Flame over a jump to convince Jock that—"

Miss Hatch checked her with an angry gesture.

"I forbid you to mention that horse to me again, Silver!" she burst out. "Kindly go and change into—civilised apparel, and take two hundred lines for being late!"

Silver went, her cheeks still red.

Two hundred lines! But what did it matter, so long as she could keep Flame safe and complete his training for the all-important race on Saturday?

At lunch-time she rang Jock up at the stables, to make sure that all was well. And as soon as she was free from afternoon school she was pedalling off to Hawthorn Lodge again.

Once again she took Flame over the water-jump, thrilling to realise how fit and keen he was. And during a practice gallop he achieved a burst of speed that dazzled her.

"Flame! You're—you're marvelous!" she told him.

Silver waited while he had his evening feed, to make sure he had the right amount of extra corn, and she drew a breath of relief when she saw young Bob Taylor, the broad-shouldered lad Jock had already engaged to help him.

Then she persuaded Jock to draw her a plan of the Camberley race-course, so that she could study every jump and bend in the track.

And—she was ten minutes late for evening prep!

More lines! Another angry lecture from Miss Hatch! And the same thing happened next day, when she was late for morning call-over, after an early visit to Hawthorn Stables.

"I say, do take care, old thing!" her study-mate, Joan Hartnell, warned her. "You're getting into Hatchie's bad books all over again!"

Joan's honest, grey eyes looked really worried.

"I'll be O.K.," Silver assured her. "After Saturday!"

But she didn't explain what she meant. She had entered for the race under another name, and not to a soul at Lowchester had she breathed a word of her plan.

At all costs she must keep it secret from the Buckleys. For if Ross Buckley knew beforehand he'd have time to plot some treachery that might spoil Flame's chance.

Later that evening she was sitting in a corner, quietly studying Jock's plan of the course, when Dot Wainwright—the red-headed captain of the Fourth—brezzed into the Common-room.

"Heard the news about Saturday, girls?" she cried.

Impulsively Silver sprang to her feet.

"You mean about the Cam—" she began, and then checked herself just in time as she saw Muriel's suspicious eyes fixed on her.

Silver's head was so full of the race that she had jumped to the conclusion that Dot was going to talk about it!

"I mean Sir John's Surprise Outing," said Dot. "It's going to happen on Saturday, girls—and we're the lucky ones this time!"

Sir John was one of the school governors, and from time to time he would send a motor-coach to Lowchester, to take one of the Forms for a trip to some place of interest in the district. They would never know

where they were going till the journey was well under way.

This time, it seemed, it would be the turn of Miss Hatch and the Fourth.

There was a buzz of excited comment from the girls, which Silver scarcely heard, for already she'd dropped into her seat again and was once more studying Jock's map, thinking breathlessly of the race on Saturday.

On Friday evening she was at the stables earlier than usual, and knew a throb of happiness as she heard Flame whinnying to her from his stall.

He was still safe. The Buckleys, so far, hadn't attempted any foul play.

Her cheeks flushed, she led the chestnut out.

"He looks a picture, Jock!" she called gaily. "You've groomed him till he shines like satin, and—Jock—you didn't forget to order the motor horse-box to take him to the course to-morrow?"

"Aye, aye! It'll be here to-night, lassie," Jock said. "But don't ye get over-confident, now. 'Twill be a mighty tough race, ye ken, and—"

"Oh, Jock, don't be doleful!" she laughed. "Come and watch him take that practice jump again."

She mounted and swung Flame into the paddock, facing the jump—a copy of the stiffest test in the whole Camberley course.

Of course, it would be different to-morrow. There would be other horses and riders jostling for position, and cheering crowds and fluttering flags, but—

"You'll win through, Flame!" she told him. "And now let's show Jock what we can do."

She urged him forward, cantering towards the furze hedge with the brook beyond. She gave him that little whispered word which was the signal for him to jump, and then—

A gasp of utter dismay left her lips. For he'd refused! For the first time in his life he'd refused a jump that Silver had asked him to take. He checked and swung sideways so suddenly that if she hadn't been such an expert rider she would have gone over his head.

Jock came running up, his wrinkled face a picture of dismay.

"What's wrong, lassie?" he cried.

"I—I just don't know," she panted, her face pale. "We'll try it again."

She swung the chestnut round to face the jump once more. She felt him quiver beneath her, and heard an odd little whinny come from him. Then once again she urged him towards that hedge of furze, faster and faster, until—

A choking cry came from her.

For the second time he had refused the jump.

"Flame!" Silver choked, slipping from the saddle.

Was he ill? The thought brought a sudden pang to her heart. He was trembling, and turning his head to gaze across the gurgling brook.

Suddenly a new idea dawned on her, and, quick as a flash, she turned to the groom.

"Hold him, Jock!" she gasped. "Stay with him! I'll be back!"

Leaving Jock gazing after her in astonishment, she scrambled across the brook. Bushes grew thickly on the soft ground here, and as she searched with straining eyes, a cry broke from her.

Behind a clump of hawthorns she spied freshly-made footprints.

"Someone was lurking here just now," she whispered. "Only a few seconds ago, I'd say, for the bent grass in one of those prints is still straightening itself."

Then she darted forward, heart pounding, and picked something up from the ground.

It was a girl's handkerchief, and as she examined it she saw the initials "M. B." embroidered in the corner.

And suddenly she understood the meaning of Flame's refusal to take that jump!



A NEW THREAT

Those initials could stand for only one name—Muriel Buckley!

"She was here—spying!" quivered Silver.

"And Flame sensed it. He wouldn't jump the brook because an enemy was lurking here!"

Silver knew a warm throb of gratitude to her wonderful horse.

But at the same instant her fears for Flame's safety came flooding back. Why had Muriel been here? What were the Buckleys plotting on the very eve of the Camberley Chase?

"I must find out!" Silver breathed. For the time being, she knew, Flame would be safe in Jock's care. Her eyes fixed on the ground, where footprints were plainly visible in the damp soil, she sped noiselessly on Muriel's trail.

Suddenly Silver stopped short, quivering from head to foot.

A girl's voice had come to her ears, from beyond a clump of bushes—sneering, unmistakably Muriel's.

"I tell you, Silver's going to run that horse in the race to-morrow," that voice said. "If her name isn't in the list of entries, then she must have entered under a false name, as I suspected."

A sudden breeze, sighing amongst the trees, drowned the words.

Her heart thudding madly, Silver crept forward, pushing her way amongst the bushes. And now, as she crouched low, she could glimpse Muriel with the burly figure of her father, Ross Buckley.

"Not that we've much to fear!" It was Muriel's voice again. "I saw the brute refuse a water jump twice just now. It won't stand an earthly in the Camberley Steeplechase."

Mr. Buckley stuck his chin out truculently.

"I'd say a schoolgirl could never win that race," he stated. "But we daren't risk—" His voice sank lower, and Silver could only catch a few odd words: "—too much at stake—a fortune—"

Recklessly she pushed her way forward, but the pair of plotters were moving farther away, towards an open space where she could not follow.

Only three more words reached her straining ears!

"To-night we must—"

Then they were out of earshot; and Silver stood amongst the bushes, hands clenched, breath coming quickly, those last three words echoing in her ears.

It means they're going to strike at Flame to-night!" she whispered. "I must warn Jock!" she panted, and raced back.

A few moments later she was pouring out her story to the groom.

Jock! What shall we do?" she gasped, grabbing his arm in her eagerness. "Shall I call in the police to protect Flame?"

He shook his head, a look of incredulity on his wrinkled face.

"Ye'll do no such thing, lassie!" he replied. "Och! Ye've no proof at all. Ye just heard a few scrappy words out there in the forest—the police would laugh at ye. And maybe ye misunderstood those few words ye heard!"

"But, Jock, I'm sure of it!" Silver cried.

Again Jock shook his head.

"If there's danger, the stable-lad and I can deal wi' it," he said. "Ye're getting jumpy, lassie—nervy! Go back to school and get a good night's rest, and don't worry about Flame!"

A good night's rest! But how could she, with Flame in peril?

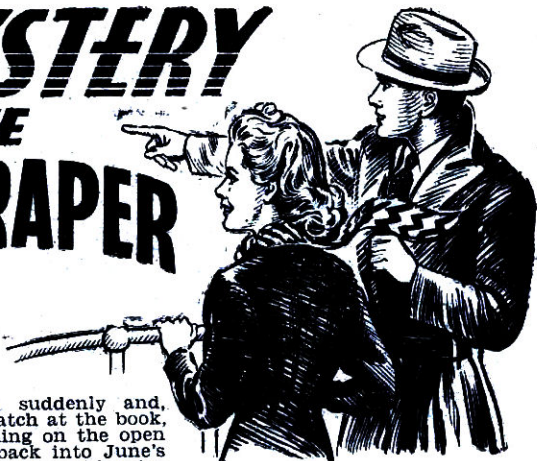
And suddenly she came to a decision.

"I must carry it out!" she told herself. "Even though it means staying away from school all night. I must! It's the only way to keep Flame safe!"

You will thrill to Silver's daring actions in next week's chapters.



The MYSTERY OF THE SKYSCRAPER



By PETER LANGLEY

THE FRIGHTENED FILM STAR

"NUNKY, it seems like a dream!" declared June Gaynor, the girl detective, as she and her uncle stepped out of the streamlined yellow taxi into the bustle and hum of New York's famous Broadway.

Noel Raymond smiled quizzically as he bought a paper at a newsstand, while June gazed round with sparkling eyes.

It was only that morning that their liner had docked in the Hudson River after an exciting voyage, and June had found herself in a new world—a world of towering skyscrapers, magnificent streets, and swift-moving traffic.

A delightful and novel lunch on the roof-garden of a famous hotel had given June a breath-taking glimpse of the city; and now, with Noel, she was eager to explore it, while awaiting a letter from Hollywood, where her uncle was to take up a post as adviser in a new film dealing with Scotland Yard.

"This should interest you, June," said Noel, glancing at a headline in the paper. "Zalia Floyd, the film star, is said to be in New York on a private visit."

"Zalia Floyd—she's my favourite actress!" June declared excitedly. "I've read that she's as— Oh, I beg your pardon!" she gasped apologetically, as she collided with someone in turning.

Quickly she bent to pick up the parcel the tall, slim girl had dropped as she emerged from the shop.

"Say, that's all right," she replied softly, though June noticed that her hands were trembling as she took the parcel. "It was my fault—"

"I do hope I didn't hurt you," put in June impulsively. "I'm—"

She broke off with a quick intake of breath as the girl momentarily raised her head. For an instant she caught a glimpse of the attractive, haunting face beneath the big, stylish hat which hid the upper half of her face; saw the startled look in the other's dark eyes.

"Why—you're Miss Floyd!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Zalia Floyd!"

The girl bit her lip, drawing back slightly and lowering her head. Noel, who had found himself parted from June in the crush, caught sight of his niece talking eagerly to a slender girl dressed in green; but the roar of Broadway drowned their hurried conversation.

"I—I guess you're mistaken—" began the girl unsteadily.

"But—I'm not!" insisted June, her eyes sparkling. "Please, Miss Floyd—I know it's dreadful, cheek—please let me have your autograph!"

And appealingly she held out her autograph-book.

For a moment the girl seemed about to refuse; then her glance rested on a card slipped into the book to mark the place—one of Noel's professional cards, bearing his name and that of his youthful partner.

The girl stiffened suddenly and, making a hurried snatch at the book, she scribbled something on the open page and thrust it back into June's hand, and, before June could voice her eager thanks, she was walking quickly towards the subway.

Excitedly the girl detective glanced down at the open page—and the smile froze on her lips.

"Nunky!" she gasped, looking round anxiously. "Nunky! Here—quickly!"

Noel, puzzled, thrust his way to her side. Speechlessly June pointed to the open page, and over June's shoulder Noel read:

"I must speak to you—alone! It's a matter of life and death. Please follow me—but don't let anyone suspect."

"Did you recognise the girl?" Noel demanded tensely.

"Of course! She was Zalia Floyd, the film star!"

"Phew! Are you quite certain?"

"Positive, nunky. I'd know her anywhere. I thought she seemed nervous when I spoke to her—"

"Come on!" jerked Noel, his eyes gleaming. "There's something behind this, June! The paper states that Zalia Floyd has unknown enemies in Hollywood, but has refused police protection."

The next moment the pair were sprinting towards the subway.

They caught sight of a slender figure disappearing through the turnstile. Quickly June and Noel followed, and they boarded a crowded train a moment after the girl they were shadowing.

June could see Zalia Floyd a little way ahead of them, her gloved hand holding tightly to the rail as the subway train started with a thin blast from its horn.

Swaying to and fro, June suddenly felt her uncle's hand on her arm.

"Don't look round, June," he whispered. "I think your nose needs powdering."

An indignant denial rose to June's lips, but something in Noel's expression caused her to open her handbag and take out her small mirror and puff.

"Tilt the mirror a trifle, June," Noel breathed. "That's better. I want to look at the fellow who jumped into the car as the train started, but he mustn't guess that I'm watching him."

"What—what's he like, nunky?" breathed June, her pulses quickening.

"A tall chap; rather foreign-looking, with a dark moustache and a green homburg hat. He got out of a taxi as we made for the subway. He's watching Miss Floyd over the magazine he's pretending to read."

June shifted the mirror slightly so that she could see the man in question.

"Do you think he's deliberately following her?" she asked.

"Possibly. We must take no risks." The train slowed down, and they

saw the young film star move towards the door.

"Forty-second Street!" breathed Noel tersely, gripping June's arm. "Don't hurry. Watch where she goes."

They followed the girl out into the crowded street, and June saw her glance quickly over her shoulder before disappearing through the glass swing doors of a restaurant—the Rainbow Grill.

Behind her June heard a slight commotion. Noel had collided deliberately with the man in the green homburg, distracting his attention.

"Awfully sorry! So clumsy of me!" he apologised. He turned to June. "Come on! We must take a taxi to the Art Museum."

"The—"

June stared, but the warning pressure of her uncle's hand checked her in the nick of time.

"I thought he might be suspicious," whispered Noel, as he guided her to the taxi rank.

But the man in the homburg was apparently satisfied when he saw them drive off in the taxi. Noel and June alighted, however, at the next block and hurriedly retraced their steps to the Rainbow Grill. There was no sign of the man in the homburg.

"Keep your eyes open for our fair quarry," murmured Noel, as they entered, to be greeted by the lively blare of a jazz band.

At a high glass-and-chromium counter light snacks were being served. Beyond that, surrounding a small, circular dance floor, were tables set in alcoves and screened by palms.

June's heart sank as she looked round in vain for the slim figure of the young film star.

"Nunky, do you think anything could have happened?" she breathed.

"Not yet," said Noel dryly. "We've put that fellow off the track for the time being, but we must contact Miss Floyd before he has time to make the next move. It's plain that she wanted you to meet her here."

"But where is she?" whispered June, staring across the crowded cafe.

Noel shrugged. "She'll probably show up if we take a table." He led the way to a pleasant, secluded table in the corner.

"There's something pretty queer behind all this, June. If Miss Floyd suspected enemies when she was in Hollywood, why did she refuse police protection? And why did she suddenly change her mind when she recognised your name?"

"Your name, you mean, nunky," rejoined June, smiling as she glanced at her handsome young uncle across

the table. "She'd possibly read that you were on your way to New York and hoped to get in touch with you."

"That's possible," agreed Noel. He picked up the menu card, and just then a faint rustling attracted June's attention.

She turned, her grey eyes widening in blank amazement.

From behind the potted palm that screened their table appeared a slender hand—a girl's hand, holding a coloured view card; a picture of a lofty, many storeyed building, surmounted by a curious domed tower.

June's stifled gasp brought Noel to his feet as the slender hand was swiftly withdrawn, the card fluttering on to the table.

In two strides he reached the palm, stepping behind it, but there was no one there. From a door marked "Service" came a dusky-faced waiter, pushing an ice-trolley. The man's eyes goggled as Noel caught him by the arm.

"There was a young lady here just now," rapped the detective, "wearing a large green hat. Which way did she go?"

"Ah not seen no young lady, suh!" declared the man, obviously scared. "Ah only jest came in, suh."

With a baffled frown, Noel released him and returned to the table, snatching up the card.

"Recognise that, June?" he asked tersely. "It's a picture of the Empire State Building, and there's something written at the top."

Excitedly June stared at the faint wording scrawled across the card, with an arrow pointing to the lofty turret.

"Meet me here—without fail."

"It means," said Noel grimly, "that Zalia Floyd is in deadly peril, and we've got to act quickly!"



ZALIA DISAPPEARS

"Wait for me outside the cafe, June!" breathed Noel, meeting his niece's startled glance. "Watch any cars that pull up, and

note who gets in or out. I'm going to make a few inquiries here."

Her pulses racing, June took up her stand outside the cafe, staring at the stream of pedestrians and traffic. She had not expected to run into a mystery on her first day in New York, but the sinister puzzle surrounding the lovely Zalia Floyd had put the girl detective on her mettle.

Guide-book in hand, she strolled along the crowded sidewalk in the casual manner of a youthful sightseer, but her grey eyes were alert and anxious.

She quickened her steps as she saw a large blue car pull up at the corner of the block, the chauffeur leaning out to argue with the driver of a delivery-van.

The van, advertising a special brand of "peanut cookies," was being loaded with a large packing-case from an adjacent shop; but it was at the driver of the car that June was staring. Where had she seen that lean, swarthy face before?

With a sudden start, she remembered, and at the same moment the chauffeur caught sight of her. An unpleasant smile curved the thin lips under the dark moustache as he backed his car, swerving it into the stream of traffic.

The delivery-van moved away, and June pulled out her notebook, quickly jotting down a number.

A moment later Noel joined her, his boyish face tense.

"Anything to report, June?"

"I've seen the man who followed us in the train, nunky, but he was wearing a chauffeur's cap."

Breathlessly June described the encounter.

"I got the number of the car," she declared eagerly.

"Good for you!" Noel gripped her arm, smiling approvingly. "We're getting warmer. I found a little clue"

—he slapped his pocket—"and cajoled that dusky waiter into telling the truth. Miss Floyd tipped him to let her out by the servery entrance. She was obviously terrified of someone—or something."

"What next, nunky?" asked June excitedly.

"The Observatory on top of the Empire State Building," jerked Noel. "It's not many blocks from here. The scoundrel's evidently on her trail, and she's trying frantically to dodge him."

While June hailed a taxi, Noel entered a telephone-booth and put through an urgent call.

A few minutes later they were speeding through the busy streets.

The taxi pulled up outside the magnificent portals of the Empire State Building, and June had one breath-taking glimpse of its dizzy height before they entered.

"The tallest building in the world," murmured Noel, as they joined the queue lining up for the Observatory ticket office. "Miss Floyd probably thought she'd be safer here than anywhere in America. Keep your eyes open, June; we may have raced her here. On the other hand, she may be waiting for us in the Observatory—on the 102nd floor."

"How—how many floors?" gasped June, her thoughts reeling as she followed her uncle to the lifts. "Why, its top must be in the clouds—Oh"—excitedly she grabbed Noel's arm—"there she is!"

She was pointing towards an express lift, the gates of which were just closing on a crowd of passengers. Noel caught a glimpse of a slim figure wearing a floppy green hat before the doors closed and the lift shot out of sight.

"You're positive that was Miss Floyd?" he demanded.

"Positive!" breathed June, her grey eyes eager. "We'll soon know the truth now, nunky. Nothing could happen to her up there."

There was a curious expression on Noel's face as they entered the next lift.

"Eighty-sixth floor, non-stop," drawled the attendant, in reply to the young detective's question. "You change there for the Observatory."

June held tightly to her uncle's arm, her heart in her mouth as they shot swiftly skywards. As the gates opened at the 86th floor she looked eagerly at the small crowd of visitors, but Zalia Floyd was not among them.

There was a smart, modern tea-room on this floor, and a single lift that carried passengers up to the lofty Observatory.

"She—she must have gone up," whispered June.

Noel nodded.

"We'll take precautions," he murmured. "That young lady is a bit too elusive. I'll go up first, while you take a look round the tea-room. There's only one lift to the turret, so no one could go up or down without our seeing them. If she isn't in the cafe, come straight up to me."

June nodded, her heart beating quickly, and a moment later Noel entered the lift and was whisked out of view.

Just then a little crowd of sightseers emerged from the tea-room, and June's pulses leaped as she saw the slim figure of the young film star among them.

Eagerly she darted forward, grabbing the girl's arm.

"Miss Floyd," she gasped, "thank goodness I've found you!"

With a swift warning gesture, the girl jerked her arm away, raising a gloved hand to her lips.

"Not here!" she whispered, with a terrified glance over her shoulder. "Wait till we get to the top."

Puzzled and anxious, June joined the little crowd making for the lift. Surely there could be no danger here—eighty-six floors above New York's busy streets!

"Uncle Noel's waiting in the Observatory," she breathed reassuringly.

The girl nodded, in apparent relief, as she stepped into the lift. But as

June made to follow, the attendant barred her way.

"Sorry, miss. Full up!"

"But—" protested June anxiously.

"I'll be down again in a few minutes, sister," declared the man, politely but firmly, as he closed the doors.

The girl detective bit her lip, waiting with as much patience as she could muster. But she consoled herself with the thought that the strange chase was nearly over. Noel would be waiting for the young film star in the Observatory, and the danger of pursuit had been avoided. Any minute now she would be listening to Zalia's own story.

Her pulses quickened with excitement as the lift returned, and she was whisked at a breath-taking speed to the very top of the towering building.

Eagerly she stepped out into the arched Observatory, where a little group of sightseers were gazing eagerly from the windows at the rooftops and streets of the great city, spread out like a map below.

Dizzily June turned from the breath-taking view, to see Noel crossing towards her, a questioning expression in his blue eyes.

"Nunky, you've spoken to her?" she asked.

"To whom?" Noel stared.

"Why, to Zalia Floyd!" exclaimed June. "She came up in the lift just before me—"

Her voice trailed away as Noel gripped her arm.

"Are you dreaming, June?" he demanded. "There's only one lift to the turret, and I've watched every passenger who came out. Zalia Floyd was not among them, nor anyone resembling her."

The blood drained from June's face as she stared round incredulously. A cold hand seemed to grip her heart.

Impossible, fantastic though it seemed, the frightened film star had vanished from the top of America's highest building—disappeared without a trace!



IN CENTRAL PARK

"Nunky, it's uncanny!" gasped June, dragging her gaze shudderingly from the dizzy view from the window and staring at

the sightseers. "We must have missed her somehow. I was speaking to her before she got into the lift."

Noel's hand tightened on her arm, and the expression in his blue eyes startled her.

"Just a minute, June. Did you see her face?"

"N-no," admitted June, staring. "She kept her head down, but I knew her at once by the things she was wearing—that floppy green hat and light green coat with white gloves—"

"Gloves?" repeated Noel in a strange voice. "On both her hands, June?"

"Of course, nunky! I noticed particularly—"

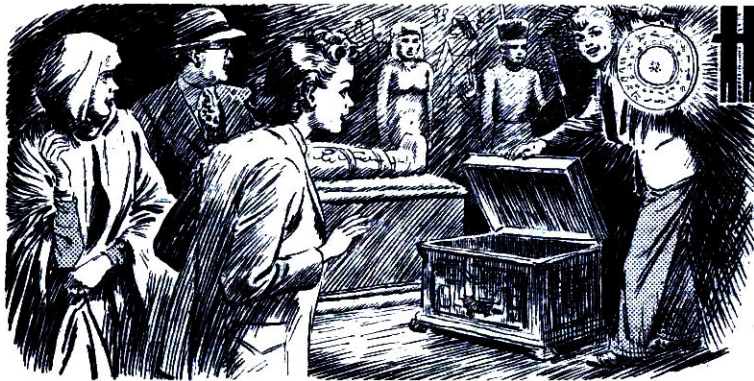
The detective drew in his breath sharply as he slipped a hand into his pocket, taking out a white kid glove.

"I found this in the Rainbow Grill behind that palm," he said grimly, "and it bears Miss Floyd's initials. Unless she's in the habit of carrying a spare glove, it means—"

He spun suddenly on his heel, staring round at the group of sightseers. His face was pale.

"It means, June," he said huskily, "that we've been cunningly tricked. Zalia Floyd intended to come to the State Building, but she never arrived here. That girl you saw was in league with the crooks. Wearing Miss Floyd's hat, she stepped into the lift, taking care that she was the last of the number of passengers allowed. Once in the lift, it would be an easy

(Please turn to the back page)



HER STRANGE ROLE IN EGYPT

INTO THE ANCIENT TOMB

RAY CHILTON and her sister, Sybil, who had been unjustly accused of theft, were in Egypt searching for a priceless Egyptian relic, known as the Gong of Ka.

Also after the gong were Norah Nolan and her father, who had been Ray's fellow guests at the home of Mrs. Van Croom and her nephew, Mike.

Ray and Sybil were kept prisoners in the desert by Hassan, a confederate of Nolan's, while the Nolans, taking Mrs. Van Croom with them, went to the Valley of Ka.

With the aid of Mike, disguised as an Arab, the sisters escaped and rushed to the Valley of Ka.

They reached it just as the Nolans obtained from Mrs. Van Croom the secret of how to enter the tomb where the golden gong was hidden. A few moments later there came shouts from the distance, and turning, Ray was horrified to see a band of Arabs riding towards the valley, led by Hassan.

WITH horror in her eyes Ray watched the white-robed horsemen gallop nearer and yet nearer to the entrance of the valley.

Sybil and Mrs. Van Croom were just as dismayed, for it looked as if they were trapped. Though they were capable of dealing with the Nolans, they could not possibly tackle Hassan and his ruffianly band.

Only Mike seemed undeterred by this alarming development. His face grim and determined, he continued to advance on James Nolan.

"Your Arab pals aren't going to save you, Nolan!" he snapped. "You've had it coming to you for a long time, and now you're going to get it!"

As Norah saw his clenched hands drawn back purposefully, she gave a nervous scream, but her father only laughed.

"You young fool, do you think I'm scared of you?" he cried, and he made a grab for the gun that hung from his belt.

But his fingers never reached it. Like a pile-driver Mike's right fist landed on his jaw, sending him staggering back.

"That'll teach you to forge my name!" he gasped. "And that'll teach you to trick my aunt!"—as his other fist smashed home.

With a howl Norah's father landed flat on his back, but he was up in a trice, a look of fury on his face.

"You cub!" he panted, and hurled himself on the boy, while Norah screamed frantically to the Arab servant who had been erecting a tent.

The Arab snatched up a heavy tent peg and came rushing to his rascally master's aid.

"Look out, Mike!" gasped Ray. But she need not have worried. Mike was equal to this new danger. Eluding James Nolan's whirling fists, he rushed in, seized the scoundrel around the waist and sent him whir-

ling away, to crash into the oncoming Arab.

Both went spinning down the entrance steps, and lay dazed on the sand.

Mike cast them one scornful glance before turning to where Ray, Sybil and Mrs. Van Croom stood.

"Now we'd better get under cover," he panted.

"Under cover?" echoed his aunt, who was still dazed and bewildered by the startling events of the last few minutes.

The boy nodded. "Sure! There's likely to be bullets flying around when Hassan and his pals arrive on the scene, but don't worry." He flashed Mrs. Van Croom a cheery grin. "We'll find some way of beating them."

Turning his back on the mounted Arabs, now only a few yards from the entrance to the valley, he went racing up the stone steps, to grasp the lever which operated the doors of the ancient Egyptian tomb, but, of course, they refused to open.

"You need the scarabs, Michael!" cried Mrs. Van Croom. "Only with their aid can you open the doors."

"The scarabs?" Wonderingly Mike turned, then he gave a shout as he saw Norah, handbag in hand, creeping furtively away. "Quick, stop her! I shouldn't be surprised if she's got the scarabs."

Ray and Sybil rushed after Norah, and while her sister seized the girl, Ray snatched the handbag from her. Eagerly she opened it.

"Here they are!" she cried. "They must have dropped from Nolan's pocket when you knocked him down, Mike, and Norah grabbed them."

"Good girl—bring 'em along—and sharp's the word. Time's precious."

Leaving Norah glaring helplessly, Ray ran up the steps, and when Mrs. Van Croom had explained how the scarabs operated the locked doors, Mike took them and pressed them into the cup-like niches in the metal panels.

Their hearts in their mouths, the others watched.

Hassan and his men had entered the valley now, and were galloping headlong towards the entrance of the tomb. Scimitars and guns glinted in the moonlight, and Ray gave an agitated gasp as she saw the bearded figure of Hassan in the lead.

"Quick—oh, quickly!" she gulped.

Crack! The oncoming ruffians had begun to shoot, and bullets whined and hissed about the little group on top of the steps.

And then, as Mike again dragged down on the lever, the massive doors creaked open. Desperately Ray & Co. plunged through the opening.

"Help me to shut the doors!" panted Mike.

All of them flung their weight against the metal panels, and the doors closed with a bang.

"But we've got to make certain they can't open 'em," declared Mike. "The scarabs are still in place, so if they know the secret—"

He finished with a triumphant cry,

for as Ray took a torch from her pocket and switched it on, the bright beam revealed two great bolts fastened to the doors.

They were stiff and rusty, but after an effort Mike managed to push them into their sockets, then cheerfully he surveyed his companions.

"There, they won't get past that barrier for a bit," he declared. "Now let's explore. I'm just dying to get a look at that jolly old gong."

"Gong," repeated Mrs. Van Croom, and she ran a bewildered hand across her forehead. "What is all this talk about a gong? And what is the explanation of all these amazing happenings?"

Realising that as yet she did not know the whole truth, Mike quickly explained, and his aunt gave a shocked gasp as she learnt the full story of the Nolans' treachery.

"The villains!" she gasped. "To think that anyone could be so heartless! And to think how cruelly I have misjudged you two," she added, turning contritely to Ray and Sybil.

Mike put his arm around her shoulders and gave her a soothing squeeze.

"Don't upset yourself, dear," he said. "I'm sure Ray and her sister don't blame you."

"Of course we don't," said Ray, and Sybil nodded quickly.

"Right—then let's get on," said Mike, and taking the torch from Ray, he led the way forward up the narrow tunnel which seemed to burrow into the heart of the sandstone cliff.

The massive doors behind them blotted out all sound of Hassan & Co.'s furious shouts, and for the moment Ray and Sybil forgot about their enemies as they followed Mike and his aunt up the tunnel. They could only remember that they were on the threshold of discovering what their father had vainly sought for so many years.

In another few minutes they might come upon the Gong of Ka—the priceless Egyptian relic which had lain hidden here unsuspected for thousands of years.



MIKE'S DARING

After twenty yards or so the tunnel opened out into a huge, cathedral-like cavern, and involuntarily Ray & Co. halted, as they realised that this must be the tomb in which the golden gong was hidden.

The moonlight, streaming down through jagged cracks in the roof, revealed that the walls were covered with strange Egyptian pictures, their colours as bright as the day when they had been painted.

In the centre of the sandy floor was a great stone sarcophagus, and above it hung three curiously carved metal bells, suspended from the towering roof by means of copper chains that were green with age.

In one corner stood an Egyptian chariot with solid wooden wheels. Urns and gleaming platters stood in niches in the walls, and at the foot of a life-size effigy of stone was a sandalwood chest, carved and ornamented with Egyptian signs.

For a minute or two none of them moved; none of them spoke. Then Mike, his face flushed with excitement, went running forward.

That chest looks a likely hiding-place!" he cried, and, lifting the ancient lid, he groped inside. "Yes—by gosh! There it is!"

And triumphantly he held up something that gleamed and glowed in the pale light.

Ray, Sybil and Mrs. Van Croom gasped.

It was a golden gong which the excited Mike held—a gong that was decorated with a hundred jewels that glinted and sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow.

The Gong of Ka!

With thrilled eyes they all gazed at it, but their feeling of triumph was short-lived. Abruptly the silence was shattered. From the bottom end of the tunnel came a thudding sound. The cavern rumbled with its thunderous echoes.

"Hassan and his men—they're trying to smash in the doors!" Ray exclaimed.

"Oh, golly, what are we going to do?" asked Sybil.

"Perhaps there's another way out," suggested Mrs. Van Croom.

A quick search killed that slim hope. There was but one way in and out of the cavern.

Only Mike remained unperturbed. That reckless grin still on his face, he was peering up at the jagged cracks in the roof, and suddenly he gave a satisfied chuckle.

"It shouldn't be difficult to climb up one of those bell chains," he commented. "From the top I could reach that big crack."

"Bell chains!" His aunt gazed at him in consternation. "Surely you aren't contemplating climbing up there!"

"Besides, what good would it do?" asked Ray. "Even if you could manage it, the rest of us couldn't."

"Of course you couldn't," agreed Mike. "And there's no reason why you should try. It only wants one of us to go for help."

"But what help can you hope to find?" cried Ray. "We're out in the desert—miles from the nearest oasis, let alone village. You might walk for days without coming across anyone."

To her surprise Mike shook his head.

"That's where you're wrong, old thing. Ahmed's not far away."

"Ahmed?"

It was Sybil who echoed the name, and the curly headed boy chuckled.

"Yes—Ahmed, your jolly old Arab helper. Don't forget he was captured at the same time as I was, and when I got free I sent him off to rustle up all his friends. He promised to follow on with them—just in case they were needed."

Ray's heart gave a thrilled leap.

"And you mean they're actually riding for the Valley of Ka now?" she whispered.

"I hope so. Of course, they don't know exactly where it's to be found. But they can't be far away, and if only I can get out of here I can flash them a signal."

As he spoke Mike crossed to the nearest bell, surveyed its long chain speculatively for a moment, then, leaping up, grasped it with both hands.

Fearfully Ray and the others watched. What they had just learnt had brought new hope to them, yet they knew the tremendous risk Mike was taking. That copper chain was thousands of years old. Suppose it would not bear his weight?

In an agony of suspense they stood round. The boy had his legs curled round the chain now. Hand over hand he was battling his way upward. The discoloured links rattled and creaked ominously, and every few moments from the bottom end of the tunnel there would come another thunderous crash as Hassan & Co. launched their attack on the bolted doors.

Higher and higher Mike ascended until—it happened!

There came a rending, snapping sound, and the chain broke. Ray and Sybil screamed as they saw that boyish figure come hurtling down towards them, while Mrs. Van Croom put a hand to her eyes.

The brass bell, with the broken chain whipping and thrashing about it, clattered to the sandy floor, but Mike did not go with it. He had checked his heart-stopping fall by clutching frantically at one of the other bell chains.

Suspended only by his hands, he dangled there, and Ray turned away. She felt she dared not watch. Every moment she expected the second chain to snap.

Sybil's fingers closed convulsively around her arm.

"Look—oh, look! He's managed it!"

Ray turned her head and gasped. Far above her head was Mike. He had succeeded in clambering up the other chain, and now he sat on the jagged edge of the hole in the roof.

"Keep your peckers up!" he called. "If only Ahmed sees my signal everything in the garden will be O.K."

One last wade, and he had disappeared. Weak from the reaction, Ray flopped down on the sandalwood chest, while Mrs. Van Croom mopped her moist, white face. And at that moment another series of rumbling thuds filled the cavern, reminding them that their enemies were still determined to smash their way in.

"Oh, goodness, let's hope the bolts hold out, that's all," gulped Ray.

Slowly the minutes dragged by. On tenterhooks of suspense they waited. The assault on the doors went on, almost deafening them with its thunderous noise. Another half-hour came and went, and then Ray, unable to sit there a moment longer, jumped to her feet and stumbled into the tunnel. Almost fearfully she gazed down it—just in time to see one of the heavy bolts twist and break.

"Oh, goodness, the other won't hold out much longer!" She turned, finding Sybil and Mrs. Van Croom standing close by, her own despair mirrored in their eyes.

"I am afraid Mike's gallant effort's failed," said Mrs. Van Croom quietly. "He's done his best, but—"

Cr-aaaa-sh!

The shattering noise was followed by a triumphant shout.

"That's done the trick!" Come on, Norah! Come on, Hassan!"

And the metal doors swung open to reveal James Nolan's exultant figure.

THE LAST THRILLING MOMENTS

"Well, what have you got to say now?"

It was Norah who was the first to push her way through the broken doors, and she chuckled maliciously as she came hurrying up to where Ray and the others stood.

None of them answered.

Now James Nolan and Hassan were climbing through the shattered doors. Beyond them could be glimpsed their followers, but the Arabs were too superstitious and scared to enter the tomb.

James Nolan, one hand tenderly fingering the marks left by Mike's fists on his face, glared as he saw the two sisters and Mrs. Van Croom.

"So we meet again," he growled. "Well, it won't be for long. Once we've got the gong and settled accounts with that confounded boy we—"

"With Mike?" cut in Ray, and she faced him with a confidence she was far from feeling. "It's he who's going to do the setting, not you. Once he's got help—"

She stopped, for both Nolan and Hassan had burst into a roar of laughter.

"What foolish optimism, white girl!" Hassan jeered. "You think that the so gallant Michael will come to your rescue. But it is not to be so. His escape through the roof is known, and already my men have surrounded the cliff. He cannot possibly get away."

Ray and Sybil exchanged looks of despair with Mrs. Van Croom. Their last hope had gone.

"Of course he can't get away!"

snapped James Nolan, and his eyes gleamed vengefully. "But now, where is the gong?"

"Find out!" snapped Ray.

Norah grinned mockingly.

"Don't worry—we mean to," she declared. "Come on, dad!"

And eagerly she led the way forward. Pushing the two girls and Mrs. Van Croom before them, James Nolan and Hassan followed. As they entered the cavern and saw the golden gong lying on top of the sarcophagus, the three rascals momentarily halted.

"At last!" gasped James Nolan hoarsely. "At last I've got it!"

And excitedly he went rushing forward. But at that moment there came a grim shout.

"That's where you're mistaken, you scoundrel! You haven't got it, and you're not going to get it!"

And down one of the long chains that dangled from the roof came a lithe, boyish figure.

"Mike!" gasped Ray.

And Mike Williams it was.

Before any of the startled rascals below could get over the first shock he had let go of the chain and come shooting down—right on top of Norah's father.

James Nolan went down with a yell, his body helping to break the boy's fall. In an instant Mike had regained his feet. As he did so there came a furious roar from Hassan, and he leapt forward, scimitar swinging.

Ray and the others screamed, for it looked as if Mike was to pay dearly for his reckless return. But even as Hassan brandished his sword there came another interruption—the crackle of rifles; the sound of panic-stricken yells.

Involuntarily the Arab chieftain swung round.

"What means this?" he gasped.

"It means you've had it!" cried Mike, and, swift to make the most of his opportunity, he hurled himself forward, catching the unprepared Hassan in a flying Rugby tackle that sent his scimitar crashing in one direction and himself toppling in another. And as the plump scoundrel hit the sandy floor, Mike turned and grinned at his aunt and the flabbergasted girls.

"Don't worry—that's Ahmed and his pals outside," he declared.

"Ahmed?" whispered Ray.

He nodded.

"Yes, I managed to signal to him before Hassan's gang spotted me up on the cliff top, so keep your pecker up. It's all over bar shouting."

And all over it was.

Surprised by Ahmed and his followers, Hassan's rascally band scattered and fled. As for their leader and the Nolans, they were in no condition to cause further trouble, and when next morning Ray & Co. set out for Cairo, their beaten, sullen enemies went with them—as prisoners. And with them also went, of course, the Gong of Ka.

The priceless relic had to be handed over to the authorities, but Ray and Sybil received a rich reward for finding it. They wanted Mike to take a share of the money, but he refused.

"I've got something better than cash out of this jolly old adventure," he declared one night when they were celebrating the successful conclusion of their desert trip in one of Cairo's most famous restaurants.

"And what is that, Michael?" asked Mrs. Van Croom.

"The best little friend in the world," he replied.

"And who might that be?" asked Sybil, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

Mike grinned.

"Ah, that would be telling," he said, but the way he looked across at the happy, rosy-cheeked Ray told its own story.

THE END.

It is goodbye to Ray in Egypt but prepare now to visit China with its strange and quaint customs, with its colour and thrilling adventure. Look out for the first chapters of "Her Holiday with Ling Min Yo" in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL.

ASSISTANT to the Secret Agent

By DOROTHY PAGE



CHASED BY THE COUNT

WHEN Gaye Leaman visited the office of a theatrical agent in response to an advertisement in a London newspaper, she was amazed to discover that Peter Kirby, the young man who interviewed her, was a secret agent, known as Mr. X.

He told her he was investigating the mysterious activities of an elusive personality called the Count. Peter had in his possession a brief-case which the Count and Roma Vadell, his beautiful niece, were anxious to secure.

The secret agent told Gaye that she was too young for the job he had advertised, and volunteered to drive her home in his sports car, taking the valuable brief-case with him. On the way they were chased by another car driven by the Count. Skidding into a side road, Peter Kirby slowed up and shouted to Gaye to jump.

"JUMP, Gaye!"

As Peter Kirby rapped out the command, he leant across and opened the car door on Gaye's side.

Gaye grabbed for her brief-case, knowing she must be quick. There were only seconds to spare before the pursuing car came in sight.

The secret agent's big sports car had nearly stopped. Case in hand, she jumped out. She heard the door slam behind her, heard a gay call of "Happy days, Gaye!" and then he had smacked through the gears to bottom and was drawing away in a crescendo of fierce power.

A little dazed, she stood for a second on the road, case in hand. The thunder of an engine from the main road made her remember. She rushed to the ditch at the side of the road and jumped into it.

With not a moment to spare. The pursuing car, going too fast, had overshot the turn. But now it stopped, backed, and made it. Glaring headlights illuminated the road in Peter's wake.

Heart bounding, Gaye crouched in the ditch. She heard the pursuing car roar past above. Thrilling curiosity made her risk a flashing glance up—to see only the rear of a huge black car as it swept by.

From somewhere far up the road came a toot-tooty-toot-toot of an electric horn. She leant against the side of the ditch, knees feeling a little trembly, but her brown eyes shining like stars.

That jaunty call on the horn was obviously Peter! How like him! "Good luck," she breathed. "Get clear with that case!"

Her gaze was on the darkened road. Somewhere along there, driving like mad on his mysterious mission with the vital brief-case, was the amazing young man known to some as Mr. X, but to her as Peter Kirby.

"Peter Kirby—secret agent!" She thrilled, still gripped by the wonder of all that had happened. "A secret agent out to beat some vast under-

world activity that's baffling the police—"

An activity with a mysterious person known as the Count at its head—the Count and his beautiful niece, whom Gaye had met, Roma Vadell.

Oh, gee, what was it all about? But how wonderful, how thrilling to have played a small part in it all, to have helped Peter—

Her thoughts abruptly switched. She sighed and suddenly slumped. How thrilling—yes, but now it was all over. Peter had said good-bye, told her that this was no game for her to get mixed up in.

Slowly she clambered from the grassy ditch. Yes, it was all over. Her last chance to get a job in London had failed that day. Her money was almost exhausted. On the morrow she would have to return to her Aunt Jennie in the country and settle down to a quiet, humdrum life—a life so in variance with her adventure-loving spirit.

She began to walk back down the road, swinging her brief-case rather sadly. If she cut across the heath, she would soon reach the girls' hostel where she was staying.

"All over," she murmured. "And I still don't know what it's all about. Oh, what an amazing person Peter is! But I shan't see him again or know what he's doing—"

She broke off and sighed again. Crossing the heath, she eventually reached the old Georgian house that had been converted into a hostel. She opened the front door with her key. In the hall, she heard a murmur of voices from the big dining-room.

She turned away from it. Somehow, after all that had happened, she didn't want to mingle with the other girls and chatter about everyday matters.

Slowly she mounted to her tiny bedroom. She dropped her case on the bed and stripped off her coat.

The breathless dash in the car had ruffled her auburn hair. She reached for the case to get a comb—and then started back as if stung!

There was something almost near horror in her wide brown eyes.

For it was not her brief-case that lay on the bed.

"It—it's Peter's!" she whispered. All too obvious what had happened.

In her dash from the sports car she had snatched up the wrong case—snatched the case which Peter had declared to be so vitally important and which had been the cause of that whirlwind speed dash through the night.

THE JIGSAW PUZZLE

"Peter's case!" Gaye paced the tiny bedroom. Irresistibly her wide-eyed gaze kept being drawn to the flat leather case



lying on the bed. It looked so ordinary, so commonplace. And yet the contents must be

far from that. The events of the day had proved it. And Peter had intended to complete some vital mission with it after dropping her.

"And—and his enemies meant to get it at all costs," she breathed. "Now—I've got it! Golly, me! What shall I do?"

She thought of Peter. How long before he realised what had happened? What would he do?

She felt helpless. How could she contact Peter? She knew practically nothing about him—where he lived or anything. The office where she had met him he had borrowed for the day.

"What can I do?" she repeated anxiously. "He said the case was urgent, and although he—he sort of joked about it I'm sure he was serious."

She was fascinated by the case, and kept touching it. What was inside? Something amazing—something staggeringly important, obviously. But what to do about it?

Should she ask the advice of Mrs. Stillman, the brisk woman who ran the girls' hostel?

"No," she decided immediately, instinctively feeling that that was the last thing Peter would want. "And yet—I must get it to him!"

Looking at the case, she thrilled to a sudden thought. Perhaps Peter's address would be stamped inside the case. Dare she open it and see?

She hesitated and then, bending over the case, she began to fumble with the straps with fingers that trembled. A few moments later the case was undone. She lifted the flap and the side of a cardboard box met her gaze. There was nothing else in the case. With a little gulp she put in her hand and drew it out.

A gasp of sheer incredulity left her lips. Suddenly she plumped down on the bed, staring bemusedly at the cardboard box. On the lid was a brightly coloured picture of a cottage in a country lane.

It was a children's jigsaw juzzle.

She stared and stared. There could be no mistake. There, above the conventionally pretty picture, were the words: "Tip-top Jigsaw Puzzles." A tentative shake at the box brought the unmistakable sound of the pieces rattling inside.

"It's—it's just crazy!" she stutted. "It doesn't make sense! Surely Peter couldn't have been chased for this!"

In a rather dream-like way she found herself opening the box. A sudden thought had come to her bewildered mind that perhaps there was something unusual and significant among the pieces.

But no! As she shook them out on to the table near by she saw that they were only what they purported to be—pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

The empty box slid from Gaye's limp fingers. Automatically she bent to retrieve it. The box had turned in falling, and as she lifted it the bottom met her gaze.

There were words scrawled on the cardboard in pencil, words that made this bewildering discovery take on a new significance.

"You've got to act fast, X. 7.30 is the deadline. Watch for the Count, but you MUST get the toy soldier."

The message, as if written in great haste, grew more and more illegible, and finally trailed away on the word "soldier."

Carefully Gaye put the box on the table. She gave a tiny shiver of excitement, excitement that grew and grew.

"Now steady, Gaye—steady!" she reproved herself breathlessly. "Think about it a bit—think it out. Oh, golly me, there's something so odd here!"

She thought, staring at the table, her brown eyes luminous, that scrawled message proved that someone, in a great hurry, had had to get the jigsaw puzzle to Mr. X.

"Someone who knows Peter only as X, as a secret agent—one of Peter's helpers!" she decided quickly. "That's it! He warns Peter against the Count. And by seven-thirty Peter has got to get hold of a toy soldier, of all things! That was why Peter was in a hurry, but—"

She paused. Obviously, then, Peter had read that scrawled message. But where and what was this toy soldier? How could it be so important? And—why on earth the jigsaw puzzle of a country cottage?

"Oh, golly me, Gaye, this is too much for you!"

For perhaps the first time she began to realise how strange and involved was the whole affair. She remembered Peter's warning words: "No game for you to be in, Gaye. It's far bigger than you think."

She ran her fingers through her short auburn curls and stared at the pieces of the puzzle. What should she do now—what could she do? On a sudden impulse she looked at her watch. It was six-forty-five. That scrawled message said that seven-thirty was the deadline.

"Must get the toy soldier," she repeated bewilderedly. "What—oh!"

She sprang to her feet, seizing up several of the jigsaw pieces, realising then a very strange fact. Although the picture of the country scene on the lid of the box was all in light greens, yellows, reds and browns, several of the pieces were dark blue and some even black.

"Supposing," she breathed, "that these pieces don't make the picture shown on the lid? Supposing it's an entirely different picture—a picture that is some sort of clue or message!"

She almost clapped her hands, delighted at the deduction.

Eager to test it, she brushed everything off the little table except the jigsaw pieces and sat down in front of them.

She worked fast. The puzzle was not difficult, and soon a picture began to take shape. As it did so she became aware of a queer thing.

She recognised the picture!

"Why, it—it's the Palace of Fun that's only a few streets away!" she gasped. "Oh, but surely it can't be!"

But it was. She fitted the last few pieces, and there before her was a roughly painted picture of the Palace of Fun, situated not a quarter of a mile from the hostel!

She was staggered. And now, incredible though it seemed, everything pointed to the following facts:

That a helper of Peter Kirby desperately wanted him to go to the Palace of Fun and get hold of a toy soldier at all costs—get hold of it before 7.30 that evening! And he must beware of the Count!

"It seems dappy," Gaye breathed, "but Peter was coming in this direction. Had he already solved the puzzle? Golly me, if not, he won't know where to go."

She rose slowly from her chair. Thoughts, thrilling thoughts, were jumping into her mind. She pretended to ignore them, but back they came, whispering: "Go on, Gaye. You go to the Palace of Fun. There can be no harm in that. Remember there's no chance of Peter being able to contact you—no chance of your being able to get the puzzle to him before 7.30.

But if you go and just look around, why you might see something, that would be helpful to Peter!"

Her breath came faster; her brown eyes grew luminous.

"But he said you were to keep out of this, Gaye," she said aloud. "He thinks you're too young—just a schoolgirl. He might be there—he might be furious!"

But the spirit of adventure had seized her tightly. Her chin came up. Why shouldn't she go? Gracious, what could possibly happen in the Palace of Fun in the crowded High Street? It was so fantastic that for a second she wondered if she'd got everything wrong. Perhaps the jigsaw puzzle wasn't a clue, after all. But it must be, surely.

"And—and if Peter does get there," she thought, with increasing excitement, "why, he needn't see me. Golly, yes, surely this is my chance to show him what I can do in the acting way. That's it!"

She laughed delightedly and darted across to a big tin box tucked away under her bed.

"I'll go disguised," she breathed.



GAYE IN DISGUISE

Mrs. Stillman, manageress of the hostel, was crossing the hall from the dining-room when she saw a girl about to leave by way

of the front door.

She paused and started. A quick frown creased her broad brow.

The girl, dressed in a light coat and black beret, had plump, rosy cheeks, a chestnut page-boy bob, and glasses. She walked with a slight stoop.

"One moment!" exclaimed Mrs. Stillman. "You are not one of the girls of this hostel! What are you doing in—"

She broke off, hurrying angrily forward. For the girl, without glancing round, had darted through the door, way and slammed the door. By the time Mrs. Stillman had opened it and moved to the top step, the girl was running out of sight round the nearest corner.

Gaye Leaman was on her way to the Palace of Fun!

Once she was sure that Mrs. Stillman had not followed, she slowed, breathless and more than a little gleeful.

It was terribly exciting somehow to realise that the manageress had not had the faintest idea who she really was.

What a difference the chestnut wig made! Spectacles always helped, too. Then two little pads in the cheeks, plus some No. 9 grease-paint, carefully powdered over, gave her face a chubby and even younger appearance.

Add to that a slight stoop and untidy walk in direct contrast to her normal upright bearing and springy tread, and she looked a different girl.

A delicious sense of excitement gripped her now. It was impossible not to feel that she was playing the sort of role that perhaps Mr. X—Peter—often played in his life as a secret agent.

She reached the near-by shopping street and made her way through the pedestrians. The town hall clock was clearly in sight. Ten minutes past seven. The Palace of Fun closed, she knew, at 7.45.

Its brightly lit entrance showed on the opposite side of the street. She stood on the pavement, unnoticed by the busy throng, staring across at it. She had been inside once. It was rather a jolly place.

There was a ghost train, little roundabouts run in the day for tiny tots, hoopla, try-your-strength machines, penny-in-the-slot machines of the type found on seaside piers, and so on.

Standing there, watching a group of cheery people go inside, the disguised Gaye felt a strong sense of unreality. Somehow it was incredible to suppose that such a jolly place could play any part in the vast and mysterious underworld activity that Peter Kirby had hinted at.

"It's all so amazing and queer," she murmured.

Walking across the road, she passed through the brilliantly lit entrance. The strains of music instantly fell on her ears—laughter and chatter. All about her were bright lights and people amusing themselves.

It was an atmosphere into which the events of the day didn't fit at all. How could one think of strange people like the Count and Roma Vadell—and Peter Kirby, having any sort of connection with this jolly place?

Gaye roamed through the different rooms, trying first this machine, then that, as if she was just an ordinary visitor enjoying herself. And all the time she was on the alert for two things. One a sign of Peter Kirby; two, anything in the nature of a toy soldier.

"Perhaps," she suddenly thought, "a toy soldier is offered as a prize at one of the stalls. Oh, golly, a toy soldier sounds so odd!"

She searched carefully, never forgetting the role she was playing and purposely assuming a rather owlish look. But nowhere could she find a toy soldier; nowhere did she see anyone remotely resembling Peter Kirby.

She paused at the entrance to another room, full of penny-in-the-slot machines, and glanced at her watch. The time was twenty-five minutes past seven.

"Five minutes to go," she found herself murmuring. She gave a rueful grin. "Gaye, I—I believe you're just being an ass. Serves you right for thinking you were clever. You've got it all wrong—Oh!"

She broke off with a gasp and suddenly found herself on the floor. A bright-faced boy had hurried through the doorway and cannoned into her.

"Gosh! I say, I'm awfully sorry!" His face concerned, he hastened to help her up. "I was so peeved by the bloke in charge of the machines in there that I didn't look where I was going. Gosh, I am sorry!"

"It's all right," Gaye smiled.

"I'm not usually clumsy, really." He was anxious to excuse himself. "But favouritism always riles me. It seems that a beautiful, snooty girl with green eyes can use a machine marked 'Out of order,' but yours truly can't. Bit peevish, specially when the machine isn't out of order."

Gaye's forgiving smile vanished. Those few words: "Beautiful snooty girl with green eyes" rang a thrilling chord in her mind. Only that afternoon she had met a beautiful, aloof girl with deep green eyes—Roma Vadell, niece of the Count!

"Sounds a bit mean," she said to the boy. "What happened?"

He frowned, glad to air his grievance.

"Why, I was in here last night about the same time. I spotted a machine in one corner, nearly hidden by a curtain. I was going to have a look at it when I saw an 'Out of order' notice on it. Then this girl came in—"

"What—what was she like, did you say?" asked Gaye.

"Eh? Oh, I suppose you'd call her jolly beautiful," he conceded. "Black hair, green eyes, fur coat, and gold-tipped cigarettes and all."

Gaye caught her breath, tingling. Roma Vadell had smoked gold-tipped cigarettes!

"And—and then?" she asked eagerly.

"I say!" He grinned. "Jolly decent of you to listen to my grouses like this. Well, this girl went over to the machine, put a penny in and worked it. The bloke in charge must have seen her, too, but he didn't say a word. Well, when I went to try it to-night he nearly jumped down my throat and shooed me off. That's what peeved me—"

He broke off, his jaw dropping, for Gaye had stepped past him into the room beyond. She hadn't meant to be rude; she was just so tremendously excited by what she had learnt that she had almost forgotten his presence. The overpowering desire to see this machine with the "Out of order" notice made her act impulsively.

Inside the room, her spectacles

masked her quick, darting glances to right and left. Round the wall were the normal slot machines of skill and amusement. Some half-dozen people were working a few of them.

In one corner leant a uniformed man, obviously the attendant in charge. In the opposite corner was an alcove, half concealed by a curtain. The alcove housed a lone machine, an "Out of order" notice prominently displayed on it.

Gaye sauntered towards it, conscious of a tremendous excitement. Pretending to be interested in a machine that registered the strength of one's hand grip, she cast a covert glance towards the alcove.

The machine there was the electrically-operated toy crane type. A penny in the slot set the crane in

motion, and the idea was to guide it by means of a handle outside the case to pick up one of the presents inside.

There were several small articles to be won, but only one of these took Gaye's glance. took it and held it in fascination.

It was a box of matches. Her eyes grew wide. Now she knew she had made no mistake in her reading of the jigsaw puzzle! Now she was certain that it had been Roma Vadell, niece of the Count, who had been here the previous night, and who would presumably come again to-night—arrive at any second.

For here was the answer—amazing one though it was—that scrawled pencil message on the jig-saw box.

The pictorial trade-mark on the box of matches was—

A toy soldier! This was the "toy soldier" that Peter Kirby was to have got at all costs. A box of matches, but obviously no ordinary box!

Faintly the chimes of the town hall clock reached to Gaye's ears.

Half-past seven! The dead line! At any second Roma Vadell would come, and Peter was not here to act. Gaye's breath came faster. She had come to a thrilling, momentous decision. Her hand dropped to the satchel bag hanging from her shoulder. And as she fumbled for a penny, she moved nearer and nearer to the alcove.

Will Gaye succeed in getting the box of matches, and what strange secret does it hold? You will find next Friday's instalment more thrilling than ever.

THE MERRYMAKERS AND THE INDIAN IDOL

(Continued from page 290.)

ting round with their ears glued to that receiver I'd repaired. I'm jolly good at tinkering around with wireless sets," Johnny boasted.

"You'd better be!" said Sally, and went on to expound her idea.

As well as the receiver, Johnny had also salvaged a small transmitting set and microphone from the crashed aircraft. Sally knew that the transmitter had been damaged, and that was where Johnny came in.

"You've got to repair it," she told him, "so that M'Gobo, the ju-ju, can talk!"

"Eh? Gosh!" Johnny blinked.

"At least, appear to talk," Sally went on quickly. "But it will be you talking through the microphone, of course. M'Gobo's going to tell the tribe that the writings inside him are to be handed to Johnny medicine-man by order of the spirits! How's that?"

"Phew! It's terrific—"
"Can you do it?"
"It's as good as done!" said Johnny confidently.

And so, eventually, Sally & Co. found themselves back at the village beside the river. Once again they were fascinated by the sight of all those caves in the cliff-face where dwelt this primitive community. Crude steps cut into the rock led up to some of the caves; the higher ones were reached by frail-looking ladders made from creeper.

There in the centre of the communal compound on the river-bank was the wireless set, just as the chums had left it and still blaring out music being broadcast from some distant studio. And around it, listening in awed wonder, were the chief and all the other cave-dwellers.

Loud, joyous cries greeted the appearance of Johnny, the white medicine-man whose "magic" had produced this "wonder box" as the tribesmen called the wireless set.

The chief, tall and dignified, came forward to welcome him. But then everybody saw the idol which the chief's son was holding on high. For a few moments there was an awed silence, then pandemonium broke out as the cave-dwellers hailed the return of their long-lost ju-ju. The idol was set up on a ledge in a palm-thatched hut, and the whole community began circling round it in a triumphant dance which became faster and more frenzied with every passing minute.

The white people became forgotten; even Johnny had to take a back seat as homage was paid to M'Gobo. But that suited the chums.

Johnny had spotted the small transmitting-set just where he had left it. Quickly he got to work on it, assisted by Don and Jerry Bates. Then an improvised aerial was fixed to the high branch of a tree, and finally the microphone was fixed in place.

"Is the set working yet, Johnny?" asked Sally anxiously.

He blew into the microphone to test it.

"Not yet. Give me a few more minutes."

If it was a strain for Sally, she

knew how much more so it must be for Anita's father.

Everything depended on the success of her idea; and the success of that depended on Johnny's ability to get the wireless in working order.

Now the cave-dwellers, exhausted by their dancing, began to gather round. Sally nodded to Johnny.

"Johnny medicine-man make more magic!" he told them. "Spirits speak. They say M'Gobo will speak!"

"When? When will M'Gobo speak?" came the eager cry.

"Plenty soon. Spirits say get ready!"

Frantically Johnny juggled around with wires and moved dials. Again he blew into the microphone—and a faint hissing sound was heard from the receiver.

"It's working—I mean, the spirits come!" cried Sally, quivering with excitement.

Now was the crucial moment. It was now or never if they were to get the vital papers for Senor Pesharo.

Sally looked at Johnny. He held the microphone close to his lips. And then—

Voices rang out—voices which the chums could not understand. But Senor Pesharo understood them. He spun round, the colour draining from his face.

"The police! They've trailed us here!"

Two uniformed figures rushed across the compound. Anita's father turned to flee, but too late. He was seized by the police.

"Wait!" cried Sally. "Senor Pesharo is innocent—"

"Pesharo comes with us!"

"No! Listen! There are papers here which prove his innocence. We're trying to get them now. Johnny—"

But Johnny suddenly dropped the microphone as if it had become red-hot in his hand. His eyes were wide with consternation.

"Look—look!" The words choked in his throat.

He was gazing across the compound towards the hut where M'Gobo, the idol, had been given a place of honour on the ledge inside it. But now the idol lay on the ground, and in the act of picking it up was Martin Petgrew!

But that was only half the shattering truth. Petgrew had concealed himself in the branches of the tree overhanging the hut. He had dropped, intending to make his last desperate bid to gain possession of the idol. In dropping, he had knocked over the idol, and it had bounded on to a stone, causing the secret spring to operate and open the head.

Sally gave a horrified cry as she saw Petgrew snatch the papers out of the secret cavity. Saw him, in the same moment, whip a lighter out of his pocket.

"He's going to burn them!" shrieked Fay.

Sally was already running, but she knew she would never get there in time. A gloating smile of triumph on his face, the lighter aflame, Petgrew was in the act of applying it to the precious papers.

And then, just as all seemed lost—

A figure flashed past Sally. It was Johnny, dangling from the length of aerial wire fastened to a tree branch,

swinging through the air like a monkey!

At the end of the swing he released his hold on the wire and catapulted onwards—right on top of Petgrew. The lighter was knocked out of the scoundrel's fingers; the papers fluttered to the ground.

Sally, streaking up a couple of seconds later, pounced on them.

"They're safe, senior! Now the police can have them. Golly!"

She found herself swept aside as the infuriated tribesmen hurled themselves upon Martin Petgrew. Johnny crawled out from under that mass of heaving bodies, tattered but triumphant.

The police were examining the papers, and Emilio Pesharo was smiling, knowing that he had nothing to fear now.

It would have gone badly for Martin Petgrew had not Johnny, exerting his influence as medicine-man, called off the tribesmen. Petgrew was handcuffed, and he knew that the game was up.

The warriors surged round Johnny. "Wah! You mighty medicine-man! You save M'Gobo!"

Johnny beamed modestly.

"Wah! Johnny medicine-man much pleased. But now he go—"

"Not go! Not go! Stay here!"

"Not go! Make M'Gobo speak out of magic box!"

Johnny gulped. His chums were looking startled. All had ended well, but they couldn't go without old Johnny. Then Sally smiled and quickly whispered in Johnny's ear.

Johnny grinned and nodded as he crossed the compound and picked up the microphone.

"Jolly good idea, Sally. Must use this after all the work I put on it. Wah!" He grunted into the mike, and his voice crackled through the loudspeaker. "M'Gobo speak through spirits of Johnny medicine-man. M'Gobo say let white medicine-man go. Wah! 'Tis the wish of the spirits!"

An awed hush had fallen on the tribesmen. But now the chief turned to Johnny.

"M'Gobo say you go! Then you go! Farewell, maker of magic!"

"Farewell! Wah!" grunted Johnny.

"Farewell!" chorused his chums.

And so they went—Sally & Co., Senor Pesharo, Jerry Bates, and Martin Petgrew, still handcuffed. They went with the police in their launch, and there were loud cheers as they set off down river, heading towards civilisation.

Late that afternoon they reached Monsarta, and there next day they said good-bye to Senor Pesharo, who would be going to Rio to join Anita, his daughter, as soon as everything was cleared up. Petgrew was taken straight to the cells, while Sally & Co., accompanied by Jerry Bates, were driven to the airfield. There a plane awaited them, and half an hour later they were off once more, bound for Buenos Aires.

"Well, this is the end of the adventure!" laughed Sally.

And this time she was a true prophet.

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday Sally & Co. reach Buenos Aires, and you will read of their further thrilling adventures.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SKYSCRAPER

(Continued from page 29A)

matter to remove her hat and slip it into her shopping parcel with her gloves. A complete stranger, she would pass unnoticed in the crowd."

"Then—then she must be here now!" gasped June.
"I doubt it," said Noel grimly. "A lift full of passengers has just descended, and she was probably among them. But I'll check up."

He left June to speak to the gate-man, and his expression was stern as he rejoined her.

"There's not a minute to lose!" he said tersely. "A fair-haired girl, hatless and carrying a parcel, jumped into the lift as you came out. She acted as a decoy while the real Miss Floyd was kidnapped."

"Kidnapped?" June's eyes widened. "Nunky—how—and when?"

"As she left the restaurant by the side door," rejoined Noel, as he hurried June into the lift.

"But—June—I was watching—" faltered June.

"And your attention was distracted by the chauffeur," said Noel gently, "while Miss Floyd was bundled into that delivery-van."

The girl detective gave a broken, remorseful gasp, but Noel pressed her arm reassuringly.

"Don't worry, my dear. We were both tricked, but it's not too late to outwit the scoundrels. Your sharp eyes spotted the number of the car, and you were able to give me a full description of the van. I was uneasy at the time and put through an urgent call to the police. I'm hoping they'll have checked up on the van."

"They reached street level, and Noel glanced at his watch."

"Take a taxi back to the hotel, June," he said tersely, "and wait for me there. These scoundrels will obviously stick at nothing to gain their ends, and, as an eye-witness, you are dangerous to their plans."

"But, nunky—" protested June. Noel took her arm understandingly.

"I'm not leaving you out of this case, my dear. I'll give you a ring as soon as I get on the trail. I'll need your girlish wits to help me."

Only partly mollified, June stepped into the taxi that Noel hailed and watched her uncle disappear into the surging crowds. Then, glancing out of the window, her heart gave a violent jump.

"Driver—pull up here!" she gasped.

"O.K., missy!"

The taxi swung to a halt at the kerb, and June sprang out. She was convinced she had recognised the big blue car they had just passed, standing deserted beside some tall railings.

Beyond them June caught an inviting glimpse of shady trees and the glistening waters of a lake.

"What—what place is this, driver?" she breathed.

"Central Park, missy."

June thanked him and walked quickly back to the blue car. In a moment she had confirmed the number. It was the same car that had been driven by Zalia Floyd's enemy!

The girl detective, a gleam in her eyes, heart pounding, hurried along the winding paths between the ornamental shrubs.

There were few people about at this time in the evening, and

anxiously June scanned the bushes and pleasant grass surrounds, seeking some clue to her quest, however slender. And then her heart missed a beat. Her sharp eyes had spotted something among the bushes—something that glinted in the fading light.

It might be nothing more than a scrap of tinfoil or broken glass, but, as June parted the shrubbery and bent down, a little gasp escaped her lips.

She was staring at a girl's dainty suede shoe, its heel missing, its diamante buckle glistening among the fallen leaves.

Her hand trembling, June picked up the pitiful tell-tale object. Her thoughts were racing, and she felt almost choked with excitement and burning anger. A swift search confirmed her fears. Here, on the soft mould, were signs of a desperate struggle—a scrap of material caught on a sharp thorn, leaves and twigs trampled underfoot.

The trail led her to the brink of the ornamental lake, where it ended abruptly.

White to the lips, June stared round her. She felt convinced that the unfortunate film star had been brought into the park, and had put up a plucky struggle before being silenced.

And, as she stood there, she heard a rustle in the bushes close to the lake. She turned, and a scream was frozen on her lips as something lunged out from the foliage, catching her by the girdle of her smart coat.

A boathook!

Frantically, June struggled as she felt herself being dragged towards the lake.

"It was jest about here, suh! Ah was sweepin' the sidewalk when I see two fellahs with a truck, takin' a big box into the park. I tells myself: 'Clarence, them fellahs don't look up to no good.'"

Noel hastily checked the Negro roadman's garrulous comments with a crisp dollar note and turned quickly into the park.

With the assistance of the police, he had managed to trail the peanut van to the vicinity of Central Park, and the road-sweeper's story had confirmed that he was on the right track.

But where, in the great public park, could the beautiful Zalia Floyd have been smuggled?

The detective wore a puzzled frown as he halted on the ornamental bridge that spanned the shimmering lake.

The twilight was deepening and the park seemed deserted. Possibly the men had merely used it as a short cut to—

Noel stiffened suddenly. To his ears had come a faint lapping sound and the creak of oars. He leant over the railing, his eyes strained as he peered through the dusk.

A boat was gliding under the bridge close to the bank. He could see a man at the oars, and another in the stern. In the bows was something that looked like a dark bundle. As he stared, the bundle moved slightly, and one of the men rapped out a husky, threatening ejaculation.

Noel drew in his breath sharply, his hands tightening on the balustrade. The next moment he had vaulted the rail and was hanging suspended over the rippling water.

The boat was practically beneath him now, and, with a sudden tensing of his muscles, Noel released his hold.

There was a startled yell as the detective hurtled from the shadows, landing feet first in the boat.

It rocked perilously, shipping a quantity of water, but Noel retained his balance as the man in the stern sprang to his feet with a shout to his companion.

"A tec!" he snarled, and a revolver glittered in his hand.

Noel ducked, making a grab at the man's wrist and sending the weapon spinning into the lake.

The next moment he was at grips with the scoundrel, whom he recognised as the man who had trailed the young film star across New York.

Noel's surprise attack had given him the advantage, and, with a muscular heave, he sent his opponent overboard. But the stupefied rower had recovered from his first shock, and, even as Noel whirled, he was met by the swing of an oar that caught him a crashing blow on his upraised arm.

The detective staggered, but, as his assailant made to repeat his savage attack—a pair of slender hands emerged from the tarpaulin in the bows, grabbing the oarsman round the ankles.

With a startled grunt, the man pitched forward, tripping over the seat. Noel, recovering, grabbed the man by his collar and sent him to join his companion, with a resounding splash into the shallow water.

White-faced, the detective bent to drag back the tarpaulin, and an incredulous ejaculation was torn from his lips.

"June!" he gasped.

Dishevelled, fearful with relief, June clung to her uncle as he lifted her to her feet. Breathlessly, she explained how she had been roughly tied up and bundled into the boat, but had worked her wrists free in the nick of time to come to Noel's aid.

"It's a good thing for me that you disobeyed orders, June!" Noel said huskily. "Well, the scoundrels have had a ducking, but we're no nearer finding the unfortunate Miss Floyd."

"But—we are, nunky!" breathed June. "I traced her as far as the lake, and there's only one place where they could have taken her." She pointed excitedly. "That artificial island out there, where there's some kind of stone shelter among the bushes."

Noel's eyes glinted.

"I believe you're right!" he breathed. "It's worth trying."

JUNE'S surmise proved correct. They found the unfortunate film star lying, bound and gagged, in the shelter on the island, where she had been carried by the kidnappers till they could make other plans.

And that evening, in the rooftop cafe of their hotel, Noel and June heard Zalia's story. For some weeks she had received threatening letters demanding money, but she had ignored them, laughing at the possibility of danger.

It was not till she had actually arrived in New York, and found herself trailed, that she had realised her peril. The chance encounter with June had prompted her to scribble the hasty message, only to be trapped as she had attempted to leave the Rainbow Grille.

Gratefully she smiled across the table at Noel and his youthful partner.

"I guess you'll never forgive me for the chase I led you," she said.

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything!" laughed June, meeting Noel's smiling glance. "Thanks to you, Miss Floyd, I'll always remember my first thrilling day in New York!"

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's grand detective story Noel and June investigate a strange mystery in a big New York store.

HER HOLIDAY WITH LING MIN YO

Quaint, colourful China provides the setting for the grand new serial which begins in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. You will vote it the most enthralling story you have ever read.