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EVERY
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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

Week
Ending
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1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The **COWBOY** WHO **MYSTIFIED** **MERLE**

Merle's Rival Takes The Lead In The All-important Race—By GAIL WESTERN

THE COOLNESS OF LARRY

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.

When Merle arrived at Lone Pine Rodeo, she learnt that Larry had also entered for the important race.

From a conversation she overheard between Larry, Garsten, and his daughter, Celia, it seemed that Larry was going to stop her winning—at all costs.

AS Merle stood there, startled by what she had overheard, Celia Garsten gave another confident laugh.

"Don't worry, dad," she said. "I know we can rely on Larry. He'll take good care that Merle Wason doesn't win the Silver Rider."

And she put a hand admiringly on the young cowboy's shoulder. He smiled down into her upturned face.

"Of course you can rely on me, honey," he said. "Guess you know I'd do anything to please you."

Merle turned away. She felt she could not bear to listen to any more.

What had just been said proved conclusively that not only was Nathaniel Garsten interested in the Silver Rider trophy, but that he was prepared to go to any lengths to secure possession of it. That could only mean that he, like Merle, believed that old Crogan's secret was hidden in the statuette.

And Larry had promised to win it for him!

That was what upset Merle most. It was silly, she knew, to be distressed.

For days past she had known that the young cowboy was not a friend, but a treacherous enemy. Nevertheless, the sight of him basking in Celia's admiration, striving to please her, brought hot, stinging tears to her eyes.

"Oh, I never want to see him again!" she gulped. "And to think that once I liked him—trusted him!"

Blindly she ran from the snack-bar, and when she reached the stable where Jake Binns was grooming Pommie, her face was still white and strained. The bandy-legged horse-breaker eyed her anxiously.

"Nothin' wrong, is there, Miss Merle?" he asked, laying aside his curry comb. "You look kinda ill."

Hurriedly Merle shook her head, furious with herself for letting Larry's treachery upset her so much.

"No, no, of course not," she replied. "It's only that—that I'm a bit worked up about the race. It means so much to uncle and me, you know."

Jake gave an understanding nod. "It sure will be terrible if you don't win, Miss Merle," he muttered. "Guess the prize money is your only hope o' payin' that debt you owe Nat Garsten, and if it isn't paid pronto—"

He gave a heavy sigh as the possibility that Happy Valley Ranch might pass into the ownership of the neighbouring rancher, then he forced himself to grin.

"But there, there's no need to fret, Miss Merle," he declared. "You won't lose. Guess there ain't a better jumper than Pommie in the whole county. Fair looks a picture, doesn't he?"

Merle's eyes shone with pride as she surveyed her horse. Gleaming from head to toe, his muscles rippling with eagerness, he looked every inch a champion.

"He's a darling," she cried. "Pommie won't let me down."

She swung into the saddle. The all-important two-mile hurdle race would be beginning in a few minutes now.

"Best o' luck, Miss Merle," called Jake, as she rode out of the stable.

Merle smiled, waved her hand, then went trotting across the competitors' enclosure, but as she approached the tunnel under the grandstand that led to the course she found her way unexpectedly barred.

A lithe figure on a magnificent black horse almost filled the narrow entrance.

A flush mantled Merle's cheeks as she recognised him.

"Larry!"

He nodded cheerily, as if they were staunch friends.

"Guess I've been waitin' for you," he announced calmly.

Merle gasped. Were there no limits to his nerve? Surely he didn't expect her to be taken in by this false friendliness? But Larry seemed to be oblivious of her rising anger.

"Thought we might as well ride down to the startin' post together," he explained. "Even if we are rivals, there's no reason why we shouldn't be friends."

"Friends!" Merle's pent-up feelings found vent in an explosive cry of contempt. "You'll never be a friend of mine, Larry Denvers! I know too much about you. Get out of my way!"

She made to ride on, but his horse still blocked the path, and leaning forward in the saddle he looked at her, that characteristic, sardonic gleam in his steel-grey eyes.

"Guess you sound kind of sore," he commented.

"Sore! I should just say I am! After the way I saw you mooning over Celia Garsten just now—"

He cut in with an amused chuckle. "Don't tell me you were jealous," he teased.

"Jealous! How dare you suggest such a thing!"

Her voice quivered with anger, but redder than ever became the flush on her face.

"Or maybe it's because I've entered for the hurdle race," he went on.

"Sorry, honey, but it had to be done. Of course, I won't like beatin' you."

"So you think you're going to win, do you?" she flashed.

"Of course, honey," he said calmly. "Guess there isn't a horse living who can race alongside Prince."

"Well see, Larry Denvers!" she gaped angrily. "Oh, we'll see! You and your precious friends cheated me out of one race, but it's going to be different this time!"

"But, honey—"

She would not let him finish. "I tell you, Pommie and I are going to beat you if it's the last thing we ever do," she cried, and with an angry flap of the reins she sent Pommie brushing by him. Next moment she was galloping on into the tunnel, her eyes flashing, her lips set in a grim, furious line.

The secret that might be hidden in the Silver Rider trophy was swept from her mind. She even forgot how vitally necessary it was for her to win the prize money. Only one thought burnt in her stormy mind—the fierce desire at all costs to shatter Larry's calm confidence, to humble him by beating him in the race.



SENSATION AT THE LAST HURDLE

"We've got to beat him, Pommie—got to make him eat his words!"

Merle whispered the words as she waited at the starting line, one of eight other competitors, all as impatient as she was for the hurdle race to begin.

Pommie pawed at the turf, as if he endorsed her sentiments about the infuriating young cowboy.

Merle gave him a fond pat, then gathered up the reins and crouched low, determined to secure a flying start when the signal came.

Suddenly there was a clatter of hoofs on the sun-baked turf behind her and a boyish voice rang out:

"So there you are, honey! Shift up a bit and make room, will you?"

And, looking round, Merle saw Larry trotting towards her, grinning cheerily, as if the recent heated scene between them had never taken place.

Tilting her chin, she silently moved Pommie over.

That sardonic gleam still in his eyes, he calmly reined in Prince beside her.

"Relax, honey," he drawled. "Guess it's a mistake to kind of tie yourself up in knots while waitin' for the flag. If you take my advice—"

"When I need your advice I'll ask for it," she burst out angrily.

He grinned, seemingly in no way perturbed by her hostility.

"Have it your own way, honey. I was only tryin' to help you."

But she was not listening. Deliberately she turned her head, resolutely keeping her eyes fixed on the wooden platform where the starter stood, a flag in one hand, the other grasping the cord of the big brass starting bell.

But that angry flush had returned to her cheeks. Was there ever such an infuriating boy? she asked herself. Clang-ggs!

The clamour of the bell cut into her thoughts. Eagerly she sent Pommie plunging forward, but possibly because her thoughts were centred on Larry and not on the race, she failed to secure the flying start she had planned.

A split second after the other horses she left the starting line, and as she saw them go hurtling away her eyes flashed furiously. It was Larry she blamed for her bad start.

"After them, Pommie!" she gasped. Gallantly Pommie responded. Like the wind he went racing over the turf, but the horses ahead were bunched together. Merle searched in vain for an opening as her rivals went soaring over the first hurdle.

"Steady on," said a calm voice at her side. "Plenty of time, you know."

And there, to her surprise, she saw Larry, riding easily at her side.

Her only response was to dig in her heels. Up soared Pommie. He cleared the hurdle faultlessly and Merle urged

him on. Despite what Larry had said, she meant to try to take the lead.

Suddenly she saw a gap ahead. Desperately she rode down on it. A clatter of pounding hoofs, a breathless burst of speed, and she was through. Rival after rival seemed to slip back behind her.

Only three horses in front of her now—and neither of them was Larry's black Prince.

Merle's lips curled scornfully.

So much for his boasting. "Alrcady he had been left behind."

She braced herself for the next hurdle. One of the horses ahead jibbed and stumbled. She flashed by, felt Pommie rise like a bird. He landed with a thud, then went galloping on, and now he was in front.

Merle's heart sang. Never had she felt so thrilled, and it was triumphantly that she went whirling down the straight past the packed grandstand. She could hear the crowd shouting her name, could see Jake Binns and the rest of the Happy Valley cowboys who were excitedly cheering her on.

And then another hurdle loomed before her. She crouched low in the saddle, but even as she prepared to take it there came an unexpected thunder of hoofs and a calm, chiding voice sounded in her ear:

"Not so fast, honey. If you keep on like this, Pommie will be exhausted before the race is half over."

And there, once more at her side, riding with amazing ease, was Larry.

Merle was staggered at finding him still in the running. Gritting her teeth, she urged Pommie on. He took the hurdle cleanly. On he galloped, taking the lead, rounding the bend and flashing on up the far side of the course.

But Merle was not satisfied. Behind her she heard again those challenging hoofs; saw a black shape looming nearer and nearer on her right.

"Faster, Pommie! Oh, faster!" she gasped.

Nobly Pommie did his best. Larry's black Prince seemed to slide back, and when the starting post was passed Pommie was still in front.

The first lap over. Only one more to go now. Could she and Pommie do it? Merle asked herself anxiously.

"Oh, we must—must!" she panted.

"Whatever happens we've just got to beat Larry!"

On over the first hurdle again, and then to her dismay the chestnut's terrific speed seemed to slacken. She sensed Larry drawing level once again and suddenly saw his calm, exasperatingly cheerful face.

"I told you you should have taken things more easily at the start," he called. "Your horse can't keep up that pace."

"He can! He can!" There was something like a sob in Merle's voice, and frantically she called to Pommie. "Go on, honey—show him! Show him that he's wrong!"

To her delight Pommie's stride seemed to lengthen. It was as if he had just found his second wind. Again he took the lead, but when the next hurdle was reached Prince had once more drawn alongside. Again Merle saw Larry grinning across at her.

"Come on, honey," he called. "Now we'll make a real race of it."

And, as the two horses thudded down from the jump, he flashed in front.

Frantically Merle urged Pommie on. Again the two horses drew level; again Prince slipped into the lead, only for the position to be evened up at the next hurdle.

Everyone was shouting for either Larry or Merle. It was evident to the whole watching crowd that there were only two horses in the race. One of them must win.

Past the grandstands, round the bend, then the rivals were galloping round the far side of the course for the last time. A blanket could have covered them both, but into Merle's heart had come a sudden fear.

She had the feeling that Larry was playing with her—that if he wanted

to he could take the lead when he chose.

Unlike herself, he was riding so easily, and Prince seemed tireless.

Was it possible that Larry had not been boasting—that Pommie really was no match for his own magnificent black?

Merle went pale. Abruptly she forgot her feud with the young cowboy. She could only remember what this race meant to her uncle and herself.

The future of Happy Valley Ranch was at stake.

And not only that.

The future also of the silver trophy in which she believed was hidden old Crogan's secret.

"Oh, Pommie, we've got to win—got to!"

At that moment Prince shot past Pommie and went leaping over the next hurdle.

For a split second his black shape seemed to remain poised in mid-air, and in that brief moment his rider whipped off his Stetson, flourished it above his head and looked grinningly back at Merle.

"Hey, what's the matter?" he called. "Not givin' up, are you?"

That taunt brought the blood rushing back to Merle's cheeks. Jumping the hurdle, she went in furious pursuit. But it was in vain. Try as he would, Pommie could not overtake his rival. It was as though Prince had wings. On he flashed—on and on.

Despair engulfed Merle. Only one more jump and Larry was a good ten lengths in front.

"It's no good, honey," she gulped. "He's too good for us. He—"

And then abruptly her voice trailed away and an amazed gasp escaped her lips.

For, ahead, a startling, an almost unbelievable thing had happened.

In front of the last hurdle Prince had reared up. It was as if something had frightened him.

Hardly able to believe her own eyes, Merle saw the horse whirl around; saw him knock over the cowboy in charge of the jump; saw Larry striving to quieten him.

Then a wild, delirious whoop left her lips.

"This is our chance!" she shouted. "Come on, Pommie—quick, oh, quick! Here's our chance to beat him, after all!"



MERLE CLEARS A DEBT

Merle heard the startled shouts of the watching crowd; caught a blurred glimpse of the still-rearing Prince, then she was soaring

through the air. Cleanly Pommie took the last hurdle; cleanly he landed on the other side. Then he was galloping on.

Merle almost whooped again. Barring accidents, the race was in her pocket. The prize money—the all-important Silver Rider—would soon be hers.

Eyes ashine, hair blowing in the breeze, she rode triumphantly on, and suddenly her ears were deafened by the loudest cheer she had ever heard.

For Pommie had hurtled past the grandstands and an official was brandishing a check flag, to show that she had won.

Breathlessly she reined in, and the first thing she saw was Nathaniel Garsten standing beside the judges' box. On his face was a look of savage hate, and Celia, seated at his side, looked just as bad-tempered.

They glared as Merle came cantering forward, but now she had no eyes for them. She was not even conscious of the fresh outbreak of cheers that rent the air. All her attention was concentrated on that ledge on the judges' box.

On a strip of green baize there stood a large, shining statuette—the figure of a galloping cowboy.

The Silver Rider!

(Please turn to page 215.)

WHEN NOEL Was KIDNAPPED

JUNE'S MYSTERIOUS TASK

"NUNKY ought to be back by now," murmured June Gaynor, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece of the oak-beamed cottage. "He said that he'd phone if he changed his plans."

Her grey eyes were anxious as she crossed to the window and looked out over the cliff-path towards the picturesque cove.

Noel Raymond had rented this furnished cottage in Cornwall while engaged on a special investigation. The notorious "Hawk-eye" gang—so-called from its swift and ruthless activities—was known to be operating along the coast, and the famous detective had been out since early that morning following up his latest clue, leaving his young partner and niece in charge.

It was seven o'clock now, and Noel had promised to be back by six at the latest. Of course, anything might have happened to delay him. But in that case he would surely have given her a ring.

June started, her eyes lighting up, as the telephone-bell trilled loudly. She crossed the room and picked up the hand-set. Then her face fell. For it was a stranger's deep voice that came over the wire, speaking with a slightly foreign accent.

"Is that Noel Raymond's cottage?" June stifled her disappointment, replying briskly:

"Quite right. This is Mr. Raymond's partner speaking."

"Ah, good-evening, Miss Gaynor! Your uncle, I believe, is out on a special investigation connected with the Hawk-eye gang?"

June stiffened. Noel's business was secret and confidential. Yet this caller spoke with an air of suave authority.

"May I take a message, please?" she inquired coolly, evading the question.

"Certainly, Miss Gaynor. The message is for you! Your uncle will not be returning to-night—"

"What!" gasped June, her face paling. "I don't understand. Who is speaking?"

An unpleasant chuckle came over the wire.

"I am known, young lady, as—the Hawk! I repeat, your uncle will not be coming home to-night—or any other night—unless you carry out my orders implicitly!"

An icy hand clutched at June's heart. The Hawk was the pseudonym of the ruthless leader of the gang that Noel was trailing!

"I can assure you, Miss Gaynor, that I am deadly serious," the caller went on. "As you may know, I have the reputation of meaning what I say. The Hawk never bluffs, so you would be advised to listen very carefully—if you wish to see Noel Raymond again!"

Sudden anger blazed in June's eyes as she momentarily stifled the dread at her heart.

"I—I will call the police—"

"Oh, no, you won't!" came the smooth, menacing retort. "My spies are everywhere, Miss Gaynor. If you attempt to contact the police, or take any action to thwart my wishes, I will not answer for your uncle's safety!"

June looked round desperately. She was alone in the cottage, the

daily help having left after tea. The local police-constable was invariably out on his rounds at this time, and there was little hope of contacting him, even if she dared to defy the caller's threat.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked, playing for time.

"A very simple task, my dear Miss Gaynor," rejoined the unknown caller. "Somewhere in your cottage you will find a green china cat—"

"A—a what?" faltered June.

"A china cat surmounting an ash-tray," went on the speaker. "A worthless novelty to which I have taken a fancy. You will pack the ornament in its original cardboard box, seal it securely, and take it under cover of dusk to the bell-buoy anchored off Pirates' Cove—"

"The bell-buoy?" echoed June incredulously.

"That is what I said!" came the sharp response. "Kindly refrain from questioning my instructions. You will row out to the buoy and place the box in the safety-cage above the bell. You will then return to the shore, and will make no attempt to communicate with anyone. Remember, I shall be watching! Carry out my orders, and your uncle will eventually be freed."

"And—supposing I refuse—"

June began boldly.

The only reply was a click and dead silence as the caller rang off. The girl detective replaced the receiver. Pale-faced, she hesitated a moment, then slowly crossed to the safe. She remembered that only yesterday Noel had brought a china cat ornament in with him. He had had a vague suspicion that it might be a clue, and had placed it in the safe while he carried on with his investigations this morning.

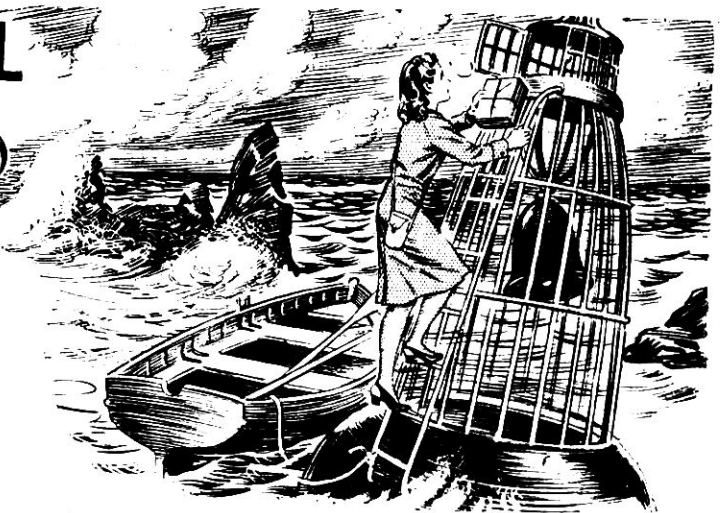
June unlocked the safe and took out the china cat.

It was a heavy, rather clumsy ornament of no apparent worth. The green cat surmounting the ash-tray was simply a hollow receptacle for cigarettes or tobacco. June examined it carefully inside and out, but could find no place where anything of value could be hidden.

But now it seemed there must be something about the china cat—some strange secret which had eluded Noel.

June's hands clenched, and a reckless gleam crept into her eyes. For her uncle's sake she would go through with the mysterious task—or pretend to. By using her feminine wits she might find some clue to Noel's whereabouts—some means of aiding him!

Searching in a cupboard, she found the original box and wrappings, and in five minutes she had made a neat, weighty parcel, sealing it with care.



By PETER LANGLEY

But, in place of the quaint ornament, the box contained a large lump of coal! The china cat June returned to her uncle's safe and locked it securely. Then, wearing a light raincoat over her summery frock, she borrowed Noel's binoculars and made her way down the cliff-path to the cave.

It was a sultry evening with heavy clouds, and the sea looked dark and restless as it surged among the rocks. Out beyond the headland was a dark speck, bobbing on the waves. The bell-buoy!

Unslung her binoculars, June trained them on the buoy. She could see it clearly now—the big, rusty cage with the bell inside which tolled a muffled warning as it rocked in the surf. She could also see, just above the cage, a smaller compartment, where she was expected to place the parcel.

But there was nothing else in sight. The local fishing-boats and pleasure-yachts had put into the sheltered harbour for the night.

June waited not a moment longer. A small rowboat was drawn up under a tarpaulin on the beach—a boat that her uncle had rented with the cottage. With an effort, the girl detective managed to launch it on her own and rowed out towards the buoy.

The sea was choppy, and in the fading light June needed all her wits about her to avoid the rocks. But at length, guided by the mournful, eerie tolling of the bell, she found herself in the shadow of the wave-swept buoy.

A rusty iron ladder, attached to its glistening side, enabled her to reach the little compartment above the bell. She placed the square parcel she had brought inside and closed the protecting grille.

Then quickly she regained her boat and set out as though to row for the shore. But, under cover of the gathering dusk, she changed her course, pulling in close to the cliff.

From her vantage point she kept watch through her binoculars. The buoy seemed scarcely a few yards away—a great, shadowy hump in the surrounding gloom. She had obeyed the mysterious instructions, but there was no sign of any boat approaching to collect the parcel.

As the minutes dragged past June kept unceasing vigil. Her heart beat quickly with excitement, mingled with anxiety for Noel.

If any vessel came near the buoy she would trail it at a distance—discerning its destination. At length, tiring of inactivity, she ventured to

row nearer, glancing up at the cage above the clanging bell.

Then she gasped. For the cage door was swinging open, though she had been careful to secure it.

With sudden foreboding, June secured the boat to the ladder and scrambled up the slippery rungs, to peer anxiously into the little compartment.

An incredulous cry escaped her lips. The parcel had gone! Yet there was no boat in sight—no means by which anyone could have reached the buoy.



ON BOARD THE ENEMY'S YACHT

June crouched on the iron ladder, staring down at the dark, lapping waves.

In spite of her precautions, her daring had outwitted her, though by what means she did not even venture to guess.

Somehow the parcel had been spirited away from the buoy without her seeing it, and her bitter chagrin was mingled with dismay.

For the situation was even worse now than it had been before. When the Hawk discovered the trick that had been played on him, what would happen to Noel?

June's blood ran cold at the thought. She had taken a risk for her uncle's sake—and had failed. But there must be something she could do.

She started as her keen eyes caught sight of something caught on a projecting piece of metal. It was a scrap of glistening material resembling oilskin. With trembling fingers June detached it, examining it by the light of her torch.

Something was stamped on the oilskin. She looked closer at it, but could not discern what it was without a magnifying-glass.

June's pulses quickened. This might be a vital clue.

There was nothing more that she could do here, she decided. She must return to the cottage and follow up the clue without delay. Every minute now was precious.

The tide was against her as she battled her way to the shore. But at length, pale and breathless, she reached the cottage and switched on the lights.

She found her uncle's magnifying-glass and discovered that the stamp on the scrap of oilskin was a fish—a fish with a long tusk.

"A swordfish!" breathed June, and for some reason the name struck a chord in her memory.

Darting to her uncle's desk, she picked up the local paper, feverishly turning the pages. At length she found the tiny paragraph she was seeking.

"A DISTINGUISHED VISITOR.—Senior Garcia, the yachtsman, is paying a brief visit to Midgarth. His luxurious steam-yacht, the Swordfish, is in harbour for refuelling and minor repairs—"

June whistled softly. She was in the act of snipping out the paragraph when there came a knocking on the cottage door.

Instinctively she jerked open a drawer of Noel's desk, taking out his spare revolver. It was unloaded, but the feel of it gave her courage.

Slipping the weapon into her raincoat pocket, she crossed to the door and unlatched it. Then a quick sigh of relief escaped her lips.

For grinning at her cheerfully from the porch was the local grocer's boy, Tim Barney.

"Evenin', Miss June!" remarked Tim, touching his cap. "A message for you."

"A message, Tim?" repeated June, holding out her hand. "Who from?"

"Search me, miss!" rejoined the boy. "A sailor chap gave it to me on the quay—a foreigner, by the look of him. No answer," he said.

"You'd better wait, Tim, while I make certain," said June, ushering him into the parlour.

Tim waited, twisting his cap between his hands, while June hastily tore open the envelope and scanned the brief, scrawled message.

"Miss Gaynor, it pleases you to make fun of me. I will not warn you a second time. Unless the china cat is delivered as instructed by nine o'clock, your uncle will pay the penalty for your folly!"

"THE HAWK."

"Bad news, miss?" inquired Tim sympathetically, noting her sudden pallor.

June pulled herself together with an effort, her thoughts racing.

"Not—not exactly, Tim. I was half-expecting it." She opened her purse, slipping a coin into the boy's hand. "By the way," she added, trying to speak casually, "have you seen the new yacht in the harbour?"

Tim's freckled face lit up enthusiastically.

"You mean that smashing steam-yacht, miss? I'll say! I've been out to it twice, an' I'm going' again this evening—"

"You've been out to it, Tim?" June exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Why, with groceries, miss!" replied the boy, staring. "They're taking on fresh stores, as they're sailin' on to-night's tide—"

"And—you've actually been on board, Tim?" June interrupted, endeavouring to control her excitement.

"Rather, miss. And I've got one more delivery to make, so—"

He broke off as June caught him by the arm, a reckless gleam in her eyes.

"Tim, would you do something for me," she asked—"for Mr. Raymond?"

"Gosh—rather, miss," declared Tim, who was a staunch admirer of the famous detective.

To his surprise, June carefully closed the door and pulled the heavy curtains across the window before making her strange request.

For Noel's safety—perhaps his very life—might depend on the boy's reply.

A FAINT sea-mist enshrouded the twinkling lights in the harbour as a sleek, white motor-boat crept towards the quayside. The swarthy seaman at the wheel hailed a boyish figure lounging on the steps.

"Ahoj, there! You the boy from the grocer's?"

"Sright, mister!" came the cheeky response. "Lend us a hand with the box, will you?"

With an ill-natured grunt, the man leaned out to grasp one end of the heavy case of groceries. As he dragged it on board, he shot a suspicious glance at the slim, good-looking youth who sprang nimbly into the rocking boat.

"Say, you're not the same boy that came this afternoon!"

"No, mister—he's off duty. I'm working overtime, see, an' I hope your boss makes it worth my while."

"Not so much cheek, young 'un!" growled the man, encountering the other's cheeky grin. "An' you'd better mind your step while you're aboard! The boss ain't in the best of tempers!"

A strange gleam crept into the young messenger's alert grey eyes, shadowed by the peak of the ragged cap.

June—for the errand-boy was none other than the girl detective in disguise—felt her heart pounding madly as the launch sped out towards the anchored yacht.

She had found no difficulty in persuading Tim to let her take his place. The boy had been excited at the chance of helping the famous detective's young partner, and had vowed complete secrecy, though June had barely more than hinted at her desperate purpose.

She was acting on a wild, almost incredible theory, with practically no proof beyond a scrap of oilskin.

But Noel was in danger, and time was a vital factor.

It was almost nine o'clock by June's watch as the motor-launch grew close to the yacht's side.

There was a clatter of ropes and tackle as the big case of provisions was hauled on deck. Her heart in her mouth, June scrambled up the ladder, followed closely by her companion.

A lantern was flashed in her face when she reached the deck, and the girl detective caught in her breath sharply as a suave, unmistakable voice came from the gloom:

"Who's this, Lugo?"

A tall, immaculate figure had stepped from the cabin, peering into her face. Her hands clenched, she stared boldly into the handsome, sardonic face of Senior Garcia, the man whom she felt convinced was the Hawk.

Would her simple make-up stand that piercing scrutiny?

She stood tense as Lugo's reply came:

"Boy from the grocer's, senior. Shall I take him along to Chang?"

"What is your name, boy?" Senior Garcia asked, stepping closer.

"B-Bill, sir!" gulped June, hastily touching her ragged cap and glancing down nervously at her reefer jacket and slacks.

"You'll report to the steward," said the other curtly, "and get your business over quickly! Lugo, show the boy the way, and see that he gets up to no mischief. I shall want to see you in a minute. I've another job for you and Krantz."

"Av, av, sir!"

June gave a little gulp of relief as she followed her guide down the companion-stairs in the wake of two swarthy sailors carrying the case of groceries.

She was on board the Swordfish, but where was Uncle Noel? What had happened to him? There was not much time—she must act quickly, she told herself.

So far her daring plan had gone without a hitch. But every moment was fraught with peril. In the steward's galley she was confronted by a slant-eyed Chinaman. He checked over the provisions, then took the receipt from June and turned away to sign it.

The girl detective seized her chance to peep into another case that stood in a corner, its lid partly raised, and, with an effort, she bit back a cry.

For the case was half-filled with sawdust and fragments of china—broken china cats!

Just then Chang turned suspiciously, to encounter June's blank, innocent stare.

"What are you doing, boy?" he demanded.

"Just—just looking round," replied June coolly, though her heart was thumping. "Must be grand to live on board a yacht like this, Chang. Wouldn't like to take on another passenger, I suppose?"

The Chinaman darted a swift, furtive glance towards a hatchway just outside the galley.

"You go back on deck—quick—before boss catches you!" he hissed, pushing June towards the stairs.

"So-long, Chang!" called June cheekily, slamming the galley door behind her.

She clattered her feet on the companion-stairs, but, instead of mounting them, she turned, pulling open the narrow hatchway at which Chang had stared, to discover an iron ladder leading into the yacht's hold.

Recklessly June stepped inside, closed the hatch softly, and, torch in hand, descended the ladder.

She found herself in a gloomy, iron-walled compartment littered with ropes, sails, and nautical stores of every description. At the far end was an iron-studded door.

Her heart pounding, she crossed to it and silently turned the handle. She pushed open the heavy door, and then a choking cry escaped her lips.

Huddled on a pile of sailcloth, securely gagged and bound, lay the disrevelled figure of Noel Raymond!

(Please turn to the back page.)



DOLORES

THE Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

DODGING DOLORES

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.

The chums discovered that a secret connected with the ketch was linked with a mysterious brass plate in the possession of Admiral Hardacre, who owned nearby Dartfleet Island.

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl staying at the camp, was also after the brass plate.

The campers, however, were in the admiral's bad books. Pat thought of a plan to appease him, and thus get his permission to examine the brass plate. Her plan entailed taking a coach trip.

To their dismay, they discovered that Dolores, determined to discover what they were up to, meant to accompany them.

NEITHER Pat nor Chris replied to Dolores' mocking taunt. They were too dismayed and apprehensive. They had been so confident that they had prevented the mischief-maker from accompanying them on the motor-coach trip, but now—

"We might have known she wouldn't be put off so easily," said Chris, as she and her chum climbed into the coach, leaving Dolores standing there, smiling triumphantly. "But what are we going to do now?" she asked.

Pat shook her head, and, with a heavy sigh, sank down on to the back seat.

"We've got to think of some way of outwitting her," she declared, and her lips set determinedly.

It was obvious why Dolores was so anxious to come on the trip. She suspected that they had a plan to appease the irascible admiral—possibly she had heard enough outside Chalet No. 10 to connect that plan with the coach trip—and so she was scheming to discover the chums' secret and make use of it herself.

"But we'll beat her somehow," Pat vowed.

Quickly the coach filled with happy holiday-makers. Dolores seated herself just in front of Pat and Chris, and the chums exchanged significant glances. They guessed that their rival was hoping to overhear their conversation during the journey. If so, she was doomed to disappointment, for they only talked about unimportant trifles. Not a single word did they let out concerning their plan to buy a replica of the admiral's smashed glass Buddha when the coach stopped at Riverstown on the return journey.

After an interesting ride through the moors, the picturesque old town of Fordstone was reached.

"Now for the Roman ruins," sang out Pat, jumping to her feet.

Hardly had she and Chris alighted than they found Dolores at their side.

"Interesting place this, isn't it?" she said chattily. "Going to look round?"

"I gather that's the idea," said Pat dryly.

"I suppose it is—one of the objects of the trip, anyway," agreed Dolores, and flashed them a half-mocking, half-anxious look. "I'll join you," she added.

"My what an honour!" said Chris. And join them Dolores did. Indeed, she never let them out of her sight during the exploration of the ruins, and when, afterwards, they all adjourned to a nearby cafe for lunch, she insisted on sitting at their table.

At last a move was made back to the coach. Again Pat and Chris made for the back seat, and again Dolores positioned herself just in front of them.

"She's taking no chances," Pat thought. More and more anxious she found herself becoming. If Dolores was going to keep this up—and she had no doubt she would—it was going to be pretty hopeless to dodge her when they got to Riverstown. But suddenly she had an idea.

She knew Dolores was listening to every word. "Jolly old place," she said. "The ruins were interesting and picturesque, but I'll enjoy our stay in Riverstown even more. They say the fair there is pretty marvellous this year. And—did you hear, Chris?—they've got one of these whizzing flying wheels. Do you mean to have a go on it?"

With her eyes she signalled to her chum as she said that, and Chris, immediately understanding, played up at once.

"Rather!" she said enthusiastically. "And I'm dying to sample the bump-ems again. But we'll have to buck up if we're going to cram it all in—"

They saw the swift, satisfied flicker that crossed Dolores' lovely face. They saw with glee that the bait had been swallowed, and excitedly they continued to talk about the fun fair.

Half an hour later Riverstown was reached. The coach pulled up in the central square and the guide in charge of the trip rose to his feet.

"Well, here we are," he said. "We've got just half an hour. Riverstown's got two big attractions—the summer fair and the new menagerie, so to save time we're splitting up into two parties. Those for the fair follow me. The others line up with the driver—"

Pat looked at Chris as they half rose. But instantly Dolores had leapt to her feet. Sweeping up her handbag, she tripped out after the guide, a whole crowd enthusiastically following her. Outside they were lined up while the driver motioned the

others to follow him. And cheerfully Pat and Chris joined his party just as Dolores' crowd was given the word to march.

"But—" Dolores cried, and then her eyes gleamed as she saw Pat and Chris in the second party. "Pat—" she cried.

"Enjoy yourself!" Pat called merrily.

Dolores glared, but Willis Green had her arm in a chummy grasp, and before she could wrench herself free the "menagerie" party had swung round the corner. The moment they were out of sight Pat gave her chum a nudge.

"Quick—back to the coach!" she hissed.

Leaving the others, they dived into a near-by alleyway and cautiously made their way back to the now deserted coach. They were just in time to see Dolores break away from Willis and go rushing across the square and down the street—dashing after the party of which she believed the chums to be still members.

"That's fooled her," said Pat, with a chuckle. "But it won't be long before she realises how we've given her the slip. Come on, let's find that curio shop."

They hurried down a maze of side streets, and their hearts leapt as, emerging into the main shopping street, they saw the old-fashioned window of Robinson's, the shop where Pat had previously seen the glass Buddha.

Was it still for sale? They crossed the street, peered into the dusty window, and then Pat gave a gasp of relief.

"Hurrah! Our luck's in!" she cried, for there, occupying a central position in the window, was the Buddha.

To the chums it seemed to be a far better specimen than the one that had been smashed on Dartfleet Island.

"The admiral's bound to be pleased with that!" Chris cried. "It's a pip! But wait a minute, it's got no price ticket on it! Oh gee, what about the price, Pat? We hadn't thought of that. I've got—hum!—just ten boblets."

"And I," Pat said, "have two pounds thirteen."

They stood for a moment questioningly staring at the image. And in that moment the proprietor came to the door.

"Do anything for you, young ladies?" he asked.

"Yes, rather. That Buddha!" Pat said. "We were rather anxious to buy it—if it's not too dear. Can you—can you tell us how much it is?"

"Five pounds ten," was the reply. "And it's a bargain at the price—"

Pat's heart dropped like a plummet. Dismally she and Chris stared at each other. Five pounds ten—when all they could rustle up between them was three. Were they to be beaten, after all?

"Oh, Pat"—Chris' voice was choked as she stared at her chum—"what are we going to do now?"

Pat was thinking furiously. There must be some way—some way—

Her thoughts were interrupted by a startled cry from Chris.

"Oh, Pat!" she groaned. "Look! There's Dolores!"



MORE SHOCKS FOR THE CHUMS

Dolores it was—she had just appeared at the opposite end of the long street. Out of the corner of her eye Pat saw her, and in the same moment she had an idea as to how the Buddha could be obtained, after all. Feverishly she nodded to her chum.

"We must trick her again! Look in the next shop," she whispered.

Swiftly she stepped aside. The next shop was the Riverstown Store, and the window into which they found themselves now gazing was filled with children's toys. Immediately they pretended to become absorbed in those articles, though neither of them had had the remotest idea of buying a toy until that moment. Then they heard the pattering of Dolores' feet behind them.

"Yes, it's certainly a lovely jack-in-the-box," Pat said with mock enthusiasm. "My little Cousin Mary would love it. We—" And then she turned, with a pretended start, as Dolores' slightly acid voice cut in behind her. "Oh, it's you!" she exclaimed in surprise. "I thought you'd gone to the fair!"

"I thought," Dolores countered, "you had gone to the zoo. What's the big idea?"

Pat laughed. "We decided," she said, "to do a little shopping instead—"

"And you've done it?" Dolores asked quickly.

"What do you think? At least—" Pat eyed the jack-in-the-box again. "I think we'll have to have that—for my little cousin, you know. She just adores jack-in-the-boxes. So do I. You see, they remind me of you, Dolores."

Dolores glared.

"Funny, aren't we?" she sneered. Pat made no attempt to reply. Leaving Dolores still glaring, she took her chum's arm, and they both entered the shop. But they did not buy the toy. Instead, they turned into the next department, hurried through it, and left by an exit at the back.

"Diddled her again," chuckled Pat. "Now for the post office. Just as Dolores appeared on the scene I remembered I'd got my bankbook with me, so I can easily raise the cash we need."

Chris looked a little doubtful.

"I don't like the idea of you spending all that money on the Buddha," she said. "After all, it's me the secret on Dartfleet Island concerns, not you, so there's no reason why you should spend—"

"Fiddlesticks!" Pat cut in. "Don't be a goose, Chris! We're in this together. Stop arguing and come and help me to find the post office."

They did that without any great difficulty, for there was a post office in that very street. Breathlessly Pat slipped into it. Producing her bankbook and her identity card, she asked for an on-demand withdrawal form, and in a few minutes found herself with the three crisp, crackling notes in her hand. Outside she smiled jubilantly at her chum.

"O.K., that's fixed!" she said. "Now to get that Buddha."

"And then—heigh-ho for the mystery plate!" Chris breathed.

They almost raced back to Robinson's, keeping a sharp look out for Dolores en route. Dolores, to their vast relief, had completely vanished.

Feverishly they entered the shop, but when they explained their mission to the proprietor he shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You've arrived just too late. I sold the Buddha—about two minutes ago—to another girl—"

Pat stared at him, while Chris let out a dismayed cry.

"Another girl? What girl?" Pat stammered.

"Why, the girl who spoke to you outside the store!" the man said in

some surprise. "Wasn't she a friend of yours?"

"A friend!" Pat felt the floor sinking beneath her. "Go—go on!" she groaned.

"Appears she saw you talking to me, so she asked me what you had bought, and when I told her you had inquired about the Buddha she said that she would buy it for you. And so—"

"You let her have it?" Chris gulped.

"Yes, she took it away with her."

Pat with difficulty suppressed a groan.

"But never mind," she said to the dismayed Chris. "She can't have got far with it, and we'll find some way of making her hand it over. Come on, let's get back to the coach. We'll tackle her there."

And, nodding to the rather bewildered shopkeeper, they darted off. Rapidly they walked back to Central Square, where the coach stood surrounded by the revellers, just returned from fair and menagerie. A little cheer greeted Pat and Chris as they came up. Swiftly they looked around, but there was no sign of Dolores.

"Willis," Pat said, "where's Dolores? Has she come back yet?"

Willis looked at her. Then he chuckled.

"Come back—and gone," he said. "Gee, how that girl can move! Dolores said she had some sort of brain-wave—must hurry back to the camp. Said she'd tell us about it later. And she hired herself a private car and left."



BACK AT THE CAMP

Grim was the look which Pat exchanged with Chris. Momentarily fierce was the expression on Chris' face, but neither of them

passed any comment until they were seated in the coach. Then—

"Oh, the trickster!" Pat exclaimed. "But she shan't beat us. Just let her wait till we get back to the camp!"

To the chums that drive home seemed never-ending, but at last the holiday camp was reached. Descending, they made instant tracks for Dolores' chalet.

But Dolores was not there. Neither was she in the canteen. But one of the attendants had news of her.

"Miss Bellamy—yes," he said when Pat questioned him. "Never seen a girl more excited—or more pretty and happy, if I may say so. Miss Dolores came along about an hour ago, carrying one of them there what-you-call-'ems. You know, one o' those Eastern images. She fairly set the whole camp by the ears. Last I saw of 'em they were all rushing off like a glee party towards the boathouse."

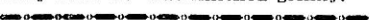
"Thanks," Pat said, and nodded significantly to her chum. "Come on, Chris," she urged.

They turned, and as they raced away Chris looked at Pat.

"What do you make of it?" she asked.

Pat shook her head.

"I can only guess," she said. "But it's pretty clear we've under-rated her cleverness again. Looks to me as if her game is to impress Bruce in some way—probably by saying she had our idea all the time. No doubt she's pulled a pretty fast one on us this time—and no doubt she's laughing her head off. But she's not getting away with it." Pat finished grimly.



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All your old paper,
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"I'll say not," Chris breathed.

They hurried on. Presently they came in sight of the boathouse, where a crowd was collected, Bruce Feltham, the sports master, among them. Again, however, there was no sign of Dolores. But there was a cry at the sight of Pat.

"Pat, come here!"

"You'll never guess—"

"Dolores—"

"Well," Pat gasped, "what about Dolores?"

"Oh, dash it," Lucy Day pouted, "don't talk like that! Wait till you hear what Dolores has done, and then cheer. Dolores had the most wizard idea—Pat, you'd never have thought of it in a million years! D'you know what she did in Riverstown?"

"Go on!"

"She spotted a Buddha—just like the one that got smashed on the island. Dolores bought it, and she means to give it to the admiral in place of the old one that was broken. Isn't it a grand idea? Of course, the admiral's bound to be pleased, and so—"

"So?" Pat asked, clenching her hands.

"So Dolores has gone off in her cruiser. She's taken the Buddha to the island."

"She would!" Pat said bitterly.

"Eh?"

"Just typical of her," Chris scornfully put in. "Having stolen the idea from Pat—"

There came a startled gasp from all around.

"Stolen the idea from Pat? I say, that's a bit stiff!"

"I'll say it is!"

Chris was fuming now, and regardless of Pat's warning hand upon her arm, stepped forward, eyes blazing.

"I tell you that was Pat's idea in the first place—that's why we went to Riverstown!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Don't fib, Chris!"

"But—it was, I tell you!" insisted Chris. "Dolores cheated—"

"You've no right to say such things, Chris!"

"Especially," cut in Bruce Feltham coldly, "as Dolores had your interests at heart as much as anything else, Chris. Dolores has gone over to the island with two objects in view. One, to square it with the admiral; the other, to help you to find out the secret you're so interested in."

Pat and Chris jumped.

"What!" they gasped.

"The secret that concerns Chris' Uncle Charles," the young sports master went on. "Dolores said that if she could only smooth over the admiral she'd also ask him to lend you that Captain Kirabee plate. If possible, she means to bring it back for you."

Pat and Chris stood as if petrified, their cheeks burning with anger. It was bad enough to have been beaten, but to hear Bruce and the holiday-makers singing Dolores' praises was the last straw.

Undoubtedly her main object in rushing off to the island was to secure the all-important brass plate, but the last thing she would do would be to hand it over to them.

"Of all the hypocrites!" Pat told herself. "To actually dare suggest to everyone she only wants the plate for Chris' sake!"

As the chums stood there, furious and dismayed, a wave of excitement swept through the crowd, and suddenly one of the boys gave a shout:

"Here is Dolores now! Oh golly, I wonder how she got on?"

Everyone turned, and Pat and Chris stiffened as they saw a gleaming cabin-cruiser come ploughing across the sea. At the helm was a golden-haired, radiant figure, and as the motor-boat drew nearer the jetty she waved a triumphant hand—a gesture that suggested Dolores' mission had been completely successful!

Has Dolores secured the vital brass plate? And what secret does it contain? There will be more surprises and thrills in next Friday's grand instalment.



THE SHIP HAD LEFT

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

She and Dave Cardew, one of a party of castaways, found a treasure chest belonging to Tania.

It was stolen from them by another joy—Gerry Royston—who was assisted by Stanhope, the ship's mate. They bound Tania and Dave and left them.

The castaways' ship had been repaired and was ready to sail. Gerry and Stanhope cunningly made it appear that Tania and Dave had been accidentally drowned, thus hoping that the ship would leave without them.

TANIA had lost all count of time as she struggled desperately to free herself from the cords that bound her. Twilight had given place to darkness, and still no help came. Dave, her one loyal friend, lay bound and unconscious only a few yards away.

Slowly, but surely, her efforts were succeeding. By turning her head from side to side, she contrived to loosen the scarf tied round her mouth. In another moment her lips were free.

Drawing a deep, gulping breath, she called for help. But she had little hope of her cry being heard, for there were no human beings within miles of the desolate clearing.

Yet her broken cry was heard—and by ears sharper than any human's. On guard by the distant cave, Michi, the panther, sprang from the rocks, his fur bristling, his eyes glowing in the dark.

For he had recognised his young mistress' voice.

Like a silent shadow, he creaked down the steep path.

Tania's efforts were slowly weakening, and the cords were cutting deeply into her wrists with her frantic struggles, when she heard a rustle among the bushes—the soft, unmistakable padding of paws.

"Michi!" she gasped. In one swift bound the panther had reached her side, sniffing and growling in obvious perplexity because his young mistress lay so still.

"Michi, if only you could help!" whispered the jungle girl. "If only Tania could make you understand!"

Her heart missed a beat as she felt the panther's sharp teeth close gently on her wrist, while an ominous growl escaped his throat. Michi had discovered the cords and scented his hated enemy!

"Michi—careful!" gasped Tania.

The intelligent animal seemed dimly to comprehend. Seizing one of the cords, he tugged at it, growling and worrying it.

And then came a sudden, sharp snapping sound. With a gasp of relief, she discovered that she was free!

Flinging her arms round the excited panther, Tania hugged him

closely before setting to work to untie her ankles.

A few moments later she rose unsteadily to her feet, her limbs painfully cramped, and stumbled across to Dave. Snatching the bone-handled knife he wore at his belt, she slashed the cords that bound him.

"Dave," she whispered anxiously, "are—are you all right?"

The boy groaned, moving his head faintly. With a little gulp of relief, Tania darted to fetch water from the stream, carrying it in a hollow stone, and bathing Dave's face.

The icy water quickly had its effect. The boy opened his eyes, staring round dazedly. He struggled to sit up.

"Tania," he muttered, "what—what's happened? These scoundrels, Gerry and the mate—"

"They've gone, Dave!" said Tania unsteadily. "They have left us here—and taken the treasure-box. That was long ago—before it was dark."

With an effort Dave struggled to his feet, gripping her arm.

"Tania—the ship! It was to have sailed by to-night's tide. Gerry means to leave us stranded on the island while he gets away with your treasure."

"But—would the great ship leave without Dave?" Tania faltered.

The boy shook his head, his eyes worried.

"I can't imagine Mr. Barnard leaving the island without us, but there's no telling what yarn that trickster, Gerry, has spun to cover his tracks. We've got to get back to the camp, Tania, and there's not a minute to lose! Can you find the way?" he added anxiously.

The jungle girl nodded. "All the forest paths are known to Tania," she replied simply. "Come! I will guide you."

The strange little procession set out, Tania picking her way unerringly along the shadowy paths, while Michi padded ahead of her and Dave brought up the rear.

At last there came a welcome break in the dense trees, and Tania halted, beckoning eagerly.

"Dave—the sea!"

Dave hurried to join her, and his face lit up as he saw the white surf breaking on the beach and the log-built schoolhouse standing out darkly against the waving palms.

"No one about," he panted. "They're probably all waiting by the boats. Hallo! Mr. Barnard!" he shouted, cupping his hands to his mouth.

But his shout was answered only by the mocking screech of a gull and an excited chattering in the branches overhead.

Tania gave a little cry as an agile, furry bundle launched itself from the foliage, to land on her shoulder.

"Bimbo!" she gasped delightedly. "Dave, here's Bimbo! I thought perhaps, that I had lost him, but he is safe."

Dave grinned at the excited monkey, but his smile faded quickly. "Strange that no one's answered,"

Their School ON CASTAWAY ISLE

he said. "Let's hurry, Tania, or they'll be giving us up for lost!"

He led the way at a run across the camp clearing, seeming strangely desolate without its fluttering tents, to halt abruptly as he came in sight of the distant reef.

Tania heard his startled intake of breath and saw the expression of bewildered horror that crossed his face.

"Tania—look!" he shouted huskily. "The ship!"

He gripped her arm, pointing towards the reef. Tania stared, and a broken, pitiful cry escaped her lips.

For the ship that had brought the castaways to the island was steaming slowly away, its light winking in the darkness as it swung out to sea, leaving her and Dave alone on the deserted shore.



THEIR ONLY HOPE WAS THE REEF

Dave's hands were clenched and his face was as white as death as he stared after the departing ship.

"Tania, something's wrong!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Barnard would never have left us like this. That scoundrel, Gerry, has played some rotten trick— Hi!" he shouted, raising his voice desperately against the buffeting wind. "Hallo, there!"

But he knew—and Tania knew—that his voice could never have carried that distance, even on a still night. His shout came back mockingly from the cliffs, startling the gulls, to be drowned by the muffled thunder of the surf.

The jungle girl's heart weiled pitifully. She knew that her own bitter grief and disappointment were as nothing compared with the shock that had staggered Dave.

She had known the loneliness of the island before the castaways had come, bringing their happy comradeship into her life. But Dave was a stranger to the island—a boy from a far-off country, whose own friends seemed to have deserted him.

The stunned, bewildered look on his face aroused all her feminine sympathy, momentarily banishing her own dismay.

"Dave, they will come back!" she cried. "They—they must come back!" But Dave shook his head, his grey eyes despairing.

"They won't come back, Tania!" he declared huskily. "The ship's getting up steam, and will be out of sight within half an hour. Mr. Barnard must imagine that something has happened to us—that it's useless to wait. Gerry has told him some lie!"

The jungle girl's lips trembled as she stared at him.

"Tania is sorry," she whispered. "It is all her fault. If Dave had not come to help Tania the ship would not have gone without him."

Dave turned suddenly, gripping her by the shoulders.

"You mustn't say that, Tania," he said quietly. "We're together in this business, and you're not to blame for anything. You've put up a plucky fight against a pair of precious scoundrels who were out to rob you, and I did no more than any other chap would have done under the circumstances. If only—if only we could

attract someone's attention on board while the ship's still in sight—"

Tania caught in her breath suddenly.

"Dave make fire!" she cried breathlessly. "Big fire! When the night is dark, fire shows a long way."

"Gosh," exclaimed Dave, "that's an idea! A fire's the very thing, but it'll have to be a big blaze, and in a prominent place, to attract attention. Got it!" he declared, his eyes lighting up. "The reef!"

The jungle girl stared at him in bewilderment.

"But—but there are no bushes out there, and rocks do not burn—"

"But driftwood does," declared Dave. "And so does tar. The last time I was on board I noticed a couple of barrels of tar and a pile of wood that had been dumped overboard on to the rocks. If we could set fire to that lot—"

His voice trailed away.

"I'm a prize trailhead!" he groaned. "We can't get out to the reef without a boat, and they haven't left us even a raft—"

"But Tania has a canoe!" cried the jungle girl. "She left it in the bushes up the stream."

Dave whistled eagerly.

"Good for you, Tania! There may still be time if we're quick. While we can see the lights of the ship, they're bound to see our fire. If only your canoe will stand up to the sea. But we'll have to chance it."

Followed by Michi and Bimbo, they raced back towards the jungle, knowing full well that every minute was precious. Panting, breathless, they at last reached the canoe.

The frail craft, built to take only two passengers, was heavily over-weighted by the extra burden of the two pets, for Tania would not dream of leaving them behind.

Dave took the paddle, bringing the canoe safely down-stream to the estuary. Eagerly they stared out to sea, and the boy gave a sigh of relief.

The lights of the ship were still plainly visible, for it had turned and was steaming slowly along the coast, almost as though its occupants were taking a last look at the island before bidding it farewell for good.

But Dave's relief was short-lived, for now the canoe was rocking perilously among the waves, threatening every moment to capsize.

Desperately he plied the paddle, while Tania knelt in the bows with a coil of rope, looking anxiously towards the reef.

They could hear the muffled thunder of the breakers dashing against the rocks. In spite of Dave's skill, the canoe gave a sickening lurch, shipping a quantity of water.

There came a frightened growl from Michi, and Bimbo squealed, climbing on to Tania's shoulder.

"It's no use, Tania!" muttered Dave. "We'll never make the reef with this weight. There's only one thing for it."

He handed her the paddle and commenced to peel off his jacket.

"Dave," gasped Tania, her eyes widening in dismay, "what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to swim for it," declared Dave, as he fastened one, end of the rope round his waist.

"The canoe will ride more easily without me. If I get to the reef first, I'll tow you in. Now paddle for all you're worth—and don't worry!"

With a reassuring grin, he examined the matches in his waterproof pouch, kicked off his shoes, and stood up in the rocking craft.

Tania saw him dive, disappearing under a billowing wave. Instinctively she steadied the canoe while she watched, her heart beating rapidly. Then, with a little gasp of relief, she saw Dave reappear, waving to her reassuringly as he struck out boldly towards the reef.

Tania commenced to paddle after him, catching momentary glimpses of his dark head above the waves.

The canoe was taking water now, and in danger of sinking. Bimbo still clung to Tania's shoulder, while

Michi, his fur drenched, crouched on the seat that Dave had vacated.

Another great wave was coming towards them, and, with a despairing sob, Tania flung her arms round Michi.

Just then there came a ringing, breathless shout from the reef:

"Hold on, Tania!"

The rope tautened. Tania grabbed the sides of the canoe as it leaped forward, cutting through the waves. Tania saw the jagged rocks loom ahead, a boyish figure crouching in the surf. Then Dave's hands seized her, lifting her out of the canoe, Bimbo still clinging to her.

Michi sprang from the sinking canoe—only in the nick of time. With a splintering crash, the frail craft hit the rocks.

Gasping, Tania stood by Dave. He pointed triumphantly to a great pile of driftwood and barrels, lying high and dry on the reef.

"There's just a chance, Tania!" he declared huskily. "The ship's still in sight. If they see the blaze and turn back, we're saved. If not—"

He did not complete his sentence. Followed by the jungle girl, he scrambled over the slippery rocks, dragging the precious matches from his pouch.



TANIA WINS THROUGH

A hushed group stood by the rail of the steamer as Castaway Isle receded slowly into the distance.

Only too well Gerry's scoundrelly plot had worked. The empty boat, set adrift by the mate, had convinced Mr. Barnard that Dave and Tania had come to grief on the rocks while attempting to leave the island.

After a long, heartbreaking search, the party had returned to the ship, and Mr. Barnard had reluctantly agreed to Captain Rawlins' urgent advice that they should sail that night.

There came a stifled sob from Pat Saunders, and Tim Burchell gulped as he gripped the rail.

"I can't believe it even now, sir!" he muttered, glancing up at Mr. Barnard. "To think that old Dave was with us only this morning—"

The master turned wearily, his pale, tense face revealing his emotion.

"I'd have kept up the search all night, Tim, if there'd been the slightest hope," he said quietly. "But Captain Rawlins assured me that no one could possibly have survived among those rocks. You young people were magnificent—all of you!"

He glanced at the silent group of young castaways, and at Captain Rawlins, who was standing sombrely some distance away, watching the island through his binoculars.

At that moment there came a stir in the group as Gerry himself approached, an expression of grief masking the gloating satisfaction in his eyes.

"What a blow this is, sir!" he said. "I—I can't help blaming Tania for what has happened, though we'll never know the truth now why she plotted against us. If only I could have done something to prevent the tragedy—"

"You did what you could, Gerry," declared Mr. Barnard. "You need never reproach yourself—"

His words trailed away as there came a sudden amazed shout from Captain Rawlins.

"Mr. Barnard! Look out there, sir!" he called. "It's that's not a fire on the reef, then I'm a landlubber!"

There was a sudden rush to the rail. All eyes were turned to the red glow on the distant reef.

"Someone must have lit it!" gasped Tim. "It couldn't possibly have started by itself."

There was a sudden incredulous hush as into every mind sprang the same fantastic thought.

Mr. Barnard was the first to recover.

"Captain Rawlins," he shouted, "have the ship turned back, and give

orders for full steam! We're returning to the island!"

In the clamour and sensation that followed his words no one saw Gerry hurrying quickly towards the cabins, his handsome face as pale as death.

HALF an hour later the steamer hove to within hailing distance of the reef, and two human figures were unmistakably seen, waving frantically in the red glow of the flaming beacon.

"Dave! Good old Dave!"

"Tania!"

Amid wild, incredulous shouts of relief, a boat put out for the reef, Mr. Barnard himself accompanying the crew. It returned, at length, bringing with it two dripping and dishevelled figures.

As they were assisted on board, the boat returned to the reef for Tania's pets.

In a moment Dave was surrounded by the cheering castaways, while Tania stood on the outskirts of the group, a rather forlorn figure.

But Dave fought his way through the crowd, taking her by the arm.

"Mr. Barnard," he said huskily, waving aside the excited questions, "there is one person that Tania and I are anxious to meet. Where is Gerry?"

The master looked perplexed and rather startled by the boy's tone.

"Why, Dave, I believe he went to his cabin for something! He'll be overjoyed to see you—"

"I bet he will!" rapped Dave, his hands clenched. "Come on, Tania!"

He strode towards the cabins, the others following in uneasy bewilderment, realising that something was wrong. Gerry's cabin was locked, but Dave burst it open with a fierce blow from his foot.

The door swung in with a crash, and a shout of amazement went up from Mr. Barnard and the castaways at the scene that met their gaze.

Kneeling on the floor beside an open chest—the lid of which had evidently been wrenched from its hinges—were Gerry and Stanhope, the ship's mate.

As the party burst into the cabin Gerry hastily crammed a handful of glittering objects into his pocket, while Stanhope made a dive for the door.

The mate was sent reeling by a blow from Dave's fist, and the next moment the boy had closed with Gerry, shaking the handsome young scoundrel as a terrier shakes a rat, while Gerry put up a futile struggle.

"Dave!" shouted Mr. Barnard. "Dave, what does this mean?"

"It means, sir," panted Dave, releasing his cringing opponent, "that this precious pair were trying to make a last-minute getaway—in one of the small boats, I bet! It means that Gerry has tricked you all from the first! I've proof here—"

He dragged the bundle of tattered papers out of his pocket—the papers that Tania had obtained from the mate.

"Here's proof, sir, that Gerry has been plotting against Tania to rob her of the treasure that was hers by right!"

"These letters were written by her father—an Englishman, and the captain of a pearling-ship—who died on his voyage back to England. He left his motherless young daughter in the care of an old friend, together with a fortune in pearls. From these letters and Tania's diary I've pieced together what happened. The ship was wrecked, and Tania and the old sailor were washed ashore in one of the boats with the chest of pearls."

"Later, the old sailor set out in the boat to fetch help. He was picked up by a passing ship, seriously ill, his mind wandering. Gerry's father was the steward on that ship, and he managed to get the whole story. But several years passed before he was able to discover the exact location of the island. Then he sent the details on to Gerry, who was sailing with our party to join his father in Africa."

(Please turn to the back page.)



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

BAFFLING BEHAVIOUR

"If only we could get permission to go to the dance 'to-night!' sighed Sally Warner. "Our hula-hula act ought to go down jolly well!" "Smashing!" agreed Don Weston. "But supposing the professor won't give us permission?" asked Fay Manners anxiously. "He's been clapping down on dances and such-like lately."

"Certainly has," said Johnny Briggs. "Who's going to ask him?" "The four chums, sitting on deck in the blazing sunshine on board the Ocean Star, the college ship en route for Australia, looked a little apprehensively at each other.

Professor Willard, as Fay said, was certainly becoming a stickler for work lately, and was expecting the students to do quite a lot of swotting in the evenings.

Sally & Co. didn't mind working, but they particularly wanted to attend the dance for passengers which was being held on the promenade deck that night.

A dance of all nations it was called. The prizes, which had been on show all day, were lovely, and had inspired the chums with the will to win one for themselves with their hula-hula dance which Sally and Fay had learnt on their recent visit to a South Sea island.

In their pretty sarongs and grass skirts which had been given them by the islanders, with Don and Johnny to accompany them on the ukulele and guitar, they felt they stood a very good chance. In fact, the only thing that stood in their way was Professor Willard's permission.

"We could say it's for the honour of the International College and so on," said Fay slowly.

"He'd say the honour of the college would be far more satisfied if we did well at work," grinned Sally. "Pity he's so down on dancing lately—"

She broke off, her mouth falling open, her blue eyes taking on a slightly glazed expression as she stared towards the end of the deck, which up to now had been completely deserted.

Not so now. And as Don, Fay, and Johnny, somewhat mystified, followed Sally's stare, their expression became as dazed as her own.

For on to the deck had appeared a short, be-spectacled figure wearing a mortar-board and flowing gown. He walked a little jerkily, stopped suddenly, and then suddenly and most amazingly broke into what seemed to be a peculiar sort of dance.

"It's not true," muttered Johnny dazedly. "I'm dreaming—I'm having nightmares or something!"

"I think it's Professor Willard who's having nightmares," replied Fay, with a grin. "Think he's got a touch of the sun or something, Sally?"

"Whatever he's got, he shakes a

pretty nimble leg," chuckled Don. "Look at that now," he chortled as the prancing figure suddenly twirled round several times in quick succession. "Makes me giddy to watch him. But what—"

"Don, I've got it!" Sally's voice was quivering with excitement and mirth as she gazed at the capering figure. "He must be practising a new sort of dance for to-night!"

"Eh? Why, the old fraud!" broke out Johnny indignantly. "Pretending to be down on dancing when he's going himself!"

"He evidently didn't bargain on us seeing him!" Sally chuckled. "But, Merry-makers, this is our chance! He can hardly refuse to let us go if he's going himself, can he? Say, just look at him!"

The figure had stopped, given a jerky bow, then had moved off down the deck.

"Oh gosh, what a performance!" gurgled Don. "But what about tacking him, Sally?"

It took some time for the chums to compose their features sufficiently to go along to Professor Willard's study, for remembrance of that amazing scene kept returning, bringing stifled little giggles from one or other of them—giggles in which all four of the chums quickly joined.

But eventually, after sundry warnings and threats from Sally, they reached the cabin door, knocked, and, at the professor's invitation, entered.

Somewhat to their surprise the professor was seated quite calmly at his desk, pen in hand, marking some papers.

"Well, Sally," he asked, "what can I do for you?"

"Er—well, as a matter of fact, Professor Willard," said Sally, with her most winning smile, "it's about the dance to-night—"

"We'd like permission to attend it, sir," backed up Don.

Professor Willard put down his pen, adjusted his spectacles, and gazed sternly at the four eager faces before him.

"I thought I'd made it clear," he said a little coldly, "that I disapprove of dancing, that I wished you to concentrate on your studies."

"We are swotting, professor," Sally said earnestly, "but it would be fun to go to the dance."

The professor pursed his lips doubtfully, and Don, quick to notice his hesitation, quickly stepped forward.

"We won't stand much chance against you at the dance, sir," he said, "but we'd like to try for one of the prizes."

Professor Willard's eyes seemed to grow enormous behind his spectacles. "I—at the dance?" he spluttered.

"Oh, rather," chortled Johnny. "We saw you practising, sir!"

"Saw me practising, Briggs?"

"It's that twidly bit that got me," put in Don, determined to lay on the flattery hard and thick. He gave a

little hop and skip, then shook his head regretfully. "Fraid I can't get it like you, sir."

Professor Willard rose slowly behind his desk.

"Are you," he asked in deadly tones, "out of your minds? Or are you deliberately trying to be impertinent?"

For a moment the chums stared at him in amazement, then Sally's face flushed a little.

"I don't think that's quite fair, sir," she said quietly. "After all, we saw you dancing on deck. I'll admit we were surprised—"

"But we guessed you were practising for the dance to-night," put in Johnny, "so we thought as you were going you wouldn't mind us going, too."

The professor sat down suddenly and hard, gripping the edge of his chair as if fighting for self-control.

"I," he said gratingly, "do not dance! As for saying that you saw me dancing on deck— He shuddered; closed his eyes. "Preposterous! Fantastic!" He opened his eyes again, glaring at the chums. "If this is your idea of a joke, then I assure you I do not share your sense of humour!"

"But—but we did see you, professor—" began Fay.

"Enough!" rapped the professor. "You will not go to the dance to-night. Instead, you will spend the time in your class-room in the charge of Edgar Phineas, doing a task which I shall set you. Now go!"

With quivering finger he pointed to the door. The chums, bewildered and shaken, went. Gazing indignantly at each other, they made their way along the passage and out on to the deck again.

"But it was the professor we saw!" exclaimed Sally. "It was— Oh golly, look!" she yelled. "There he is again!"

A figure in gown and mortar-board had suddenly appeared at the end of the deck. Once again it was spinning round and round in a peculiar, jerky sort of dance.

"Professor Willard—" began Sally, running forward.

And then she stopped, her voice trailing away as she stared at the figure before her. It wore similar clothes to Professor Willard; it bore a likeness to him. But now, seeing the face, seeing the figure at really close quarters—

Sally closed her eyes, opened them, and looked again. An amazed cry left her lips.

"Gig-golly!" she stuttered in a stupefied voice. "It's not the professor, shipmates! It—it's a dummy!"



PERCY FOOLS PHINEAS

"A—a dummy?" gasped Johnny, and prodded his finger into the chest of that figure which bore such an amazing likeness to

Professor Willard. "Corks! So it is. But—but how—why—who—"

The sound of a chuckle came from the shadows. Sally & Co. swung round, and into view stepped Samuel Leander Kaplin, otherwise known as Slick, the boy inventor from Detroit.

Sally, seeing him, gave a violent jump. Slick gave another chuckle,

his thin, usually serious face one huge grin, his eyes twinkling behind his enormous horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Guess this is one up to me!" he drawled. "Meet my latest invention—Percy New Man; he's almost human," he added, quoting one of his interminable slogans. "Percy, say 'How do you do.'"

And while the chums stared in goggling, open-mouthed wonder, Slick pressed something at the back of his robot. There was a faint whirring sound.

"How do you do?" came from the automatic figure, and, amazingly enough, it sounded like Professor Willard's voice, though with a slight husky metallic tone. "I hope you are enjoying your trip!"

"You see?" Slick beamed proudly. "It talks—and it walks!"

Again he pressed something. Again there was that faint whirring sound. The robot began to move, strutting along the deck. Down a companionway Slick guided it, and dazedly Sally & Co. followed. And a few minutes later, still in a daze, they found themselves in Slick's cabin.

He closed the door, and then surveyed them through his spectacles.

"Well, what's the verdict?" he asked. "What do you think of Percy?"

"He—he's uncanny!" Sally gasped. "He took us in completely!"

"Reckon I heard you talking about the dance and thought I'd give Percy a try out to see how he went," Slick said with satisfaction. "I've been working on this invention for ages in secret."

Sally & Co. looked on in awe. Percy's face and hands were made of a special wax preparation perfected by Slick, giving a most realistic and life-like effect.

The movements of the robot were operated and controlled by a battery connected to a bewildering array of levers and switches—which were, of course, concealed under the clothes worn by Percy. The voice came from a record. With endless patience Slick had made a series of small discs on which he had recorded Professor Willard's remarks on a variety of subjects.

Sally, listening to Slick's explanation, seemed to come out of a trance. She drew a deep breath.

"Congrats, Slick!" she said. "It's marvellous. Anyone seeing it could certainly make the same mistake as we did—Golly!"

Sally jumped. Slick looked concerned.

"Sav, you haven't touched one of these wires and given yourself a shock, have you?"

"No; but we might give someone else a shock—Phineas, for instance!" said Sally, a reckless gleam coming into her blue eyes.

Her chums knew that sign.

"What's the wheeze, Sallykins?" came a chorus.

"Well, if Phineas saw us with Percy, and he thought it was Professor Willard, and if we gave the impression that our detention had been cancelled—"

"Whoops!" broke in Don excitedly. "Phineas wouldn't turn up at the class-room and we could go to the dance!"

"Exactly!" Sally smiled at her own audacity. "Of course, it's risky—"

"We'll risk the risk. But will Slick lend us Percy?"

"Sure!" Slick was at once agreeable when he heard what had happened as a result of his jape on the chums. "Percy's all yours."

He showed them, how the robot worked. One main switch, when pressed down, started him walking. When pressed up, he stopped. Slick also indicated a button that would start a record of speech suitable for impressing Edgar Phineas.

Five minutes later the Merry-makers gleefully made their way towards Phineas' little office on D Deck. And with them went "Jerky Percy," as Johnny had named the robot.

Dusk was falling—a fact for which Sally was thankful. As long as they kept Percy in the shadows she was sure her idea would work.

A rumber of students were about, and they stared in surprise as Fay and Sally, arm-in-arm with what they supposed to be Professor Willard, passed by, Don and Johnny grinningly bringing up the rear.

"Gosh!" murmured Linda Powell. "Sally & Co. seem to have made a hit with the professor. Look at them—arm-in-arm!"

Sally and Fay gurgled, guiding Percy on past the staring students.

But Sally's smile faded as she saw that now they would have to run the gauntlet of a number of passengers, among whom was a particularly talkative, middle-aged spinster named Miss Prinsepp.

"Ah—good-evening, professor!" she gushed. "But you're limping," she added in concern, as Percy, the robot, went jerkily on his way.

"Poor professor," said Sally hastily. "His lumbago is troubling him again."

"Lumbago? I know just the cure for that—," began Miss Prinsepp, peering short-sightedly at the professor through her thick spectacles.

The little party swept on hurriedly. Percy might be marvellous, Sally was thinking, but he would have his limitations if involved in a complicated discussion about cures for lumbago.

To the chums' relief, they reached the office of Edgar T. Phineas, the head prefect, without further mishap. A peep through the window told Sally that Phineas was inside.

"Don, the light," she whispered, pointing to the electric lamp above their heads. "Let's play for safety. The darker the better."

With an understanding grin, Don reached up and disconnected the light bulb.

"Oh, Professor Willard," said Sally in a loud voice, "it's so good of you to cancel our detention. Shall I tell Phineas?"

She smothered a little giggle as she saw Phineas shoot round in his chair, on his face a look of blank amazement. He peered towards the window, saw the shadowy figures outside, and shook his head bewilderedly.

"Do you think he's fallen for it, Sally?" gurgled Don.

Before Sally could answer, Phineas rose to his feet, a form in his hand, and strode towards the door.

"Golly, he's coming!" hissed Fay in alarm.

With a quick movement Sally stepped in front of the professor and smiled at Phineas as he emerged.

"Isn't it wonderful of the professor to let us off our detention?" she cooed.

Phineas peered round her trying to get a clear view of the professor.

"But, sir," he said protestingly, "I don't understand. You were so insistent that this detention had to be done. Do you really want it cancelled? And, if so, would you initial this form?"

"You heard what the professor said," put in Don firmly.

But Phineas was obviously waiting for some confirmation from the professor himself. Frantically Sally made signs to Johnny, and he, guessing what was wanted, carefully pushed one of the buttons.

"It is quite all right, my boy, quite all right," said a rather husky voice.

"Ahem! I say sir," said Sally hastily, "your throat does sound bad again. You'd better come along to my cabin for another dose of that special cough mixture. Phineas," she added, "it's too bad of you to worry the professor like this when he's not feeling too well. Surely you can cancel the form yourself. Come along, professor," she added tenderly.

And, with a last reproving look at Phineas, the little group moved off, their faces beaming with delight as they saw him, still looking slightly dazed, tear up the form he had been holding.

"Oh gosh, it worked!" chortled Johnny. "Now we'll get Percy back to Slick before we have any more awkward moments."

"Thanks, pal!" chuckled Don, giving the robot a friendly slap on the

back. There came a whirring sound, and then—

"Oh, my name is McNamara, I'm the leader of the band!" came in a ringing baritone from the robot.

Sally gave a startled gasp. Slick must have slipped a wrong disc into the robot by mistake, and Don had hit the button that started it off.

"Johnny, switch off, for goodness' sake!"

But too late.

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed a gruff voice, and into view loomed Colonel Brough, taking his constitutional around the deck.

He peered at the figure before him.

"Great guns, sir! Never heard you sing before," he puffed. "Sounds a bit queer, if I may say so. You look it, too," he added candidly peering again at the waxen face.

The professor's not feeling too good," said Sally hastily. "It—it's his throat. He—he's exercising it."

"H'm! That won't do it any good. I've a little something in my cabin that's just the thing for bad throats. What do you say, sir? Will you come along with me and have a dose?"

The chums looked at each other in alarm. Certainly Slick hadn't fitted any disc in the robot that could answer that question.

"Well, professor?" asked the colonel impatiently.

"For goodness' sake do something, Johnny!" Sally whispered agonisedly.

The only thing Johnny could do was press another button. He closed his eyes and pressed, hoping for the best. And then:

"Such impertinence! Stand straight when you speak to me!" came from the robot, who seemed to be glaring at Colonel Brough.

Sally gasped as the professor's voice went on, launched on the ticking off he had given Tubby Winwood a day or so ago when he had found him in the cafe instead of at a lecture.

"Lazy good-for-nothing! All you think about is food. Just look at your waistline—"

The colonel seemed to fight for breath. Sally felt her hair rising on end. The colonel's waistline, she knew, was a very sore point with him. Frantic, she grabbed Percy, managing to find the button which stopped the flow of conversation.

Tremblingly the colonel shook his stick.

"Sir!" he stormed. "How dare you—"

"Colonel, please!" gasped Sally. "It—it's all a mistake. I'm-mean, the professor isn't himself—"

"Mistake? I have been insulted!" quivered the colonel. "I shall demand redress for this when Professor Willard is himself again!"

And the colonel stormed off down the deck.

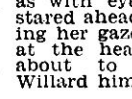
Weakly, horrifiedly, the chums looked at each other.

"Oh, my only aunt!" groaned Sally. "Everything was going so nicely—"

"Now we're in the soup!" groaned Don. "The colonel was furious and he thinks it really was the professor."

"And if we own up to having a dummy and Phineas finds out that we tricked him—"

And there Sally's voice trailed away as with eyes filled with dismay she stared ahead. And her chums, following her gaze, groaned in unison. For at the head of the companionway, about to descend, was Professor Willard himself!



THE COLONEL TAKES A HAND

"Get Percy out of the way—quickly!" Sally's voice rose on a squeak of alarm. "Oh golly, we mustn't let the professor see him!"

Don and Johnny leapt. They grabbed the robot up under the arms and whirled it out of sight round the corridor, just as the professor reached the bottom of the companionway and saw Sally and Fay.

He nodded rather frostily.

"You are on your way to detention, I presume?" he said. "You can tell

Phineas that I shall be in my room if I am wanted."

He didn't wait for a reply, but walked on, while Sally and Fay, feeling somewhat weak at the knees, tottered round the corner to where Don and Johnny waited with Percy.

"Golly, this is almost getting too much for me!" Sally puffed. Then she grinned. "But we win, shipmates! Whisk back Percy to Slick, then off to our cabins to get ready for the dance. The professor's in his cabin, Phineas thinks our detention's been cancelled."

"So everything's wizard!" Don whooped. "Good old us! Good old Percy!"

Percy was returned, with many thanks, to Slick. After that it didn't take them long to get ready for the dance. Highly gleeful, they slipped up to the promenade deck. Rather to their surprise, Colonel Brough was at the entrance to the ball-room.

"All right, in you go," he said genially. "I'm in charge to-night and—"

And there he stopped, his moustache bristling.

Sally followed the direction of his gaze, gasped, and shot into the ball-room as if propelled by a gun.

"The professor!" she hissed to her startled chums. "Oh, my hat, he's coming in here!"

"What are we going to do?" whispered Fay. "We'll be caught—"

They dodged back behind some palms, watching in wide-eyed alarm as the professor drew nearer. He stopped in front of the colonel, his face rather grim.

"Good-evening," he said. "Would you please let me enter, sir. I wish to make sure that none of my students—"

The colonel interrupted, drawing up his plump figure.

"Sir," he boomed, "you shall not enter! You shall not enter, I say!"

The professor's jaw dropped. He peered at the colonel as though unable to believe his ears.

"I, sir," continued the colonel, obviously enjoying this chance of retaliation, "am running this dance. And since you saw fit to be so insulting to me this evening, then I refuse—I utterly refuse to let you enter this room."

And, with arms folded, he took up his stand in front of the door.

"Pshaw! Thank goodness for that," gurgled Don. "Can't help feeling it's a bit tough on the professor, though."

"Don't worry about that," chuckled Sally. "I've been thinking that over—"

I've got an idea. But first—the dance."

And the chums joined the throng in the ballroom.

But they couldn't put the thought of the professor out of their minds, for the main topic of conversation among the dancers was the sudden strange behaviour of Professor Willard.

"You've certainly got to think of something good, Sally," said Don, as the four of them took their places in the cleared centre of the ballroom for their hula-hula dance, "otherwise the poor old professor will be drummed off the ship or something."

But Sally was giving her mind only to the dance then. Together she and Fay swirled and twirled, while Don and Johnny accompanied them on the ukulele and guitar. There was a loud burst of applause at the end.

"And now," dimpled Sally, "for the plan. Winners won't be announced until later, so we've got plenty of time. First of all, Don, you've got to dodge out and find Slick. And this is what he's got to do."

She whispered in Don's ear. Don grinned, and slipped through one of the windows on to the promenade deck. It wasn't long before he was back, nodding in reply to Sally's inquiring look.

"And now to face the music," said Sally.

The four of them, somewhat apprehensive, stepped out of the ballroom on to the deck.

"Ah!" It was a cry of reproach and triumph from Professor Willard as he stepped forward from the shadows, Edgar Phineas by his side. "So! You disobeyed me—"

"Disobeyed you, professor?" Sally's voice was honey-sweet. "But you were so nice to us. Forgive us if we misunderstood," she said pathetically, "but, Phineas, you saw—you heard—"

"Why, sure I did," said Phineas uncomfortably. "When you were walking round the deck arm-in-arm with Sally and the others, sir, and talking to them, I understood you'd cancelled the detention."

"I, walking round the deck with Sally?" gasped the professor. "Why, this is absurd—"

"It wasn't absurd when you insulted me, sir," rumbled the colonel, who was an interested witness of the scene.

"Colonel," said the professor wildly, "I assure you I never insulted you—I haven't been round the deck with these students. I—"

tracted hand through his hair. "Someone is posing as me—it's a trick. A trick!"

Sally's eyes opened wide. "Professor," she gasped, "you really think— She swung round on her chums. "Did you hear what the professor said?" she asked in shocked tones. "An impostor. I— Oh, look!" she ended with a dramatic cry.

Ahead of them a shadowy figure appeared—a figure in mortar-board and gown. Even as Sally shouted, it darted jerkily off down the deck towards the companionway.

"It's the impostor," yelled Don. "After him! Grab the rotter!"

He tore forward. After him went Johnny, and behind them Sally and Fay, determinedly keeping in the way of the professor and Phineas, who were bringing up the rear.

"Lost him!" panted Don, with a wink at Sally, as they reached the head of the companionway. "But we'll go on searching for him, sir. Don't you worry!"

"Bless my soul!" The professor looked quite fatal. "An impostor—someone impersonating me. How dare they! And now, colonel," he added, swinging round, "perhaps you will have the goodness to believe me when I say I most certainly have not insulted you."

"Hrrmph!" The colonel looked decidedly un-comfortable. "Seems we owe each other an apology, professor."

Which was the nearest the colonel would go to expressing his sorrow.

"And—and what about us?" asked Sally in a small voice.

The professor stared at them for a moment, then he nodded.

"There, too, it seems a mistake was made," he said slowly. "A genuine mistake. In the circumstances—"

"We can go back to the dance?" asked Sally eagerly.

"Well—yes," agreed Professor Willard.

Before he could say any more, Sally & Co. were darting off.

"So it worked," chuckled Don. "Good old Sally! We've cleared ourselves and we've cleared the professor—"

"And I hope old Slick has cleared Percy away where he can't be found," gurgled Sally. "And if I'm not mistaken, there's our name being called."

And the four delighted chums stepped into the ballroom to receive a handsome prize.

(End of this week's story.)

Percy the robot plays another uproarious part in next Friday's story of Sally & Co.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 206.)

Did it contain the secret her uncle so eagerly sought?

With hands that trembled she took it from the smiling chief judge; took also the envelope containing the prize money. She shook hands with him, responded to his congratulations, then crossed to where Nathaniel Garsten sat.

"I believe you're a bit worried about the money uncle owes you," she said. "Well, here it is." She took two hundred dollars out of the envelope and held them out. "I'd like a receipt, please."

The rancher glowered as he took the money.

"I'm busy now; it'll do in the morning."

But Merle shook her head. "Oh, no, it won't. You're not the only one who doesn't trust people," she retorted. "I'll have it now."

Nathaniel Garsten glared again and then, muttering under his breath, savagely snatched a pen from his pocket and dashed off a receipt. Merle took it, then made for the competitors' enclosure.

There, eagerly waiting for her, were Jake Binns and all the rest of the Happy Valley Ranch hands, except Slim Harris, the foreman, who had

volunteered to stay behind and look after the ranch.

Despite her smiling protests, they insisted on lifting her up on to their broad shoulders and in carrying her in triumph to the rodeo café. There a celebration tea was quickly ordered.

Her heart glowed as she realized how delighted they were at her victory, and it was reluctantly that at last she pushed back her chair and got to her feet.

"Thanks awfully for the party, boys," she said. "It's been simply wizard, and I hate to leave you, but I'm afraid I must be getting back."

Jake looked at her in dismay.

"Aren't you going to stay for the rest of the programme?" he asked.

Regretfully Merle shook her head.

"I'd love to," she answered, "but uncle will be wondering how I got on and I promised to look in at the hospital on the way home. But there's no need for you boys to leave. I can drive the horse-box back myself. But perhaps you wouldn't mind putting Pommie away while I have a wash."

There was an instant rush for the door, and leaving them harnessing up the big, cumbersome van in which Pommie would ride home in state, Merle crossed to the stables.

There she would be able to have a refreshing wash, and there, too, she would be able to examine the Silver Rider.

She thrilled as she carried it across the enclosure. Were all her hopes about to be realised?

Entering the stables, she put the statuette down in one of the mangers, then drew herself a bucket of water and sluiced her hot, dusty face. Only when she had finished washing did she cross again to the silver trophy.

"Now for it," she breathed.

But as she bent to examine it there came an unexpected interruption. The door clicked open. She whirled, to find herself confronted once again by Larry Denvers.

There was a queer gleam in his steel-grey eyes, and something like a gasp of relief escaped his lips as he saw her standing there with the Silver Rider clutched in her hands.

"Thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "I thought I'd missed you."

A little uneasily Merle regarded him.

"What do you want?" she asked stiffly. "Have you come to congratulate me, or to make excuses for your horse?"

He shook his head, his face grim.

"No, I've come for something more important than that," he declared. "I've come to talk to you."

But it was not at Merle that his gaze was directed, but at the Silver Rider she so fiercely clutched!

Has Larry some plan for taking the vital trophy from her? You mustn't miss what happens next Friday.

WHEN NOEL WAS KIDNAPPED

(Continued from page 208.)



THE SECRET OF THE BELL-BUOY

"Nunky!" whispered June, brokenly. "Nunky!"

In a moment she was on her knees, loosening the gag that secured Noel's lips. There was an incredulous look in her uncle's eyes as finally she tore the cloth away.

"June!" he muttered. "Am I dreaming?"

He stared dazedly at the peaked cap, reefed jacket, and slacks.

"I don't understand, June—"

Disjointedly June blurted out her amazing story as she tore at the stubborn knots. Amusement and admiration gleamed in Noel's eyes.

"You've done more than you imagine, my dear," he declared huskily. "You've outwitted one of the cleverest rogues who ever defied the police. I was taken by surprise while attempting to board the yacht. They questioned me about the china cat, but I refused to answer. I never dreamed for a moment that the Hawk would attempt to contact you. Ah, that's better!" he added, as June managed to free his ankles, and he was able to move his cramped limbs.

"Now my wrists, June—and we'll give 'em a run for their money!"

Feverishly June tried to loosen the cords that bound his wrists.

"They—they won't come undone, nunky!" she gasped at length. "If they find us— But wait a moment!"

Her eyes gleamed suddenly. She remembered seeing a clasp-knife among the stores in the hold.

She darted out into the store-room, but even as she snatched up the knife, someone descended the iron ladder from the hatchway—someone, or something!

To June's petrified gaze, it seemed for a second like a glistening monster with webbed feet and hands. Then, as the figure removed the big goggles that concealed its eyes, the amazing truth burst on her.

She was looking at a frog-man—an under-water swimmer!

So that was how the parcel had disappeared from the bell-buoy!

While June crouched in hiding, the man removed his headdress, revealing a lean, swarthy face. Abruptly, from the deck above, came a clamour of voices.

"Krantz! The boss wants to see you!" a voice shouted from the hatchway. "You're to go out on another job right away!"

There came a guttural exclamation from the frog-man:

"What's the matter now, Lugo?"

"Matter?" called Lugo. "We've been spied on! That urchin who brought the groceries—Chang swears he was up to no good. He's disappeared, and may contact the police. You've got to fetch the last consignment from the buoy before they tumble to the truth. Hurry, man! The boss has given orders that we're to sail on this tide."

Grumbling, the frog-man commenced to relace his costume. June could hear the muffled throb of the yacht's engines as it got up steam.

Scarcely daring to breathe, she crept behind the pile of bales back to the dark bulkhead where Noel was waiting.

"June, what's happened?" muttered the detective, as she slashed at the cords securing his wrists.

In a breathless whisper, June commenced to explain—when a stealthy sound behind her brought her spinning round, the knife clattering from her nerveless fingers.

Crouched in the low doorway, a glitter in his eyes, was the frog-man!

June screamed. The man sprang at

her, but at that instant there came a sharp snapping sound as Noel broke the half-severed cords that bound him.

While June looked on, her eyes wide with horror, they crashed to the floor in a desperate struggle, the frog-man uppermost.

SEÑOR GARCIA—alias the Hawk—paced the deck of the yacht, a scowl on his handsome face. Anxiously he stared out across the misty bay.

"Where's that fool Krantz?" he demanded, whirling on the little group of seamen. "Did you give him my message, Lugo?"

"I did, sir—and here he comes now," declared Lugo.

There was a general move as the frog-man's glistening figure appeared in the mist on deck. Then a shout went up, for he was holding a white-faced young captive.

"The grocer's boy!" shouted Lugo. "Caught him skulking in the hold, señor," growled the frog-man, "trying to release the prisoner!"

"So!" murmured Señor Garcia, catching June by the shoulder and pulling off her cap. "A girl, eh? Now I understand! Congratulations, Miss Gaynor, on a very clever trick! It's just too bad for you—and your meddling uncle—that you were caught!"

June stared at him, white-faced and defiant.

"What—what are you going to do?" The Hawk laughed unpleasantly.

"Krantz and Lugo are going to take you for a little trip," he murmured—a trip from which you will not return. I shall settle with your uncle as soon as we are out at sea. The little secret of the china cat will remain—a secret!"

Struggling, June was hustled into the waiting launch. Lugo started the engine, and they sped out across the misty bay.

As they came in sight of the bell-buoy the frog-man gave a signal, and Lugo brought the boat to a standstill.

"Shall we settle with the girl before you collect the goods, Krantz?" he demanded. "The boss said we were to tie her to the buoy and leave her there."

The frog-man nodded, with a deep chuckle, as he raised his goggles—to reveal the eyes of Noel Raymond!

"First, Lugo, I'll settle with you!" he rapped.

With a stifled ejaculation, the scoundrel whipped out a revolver. But June sprang at him from behind, clinging to his arm, while the frog-man sent him crashing back into the boat.

"Good for you, June!" chuckled Noel, removing his glistening headdress and grinning at his breathless young partner. "Your little plan worked like a charm. But we've no time to lose. We must collect the stuff and contact the police before Garcia gets wind of the truth and escapes."

Starting the engine, he brought the boat close to the buoy—and once again that evening June scrambled up the slippery ladder to the little compartment above the bell.

She came down mope slowly, carrying a large oilskin package stamped with the mark of the swordfish.

"Nunky, what is it?" she gasped. "What does it mean?"

Noel ripped open the package, taking out a number of green china cats!

"Smuggling, June!" he said. "The goods were dumped here by a foreign ship and picked up by the frog-man. The fact that I'd managed to get hold of one of the ornaments worried our friend the Hawk. He was afraid I might discover its secret—and give the whole game away."

"But, nunky, what is the secret?" demanded June in bewilderment. "Why should anyone want to smuggle china cats? It's not even as though anything were hidden in them—"

"That's where you're wrong!" chuckled Noel. "Apparently, there's nothing hidden in them—but you didn't look far enough."

Using the butt of Lugo's revolver, he shattered one of the china ornaments and held up the broken fragments.

June gasped, her eyes widening. Embedded in the china itself, baked in the clay, were a number of glittering objects like large, bright beads.

"Diamonds!" said Noel. "Smuggled diamonds! There's a fortune here and on the yacht, and a big reward coming to a very plucky girl detective!"

June smiled up at him. "I don't want the reward, nunky," she declared. "You're safe, and that's all that matters to me. If there's a reward coming, then let Tim Barney have it. I could never have rescued you without his help!"

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday the daring girl crook, Rosina Fontaine, returns in an exciting battle of wits with Noel and June entitled

THE BOGUS GIRL REPORTER.

THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

(Continued from page 212.)

"From the moment that we set foot on Castaway Island, Gerry recognised it, and when Tania came along he knew who she was. You can imagine the rest, sir, from what has happened. Gerry, with the aid of Stanhope, was responsible for everything, and Tania

held out his hand to the jungle girl, who grasped it quickly, her dark eyes shining through her tears.

"Tania wanted only friendship," said Dave gruffly. "The friendship denied to her for so many years. Aren't you going to give her a break?"

For a moment there was a tense, moving silence, then Pat Saunders darted from the group and caught the jungle girl by both hands, while the others crowded round, eager to make amends.

"IT'S good-bye to Castaway Isle, Tania!" said Dave gently. "Are you sorry?"

The jungle girl was silent as she stood by the steamer's rail with Dave beside her.

She was setting out on a great adventure with friends whom she could trust. All the misunderstanding and loneliness of the past weeks had been swept away.

Dave had explained everything. Gerry and the mate were confined in two cabins, and the young castaways had gone out of their way to make amends to the jungle girl.

Even Michl and Bimbo had shared in the fussing, and were now snugly ensconced in special quarters below deck.

"Afraid about the future, Tania?" Dave asked gently.

The jungle girl shook her head, smiling through her tears.

"Tania is not afraid," she breathed. "In the white man's country she will learn to be an English girl—to read and write and do everything that Dave has told her. Tania has much to learn, but she has no fear—with Dave beside her."

The boy's hand closed over hers, and they stood there in silence, listening to the throbbing of the ship's engines, as the island that had been Tania's jungle home dwindled to a dark speck on the horizon—and was lost to sight.

THE END.

It is goodbye to Castaway Isle—goodbye to a fine serial. But look out for Dorothy Page's latest story—entitled

THE FOURTH GUY IN THE CRYSTAL.

It starts in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL.