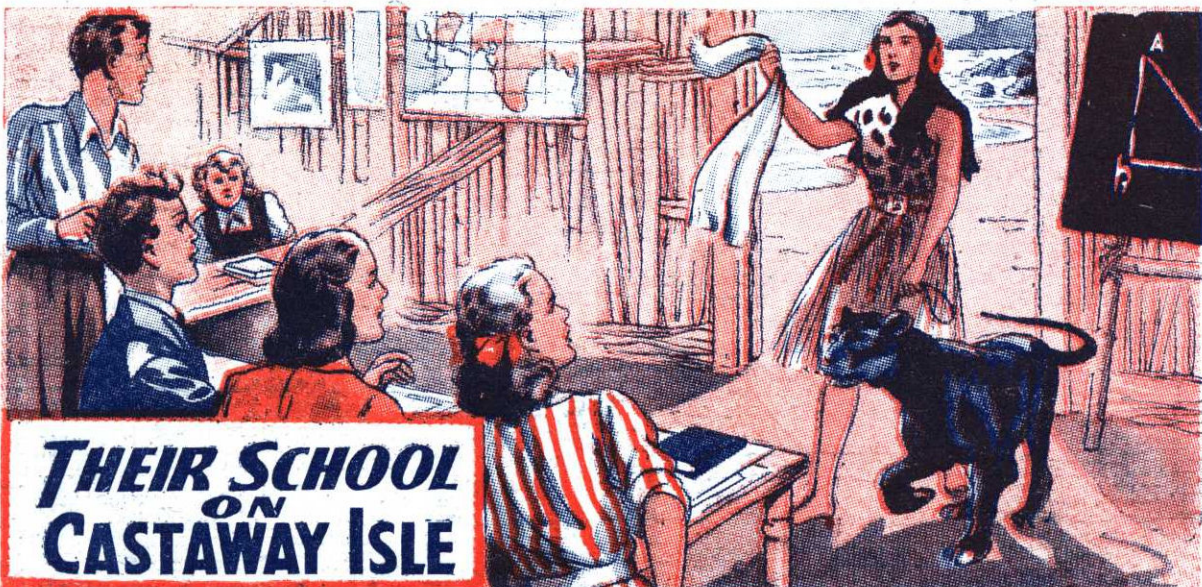


GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

Week
Ending
April 24th,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

The Jungle Girl Brings Her Pet Panther To School—To Unmask Her Enemy!—

Written by RENEE FRAZER

THE WRONG BOY

TANIA, a jungle girl who had lived alone on Castaway Isle for many years, was thrilled when Mr. Barnard, in charge of a party of shipwrecked boys and girls, gave her permission to attend his island school.

Two boys, cheery Gerry Royston and quiet Dave Cardew, seemed eager for her friendship, and both offered to accompany her to collect tropical shells for Mr. Barnard.

Tania, however, could only take one in her boat, and arranged a test to see whom she should take with her.

But while waiting for them in a jungle clearing she heard voices, and, to her horror, learnt that one of the boys was her enemy, but the question was: which?

MOTIONLESS, scarcely daring to breathe, the jungle girl crouched among the branches. The unknown people she had heard talking had gone, but the meaning of their words remained to dismay Tania.

Gerry and Dave—those two likeable boys, whose friendship had delighted her—one of them, she now believed, was an enemy!

But—which? Dave, so quiet, yet determined—or the gay, masterful Gerry?

Tania's dark eyes bore a hurt, bewildered look.

Only a few minutes ago, she had set out light-heartedly to arrange a test for her new-found friends: to decide which of the rival boys should accompany her to the grotto of shells.

But now everything was changed. Unhappily, she descended to a lower bough, with scarcely a glance at the bright bead necklace that she had hung on one of the topmost branches.

Then, suddenly, her slight figure stiffened, as once again she heard

approaching voices; but this time they were clear and recognisable—Gerry's laughing greeting, and Dave's rather brusque retort.

"Hallo, Dave! I see you got here first!"

"I came at the time Tania fixed. Any harm in that?"

"Not a bit of it, old boy! Both ready for the fray—and may the best man win! By the way, where is Tania?"

Tania's eyes flashed. Into her shrewd, jungle-trained mind crept a new determination. The light-hearted test she had planned could serve a double purpose. The boy who was her enemy might betray himself by his actions, if he believed he was unsuspected!

The jungle girl felt her heart beat more quickly as, making barely a sound, she swung herself from the branches, to leap with a strange, challenging cry into the clearing.

Both boys whirled, startled. "Hallo! Hallo!" Gerry exclaimed. "What's the big idea—starting the life out of us? Where have you been hiding?"

Tania glanced swiftly from one to the other.

"Tania watches from the high trees," she murmured. "She sees and hears all that goes on in her jungle!"

"Does she?" chuckled Gerry—while Dave shot her a swift, questioning glance. "And what have you seen or heard, Tania?"

The jungle girl regarded them, her head slightly tilted.

"I see two boys who say they are my friends—and hear their voices," she replied softly. "And Tania wonders: why are these boys so eager to come with the jungle girl in her canoe to the grotto of shells?"

Did Gerry's smile falter for an instant? Did Dave's grey eyes harden? Tania could not be sure.

"Just for the fun of it!" declared Gerry, grinning.

"To give you a hand, Tania—and

because I'm interested in shells!" added Dave, with a suspicious glance at the other boy.

"You don't say!" murmured Gerry. "Sure that's all, old man?"

Once again that swift, hostile stare that Tania had noticed in the school-room; but for the first time she sensed something more than ordinary rivalry.

There was something between these boys—a mystery beyond the jungle girl's wits to fathom. Each had warned her secretly against the other—and both claimed to be her friend!

Which boy was she to trust? Which to doubt?

"Tania is answered," she replied softly, "but only one boy can come with her in her canoe. He whose eyes are swiftest—whose hands are most nimble; he who is the first to find and bring Tania's necklace."

Dave looked momentarily taken aback, but Gerry chuckled.

"Fair enough! Hunt the necklace, eh? I suppose it's in sight?"

"It can be seen by those with eyes to see," murmured Tania.

Dave, in his direct, methodical fashion, started to search among the bushes and the tall, tropical grass. Gerry, his hands in his pockets, stared round the clearing.

"Hallo! Hallo!" he exclaimed, with a disarming smile. "What made you think of hiding it there, Tania?"

Instinctively, taken off her guard, Tania glanced up at the tree—and Gerry's laughing eyes darted in the same direction.

"Whizzo—it worked!" he chuckled, catching sight of the necklace. "One up on you, Dave!"

"That wasn't fair, Gerry!" growled Dave, making a sudden dive for the tree.

"All's fair in jungle tactics, eh, Tania?" chuckled Gerry, as he sprang for the nearest overhanging bough.

His laughing glance completely banished the jungle girl's momentary

annoyance. Gerry's wits had proved the quicker of the two; but Dave, stronger and more agile, was scaling the tree before Gerry had obtained a foothold.

With bated breath, Tania watched them climb. Dave was slow, but sure, and the jungle girl admired his grim tenacity, so like the boy himself. Gerry seemed to treat it all as a huge joke.

Keeping up a running commentary on Dave's progress, he commenced to slash with his knife at the tangled liana creeper that hampered his movements.

"Only a few yards to go, Dave—you'll make it!" he called. "I'm no hand at tree-climbing. Shed a tear for me, Tania! Hallo, look out there, Dave!"

A warning cry also escaped Tania's lips as the creeper to which Dave was clinging suddenly broke. The boy grabbed a branch in the nick of time—but the head necklace, shaken free, went slithering and flashing among the foliage to catch on a lower bough.

"Phew, tough luck, Dave!" called Gerry. "Want any help?"

"No, thanks!" came Dave's terse, husky retort. "It's queer how that creeper gave way like that!"

"It looks rotten to me!" said Gerry. "And with your sudden weight—well, the fortunes of war, y'know! If you're sure you're O.K., I'll try my luck!"

He was now far nearer to the necklace than Dave, who was climbing down doggedly in a vain effort to reach it. Gerry good-naturedly allowed his rival to draw level, then, with a deft hand-swing, he managed to grasp the string of beads, waving them triumphantly.

"How's that, Tania?" he called. "The jungle girl's mind was torn by conflicting pleasure and doubt. Secretly she had hoped that the handsome Gerry would win—the boy whose friendly, smiling invitation had first brought her to the island school."

Yet Dave had so nearly won the contest.

As she hesitated, both boys reached the ground, and Dave, his face white and tense, turned on Gerry.

"Lucky break for you," he said quietly. "If it was just—luck—Gerry's blue eyes glistened.

"Cut that out, Dave!" he retorted. "An accident can happen to anyone. Of course, if you can't take it like a sportsman—"

Dave's lips tightened.

"If Tania wasn't here, I'd have an answer for that, Royston," he said curtly; and, turning on his heel, he strode away without a backward glance.

"Dave!" called Tania anxiously, but he was already out of sight.

Her dark eyes were troubled as she met Gerry's apologetic glance.

"Don't let Dave worry you, Tania," he said. "He was always a bit touchy, and he's been like a bear with a sore head since we came to the island. Can't think why he was so anxious to go with you to this grotto of shells. Is it anywhere near your jungle home?"

Tania nodded. There was an infectious friendliness about Gerry's manner that banished her uneasiness. Gerry, she felt certain, she could trust. And—Dave? Tania was concerned about Dave, but she could not believe yet that he was her enemy.

"My home is but an arrow's flight from the grotto," she explained. "Tania will fetch you in her canoe—if you will wait for her by the pool of laughing water."

"Charming name, but I'm none the wiser!" said Gerry, with a grin. "Look here"—impulsively he pulled out a notebook and a stump of pencil—"you're a good hand at drawing. Suppose you make me a little map?"

"Map?" echoed Tania wonderingly.

"Well, a picture of the stream and the grotto, so I shan't make a mistake."

Quick to grasp the intriguing idea, Tania busied herself with the pencil.

"Here—Tania's home," she explained. "Here—the grotto of shells. And here the pool of laughing water, where Tania will come with her canoe."

Frankly admiring, Gerry praised her clever effort, tearing out the slip of paper and slipping it into his wallet. They parted then, Gerry returning to the camp, with a promise to be at the meeting-place in an hour, while Tania made her way swiftly through the trees to her jungle home.

Michi, the panther, was out hunting, so she left Bimbo in charge, with a bowl of nuts to keep him happy. Then, unmooring her canoe, she paddled swiftly down-stream till she came to the sparkling forest pool where two streams met—the pool she had named from the rippling sound of the splashing water.

Here she waited until she heard the crunch of firm footsteps on the jungle path. The bushes parted, and a boy stepped out of the shadows. Tania's smile faded.

For the boy was Dave! And Dave was alone!



AN UNKNOWN INTRUDER

"Hallo, Tania! Sorry to keep you waiting," Dave spoke awkwardly, a trickle out of breath, his face flushed as he encountered the jungle girl's bewildered glance. Gerry couldn't make it, he added hurriedly, "so I came instead."

"Gerry—Gerry not come?" she questioned. "Tania not understand. He promise he will meet her here—at the pool of laughing water."

Dave nodded, biting his lip.

"So I gathered," he said dryly, "but, apparently, he had a more urgent appointment, so I came along to offer my help."

Disappointment gave place to suspicion in Tania's dark eyes. Her quick wits fastened on an obvious question:

"How does Dave know that Gerry promise to meet Tania here?"

The boy looked momentarily confused.

"Oh, I heard him mention it—to Pat and the others! We aren't on speaking terms just now. But I expect Mr. Barnard wanted him for some reason, and he forgot the time."

Tania swallowed a little lump that had risen in her throat. She was disappointed and puzzled about Gerry. He had not come as he promised; he had not even sent a message.

"Very well," she said, her chin coming up. "If Gerry not keep his promise, then Dave shall come with Tania."

"I say, thanks a lot!" said Dave, his grave face lighting up with a rare smile.

He stepped cautiously into the frail craft, but, unprepared for its sudden rocking, he almost lost his balance. Grabbing a branch to steady himself, he dropped something that had been clenched in his hand.

As it fluttered into the canoe Tania gave a little cry and snatched it up.

It was the drawing she had done specially for Gerry—the little picture he had called a map!

Wondering, suspicious, she stared at Dave, whose rugged face looked suddenly confused.

"Where did Dave find this?" she demanded swiftly. "Did Gerry give it to him?"

"Er—not exactly," muttered Dave, crimsoning. "You see—that is—"

Tania started to her feet in the canoe, her slender hands clenched, her eyes flashing angrily.

"Then Dave stole it from Gerry!" she accused. "That is the reason why Gerry has not come, as he promise with solemn word. You trick him away—"

"Tania, that's not true!" protested Dave. "You don't understand—"

"Tania understands that white boy speaks with lying lips!" exclaimed the jungle girl impetuously. "You are

not her friend! Gerry is her friend, and you have sent him away—"

"Tania, listen to me!" rapped Dave, gripping her arm.

"I will not listen!" Tania exclaimed. "Go away! Tania will fetch shells by herself!"

A little wild thing, she confronted him, her eyes blazing, her dark hair ruffled by the breeze. For an instant Dave hesitated, then, silently, he stepped out of the canoe.

"You'll be sorry about this, Tania!" he said gruffly. "If you'd only listen to—"

But his words were lost to Tania as she paddled swiftly away from the bank, her eyes smarting with angry tears.

It was not until five minutes later, when the canoe skimmed out of the dappled sunlight into the twilight gloom of the great, vaulted cave, that Tania cooled down a little.

The canoe glided forward on the shimmering surface of an underground pool as unrudded as a sheet of glass—a dark mirror reflecting the greenish rocks, with their crystalline formations and myriad colourful shells.

Taking a rusted knife from the bows of the canoe—a stout, bone-handled knife that had once belonged to the bearded white man who had been her friend—Tania commenced to prise up some of the shells, dropping them into the boat.

Her fingers worked nimbly, but her thoughts were troubled—torn between doubt and remorse. Though she was still smarting from the trick she believed had been played on Gerry and herself, she remembered the strange, hurt look in Dave's grey eyes when she had stormed at him.

That Dave must have prevented Gerry from meeting her seemed beyond doubt. But had he done it simply because he was jealous of the other boy, or had he some other reason? She could not forget that sinister conversation she had overheard.

Unable to solve the problem, she at last left the cave, her frail canoe laden with its cargo of glistening shells.

She paddled swiftly, anxious to reach her jungle home before dusk, for the shells must be cleared and polished—in readiness for school the next day.

Her pulses quickened at the thought. Momentarily her troubled doubts were thrust aside as she remembered the white master's praise for her work. Soon she would learn to read and write like the cheery boy and girl castaways, and then her dearest ambition would be within her grasp. She would be able to read the secret of her past from her father's tattered old diary—her one jealously guarded treasure!

Her eyes shining, she sent the canoe skimming towards her picturesque little home in the cliff, with its thatched roof and its ladder of trailing creeper.

Just then there came a sudden startled scuffling, and a small, furry shape sprang from the ladder into the boat, clinging tightly to her leg, teeth chattering with terror.

"Bimbo!" gasped Tania, stooping anxiously to reassure her monkey pet. "Bimbo, what has happened?"

Even as she spoke a sleek black form sprang from the bushes, tail lashing, eyes glowing angrily.

"Michi!" exclaimed the jungle girl, wondering for a moment if her panther was to blame for Bimbo's terror.

But the panther, restless and uneasy, was sniffing the ground at the foot of the ladder, prowling in widening circles, as though seeking a hidden foe.

The jungle girl paled slightly under her dusky tan. Calling the panther softly to heel, she sprang for the trailing ladder, climbing nimbly to her little home.

Then a broken cry escaped her lips.

The scattered rushes, the overturned gourd that had contained her

(Please turn to the back page.)



Sensation AT THE CO-ED EXAM

By PETER LANGLEY

WAS LORETTA GUILTY?

"If you can track down this scandalous japer, Mr. Raymond, I shall be extremely grateful." The Dean of Beverton Co-Ed College spoke with a frown. "It is scarcely a matter for the police, but when I heard you had just arrived in Hollywood I determined to invite your help."

Noel Raymond and his youthful niece and partner, June Gaynor, were sitting in the Dean's study, where they had arrived in response to an urgent message.

An important examination, lasting several days, was being held in the college, and each session of the exam had been disturbed in a mysterious way.

So far the disturbances had all taken the same form. Alarming messages would appear on the walls of the examination hall, and these were invariably followed by destructive happenings close by.

"It is monstrous!" The Dean jumped indignantly from his chair and paced up and down. "The Founder's Exam, as we call it, is a most important event, with money prizes and valuable scholarships for the winning boy and girl. To think there should be these deliberate attempts to disturb it—to wreck it!"

The famous detective eyed him keenly. "And you have no suspicion as to who is responsible?" he asked.

The Dean hesitated. "Certain suspicions have reached my ears," he admitted slowly. "I had better explain. You see, some days ago a boy named Jack Ripley disappeared from the college. He was treasurer of our Sports Club, and apparently decamped with the whole of the funds. Ripley would certainly have stood a good chance of winning one of the founder's prizes had he not proved himself a despicable thief."

The Dean glanced through the window towards the campus, across which groups of boys and girls were strolling.

"Ripley had a great friend—a girl, Loretta Carr," he went on. "It is a fact that she has been behaving strangely—suspiciously—of late. And rumours are going round that she has been deliberately upsetting the exam out of sheer spite, because her chum can no longer take part in it."

Both June and Noel followed the Dean's glance out to the campus.

And suddenly into view came a dark girl in a coral-pink frock, passing close to the window. Frank admiration glowed in June's grey eyes at sight of her.

"I think that's the prettiest girl I've ever seen!" she mused.

"That is Loretta Carr," the Dean said shortly. "She is regarded as a likely winner of the girls' prize. But should you find proof that she is guilty of these acts she will, of course, be instantly expelled."

Somehow June's instinct rebelled at the thought, and she found herself fervently hoping that their investigations wouldn't prove that Loretta was the mystery japer. Noel, glancing at his wrist-watch, had risen to his feet. "A quarter to ten," he murmured. "It is time I carried out the plan we agreed on—"

In the examination hall thirty students had already taken their seats. There was a buzz of excited chatter as they speculated as to whether the mysterious japer would strike again on this last day of the vital exam.

Only Loretta Carr sat pale and silent.

And then suddenly the talk died away as the Dean entered with a young man in cap and gown.

"I wish to introduce Mr. Forrest, a visiting tutor," he said. "He will supervise the last sessions of the examination to-day."

The young man sat down at the tutor's desk and opened a sealed envelope containing the exam questions. None of the students realised that the young man was none other than Noel Raymond, the famous English detective.

Noel's thoughts were busy as he watched the boys and girls settling down to their exam questions. He noted how pale and tense Loretta looked as she wrote busily.

Until suddenly—

"Look! Look!" The excited cry came from a fair boy sitting near Loretta, as he pointed to the wall behind Noel.

"It's another mystery message!"

Noel turned his head as a babel of voices broke out. On the pale-coloured wall behind the tutor's desk a message, scrawled in printed capitals, had suddenly sprung into view, as if by magic:

"LOOK OUT FOR MORE TROUBLE!"
(Signed) THE PHANTOM JAPER."

If the japer wanted to create a sensation and upset the exam, he or she had certainly succeeded! Most of the students were on their feet, chattering excitedly, and it seemed to Noel that Loretta's attractive face had turned paler than ever.

With a few words the young detective calmed them down, and then turned to examine the message.

Its mysterious appearance on the hitherto blank wall was no puzzle to Noel. It had obviously been produced by a chemical ink of the type that was invisible when first applied, but would suddenly become visible after it had been exposed to the light for a certain period.

Students glancing up from their exam papers were surprised to see the visiting tutor produce a magnifying-glass from his pocket and carefully examine every stroke of the japer's message.

Noel's face was thoughtful as he returned to his desk.

Had that message been written by

Loretta Carr? The young detective already believed he had an answer to that question.

The minutes passed slowly, tensely, and half an hour after the appearance of the message:

"Help! Help!"

The shout sounded in the corridor, and in a twinkling Noel had darted outside. Opposite was an open door with a name-plate: "Mr. van Klee, art tutor." And through this doorway poured black, stifling smoke.

"My water colours! They're ruined!"

The cry came from the art tutor, who had just returned to his study to find it whirling with black smoke. At one end of the room was a screen on which he had pinned a number of his own water colours, which were now smudged and blackened.

In a twinkling Noel had traced the smoke to its source.

A half-consumed smoke bomb, with the remains of a fuse attached, lay near the screen. Noel grabbed it, flung open a window and threw it out. Then he hurried to help Mr. van Klee remove the ruined paintings.

The mystery japer had struck again!

And from the doorway of the examination hall came a murmur from Cyril Neame, the fair boy who had first spotted the message on the wall.

"Say, I hate to seem suspicious." There was a note of frank regret in Cyril's low voice. "But Mr. van Klee was the tutor who first found that the sports fund was missing and reported Jack Ripley to the Dean. It sure looks as if this is another of Loretta's schemes to be revenged."

At the same moment Noel, standing just inside the tutor's study, saw a tiny object on the carpet, and stooped to pick it up.

It was a badge, as worn by many girl students, and Noel caught his breath as he saw the initials on the back: L. C.

"Loretta Carr!" he whispered. "Everyone suspects her, and this certainly points to her being the culprit, and yet—"

And yet there was still a baffling doubt in Noel's mind.



IN THE SECRET ROOM

"Well, June, any thing to report?"

Noel smiled across the table at his youthful partner as they snatched a hurried lunch in the college cafeteria.

"I have, nunky," June replied. "During the morning I searched Loretta's chalet, as you suggested, and in the waste-paper basket I found—this."

She handed a torn scrap of paper to Noel, who studied it closely.

"—exam plot—secret room—reverse alp— Yours ever,—JACK."

A puzzling fragment! Yet it obviously seemed part of a letter from Loretta's chum, the scapegrace boy whose disappearance from the college had affected her so strangely. And surely it suggested that Loretta was concerned in some kind of plot against the exam.

"I've been listening to college gossip, too," murmured June. "Everyone suspects Loretta, nunky. I wish we could prove her innocent." There was genuine regret in her voice.

Ever since she'd seen Loretta cross the campus in the morning sunshine, June had hated to think she was guilty of such senseless japing.

Noel rose to his feet with an odd smile.

"I'm making no promises, my dear," he replied. "There is one very puzzling feature in this affair. I'm wondering—" He checked himself, and patted June's shoulder. "In any case, I want you to shadow Loretta closely when she leaves the exam room this afternoon."

A few moments later, in cap and gown, Noel was approaching the examination hall again.

He found Reeves, the college janitor, hovering anxiously near by.

"I'm mighty glad you've turned up, sir," he said in relieved tones. "The Dean told me to stand guard here during the lunch break, but—well, I guess someone's been snooping in the hall, all the same."

Unlocking the door, the janitor pointed to a half-open window.

"All those windows were fastened when you went to lunch, sir," he declared. "But someone has forced one of them, as you can see, though I never heard a thing out here."

Was that the reason Loretta had been late for lunch? Had she forced open a window and prepared another jape?

Noel's face was grave as he took his seat once more at the tutor's desk and opened the final sealed packet of exam questions. The students came in, and it wasn't long after they had settled down that an excited cry burst from Maisie Fellowes, a red-haired girl in the front row.

"Look! It's there again—another mystery message!"

Sure enough, large scrawled letters had appeared on the wall:

**"WATCH OUT FOR THE LAST SURPRISE!
"(Signed) THE PHANTOM JAPER."**

A buzz of indignation broke from them all. The exam had meant a great deal of hard work, and this afternoon's paper was one of the most important. No wonder they were furious at these disturbing japes!

And many angry glances were thrown at pale-faced Loretta.

Again Noel made a careful examination of the mystery writing. He quietened the students, then reseated himself, tensely on the alert. He felt sure another startling occurrence would shortly take place, and it might provide him with a vital clue.

Forty minutes passed, and then—
"Look! Look up there—at the roof!"

The hoarse cry came from Cyril Neame, and all followed his pointing finger.

The examination hall had a roof of oak beams and panelling. Between two of the beams a trap-door opened suddenly, and a figure hurtled down, striking the floor with a thud that brought shrieks from several girls.

"Keep calm!" Noel's voice rose above the excitement. "It's just a dummy."

It was, in fact, a cleverly made dummy representing the Dean himself. And on its chest was pinned a card with the roughly printed words: **"WHO HOUNDED JACK RIPLEY OUT OF COLLEGE?"**

Part of the dummy's stuffing had come loose, and red-headed Maisie Fellowes darted forward, picking up a scrap of dainty white material.

"It's a girl's hankie!" she burst out. "And it's got a monogram on it—the initials L. C. It's Loretta's!" Accusingly she whirled round.

"Your hankie was inside the dummy, Loretta!" she cried. "That proves you made it. You planned this senseless jape!"

Loretta seemed to shrink back. "I didn't! I—I couldn't!" she whispered, faced by a barrage of angry cries. "And—and I lost that hankie some days ago."

Purposely Noel didn't interfere for the moment. Keenly his eyes passed from one to the other of them.

"No, no! Be fair, everyone!" Cyril Neame was doing his best to defend Loretta. "It's obvious Loretta couldn't have worked that jape, because she was in here. Unless, of course, she had an accomplice who—"

"Sure! That's it!" chimed in another boy. "She probably bribed someone, else to throw down the dummy."

And now it seemed that Loretta was at the end of her tether. With trembling fingers she gathered up the papers on her desk and fairly pushed them into Noel's hands.

"I've finished the questions," she panted. "And so there's no need for me to stay here. I—I just can't stand it!"

Breathlessly she fled from the room, but Noel glimpsed June hovering in the corridor, and knew he could trust his girl partner to shadow the puzzling Loretta.

"She ought to be banned from the exam!" Maisie Fellowes cried. "That hankie proved she was the mystery japer!"

A chorus of agreement rang out. No one guessed what was passing in Noel's mind, however. But during this last mystery jape the young detective had made a startling discovery which set his thoughts working in an entirely new direction.

"SHE—she's vanished!"

The breathless words broke from June some time later.

Never had she had to trail a more elusive quarry than Loretta Carr. She had tailed on to the girl as soon as Loretta had burst so impetuously from the lecture hall, but several times she had lost her.

Finally she discovered Jack Ripley's chum stealing up the winding stairway of the tower that rose up in the centre of the college buildings. Her pulses racing, June had followed.

But now, on the tower top, she gazed about her in utmost perplexity, for Loretta had disappeared.

"Where on earth—" June murmured.

Then she darted forward, for she'd caught sight of a tiny scrap of coral-pink material fluttering on a metal rod which projected from a low brick wall at one side.

That fragment had undoubtedly come from Loretta's frock, which she must have caught on the rod, but where was she now?

June grasped the metal to remove the scrap of material, and as she did so she must have given it a slight push. A startled cry escaped her as part of the brickwork moved back slowly, disclosing a square aperture with stone steps leading downwards.

That was how and where Loretta had vanished.

Heart pounding, June followed. She found herself on a dim landing below, with a half-open door ahead of her, and she peeped through.

Beyond was a small, shadowy room, but no sign of Loretta!

June tiptoed in. A small table stood there, strewn with papers. She bent to examine them, and gasped.

For they were copies of exam questions! And on a shelf near by were reference books which would provide the correct answers. And on a lower shelf was a cash-box with the label "Sports Fund."

In a flash June remembered that the sports fund had vanished when Jack Ripley disappeared.

Had Jack been here? Was this the secret hide-out of Loretta's boy chum? And did these questions and reference books mean that Jack had been helping Loretta cheat in the exam—helping her play the japes?

Her thoughts broke off with a

choking cry as a dim figure leapt at her from the shadows.

In the brief glimpse she had of it, she was sure it wasn't a girl. And then a muffling cloth was thrown over her as she struggled violently in the grip of her unseen assailant.



A CHEAT UNMASKED

The Founder's Exam was over. The papers would be marked by a special staff of examiners that evening, and the result announced next day.

One person remained behind in the examination hall. It was Noel, and he had moved to one of the desks that stood against the wall.

"The answer to the riddle should be here," he murmured tensely.

Carefully he examined the wall. On it was a small silver plaque with a Greek inscription.

Suddenly an idea occurred to the young detective, and from his pocket-book he took the torn scrap of paper June had found in Loretta's chalet.

"—exam, plot—secret room—reverse alp—"

The last three letters were probably part of a longer word, for the paper had been torn off close to the letter "p."

"I wonder!" Noel mused. "Alp" may have been part of the word alpha, meaning the Greek letter A.

Again he bent to read the inscription, formed of raised letters on the gleaming surface of the plaque. It contained only one letter "a," and Noel twisted this between finger and thumb. It swivelled upside-down, and at the same moment with a faint click the plaque swung outwards, revealing a space within like a small cupboard.

And then:
Plop!

He stared in utter amazement. Into the hidden space had dropped a girl's bracelet!

"It's June's!" he exclaimed. "But how—"

His face paled. He drew a powerful torch from his pocket, and was just able to get his head inside the narrow opening and shine the torch upwards. He saw that a tube-like shaft, about a foot square, rose up inside the wall to a great height.

"June's in danger!" The thought hammered in his brain. "And she'll be high up in the building, near the roof. On the tower, perhaps—that's where the shaft goes up!"

He sprang from the room, and raced up through the building, eventually bursting into the open air on the flat roof.

A cry escaped him as he saw the opening in the low brick wall, with that scrap of pink material from Loretta's frock still fluttering against it. He raced down the steps and burst in the door confronting him.

"June!" he panted.

His youthful partner, gagged and securely bound, was lying against the wall. In a few seconds Noel had released her.

"I'm okay, nunky!" Rather shakily June reassured him. "Whoever bound me up, bolted when he heard you coming. But—golly! Just look!"

She saw to her amazement that the books, papers and other evidences of cheating had been swiftly removed by her unknown assailant. Quickly she told Noel what she had found.

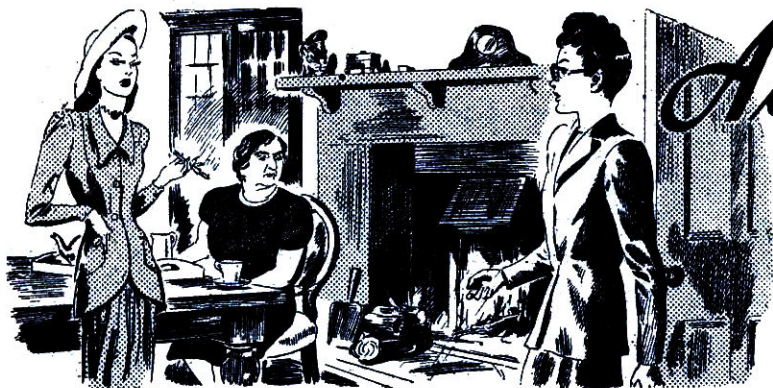
"But, nunky, I still don't understand," she exclaimed. "Loretta and Jack Ripley must have been plotting, cheating—"

"Show me where you lost your bracelet, June," Noel cut in quietly.

She indicated the spot, and in the wall near by Noel found a slot which opened into the top of a narrow shaft.

"The final clue to the mystery, June!" he exclaimed. "We've found it, thanks to you and your bracelet. That shaft leads down to the wall of the exam room, where a silver plaque opens into it. A container could very

(Please turn to the back page.)



Assistant TO THE SECRET AGENT

By DOROTHY PAGE

ROMA IS SUSPICIOUS

GAYE LEAMAN visited a theatrical agency and discovered that Peter Kirby, the young man who interviewed her, was really a secret agent, known as Mr. X.

She learnt that he was investigating the mysterious activities of an elusive personality known as the Count, and his beautiful niece, Roma Vadell.

Gaye and Peter tracked a mysterious consignment of toy soldiers to "The Sign of the Toy Soldier," a toy shop in Kennchester.

They believed that these toy soldiers were the key to the Count's rascally activities.

Gaye, disguised, took the place of a new girl assistant that Simon Brown, the toy shop owner, was expecting.

GAYE paused in front of "The Sign of the Toy Soldier" and drew a deep breath. It was a fateful moment. In a few seconds she would enter—and embark upon the most daring and dangerous role of her life.

Her hand tightened on the handle of her suitcase.

"Here goes, Gaye," she whispered. "Now for it!"

She crossed the pavement through busy shoppers. The last customer had not closed the door, so she passed into the rather dim interior of the old-fashioned toy shop without sound of her entry.

The shop was empty. Gaye paused. It was a moment of respite before she had to face the ordeal of meeting Mr. Simon Brown and his wife in her disguise. Then, hesitantly, she moved forward. At the end of the long counter was a door which led to the living quarters above the shop.

It swung wide under her touch, showing a staircase winding up to her right. In front of her was another door, the top half of it frosted glass. This door was open, and beyond it was—

Gaye stopped, catching her breath. Two figures stood in the passage, and one of them held one of the vital wooden soldiers!

Tensed, Gaye instantly recognised Mr. Brown. The other, a big woman with hooked nose and heavy eyelids, must be his wife. Their heads were raised. They had heard Gaye.

For a second they stared at her with a strange, fierce stillness.

Gaye forced her fascinated gaze away from the wooden soldier they appeared to be examining; it would be madness to show too much interest in that brightly painted toy. She smiled.

"I'm Jess Hamilton. You're Mr. and Mrs. Brown?" And she gave the vowels a slight Northern drawl.

Only then did the two figures move—relax a little. Simon Brown handed the wooden soldier to his wife with a quick, significant nod. Then he stepped towards Gaye, closing the frosted door behind him so that his wife and the wooden soldier—were hidden.

"Jess Hamilton, eh?" His eyes peered keenly through his glasses and he fumbled in his pocket. Gaye's heart beat a little faster. She knew he was searching for the photograph of Jess Hamilton that Peter had neatly purloined. "Mistaken it," he muttered, and peered at her again. He nodded, as if satisfied from memory. "You're late. Why?"

Gaye shrugged; it was a cool gesture. She had an excuse ready. "Missed the train," she said. "I had to catch the second one."

He grunted. "Very well, Miss Hamilton. Now listen to me." His ready voice held a bite of malice. "You're here to help in the shop, obey all orders—and keep your mouth shut." He turned as the frosted glass door opened and his wife came through. Instantly Gaye noted she was without the wooden soldier. "Show Miss Hamilton to her room, my dear," he added.

Without a word the big woman beckoned and started to ascend the staircase. Suitcase in hand, Gaye meekly followed.

Inside she was thrilled and exultant. She had passed the first test. She was accepted as Jess Hamilton!

"This is your room—"

They had climbed two sets of stairs, and then Mrs. Brown passed into a simply furnished attic room.

Without expression the big woman stared at Gaye.

"Your luggage is in the corner," she said abruptly. "Arrived half an hour ago. Get your things off, then go and help Mr. Brown in the shop."

She turned, but paused in the doorway, eyes hard.

"Understand this, my girl—keep away from the passage beyond the frosted door downstairs. There's only the stock-room there, and that's no concern of yours."

The door closed behind her. Her heavy steps moved away.

Slowly Gaye sank down on to the single bed and relaxed.

"Gaye—done it!" she breathed. "You're in—accepted! And—"

Excitement suddenly surged. The passage beyond the frosted door—the stock-room. The vital wooden soldiers must be there! Surely it shouldn't be difficult to find a chance to investigate secretly?

Stiffing her excitement, deciding to start with a good impression, Gaye took off her coat, checked her disguise in a small mirror on the wall, and then hurried downstairs, passing the living-room on the first floor.

At the bottom of the staircase Simon Brown was waiting.

"Come into the shop, Miss Hamilton. I'll show you around. You'll find all the goods marked. It is quite simple."

Simple it was, and after a few minutes Simon Brown left her. Behind the counter, Gaye listened tensely, hearing him shuffle upstairs.

"Dare I risk a search now?" she wondered.

But that was impossible. She was kept busy for over half an hour, then

Simon Brown shuffled downstairs again.

"Go up and get your tea," he ordered.

He closed the door behind her as she left the shop.

Gaye came to a lightning decision. Now! She would chance it now!

She ran up the staircase a little, purposely noisy; then silently crept down again and tiptoed towards the frosted door. It opened under her cautious touch. She passed through, breathing swiftly.

A moment later she was in the stock-room. It was small, and the walls were lined with shelves containing toys, boxes, books.

Her eyes grew worried. After a swift search Gaye was convinced that the vital wooden soldiers were not there after all!

Baffled, she slipped out again, passed through the frosted door and sped silently upstairs. Where, then, were the toys with a secret? What had Mrs. Brown done with the one she had had in her hand?

"They must be there—somewhere!" she told herself fiercely. "The passage holds the secret—otherwise why was I forbidden it—"

The mystery was hot in her mind as she entered the sitting-room.

Mrs. Brown was there, presiding over the tea-table. But there was someone else there, too—a someone who slowly rose, gold-tipped cigarette in hand, a someone who made Gaye halt, tensed, rigid.

It was Roma Vadell.

Here was a test of her disguise she had never expected!

Sleekly poised, darkly beautiful, the Count's niece moved slowly towards Gaye. Her green eyes were narrowed, calculating.

"So—you are Jess Hamilton?" she purred. "And you arrived late—on the second train, I believe?"

Gaye fought down a thrill of uneasiness and got a grip on herself. There was a strange menace and suspicion in Roma's manner.

"That's right," she answered steadily. "The second train. You see—"

"How strange!" Roma's husky voice came in a hiss. "Because—there is no second train from the North to Kennchester this afternoon! Exactly how do you explain that, Miss Jess Hamilton?"



LULLING ROMA'S SUSPICIONS

The atmosphere in the sitting-room was electric, charged with suspicion and tension. Roma's strange green eyes never moved from

Gaye's disguised face.

And Gaye—she knew with inward panic that she had slipped up.

"The second train," continued Roma coldly, "only goes as far as Weyrith Junction. I happen to know that. Well, Jess Hamilton?"

She stepped nearer.

Gaye thought swiftly.

"Why, I took a taxi from Weyrith Junction, of course," she said.

Roma halted. Her green eyes flickered.

"Taxi—"
"I did it for the best," Gaye nodded defensively. "I was late, and I was frightened that the Count might hear of it, so—so I took a taxi."

Silence followed her explanation. The tension brought Gaye's nerves to snapping point. Then Roma shrugged, put her cigarette to her lips and turned back to her chair.

"In future," she said with a contemptuous glance, "you will not be late when the Count sends out an order. Understand?"

Shaky with relief, Gaye lowered her eyes behind her heavy horn-rimmed glasses and nodded meekly.

"Yes, Miss Vadell. I'm sorry."
"Get your tea, girl," put in Mrs. Brown abruptly.

Gaye took a cup of tea and some toast and sat down, trying to hide her reaction from those awful few seconds.

Had she completely lulled suspicions in Roma's mind?

That beautiful girl was lolling back in the one armchair.

"Miss Hamilton"—her husky voice was almost a whisper—"it is strange, but I have the odd feeling that I have seen you before."

"Really, Miss Vadell?" Gaye managed to say steadily.

Roma's eyes suddenly opened wide. She sat up.

"Another thing," she murmured, "my uncle mentioned that you are rather hard of hearing."

Gaye's reaction to this unknown characteristic of the real Jess Hamilton was split-second. She saw the danger.

"So I am, Miss Vadell," she admitted, and daringly added: "Perhaps you are wondering how I heard your voice then when you spoke so softly? You see," she ended calmly, "being rather deaf has made me adept at lip-reading."

Roma sank back again, and Gaye sensed that any vague suspicions Roma had left had been lulled.

That was proved a few seconds later when Roma, without reference to the silent Mrs. Brown, broke out irritably:

"Well, if you've finished your tea, hadn't you better go and help Mr. Brown again? You're here to work—not idle!"

The insolence in her husky voice angered Gaye, but meekly she nodded, placed her cup and plate on the tea-tray and left the room. An involuntary, deep sigh of relief escaped her lips as she closed the door behind her.

"Golly me," she gulped, "this—this is getting close. Gaye—"

She snapped short, listening. A fragment of conversation just reached her through the door. First Mrs. Brown's abrupt tones: "How did you get on with the soldier, Miss Vadell?" And then Roma's husky answer: "Perfectly! It was accepted without suspicion. Others will be collected when—but wait one moment—"

Silence followed, and suddenly Gaye heard faint footsteps crossing towards the door. Roma was taking no chances of eavesdropping! In a flash Gaye turned and silently fled down the stairs.

She arrived in the shop, hastily composing herself. Simon Brown was attending to a family group. An Air Force officer, his arm in a sling, was flicking through books on the centre stall. An elderly man was gravely studying a box of lead soldiers.

As Gaye crossed helpfully towards the latter she realised that someone in the shop was softly whistling a gay little tune.

She stopped short, stiffening, her eyes flashing incredulously to the back of the R.A.F. officer. He was carelessly whistling the opening bars of "John Peel"—the tune Mr. X often used as a signal. But surely—surely—

Breath held, she glanced cautiously towards Simon Brown. He was fully occupied. No one was watching.

"Can I help you, sir?"
Gaye stopped at the Air Force officer's side. He turned towards her

a cheery tanned face with a magnificent moustache. But the eyes—cool, grey and whimsical—they were Peter's!

Her heart leapt. The disguise was wonderful.

"Ah, thank you, miss," he said lightly, not a trace of recognition on his features. "I was looking at these books—"

He picked up a handful, but from the side of his mouth he whispered softly:

"Any trouble, Gaye? And—any news of the soldiers?"

Thrilled to see him again, she pretended to examine the books he held: "I'm—I'm O.K., Peter," she breathed. "And I believe I've got a lead to the hiding-place of the soldiers."

Purposely she didn't mention her close call with Roma; she didn't want him to get anxious about her.

"Grand girl," he whispered. "Now, quick—slip your hand into this sling I'm wearing. You'll find a small package. It contains a green electric light bulb. If you discover anything definite—or want me—plug that into your electric light and open the blinds—"

In one swift movement Gaye took the package and slipped it into her pocket.

"Any time after nine at night I'll be watching for the light," he breathed. "And remember—"

Abruptly, his voice cheerily rose: "Thanks very much, miss," he said. "I'll take this one!"

Gaye caught his quick warning look. She flicked a glance sideways as Peter drew out some loose change.

Roma Vadell was standing in the half-open door to the living quarters, thoughtfully looking into the shop.

Peter left. Coolly Gaye turned her attention to the elderly man. But her thoughts were anything but cool! She felt certain that Roma had seen nothing to arouse her suspicions, but she must be careful. One false move would mean disaster!

The evening drew on. Gaye heard Roma leave by the back door—the way she had obviously entered. At last the shop was closed, and after tidying up, Gaye expressed a desire to turn in. The Browns let her go without a word.

Alone in her attic room, Gaye felt she could relax, think—and make plans that were daring in very truth.

First of all she carefully tucked away up the chimney the green light bulb Peter had given her. She checked her disguise—and then settled down to wait for the vital moment.

For she had come to a decision that made her heart beat faster. In the quiet of the night, when the Browns were abed, she intended to slip down and search for the vital wooden soldiers!

Fully clothed, she stretched out on the bed after turning out the light, and waited. At last all was quiet.

"Now to search the passage behind the frosted glass door," she murmured, and crossing to the door she grasped the knob. Then an icy chill swept up her spine, seeming to paralyse her.

Someone was standing outside the door, waiting in the darkness!



THE TRAIL OF SAWDUST

The hammering of Gaye's heart seemed to fill her ears. She just couldn't move. Her blood was chilled. Her

Who waited out there silently—and why?

With dilated eyes she stood in the darkness. Then, softly, she heard a faint click as the key was turned in the lock. Then cautious, heavy footsteps crept away.

They faded. Gaye did not move. So—the Browns were taking no chances. The Browns were suspicious of her!

Realising that it was impossible now to carry out her plan, she crossed and sat on the bed, think-

ing desperately, conscious that this was rather like living on the lip of a volcano. Why were they suspicious? What should she do?

She had the uneasy feeling of being trapped—of a net remorselessly closing in on her.

Quickly she undressed and slipped into bed, trying to sleep. At length she dozed, to be awakened by Mrs. Brown's voice in the passage, calling abruptly:

"Half-past seven, girl. Get up!"
Gaye rose hastily. The door was now unlocked.

She went down to the sitting-room to breakfast, conscious of the silent watchfulness of the Browns.

Gaye felt she could not relax for a second. The strain of constantly acting was great, and so at the very first opportunity she meant to strike to learn the secret of the soldiers.

The chance came sooner than she expected.

Once the shop was open, Simon Brown put on his hat and coat.

"I shall be out for ten minutes, Miss Hamilton. Look after things."

He left the shop—and Gaye thrilled. Mrs. Brown was upstairs, tidying the sitting-room, she knew.

"Now—Gaye! Get moving," she told herself breathlessly.

She slipped out of the shop, opened the frosted glass door and passed through. She left it open, so that she could hear if anyone entered the shop, and also hear if Mrs. Brown started to come down the staircase.

Extraordinarily thrilled, she paused in the passage, thinking hard.

Where were the soldiers?
"Oh!"

She exclaimed in sudden excitement. To her left was a big hall-stand. Leaning untidily against it was a broom, the hairs of which contained sawdust. There was also a little sawdust showing under the hall-stand.

"Sawdust," whispered Gaye slowly. "The soldiers were packed in sawdust! There was sawdust on the one the Browns were holding! I wonder—"

On a sudden impulse she fell on her hands and knees and peered under the hall-stand.

There was quite a little trail of sawdust there, leading to the wall.

Gaye straightened, her eyes glowing like stars, cheeks flushed.

"I believe I've got it! Oh, golly me—"

Feverishly impatient now, she seized the big hall-stand and tried to drag it out, away from the wall. It hardly budged. It was very heavy.

Gaye tugged with all her strength, trembling in excitement, conscious that every second was vital. She paused, snatched up the broom, and used the handle to lever the hall-stand away from the wall.

Slowly it slid out—farther—farther. At last she desisted, panting, and at what she saw she wanted to cry out in her tumultuous triumph.

"A secret door!"
For that was what it was. It had been papered over, but now the hall-stand was away, the outline and small catch were plainly revealed!

And behind that door were the wooden toy soldiers—the secret of which would enable Peter to smash the Count and his whole vast organisation!

For a second Gaye paused, regaining her breath, savouring this great triumph. It was then that a slight movement in the looking glass in the centre of the hall-stand caught her eye.

From this angle the looking glass reflected the rear door. That door had silently opened.

Gaye knew a moment of absolute freezing horror!

Standing motionless in the doorway, watching her with unspeakable menace, was Roma Vadell and—the dreaded Count himself!

Will Gaye's real identity be discovered? See next Friday's thrilling chapters of this grand serial.



HER HOLIDAY WITH LING MIN YO

By DORIS BROOKES

THE DOUBTS OF MIN YO

MAUREEN CARSTAIRS was staying in Puchow, in China, at the home of her friend, Ling Min Yo.

She was warned by Wong, a mysterious young boatman whom the Lings believed was chief of the river pirates, to guard part of a jade tablet her father had given her.

It was stolen by Shan, high steward of the House of Ling, who passed it on to Ku Yi Tso, whom Maureen knew to be the Great One of the Scarlet Dragon, who was plotting against the House of Ling.

Wong, who had already obtained possession of the other half of the vital jade tablet, however, managed to get it back from Ku Yi Tso.

Min Yo, who believed Ku to be a respectable business man and an old friend of her father, was distressed when she learnt of the "robbery," and when she saw Maureen talking to a boatman answering Wong's description, she felt it her duty to tell her father.

MAUREEN gave an apprehensive gasp. Terrible would be Mr. Ling's anger if he were told that she had been meeting Wong.

Without any doubt it would mean the end of her stay at the House of Ling—and no knowing what other complications, too.

"No! Yo-Yo, you mustn't do that—" she began desperately.

But already Min Yo had turned, was beginning to move towards the adjoining courtyard, where Ling Cho Yen was still talking to Shan, the treacherous high steward of the household.

Maureen caught her by the arm.

"Wait! You don't understand— I understand that Maureen has had meeting with that river brigand who is my honourable father's deadliest enemy!" Min Yo said in a choked voice.

"Oh, goodness! Please let me try to explain—"

"How can Maureen explain such unworthy behaviour?" the Chinese girl retorted passionately.

Maureen's blue eyes filled with consternation. Never had she seen Min Yo, usually so sweet and gentle, aroused to such anger and scorn.

It made her realise how deeply Min Yo had been offended; made her realise, too, that their friendship had now reached breaking point. And it was no fault of Min Yo's, Maureen reflected with a feeling of remorse.

But such a friendship must not be allowed to founder because of misunderstanding. Surely there was some way of averting this tragic mistake?

"Yo-Yo, you must trust me!" she pleaded fiercely, and her grip on the other girl's arm tightened. "You must believe that what I do is done to help the House of Ling. You must believe also that Wong is a friend, not an enemy—"

"A friend! That I cannot believe!"

"Not if I prove it to you?" Maureen challenged.

"And how can Maureen do that?"

For a moment Maureen hesitated. Not yet had she won Min Yo's confidence, and she must be careful not to betray Wong.

"Will you make a bargain with me, Yo-Yo?" she asked. "I have said I will prove to you that Wong is a friend. If I fail, then—I shall consider myself unworthy and leave the House of Ling of my own accord. For your part, I ask for a pledge of secrecy, to be kept until I release you from it."

Min Yo looked intently into Maureen's blue eyes. Her first wave of anger was passing. With all her heart she wanted to believe and trust this girl with whom she had known such happiness.

"Please give me this one more chance, Yo-Yo," Maureen pleaded earnestly. "Please, for the sake of—of old times!"

Still Min Yo hesitated. Her lips quivered, and then—

"I promise," she breathed softly.

"You darling!" exclaimed Maureen, and a smile came to replace the anxious expression that had been on her face. "Oh, Yo-Yo, I won't fail—I will convince you. And to do that we must go out."

"Where do we go, Maureen?" Maureen looked around cautiously. Mr. Ling and Shan were no longer in sight. The courtyard was deserted.

"To the Cafe of Mimosa in the Street of Orchids," she said. "You know it?"

"Yes. It is some distance from here. I arrange for sedan chairs to take us," Min Yo replied.

Neither she nor Maureen heard a faint rustle of silk from behind the near-by wall which divided this courtyard from the next. Neither of them saw the figure crouched there close to the gateway.

Ten minutes later two sedan chairs, with their four attendant bearers, were waiting outside the House of Ling.

With Min Yo in the leading one, they set off through the narrow streets of old Puchow.

Maureen felt all her excitement returning.

Once again she was on her way to meet Wong, that mysterious young Chinese who had the reputation of being a notorious river pirate, and yet in whom she had implicit faith.

As promised, he had sent out the signal telling her that he now had both halves of the jade tablet which was the key to all the mystery. Together, at the Cafe of Mimosa, they were going to examine it and learn its secret.

And Min Yo would be there, too. Momentarily Maureen frowned a little, wondering what Wong, so masterful at times, would think about that.

But she had no regrets for having made this move on her own initiative. It had been the one way in which she could prove to Min Yo

that Wong was seeking to help the House of Ling, and to explain why she herself had been acting so strangely these last few days. It was time that Min Yo was let into the secret—and the tablet would tell all.

Maureen thrilled in anticipation. Just what was it going to tell? How was her happiness linked up with this Chinese tablet depicting a humped bridge?

And Wong had said that the House of Ling, and his own destiny, too, were concerned in the secrets which this intriguing piece of jade would reveal.

"Goodness, Yo-Yo's going to be as excited as I am," Maureen chuckled. "I'm glad she's coming. The mystery's on the point of being cleared up, and then everybody can be told—and I can start enjoying myself again instead of having to be so secretive."

At that moment there was a faint jar as the coolies set down the chair. One of them sprang forward to lift up the curtain.

"Illustrious guest has arrived!" he said in Chinese, bowing low as she stepped out.

Maureen looked about her eagerly. The grounds of the cafe were a blaze of yellow, with the fragrant scent of mimosa sweet in the air. From the cafe itself came the sounds of music and a chattering hum from the Chinese seated at the low tables.

Was Wong there waiting for her? How would she know him? For Wong the pirate was a hunted man, and he would be in one of his many disguises.

Excitedly she ran across to Min Yo's sedan chair, surprised to notice that the attendant bearers were not standing beside it. Nor, it seemed, had Min Yo herself alighted yet, for the curtains were still drawn and she was nowhere in sight.

Maureen smiled. Had little Yo-Yo guessed that she had been brought here to meet Wong and was afraid to show herself?

"Out you come, Yo-Yo!" she exclaimed, drawing aside one of the curtains.

The smile faded from her face. Min Yo wasn't in the sedan. But on the seat was her bangle. Maureen, picking it up, noticed that it was broken.

Where was her Chinese friend?

The sound of running feet made Maureen turn. Two rickshaws had arrived, the coolies panting and perspiring. In the leading one was Min Yo's father; in the other—Shan.

A premonition of disaster suddenly gripped Maureen. Ling Cho Yen had left his rickshaw and was coming towards her at a run—and that was ominous in itself. And on his face, usually so inscrutable, was an expression of terrible anxiety.

"Where is Min Yo?" he demanded hoarsely.

"We—we've only just arrived, Mr. Ling," Maureen stammered. "I think she must have gone into the cafe—"

"Search, Shan!" commanded Mr. Ling. "But I fear we are too late. Fool of an English girl!" he added violently, swinging round on Maureen. "There is a plot afoot to

kidnap Min Yo—and if harm has befallen her then you will be to blame!"



A MESSAGE FROM WONG

The colour drained from Maureen's cheeks, and she reeled back as if she had been struck a blow.

A plot afoot to kidnap Min Yo? Oh, great goodness, was this why she had found her friend's sedan empty save for the broken bangle—because she had been kidnapped?

It was too awful to contemplate. No surely such a thing could not have happened—

Shan returned in a state of great agitation.

"O illustrious master, unworthy Shan has failed to find your daughter," he said in an abject voice.

An icy feeling of dread caught at Maureen's heart. Then where was Min Yo? Now she began to fear the worst—and the worst was confirmed a few moments later.

Two figures came staggering into the cafe grounds—the figures of the sedan chair coolies.

They were bruised and cut and covered with dust, as if from fighting. The crowd which had begun to gather made way for them as they crossed to Mr. Ling and prostrated themselves in front of him.

"Illustrious master, we were attacked on our way here!" they wailed.

"Where is my daughter?" Ling Cho Yen demanded in a terrible voice.

"Daughter of illustrious master was carried away by villains bearing the sign of a crescent moon!"

Maureen gave a gasp. A crescent moon—that was the sign of Wong!

From Mr. Ling came a stricken cry. "Wong! Wong has done this wicked thing!"

The frightened bearers went on to tell how they had been far ahead of the second sedan containing Maureen when they had been attacked at a quiet spot. They had been overwhelmed and left dazed on the ground.

Min Yo, it seemed, had been whirled away in a car, for here on the outskirts of the old city the streets were broader and allowed of such traffic. Her sedan had been audaciously carried on to the Cafe of Mimosa by two of the gang—no doubt to allay any suspicion while Min Yo was rushed away by her captors.

Maureen stood listening like one stunned, her thoughts in tumult. A frantic anxiety for Min Yo was the overriding emotion; but with it was a sense of horrified bewilderment.

"Wong had kidnapped Min Yo? No; she could not believe that—could not. Why should he harm her when he was friend of the House of Ling?"

"Now you see what you have done, Maureen!" came Mr. Ling's accusing voice.

"I? I do not understand—" Maureen stared at him dazedly.

"It is as I said, O master," broke in Shan. "Wong has carried away Min Yo, knowing that the English girl would bring her here!"

"No; it isn't true!" protested Maureen fiercely, and in that moment was caught off her guard. "Wong couldn't have known—"

"Does English girl seek to defend Wong?" shot out Shan. "Does she deny that she persuaded daughter of my illustrious master to come here? And how is it that English girl did not know of kidnapping? Was she not travelling with my master's daughter?"

"My bearers dawdled," Maureen said. "Did you not hear the other coolies say that they were far ahead?"

And then she gave a horrified gasp as one of her bearers spoke.

"Guest of illustrious master tell us not to hurry," he said.

"It's not true!" she panted. "The man lies. This is a trick—"

She broke off, realisation coming to her then. This was a trap sprung by Shan, who must have overheard her arranging with Min Yo to come here to the Cafe of Mimosa.

Min Yo had been kidnapped by the Scarlet Dragon—that dreaded and powerful organisation which was the House of Ling's secret enemy; her enemy and Wong's too!

With this dastardly deed the Scarlet Dragon had struck against them all. Min Yo was the victim—and she and Wong were being blamed for it!

But where was Wong now? If he was at the cafe, he must know what had happened. Surely he would be able to act in some way—

Suddenly she became aware that Mr. Ling had swung round on her—accusingly, such anger blazing in his eyes that she drew back appalled.

"So! Can it be that English girl knew my daughter to be kidnapped?" he cried. "Was that why she persuaded Min Yo to come here—"

"No—no! How can you say such a dreadful thing Mr. Ling? It's not true. It's all a trick—and your treacherous steward, Shan, is to blame—"

"Silence, English girl!" thundered Ling Cho Yen. "You will return to the House of Ling immediately. You will pack your luggage to-night and be prepared to leave in the morning when the authorities come to fetch you! You will be held under suspicion of being an accomplice of the pirate Wong!"

Maureen clenched her hands. "Held by the authorities?" she gulped. "But—but—this is fantastic! I have done nothing wrong—"

"Go!" Mr. Ling said harshly. "It is my wish that English girl will never address another word to me! Shan, see that she is locked in her room for the night!"

"But—but—" Ling Cho Yen turned coldly away. In a voice hoarse with emotion he began giving instructions that everything possible must be done to find his daughter; then he strode away to inform the authorities.

Shan's face was inscrutable as he looked at Maureen; only his glittering eyes betrayed his mocking triumph.

Maureen almost groaned aloud at her helplessness.

She stepped into the waiting sedan chair and slumped back in the seat. If only she could have seen Wong! But there was no chance now.

At last the House of Ling was reached. And by that time her eyes were gleaming fiercely, recklessly.

Hadn't she always been a fighter? She wasn't going to admit defeat. She wasn't going to submit tamely.

She must remain free—free to search for poor little Min Yo; free to contact Wong so that they should see this thing through.

But when she looked out of the sedan chair—Shan had already acted, forestalling any attempt at escape on her part.

The gatemen, gardeners, and carpenters immediately surrounded her as the chief steward gave the command. In their midst, she was escorted to the little house which she had shared with Min Yo in the Courtyard of Sweet Briar.

They watched her go in; then the door was locked on her, and Shan took charge of the key.

Suddenly down-hearted, Maureen sank slowly on her bed. This was the end, after all. There was nothing she could do—except start packing.

She reached under the bed, dragging out her suitcases. As she did so a slip of paper fluttered out from between two of them and fell to the floor.

Maureen stooped to pick it up. Then she gave a gasping cry of excitement. For there was a message on the slip of paper which said:

"Be ready to escape at dawn—and do not worry about Min Yo."

And it was signed—"Wong."



THE RESCUE PLAN IN DANGER

A thrill of joy ran through Maureen. Here was news of Min Yo—news of Wong!

Had he himself been in the House of Ling to leave this message—or had his secret helpers here the same as had the Scarlet Dragon?

But it did not matter. The important thing was that she had heard from Wong.

He must have been at the Cafe of Mimosa and knew what had happened. And now he was organising her escape before the authorities arrived to take her in their charge.

"And he says I'm not to worry about Yo-Yo," she murmured, a feeling of gladness in her heart. "Does that mean she is safe?"

It could mean so many things. Safe, perhaps—but still a prisoner of the Scarlet Dragon. It was a relief, however, to have had even this news of her, indefinite though it was.

"Perhaps Wong knows where she is," Maureen thought hopefully. "And then, when he has helped me to escape, we'll be able to rescue her. Goodness, I wonder how he intends getting me away from here?"

But that question would not be answered until dawn. In the meantime she must be patient.

It was with a lighter heart that Maureen got on with her packing. Then she went to bed. But there were too many things on her mind for sleep to come easily.

Mingled with her excitement at the prospect of escape was still an anxiety for Min Yo.

Where had her kidnapped friend been taken? Would she and Wong be able to find and rescue her?

And ever and again, returning like a nightmare, was the thought of that scene at the Cafe of Mimosa, when she had been accused of being partly responsible for the kidnapping.

At last she did doze off, but she was awake again long before dawn.

She rose and made herself a cup of tea with the water boiling on the little charcoal brazier. She dressed, and then began the waiting.

Outside it was pitch dark. Inside the little house there was the chill that comes before the dawn. Maureen shivered and crossed over to the brazier, making herself another cup of scalding-hot tea.

As she sipped it she looked round. Her last hour in the House of Ling—her last hour in this bright room where she and Yo-Yo had known happiness and had such fun!

Maureen felt saddened. She, who was so high-spirited and so happy-go-lucky, always wanted to be friendly with everybody. It was heart-breaking to be leaving like this.

But she must—she must. There were so many things to be done. Min Yo must be found and rescued; all this mystery must be cleared up. And she must fight to expose the Scarlet Dragon. So many things to do—but she and Wong would do them.

She looked at her watch. Not long now to dawn.

Maureen crossed to the locked door and peered out through the curtain. She gave an anxious start. Hers was not the only light burning in the House of Ling; she was not the only one astir, for already there were signs of life in some of the courtyards.

Why should this be so on this particular morning? She felt herself begin to tremble with suspense.

And then she heard the shrill, reedy notes of a flute.

Suddenly Maureen remembered Min Yo mentioning that there were great celebrations due to take place

(Please turn to page 35.)



THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE MISSING STUDENT

"NOW all the newcomers have settled down, what about introducing ourselves?" asked Sally Warner eagerly. "We may find some new recruits for the Merry-makers' Club."

"Good idea," approved Don Weston. "And we could do with some more really good deck-tennis players."

"Ah! That little blonde who came aboard at Chico," broke in Johnny Briggs eagerly. "I was wondering how to get to know—I was thinking she looked as though she could play deck-tennis."

"That little blonde," said fair-haired Fay Manners witheringly, "looked too frail to wield a fly-whisk, let alone a tennis racket. You'll have to think up another excuse for introducing yourself, Johnny."

"Come to think of it," murmured Sally thoughtfully. "I haven't seen her since we set sail yesterday. Maybe she was just seeing someone off. Hard luck Johnny. Hallo, what's the matter with Phineas?" she added in some surprise. "He's dashing around like a cat that's lost its kittens. Hey, Phineas," she called, as that boy approached, "what's wrong?"

Edgar T. Phineas, head prefect of the floating college, one hand clutching a sheaf of papers, the other a pencil, paused and gave the others a worried blink.

"I've lost one of the students," he began.

"Tut-tut," broke in Don, with a grin. "You're getting careless, Phineas, you're going around mislaying students."

"This is no laughing matter, Weston," said Phineas coldly. "It seems the girl is nowhere aboard, yet her luggage is in cabin thirteen—"

"Cabin thirteen?" Sally's voice rose in horror, belied by the twinkle in her blue eyes. "Phineas, can you wonder she's missing? The Black Abbot's got her," she added in a blood-curdling whisper.

"You know he haunts cabin thirteen. That's why it hasn't been used before," added Johnny in a sinister voice.

"Oh, nonsense!" snapped Phineas. "Nobody believes that rubbish."

But just the same there was the slightest trace of uneasiness in his expression as he looked at the four chums. It was true, of course, that cabin 13 had been out of use because of the story associated with it. Apparently on one voyage some time ago it had been occupied by a man belonging to some peculiar sect, who had been known as the Black Abbot because of the sombre hood and robes he wore. And that man had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, no trace of him ever being found.

And, according to rumour, whenever the cabin had been in use after that some ill-luck had befallen the occupant.

Whether the story was true or not, cabin 13 on B deck had certainly not been in use on this trip—until now

when, owing to the crowd of new students who had come aboard at Chico, the last port of call, the room had been needed.

"You'll have to make out a special schedule for this, Phineas," said Fay in the most scared voice she could manage.

"With a paragraph about being spirited away," quavered Sally. "I know something queer has happened. You can feel it in the air."

"Oh, shut up!" muttered Phineas; but once again he glanced uneasily around, agitatedly mopping his damp face.

Yes, Sally was right. There was something in the air—something sinister. Overhead the sun poured down like molten brass from a curiously leaden sky; the sea looked grey and oily. There wasn't a breath of air.

But despite this, Phineas gave a little shiver—then suddenly glared at the chums.

"You're just trying to be funny," he said crossly. "For that you can jolly well help me find her. Get going."

"Yes, Phineas," said Sally meekly, but with an irresistible smile curving her lips. "Come on, shipmates."

And with a grin at the annoyed Phineas the four chums moved off, not at all displeased with the task the head prefect had given them. For this was as good a way as any of getting acquainted with the new students who had come aboard just before the Ocean Star had sailed away from Patagonia the previous day.

But though they spent almost two hours at their task, not a trace of the occupant of cabin 13 could they find. And even the chums began to share Phineas' bafflement.

"Queer!" murmured Sally, after they had reported to the head prefect. "Where can she be?"

"Probably just missed the boat," said the practical Johnny.

"Then why is her baggage aboard?" asked Don. "Even her hand baggage."

"The mystery thickens," murmured Fay. "Like the atmosphere. Golly, just look!"

The chums, emerging into the open air, were already looking. The sun had disappeared now. The whole sky was boiling with enormous black clouds, edged with angry purple. Where the sea had been sluggish and oily before, it was now rolling in a heavy swell, hissing as it slapped against the sides of the Ocean Star.

"Golly, it's only six o'clock and as black as night already," said Sally. "Think we're in for a storm, Don?"

"Seems like it," replied Don rather uneasily. "Doesn't—Gosh! Look at that!" he shouted.

For a savage fork of lightning suddenly split the black clouds, momentarily blinding the Merry-makers. It was followed by an ear-splitting crash of thunder. And even as the chums stood shaken and dazed by the noise, there sounded from below them a frenzied, terrified scream. "Great jumping Jiminy!" Johnny

leapt almost a foot into the air. "This is too much. What—ouch!" He jumped again as another scream came from below.

"Quick!" cried Sally urgently. "This way."

She darted towards the companion-way that led down to the cabins on B deck. But before she could descend the steps a flying figure rushed blindly up them, giving another cry of fear as she crashed into Sally.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she quavered shrilly. "Oh, no—"

But Sally, recovering quickly from the violent push she had received, gripped the girl's arms tightly, shaking her a little.

"Pull yourself together," she said firmly. "Tell us what happened—did the thunder frighten you?"

"Oh, no, no!" moaned the girl. "Outside cabin 13. A figure clothed in black. Like—like a monk. Oh, it was horrible—horrible!"

"Like a monk! Golly!"

Sally's voice was startled. She blinked as the ship's lights suddenly came on, then stared towards the girl who was trembling in her grip. It was, she saw now, Zena Guidice, one of the new students who had boarded the Ocean Star yesterday. A rather flashy sort of girl, who seemed to prefer the company of Sally's fiery Mexican rival, Carmentita Pascali, to that of the Merry-makers. But sheer terror was making Zena cling to Sally now.

"The—the Black Abbot!" whispered Fay fearfully.

As if to emphasize her words there came another dazzling flash of lightning, another ear-splitting crash of thunder. The large crowd which had now gathered round gave scared gasps. Zena gave a whimpering cry.

"It—it came towards me," she muttered. "Like—like a ghost."

Sally felt a shiver go over her at the words. Then she shook her head.

"Nonsense!" she said briskly. "You've probably been listening to that story about the Black Abbot, and what with the darkness and that awful flash of lightning you imagined you saw him. You'd better come and have a cup of coffee to buck you up."

"That's right," put in plump Tubby Winwood. "And a few cream buns—they'll put new life into you. Mustn't go imagining things, you know," he added, drawing Zena through the crowd.

"But I didn't—I didn't!" she shrieked. "I saw it, I tell you."

"Saw what?" asked a new voice, as Edgar Phineas pushed his way on the scene, the usual bundle of forms in his hand. "What's the trouble?"

"Zena's seen a ghost," announced Johnny. "The Black Abbot."

"Eh?" Phineas looked startled—a look that turned to suspicion as he stared towards the chums. "Say, you brought that subject up a little while back," he said sternly. "Have you been fooling around?"

"Certainly not!" replied Sally indignantly. "I think Zena must have been imagining—"

She broke off, wincing, as another blinding flash of lightning lit up the ship. Then she gave a violent jump, a loud cry.

Only for a split second it stood revealed, that black, ghostly shape in the monk's robe and cowed hood, standing at the top of the other steps

leading down to the staterooms' cabins on B Deck. Then it wheeled and vanished.

For a second Sally stood transfixed, a feeling of fear gripping her. So it had not been imagination on Zena's part. There was something queer about it.

With a quick "Come on!" to her chums she flew down the companionway, and darted along the passage towards the cabins. Then she gave a cry, pointing.

"Look!" she cried. "Cabin 13. The door's just closing. Whoever it is, we've got them trapped now. And it's no ghost—ghosts don't have to open doors."

With Don, Johnny, and Fay at her heels, she turned the handle, flung open the door, and clicked on the light.

"Now!" she cried triumphantly. "You're caught. What—"

And there she stopped, staring round in incredulous disbelief. For apart from the furnishings and the baggage on the floor, cabin 13 was empty!



THE BLACK ABBOT AGAIN

"I just don't understand it," Sally's tone was bewildered as she glanced round at the students collected in the Merrymakers' Club.

It was the following morning—a morning comparatively calm after the wild storm that had lashed around the Ocean Star during the night, though the sea was still choppy and wild clouds scudded across the sky, releasing torrential showers of rain every few moments.

Lectures had been temporarily suspended owing to the pitching of the ship, and in any case, after the storm and scares of the previous evening, most of the students felt too shaky for any work.

"We searched cabin 13 from end to end and couldn't find a thing," put in Don puzzledly.

The chums felt completely baffled. Here was mystery, indeed.

"And what about the missing student—say, what's her name?" Linda Powell demanded suddenly.

"Nicola Mendoza," replied Sally.

"N-Nicola Mendoza?" Zena almost shouted the name, her complexion turning a sickly yellow.

"You know her?" asked Sally puzzledly.

With a tremendous effort Zena pulled herself together.

"I—I know somebody of that name," she muttered viciously. "And if it's the girl I know, then it's a jolly good thing she did miss the boat."

And with that she spun on her heel and hurried out of the room.

"Funny!" murmured Sally. "Zena seemed scared when I mentioned that name. I wonder why?"

But Zena was not prepared to answer that question. She closed up like an oyster when the subject was reopened later that day, and flatly refused to discuss the missing student.

With the coming of night the storm returned with redoubled violence it seemed.

Sally and Fay were still discussing the Black Abbot as they came out of their cabin on the way to dinner that evening.

"It's a mystery!" said Sally. "We must—Ouch!" She tried to save herself as the ship rolled heavily, but she was unsuccessful. She cannoned against Fay, and clutching each other, the two of them fell against one of the cabin doors.

It flew open, sending them sprawling to the floor. And as rather breathlessly they scrambled to their feet, and began to shut the door, Zena and Carmentita appeared at the top of the passage. Zena's face was furious.

"What are you doing in my cabin?" she snapped.

"We were not in your cabin, Zena," Sally replied. "We fell against the

door when the ship lurched and it flew open. Perhaps—"

And there she stopped as from Zena, who had pushed past her and flung open the cabin door, there came a strangled gasp.

"You—you dare to say you were not in my cabin?" she almost screamed. "Look! Look!"

With a quivering finger she pointed into the cabin, and as Sally and Fay stared in, they blinked in startled surprise.

For someone had been in the cabin, that was certain. Drawers had been pulled open and their contents scattered. The contents of Zena's handbag had been spilled out on the dressing-table—even the bedclothes had been dragged back and the coverlet was hanging on the floor.

"Surely you—you don't think we did it?" gasped Fay.

"Who else?" stormed Zena. "You were coming out of this cabin when I saw you—"

Trembling with agitation—a queer sort of fear in her eyes, Sally noticed—she ran into the cabin. Quickly she swung open the door of the cabinet over the wash-basin, and Sally saw her agitatedly finger a blue toilet-bag. When Zena turned her face showed relief, and when she spoke again there was a bullying note in her voice.

"Well, I'm waiting for an explanation," she said aggressively, looking for approval at the crowd of students, including Don and Johnny, who had been drawn to the scene by the raised voices.

But before anyone could say anything, a new figure appeared on the scene—at sight of whom Sally's face fell in dismay. For it was Professor Willard, the headmaster, who had rejoined the ship at Chico.

He listened in silence to Zena's angry accusations, to Sally's and Fay's indignant denials, then pursed his lips, frowning worriedly.

"I find it hard to believe that Sally and Fay could have done this, particularly as there seems no reason for it. And yet they were seen here, and then, of course, there was that ridiculous ghost business yesterday. That is also directed against Miss Guidice. It couldn't, perhaps, be your misguided way of ragging a new student, could it?" he asked, turning a stern gaze upon Sally and Fay.

"Certainly not, professor," answered Sally, her face crimson with distress. "We had nothing to do with this—or with the Black Abbot affair."

"H'm!" The headmaster rubbed his chin. "Well, in the absence of proof there's nothing I can do at the moment. But remember," he added sternly, looking hard at Sally and Fay, "if I find who is responsible for these bothers—and particularly for that ghost scare—then I shall deal very strictly with them." And with a curt nod he walked off.

"It's jolly unfair blaming you," muttered Johnny at dinner. "Whoops! Grab the rolls, Don," he cried, as the ship gave another lurch. "Can't eat a decent meal for this storm," he said disconsolately.

SAVE WASTE PAPER

Every kind of waste paper—bus tickets, old newspapers, old books and magazines, catalogues, concert and theatre programmes, old bills and receipts—all can be recycled and made into goods for export, and thus help to hasten the return to prosperity.

So join in the National Paper Chase and collect all the bits and pieces you can.

But Sally was not worrying about her dinner, nor about the storm.

"You know," she said thoughtfully, "I don't believe Zena really thought we were responsible for what happened in her cabin. She was really scared about something, and ready to fly at anyone. Somehow I think she has some connection with cabin 13 and the Black Abbot. No, listen!" she said as Don made to speak. "I've got an idea."

A few minutes later, while the others were still at dinner, the four chums slipped out of the dining-room. They made their way to cabin 13, opened the door, and went in. Keenly Sally looked round, then she shrugged.

"Nothing here," she said in a loud voice, "so let's go and investigate the store-room next door!"

She switched out the light, then came the sound of retreating footsteps and the door of cabin 13 slammed. There was silence for a few moments, then from the far side of the cabin came a strange creak. The almost incessant lightning flashes revealed that a section of the wall was slowly sliding back. Through the aperture, frightening in the fitful light, stepped a black-robed figure. The panel closed behind it.

And in the same instant the lights blazed on. Four triumphant figures sprang forward.

"We've really got you this time," shouted Sally. "Our trick of pretending to go away fooled you properly."

There was a startled cry from the monk-like figure. It turned to dash back to the wall, caught its foot against a chair, and with a cry of pain fell to the floor.

And before it could rise Sally, Fay, Don and Johnny had pounced upon it, had snatched off the monk's hood. And then they stared in astonishment.

For the face that was revealed was that of a young girl—a girl whose brown eyes were filled with fear and pain, whose fair hair fell in rippling waves to her shoulders. It was the blonde girl who had come aboard at Chico. The missing occupant of cabin 13.

She was the Black Abbot!

ZENA RECEIVES A CABLEGRAM



"But—but why?" blurted out Sally in bewilderment. "Why the disguise—why all the mystery? After all, you had a perfect right

to be on board. That is if you are Nicola Mendoza?"

The girl nodded dully.

"Yes, I am Nicola Mendoza." She looked up hopelessly at the circle of puzzled faces around her, then shrugged. "I suppose I might as well tell you," she added bitterly, "since soon all the ship will know. I did this to help my brother—he is held in Chico on a charge of stealing valuable bonds. He was accused by his partner. But the accusation is false." Her eyes flashed, her voice shook with indignation. "The bonds couldn't be found—naturally, because I have reason to believe that his partner's sister brought them aboard herself."

"You—you mean," gasped Fay, "that they would allow an innocent man to go to prison?"

"Indeed they would," replied Nicola fiercely. "I so desperately wanted to help my brother—I could only do that by proving that the bonds were in that girl's possession. That is why I masqueraded as the Black Abbot—partly to scare her and partly so that she should not suspect who I really was. But what's the use now?" she finished with a choking sob. "You have found me out—I don't know how—"

"Because I suddenly remembered," said Sally, gazing compassionately at the tragic little figure, "that the last time we came in here there were wet footprints leading to that wall and none leading away from it. Which

seemed to indicate an opening of some sort."

"That is so," nodded Nicola. "The sliding panel used to lead to an adjoining bath-room, which is now dismantled and used as a store-room."

"Sally figured that out, too," put in Don. "But never mind all that. The question is: what are we going to do about you?"

"We," said Sally softly, but firmly, "are going to help her. Yes, Nicola," she added, as that girl looked up in wild disbelief. "I mean it. Listen," she said excitedly. "The girl who has the bonds—it is Zena Guidice, isn't it?"

"Yes, but—but how—"

"That's easy to guess, after the way you ransacked her cabin," smiled Sally. "But there's something else. I've got a pretty shrewd idea where those bonds are kept."

"You have?" New hope in her eyes, Nicola made to leap to her feet, only to sink back with a cry of pain. "My ankle!" she gasped, her face turning ashen. "Oh, that this should happen now! What can I do?"

In quick sympathy Fay knelt to look at the ankle, now rapidly swelling.

"Pretty bad sprain," she remarked. "I'll bandage it for you, Nicola. But you certainly won't be able to use it for a while."

"I must! I must!" cried Nicola frantically. "If Zena suspects I am aboard she may destroy the bonds. What am I to do?"

"Stay in the store-room," replied Sally briskly. "Keep out of sight—until we can smuggle you to Fay's cabin. Meanwhile, hand over those robes and that hood."

For a moment Nicola and the chums stared at her blankly. Then Johnny's eyes widened.

"You mean you're going to be the Black Abbot?" he asked incredulously.

"Just that," replied Sally cheerfully. "Now listen," she added, as she saw the boys preparing for argument, "I'm the one who knows where the bonds are hidden. I shall take care to wait until Zena is out of the way—and even if she should come in I shall be disguised—she won't know who I am. There's nothing to it."

And despite her chums' pleas and Nicola's doubts, Sally remained adamant. Finally, seeing that argument was useless, Don, Johnny, and Fay quitted the cabin, and strolled along the passage to make sure the coast was clear. A few moments later Sally, robed from head to foot in black, cautiously followed.

Straight to Zena's cabin she sped. With trembling fingers she turned the handle of the door and slipped inside. Without hesitation she darted across to the cabinet over the wash-basin and eagerly groped inside. And then, beneath the enveloping hood, her face fell in dismay. For the blue toilet-bag, the article over which Zena had shown such concern when her cabin had been ransacked, the bag in which, Sally now felt sure, the incriminating papers were hidden, had disappeared.

Zena must have been scared—must have hidden it somewhere else. But where—where? Frantically, in the fitful lightning flashes, Sally looked round the small cabin. She dared not risk turning on the light, and so—

She gave a startled cry as the light was suddenly switched on for her. Then she started back with a gasp of alarm as into the cabin strode Phineas, followed by Professor Willard and a crowd of excited students.

Before Sally could move Phineas had snatched off the hood. In sorrowful triumph he nodded.

"I thought so," he said, rather regretfully. "You see, sir, I told you that if we kept watch we'd catch the guilty person."

Professor Willard nodded. "Well, Miss Warner," he said, "I'm waiting for an explanation."

Sally licked her lips, looked hungrily around. What could she say? If she gave her reason for coming here Zena would be warned, Nicola would be caught, and all hope of helping her brother would be gone.

Dumbly she shook her head.

"Very well," said Professor Willard, "since you have no explanation, you will be locked in your cabin until I decide upon your punishment. Wait!" he added. "Miss Manners, of course, shares your cabin, and it is inadvisable that she should have communication with you." He thought for a moment, then nodded. "Ah! Cabin No. 13 is still empty. Phineas, lock Miss Warner there."

Sally was escorted away and locked up in the supposedly haunted cabin, but when the stewardess entered it next morning, carrying a breakfast tray, the cabin was empty. Sally had disappeared!

The news quickly spread around the ship, and after breakfast the students congregated outside the dining saloon and excitedly discussed this new and totally unexpected development.

Don & Co. were as puzzled as the others. They guessed, of course, that Sally had escaped by means of the sliding panel communicating with the store-room next door, but where was she now? And what was her game? Nicola could not help them, for during the night she had been smuggled along to Fay's cabin, and was still in hiding there.

Heavy-hearted, worried, Sally's chums made their way down below. In the corridor they passed Zena, who had been strangely jittery and on edge ever since she had heard the news of Sally's disappearance. With a glare at her, they passed on, entering their cabins. That worried look still on her face, Zena entered her own cabin. Closing the door, she paced nervously up and down. If only she could conquer this feeling of panic that gripped her—this feeling of watching eyes. Where was Sally? she asked herself. Somehow she had the feeling that the leader of the Merry-makers knew of her guilty secret.

A quarter of an hour passed by, and then she jumped violently as a knock came at the door. A cablegram was slipped beneath the door. With trembling fingers she picked it up and smoothed it out, to give a cry of relief as she read the message:

"Destroy articles entrusted to you.
"RAMON."

From Ramon, her brother. "Destroy articles." That meant only one thing—naturally, he could not openly name them. With a cry of relief, she darted towards the porthole, opened it, and pulled at a thin black cord attached to the catch. After a few seconds an object came into view—a blue envelope-shaped plastic toilet-bag. Working feverishly, she slit along the stitches which held the outer covering and the white plastic lining together. With shaking hands she extracted a flat bundle of papers. Violently she screwed them into a ball, made to dart towards the porthole again.

And in that moment a figure leapt from behind the curtained alcove in the corner of the cabin—so violently that it brought the white curtain with it. With a triumphant cry, it snatched at the papers. Tripping and stumbling over the enveloping curtain, it dashed out of the cabin, straight into the arms of Edgar T. Phineas.

With a yelp, Edgar started back. "Help! Another ghost!"

"Not this time, Phineas. It's just me!" And, with a laugh of triumph, Sally snatched off the curtain and waved the bonds high in the air.

"Sorry, professor," said Sally, with a bewitching smile, as that outraged man appeared, "but you can hear the whole story now."

As quickly as possible she told him about Nicola's brother, about the bonds, and about Zena's guilt.

"I'm afraid I had to leave a note in Johnny's cabin asking him to forge a cablegram," she added unrepentantly, "but I had to find out where those bonds were hidden, and I guessed that Zena would act at once when

she received the cablegram. It was a jolly clever hiding-place she chose," she added.

Zena, however, was in no mood to appreciate praise. Sick and furious, she crouched back in her cabin, knowing that her rascally brother was unmasked, that she herself would be sent back to Patagonia as soon as possible.

But Nicola was all smiles when she learnt the news. By then instructions had been given for the police at Chico to be cabled the great news—the news that would result in her brother being set free.

"You are not angry with Sally, professor?" Nicola asked the headmaster. "And you will please let us both stay on the ship?"

The professor smiled and nodded. "In the circumstances I forgive you both," he said. "But from now on Cabin No. 13 is out of bounds. You, Nicola, will be found other accommodation—"

There was a whoop from Sally, and excitedly she and her chums led Nicola along to the deck cafe, there to celebrate their success.

(End of this week's story.)

An entertaining story, featuring the Merry-makers of the College Ship, in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

HER HOLIDAY WITH LING MIN YO

(Continued from page 32.)

that day at a neighbouring home-
stead.

A bride was leaving that home-
stead and going to join her groom
amid all the traditional ceremony
and festivity. Such a ceremony began
with the dawn, and evidently the
House of Ling were early astir to
watch the scene.

Had Wong known of this?

A faint hope began to burn in
Maureen's mind. If Wong had known,
perhaps, when all the House of Ling
were occupied, he would be able to
put in use his plan to help her
escape.

"Oh, he must, he must!" she
breathed.

She thought of little Min Yo, in
the hands of the Scarlet Dragon. If
she were to come to any harm she
would never forgive herself.

"I ought to have known," groaned
Maureen. "I ought to have thought
they would try other tricks to dis-
credit me with Mr. Ling. But I didn't
think they would kidnap *Yu-*Yo**—"

No, she hadn't. There seemed no
limit to the villainy of *Ku Yi Tso*.
But he would surely meet his match
in Wong.

If only Wong would come!

Tensely Maureen waited. The first
streaks of dawn lighted the sky. The
sound of flutes drew nearer and
clearer.

And then another sound—a sound
that made Maureen, tense and keyed
up as she was, jump violently.

It was the deep booming of a gong
from the Entrance Courtyard—that
same gong which Shan had sounded
when he had caught her returning
from the river after a meeting with
Wong.

The emergency gong!

Why was it being sounded now?
What was happening?

The reverberating notes of the
gong boomed through the House of
Ling. There was the patter of foot-
steps rushing towards the Entrance
Courtyard. Then came shouting
voices.

"Lock all doors and guard all gate-
ways! Wong is here in the House of
Ling. Search, search—and do not let
him escape!"

Maureen gave a choking cry of
apprehension. Wong's plan to rescue
her must have been discovered—and
now he himself was in danger of
being captured!

Further exciting chapters await you
in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

SENSATION AT THE CO-ED EXAM

(Continued from page 28.)

easily be hauled up and down the shaft, and a cheat near the plaque could place copies of the exam questions in it and receive answers from an accomplice up here."

June caught her breath. "But the trick had to be worked in a room full of students," Noel explained. "The cheat needed to create some dramatic diversions to capture their attention while the plaque was opened. Hence the mystery messages and their alarming sequels. But you're looking distressed, my dear." "It's only that I felt so sure Loretta was innocent," June murmured. Noel's smile was quizzical. "The evidence has been removed," he said. "But, all the same, I hope to unmask the culprits to-morrow."

NEXT day an eager throng gathered in the hall to hear the result of the Founder's Exam.

"As you are aware, there are two prizes," the Dean announced impressively. "One for the winning boy, and the other for the winning girl. And the winning girl is—Loretta Carr."

There was a dead silence. Not a soul in the hall moved. "Loretta Carr!" the Dean called more loudly.

Still no one moved, but a buzz of whispers began to run round the hall.

"She's not here," Maisie Fellowes breathed. "She wasn't at breakfast either, and no one has seen her since yesterday."

"Haven't you heard the rumour that's going round?" her companion whispered. "They say that the visiting tutor was really a private detective, and he found proof that Loretta was cheating—"

She broke off as the Dean raised his hand for silence.

The Dean's face was stern. "Since Loretta Carr has not seen fit to be present, we will leave that matter in abeyance," he went on. "We now come to the boy who wins the money prize and the scholarship. That boy is Cyril Neame, and I may add that his papers were the most accurate and complete that have ever been handed in for the exam."

There was a burst of spontaneous applause as Cyril rose to his feet. And then, with startling suddenness, the clapping died away.

Black letters had appeared on the wall behind the Dean.

"CYRIL NEAME IS THE CHEAT. HE MUST NOT RECEIVE THE PRIZE."

Cries of amazement rose up. As for Cyril, his good-looking face was a picture of indignation as he halted half-way along the gangway.

"Don't you understand what it means?" he almost shouted. "This is another of Loretta's spiteful tricks. She's out to disturb the prize-giving just as she disturbed the exam—"

"Oh, no, she isn't, Cyril!" They'd been so intent on the mystery message that no one had noticed the uniformed figure of the college janitor entering the hall.

"W-what do you mean?" Cyril panted. "Say! Surely you haven't forgotten!" drawled the newcomer. "Didn't I hide up in the secret room and supply you with answers to the exam questions?"

Cyril's face was deathly pale. "It's lies—lies!" he gasped. "You've a short memory, son," said the janitor. "You've forgotten it was me who fixed the mystery messages and happenings and laid the blame on Loretta. And that we kidnapped Jack Ripley because he was getting on the track of our secret, and we pretended he'd stolen the sports fund and—"

Suddenly Cyril's nerve seemed to crack. He flung himself at that uniformed figure.

"Are you crazy?" he shrieked. "After all we've plotted and planned you've ruined the whole scheme. You've—"

The boy's furious spate of words stopped short as the "janitor" whipped off peaked cap and wig, raised his head and revealed—Noel Raymond!

"You've betrayed yourself, Cyril, as I hoped you would," the young detective said sternly.

Then the hall door flew open to reveal Jack Ripley and Loretta, and a smiling June. Noel had discovered both Jack and Loretta in a cellar under the janitor's lodge. Loretta, following up the lead given her by Jack in his letter, had also been caught and imprisoned.

Noel had been convinced from the first that the mystery messages were written with the left hand, for the strokes made by a left-handed writer are slightly different from those made with the right hand.

He could see for himself during the exam that Loretta was right-handed, and his attention had first been drawn to the janitor by the fact that the man had unlocked the hall door with his left hand, and Noel had then noticed peculiar tei-tale stains of the invisible ink on his fingers.

"Cyril Neame gave himself away, too," Noel told them, "when that scream rang out. He knew a dummy was going to fall, but he over-acted his part and I saw that he pointed to the roof a split second before the trap-door opened."

Never had there been such a sensation in Beverton College!

And later on June and Noel learned that Jack Ripley had been allowed to sit for the exam at a special session, and that he—like his loyal chum Loretta—had been awarded the coveted scholarship.

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's story features Noel and June in Hollywood. Look out for THE CASE OF THE KIDNAPPED FILM GIRL.

THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

(Continued from page 26.)

simple evening meal—these could only mean one thing.

An enemy had been here in her absence—an enemy who had come by stealth to search and rob!



MICHI COMES TO SCHOOL

A cold fear at her heart, Tania darted to the corner where the treasured diary had been hidden—beneath the rushes, in a secret gap in the wattle flooring.

Then a little sigh of relief escaped her lips. The wooden box with its precious contents was safe.

Michi, the panther, must have returned from his hunting trip in time to scare the intruder, but not to catch him.

Who was this enemy who had come by stealth to rob her of her dearest possessions?

Tania stared round her, her hands clenched. Then she drew in her breath sharply as her keen eyes noticed something fluttering in a crevice of the cliff—something caught on the sharp rocks.

Swinging by one hand from the ladder, she reached for the fluttering object and examined it eagerly. It was a scarf of grey, silky material, though Tania did not recognise it as such.

But she knew instinctively that it must belong to one of the island castaways. But which one?

"Michi, smell him out!" she whispered, thrusting the scarf to the

panther's soft muzzle. "Smell out Tania's enemy!"

The panther growled, his tail lashing, the fur rising on the back of his neck.

In one graceful bound, he sprang from the wattle platform, and Tania slid down the ladder, following her pet. But, reaching the winding stream, Michi paused, obviously baffled.

Tania watched him, a strange gleam in her eyes. Softly she called him to heel.

"Tania can wait, Michi. To-night the enemy may sleep, but to-morrow we will find him—he of the treacherous heart who came like a thief to Tania's home. To-morrow, Michi, we shall know the truth!"

THE cheerful clanging of the school bell awakened the echoes of Castaway Isle the next morning. Sam Perkins, the ship's handyman, was ringing the bell, as Mr. Barnard had not yet arrived.

Freckle-faced Pat Saunders was one of the first to turn up, with elegant Moyra Curtis and several other girls and boys. Gerry Royston strolled in a few minutes later.

"Morning, Sam!" he remarked cheerfully, as he dumped his books on his desk. "Hallo, girls! Anyone seen Tania this morning?"

There was a general shaking of heads. "She's not turned up yet, Gerry," said Pat. "Probably she's busy with those shells she promised to collect. By the way, did you meet her as you arranged?"

Gerry grinned ruefully. "Afraid I made a complete hash of that! To start with, I lost the map she'd drawn to show our meeting-place. Then, while I was hunting for it, some chump went and locked me

in the empty school-room. By the time I got out it was too late."

Just then Dave strode into the school-room, a frown on his face. With a brief nod to the others, he walked up to Gerry.

"I'd like a word with you," he said. "Several, if you like, old man," rejoined Gerry good-naturedly.

Dave's expression was grim as he bent forward.

"Just what is your game with Tania?" he asked quietly.

Gerry's blue eyes glistened.

"Sorry, I don't follow you. I haven't seen Tania since that little tree-climbing test—I say," he broke off, regarding the other boy keenly. "It wasn't you who pinched my map, by any chance?"

"I"—Dave flushed—"I found it in your tent, and met Tania, as you hadn't the decency to turn up."

Gerry whistled.

"And you ask me what my game is! What about you—locking me in the school-room, so that you could meet Tania behind my back—"

"That's a lie!" snapped Dave.

Their angry mutters attracted the attention of the others.

"Cave!" called Pat warningly. "Mr. Barnard's coming!"

There was a hasty rustling of books as the school-room door was flung wide.

Then a gasp went up from the boys, startled screams from the girls. For it was Tania, the jungle girl, who stood there, her dark eyes blazing, a sleek black panther crouching at her side.

"Seek him out, Michi!" breathed Tania, holding up a grey scarf. "Seek out the false one who is Tania's enemy!"

What will be the result of Tania's dramatic entrance? Breathless moments await you in next Friday's chapters.