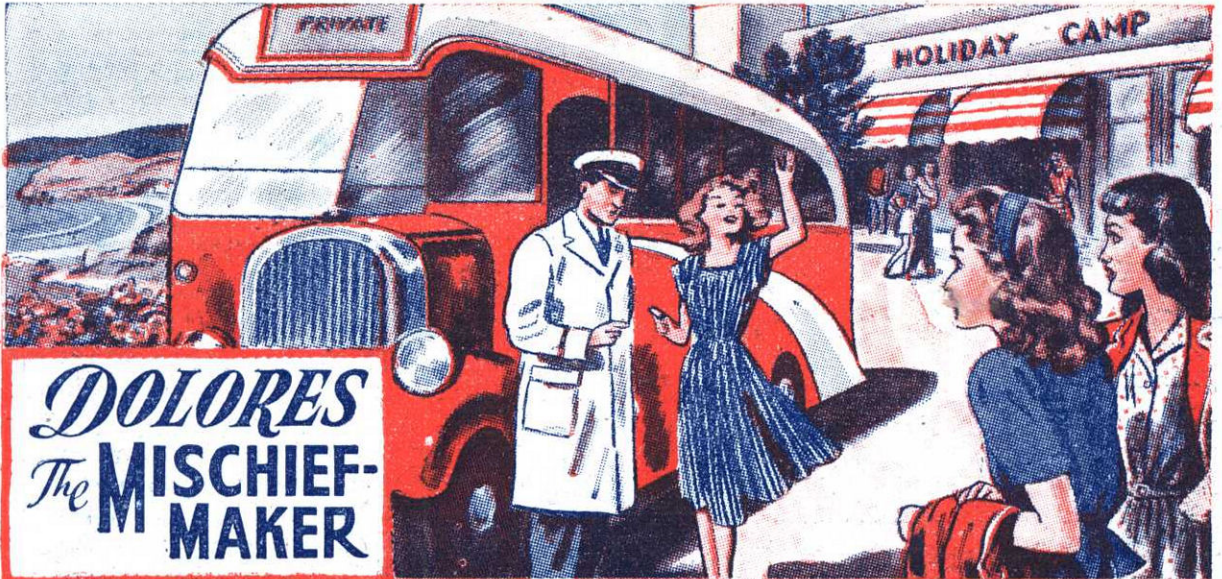


GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3rd}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



DOLORES The MISCHIEF- MAKER

The Holiday Campers Admired Dolores. Only Pat And Chris Knew What A Trickster She Was—Written by HAZEL ARMITAGE

THE ADMIRAL IS ANGRY

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westonmouth Holiday Camp, were helping to turn an old ketch into a Roman galley, to be used in a regatta.

Chris believed that the ketch had once belonged to her Uncle Charles, who had been drowned while sailing it.

Scratched on the ketch was a message which led the chums to pay a secret visit to near-by Dartfleet Island, which was out of bounds to the campers.

There, in a cave, they discovered that the mystery was connected with a brass plate in the possession of Admiral Hardacre, the owner of the island.

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl staying at the camp, persuaded Bruce Feltham, the camp's sports master, to allow her to accompany him to the island when he visited the admiral. She was also after the brass plate.

In the cave on the island Dolores discovered the chums hidden in an old chest.

"YOU can come out of that chest, Pat Rockwell and Chris Caslon!"

Dolores' voice, low, mocking, musical, fell like a bombshell on the ears of the two chums. For a moment they were incapable of movement; they could only stare dazedly up at the mischief-maker from the holiday camp.

"Thought I wasn't up to your little game, did you?" Dolores went on scornfully. "Thought you'd steal a march on me by sneaking across to the island." She laughed. "It's about time you two realised that you're not clever enough to get the better of me."

As she spoke, she jerked up the lid of the wooden chest again, and as she sent it crashing back against the wall

of the cave her arm knocked against one of the admiral's curios.

The glass Buddha!

"Look out!" gasped Pat, but her warning came too late.

The small statuette toppled and fell, thudding to the floor, there to shiver into a hundred fragments. Clambering out of the chest, the chums stared at it in consternation.

"Dolores, you idiot—" cried Pat.

For a second or two even Dolores looked disconcerted, then that mocking gleam flashed back into her eyes and swiftly she raced to the cave mouth, there to cry out in mock distress.

"The Buddha! The Buddha! Oh, goodness, what will the admiral say?"

Almost instantly there was a response. The sound of swift, running feet. And while Pat and Chris, still confused, stood there, Bruce Feltham himself arrived on the scene. One horrified glance he gave at the wreckage on the floor. Then he turned to the two girls in swim-suits.

"Pat! Chris!" he cried. "What on earth are you doing here? You know the admiral—"

"Hey, hey, what's this?" bellowed a voice and there, in company with the young man the chums had heard addressed as Malcolm, stood the admiral himself. The old naval man's face turned scarlet as he saw the smashed statuette. "My Buddha!" he choked. "And—you girls!" he added with a glare at Pat and Chris. "Who are you?"

"We—" Pat faltered. "Don't answer! I can see! Holiday campers, eh?" His voice thickened in furious scorn. "Malcolm, I told you you were a fool to persuade me to let these people come here. I told you there'd never be any peace or safety where boys and girls are concerned. Get off my island—all of you—"

"All of us?" Dolores gave a start of dismay. "But, admiral—"

"And don't try excuses. Off with

you—and don't argue, young man," the admiral blazed, as Bruce protestingly opened his mouth.

"But, admiral," Pat protested, "let me explain! It wasn't Bruce's fault that—"

"I don't care a rap whose fault it was. You're all in it. Leave my island—"

So fierce did he look that Pat feared he would have a stroke. Dolores, too, was looking furious now. It was plain that she had never expected her malicious trick to result in her own expulsion. Bruce, however, was utterly fed up. Angry, too, but more bitterly disappointed than anything else. He nodded curtly.

"All right, we'll go!" he said. "But I think, sir, you're being rather unjust to punish us all! Come along!" he added, leading the way.

Pat and Chris looked at each other. They felt utterly sick. Dolores' eyes were glittering now, but as the admiral fastened his wrathful gaze upon her, she immediately melted into the sweet, pleading, hypocritical expression she could so easily command. Appealingly she turned to him.

"Admiral, do please listen. It was a pure accident—"

"Aye, but nothing to the accident there's going to be if you don't all get out of my sight," the admiral threatened. "Go!"

"Come on!" Bruce snapped.

Dolores bit her lip. With a sigh she followed Pat and Chris as they filed past the bristling old admiral. As they all reached the iron gate outside which Dolores' motor-cruiser stood moored, Bruce paused for a moment. His handsome face was full of bitterness.

"And to think," he said, "that you could have done that, Pat! When you knew the fuss the admiral would make. When you knew how much depended upon our getting on the right side of him—"

"Bruce—we're sorry. Honestly, we're sorry!" Pat said. "We didn't mean to—"

"To get caught!" Bruce shrugged. "Perhaps not! But why play such a fool trick in the first place? Oh, don't explain," he added wearily as Pat opened her lips. "We'll hear all that when we get back. All the same, I hardly expected you two to ruin everything. —oh, dash it, come on! Let's get back!"

He stepped on to the motor-boat. Pat bit her lip, hating the sidewise glance she met from the mocking yet furious eyes of Dolores. Without a word they embarked in the cruiser. Bruce himself took the wheel, Dolores standing beside him in the cockpit. And then, with a roar, they were away, streaking back across the bay.

"And so," Chris breathed to her chum, "that's that. And Dolores must be feeling pretty sick," she added. "She rather overdid it that time! But, Pat, what about the brass plate?"

Pat shook her head. She was feeling utterly deflated and humiliated. Gone it seemed was their hope of progressing further with the mystery. And gone their hope of using Dartfleet Island for the regatta. What a horrible, dreary flop! Dolores' one act of spite had ruined everything. Not only for themselves, but for the holiday campers as a whole.

Perhaps it was some consolation to reflect that for once Dolores had overreached herself—for Dolores, of course, had never anticipated that her spiteful trick would end in the wholesale expulsion of the whole party; she had simply wanted to get rid of Chris and Pat. But that reflection gave small comfort. And, as Chris said, there was still the plate that had been attached to the figurehead in Neptune's Nest—the plate which was the next vital link in the secret they were trying to solve and which was in the irascible admiral's possession.

The boat ploughed on, Bruce grim and silent at the wheel. He did not speak—not even to Dolores, but the utter disappointment in his face proclaimed only too plainly what his feelings were. And then, hardly before Pat was prepared for it, she saw the camp's boathouse ahead, glimpsed a crowd of eager, hopeful people thronging the landing stage.

Suddenly they were gliding alongside the jetty while the crowd, expecting Bruce's good news, set up a cheer. Then Bruce and Dolores climbed out, Pat and Chris more slowly following. And at sight of the two in bathing costumes, a gasp of surprise went up.

"Pat! Chris! Whatever are you doing? But—Bruce, tell us," Lucy Day asked eagerly. "Did the admiral consent to let us use his island?"

"No!" Bruce said flatly.

"No!" Everybody jumped. Expectation changed to questioning dismay. "Oh crumbs, why?"

"Ask Pat!" Bruce said curtly. "Ask Chris. If they hadn't gone trespassing and broken the old man's Buddha—"

He turned, his eyes full of reproach as they fastened upon the crimson-faced chums. Dolores sighed, hypocritically shaking her head. For an instant the crowd seemed stunned. Then a stir went through it as they stared at Pat and Chris.

"So—you messed things up!" Lucy Day cried.

"We didn't," Pat choked.

"Why did you go to the island, then? Why—but no! We know that!" Lucy Day said scornfully.

"You went there because you wanted to get one over on Dolores! And that's also why, I suppose, you broke the admiral's whatever-it-was?"

"We didn't break it," Chris gasped. "That was Dolores. At least," she added, trying to be fair, "I'm not saying—Dolores deliberately intended it—"

"Of course you aren't! It was an accident," Dolores cut in swiftly. "Oh, please, girls, don't blame Chris and Pat for all that. All the same," she added in gentle reprimand, "it was rather naughty of you to trespass on the island, Pat. And it certainly does

seem that the regatta is scuppered now—"

There was a murmuring in the crowd. It was a murmur of resentment. Grim indeed were the glances directed at the two chums and it seemed, all in a moment, that an angry outburst was on the point of breaking. Swiftly Bruce intervened.

"Now, now, let's be fair," he said. "Let's hear what Pat and Chris have to say for themselves." He turned to the chums. "Come on, tell us why you went to the island," he said. "Explain why you broke camp rules and went out of bounds."



PAT EXPLAINS

Pat heaved a deep breath. The time, she saw, had come for telling the truth. But she also saw, in the presence of this hostility, that it would be unwise to accuse Dolores of treachery. Without concrete evidence, the campers were not likely to believe any accusation against that girl.

"I'm sorry now that we did go," she said simply. "But we just had to. There was no other way. If you want to know, we went to try to find out the secret connected with Chris's uncle—"

There came a startled gasp from all around.

"Secret! What secret?" came in a wondering chorus, while Dolores pretended to look surprised.

"I say, that sounds frightfully interesting," she commented.

"And who," asked Bruce, "is the uncle? You don't mean Chris's Uncle Charles who was wrecked off these shores during the war?"

"The same. Chris's Uncle Charles," Pat nodded and Chris blinked, not quite understanding, but content now to leave it all in her chum's hands. "You see, we first found out that our old ketch was the Grey Phantom—the boat which originally belonged to Uncle Charles. We found out that there was a clue to a secret on the ketch, and that clue was linked up with the figurehead in Neptune's Nest on the admiral's island. So—well, we just had to go and look at it—"

There was a silence. A feeling of curiosity began to replace the campers' resentment. This talk of a secret intrigued them all.

"Is this on the level?" asked Lucy Day.

"Absolutely," Pat said. "If you don't believe me, look under the plate on the hatchway—you'll find the Grey Phantom's name there. Well, cutting a long story short, we did swim to the island. We found the figurehead and we found Chris's uncle's initials carved on it. That convinced us more than ever that there is some big secret connected with Chris's uncle."

There came a buzz of excitement. The atmosphere had completely changed now.

"But what can this secret be?" asked a girl named Mabel Swann.

Pat shook her head.

"We don't know yet, but—with a glance at Dolores—we mean to find out!"

Dolores gave a musical laugh.

"But, I say, how thrilling!" she cried. "And fancy you keeping all that from us, Pat! Oh, Pat, you silly goose, why didn't you tell us all about it before?"

Pat looked at her in contempt. What a two-faced schemer Dolores was! Pretending to be thrilled and sympathetic while all the time she had been plotting to rob them of the secret!

"If we had only known," Dolores went on, "we could have helped. Oh, ever so much, Pat! This is far too thrilling to keep to yourselves! Gee, and we will help! Perhaps it's not too late even now," she cried, infecting the crowd with her own apparent inspiration. "If you found those initials on the island it stands to reason that other clues must be on

the island. Now—wait a minute, let me think. I mentioned that figurehead to the admiral, didn't I? What was it he said?"

"Gosh!" choked Chris, and had to turn her head away to hide her disgust for this girl's hypocrisy.

"He said," Bruce chipped in—and Bruce himself was looking more sympathetically understanding now—that there was a plate on the figurehead—a plate containing a lot of puzzling figures he couldn't make out. He said he'd got the plate in his collection in his house—"

"That's it!" Dolores laughed. "Thanks, Bruce—yes, of course, that is exactly what he did say. And—oh gosh," she cried excitedly, "it's possible, Pat, that those puzzling figures were another clue—"

Pat eyed her. Never, she thought, had she seen such bluff acted so convincingly. But she was completely on her guard.

"It's possible—yes," she agreed.

"Then in that case we've got to get hold of the plate," Dolores cried. "We've just got to see this thing through now—all of us! Apart from that, we've also got to think of our regatta—which means we've got to invent ways and means to get back to the island. And so—what's the next move?" Dolores brightly beamed.

"Ask a policeman," Willis Green growled.

"The next move," Dolores went on enthusiastically, "is to get back on the right side of the admiral. How? Leave that to me; I'll find a way. Yes," she boasted, throwing a look at Pat, "give me twenty-four hours and I'll have the admiral eating out of my hand. Don't worry. I'll soon think up an excuse to go and see him again—"

She beamed brightly at her hearers. Everybody was visibly hopeful now; everybody enthusiastic. Dolores sounded convincing. Even Pat, for a moment, was dismayed—and a little taken aback. She knew that from now on Dolores would go all out to find ways and means of contacting the admiral—that Dolores had got to if she wanted to get hold of the plate the admiral had.

"That's the wheeze," Bruce said cordially. "Dolores has summed it up. And—" He broke off as the loudspeaker suddenly blared.

"Calling all campers," it said. "Listen. The Blue Coach leaves in half an hour for a morning trip to the Roman Bath at Fordstone, returning via Riverstown where a half-hour's halt will be made to visit the fair or the menagerie."

"Gosh!" Pat cried involuntarily.

"An idea—"

"Idea?" Dolores looked at her quickly. "Pat, you mean an idea for getting round the admiral?"

Pat smiled tantalizingly.

"That's telling," she said. "Anyway, I'm more interested in the coach trip at the moment."

"Oh, so you're going on the trip?" Dolores said quietly.

Pat nodded and hurried away with Chris. As they regained their own chalet, Pat grinned across at her chum.

"I've thought of a dandy wheeze," she declared.

"For making pals with the admiral?" Chris asked incredulously.

"Pat, you know he'll never listen—"

"Won't he? We'll see," Pat chuckled. "Supposing, Chris, he got his Buddha back?"

"But it's smashed!" Chris exclaimed.

"Not that Buddha, goose! Another one—a better one. Listen, Chris. You remember Riverstown, where the coach is going to stop? You remember that topping curio shop—Robinson's—on Market Corner? Well, they've got a Buddha for sale there—just about the same size as the admiral's, although, I should think, a bit better. Well, supposing we buy that Buddha and—"

"Gosh!" breathed Chris. "Yes?"

"Supposing we took it across to the admiral—told him how sorry we were

(Please turn to the back page.)



PERIL IN THE QUAGMIRE

MERLE WASON believed that a secret, vital to the future of her home, Happy Valley Ranch, was hidden in the Silver Rider Trophy, to be competed for at Lone Pine Rodeo.

Merle was also anxious to win the race, for the prize money would enable her to pay Nathaniel Garsten, a bullying rancher who had a mortgage on her home.

Merle encountered a strange young cowboy named Larry Denvers, who, despite his mysterious behaviour, declared himself to be her friend.

The night before the race all the horses on the ranch were driven away.

Merle found a glove bearing Larry's initials. It seemed that he was responsible for the cruel brow.

WITH horror-stricken eyes Merle gazed at the tell-tale initials burnt on the inside of the glove.

"L. D.," she gasped. "Larry Denvers! Then—"

Her voice trailed away as she realised what this discovery must mean. The gap in the wire fence, through which the Happy Valley horses had escaped, had been cut by Larry.

No longer was it possible to hope that there might be some innocent explanation for the young cowboy's mystifying behaviour. His guilt was now proved.

He was her enemy: was in league with Nathaniel Garsten, his rascally employer.

And there could be only one possible reason for his stampeding the horses.

"It's a plot to prevent me from racing to-morrow," Merle told herself. "Larry and Garsten don't want me to win the Silver Rider trophy, and so—"

Her face went deathly white as she remembered that her own pet horse was amongst the animals now careering across the range towards Forbidden Pass.

In her mind was a terrifying picture of Pommie and the others, being driven headlong into the treacherous quagmires in that pass.

Then abruptly she whirled, to clutch agitatedly at the foreman's arm.

"Slim, we must go after them—stop them before they reach the pass!"

He gave a helpless shrug.

"But how can we, without hosses?" he asked. "It's hopeless."

In her present distraught state she found his pessimism infuriating.

"Hopeless or not, we've got to make the effort," she cried. "Don't stand gaping there—rouse Jake and all the others!"

"Very well, Miss Merle."

Obediently the foreman dashed away, and, pocketing the glove she had picked up, Merle went rushing frantically across the range.

She dared not wait for the cowboys to take up the hunt. Every second

was vital if the runaways were to be saved.

As she ran on she thought furiously of Larry. What a mean, contemptible enemy he had proved himself to be. And what a fool she had been ever to like him.

"Just let him wait!" she panted. "He'll pay for what he's done! And Garsten, too! They shan't—"

Her voice trailed away and a faint spark of hope flickered again in her heart.

For there in the distance could be seen a number of dim shapes. Horses! And, no longer running madly on. They were wandering slowly over the prairie, contentedly cropping the grass.

Merle was too far off to recognise them, but eagerly she began to count them.

"Seven—eight—nine—"

And then she stopped, breath held. For her count showed that one horse was missing. Which one was it? Could it be Pommie?

Gripped with an awful fear, she ran on, and now she was calling her pet's name. The runaways, one by one, turned their heads, but not one trotted eagerly towards her as Pommie would have done.

"Pommie's not here," she told herself in despair. "It's he who's missing. I suppose Larry wasn't interested in the others." It was only poor Pommie he wanted.

Again she felt a burning anger for the young cowboy. And then, as just ahead she saw the beginning of the sunken road which led to the deadly quagmires in Forbidden Pass, she rushed on more frantically.

Dropping down into the sunken road, she peered at the soft, sandy ground. There were newly made footprints to be seen there, and they led straight to the jagged gap in the near-by hills.

"Pommie has come this way!" she murmured, her voice little more than a whisper. "Larry must have driven him into the sunken road and forced him to head for the pass."

She shuddered as she thought of what her pet's fate might be, and, hoping against hope that there might still be time to rescue him, she hurried on, breathless, nearly exhausted.

At last the mouth of the pass loomed ahead. Frighteningly dark it was inside, for the towering cliffs shut out the moonlight.

"Pommie!" cried Merle. "Pommie!"

From somewhere in the blackness there came a plaintive whinny, and the colour rushed back to her cheeks.

"Stay where you are, honey!" she panted. "Don't move! I'm coming to your help."

And recklessly she plunged into Forbidden Pass, oblivious of the quagmires that lurked in readiness to entrap the unwary.

Ten yards she ran on, and then there came a horrible squelching sound and abruptly her feet sank into the ground.

She gave a gasp of alarm.

It was obvious what had happened. In her eagerness to save Pommie she

The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

By GAIL WESTERN

herself had blundered into danger—had stumbled into one of the deadly bogs!



LARRY'S EXPLANATION

As Merle felt herself sinking she strove desperately to free herself, but the mud was like glue. It clung tenaciously, and the more she

struggled the more she became engulfed.

Already her legs were embedded half-way to the knee, and every moment saw her sinking deeper and deeper.

It was when panic began to grip her that there came an unexpected voice from near by.

"Hold on there!" it cried, and through the darkness came whirling a lasso.

The open lop dropped over her head, tightening under her armpits. There came a steady pull, and slowly she was dragged from the grip of the bog.

Gasping, Merle felt firm ground beneath her hands, and before she could struggle to her feet deft fingers had slipped the rope from her and a drawing voice sounded in her ears.

"So we meet again! Guess I seem fated to be around when you run into trouble!"

Merle looked up. She gasped as she saw who her rescuer was.

"Larry!"

The young cowboy, busy re-coiling his lariat, gave a cool nod.

"Yep, it's me. And mighty lucky for you, honey, that I happened to see you. You ought to have more sense than to blunder around here in the dark. A girl like you ought to be in bed—not foolin' about in Forbidden Pass."

The feeling of gratitude in her heart vanished. How dare he talk to her like that! Her cheeks scarlet with indignation, she rose to her feet.

"Well, of all the cheek!" she spluttered. "To try to put the blame on me—when it was all through you that I was forced to come here!"

"Through me?"

The note of surprise in his voice stung her to fresh anger.

"For goodness' sake stop trying to bluff!" she cried. "You know as well as I do what brought me to Forbidden Pass. It was to try to save Pommie!"

Suddenly remembering her horse's danger, she swung round, peering frantically into the darkness.

"Pommie!" she called. "Pommie, where are you?"

And in her anxiety she took a reckless step forward; but instantly Larry had grabbed her.

"Don't be a little fool!" he ordered. "Do you want another mud bath?"

Angrily she wrenched at her arm. All she could think about was her beloved horse.

"Let me go!" she stormed. "I've got to see what's become of Pommie!"

But his strong fingers only tightened their grip.

"There's no need to worry about your horse. He's safe enough."

"Safe?"

Incredulously Merle echoed the word, but her heart gave a sudden

leap and excitedly she gazed around. As her eyes became accustomed to the gloom she saw two horses standing in a circle of rocks near the entrance to the pass.

One was Larry's magnificent black, Prince; the other was—

"Pommie!" she cried. And, wrenching herself free, she hurled herself joyfully forward.

Pommie whinnied a greeting as she threw her arms around his velvety neck, but he was quivering with fear and the muddy stains on his legs showed how narrow his escape had been.

"Oh, Pommie, thank goodness you managed to get out!" she panted. "Thank goodness you're safe!"

Overcome with relief, she patted and fondled the horse.

"I told you there was nothing to worry about," Larry drawled.

Merle swung round, scorn in her eyes.

"It's no thanks to you!"

"So you reckon it was me who drove him into the quagmire?" he said.

Angrily she nodded.

"Of course. Do you dare deny it?"

He shrugged.

"Guess it wouldn't do much good if I did. You made it clear the other day that you didn't put much trust in a supposed cattle rustler. But it's just possible, you know, that I might have had some other reason for comin' here."

"Such as?" she demanded.

"Well, it's possible that I heard him squealin' and realised that he needed help."

She stared at him, hardly able to believe her own ears.

"Are you trying to—suggest that you actually rescued Pommie?" she gasped.

"Guess I'm not tryin' to suggest anything. Honey. I realise it wouldn't be any use. But maybe you'll remember that rescuin' folks is becomin' quite a habit with me."

Merle's cheeks went scarlet at this pointed reference to the two occasions the young cowboy had saved her, and for a moment she felt horribly mean and guilty. Was it possible, after all, that she had done him a terrible injustice? Then she remembered the incriminating glove in her pocket, and her face hardened.

"I suppose you'll be telling me next that you haven't been anywhere near Happy Valley Ranch to-night," she said scornfully.

"I sure haven't, honey."

"Then what was your glove doing there?"

"My—my glove?"

For the first time since they had met he looked startled and uneasy. She gave an angry laugh.

"Yes—your glove! I found it lying beside the wire-clippers."

Dragging it from her pocket, she held it out accusingly, then, as she glimpsed something tucked in his belt, she gave an excited gasp, and before he could stop her she had reached out and snatched it.

It was another glove. Swiftly she compared the two. In every way they were identical. And the one she had torn from his belt also had his initials burnt in the inside.

"This proves it!" she gasped. "It was your glove I found."

Quite calm again now, he nodded.

"I guess it was, and I've sure got to thank you. Ever since I lost it yesterday I've been wonderin' what had become of that glove."

"Lost it yesterday! What a feeble excuse!"

There was utter scorn in her voice, and angrily she tossed the two gloves down on to the ground. Then she caught at Pommie's silky mane and swung up on to his back.

"Come on, pct, let's go!" she gasped.

Larry stepped forward.

"Not so fast!" he cried. "You're not goin' off with that horse yet awhile. Not until—"

But, defiantly she pressed her heels into Pommie's flanks.

"You try to stop me!" she cried. "Your first plot to keep Pommie out

of the race has failed, and you're not getting another."

And forward the big chestnut plunged—so quickly that Larry had to leap aside in order to avoid being knocked down. Merle waved a mocking hand, then she was galloping out of the pass.

As she went riding down the sunken road she heard distant shouts and the sound of thundering hoofs, and a minute or two later a body of horse-men loomed into sight.

For a moment she felt uneasy. Were the oncoming riders some more of Nathaniel Garsten's rascally employees? Was this another attempt to make off with Pommie?

And then she gave a gasp of relief as she recognised the tall, slim figure leading the on-galloping band. It was the Happy Valley Ranch foreman.

"Slim!" she ejaculated, reining in.

The foreman gave a surprised cry of recognition.

"Miss Merle! Thank goodness you're safe. We were gettin' worried about you and—"

He broke off with a gasp. "Gee, that's Pommie! So he wasn't trapped in the quagmires, after all!"

Merle shook her head, suddenly loath to mention her encounter with Larry Denvers.

"No, I managed to save him," she said. "And I see you've managed to round up the rest of the horses."

Slim Harris nodded, while Jake Binns, the bandy-legged horse-breaker, gave an angry growl.

"But no thanks to that coyote from V-Bar-V," he growled.

"From V-Bar-V?"

Merle regarded him in astonishment. How did Jake know that anyone from the neighbouring ranch had anything to do with to-night's outrage?

"Yep, Miss Merle, from Nat Garsten's outfit. Those wire-clippers bore their mark, and I've a pretty good idea who the guy was who used 'em. That no-good cowboy Slim was tellin' us about the other day—that feller Denvers. According to what Slim says, this is just the kind o' trick he used to play back at Snake Canyon."

There came an angry murmur from all around.

"I reckon we ought to ride across to the V-Bar-V an' pay 'em out for this business," muttered a burly sandy-haired man named Ted Gardner.

Instantly there came a chorus of approval, but Slim Harris shook his head.

"Nope; that wouldn't do any good. Nat Garsten's an influential guy in these parts, and he's liable to get the law on his side if we cut up rough," he declared. "And that's just what we don't want. Guess we've got all the trouble we want at Happy Valley already."

Merle nodded.

"Slim's right, boys," she said. "Cool down, there's good fellows, and let's get home."

A little reluctantly the cowboys allowed themselves to be persuaded, and one by one they turned and followed the girl boss.

On arriving back at Happy Valley, Merle groomed Pommie and then made him comfortable in his stall, but there was an anxious look in her eyes as she stepped back into the yard. After what had happened she didn't like leaving Pommie alone. As if guessing her thoughts, Jake Binns strode forward.

"Don't you worry, Miss Merle," he growled. "You go off to bed; guess you can do with all the sleep you can get if you're to win the hurdle race to-morrow. I'll sit up an' guard your hoss."

Merle eyed him gratefully.

"Thanks, Jake—that's nice of you."

The horse-breaker gave an embarrassed laugh.

"Aw, it's nuthin'! Guess we all want to see you make a success of things, Miss Merle. So you hit the hay, and don't you fret about your boss. Guess if that coyote Denvers shows up I'll deal with him."

And, dragging a huge revolver from

his belt, he put one work-scarred finger through the trigger-guard and twisted it grimly.



A LAST-MINUTE ENTRY

It was thankfully that Merle went to bed. The excitement and alarm of the last hour had left her exhausted. But it was long before she could get to sleep.

She couldn't help worrying about the race at Lone Pine. It would be disastrous if she lost it. Only the prize money could enable her to pay Nathaniel Garsten the money her uncle owed him, and if that debt were not paid promptly on time—

She shivered.

The bullying rancher would keep his threat. The home she loved would become his property.

And it was not only Happy Valley that was at stake. Winning the Silver Rider was just as important, for she believed that old Crogan's secret was hidden in that trophy.

What could that secret be? she wondered. And why was Nathaniel Garsten so desperately anxious to prevent her finding it?

Utterly baffled, her thoughts turned to Larry, and she groaned, for his treachery still distressed her. Oh, if only her first belief in him had not been ill-founded! If only he had proved to be a friend and not a despicable enemy!

When she awoke next morning her first thought was of Pommie, and the moment she had washed and dressed she rushed downstairs and out into the yard.

But there was no need for any anxiety.

For seated outside the stables, his revolver on his lap, was Jake. Suppressing a yawn, he greeted her with a cheery grin.

"Everything's O.K.," he assured her.

Smiling her relief and thanks, Merle stepped into the stables. To her delight Pommie seemed to have completely forgotten his frightening experience of the previous night. Never had she seen him look fitter.

"I'm sure there won't be a horse to touch you at Lone Pine," she declared. "You're a darling, if ever there was one!"

Pommie wished his long tail as if to show that he appreciated the compliment.

Having made arrangements for the horse-box to be got ready, for Lone Pine was too far away to ride Pommie there, Merle went in to her own breakfast.

Mammie, her plump face shining as if it had been polished with boot blacking, put an enormous plate of bacon, eggs and sausages before her.

Merle gave a gasp.

"Golly, I can never eat all this!" she exclaimed.

The negro housekeeper grinned.

"Go on, w! yuh, missy, that am only a snack," she said. "Yuh tuck into it. Yuh'll need all your strength if youse goin' hoss-racin'."

Merle did her best to satisfy the motherly Mammie that there was nothing wrong with her appetite, then, when she had consulted Slim Harris about the day's work on the ranch, she went out into the yard, to find the horse-box harnessed up and Pommie safely stowed away inside.

Jake, who had volunteered to drive, was already up on the high driving-seat, and when she had clambered up beside him he took off the brake and started the horse team with a flick of his lag whip.

Lone Pine lay on the other side of the wooded hills that encircled Happy Valley and the neighbouring V-Bar-V, and it was not until lunch-time that Merle reached the big, oval stadium on the outskirts of the town.

The rodeo had already begun, and cheers came from the packed terraces as Jake drove the horse-box into the competitors' enclosure at the rear of the main grandstand.

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The Merry-makers Afloat

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE GIRL IN SALLY'S CABIN

"IT'S grand to be back again aboard the Ocean Star," declared Sally Warner.

"Rather!"

There came a chorus of agreement from her chums Don Weston, Fay Manners and Johnny Briggs. It was early evening and the four Merry-makers were standing on the deck of the college ship, which was anchored off the island of Borlona. Gathered around them was a crowd of fellow students who never seemed to tire of hearing about Sally & Co.'s recent exciting adventures.

"And you say that oilskin bag you got from those crooks contained some new secret radio invention?" asked Slick, the boy inventor.

Sally nodded.

"Yes—it belongs to Professor Dubray, who lives on this island," she replied. "The Ocean Star was to deliver it to him, and I believe the professor is with Captain Thorne now. He's naturally anxious—ah, this must be him," she added, as a tall, rather burly man in a white drill suit came striding along the deck.

The newcomer beamed as he saw Sally.

"You must be the young lady the captain's been telling me about," he said. "I can't tell you how indebted I am to you and your friends. That radio invention is of immense value. Where is it, by the way?"

"In my cabin," said Sally. "I'll go and get it."

And off she hurried, but when she entered the cabin she shared with Fay she received a shock, for there was already someone there, bending over the oilskin bag that contained the professor's property—a golden-skinned, dark-haired island girl.

"What are you doing here?" gasped Sally. "And who are you?"

The South Sea islander straightened up in alarm, and two melting brown eyes gazed across at Sally.

"Me Lalola. Please do not be angry. I am not a bad girl. I only came to save the secret radio. You see—"

She broke off as footsteps sounded out in the corridor and agitatedly she clutched Sally by the arm.

"Lalola cannot stay. She must not be seen," she gasped. "But she must talk with the white girl. She has much to say. Radio—he in great danger. Come to island—to Place of Singing Water. But not a word to anyone."

And before Sally could get over her surprise, she had slipped past her and gone racing down the corridor. From the distance there came a startled shout, then the thud of hurrying feet. The cabin door was flung open and there stood the professor, his face red and angry.

"What was that girl doing here?" he demanded.

"I—I hardly know," Sally stammered. "She was here when I entered."

The professor's gaze went to where lay the oilskin bag, and he frowned.

"It must have been spite that brought her here," he declared. "Possibly she had some crazy idea of smashing up my radio invention. She's a bad lot. I employed her as a house servant until yesterday, then I had to dismiss her for theft."

Sally looked dismayed. She had rather liked the mysterious young island girl, and her cryptic words had intrigued her. It came as a shock to learn that she was a thief.

Seeing how worried she looked, the professor smiled.

"But never mind about Lalola," he said. "By now she'll have jumped overboard and swum ashore—and that's where we must go. We're giving a feast this evening, you know. Luau it is called, and it's to celebrate the arrival of the Ocean Star."

As he spoke he picked up the precious oilskin bag and led the way back up on deck. There were gathered all the students, Professor Willard, the headmaster, as well, and also many of the ordinary passengers. All were excitedly looking forward to the feast and entertainment which had been arranged in their honour.

In happy groups they went ashore in the ship's boats, and on the beach a crowd of golden-skinned natives greeted them, to adorn them with necklets of flowers and to lead them to a great clearing near Professor Dubray's house. There, in front of a half-circle of native huts, food had been prepared and, seating themselves cross-legged on the grass, the guests waited in delighted anticipation.

Before the meal was served island girls played sweet, dreamy music on guitars and ukuleles, while others twirled and swayed in a traditional hula dance.

Sally could have sat for hours listening to the music, watching the dancing, but in her mind was the memory of what Lalola had said. Whether the mystery girl's urgent appeal had been genuine or not, she felt she must try to contact her.

Unobtrusively, whilst the fun was at its height, she slipped away. By questioning one of the islanders she found out in what direction the Place of Singing Water lay, and eagerly she made her way through the trees.

She heard the "Singing Water" even before she saw it, and a gasp of delight left her lips when finally she saw the cascading waterfalls, the broad stream across which was built a crazy bamboo bridge, and beyond the bridge a stockade clearing which contained a number of stoutly built wooden shacks.

She crossed the bridge and was approaching the gate in the stockade when suddenly a stocky figure barred her way, brandishing a long spear.

"No go this way," the islander said sternly. "This taboo."

"But—" began Sally.

"He's quite right, you know," said an unexpected voice, and Professor Dubray appeared on the scene. "I don't allow anyone in there. It's not very interesting, anyway," he added with a laugh. "Just the huts where I keep my equipment and so on, but

it doesn't do to let the islanders wander around."

And taking Sally by the arm he began to lead her back across the bridge. But Sally suddenly pulled up.

"But wouldn't you show me—" she began, and then stiffened. For from the direction of the huts had come the faintest of faint cries. But, faint as it was, a single shot through Sally.

"That voice!" she gasped. "It was Lalola!"

"Lalola?" The professor stared at her, his face suddenly grim. Then he laughed. "You're imagining things," he said lightly. "I've sent that little mischief-maker right away to the other side of the island. Come along, you must rejoin your friends. You mustn't miss all the fun, you know."

But, despite the geniality of his tone, Sally's mind suddenly filled with a queer suspicion. That laughter hadn't rung true. The grip on her arm had tightened hurtfully as she had mentioned Lalola's name; for a moment the professor had looked distinctly startled.

There was something peculiar here, Sally felt. Something which involved the little island girl, and something which she—Sally—was going to do her best to investigate.



SALLY LEARNS THE TRUTH

But how to get into the compound when it was so closely guarded? That was Sally's problem as Professor Dubray, with a smiling

nod, left her once again on the fringe of the feasters.

It was a problem which was solved with amazing simplicity, for a smiling girl suddenly darted forward, grass skirt in hand.

"Your friends say you nearly like us," she said, with a flash of her white teeth. "You wear this—you be like island girl, yes?"

Sally's heart leapt with excitement as the girl held out a grass skirt.

"That's sweet of you," she said with an eager smile, "but I still don't think I'd fool anybody. My skin's not dark enough, and my blouse—"

"Me fix that," said the girl eagerly. "Come—follow!"

She drew Sally into one of the huts, seized a handful of brown berries and crushed them.

"This stain am good," she dimpled. "But take long time come off."

"That suits me fine," laughed Sally, rubbing the brown juice over her face, arms, and legs. "Now, what about the sarong, or whatever it is?"

"Me find!"

The island girl laughed again, and, rummaging around, produced a length of vivid yellow silk which she handed to Sally, her eyes glowing with delight when Sally handed over her own blouse, intimating to the girl that she could keep it as a present.

But her delight was nothing to Sally's own when she looked at herself a few moments later in the piece of broken mirror the girl produced.

She looked like any other island girl. Except—and here for the first time Sally's growing excitement received a severe check—except for her blue eyes. Nothing could disguise them.

For a moment she hesitated. If she were caught trying to get into the clearing in disguise after Professor Dubray had expressly warned her to keep away, it would probably end in her being sent back to the ship in disgrace. Then the mystery—if there really was a mystery—would remain unsolved.

Well, she wouldn't be caught. She wouldn't let anyone see her eyes. "You come with me?" The island girl's voice broke into her thoughts. "I'll come soon," she answered. "But, remember, don't tell anyone my secret—I want to surprise them all."

"I not tell," said the girl, and, with a little giggle, she darted off.

Left alone, Sally crept cautiously out of the hut and looked swiftly around. The feast was still going on, and she saw Professor Dubray striding alone in the direction of the shore. Swiftly she darted through the trees towards the Place of Singing Water.

This time she was much more cautious. She saw that the guard was still by the gateway, but now he was leaning sleepily upon his spear. She looked towards the huts in the stockaded compound, and then her heart leapt. For in front of those huts were several rush baskets containing food, a pile of water-gourds, and great platters of fruit. Obviously food had been taken into the clearing recently.

A look of resolution crossed Sally's face. Quickly she stared round. It wasn't hard to find a rush basket. They seemed to be lying around everywhere in various stages of decay.

She picked up one, ruffled her dark curls so that they hung around her face, then, outwardly calm but quivering with suspense and excitement, she sauntered with assumed nonchalance across the bridge, the basket on her head.

"What you want?" asked the guard. "I take more food," Sally answered. For a moment the guard hesitated, while Sally's heart thumped with suspense. Then, with a grunt, he motioned her forward. Trying not to hurry, Sally walked into the compound. A swift look back told her that the guard had his back to her. Like a flash she darted towards the huts, calling softly: "Lalola! Lalola!"

A tense wait, and Sally's spirits took a sudden downward plunge when there came no reply. Had she been imagining things, after all? Was Lalola really the little thief the professor had vowed she was, and had she merely fooled Sally with her hint of mystery in order to get away from the Ocean Star?

Anxiously she called again, and then her pulses raced, for suddenly a muffled cry came from one of the huts.

"I am here," said a faint voice. "White girl, you come—"

The voice came from a hut to Sally's left. She hurried towards it and tried the door. It was heavily padlocked. She darted round to the side and peered through a small, barred window. Next moment a startled cry left her lips. For there was Lalola, tied hand and foot. The island girl stared wonderingly as she saw the dusky face at the window, and Sally smiled.

"Don't be frightened," she whispered. "I am Sally Warner. I had to disguise myself in order to get through the gateway. But how am I to get you out? The door's padlocked."

Lalola shook her head. "Never mind me," she said. "Lalola not important. The professor, he a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" Sally stared blankly. "But I've just seen him—down on the beach."

Lalola shook her head violently.

"No—him an impostor."

"An—an impostor?"

"Yes—he only real professor's assistant. Look in next hut and you will see that Lalola speaks the truth."

Her eyes were full of such wild expectancy that Sally instantly slipped away.

The other hut was also heavily padlocked and its solitary window was also barred. Peering through, Sally saw a man lying on the floor. He was not only bound hand and foot, but gagged as well.

"Professor Dubray?" Sally asked.

He nodded violently.

"I am from the Ocean Star," said Sally eagerly. "Don't let this disguise fool you," she added as she saw the puzzled look in his haggard eyes. "I'm white really. But I don't understand. Professor Dubray came aboard and took the radio equipment—"

The bound man gave a violent, convulsive jerk. The perspiration stood out on his forehead as frantically he tried to speak. Then, with a muffled, hopeless groan, he fell back again.

For a moment Sally stared at him, her heart torn by pity and anger against the person who had treated him like this. And then, suddenly, like a flash, the truth flooded into her mind.

The precious radio invention, of course! That was what the assistant was after. He had imprisoned his employer and taken his place in order to steal it! She voiced her theory, and the real professor's eager nods confirmed it. Almost stunned, Sally stared at him, her mind in a whirl.

She had thought the precious equipment was safe now that they had reached the island, but apparently it was not so. Surely it couldn't be possible that the assistant was in league with the rascally Seth & Co., from whom Sally had escaped a few days before? It seemed fantastic, and yet Sally remembered that those scoundrels had mentioned the island. Suddenly Sally was galvanised into action. She must get help—at once!

With a few words of hope to the imprisoned man, she darted round the huts, making for the guarded gateway.

She paused by the last hut, glancing towards the gate. And suddenly an icy chill ran through her veins, leaving her frozen, incapable of movement.

For suddenly from inside that hut came the sound of upraised voices—hateful, too-well-remembered voices. "I'm fed-up with hanging around here. When is that darned ship leaving?"

"In about another half hour, skipper!"

A shiver ran through Sally, and her face whitened beneath its stain. For there could be no mistaking those voices. The occupants of the hut were the very last men she had expected to hear again—the scoundrels who had been responsible for all her recent nerve-racking adventures.

"Seth & Co.!" she muttered dazedly, then froze again as the voices continued:

"Pity we couldn't have got away before, but we can't take a chance of being seen by those interfering busy-bodies. Gee, when I think of the way Lamont is fooling them all, pretending to be the professor—"

"Yeah! It's all right for him—he ain't cooped up in a hut like this!" growled Seth's voice.

There were murmurs of agreement, then Seth spoke again.

"I'm gettin' hungry, too. Ain't there no decent food hereabouts?"

There was a scrape of feet. With a stifled gasp Sally came back to life. She swung round, her heart pounding with fear. She must get back to the others, must tell them of the trick that had been played on them.

Too late! For, even as she swung round, a hand reached out and gripped her arm.

"What's your hurry?" asked Seth's voice roughly. "Just stick around. We've got a bit of cooking for you to do!"

And, limp with fear and anguish, Sally found herself being drawn inexorably towards the door of the hut.



THE TELL-TALE BRACELET

If it hadn't been for the rough grip on her arm Sally would have fallen. Helplessly she allowed herself to be drawn into the dimly lit hut, where stood Seth's three rascally confederates.

"Even if you are an island girl, I suppose you speak English?" Seth growled.

Eagerly Sally nodded. At all costs she must prevent them from discovering her real identity.

"Me come for fruit," she said, keeping her eyes veiled and her face in shadow. "Me must go. Me must help with the feast."

"Nuts to the feast," Seth rapped coarsely. "We're hungry, too. You stay here and get us some chow. Get cracking!"

Sally smothered an hysterical desire to laugh. Always, it seemed, when she ran into Seth & Co. there was cooking to be done. But that desire for laughter, hysterical though it was, was crushed next moment in a wave of alarm as she heard Seth murmur to his companions:

"This kid seems mighty anxious to get away. D'you think she suspects?"

"Not a chance," replied Joe easily. "She just wants to join in the fun. Only natural."

"I dunno!" Seth stared keenly at the supposed island girl. "She seems scared. Funny," he added musingly, "she's got a familiar look about her—"

Sally waited for no more. "Me go and get you food," she gasped, and, hurrying out of the hut, she made for where she had seen the platters of fruit and baskets of food. As she collected enough for a meal, she tried desperately to think of some way of getting back to her friends, of warning them.

Not daring to keep Seth & Co. waiting, she hurried back to the hut and, with downcast eyes, spread the food before them.

"O.K.!" snapped Seth. "Now—" Suddenly his voice broke off. With a quick movement he reached out and grabbed Sally's wrist. "That bracelet," he snarled, "where'd you get it? Come on, now!"

A cry of fear rose to Sally's lips. She had forgotten that she had on the same bracelet as she had been wearing when she had seen these men before.

"White girl give me," she gasped.

"She give me present."

Seth gave a grunt. "Funny! She seemed mighty attached to that bracelet when she was with us."

"Gee, boss, leave the kid alone," said one of the others. "If she swiped the bracelet, then good luck to her; Let her bring something to drink."

Seth let go of Sally's wrist and gave her a push that sent her staggering. She darted away, then his rough, upraised voice sent another shock of fear through her.

"There's something familiar about that girl. Somehow she reminds me of Sally Warner—"

There was a roar of ribald laughter from the other three.

"You've got that kid on the brain, chief," scoffed Joe. "She's probably still floating about the sea with those precious friends of hers."

"Maybe you're right," answered Seth, though obviously still far from satisfied. "Still, never mind that. We've got the radio invention, and that's all that matters. The fake professor will have taken it aboard the ketch by now, and soon we'll all be sailing away." He pointed through the doorway. "We'll take that path through the jungle to where the ketch is anchored—"

Sally, picking up a gourd of water, went rigid with horror. So already the bogus professor was aboard the ketch with the radio equipment. The

(Please turn to the back page.)



THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

By RENEE FRAZER

The jungle girl's heart leaped, only to sink again as she remembered her disgrace with the castaways.

"But Mr. Barnard is angry with Tania. He would not let her come—"

"He will when he knows the whole truth," said Dave quietly. "The main thing now is to get you away from here—and the sooner the better!"

But the jungle girl had caught at his sleeve.

"There is something Dave must see first!" she cried. "Come—quickly!"

Surprised, the boy followed her as she led the way back to the glimmering lantern.

Dave whistled, starting forward in amazement as he caught sight of the iron-bound chest.

"Tania," he exclaimed, "what on earth—"

Tania's eyes were sparkling. She picked up the lantern, pointing to the strange marks carved on the lid of the chest.

"Dave, read!" she begged. "What does the writing say?"

Dave dropped to his knees, staring at the carved letters.

"For Tania—June, 1935," he read.

"Tania"—he turned, a delighted smile on his rugged face—"it's yours! It's the treasure that I suspected Gerry was after from the first—and this is the final proof!"

THE TABLES TURNED

It was several minutes before Tania could speak. Her eyes shining excitedly, she knelt beside Dave, tracing the magic



letters with her finger.

Her own name, carved there by a forgotten hand—by the same person, perhaps, who had brought her to the island so many long moons ago and who had disappeared on a night of storm that was only a dim memory to her now.

"Thirteen years ago," muttered Dave. "You were barely two or three years old, Tania. There must have been a shipwreck, and this box was brought ashore with you. But how did Gerry get wind of the secret? There may be some clue in the chest, but it's locked securely—"

With a roguish, triumphant smile, Tania snatched the rusty key from her satchel into which she had slipped it, and with the key came the papers she had taken from the mate's torn pocket.

Breathlessly she explained, and Dave's eyes lit up admiringly. "Good for you, Tania!" he chuckled. "These papers are old letters, dated 1935! Probably Gerry stole them. We'll look at them later, but now for the chest!"

Eagerly he inserted the rusted key, but his face fell as he attempted to turn it.

"No use! The lock's rusted up. We'll have to take the box with us. I guess I could carry it at a pinch."

He lifted it by its metal handles, to let it fall, with a grunt.

"Phew, it's heavy! Lucky I brought the boat with me, and a rope. We'll get it down to the water, and then everything will be plain sailing."

Unwinding the rope that was coiled round his waist, he secured it to one

THANKS TO DAVE

TANIA, a jungle girl, had lived alone on Castaway Isle for many years.

She discovered that Gerry Royston, one of a party of castaways, and Stanhope, the ship's mate, were plotting against her.

In a secret tunnel Tania found a box which she believed contained treasure belonging to her. As she tried to raise the lid, however, she turned, to see Stanhope triumphantly confronting her.

TANIA stared in fear as Stanhope, the ship's mate, crawled through the tunnel towards her, a lantern held on high.

It seemed that escape was impossible, for in this dark labyrinth there was nowhere she could hide.

Instinctively she clung to the wooden chest—the long-hidden treasure that she believed was hers—as though seeking protection in its solid firmness.

The mate walked towards the chest, a satisfied glitter in his small eyes.

"So," he chuckled, straightening himself as the roof became higher, "I've managed to corner you at last—and with the very thing that Master Gerry and I have been looking for!"

Tania shrank from him, her dark eyes wide with mingled terror and defiance.

"You shall not touch me!" she gasped, confronting him pluckily in spite of her fear. "Nor what is mine! Tania—Tania will fight you—"

"Fight me?" The mate threw back his head, his laughter booming down the tunnel. "That's good! I've a score to settle with you for that panther brute of yours." He pointed to his torn shirt and the deep scratch on his arm left by Michi. "I reckon I'll bind you up, for a start, before examining that box. Ha, the key's in the lock, too!"

Key? The word struck a sudden chord in Tania's mind, momentarily displacing her fear. She stared at the iron-bound chest, now revealed in the yellow glare of the lantern.

A rusty key protruded from the ancient lock—a key like the key of Mr. Barnard's safe, only larger—the key that protected her treasure. With a swift movement she snatched at it, even as the scoundrel took a step towards her, pulling a length of cord from his pocket.

"Oh, no—you don't!" he snapped. His hand closed like a vice on her slender wrist as he placed the lantern on the chest. "We'll soon stop your little game— Ah!"

He whirled suddenly. A shout of anger had echoed down the tunnel. A boyish figure leaped towards them, torch in hand.

"Dave!" sobbed Tania incredulously. "Dave—"

The mate rapped out a furious ejaculation, reaching for his revolver. But Dave Cardew was quicker. His fist shot out, sending the scoundrel sprawling, the weapon clattering from his hand.

But the next moment the man was on his feet, an ugly glitter in his eyes. He snatched up a heavy lump of rock and made to fling it at the boy.

Dave dragged Tania aside, and at the same instant a dark, slinky shape sprang from the shadows as Michi, the panther, leaped, with a snarl, at his hated enemy.

The mate's eyes widened with sudden fear. Flinging the rock at the panther—and missing it by inches—he turned and fled down the tunnel, Michi snarling at his heels.

Dave snatched up the revolver, and Tania whistled to her pet, fearful that he might be accidentally hurt if the boy was compelled to fire. Growling reluctantly, Michi padded back towards his young mistress, but still they could hear the mate's blundering footsteps and terrified yells fading into the distance—for the scoundrel, unarmed, had good reason to fear the panther he had once sought to maim.

Dave smiled grimly as he pocketed the revolver, while Tania clung to him, half sobbing in her relief.

"Steady, Tania—take it easy!" he said quickly. "You've nothing to worry about now. I'm armed—and we've got Michi with us. Stanhope won't dare to return."

Tania gulped.

"But—Gerry?" she whispered.

"He tried to stop me," said Dave, his eyes glittering, "but I knocked him to the wide and bound him with his own belt and scarf. Thank goodness I reached you in time!"

Tania drew away from him instinctively, her dark eyes filled with tears of gratitude—and remorse.

"Dave has done all this for Tania," she breathed, "and she is ashamed! Because she believed Gerry, the treacherous one, she has spoken cruel words that she did not mean, and Dave must look on her with scorn."

"I say, steady on!" interrupted Dave, flushing. "Don't talk rot, Tania. I'm still your friend—more than ever!"

He squeezed her arm and hastily pulled a large handkerchief from his pocket. "Here, blow your nose," he added gruffly. "I've not seen you cry before, Tania; you're not the sort."

Tania blew her nose obediently and stared at him with a tremulous, scarcely believing smile.

"Then Dave—Dave is not angry?"

"I am," said Dave, his jaw hardening. "I'm furious, Tania—furious with that trickster Gerry for the way he's hoodwinked you from the first! I've not settled my score with him by a long chalk. And I'm afraid we're not out of the wood yet, as far as he and the mate are concerned."

His hand tightened on her arm. "I've got to get you back to the camp and tell Mr. Barnard the whole story. He wouldn't listen to me before, but he'll have to listen now. When the ship sails to-night, Tania—"

"The—the ship?" gasped Tania.

"Dave, you are not going—"

"I am!" declared Dave, nodding.

"We're all going, Tania, if the tide's favourable. And, what's more, you're coming with us!"

of the handles. Together they dragged the heavy box along the tunnel, making for the distant glimmer of light that Dave declared led out into the open.

He was right. The opening was little more than a foxhole, but, working with a will, they managed to enlarge it, and Dave assisted Tania to scramble through.

Taking a deep gulping breath, the jungle girl stared round her. Already the crimson sunset was fading.

They had emerged on a slope of the hill, and below, in the valley, shimmered the winding stream that led to the sea.

A moment later Dave joined her, holding the rope that secured the chest. Between them they managed to raise it through the opening, and Tania anxiously whistled her pet.

There was a scrambling sound as Michi appeared, his glossy fur covered in dust, his amber eyes blinking in the daylight.

"Good old Michi!" chuckled Dave. "It's really thanks to him that we got away. I suggest we leave him to guard the opening, Tania, in case the mate plucks up courage to come back."

Tania agreed to the suggestion, for now that the mate was unarmed she had no fear for her courageous pet.

But in their excitement neither she nor Dave gave more than a passing thought to Gerry, and that boy's cunning. Though bound and helpless, his shouts had already attracted the scared mate, and even as Dave and Tania made their way cautiously down the slope Dave was staggering slightly under the weight of his precious burden, the pair of scoundrels were heading for another exit from the subterranean caves.

Dave's wounded head was beginning to throb again from his recent exertions, and after a while he was forced to rest.

"Don't worry about me, Tania; I'll manage," he declared breathlessly, waving aside her anxious offer to help him. "The boat's moored to a tree-stump just beyond those rocks. If you'll pull it to the bank I'll bring the box along."

Tania nodded and hurried forward, stepping into the shadow of the rocks. She could just see the dark outline of the boat and the mooring-line that secured it to the bank.

She bent to grasp the line as the bushes behind her parted silently, and a tall figure stepped out, his handsome face pale and vindictive in the fading light, a bruise showing on his forehead.

Tania's sharp ears detected the stealthy tread, and she whirled, a warning scream choked on her lips as Gerry's hand was clapped over her mouth.

"Quiet, you little fool!" he breathed. "Or it'll be the worse for you. All right, Stanhope, tie her up!"

The mate's burly figure loomed behind her, and a scarf was whipped round the jungle girl's mouth, while her hands and feet were securely tied. "Tania," called Dave's voice, "is everything all right?"

Frantically Tania tried to reply, to scream a warning, but the muffling scarf choked back her cry.

With a warning gesture to the mate, Gerry stepped back into the shadows—just as Dave appeared.

"Too late he caught sight of them. Even as he reached for the mate's revolver Gerry leaped at him from one side, while the mate struck at him savagely with a heavy stick.

With a groan, Dave collapsed, the chest falling with a thud to the ground. Helplessly, her blood boiling, Tania looked on while Dave was bound and gagged.

Gerry rose to his feet, a mocking, revengeful smile on his handsome face.

"Many thanks, Dave, old man," he drawled, giving the helpless boy a scornful prod with his feet. "You've saved us a lot of trouble, and I guess this makes us quits!"

He nodded to the mate, and together they lifted the chest into the boat.

"Mr. Barnard will be worried when

you don't turn up, Dave," he added smoothly, "but I've a little scheme to prevent a search. So-long, old boy—and good-bye, Tania!" He raised his hand in a mocking salute. "I've an idea that we'll be sailing to-night—without you!"

The mate seized an oar, pushing the boat away from the bank. Struggling, Tania watched it helplessly as it disappeared into the gathering darkness.

Its two occupants exchanged furtive glances, though the mate looked a trifle worried as he rested on the oars.

"What now, Master Gerry?" he demanded. "There'll be the dickens to pay if young Dave is found and tells his story—"

"He won't be found!" declared Gerry, a ruthless glitter in his blue eyes. "Our first job's to smuggle the chest down to the shore. Then we'll work a little plan to bluff Mr. Barnard and the rest. If you carry out your part, you can leave the rest to me!"



THE CUNNING OF GERRY

A white-faced, anxious group stood on the shore in the yellow light of a score of lanterns.

The camp had been dismantled and the boats were waiting, but Mr. Barnard and the youthful castaways were talking agitatedly to Captain Rawlins and the crew.

"Something will have to be done about it, captain!" declared Mr. Barnard. "Neither Gerry nor Dave has come back, and it's getting late." "Don't you worry, sir," said Captain Rawlins. "They'll turn up. They know we're sailing at midnight?"

Mr. Barnard nodded, staring anxiously towards the trees.

"I don't like it, captain," he declared. "I've sent Tim and some of the other boys to look for them, though I warned them not to go far. Dave has been acting very strangely since his accident. This afternoon he practically accused Gerry of plotting against Tania, though he didn't mention him by name. I'm afraid there may have been a fight. If I don't—"

He broke off, halted by an excited cry from Pat Saunders and the other girls.

"Here they come!" Mr. Barnard led the excited rush across the beach as a group of boys appeared from the trees, supporting someone between them.

"Gerry!" exclaimed the castaways. "It's Gerry!"

The master's face lit with relief. Gerry Royston was being assisted by Tim and the others. He looked dazed and bewildered as the excited castaways clustered round him, plying him with questions.

Mr. Barnard pushed his way to the front of the group.

"Gerry, my boy, what happened?" he demanded. "Where's Dave?"

"Have you seen Dave?" chorused a dozen anxious voices.

Gerry nodded, seeming to pull himself together with an effort. He passed an unsteady hand over his forehead, masking the cunning gleam in his eyes.

"I—I met him as I was coming back from exploring, sir," he declared huskily. "He was with Tania—"

HAVE YOU SEARCHED

in every nook and cranny for all those old newspapers, cardboard boxes, and even those treasured copies of your own **GIRLS' CRYSTAL?**

They can all be repulped and turned into a 101 useful articles which are urgently needed.

Please remember—

SALVAGE IS SO IMPORTANT

"Tania!"

"We might have guessed that girl was behind it!" shrilled Moyra Curtis.

Mr. Barnard raised a hand for silence.

"Well, Gerry?"

"I tried to persuade him to come back with me," said Gerry, with a twisted smile. "I warned him that Tania was up to no good, that she was making a fool of him. Maybe I was a bit tactless. Anyway, old Dave got his back up, and there was a bit of a fight. He—he knocked me down—"

An indignant murmur went up from the castaways.

"But where are they now?" demanded Mr. Barnard. "What happened then, Gerry?"

"Frankly, sir, I don't know," said Gerry. "I must have struck my head on a stone as I fell. All I remember was Dave saying something about a boat and putting out to sea. When I came to my senses they had both gone—"

He broke off, passing a hand wearily across his forehead.

The rest of the castaways were regarding each other wonderingly.

"Where could they be going?" demanded Pat Saunders.

"And why?" added Tim Burchell. Gerry shook his head.

"I haven't the foggiest idea," he replied. "But when I came upon them, Tania seemed to be persuading Dave to do something—"

"And you have no idea what—?" Mr. Barnard began anxiously.

"None whatever, sir," Gerry hastened to assure him. "I only know that they were both acting very strangely, especially Tania. She—"

At that moment there sounded a shout from the direction of the cliffs. A breathless figure came running down towards the group.

"Stanhope!" exclaimed Mr. Barnard as he recognised the ship's mate. "What's wrong?"

The mate seemed to be struggling for breath as he encountered Gerry's meaning wink.

"There's a boat put out from the headland, sir," he panted, "making for the reef. It looks to be in difficulties, and it seems like young Dave and that jungle girl are on board—"

A horrified gasp arose, and by common consent a rush was made towards the cliff, Gerry making sure that he was well in the lead.

"Can you see them, Gerry?" shouted Mr. Barnard.

"It's drifting on to the rocks, sir!" yelled Gerry, who had outdistanced the others. "Oh gosh, it's struck—it's capsized! Dave—poor old Dave—"

Horried, the others crowded up on to the cliff's edge. Far out to sea, among the jagged rocks of the reef, they could see a rowboat half submerged, the waves washing over it.

"There may still be a chance!" exclaimed Mr. Barnard huskily. "Come on, boys!"

He led the way back to the beach, Gerry bringing up the rear. The crew, under the direction of Captain Rawlins, were feverishly launching one of the boats. The mate stepped forward, with a furtive grin, as Gerry approached.

"O.K., Master Gerry?" he whispered. "I took the bung out, as you said, and pushed the empty boat out. I knew the current would take it on to the reef. But did you manage to bluff Barnard and the others? Do they think young Dave and the jungle girl were aboard?"

Gerry frowned warningly. "Keep your voice down!" he breathed. "Yes, I bluffed them. They'll think Dave and Tania have been drowned all right! Get that chest on board while I join the others on this rescue stunt. Barnard will give up hope after a while, and with any luck we'll sail on the midnight tide—with not a soul suspecting that Tania and Dave are still on the island where we left them!"

It seems that Tania and Dave will be marooned, thanks to Gerry's cunning—and the jungle girl's treasure will be lost into the bargain. Don't miss next Friday's exciting chapters.

The Amazing WAX DUMMY



By PETER LANGLEY

JUNE KEEPS WATCH

"YE Olde Crafts Exhibition—Grand Opening To-morrow by the Mayor of Sherville," read June Gaynor, glancing up at the banner fluttering over the courtyard of the ancient town hall. "A pity we shan't be staying to see it, nunky."

Noel Raymond's eyes twinkled. "There's a chance we may be staying, June," he said. "That phone-call I had this evening was from Mr. Webster, the manager of the exhibition. Apparently he heard that we were down here on a case, and he wants to consult me about certain peculiar happenings. His office is close by—"

He broke off as June grabbed him by the sleeve, her attractive face paling slightly in the dusk.

"Nunky, look—over there!" she gasped, pointing across the shadowy courtyard. "Someone's fallen down those steps—a man—in fancy-dress!"

The famous detective followed the direction of her glance. Lying motionless on the flagged courtyard, close to a flight of winding steps, was a man's figure wearing a velvet cloak and plumed bonnet, his bearded features dimly revealed in the evening twilight.

Noel sprinted forward, June at his heels.

"Nunky," she faltered, "is he—"

To her amazement, a chuckle escaped her uncle's lips.

"Not 'he,' June," he corrected. "It. This is nothing more than a wax dummy!"

"A—a dummy?" echoed June. "But what's it doing here?"

She could see now that it was undoubtedly a wax model, attired in the flamboyant costume of an Elizabethan grandee. Its arms were jointed, and its feet were secured firmly to a wooden pedestal. A Van Dyke beard lent a sardonic expression to its waxen features.

"Obviously it belongs to the exhibition," commented Noel, "though why it should have been left out here beats me. Phew!" he added, as he bent and lifted the model. "It's no light weight, June. It's been built on an iron frame that's screwed to the pedestal."

Just then there was a sound of hurrying footsteps, and two figures came running across the courtyard from the offices adjoining the main building.

One, by his uniform, was evidently the caretaker; the other was a grey-haired, worried-looking man whom Noel assumed correctly to be Mr. Webster, the manager of the exhibition.

They both stared in amazement at the wax model.

"Good evening!" remarked Noel, smiling dryly as he introduced himself and June. "You are expecting us, I believe, Mr. Webster? My partner and I were on our way to your office when we came across—this!"

"I say!" exclaimed the astounded caretaker, peering at the dummy. "It—it's Sir Jasper!"

"Who?" asked June. The manager passed a bewildered hand over his forehead.

"This—this is extraordinary, Mr. Raymond!" he declared. "You have found the model of Sir Jasper Forsdyke, the first mayor of this town. It belongs to a special tableau—the centre-piece of to-morrow's exhibition. On two occasions recently the tableau has been disturbed. But this passes all understanding." He turned on the caretaker. "Was everything in order when you made your rounds this evening, Parker?"

"Everything, Mr. Webster, as far as I could see," replied the other defensively. "There weren't no models missing, I'll swear to that. Not as you'd expect anyone to be interested in a dummy—"

"Unless the costume happens to be valuable?" suggested Noel.

The manager shook his head.

"It is of trifling value."

"Yet I am sure an attempt has been made to steal it," said Noel. "It's clear that thieves were making away with it, when they were disturbed by our footsteps—and took flight." He eyed the manager shrewdly. "Something bigger than this was worrying you when you phoned me, Mr. Webster?"

The other nodded, biting his lip.

"It may have no connection, and yet—Parker"—he turned to the caretaker—"take your torch, and make certain that there is no one lurking in the courtyard. Mr. Raymond, perhaps you'd be kind enough to give me a hand with the dummy? I would like you to inspect the showroom."

Carrying the heavy model between them, June following, Noel and the manager climbed the steps, halting by a private door that gave access to the main showroom.

The door stood ajar!

"Parker was careless—or the thieves had a duplicate key," remarked Noel.

The manager nodded, his face clouded as he switched on the light.

"I've been afraid of that. You'll understand in a minute why I am so worried. That is the principal tableau—in the middle of the room."

June gave a little gasp of surprise and delight: The tableau represented the redoubtable Queen Bess herself, surrounded by courtiers and waiting-maids, greeting several of the town's chief dignitaries, who knelt humbly on the platform before her.

But one place was vacant—the place that should have been occupied by Sir Jasper. And beside the vacant place, a kneeling page-boy was holding aloft an empty gilt tray.

Noel eyed the group keenly.

"Something is missing—apart from Sir Jasper," he commented. "The queen is pointing to that tray—"

"Not much escapes you, Mr. Raymond!" remarked the manager. "This tableau represents the gift to our town of the priceless Sherville regalia—gems worth many thousands of pounds. At present they are locked

securely in the vaults of the city bank—but to-morrow they will be brought to the exhibition, under special guard, and placed on that tray to be viewed by the public—at a safe distance, of course."

Noel whistled, his eyes narrowed. "I'm beginning to understand your anxiety!—This seemingly purposeless attempt to steal a wax dummy might be a preliminary to a more daring theft. Though exactly what the thieves hoped to gain by their curious theft, I can't surmise for the moment—"

"There may be something hidden inside it," ventured June.

"That's worth trying!" Noel declared; and with the manager's ready permission he set to work to examine the figure thoroughly, removing its costume and probing the canvas-covered iron framework, together with the wax head and jointed arms.

But the search proved fruitless.

After returning the dummy to its place in the waxwork group, Noel questioned the manager about the regalia—and the arrangements made for the safety of the priceless gems. Though they were to be brought to the building under a strong escort, and guarded throughout the day, Mr. Webster was still uneasy.

"If anything should happen to the regalia I'm a ruined man!" he declared unsteadily.

Noel nodded sympathetically, and was about to suggest a plan of action, when he was interrupted by the distant trilling of a telephone.

"That's the phone in my office!" exclaimed the manager. "There may be news. I asked the constable on patrol to keep his eyes open for any suspicious person loitering near the town hall."

He led the way from the showroom, locking the door with his own key. In his comfortably furnished office across the courtyard he snatched up the phone, while June and Noel waited.

At length he rejoined them, his manner revealing excitement.

"Two men were seen climbing the wall, and entering a waiting car," he jerked. "The constable got its number, and thinks there may be a chance of overtaking it. My car is waiting—if you'd care to come with me—"

Noel nodded. "You'd better wait here, June," he said tersely, "in case there is another message. We shan't be long. You might keep your eye on the main building, and phone the police station at once if you notice anything amiss."

June watched them depart. She felt that she was missing all the excitement. Then her glance rested on the bunch of keys laying on the manager's desk—and a daring gleam crept into her grey eyes.

The girl detective took the keys, crossed the courtyard and let herself

quietly into the deserted showroom. If anything happened in Noel's absence she wanted to be in the position to give first-hand information!

The group of wax figures stood out eerily in the pale light that crept through the windows. They looked very lifelike—and June suppressed an involuntary shiver as she stepped boldly up to the platform.

She knew exactly what she intended to do. The idea had come to her in a flash when she saw that bunch of keys. It would be better to keep watch from inside the building than from outside: to keep her vigil unseen—and unsuspected!

She removed the satin gown and headdress adorning one of the queen's waiting-maids, and donned them swiftly, taking her place on the platform with the other wax courtiers.

If anyone should enter the gallery she would be able to watch and listen—and possibly discover the whole mysterious plot!

With bated breath she waited, while the minutes dragged past.

After a quarter of an hour June began to feel cramped and restless. She wondered whether she was keeping her strange vigil in vain. Her glance wandered to the other figures in the group—the stately wax queen and her courtiers, the town grandees, the tall figure of Sir Jasper—

Then June's blood froze. For Sir Jasper had slowly turned his head and was staring at her with a malevolent smile!



THE DUMMY RETURNED AGAIN

For an instant terror held the girl detective motionless. In the whole of her eventful career she had never received a shock like

this. Then, in a flash, her natural courage reasserted itself—and her common sense.

Someone had taken the place of the wax dummy before she had entered the room!

And that someone must be one of the crooks! Where the real dummy was and why the crook had taken its place she did not know. But it was clear by the expression on the crook's bearded face that he meant to take action against her.

He stepped from the pedestal. June acted desperately. Her fingers had closed on something in her pocket. Now she pulled it out and, with an unexpected movement, flung the contents of her powder-compact into the scoundrel's face.

With an enraged snarl the bearded figure clapped a hand to his eyes—and at the same instant June sprang from the platform and sped across the gallery.

She heard the other's shout, and the pounding of his footsteps behind her. But she reached the door in the nick of time, slamming it in her pursuer's face and turning the key in the lock.

For a moment she paused for breath, her heart pounding madly. Then she sped down the steps into the courtyard, racing towards the main gates.

She had outwitted her mysterious opponent, and her one thought now was to fetch help.

The short drive to the gate was bordered by laurel-bushes. As June brushed against one of them in her haste, a hand reached out, gripping her by the shoulder.

With a gasp, June turned—and this time she could not keep back her scream.

For there stood the figure of Sir Jasper!

Even in that moment June wondered how he had escaped so quickly from the gallery—by another door, perhaps, or with a duplicate key?

But her cry for help had been heard. There came a screech of brakes as a car pulled up on the drive. With a frantic wriggle, June struck out at her captor, twisting herself free from

his grasp and making a dive for the car.

"Nunky!" she cried as Noel leapt out, followed by Mr. Webster.

"June!" exclaimed Noel, catching her by the arm. "What has happened? What's the meaning of this costume? Webster and I were tricked away by a false phone message, and we—"

Chokingly, June gasped out her amazing story.

"This—is incredible!" exclaimed the astounded manager. "A man masquerading as a waxwork—"

"In order to steal the priceless regalia to-morrow!" snapped Noel, his eyes glinting. "That's why the dummy was stolen in the first place—so that a man could take its place. But the scoundrel reckoned without your daring wits, June—and your pluck. Where did you leave him?"

"He—he was hiding behind those laurel bushes—"

"He's there now!" exclaimed the manager, pointing. "I can see his hat!"

Noel made a leap for the bushes, revolver in hand, followed by the manager and June. A tall figure stood in the shadows.

"Got you, you scoundrel!" shouted Mr. Webster, striking out.

There was a dull thud. The figure toppled on to the path. Then a cry escaped June's lips as Noel flashed his torch.

"Great Scott!" shouted the manager. "It—it's—the dummy Sir Jasper!"

Incredulously Noel bent down, touching the figure's waxen face. More amazing still, the figure was still attached firmly to its pedestal.

The manager stared pityingly at June.

"Miss Gaynor—you've been dreaming!" he cried. "It's clear that another audacious attempt was made to steal the dummy—and you imagined the rest—"

"Oh!" gasped June indignantly— but meeting Noel's warning glance she checked her angry words. For it was obvious to June that the disguised crook had escaped, leaving the dummy in his place.

Mr. Webster bellowed for the caretaker, and a moment later the man appeared from his lodge, rubbing his eyes. He admitted that he had been dozing, and he stared open-mouthed at the dummy.

"Someone seems to have taken a rare fancy to Sir Jasper, sir!"

"You can help me carry the model back to the gallery," snapped the manager, frowning. "It's through your negligence that this happened. To-night we shall take it in turns to keep watch on the showroom. These scoundrels won't get the better of me!"

Noel detained June as she was about to follow them. He was staring curiously at her slender hand.

"One of your nails is broken, June," he said. "How did that happen?"

June glanced at the broken nail.

"Perhaps when I was struggling with Sir Jasper—I mean the impostor, of course—"

"Just a minute!" said Noel, and he removed a flake of whitish substance from under her broken nail, examining it by the light of his torch. "Just take a look at this, June."

She obeyed, with a puzzled frown.

"What is it, nunky?"

"Wax!" replied Noel.

"W-wax?" faltered June, staring.

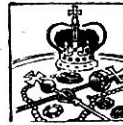
"But how—"

"How did you come to get wax under your nail when you struggled with the pseudo Sir Jasper?" inquired Noel. "That's what I want to know, June. We've been assuming that your opponent was an ordinary man, in disguise. But this suggests—"

"Nunky!" gasped June, her cheeks flaming. "You're not suggesting that a wax dummy could suddenly come to life—"

Noel shook his head.

"I'm suggesting nothing of the kind, June—I accept your story as it stands. But this clue throws an entirely different light on the case. I've a feeling that it may help us to solve the mystery of the dummy!"



HOW MANY SIR JASPERS?

Noel was unusually thoughtful, while June was excited, as they made their way to the town hall the next morning for the opening of the grand exhibition.

They had discussed the amazing mystery from all angles, and were agreed on one point: that the affair of the wax dummy had been part of an audacious plot to steal the priceless regalia.

But June felt convinced that the plotters had failed. The daring impostor who had tried to take the dummy's place in the exhibition had given himself away too soon.

According to Mr. Webster's latest message, no further attempts had been made during the night.

"I expect the thieves have given up hope, nunky!" she declared.

The famous detective slowly shook his head.

"With a fortune at stake—I hardly think so!" he replied. "And I'm still worried about the clue of the wax under your finger-nail. Anyway, our job this morning is to safeguard the treasure!"

They had come early, at the manager's request, and Mr. Webster was waiting for them, still looking anxious and rather tired after his night's vigil.

"Perhaps you'd like to have a final look round before the jewels arrive from the bank, Mr. Raymond," he said. "Parker and I kept watch in turns during the night, but the models were not disturbed."

He waved his hand towards the tableau, now lit by the brilliant glare of arc-lamps.

Noel stepped forward to examine them, followed by June. The girl detective glanced a trifle apprehensively at the dummy Sir Jasper.

But under the revealing lights there could be no doubt that the figure was a wax model, like its companions. To make quite sure, she hastily touched the waxen features—drawing back with a half-embarrassed smile as she encountered Noel's quizzical glance.

"It certainly looks as though the thieves have abandoned their plan, June," he remarked dryly. "But I'm taking no chances. The jewels should be arriving at any minute—"

As he spoke there came a sudden stir among the assistants in the showroom. The manager reappeared, accompanied by two burly attendants carrying between them a black-japaned box. They were escorted by a police inspector in plain clothes, who greeted Noel with a friendly nod.

"I heard you'd be here, Mr. Raymond! Not much for us to do, except look on. The credentials of all the attendants have been checked, and the public won't be allowed near the stand. I'd defy the cleverest thief in England to get at the jewels while they're on view."

"I hope you're right, inspector," said Noel gravely, turning to busy himself with something on the stand, while the manager unlocked the box.

June gave an involuntary cry of delight as the priceless jewels were lifted from their velvet bed and placed on the gilt tray. Then, seeing that Noel was busy with his last-minute precautions, she crossed to the window overlooking the shady courtyard, glancing down at the crowds assembling outside.

Suddenly she stiffened. She was staring at the window-sill, on which showed a trace of whitish powder. She touched it lightly with her finger and sniffed it. Unmistakably it was face-powder—her own special brand!

The girl detective's mind worked swiftly as she recalled her terrifying experience on the previous night. She had thrown the contents of her powder-compact at her would-be attacker—and the powder had clung to his velvet cloak. He must have escaped from this window!

Looking down, June saw that there

was a shrubbery below—and flower-beds. The ground would still be soft after the previous day's rain. There was a chance that she might find a trail.

Unobserved, June stole away, letting herself out of the private door into the courtyard.

In a few minutes she had reached the shrubbery, and her pulses quickened as she discovered an unmistakable trail of footprints!

Eagerly following them, she came to a postern door half hidden by the ivy that grew thickly over the wall. She pushed it gingerly and the door creaked open—revealing a flight of steps leading to the cellars of the ancient building.

June took out her torch and descended the steps, her ears strained for the slightest sound. As she reached a bend, a stifled cry escaped her lips. Huddled among a pile of rubbish in a corner of the brick passage was a wax figure.

The dummy of Sir Jasper Forsdyke! June bent over it, incredulous bewilderment in her eyes—a sudden icy chill at her heart.

If this was the original model, then what—that was that other figure, upstairs in the showroom?

She straightened suddenly, hearing a stealthy footstep behind her. At the same moment the torch was knocked from her hand, plunging her into darkness.

NOEL glanced at his watch. Strains of martial music could be heard as the mayor's procession neared the town hall. He encountered Mr. Webster's anxious glance.

"Shall we open the doors now, Mr. Raymond?"

The young detective nodded, with a final glance at the jewels on the stand. The manager signalled to the attendant at the door—but at that instant there came a sound like a muffled explosion, and the brilliant arc-lamps were suddenly extinguished.

"Keep still—everyone!" exclaimed Noel, his voice rising above the startled clamour.

He whipped out his torch, flashing it on the motionless tableau. The brilliant light flitted over the wax

figures, resting finally on the gilt tray. A horrified shout arose. The tray was empty—the priceless jewels had vanished as though into thin air!

"Stop the thief!" shouted the manager, his voice hoarse with sudden panic. "He can't have gone far—"

"Stay where you are—all of you!" rapped Noel.

He whirled suddenly as, through the open window, drifted a faint, terrified scream.

"That's June!" he breathed huskily. "Inspector—see that no one leaves the gallery till I get back!"

He raced through the private door into the courtyard. In a moment he had picked up the faint trail that June had followed. The postern door stood open, and Noel leaped down the steps, torch in hand.

The sound of a struggle reached his ears. A burly figure loomed in front of him—to be sent crashing to the ground with a blow from the detective's fist.

"Nunky!" gasped June, clinging to him in relief. "Who—who—"

Noel flashed his torch on the huddled, scowling figure lying near the wax model.

"Parker—the caretaker!" he snapped. "I might have guessed that he was in the plot. It was he who left the door open for the scoundrels to get at the model—and possibly he assisted them to lower it from the window—"

"And it must have been Parker who took the model's place last night!" cried June.

"But it wasn't Parker whom we found after you escaped," said Noel grimly. "That wax figure whose face you scratched in your struggle was the real scoundrel!"

"A—wax model—the real scoundrel!" faltered June, staring at her uncle as though he had taken leave of his senses.

Noel bent to handcuff the caretaker. "Come with me!" he jerked.

"They're all waiting for us upstairs." In the gallery, the fused lights had been repaired. The white-faced manager was talking to the mayor.

"You're to blame for the loss of the priceless regalia, Webster!" exclaimed the latter sternly. "Your precautions were—"

"One minute!" exclaimed Noel. "The jewels are not lost. They are in the possession of the thief—who is standing among us!"

There was a sudden, agitated stir among the onlookers.

"You'll observe," said Noel, "that the black cotton I attached to the dummy figures on the stand has been snapped—in one place—where it was secured to the wrist of Sir Jasper Forsdyke—"

"Nunky—look out!" screamed June, for Sir Jasper's waxen hand had moved suddenly, and now it was holding a revolver!

With a sudden leap, Noel sent the weapon flying, while his bunched fist crashed into the model's face. The wax features cracked and fell in fragments—revealing a glaring face behind the cunning mask.

"Nick Crawshaw—the jewel thief!" snapped Noel. "The leader of the most daring gang in the country—"

"But how—how did he get here?" gasped the amazed manager.

"You carried him here last night—you and the caretaker between you!" said Noel, with a grim smile. "This cunning wax shell was contrived so that he could move his arms—but the feet were secured to the pedestal. Therefore he had to be carried by someone. This was their scheme all along, although of course we surprised them last night before they could complete their task themselves."

"But why hamper themselves with the pedestal?" demanded the dumb-founded inspector.

"A clever hiding-place for the jewels," replied Noel with a smile, as he opened a trapdoor in the pedestal, revealing the precious regalia. "It was the work of a minute to empty the tray into this cavity. Nick Crawshaw is an artist at his job—but he reckoned without my young partner. In her plucky struggle to defend herself she scratched his wax mask—and it was that scratch on Sir Jasper's face that gave me my final clue!"

(End of this week's story.)

WHEN NOEL WAS KIDNAPED is the title of next Friday's detective story. You will read how June plays an amazing lone hand.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 106.)

Looking round, Merle caught a glimpse of a high-hatted cowboy in the arena, struggling to ride a rearing, bucking horse. Evidently the bronco-busting competition was in progress.

Leaving Jake to unload Pommie and give him a final groom, Merle ate a hasty sandwich at the snack bar.

She did not feel very hungry after Mammie's tremendous breakfast, but there was a curious empty feeling inside her, caused by the thought of the all-important race soon to start.

"Just a touch of stage-fright," she told herself. "Guess I'll be fine once I can get into action. It's the waiting—"

Her thoughts broke off. She had paused in the snack-bar doorway, to be greeted by a sudden chorus of cheering, hearty voices.

"There she is, boys!"

"Hi, there, Miss Merle!"

"How you feelin'? Goin' to win hands down, eh?"

Startled, Merle looked up.

Striding towards her was a group of dusty, but cheerfully grinning cowboys, spurs jingling, big sombreros waving in their tanned hands.

She stared for a second in blank surprise, then a delighted cry escaped her lips as she recognised her own cowboys from Happy Valley Ranch.

"Ted! Rex! Golly, all of you!" she exclaimed. "What on earth—"

They halted in front of her, and burly Ted Gardner wiped his dusty, beaming face.

"Reck'n it's a little surprise, Miss Merle," he drawled. "Jake knew

about it, too. Guess us boys reck'ned it would do you a power of good to have someone you knew here to cheer you on!"

"We sure did!" chimed in one of the others. "We had a word with Slim, and he said he could spare us. He's lookin' after things back at th' ranch."

Merle, surrounded by these tall riders of hers, felt a lump in her throat. Oh, it was fine to know such loyalty, such support!

"Boys," she said, a little unsteadily. "I think it's grand of you! It's just the tonic I needed. I'll admit I was feeling a touch of nerves!"

Ted Gardner waved a big hand scornfully.

"Not you, Miss Merle. You're just about the gamest little rider I've ever seen! You'll go in there and win—you an' Pommie!"

There came a quick chorus of assent.

"You make it sound easy, boys!" Merle smiled. Then her chin came up determinedly. "And I'm going to win—I've got to!"

They nodded, suddenly a little grave. They knew of the money owed to Nathaniel Garsten.

"That's the spirit, Miss Merle!" said big Ted gruffly. "And us boys'll be there, shoutin' for you the whole of the way!"

He paused, his beam returning.

"And we'd sure better get good places for the race quickly," he added. "Come on, boys! Good luck, Miss Merle!"

"Thanks, Ted! Thanks, boys!"

Happily full of greater confidence, Merle watched them stride away. Almost light-heartedly she turned towards a programme pinned to the wall.

She saw that the two-mile hurdle race was the next item to be staged, and then her gaze wandered down the list of entries.

At the foot of the names a last-minute entry had been scribbled in, and she gave a gasp as she saw it.

"Larry Denvers!" she exclaimed.

It was a startling surprise to know that the young cowboy from V-Bar-V was to be one of her rivals for the all-important Silver Rider trophy, and before she could get over the first shock she received another.

Through the open window of the snack bar drifted familiar voices, and, peering through, she saw three figures standing there—Nathaniel Garsten, his daughter Celia, and Larry himself.

Despite the fact that she knew Larry was her enemy, it hurt her to see him standing there, a friendly hand on Celia's shoulder; and then she stiffened, for clearly had come Nathaniel Garsten's voice.

"Don't forget, Larry, it's up to you," he said. "I don't want to take sterner measures unless it's absolutely necessary, but by hook or by crook that girl's got to be stopped from winning the Silver Rider."

Celia gave a tinkling laugh, and she gave the young cowboy's arm an admiring squeeze.

"Oh, we can rely on Larry, can't we?" she said, smiling up into his sun-tanned face.

Merle stood as if frozen. She saw Larry give a cool nod.

"Sure thing. Guess there'll be no mistake this time, Merle Wason won't stand a chance—I'll see to that!"

Can there be any doubt now that Larry is an enemy? And what will happen in the race? Don't miss the next fine instalment.

DOLORES THE MISCHIEF-MAKER

(Continued from page 191.)

and offered him the new Buddha to replace the old one? What would he say? Take my word, he'd be delighted. We'd be pals then. We'd get him to show us round the island and ask him then to let us see that plate on our own account. Like the idea?"

"Pat, it's a brainwave," Chris said fervently. "Gee, why didn't I think of it?"

"Why didn't Dolores?" Pat grinned. "She'd give her ears for it—especially after her swank. But keep it under your beret," she warned, as she began to change out of her swim-suit. "We've got to do this job on our own and we're not telling a soul until we've patched it up with the admiral and had a peek at that plate. And—oh golly, cavel!" she hissed. "Here is Dolores!"



THE CUNNING OF DOLORES

In some consternation Chris turned round. For a moment she felt utterly dismayed. For there, outside the chalet window, was Dolores, and it was obvious, at the first glance, that she had been listening. Now, seeing that she was spotted, she shrugged. For a moment she paused, as though to say something, then abruptly changing her mind, turned on her heel and walked away.

"Gosh, did—did she hear?" Chris muttered.

THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 198.)

others would be joining him at any moment. She must find some way of stopping them—she must!

Trembling with anxiety, she returned to the group with the gourd of water, giving a little shudder as she felt Seth's eyes glaring at her. Trying to appear unconcerned, she strolled away again, and her brain working frantically, she busied herself filling one of the rush baskets with fruit.

Suddenly she straightened up and went hurrying towards the gate of the compound, but as she reached it there came an angry shout from Seth:

"Hey, stop her! Come back, you—"

"The fruit," stammered Sally to the guard, "it—it must go to the feast—"

"You take the fruit, buddy," said Seth, running forward and thrusting the basket at the surprised guard.

"And as for you—" he pinched Sally's arm cruelly.

She gave a cry of pain and, off her guard for a moment, raised her eyes. Too late she realised her mistake, for as Seth saw her blue eyes he gave a startled shout.

"Look!" he shouted, as his three companions emerged from the hut. "Didn't I say she was that Warner girl? Have you ever seen an islander with blue eyes?"

Desperately Sally tried to wrench herself free as the other three dumb-founded men surrounded her. But Seth's grip tightened even more.

"You got away from us once," he declared, "but you won't escape again—I'll see to that. As soon as we've finished our supper you'll come with us to the ketch, and when we sail away you'll go with us!"

A QUARTER of an hour later Sally found herself stumbling along the jungle path that led to the

"I don't know." Pat bit her lip. "Idiot me to forget the window. Anyway, she can't have heard much—and if she has heard she'll be wanting to come on this trip. Let's get away and book the coach tickets," she added feverishly.

And hastily finishing their dressing, they rushed away at once to the booking kiosk. The assistant there grinned.

"Just in time," he said. "Only three tickets left."

Pat had a swift idea.

"Has Miss Bellamy booked one?" she asked.

"No. Not Miss Bellamy. If she wants one I guess she'll have to hurry—"

"I guess," Pat grinned, "that it'll be no good her hurrying. I'll have all three."

The clerk handed her the tickets, she paid for them, then she and Chris strolled away.

"That's outwitted Dolores," Pat chuckled. "She can't come on the coach trip now even if she wants to. Tell you what, we'll give the spare ticket to little Muriel Dale in Chalet three. She's a nice kid and hasn't much money to spend on excursions."

"Good idea," said Chris, then gave her chum a nudge. "Look," she whispered.

Pat turned her head, then she chuckled again, for hurrying towards the booking kiosk was the mischief-maker.

"My, won't she be furious when she discovers all the tickets have gone!" gurgled Chris.

Pat nodded delightedly. It was grand to know they had got the better of Dolores.

Happily they made their way to Chalet No. 3 and presented the spare ticket to the delighted Muriel. Next

striding forward. "I must thank you, my dear—"

"Not her," broke in Seth violently as he was dragged to his feet. "That's the only bit of comfort there is. That girl has nothing to do with our downfall."

Don grinned at the sullen rascal.

"That's just where you're mistaken," he declared. "It was Sally who fixed everything. Just look at this."

Pulling an orange from his pocket, he thrust it before the startled man's eyes, and Seth turned almost purple, for carved in the thick skin was an urgent message: "Help! Go to jungle path—SALLY!"

"Smart, wasn't it?" Don asked the glowering Seth. "And you actually handed the basket of fruit to the guard yourself?"

"It was Fay who received the orange," explained Johnny, "and as soon as we saw what was carved on it Don and I rushed off to prepare our ambush, while Fay led another crowd to the compound where the guard said the orange came from."

"And there we found Lalola and the real professor and so learnt the whole story," Fay added.

At that moment there came a shout from the beach. The third party, which had been sent off to round up the bogus professor, had boarded the ketch, made him a prisoner and were now returning with the stolen radio invention.

"And so all's well," cried Sally happily.

"Thanks to you," declared Professor Dubray.

But Sally shook her head and looked across at the shy island girl.

"No—thanks to Lalola," she corrected him. "If she hadn't guessed what was afoot and stolen aboard the Ocean Star with the idea of hiding the oilskin bag until she could expose the impostor, those rascals would have succeeded in getting clear with it."

(End of this week's story.)

Next week the Merry-makers are afloat again, and in the GIRL'S CRYSTAL you will find another enthralling story about them.

"Yes, thanks to you," Sally replied.

"Oh, it was wonderful the way you two went for those four bulles."

"And it was wonderful how you behaved," declared the professor,

they made tracks for the cliff café, there to have a snack meal in place of the breakfast they had missed. That done, they strolled through the camp grounds to where the motor-coach stood waiting.

"Poor old Dolores!" said Chris. "I wonder if she will come and see us off? I wonder—"

And then abruptly she stopped and both she and Pat stared in dismay. For standing outside the coach, talking to the driver, was Dolores, and in one hand she held a yellow slip of paper.

"Surely that—that can't be a ticket?" Pat gasped in dismay.

At that moment Dolores looked up, and cheerily she waved.

"Hallo, so you've come to make certain of a good seat, have you?" she said, smiling pleasantly, as if they were the best of friends. "Well, you can come and sit with me, if you like."

Pat and Chris gulped.

"You mean that—that you're coming on the trip?" Pat exclaimed.

Dolores smiled more sweetly than ever.

"Of course," she said, and waved the slip of paper in her hand.

"But—but we bought the last tickets!" gasped Chris.

Dolores nodded, and for a moment an angry gleam flickered in her beautiful eyes.

"I know you did, but I managed to persuade Lucy Day to let me have hers. Apparently she's not really keen on Roman ruins. Wasn't that a bit of luck?"

Once again Dolores has been too clever for the chums. How will they be able to prevent her from learning about their secret plan? You will find next Friday's instalment even more enthralling.