

# GIRLS' CRYSTAL <sup>3<sup>d</sup></sup>

Week  
Ending  
May 15th.  
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



## The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

Ever-popular Sally & Co. Are Featured In Another Grand Story Of Life Aboard  
The College Ship—By DAPHNE GRAYSON

### WAS DULCIE A CHEAT?

**L**OVELY, Dulcie!" Sally Warner's blue eyes shone with delight and enthusiasm. "You're certainly a discovery."

"Super!" agreed Don Weston. "Our concert's a hit before it's started."

"You've certainly got a wizard voice," put in Johnny Briggs, while Fay Manners, as she rose from the piano stool, smiled admiringly across at the girl whom she had accompanied.

Dulcie Ransome's piquant, sensitive little face was unusually flushed.

"It's nice of you to say so," she murmured.

Sally smiled. Dulcie was a sweet little person. She had joined the College Ship, Ocean Star, at Patagonia, and the Merry-makers had taken an instant liking to her. And to discover that she had a lovely voice, and was eager to help them with the students' concert in aid of the Seamen's Orphanage, was another point in her favour.

"Well, we'd better be off ticket selling while Dulcie puts away the music," said Sally. "See you later, old thing, when we're bowed down with filthy lucre."

"We hope!" added Don as he followed Sally out of the club-room. "Who's first on the list?"

"Miss Edmunds," said Sally, looking at the list in her hand. "Loads of money and leader of the musical set on 'A' deck. Forward into the breach!"

She led the way to the first-class deck, knocked at a door and waited until a decisive voice bade them "Come in!"

The chums entered the state-room, smiling sweetly at the grey-haired, rather severe-looking woman who confronted them, and at the pretty, rather spoilt-looking girl who was lounging in an armchair.

Very charmingly Sally explained their errand, adding:

"Of course, we've heard of your great interest in music, Miss Edmunds, and we were sure that you'd like tickets for yourself and Vanessa. And we hoped you'd be kind enough to persuade your friends—"

"Of course! Of course!" broke in Miss Edmunds. "A very worthy object. I like to see young people like you with such a sense of responsibility. My purse—"

She looked round, whilst Sally & Co. exchanged delighted smiles.

"You're going to be very interested in our vocalist, Miss Edmunds," said Fay. "She's brilliant. I can see that Dulcie—"

"Dulcie?" Miss Edmunds, notice in hand, rapped that name as she swung round upon the chums. "Dulcie whom?"

"Dulcie Ransome," said Johnny. "She joined the ship at Patagonia with you and Vanessa. Do you know her, Miss Edmunds?"

"Know her?" Miss Edmunds almost barked the words. "I should be far happier if I didn't know her. But I must tell you, if this girl is going to take part in your concert, then nothing will induce me to give it my support. And in no circumstances will I allow Vanessa to come into contact with her."

There was such indignation and contempt in Miss Edmunds' voice that Sally & Co. looked at one another in puzzled alarm.

"I'm sorry if there's some sort of better between you and Dulcie, Miss Edmunds," Sally said, "but she's such a sweet girl that I'm sure she could very quickly clear things up if you spoke to her yourself—"

She was interrupted by a contemptuous laugh from Vanessa.

"Sweet? That little cheat—"

"Vanessa!" cried Fay indignantly. "Well, it's true—"

"Quiet!" Miss Edmunds held up a commanding hand. "Vanessa, since we have said so much, I think it is up to us to explain."

She turned to the now rather angry Merry-makers. "Dulcie and my niece attended the same school. They both entered for the scholarship. I was very keen for Vanessa to win, and she, dear child, worked terribly hard. It was a surprise, therefore, to hear that Dulcie Ransome had won. Later I heard how—"

"You mean—" began Don unbelievably.

"I mean she cheated. Vanessa and her friends can vouch for that. I could do nothing in Patagonia, but I brought Vanessa on this cruise so that if eventually I won my case, my niece would be able to take her rightful place among the rest of you. As for that girl—" Miss Edmunds drew a deep breath. "She has no right to be here at all."

For a long moment there was a dead silence in the state-room. In shocked disbelief the four chums stared at one another. It was Sally who broke the silence.

"I can't believe it," she said at last. "There must be some mistake—"

"There is no mistake," said Miss Edmunds frostily. "But as I said before, so long as this girl is connected with the concert I must withhold my support. Now perhaps you will go."

Almost before they realised it Sally & Co. found themselves outside. Sally drew a deep breath.

"Well!" she said explosively. "What a dreadful thing to say about poor little Dulcie. There is some excuse for Miss Edmunds. Obviously she believes what she has been told. But that Vanessa—"

"Probably slacked madly, then had to make up some excuse for losing the schol," put in Don, "not realising her aunt would tag her along on the



cruise to try to put things right, as she thinks."

"That's about it," agreed Johnny. "Anyway, blow Miss Edmunds. We'll just have to do without her support. We must have Dulcie in the concert—she's the star-turn. But I don't think we'd better say anything about this business to her, do you, Sally?"

"Rather not!" agreed Sally. "We'd have the poor kid a mass of nerves."

They went along to the dining-saloon, for it was tea-time. Afterwards, they took a stroll along the deck, and at the top of one of the companionways they saw Miss Edmunds' niece. She was talking excitedly to Carmentita Pascali and a group of other students, but at sight of Sally & Co. Vanessa made a hurried excuse and hurried away. Sally frowned, for the malicious look on Vanessa's face made her suspicious. Had the girl been telling Carmentita and her cronies about Dulcie? Knowing Dulcie to be a friend of Sally, it was the sort of thing the spiteful Carmentita would seize upon with glee. Sally's chin squared.

"They'd jolly well better not start anything with Dulcie," she said grimly, "or there'll be trouble. Let's go along to the club-room, ship-mates. She may still be there."

But Dulcie was not there. Neither was she in the lounge, the café or the lecture-room.

"Must be down below," said Don. "Hallo, who's that shouting? What-  
ever's going on?"

The shouts were in the nasal tones of Alec Burt, one of Carmentita's closest friends, and, as Sally realised what he was shouting, she led the way down the remainder of the steps. As she reached the passage, a cry of indignation broke from her lips.

For there was Dulcie, her small face paper-white, her large eyes wide with fear, standing with her back pressed to the wall, while before her capered Alec Burt yelling "Cheat! Cheat!" Tubby Winwood, his plump face crimson with anger, was shouting at him to be quiet, while Carmentita was shrilling to the listening crowd the story which Miss Edmunds had told Sally & Co. about the scholarship.

"This is beastly!" Sally's own face was white with contempt for Carmentita & Co. "As for Alec Burt and—"

"I'll deal with him," said Don grimly. "Charge, Johnny!"

Using his shoulder as a battering-ram, he plunged through the crowd, Sally behind him. Before he realised what was happening Burt found himself spinning up the passage, while Sally rushed to Dulcie's side and placed a reassuring arm about her shoulders.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" she exploded, glaring at Carmentita and her cronies. "You cowards—"

"Better cowards than cheats," taunted Carmentita.

"Sally, it isn't true! I don't know why they're saying these things," gulped Dulcie.

"Of course it isn't true!" Fay took Dulcie's arm. "Don't take any notice of them, Dulcie."

"We will make her take notice," snapped Carmentita. "She cheated and she must admit it—"

There was another uproar, and then on to the scene strode Professor Willard, their headmaster. He looked sternly around.

"From the disgraceful noise down here," he said, "I gather you have all heard of the terrible accusation that has been made against one of my pupils, Dulcie Ransome—"

Dulcie gave a quivering cry and gripped Sally's arm.

"Brace up, old thing," whispered Sally. "It's better that the whole affair should come out into the open."

"Naturally," continued the professor, "I have a completely open mind on the subject. Nevertheless, in fairness to my other pupils, I feel I must suspend Dulcie from all association with the rest of you until

I have cabled back to Patagonia for an investigation. Until that investigation is completed I trust I can rely upon you to behave like human-beings—not like a cage of wild animals."



## THE STOLEN EXAM PAPERS

There was a dead silence after the headmaster left, then rather shamefacedly the crowd broke up and drifted away until only Sally & Co. and Dulcie were left. Dulcie, indeed, seemed incapable of movement, so very gently Sally took her arm, led her into the cabin occupied by herself and Fay and seated her in a chair.

"Dulcie," she said softly, "don't take it to heart so much. Everything will be all right when the professor gets a reply to his cable."

Dulcie appeared not to have heard. Numbly she shook her head.

"Suspended from all association with the rest of you," she murmured through ashen lips. "That means I can't appear in the concert to-morrow—"

"Sure does," muttered Johnny. "That's a bit of a facer. It'll be a flop without you, Dulcie. Not that that's the important thing," he added hastily.

"It's more important than you realise," replied Dulcie heavily. "You see," she added, looking miserably at the chums, "my parents are not well-off. They sacrificed a lot to send me to a good school in the hope that I'd win this scholarship." Her eyes lit up for a moment. "Did you know that Professor Terrazoni, the world-famous voice-trainer, is attached to the International College? I hoped to study under him when I got to Australia. But now—"

She sighed. "Oh, Sally, if anything happens to upset this wonderful chance of mine I'll never get another. Why should Vanessa do this to me? It's so unfair."

"It certainly is," agreed Don grimly. "But try not to worry, Dulcie. Maybe the professor will get a reply before the concert to-morrow night."

"I don't see how that will help," replied Dulcie dully. "I'm not a brilliant scholar, but I swotted madly for the scholarship and came out with twelve more marks than Vanessa, who's always romped home with the honours before. That's probably why she didn't trouble too much."

"Golly!" Sally looked startled. A reply from the school in Patagonia, far from clearing Dulcie, looked like making things worse for her. It was impossible to prove whether she had or had not cheated, but for a fairly average student to be twelve marks ahead of the brilliant Vanessa was enough to raise doubts in any mind, now that suspicion had been thrown upon her.

She saw the echo of her own dismayed thoughts in the faces of her chums. They, too, were realising how black things looked for Dulcie.

"I think we ought to see Miss Edmunds again," said Sally decisively. "We'll tell her all that Dulcie has told us. After all, she's a stickler for justice. She only dragged Vanessa on this cruise because she thought she had been cheated. Maybe when she hears our story she'll agree to withdraw the charge she has made against Dulcie."

"It's worth a try," agreed Don. "Let's go."

"Chin up, Dulcie," said Fay. "We'll be back soon."

Dulcie smiled wanly, and Sally felt a wave of pity go through her at sight of the little white face, the shadowed eyes. Dulcie was certainly bearing the whole affair very bravely, though it was a horrible position for her to be in. That realisation made Sally all the more eloquent in her pleading with Miss Edmunds when she saw that lady in her state-room a few minutes later.

Miss Edmunds listened attentively,

but to Sally's request that she drop the whole affair she shook her head.

"I'm afraid it's gone too far for that now," she said. "It would leave everything in a very unsatisfactory state, clearing neither Vanessa nor Dulcie. I have a much better plan." She glanced towards Vanessa as she spoke, then back to the chums. "I shall suggest to the professor that he set an entirely new examination between the two girls. The winner of that will be the one to go to Australia."

"Aunt!" Sally, looking at Vanessa, saw the dismayed look that flashed across her face, a look that quickly vanished as her aunt turned towards her. "How—how clever of you," she muttered. "And now if you'll excuse me—"

She hurried towards the door, followed more slowly by Sally & Co.

"She's scared," said Sally in a low voice, as Vanessa disappeared from sight. "Didn't you see the look on her face?"

"Yes," admitted Fay, "but if she's such a good scholar—"

"All the more reason for being scared," put in Sally. "Obviously the questions will be on the same lines as the scholarship, and Dulcie swotted up for it while Vanessa slacked. If Vanessa loses again her aunt will know that she fibbed about Dulcie. She's got to win one way or another."

"Meaning?" asked Don.

"I don't know," but I'm worried," admitted Sally. "Anyway, let's go and see Dulcie. I don't know how she'll take this idea of Miss Edmunds. If the professor acts on it it's going to be a risk for Dulcie, too. Oh, bother Vanessa! The whole thing's so unfair."

In silence she led the way back to her cabin—just in time to see Vanessa flounce out of it and stride away, her eyes blazing vindictively.

Suddenly anxious, Sally led her chums into the cabin. They found Dulcie looking rather flustered.

"Sally!" she cried in relief. "Vanessa has just told me about the possibility of a re-examination—and said that if I don't take part in it she'll use her influence to get me a job with a band in Patagonia. I—I refused to back out!"

"Good for you!" cried Sally, her eyes gleaming. "If you ask me, this proves she's a trickster! She's afraid you'll win again and show her up!"

Don and the others murmured agreement. But Sally was a little worried. She felt that if there was a new exam, Vanessa would stop at nothing to win it.

And that there was to be a new examination they learned a few moments later, when a message arrived from the professor for Dulcie, saying that he was now getting out a new set of questions and answers. The examination would take place the following morning and the result would be announced at four o'clock in the afternoon.

"So you'll win it in plenty of time to take part in the concert," said Sally confidently. "Everything will be all right, you see, Dulcie."

But just the same Sally decided it might be a good idea to keep a wary eye on Vanessa. With that idea in mind she and her chums made their way on deck, looked around. There was no sign of the girl anywhere, but Miss Edmunds was talking to the headmaster of the floating college in the first-class lounge.

"And you are sure, professor, that the examination papers are quite safe?" she was asking anxiously.

"They are locked in my cabin, madam," replied the professor a trifle wearily. "Perfectly safe, I assure you."

Miss Edmunds seemed satisfied, but for some reason a cold feeling gripped Sally. She saw again Vanessa's vindictive face when she had flounced from the cabin. And in sudden panic she motioned to her chums to follow her down to the professor's cabin.

"I don't know," she replied in

(Please turn to the back page.)





# THEIR SCHOOL on CASTAWAY ISLE

By RENEE FRAZER

## DAVE HELPS MICH

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

Two boys, cheery Gerry Royston and quiet Dave Cardew, seemed eager for her friendship, but Tania suspected that one of them, though she did not know which, was her enemy.

She believed that Michi, her panther, could identify her secret enemy, but Michi was injured by Stanhope, the rascally mate.

Later, Dave arrived at her jungle home, and promised to cure Michi. But Tania was doubtful—dare she trust him?

**"YOU will not hurt Michi, or—or Tania will hurt you!"**

Her dark eyes fiercely protective, the jungle girl knelt beside her injured panther, as Dave opened his first-aid set.

For an instant the boy's steady glance met hers, and a flicker of a grave smile curved his lips.

"That's a bargain, Tania! But you can trust me."

Tania watched suspiciously, as he took out the gleaming scissors and commenced to cut a length of bandage.

On this he smeared some greenish ointment, and bent to examine the wound behind the panther's ear.

"Water!" he said tersely. "Clean water, Tania—quickly, please!"

His cool, decisive order took the jungle girl by surprise. She had never heard Dave speak like this before.

In spite of herself, she rose to her feet, and picked up an empty gourd from the corner of her little home. Dave did not look round. He was carefully snipping off the matted fur near the panther's wound.

Backing slowly, reluctant to leave her pet, Tania descended the swaying rope-ladder and ran to the spring. In a minute she returned, the gourd brimming with sparkling water.

Dave looked round, and his grey eyes gleamed approvingly.

"You've been quick! Now—I want you to hold Michi's head—so. If he wakes, try to soothe him. He may be uneasy if he senses the presence of a stranger!"

He dipped a bandage in the spring water, and commenced gently to dab the wound—while Tania, watchful and anxious, stroked the panther's head.

"Good!" said the boy, at length, wiping his hands. "Now for the bandage. This may smart a little—but it will kill the germs."

"Germs?" repeated Tania, in perplexity.

Dave smiled faintly.

"The bad things that make Michi ill."

The jungle girl's eyes gleamed angrily.

"So! Then the tall man—he they call the mate—he is a germ!"

Dave chuckled outright, the laughter lighting his rugged features.

"Well—that's one way of putting it. Can't say I'm keen on Stanhope, myself—but you'd better not let him hear you call him a germ!" He was deftly bandaging the wound as he spoke. "The mate was only obeying orders," he added quietly.

Tania considered this, as she gently stroked her pet. Her simple mind was perplexed.

"Bad man shoot at Michi because he was told to shoot—by Tania's enemy. The false one feared that Michi might smell him out!"

Dave glanced at her sharply, questioningly.

"Just what do you mean by that, Tania?"

"There are two boys who speak to Tania of friendship," said the jungle girl, unsteadily. "And one of them she knows is false. How is she to discover which—now that Michi is ill?"

Dave frowned, though his deft fingers continued their work.

"I see what you're getting at, Tania. You're trying to decide between Gerry—and me. Why did you send Gerry away, just now?"

"Because"—Tania glanced quickly towards her precious book—"Gerry came when Tania was not here, and took the book of pictures from its hiding-place—"

Dave's eyes glinted.

"I thought as much! Gerry's up to no good. Look here, Tania—you trusted me to treat Michi, and I promised not to hurt him. Have I kept my promise?"

The jungle girl nodded, as she fondled the sleeping panther. Gently she touched the neat, white bandage that covered his wound. Her expression softened, though her eyes were still troubled.

"Dave has been good to Michi—and Tania is grateful."

"Then will you go on trusting me?" urged Dave.

"What is it that Dave wishes Tania to do?"

"To start with," said Dave, "I want you to wash and bandage Michi's wound every day—as you've seen me do. I'll leave you these bandages, ointment and scissors—you understand how to use them, now?"

Tania nodded, accepting the gifts a trifle nervously. The bandage and ointment she concealed in an earthen jar; but the small, bright scissors fascinated her. Carefully she attached them to a fine string of coconut fibre, slipping it round her neck as a locket.

Dave grinned.

"That looks fine," he declared, "but don't forget to use 'em! And now—for my second request." His smile faded, as he rested a hand on her shoulder. "Tania—will you let me take care of that illustrated diary of yours? It's the only thing you've got that might help to clear up the

mystery of your presence on this island—and you're in danger of losing it!"

Tania was instinctively on her guard.

"It cannot be," she said. "Tania thinks, now, that Dave is her friend—because he was kind to Michi. But once she thought that Gerry was her friend, yet now Dave tells her that he is false. Tania cannot trust her book with either!"

And she snatched up the precious diary, as though fearful that he might take it by force.

Dave bit his lip.

"You're a stubborn little thing, Tania!" he declared. "Very well, then—I've another idea! That book isn't safe here. Everyone knows about it, by now. Why don't you hide it somewhere?"

"Hide it?" repeated Tania, suspiciously.

"Yes—somewhere in the jungle—where no one will think of searching for it!" Dave spoke earnestly. "I give you my word, Tania, that I won't watch you. I'll stay here with Michi, till you come back."

Tania stared at him, persuaded in spite of herself by the boy's earnest tone.

"Dave's words are wise," she said simply. "And Tania will do even as he says."

She stepped over to the ladder, and Dave gave a little sigh of relief.

"I'll wait here—don't be long!" he called, sitting down beside Michi.

Her thoughts racing, Tania descended the swaying ladder, and hurried towards her canoe, pushing it out into the stream.

Her simple heart had been touched by the boy's skilful treatment of her injured pet, and though not fully trusting Dave, even now, she saw the wisdom of his advice.

Swiftly, she paddled towards the near-by Grotto of Shells. Mooring her canoe to a tree-stump, she climbed softly out on to the sun-dappled bank, and moved forward with the precious book. Just then a twig cracked sharply among the bushes behind her.

She spun round, and a scream was torn from the jungle girl's lips as a powerful hand caught her by the shoulder.

"Got you!" growled a deep voice. "Hand over that book!"

Frozen with fear, Tania stared into the dark, triumphant features of Stanhope, the ship's mate.

## MR. BARNARD TAKES A HAND



Only for an instant was the jungle girl chilled by terror; then her natural courage returned and she struggled fiercely to break from that powerful grip.

The mate laughed harshly.

"Oh, no, you don't, my young spit-fire! I've got a little score to settle with you. First of all, I want that book! I reckon you've no right to it—see? It belongs to someone else, au' I've come to fetch it—"

Desperately Tania twisted round to face him.

"The book of pictures belongs to Tania," she gasped, "and you will not touch it!"

"Who's to prevent me?" sneered the



mate, making a sudden grab at the diary.

Tania gave a broken cry—a cry answered unexpectedly by a shout from the trees. The mate released her hastily, backing away as a boyish figure sprang into the clearing.

"Tania, what happened? I heard you scream—"

With a little sob of relief, the jungle girl ran towards Dave, clutching her precious book. The boy's face was grim as he reached her, taking her arm reassuringly as he stared towards the scowling mate.

"I guess she squealed for nothing!" growled the latter, recovering from his confusion. "Just because I questioned her about that book she went for me like a little wild-cat—"

"You tried to steal my book!" cried Tania stormily. "You are a bad man—a thief—"

"Steady, Tania!" interjected Dave. "There's been some mistake. I'll deal with this."

He stepped towards the mate, but at that instant there came a sound of hurrying footsteps and breathless voices.

Both Dave and the mate turned, and Tania's face lit up as she recognised Mr. Barnard's athletic figure, followed by Gerry and several of the other boys.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Gerry, taking in the scene at a glance. "Looks as though there's been a spot of bother here, sir!"

Mr. Barnard strode forward, his shrewd eyes glancing keenly round the little group.

"What is going on here?" he demanded bluntly.

"It's Tania's book, sir," said Dave, his face rather red. "I advised her to hide it—for safety. It appears that Mr. Stanhope questioned her right to it."

"It looks like one of the school books, sir!" growled the mate defensively. "I wasn't to know that she hadn't stolen it. She went for me like a young, savage when I tried to stop her—"

"The bad man tried to take my book!" exclaimed Tania, appealing to Mr. Barnard.

"I'd like to get to the bottom of this," he said. "Why did you advise Tania to hide her book in the first place, Dave?"

The boy's lips tightened, and his grey eyes darted significantly towards Gerry, who returned his stare with interest.

"I thought it would be safer, sir," replied Dave gruffly. "It seems that Tania has had some trouble—with prying visitors!"

"Nice of you to take such an interest in Tania's affairs, Dave!" murmured Gerry.

Mr. Barnard frowned as he noted the exchange of hostile glances.

"That will do, you boys!" he said sharply. "I don't know what has been going on behind my back, but I'm not standing for any quarrelling in our small community! We've been shipwrecked on this island, and it's up to all of us to pull together. And that applies to you, Stanhope," he added, glancing at the scowling mate. "Tania is one of my pupils now, and I won't have her bullied by anyone!"

The mate's eyes glittered. "I reckon that little spiffire's out to cause trouble!" he growled. "Mark my words!"

And turning abruptly on his heel, he strode away.

Mr. Barnard smiled grimly. "I'm afraid, Tania," he said, "that you're unpopular in some quarters. I shall have to have a serious word with Captain Rawlins! Meanwhile, may I see this book that has caused so much trouble?"

Trustfully, Tania placed her precious volume in the master's hands. Him, at least, she could rely on implicitly.

Mr. Barnard studied the tattered diary with keen interest, turning over the yellowed pages with their faded lettering and quaintly drawn pictures, while Dave and Gerry edged closer, each eyeing the other warily.

"This is remarkable, Tania!" declared the master, looking up with a smile. "Though the writing in most places is almost too faint to decipher, the pictures alone appear to tell a story—if only we could read them correctly! It will obviously take some time. You say that you can't remember how you came by this book?"

"It has always been Tania's," replied the jungle girl simply. "The white man who looked after Tania when she was very small may have written it—but Tania does not know."

"Quite a mystery, sir!" put in Gerry, a quizzical smile in his blue eyes as he glanced at the jungle girl.

Tania looked away hastily, biting her lip. Gerry she could not trust—now! Was it he who had told the mate to steal her book? If only she could be sure!

"A mystery," agreed Mr. Barnard thoughtfully, "and we must try to clear it up—for your sake, Tania. But tell me—how is Michi?"

Tania's dark eyes softened, and she flashed a grateful glance at Dave.

"Michi will be better—soon."

"The animal's out of danger, sir," said Dave. "Tania could come to school to-morrow."

"To-morrow, Tania?" asked Mr. Barnard.

Tania nodded, her eyes shining. She had missed her visits to the island school more than she would admit.

"To-morrow," she promised, "Tania will come to school—if Michi is not too ill. And she will bring her book of pictures so that she may learn to read its meaning!"

"Why not let Mr. Barnard take it now, Tania?" put in Dave quickly. "You know it would be safe with him."

"Good idea!" agreed Gerry heartily. "What do you say, sir?"

"If Tania is sure she can trust me with it," replied Mr. Barnard, with a smiling glance.

Tania's heart beat rather quickly, but she nodded.

"Tania knows her book will be safe with white master," she declared. "It shall be even as he says. For to-morrow Tania may learn from the book who she really is—and why she is here!"



## A SURPRISE IN SCHOOL

That night Tania slept soundly, undisturbed by any fears for her precious book. Even her frightening encounter with the mate was temporarily forgotten in her excitement about to-morrow, though at the back of her mind there still lurked a nagging, wistful thought.

If only she could bring herself to trust Gerry—handsome, smiling Gerry—as she now trusted Dave! Everything seemed to show that he was her enemy, yet even now she had no proof.

Michi's keen scent had been her one chance of making sure, but that chance would be lost by the time her pet was well enough to walk.

She would have to rely on her own wits alone to discover the truth!

When morning came to the forest, Tania was wide awake and alert. Her first care was for Michi.

The panther was much better, though still too weak to move. But he recognised his young mistress with a purr of pleasure, and eagerly lapped the water she brought to him.

"And now," said Tania firmly, "we make the bandage, even as Dave showed!"

After that, Tania ate her own breakfast of fruit, washed down by sparkling spring water. Then she looked round for Bimbo, her little long-tailed monkey.

She could not leave Michi entirely on his own while she went to school. Bimbo would be company for him.

After much calling, Bimbo scrambled sheepishly up the rope-ladder. He had evidently been out early, bent on some mischief.

Ordering him to remain with Michi till she returned, Tania set out happily in her canoe.

The school bell had rung by the time she reached the camp clearing, and only Sam Perkins, the odd-job man, was in sight, leaning against the cookhouse as he stared reflectively out to sea through an old brass telescope.

Tania, who had never seen a telescope before, stared at him in amazement, for the gleaming lens looked like an enormous eye. Catching sight of her, Sam gave a friendly wink.

"Better hurry, young'un, or you'll be late for school!" he declared. "Mr. Barnard's on the warpath this morning!"

Startled, though scarcely understanding, Tania hurried towards the school-house, nervously pushing open the door.

"There she is!" called Moyra Curtis accusingly.

Everyone turned, and Mr. Barnard looked up from his desk.

"Come in, Tania!" he said gravely. "I've got a bone to pick with you!"

"Bone?" echoed the jungle girl in surprise. "But Tania has already eaten—"

There came a roar of laughter from the class, and Tania looked round with bewildered indignation.

"That's enough!" called Mr. Barnard, his lips twitching as he held up his hand. "I'm afraid we're teasing you, Tania, though you can blame your little rascal of a monkey!"

"Bimbo?" echoed Tania, her heart giving a nervous jump as she remembered her pet's sheepish return.

Mr. Barnard nodded more gravely.

"He was seen in the camp early this morning by Moyra, scuttling out of the store tent where we keep the school books. And later I found that the tent had been completely ransacked! You must really keep a stricter watch on your pets, Tania; they're causing quite a lot of trouble one way and another."

Tania's dark eyes widened in dismay.

"But Bimbo would not do a thing like that!" she protested.

"I'm not so sure," said Mr. Barnard dryly. "I've not forgotten how he tore that book on your first day at school. Anyway, we won't say any more about it now. But it's fortunate that I didn't leave your diary among the other books, as I'd intended. It might have been harmed. I decided at the last minute to lock it in the ship's safe."

He crossed to a massive iron safe in the corner of the school-room and unlocked it.

Tania felt hurt at the accusation against her pet. Bimbo was mischievous—inquisitive. He might well have paid a visit to the camp clearing and followed someone into the tent, but he would not deliberately have upset the books.

For an instant a startling thought flashed across her mind. Perhaps the damage had been caused by an enemy, searching for her precious diary!

Instinctively her glance darted towards Gerry, who was seated in front of the class. His blue eyes met hers with a quizzical, half-rueful glance.

"Aren't you speaking to me to-day, Tania?" he inquired.

Tania bit her lip, turning her back on him as Dave rose from his desk in the corner and motioned her to sit beside him.

At that moment Mr. Barnard turned from the safe, the precious diary in his hand, a pile of books under his other arm.

"Will one of you boys hand this to Tania?" he asked.

"I will, sir!" declared Gerry promptly, springing to his feet.

"Oh, no—you won't!" muttered Dave, starting up and making to snatch the book from Gerry.

There was a sharp rending sound, and Tania cried out.

"My book—you have torn him!" His face crimson, Dave held grimly to the tattered volume.

(Please turn to page 71.)





# Assistant TO THE SECRET AGENT

By DOROTHY PAGE

## THE COUNT'S THREAT

**G**AYE LEAMAN was helping Peter Kirby, a young secret agent known as Mr. X, to investigate the mysterious activities of an elusive personality known as the Count, and his beautiful niece Roma Vadell.

When, after many thrilling encounters with the Count, Gaye and Peter discovered that his organization were forging bank notes and clothing coupons, Peter told Gaye that she must return home.

Reluctantly, Gaye did so, and arrived at her aunt's country cottage. There, to her horror, she found not her aunt, but the Count and Roma.

"We are going to hold you as a means of crushing Mr. X," the Count told her.

**D**ESPITE the gravity of her own plight, Gaye's first thought was not for herself. Agitatedly she regarded her captors.

"My aunt!" she gasped. "What—what have you done with her?"

"Your aunt is unaware of what has happened," said the Count coldly. "She was tricked away into the village by a false message!"

"How did you trace me here?" Gaye asked next. "What—what do you want?"

The Count slowly, carefully smoothed his silver hair.

"We want—you! With you in our hands I shall force Mr. X into a position of helplessness! You cannot escape. This is a lonely cottage—no one would even hear if you shouted—"

The ringing of the telephone cut startlingly into his words. There was a second of silence as all three stared at the instrument.

"Count, shall I—" started Roma, when the Count shook his head. With the speed of a striking snake, he suddenly caught Gaye's arm and in a vice-like grip led her across to the phone.

"Answer that call, Miss Leaman. But be careful—"

Gaye moved unresistingly, a covert gleam in her brown eyes. For surely the Count had tripped. Surely here was a chance to get help!

With her free hand she swiftly lifted the handset.

"Hallo!" she called. In wild hope her heart leapt as a voice came over the line.

It was Peter's voice! Agitatedly he spoke.

"Gaye—thank goodness! One of my agents reported that he saw a couple of the Count's men at Kennchester Station. I was afraid you had been followed—"

So that was how she had been traced to her aunt's cottage!

"Gaye—answer!" Anxiety sprang to Peter's voice. "Is anything wrong?"

Before Gaye could shout the words that came to her lips, the handset was whipped from her grasp and at

the same instant Roma caught her arms from behind.

The Count raised the handset. His smile was coldly exultant.

"Nothing is wrong, my dear Mr. X," he said softly—"nothing, that is, from my point of view. I had a suspicion it might be you phoning, and I want a word with you."

From where she stood, pale-faced, Gaye caught the sharp incredulous exclamation that came over the line: "The Count!"

"Precisely," answered the Count coldly. "And the girl is in my hands. Do you understand?"

Silence. Gaye could visualise the terrible shock to Peter.

"Listen to me!" continued the Count. "You are trying to decode a message that will give you the location of my headquarters, aren't you? You will find it difficult, I think, but if you do decode it before I have set my great coup into action—remember that Miss Leaman is in my hands! Remember that, if you value her safety!"

Peter spoke at last. His voice was strained, hoarse, totally unlike his usually light and devil-may-care speech.

"Count—I warn you! If any harm comes to Gaye Leaman—"

"You are hardly in a position to warn," cut in the Count. "I've got you, X, this time. If you decode that message, if you make one move against my headquarters, I will not answer for the safety of the girl. I have nothing against her personally, but nothing—nothing, do you hear?—shall stand in the way of my final coup!"

He replaced the handset and turned to his niece.

"Roma—action," he rasped. "X will concentrate all his attentions on this cottage! He may even recourse to police help, having all roads blocked. All his helpers will be out—"

"And you'll be caught!" burst out Gaye defiantly, her courage returning. "You'll never get away with this."

The Count turned his pale gaze on her.

"Do you think I'm a fool, girl? I am prepared for such an emergency. I shall beat X! Quick now, Roma!"

As he spoke his arm whipped round Gaye, the other hand coming over her mouth. She was lifted with amazing strength and Roma caught her legs. In vain she struggled; the Count's grasp was like iron.

She felt herself being borne out of the back door of the cottage, across the old-world garden. But hope did not fade—yet.

Surely the Count couldn't hope to get away with this kidnapping in broad daylight? Peter would be acting even now! Every car leading from the village would soon be stopped. The hunt would be up.

"Release her feet, Roma!"

Gaye suddenly found herself upright, still held by the Count. In amazement she realised that she had been carried into the small wood at

the back of the cottage—into a large, well-remembered clearing there.

"Now do you understand, Miss Leaman?"

Her eyes flicked round—and dismay engulfed her.

In the clearing stood a helicopter!

It was the machine the Count had used before in his sinister activities—and obviously it was to be the means of carrying her away, a helpless prisoner, to the Count's secret headquarters!

"I think I win," said the Count slowly. "Rescue for you is impossible—and within twenty-four hours I shall flood England with my forgeries—the greatest coup of all time will be under way! The Count wins—and Mr. X loses!"



## FLYING TO THE COUNT'S H.Q.

Above the low-lying, sun-tinged clouds purred the helicopter.

The Count himself was at the controls. In the second seat sat

Roma, while behind her, huddled despairingly in the short tail of the machine, was Gaye.

Suddenly Roma twisted in her seat and gazed at Gaye in malicious amusement.

"You might be interested to know we're well out over the sea," she said. "making for a little island off the Irish coast! Perhaps now you're regretting you ever meddled in this affair!"

Gaye forced herself to stare back defiantly at the beautiful girl with the strange green eyes.

"A rather unpleasant position for you, eh?" purred Roma, with a slow, hateful smile. "And there'll be no hope of rescue, I assure you. Our little island retreat is unsuspected. One large, rambling house, owned as far as anyone knows by a quiet recluse—"

—the Count!"

She laughed. The Count, who had been glancing through the open cabin window, slightly turned his head.

"There is no need to speak of the island, Roma," he said coldly. "Just watch the girl—she is clever!"

"But, Count, she can do nothing up here—"

"Do as I say, Roma!"

Roma's crimson lips drooped slightly, but she did not question.

Twisting in her seat, she fastened her green eyes on Gaye.

Gaye turned her head away, abruptly, she burst into sobs!

Knees drawn up, face buried in the handkerchief, her shoulders shook in great spasms.

Roma's crimson lips slowly twisted into a malicious smile.

"Well, well," she mocked softly. "Not quite so brave, eh? Just a snivelling school kid after all!"



Gaye choked, one hand fumbling nervously at her coat.

"What—what's going to happen to me?" she muttered quaveringly.

Roma laughed in pure enjoyment at seeing the breakdown of the girl who had so brilliantly tricked her in the past.

"That, my dear snivelling child," she jibed, "is a pleasure to come! Getting scared now, I see! Keep crying! I quite enjoy it!"

She lit one of her interminable gold-tipped cigarettes and leant back, relaxing. After a while, the amusement she got out of seeing Gaye crying began to pall and, despite the Count's order, she turned her gaze more frequently out of the cabin window.

At the controls the Count was constantly looking out of the other window, plotting his course, and ensuring that the helicopter was always hidden above the clouds.

Roma leant back, blowing slow smoke rings, smiling a little still. Perhaps she was thinking of the vast wealth in which she would soon share; perhaps her cold nature was still enjoying the breakdown of Gaye.

But—there were no tears in Gaye's eyes!

Rather did the masking handkerchief hide brown eyes that sparkled with tense excitement and hope!

For Gaye had been bluffing—bluffing to get attention away from herself. It had succeeded! The shaking hand, fumbling at her coat had, unseen, withdrawn her silver pencil and painstakingly, laboriously printed words on the white handkerchief!

As the helicopter that was taking her to virtual imprisonment roared on over the clouds, Gaye's deft hands were busy behind her knees.

At last the job was done—the four corners of the handkerchief knotted to the silver pencil, forming a crude parachute. And now for the last move in this daring, desperate effort to help Peter—perhaps to save herself.

Gaye flung herself forward. The handkerchief, bunched round the pencil, hurtled from her fingers—and out of the open window!

The Count saw and, too late, so did Roma.

"A handkerchief! It's floating down—through the clouds!" Round jerked the Count's head and Gaye courageously met his blazing stare.

"So—perhaps a message, eh? Very clever, Miss Leaman, but your trick will fail. The handkerchief will fall into the sea—will sink! No one will ever read your message."

"ANY news?"

In a large room that appeared to be a commonplace office, Peter Kirby abruptly stopped pacing as the door opened.

A tall, lean, swarthy-faced figure entered. He shook his head.

"None, senor. We can still make nothing of the coded message—and there is no news of the Senorita Leaman. You have been to the village yourself. In some very amazing way the Count spirited her away, unseen by any."

Peter nodded, and waved a hand towards a seat. X4—for the newcomer was Ricardo, the Italian—silently crossed.

There were other men in that room, men of varying ages and appearance—but each sworn to help Mr. X in the relentless battle against the Count. Silently they watched Peter and suddenly the secret agent smacked his hands together.

"Gentlemen, we've got to find the Count's headquarters!" he exclaimed. "You know why! His final plans are ready. Within twenty-four hours maybe—unless he is stopped—the whole country will be flooded by his forgeries. It may mean ruination for Britain. And apart from that—"

He paused, his rugged face working. "Apart from that he has in his hands as a hostage a very brave and clever girl who has rendered invaluable aid to our task. You know the

Count! He will sacrifice anything—anyone—to succeed—"

He snapped short and leapt to his desk as the phone shrilled. The silent watchers rose as he listened tensely, snapped a few words, then jammed back the handset, straightening with blazing eyes.

"That was X9," he rapped. "West coast. He contacted a fisherman who picked up a handkerchief out at sea that came down like a parachute! It had Gaye's initials on it—and a message!"

Exclamations rang out. Tension was in the air.

"The message, X?"

"Just—Island of Ireland. Recluse. I ought to have guessed—she was taken off in their helicopter!" grieved Peter. "But—bravo, Gaye! It gives us a chance! An island off Ireland. And, I see a meaning in the word recluse. We've got to trace that island—"

"And then," broke in Ricardo with a tigerish smile, "we mass raid it, eh, senor? We smash the Count and his gang!"

"No!" Peter said. "Gentlemen, I have told you. The Count holds Gaye Leaman—as a hostage. If we attempted a mass raid we could not do so without the Count having some warning, and that might mean—"

He did not finish. A silence fell. They knew what Peter meant.

"Then—what do we do?" asked one of the men.

"We try to trace the island," answered Peter. "If we succeed—," He paused. "I go to that island—alone—to get Gaye. Once that is done—we can mass raid the place and smash the Count!"



### CARL MENNIN'S STARTLING NEWS

The boom of waves, lashed by half a gale of wind, was in Gaye's ears as she stared unseeingly through the small stone window into the darkness of night.

The past eight hours had been like a hazy nightmare. Cramped in the confined space on the helicopter, attacked by air sickness, she had had but a hazy vision of all that had happened.

After flying for what seemed untold hours, they had come down through the dark, threatening storm clouds and landed.

With but a glimpse of bleak rocks and stunted bushes, she had been hustled from the helicopter into this huge, rambling stone building. It had been no surprise to her to find herself in the charge of the big, silent Mrs. Simon Brown. Undoubtedly many of the Count's men were on this lonely, wave-lashed island.

A small room with a heavy locked door high up in the building was her prison, and except for a simple meal brought by Mrs. Brown, she had been left alone with her anxious thoughts.

The only window commanded a limited view. The sea was close and in daylight armed men, patrolling, had often crossed her vision. The place was like a fortress.

"What's going to happen—what's going to happen?" For the hundredth time Gaye muttered the words, and for the hundredth time fought to keep her courage up. "Oh, Peter, if only—"

She turned quickly. The key had turned in the lock, and the door opened.

There, in the doorway, stood Roma Vadell and the Count.

Silently they stood looking at her, the Count slowly swinging the ebony cane he always carried.

"Miss Leaman, you will doubtless be interested to know that the game is nearly won! Within six hours I shall have triumphed! Perhaps you have heard the distant hum of machinery? That was the last run of my forgeries. Vast amounts of them will be packed aboard a fleet of fast boats in a secret cave on this island. By dawn the storm will have

abated—and then to deluge Britain with them!"

"You have forgotten Mr. X!" Gaye suddenly burst out spiritedly. "You haven't beaten him yet! He'll trace you—"

The Count interrupted with a cold laugh.

"Brave words, Miss Leaman—but futile and foolish words. X has not traced us yet! And supposing he suspects this island? How could he and his followers reach us in this storm? And also—his stare grew blank—"you are surely not forgetting, Miss Leaman, that we hold you. One sign of attack on this island, and—"

He paused, listening intently. Distant shouts from the night reached them above the boom of the breakers.

"What is that?" snapped the Count. "Something has happened!"

The three stood still, tensed. Gaye's heart was thudding madly all at once.

What was the meaning of those shouts? Were the Count's men already prepared to send off that cargo of forgeries—or, thrilling thought, had Peter located her?

But if he had, that surely meant he had been seen—perhaps captured!

In that moment Gaye caught in her breath. She did not think of her own perilous position, but of Peter—gay, brave Peter. If he were captured, what would happen to him?

"He'd go careful, because he knows I'm here," she thought frantically.

"That means he might risk being caught rather than start a battle. Oh, why did I let them capture me? But perhaps it isn't Peter. Could he have traced me so quickly?"

More shouts, then the pounding of footsteps in the building. The Count turned to the door and wrenched it open. A huge figure in a raincoat appeared, panting, in the passage.

Instantly Gaye recognised Carl Mennin.

"Count"—Mennin was wheezing for breath—"we spotted—a small rowing-boat—the waves hurled it on the rocks, smashing it. The oars were gone—no one inside. But this was lying on the seat!"

He jerked up his arm—and dangling from his fingers was a hand-knitted, brightly hued tie.

Silence—broken by a choking cry of horror from Gaye.

Only one person she knew who wore such ties, and about this one she had no doubts.

It was Peter's!

"Oh!" she whispered. "Oh, Peter! He—he—"

White as death, her voice trailed away. The Count gave her a flashing glance, then seized the tie.

"So!" he exclaimed. "So! Yes, Miss Leaman, I recognise it, too—and your reaction confirms it!"

He hurled the tie to the floor and laughed exultantly.

"The fool!" he cried. "He traced the island—perhaps through you, Miss Leaman—but he remembered my warning. He knew what would happen if he tried a mass attack, so he tried to gain my stronghold single-handed—and perished miserably in the storm!"

The Count laughed again. His icy reserve was thrown to the winds in his cold-blooded triumph.

"I win—win completely!" he exulted. "That fool X! Even had he beaten the storm, did he think to land unseen? Did he think—"

He snapped short, and a curious grey pallor crept into his cheeks.

"What—what is that?" he asked slowly.

They all heard it, and the strange sound hit Gaye like a blow, making her straighten, bringing an incredulous light to her widening eyes.

Above the roar of the waves there filtered through the window as if from a great distance a gay little tune.

Someone, somewhere out there in the storm-bound night, was whistling the opening bars of "John Peel"—the tune of Peter Kirby!

Is Peter alive after all? But even if he is, how can he possibly rescue Gaye? See next Friday's thrilling chapters.





# Her Holiday WITH LING MIN YO

By DORIS BROOKES

## THE BAFFLING JADE TABLET

WHILE staying at Puchow, in China, with her friend, Ling Min Yo, Maureen Carstairs met Wong, a mysterious young boatman whom the Lings believed to be chief of the river pirates.

From him she learnt that an organisation known as the Scarlet Dragon, whose leader was Ku Yi Tso, were working against the House of Ling.

Min Yo was kidnapped by Ku Yi Tso, but Wong and Maureen were blamed for her disappearance. Disguised as a Chinese maid, Maureen managed, however, to rescue her Chinese friend. The two girls hid in a barrow of hay pushed by Wong. But they had not moved far when Wong was stopped by Chang, a rascally servant employed by Ku.

"STOP!" With a feeling of dread Maureen heard that command ring out.

Beside her, under the piled-up hay, she felt Min Yo give a start and then lie motionless. In the minds of the two girls was the same fear:

Had they been seen? Did Chang suspect they were concealed in this large, cumbersome wheelbarrow?

"Stop! Stop, you clumsy fool!" Again Chang's voice rasped out, angrily this time, for he had to jump aside to avoid being run down. With the breeze filling out the little sail which was fitted to the barrow, Wong had difficulty in bringing the heavy contraption to a halt.

"A thousand pardons, master!" he quavered.

He stood there trembling—apparently a frightened coolie who was awed to confusion at being addressed by so important a personage as the high steward of the House of Ku. Wong played his part to perfection, knowing that the slightest slip would betray not only himself but the two girls as well.

"Take more care in future, fool!" Chang said angrily. "Now listen well. I seek two girls who have given offence to the mighty Ku himself. They came this way. Have you seen them?"

Maureen and Min Yo, huddled close together beneath the hay, lay utterly still, hardly daring to breathe. But their fears had been allayed slightly. Evidently Chang did not suspect. If only Wong could bluff him—

"My poor eyes grow dim, master, and in the gathering darkness I am as one blind," Wong replied in a whining voice.

Chang scowled uneasily. Terrible would be the wrath of Ku Yi Tso at the escape of the prisoner, and Chang would have to bear the brunt of that wrath. Chang was a frightened man, knowing the penalty that must be paid by those who failed in the service of the Scarlet Dragon.

"Miserable, useless one!" he raged, and then peered suspiciously at the

disguised Wong. "If your eyes are dim, how is it that you are still in the fields after sunset?"

And suddenly he prodded at the hay with a stick he carried.

Not by the twitch of a muscle did Wong betray the tension he felt.

The stick actually lunged down within two inches of Maureen's arm. "Because of my eyes, master, I lose my way, I who am strange here," Wong said quaveringly.

Chang withdrew the stick, his suspicions lulled now. Without another word he strode away, followed by his companion—a lesser serving man who had remained silent, but watchful.

Min Yo moved as she heard their retreating footsteps.

"Don't show yourself yet—oh!" Maureen's hissing whisper ended in a gasp as she felt herself being bumped up and down.

Once more Wong was pushing the heavily laden barrow, panting with the strain of it, but breaking into a trot as he received assistance from the breeze as it billowed out the sail. Soon, however, he stopped again, in the shadows of a small copse.

"Come!" he whispered. "The sailbarrow has served its purpose. But not yet are we out of danger, for the search still goes on."

The hay heaved upwards as the two girls emerged into view, shaking the clinging stuff from their hair and clothes.

As Maureen jumped out of the barrow she saw the glow of many lanterns moving about in the gathering darkness.

A thrill of apprehension tingled through her, but before she could say anything Wong spoke again.

"Min Yo has rested and will be fresh again. You, too, Maureen. We must get back to the junk with all speed. Follow me!"

He led the way at a run, seemingly tireless, and Maureen marvelled at his powers of endurance. She felt Min Yo's hand steal into hers as they followed.

"He knows our names," the Chinese girl said wonderingly. "He speaks of a junk, as you did back at the tower, Maureen. Does he mean—Wong's junk?"

"Yes, Yo-Yo!" Min Yo caught in her breath. "Maureen, is—is he Wong?"

"Yes," Maureen said again. For a moment Min Yo's stride faltered. In the starlight her face was troubled and bewildered. Oh, what was she to make of all this—she who had had it drummed into her by her father that Wong was a villain and an enemy of the House of Ling?

Yet Wong had just helped her to escape from her captors. She, who had believed she had been kidnapped by Wong, knew now that she had been imprisoned in a tower belonging to Ku Yi Tso, her father's most trusted friend. She knew that Ku's men were chasing her, seeking to recapture her.

Maureen could read her friend's thoughts as if she had spoken them aloud. Comfortingly, reassuringly she squeezed that hand clasped in hers. Well might Min Yo be so bewildered, she reflected.

But soon Min Yo would understand everything. Once they were back on board the junk they would be able to examine the two sections of the jade tablet—that tablet which possessed the key to the secret of the whole mystery!

Wong was making for the creek now. Once or twice those glowing lanterns, like fireflies in the night, came dangerously close; but then Wong would freeze as into a statue, motioning the girls to do the same.

And so they eluded their pursuers. At last Maureen saw the gleam of water ahead; saw a dark shape looming against the starry sky, and knew that they had reached the creek where Wong's junk was moored among the willows.

Wong uttered a bird-like whistle. Shadowy figures appeared as if from nowhere; a plank was run out on to the bank, and down it padded one of those figures.

"Praise be that mighty Wong returns," said the man with a low bow. "What are your instructions?"

"Prepare to return to Puchow immediately," Wong said, and himself bowed as he waited for Maureen and Min Yo to step on board.

For a moment Min Yo hesitated, not yet able to forget all her fears and suspicions. Then, as she saw Maureen smile and nod, she trotted up the plank.

A minute later the junk was gliding away from the bank, and the lanterns of the searchers ashore receded into the mist that was creeping over the low-lying land from the river.

"Maureen, we return to the home of my ancestors," Min Yo said. "There will be much rejoicing."

"You will return. Yo-Yo. Maureen's blue eyes clouded. "But I'm not so sure about myself. I haven't told you yet, but I—I had to leave your home. You see, your father thinks I helped in your kidnapping, and he was going to hand me over to the authorities."

Min Yo stared incredulously, shocked by this revelation.

"Maureen! But—but this is terrible. My honourable father must be told the truth. I will tell him. He shall learn how brave you have been. How you and Wong have helped me to escape from the—the House of Ku." She paused, frowning bewilderedly. "Oh, what does it all mean? There is so much I do not understand. But at least I begin to see clearly that Wong is not the villain and enemy my father thinks him to be."

Wong gave a bow, his eyes lighting up with pleasure.

"Min Yo, daughter of the illustrious family of Ling, speaks words I have longed to hear," he said. "Come below to my cabin, and there, Min Yo, you will learn much that will amaze you."

They went down to Wong's sparsely furnished cabin, lit by a lamp suspended from a rafter in the ceiling.

And there Maureen began to tell



Min Yo everything, starting from the first day of her arrival in China when she had received that intriguing message from Wong.

Min Yo's pretty face was a study in varying expressions.

"Mauleen, if only I had known all this before," she cried. "But where is this jade tablet which you say will reveal all the mystery—"

"I have it here!" broke in Wong, crossing over from a chest which he had unlocked.

Maureen's eyes brightened with excitement as he laid the two halves of the jade tablet on the table. They fitted perfectly, and that peculiar humped bridge painted on the jade became revealed in its entirety. Graceful and picturesque it was, with a lot of ornamental scrollwork in the centre of the span. And something else became revealed, too.

Down the length of the tablet where it was joined, a number of hitherto broken, meaningless symbols fitted together, forming characters of the Chinese language.

"A message!" breathed Maureen. "The message that will tell us all—" began Wong, and then broke off.

"Wong, what is the matter?" He was staring at those characters in baffled frustration.

"Alas, Maureen, I cannot read them!" he exclaimed. "They are not of the Mandarin writing, but in a writing which is strange to me. Min Yo, can you read them?"

Maureen held her breath as the Chinese girl bent over the tablet. And then Min Yo, too, was sadly shaking her head.

"I am sorry," she said, "but I also am baffled!"



### WONG'S MISSION

A sense of bitter disappointment overwhelmed Maureen. She had been so sure that they were on the verge of a momentous

discovery; that the whole mystery would be unravelled and made clear. But now—

"Oh, Wong, what an awful blow!" "I am as disappointed as Maureen is," Wong said. "But let us not give way to despair. We are not yet beaten."

Maureen's hopes soared again at the note of confidence in his voice. Questioningly she looked at him.

"Many are the people faithful to Wong and the sign of the silver crescent!" he announced proudly. "From the humblest coolie to the most learned professor. And among them is one who is master of many writings. Li San will be able to read this message, and I will go to him, taking a copy of it."

"That's marvellous!" Maureen said eagerly. "When will you go?"

"I must go to-night, for I happen to know that Li San leaves for Shanghai early in the morning. And that means—" Wong paused, looking at Min Yo—"that we must delay our return to Puchow. We must anchor in a quiet stream of which I know, while I journey through the night to Luchin, some five miles away. You are agreeable, Min Yo? I realise you must be concerned for your illustrious father's anxiety, and I promise that a message shall be sent informing him that you are safe."

Min Yo expressed her relief and gratitude. She smiled. Already she was beginning to like Wong, now that she had met him.

"I wish to do anything I can to help," Min Yo replied simply. "Be assured, Wong, that my honourable father shall know the truth when I am restored to him."

"If all goes well, that will be by to-morrow," Wong said. "An hour from now I shall set out for Luchin, returning to the junk by dawn. Then we will sail for Puchow. I go on deck to give the necessary orders. And

then we will eat as I make a copy of the message."

With a bow he went out of the cabin. Maureen and Min Yo looked smilingly at each other.

"Wong—he is brave and strong," the Chinese girl said softly.

Maureen's blue eyes twinkled. "And awfully nice?" she teased.

Min Yo blushed and nodded. "I will copy the message for him," she volunteered, seating herself at the table. "Maureen, I am so intrigued. What can it mean? How can your destiny be linked with that of my family and Wong?"

"I'm as eager to know the answers as you are, Yo-Yo," smiled Maureen. "But we must have patience until to-morrow."

Min Yo busied herself copying out the Chinese characters, working with a brush and paints, while Maureen watched. They felt the junk give a sudden lurch, and knew that it was altering course.

Then Wong returned, smiling with pleasure as he saw what Min Yo was doing. She, who had hated and feared him, had now become a willing ally.

They had a meal, and then one of the crew appeared in the doorway of the cabin.

"We approach the appointed spot, O Wong."

Wong rose, picking up the copy of the message and thrusting it into his blouse. Maureen and Min Yo accompanied him as he went on deck.

A mist hung low over the water. Maureen strained her eyes through the darkness, but could see nothing. Not a light showed from the junk.

"We are still in Scarlet Dragon territory?" she asked.

"Yes; but do not fear. You will anchor for the night in a cave where you will not be seen. They still search, but not in this direction. They move north—"

Abruptly he broke off. Min Yo gave a little gasp.

"Luchin is to the north, Wong," she said.

Wong drew himself up, proud and confident.

"Wong will return by dawn with good news!" he said. "My cabin is yours. Sleep well while I am away. Farewell!"

"Good luck, Wong!" chorused the two girls.

The junk glided to a standstill. Wong leapt ashore, and a few moments later he had vanished into the mist and darkness.

Together the girls returned to the cabin. On deck, Wong's faithful followers took up guard positions.

The night passed peacefully, and the sun was well up when Maureen awoke.

"Goodness, I've overslept!" she exclaimed. "Nearly eight o'clock—Wong will have been back hours ago!"

Min Yo still slept, and Maureen did not disturb her. She rushed up on deck.

The crew were still at their posts. "Where is Wong?" she asked of the nearest man.

He bowed. His Oriental face was grave.

"Illustrious master has not returned!" he replied.



### THE JUNK CAPTURED

"He'll come, Yo-Yo! Wong has never failed yet!"

Maureen tried to infuse confidence into her voice as she stood

with Min Yo on the high poop of the junk, staring out through the opening of the cavern, her gaze fixed on the narrow ledge of rock along which Wong would have to come.

But it was an hour later, and Wong was long overdue.

The sun climbed higher into the cloudless sky. Another hour passed, and still Wong had not returned.

"Oh, goodness, what can have happened?" Now Maureen no longer tried to hide her anxiety. "I—I'm going out to see if I can spot him."

"I come with you, Maureen."

They announced their intention to the leader of the crew. He shook his head warningly.

"Illustrious master spoke of much danger," he said. "Enemies still search."

"We'll take care," Maureen said in Chinese. "Come on, Yo-Yo!"

They left the junk, glad of the chance to stretch their legs. Making their way along that narrow ledge, they emerged into full daylight and climbed the rocky bank which led up the side of the cavern.

Cautiously, Maureen peered over a large boulder.

"Which would be the direction for Luchin?"

Min Yo took her bearings from the sun.

"Over there," she said, pointing. "Luchin is famous for its leaning pagoda of seventeen tiers, five miles away to the north. We would be able to see it but for those trees ahead!"

"Then let's go as far as the trees."

In their desperate anxiety for Wong they recklessly ignored their own danger, well though they realised that the search for them would be relentlessly continued.

At all costs would Ku Yi Tso want Min Yo to be recaptured. Her escape, if she succeeded in getting back to Puchow, would mean his exposure.

The trees were farther away than they had imagined—distances were deceptive in the clear atmosphere—but at last they reached them.

"There is the pagoda!" Min Yo exclaimed, pointing.

It stood on the skyline, beyond the wide stretch of undulating rice-fields that stretched for miles around. And winding through those bright green fields was a ribbon of darker colour—the narrow, rutted road—if road it could be called—leading to Luchin.

Eagerly, hopefully, the two girls' gaze roved along it.

"I can't see any sign of him—" "Cra-a-ack! Crack!"

Maureen stopped, swinging round with a startled gasp. Rifle-shots had sounded from behind them, coming from the direction of the cavern.

Quickly she and Min Yo exchanged glances—alarmed, wondering.

"What was that? What's happening?" Maureen cried. "Come on!"

They went rushing back towards the cavern. They had covered half the distance when suddenly Maureen went diving into a hollow, dragging Min Yo with her.

The short burst of rifle-shots had ended. There had been shouts—and now there was silence—an ominous, foreboding silence.

"Look!" Maureen hissed in apprehension. "It's the Scarlet Dragon! They've captured the crew of the junk!"

Peering over the edge of the hollow, she saw the four members of the crew being dragged roughly along the bank in the grip of half a dozen men. Then the junk itself drifted into view, and other men were boarding it. Still other men were concealing themselves in the surrounding rocks.

"Don't let them see you, Yo-Yo!" Maureen panted frantically. "We'd have been captured if we'd still been on board—Oh, good goodness! Do you realise what this means—"

"Maureen! The jade tablet!" Min Yo exclaimed. "They will have found it!"

"No. I've got the tablet here in my handbag. I wasn't thinking of that. It's a trap. They're waiting for Wong to return—waiting for us. We're stranded, Yo-Yo—stranded!"

Min Yo's face paled. In horror she looked at her friend.

"What are we to do, Maureen?" she asked in a quivering voice.

You will read very exciting developments in next Friday's fine instalment



# The RIDDLE of the SEVEN SISTERS

## ANGELA DISAPPEARS

By  
PETER  
LANGLEY

"WHAT a glorious place this is!" June Gaynor, the attractive young niece and assistant of Noel Raymond, the well-known detective, looked blissfully around her.

Noel and June were working for a Hollywood film company, acting as advisers on a film that was to feature Scotland Yard. But for a week they were on holiday, guests of the wealthy Mr. van Kuyser, at his luxurious seaside home on the Californian coast.

June was lying on the beach, idly studying the beautiful coastline. A mile out at sea she could make out a small island—Pirates' Island, as it was called. It was owned by Mr. van Kuyser, and he had taken Noel and his other guests out in his sleek cabin cruiser to visit the place.

"I wonder how Angela is getting on with her painting?" thought June suddenly. "I'll stroll over the cliffs and find her."

Angela Fielding was another of the guests, a pretty, dark-haired girl whose hobby was painting. Just now she was alone in a small cove near by, busily painting a seascape.

June scrambled to her feet and set off up the beach. She climbed the cliffs, made her way across a headland, and found herself looking down into a tiny, secluded cove. There on the beach stood an artist's easel, bearing a canvas. A small folding stool was beside it, and a litter of paints and brushes. But of the young artist there was no sign.

A frown crossed June's attractive face.

"That's queer," she murmured. "Where on earth has Angela got to?"

She slithered down a steep path into the cove, and made her way across to the deserted easel. A half-finished painting occupied the canvas, beautifully done.

June's quick eyes saw that the paint on the canvas was still very fresh and wet. So Angela had not been gone long. But why had she gone off—and where?

Puzzled, June walked up and down the cove, searching fruitlessly, and then turned her attention to the great rocks littering the foot of the cliffs.

Her back was turned to the easel, and for some minutes she searched industriously, but still without result.

"I do hope nothing's happened to Angela—"

She broke off with a gasp of sheer amazement, gazing across the sands at the artist's gear.

The folding stool was now occupied. A pretty girl was sitting there, painting away as though she'd never left it!

"Angela!" June cried. The girl looked up, startled, and then smiled as June came running from the rocks towards her.

"Angela! Where have you been? I've been searching everywhere," June called.

Angela seemed to hesitate. "I— Oh, why, I— I've been down among the rocks at the water's edge," she replied. "I wanted to see how the cove looked from a different angle."

June looked at her narrowly. "I see," she said slowly. But her brain was racing. June

had searched near those rocks, and seen no sign of Angela, and no sign of her footprints in the sand.

"Hallo, here comes the cabin cruiser, back from Pirates' Island!" went on Angela quickly, as if wishing to change the subject. "It must be time for dinner."

The sleek cabin cruiser was just grounding at the water's edge, crowded with chattering holiday-makers. June saw a familiar athletic figure leaping ashore.

"Nunky!" she cried, and ran down to meet him.

As she got closer, she saw that her famous uncle was looking worried. Behind him came Mr. van Kuyser himself, his face grim. The other guests, still in the boat, were all obviously anxious and upset.

"June," said Noel, as they met, "we've just discovered something on Pirates' Island. There's been another robbery!"

June caught her breath. "The— the Seven Sisters?"— she asked.

Noel nodded. "The fifth Sister has disappeared— since this morning!" he answered quietly.

June's eyes widened. There was a small house on the island, and Mr. van Kuyser had turned it into a museum to hold the treasures he had collected from all parts of the world. Each day he spent a few hours cataloguing them.

In the collection was a set of priceless Chinese figures, carved in jade, and known as the Seven Sisters. But since the guests had arrived at Mr. van Kuyser's home, those figures had been disappearing, one by one!

Four had already vanished since Noel and June's arrival, with no clue to show what had become of them. The baffling thing about the disappearances was that no one could possibly approach or leave the small, bare island without being seen from the mainland—yet no one had been seen!

Every morning at ten o'clock, Mr. van Kuyser set out in his cabin cruiser to work on his cataloguing, and again at four in the afternoon. At his morning visit, everything was normal. In the afternoon, another priceless statuette had vanished without trace!

"I can't understand it," broke in their host, his kindly face lined with worry. "Mr. West, my secretary, and I have done everything we possibly could to prevent the thefts, locking up the museum, keeping a watch on the island, informing the police and the coastguards. But it's no good. The Seven Sisters are vanishing one by one into thin air!"

Noel was looking thoughtful. The case had stirred his professional interest.

"Is there anyone you suspect of these robberies, Mr. van Kuyser?" he asked.

His host hesitated for a moment before replying.

"I guess there's only one person I can think of who might want to rob me," he said slowly. "That's young Roy Taylor, who used to be my chauffeur here. I had to fire him a month ago, when I learned he'd been forging my cheques. The police wanted to question him, but he bolted and hasn't been seen since."

Noel nodded briskly.

"Well, with your permission, June and I will make another trip to Pirates' Island—this time on our own—and make some further investigations," he said. "Ready, June?"

June nodded, her eyes glowing with excitement.

The two of them went aboard the cabin cruiser and set off for the lonely little island again, while the guests went in a chattering group up to Mr. van Kuyser's mansion.

June could not repress a tiny shiver as she stepped ashore on the deserted island. Friendly and inviting in the day-time, with many cheery holiday-makers swarming over it, it looked desolate and slightly sinister now that the sun was setting.

Noel led the way up to the house that served as a museum, and unlocked the door. Inside, the main room was crowded with gold and silver antiques, jewelled swords, beautiful native carvings, and other rare treasures from many lands. But the place of honour was occupied by seven small pedestals, arranged on a velvet-covered table.

Those pedestals normally contained the seven exquisitely fashioned jade statuettes that together were worth a king's ransom. But now five of them were bare! Only two statuettes remained!

"You see, June?" Noel said grimly. "Another one gone since this morning, vanished without trace. And yet—how could anyone come across the water without someone ashore seeing them? We've searched the island; it doesn't take five minutes. But there wasn't a clue to be found. It's as though there were an invisible man in our midst."

"It—it's uncanny, 'uncle," whispered June uneasily. Then she started forward. "What is it? What have you found?"

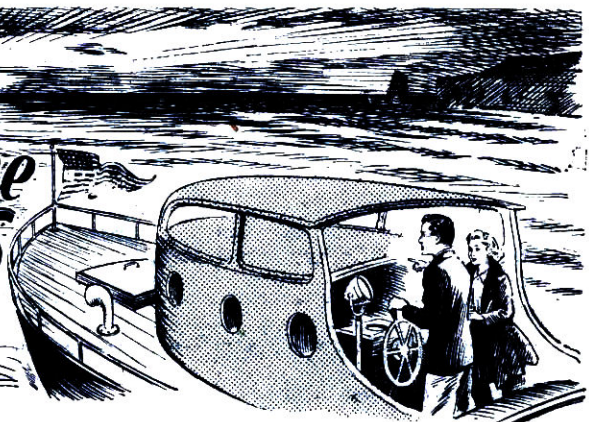
Noel had stooped swiftly and picked up something that lay on the floor beneath the table bearing the pedestals.

"A powder compact!" he exclaimed. "And look, June, it's got some initials inside the lid. I can just make them out—A. F."

"A. F.!"

The shocked cry came from June. "Angela Fielding! It must be her compact!" she gasped. "But, nunky, it can't be! Angela was painting on the beach all the morning. I saw her myself, just before you got back with the others—"

June's voice trailed away. She had just remembered Angela's strange





disappearance from the little cove. Could the young artist somehow have slipped across to the island and committed this latest robbery? Noel's youthful assistant shook her head impatiently. She could never believe that of Angela!

Noel was slipping the compact into his pocket, having carefully wrapped it in a handkerchief.

"We'd better be getting back," he said. "I don't think there's any more to be learnt here."

They were both quiet on the journey back, puzzling over the strange affair. As they walked towards the mansion, snatches of conversation floated out from the open windows. Evidently dinner was being served to the house party.

Suddenly Noel stopped dead.

"What is it, nunky?" June asked inquiringly.

"See that first floor window up there—the one that's open?" Noel said tensely. "That's Angela Fielding's room, if I'm not mistaken. And that's her swim-suit hanging over the sill to dry."

"Well, what of it?" asked June in surprise.

"Why should Angela's swim-suit be wet if she hasn't been in the water to-day?" asked the young detective. "You told me she'd been painting on the beach all day."

June caught her breath.

"Then—then she must have been out swimming when I was searching for her!" she whispered, almost to herself. "Uncle Noel, it can only mean one thing. She—she swam out to the island! Angela must be the thief!"



### NOEL'S SEARCH-LIGHT SURPRISE

"Mr. Raymond, will you and June accompany me to Pirates' Island this morning? I want to make sure that everything's all

right."

Mr. van Kuyser looked anxiously at Noel and his niece as he scrambled aboard the cabin cruiser. It was the following morning, and no further developments had taken place. Noel had told June not to say anything of their suspicions to Angela Fielding, and that young person had kept very much to herself since the previous evening.

When Noel and June had settled themselves in the tiny cabin, the boat sped away across that mile of smooth water, and they landed on the island. None of his treasures had been touched since the previous day, and Mr. van Kuyser breathed a sigh of relief.

But he very carefully padlocked and sealed the door of the museum before leaving it, watched by Noel and June. The two remaining statuettes of the Seven Sisters should be safe enough now!

For the rest of that day, the holiday-makers sun-bathed on the beach, directly opposite the island, or swam in the blue waters. Noel and June had a secret arrangement to keep the island in sight the whole time, taking it in turns, so that there was never the slightest chance of anyone landing on Pirates' Island without being observed. But nobody attempted to go near the island.

At four in the afternoon, Mr. van Kuyser paid his usual second visit, again accompanied by Noel and June.

They strode up to the cottage door, with their host leading the way. Then, as he came within a few yards of the door, a gasp broke from his lips.

"Mr. Raymond—look! The seals! They've been broken since this morning!" he shouted. "Someone has been here again!"

Noel broke into a run. It was true! The door had been forced, and the padlock wrenched away. He thrust the door open and dashed inside the treasure chamber. Then he halted, breathing hard.

Another of the pedestals was empty! The sixth of the Seven Sisters had vanished without a trace!

## BECOME A TREASURE-SEEKER

There's no need to sail away to some far off desert isle. You can find treasure in your own home—treasure in the form of waste paper and cardboard that is urgently needed in the great campaign to bring back prosperity to Britain.

Waste paper can not only be turned into newspaper necessary in order to produce the GIRLS' CRYSTAL, but it can also be turned into a hundred and one articles required in the export drive.

So save every scrap you can. Hunt in the attic; explore the cupboard under the stairs; ask your mother if you can turn out the sideboard drawers.

Noel's eyes narrowed grimly as he took in the scene. His thoughts were in a whirl. He knew, beyond any doubt, that no one could possibly have left the mainland and landed on the island since the museum door was sealed that morning, for he and June had had the place under observation the whole time.

Could anybody be in hiding on the island?

With a sharp word to the others not to move, he sprinted outside and combed the ground thoroughly. There were patches of undergrowth and a few trees about, but no sign of any other living thing!

Noel's eyes gleamed. He ran back to the cabin cruiser and fetched some odds and ends from it. Then, for a few minutes, he was busy making certain preparations. After that he called to Mr. van Kuyser and June.

"We may as well leave," he said. "The sixth Sister has been taken from the island without doubt. But when next the thief comes—and he will come, I'm certain, to make sure of getting the last of the statuettes—he'll fall into a trap!"

And more than that he would not say.

June went to bed that night tired and bewildered. What lay behind all this mystery? Was Angela Fielding really the thief? And if so, why had Uncle Noel done nothing about her?

She dropped off into an uneasy sleep, to be awakened in the early hours of the morning with a sudden start. She sat bolt upright as she realised what had awakened her.

Someone was throwing stones at her window. Then a voice called softly:

"June!"

It was Noel's voice. Scrambling out of bed, June dressed hastily. She left the house and found Noel on the gravel path outside, with Mr. van Kuyser.

"Look, June!" Noel said, and pointed out to sea, to the dim black shape that was Pirates' Island.

June stared, and her sleepiness vanished. A blinding white beam of light was shining from the island—pointing straight at Noel's bed-room window!

"There's someone on the island!" Noel rapped. "I've got the cabin cruiser ready. Come on!"

They tumbled into the boat, and the craft sped away.

It seemed ages before they reached the dark shores of Pirates' Island, but at last the boat grounded, and Noel sprang ashore, followed by June and Mr. van Kuyser.

They rushed up to the cottage door. But before they could reach it, it had opened and someone slipped out from the museum!

There was a startled cry as the intruder caught sight of Noel & Co. Then another figure emerged from the cottage!

The two of them dashed for the scanty shelter of the dark undergrowth. But it was hopeless to attempt hiding on Pirates' Island.

Noel and his host plunged into the undergrowth, grabbed at the fugitives, and forced them into the bril-

lant white light that still shone out from a powerful lamp concealed in the bushes.

June gave a cry.

"Angela! It's Angela Fielding!" she gasped.

"And, by thunder, young Roy Taylor—my ex-chauffeur!" roared Mr. van Kuyser angrily, as he recognised the other figure.

Angela, her eyes wide and frightened, shrank back. The young man caught her arm.

"Steady, sis!" he muttered. "I won't let them hurt you!"

Mr. van Kuyser looked from one to the other grimly.

"So you're brother and sister! I might have guessed—"

"Angela's my stepsister," the young man cut in defiantly. "And if you think we came to rob your museum, Mr. van Kuyser, you're wrong. We were in search of the real thief!"

"A likely story!" rapped the irate owner of Pirates' Island. "Mr. Raymond, I don't know how you managed to trap this precious pair, but I'm mighty grateful to you. I suppose young Taylor has been stealing the Seven Sisters to revenge himself because I sacked him."

For the first time Noel spoke.

"I fixed a wire across the doorway that would switch on a portable searchlight when the door was opened," he explained. "The searchlight was trained on my bed-room window, and so woke me up as soon as it came on. But I think you're making one mistake, Mr. van Kuyser, about Miss Fielding and her step-brother."

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Mr. van Kuyser, in surprise.

"Although my little trap caught them entering the museum to-night—they aren't the real thieves!" Noel said quietly.

A cry of gratitude came from Angela. Mr. van Kuyser shook his head angrily.

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "They were caught in the act. I'm contacting the police right away—"

He broke off. For Roy Taylor had suddenly broken away from the little group. With a shout, he plunged among the undergrowth.

Next second there was a splash in the sea, and they could just see the young man's bobbing head as he struck out for the mainland.

"That proves it, Raymond!" snapped Mr. van Kuyser. "He bolted because he knew he was bowled out. I'll have every policeman in the State on his trail. Meanwhile, we've got his precious stepsister. Young lady, you're under arrest!"

The girl shrank back as he grabbed at her wrist.

Noel shook his head grimly.

"I still say you're wrong," he announced. "Those two are innocent. And I'll prove it to you—by finding the real thief!"



### THE TRAIL OF POWDER

"Uncle Noel, are you serious about Angela and her stepbrother being innocent?"

June Gaynor asked the question as she cornered Noel in a quiet corner of Mr. van Kuyser's mansion. It was early the next day. Noel's sensational capture on the island had caused a tremendous stir of excitement among the guests.

Now Angela Fielding had been locked in her room to await the arrival of the police. Meanwhile, Mr. van Kuyser had telephoned to them a description of the runaway Roy Taylor, and a great hunt for the fugitive had started.

Noel, having made certain that the last of the Seven Sisters was still safe upon its pedestal, had disappeared on some mysterious errand of his own, and only now had June found him.

"Of course I was serious!" he said gravely, in answer to her question. "But here comes Mr. van Kuyser's secretary. Did you give the guests my message, Mr. West?"



Stephen West, the mild-mannered secretary, nodded.

"I've told each one that you want them all to visit the island once more this afternoon," he reported. "And I mentioned that you promised to unmask the real thief then."

"Good!" nodded Noel. "I'm certain that another attempt will be made to steal the last of the Seven Sisters during the day, but we shall see what happens."

And with that June had to be content. Some time later Mr. van Kuyser paid his morning visit to the island and came back with the news that all was well. The seventh statuette was still on its pedestal, and he had put a new lock on the museum door.

In a fever of impatience, June waited for the day to pass, wondering what Noel had up his sleeve. But her famous uncle was giving nothing away.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the guests assembled on the beach and boarded the cabin cruiser. Many pairs of eyes had been watching the strange little island that day, but no one had seen anything suspicious.

"Are we all here?" demanded Noel, as he climbed aboard.

"All except Mr. van Kuyser and his secretary," someone answered. "What's happened to them?"

And then there came a loud hail. The missing Mr. van Kuyser had suddenly appeared along the beach. With him were two other men. One wore the uniform of a State policeman.

The other was the fugitive chauffeur, Roy Taylor.

"We caught the young scoundrel," explained Mr. van Kuyser, as he dashed up to the waiting boat. "Found him hiding in a cave in the cliffs beyond the little cove. So you can save yourself the bother of going out to the island, Raymond. We've got both the thieves now."

Noel shook his head.

"I still want you all to come and have a look at the museum," he said gravely. "We'd better get the policeman to bring young Taylor along, too."

He turned to where his girl partner stood.

"Will you go along to Miss Fielding's room and ask her to join us," he said. "Also ask Mr. van Kuyser's secretary to come along."

June nodded, and went running back to the house. On inquiring for Stephen West, Mr. van Kuyser's secretary, she learnt that he had gone out on urgent business that morning and had not returned, so she mounted the stairs to Angela Fielding's room.

She found the girl seated on the bed, dabbing at her eyes and trying to stem her tears. It was obvious that she had just heard the news about her stepbrother, and, as June turned the key and entered, she leapt to her feet, to put an agitated hand on the girl detective's arm.

"Oh, it's not true—it's not true!" she blurted out. "Roy isn't a thief! It isn't he who's been stealing those statuettes."

June patted the girl's quivering fingers.

"I'm sure it isn't," she said softly. "And you mustn't worry too much. I've a feeling that everything's going to come all right. Now, dry your eyes and come downstairs with me Uncle Noel's waiting for us. He wants us to accompany him to Pirates' Island."

"Pirates' Island!" Angela caught in her breath. "But—but why's he want us to go there?" she asked.

June shook her head. "I don't know, but I've an idea he hopes to establish the truth," she said, and gave the other girl's shoulder a soothing squeeze. "Come along," she bade, "and try to cheer up."

Drying her eyes, Angela followed the girl detective downstairs.

A few minutes later the overloaded boat set out on the short trip to Pirates' Island.

Many strange glances were directed at Noel during the journey. Mut-

tered questions passed between the guests. What was the sense in visiting the place again when the two culprits had been caught?

But Noel kept his own counsel, and June sensed that he had something dramatic up his sleeve.

At last the tiny strip of beach on Pirates' Island was reached, and everyone streamed ashore. With Noel leading the way, they went up to the locked museum.

"Guess you'll find that everything will be untouched, just as it was this morning—" Mr. van Kuyser was saying confidently.

Then, as he caught sight of the cottage door, his jaw dropped.

The new lock had been expertly wrenched off, and the door swung idly open!

There was a rush to get inside the museum. All eyes turned at once to the velvet-covered table on which stood the seven pedestals.

An incredulous cry went up from the party. For now the last of the pedestals was bare. The seventh of the Seven Sisters had vanished!

With an angry shout, Mr. van Kuyser swung round on Roy Taylor.

"You young scoundrel! How did you manage to get it?" he cried.

"Who's been here since this morning—you or that good-for-nothing step-sister of yours?"

"We know nothing about it, I tell you!" the young man retorted hotly. "You know perfectly well that Angela has been locked in her room all day, while I was hiding in that cave, waiting a chance to try to find the real thief—"

"One moment!" Noel cut in briskly. "Do you see something on the table by the seventh pedestal?"

They all looked, and then gasped. There was a faint but unmistakable trail of white powder close to the empty pedestal.

Noel whipped out a magnifying-glass, and with its aid began to follow the powder trail. From the velvet-covered table it led across the floor and out through the doorway.

Then it led away along the stony track that ran down to the tiny beach where the cabin cruiser lay moored. A breathless hush descended on the party. All eyes were intent upon Noel.

He followed the trail almost to the beach. Then it turned into some dense bushes. And from there it led down to the cabin cruiser itself.

Noel scrambled aboard the deserted vessel and went to the foredeck. There was a hatch on the deck, giving access to a compartment where ropes and lamps were stowed.

The young detective whipped up the hatch and stared down into the dark compartment.

"All right!" he rapped. "The game's up! You can come out of there!"

To the utter amazement of the watching guests on the beach, a man's head appeared in the open hatchway.

Then, as Noel stood guard, the man reluctantly climbed on to the foredeck, clutching in his arms—the last of the Seven Sisters!

"By thunder, it's my secretary, Stephen West!" shouted Mr. van Kuyser, his jaw dropping.

"And the real thief!" added Noel grimly. "He was the culprit all the time, but he slipped up when he made this final attempt to get the Seventh Sister. He didn't know that I'd hidden a tube of powder in the base of the statuette, so that a tell-tale trail was left when it was removed!"

"But, say, how on earth was he able to get on and off the island without being seen?" stuttered Mr. van Kuyser.

"Simple!" said Noel. "He stowed away in that compartment when you came out in the mornings, waited until you'd gone up to the museum, then slipped ashore and hid in the bushes. After you'd left the mainland he raided the museum and stole one of the Seven Sisters. In the afternoon he was waiting in the bushes when you landed.

"While you were on your way up to the cottage to make your second visit, he slipped to his hiding-place in the cabin cruiser again, and was taken back by you unawares."

Noel paused, staring grimly at the white-faced secretary.

"West was never missed, because he was supposed to be working most of the day in his room on your business notes. And in his room we shall doubtless find the rest of the missing statuettes."

"Great guns!" gasped Mr. van Kuyser. "It—it's amazing! But look here! What about young Taylor?"

"Young Taylor suspected West," said Noel, "so West faked some evidence to get him dismissed."

"Taylor came back to clear his name, hiding in that cave while his stepsister supplied him with food. That day, when she vanished from the cove where she was painting, she swam round from the cove to Roy's hideout, left him food in a water-proof package, and swam back again, slipping her dress on over her wet swim-suit. And that's really all there is to it."

June smiled happily at a radiant Angela Fielding.

"So now everything's fine!" she chuckled. "But why were you so sure that Angela was innocent, nunky?"

"You remember we found her powder compact in the museum?" Noel smiled. "When I examined it there were some fresh finger-prints on it—not Angela's. It showed that it had been planted there to incriminate Angela, but Stephen West was a bit too clever. For it all ended in him being caught himself!"

(End of this week's story.)

**THE CLUE OF THE MERMAID BRACELET** brings June to the fore in next Friday's detective story.

## THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

(Continued from page 61.)

Gerry stared at him coolly.

"Steady on, Dave! No need to snatch—even if we are interested in Tania's book!"

"I'm not the only one!" retorted Dave significantly, going a little red as the class murmured in some surprise at the scene. "Tania, I'm—I'm sorry about the book getting torn, but—"

"I should think so indeed, Dave!" cut in Mr. Barnard rather curtly. His keen eyes were watching the two boys shrewdly. "Understand, both of you, I want no squabbles."

He took the book from Dave's hand and turned to Tania. She was staring at the tattered volume in dismay.

"It's all right, Tania," Mr. Barnard smiled. "No real harm done. Just torn the spine of the book—"

He was interrupted by a surprised exclamation from Moyra Curtis.

"I say—look, sir! Something's fallen from the book!"

Everyone looked to where she pointed. On the floor lay a tightly folded piece of yellowed paper.

Tania's eyes widened with surprise and wonder.

"But that cannot be!" she cried. "For did not Mr. Barnard look through the book yesterday?"

Both Gerry and Dave had stepped forward, but Mr. Barnard was before them, bending and picking up the paper.

"It must have been behind the spine of the book," he said shrewdly. "This is a very interesting discovery indeed, Tania!"

He carefully unfolded and flattened out the piece of old paper. A whistle of excitement left his lips.

"Tania, come here!" he said. "Do you know what this is? It's a map—a picture of your island! And it may help us solve the mystery surrounding you!"

This is an exciting discovery. What will it lead to? Don't miss next week's chapters.



# THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 62.)

answer to Johnny's query as to what was wrong. "It's just a feeling I have about those papers and Vanessa."

"You mean we should keep guard outside his door until he returns?" asked Don. "Okay with me, Sally. Here—great snakes look!"

They had almost reached the professor's cabin now, when suddenly the door shot open. Out streaked a figure clad in a white macintosh, the hood pulled round its face. And in one hand it held a sealed envelope.

For one moment Sally stood transfixed. Then she gave a startled cry. "Don, look! That envelope must contain the answers to the examination questions! And that macintosh—oh, goodness, I'd know it anywhere. It's Dulcie's!"



## THE PROFESSOR'S DECISION

For seconds that seemed like hours the chums stood as if petrified, staring after that flying figure. While within them all rose a feeling of sick dismay. It was Dulcie's macintosh, no doubt of that. Was it possible, then, that Vanessa's original accusation had been true—that Dulcie was indeed a cheat?

Sally thrust that thought from her almost as soon as it came. No! It wasn't, it couldn't be true.

"After her!" rapped Sally. But the flying figure had got a good start. As the chums dashed after her she began to ascend the stairs. They gave a shout as they pelted after her. It was a shout that seemed to fill the unknown thief with panic. As if in utter desperation she looked hunted by this way and that, then, with a strangled cry leapt across the deck. Rushing to the rail, she flung the sealed envelope into the sea, then turned and quickly disappeared down another companionway.

"Well, of all the queer things to do," muttered Don bewilderedly, peering over the rail. "Lost her nerve, I suppose."

"Yes," agreed Sally, a queer note in her voice, "looks like it. I think we'd better find the professor and—"

"You're looking for me, Sally?" Professor Willard himself emerged from one of the companionways, rather puzzledly holding a macintosh in his hand. "Strange," he murmured. "Somebody hurried past me and dropped this almost at my feet. Dulcie Ransome," he added, peering at the name tape inside the hood. "Now what on earth—Sally," he added sharply, noticing the apprehensive looks that passed between the chums, "what is it? What have you to tell me?"

Somewhat haltingly Sally told the professor what they had seen.

"But I'm sure it wasn't Dulcie," she added entreatingly. "Quite sure!"

"How can you be sure," remarked the professor sharply, "when you admit you did not see her face? H'm! Wait," he added, as Sally made to speak again. "First we will check and make sure the answers to the examination questions were taken."

It took only a few moments to make certain that the answers were indeed missing. Furiously angry as he was, there was also a deeply hurt look in the professor's face as he rejoined Sally & Co., and the other students who, sensing something was wrong, had crowded around them. At the back of the crowd, Sally noticed, was Vanessa, arm-in-arm with Carmentia.

"Where is Dulcie?" asked Professor Willard grimly.

"I'm—I'm here," said Dulcie's voice as she stepped forward into the light, a number of books under her arm.

"And may I ask where you have been?" asked the professor sternly.

"Why, yes—I've been in a corner of the reading-room swotting," replied Dulcie. "Is anything wrong?"

"Miss Impudence!" came Alec Burt's sneering voice.

There was a murmur from the students, most of whom were looking suspiciously at Dulcie. But before the professor could question her further Sally stepped forward.

"Before you ask any more questions, sir," she said quietly, "may I have a few words with you privately?" Professor Willard looked surprised, then he nodded.

"Very well, Sally. If it has to do with this unpleasant business."

He listened to Sally in silence, then with a rather a strange look on his face returned to the wondering students.

"I think," he said to everyone's stupefaction, "that we need probe no further into this matter. Sally assures me that the culprit had no opportunity whatever of looking at the stolen answers before she threw them overboard. In those circumstances I have decided that the same questions will stand. There will be no alteration."

And he marched off, while Sally, ignoring the looks of surprise on the faces of her chums, took the puzzled, apprehensive Dulcie's arm and drew her off to the café.

"COME on, Dulcie, run through it just once more." Sally's tone was brightly encouraging, but Dulcie, with a sigh of despair, shook her head.

"I'm sorry," she apologised, "but I can't concentrate—really, I can't. And what's the good of rehearsing anyway, when I may not take part in the concert? When I may not even be a pupil here much longer," she added with a little sob.

It was the following afternoon. The examination had been over for some time, and since Dulcie was a mass of nervous tension, the chums had tried to divert her thoughts by rehearsing for the concert.

But it was no good. Indeed, Sally & Co. themselves were not in much better shape. Every few moments one or other of them would dart towards the door, to see if there was any sign of the professor making his way towards the lounge where the result was to be announced.

But despite their frequent excursions, they felt a terrific shock when Edgar T. Phineas, the head prefect, appeared in the doorway.

"Wanted in the lounge," he said briefly. "Exam results."

Anxiously Dulcie and Sally & Co. made their way to the lounge. A large crowd was gathered there, and well in front stood a very confident-looking Vanessa, Miss Edmunds by her side. The girl turned a mocking glance upon Dulcie as she entered, but Dulcie was too nervous to notice anyone but the professor. With dilated eyes she stared at the paper in his hand.

"I see we are all here," the headmaster said, "so I will not keep you in suspense any longer over the name of the winner of the examination this morning." He paused, his eyes roving over the assembled crowd. "I must say that this result has come as a great surprise to me—a very great surprise. One of the two entrants turned in a perfect paper—gave the correct answer to every question." He held up his hand to quell the buzz that arose, while Sally, holding Dulcie's arm, saw her clasp her hands together in an agony of apprehension. "The name of that entrant is Vanessa Edmunds."

It was fortunate that Sally was holding Dulcie's arm, otherwise she would surely have fallen. She closed

her eyes, swayed, while from all around rose an excited buzz.

Sally saw Vanessa, her face alight with glee; saw her aunt, Miss Edmunds, gazing around in triumph. Then from Carmentia & Co. rose the sound of cheering. But quickly Professor Willard held up his hand, and now there was an ironical look in his eyes.

"He's never going to say anything about Dulcie in front of all this crowd," muttered Fay agonisedly.

"Shush!" warned Sally. "Listen!"

"Miss Edmunds," continued the professor, as though there had been no interruption in his speech, "gave correct answers to all questions on the original papers, the answers to which were stolen last night. I must confess here that I have been guilty of a little subterfuge." He cleared his throat, a steely look coming into his eyes. "At Miss Warner's suggestion I allowed both candidates to believe that the original papers would stand, as it seemed that the thief threw the answers overboard without looking at them. But, as Miss Warner pointed out, this may have been a trick. A fake envelope could have been thrown overboard and the answers retained."

"An almost deafening buzz went up then, and there was a grating of necks to look at Sally. As for Dulcie, she slowly raised her head, a look of puzzlement replacing the despair in her eyes.

"Apparently she was right for unknown to the candidates, I altered every question very slightly, so that a casual glance would mistake them for the original questions."

The headmaster's tone grew positively grim now. In front of the crowd Vanessa began to fidget, to turn from red to white, to look hunted around.

"Miss Edmunds," he continued, fixing a gimlet eye on that girl, "filled in every question on the revised paper with the answer to the original paper. Which means that on the real examination paper Vanessa Edmunds answered every single question incorrectly. I leave you all," he added in a disgusted tone, "to draw your own conclusions. And at the same time I am happy to announce that Dulcie Ransome is proved once and for all to be the rightful winner of the scholarship."

A rousing cheer went up at that. Half-laughing, half-crying, Dulcie stood with tears pouring down her face while her eyes danced with delight. Whilst, unnoticed, Vanessa vanished from the lounge, pursued by her livid-looking aunt.

And it was some half-hour later, when Dulcie was still being congratulated, that she returned.

"I owe you a very deep apology, my dear," she said in her forthright way. "My niece has confessed that she lied to me all the way through. At the first opportunity I shall send her home in disgrace. Meantime, about this concert—"

"Yes, Miss Edmunds?" asked Sally demurely.

"Give me a dozen tickets—and I'll see that all my friends come to make it a success. As for you, Dulcie, in an effort to make up for some of the unhappiness my wretched niece has caused you, I shall make it my business to help you in every possible way in your future musical career. No, don't thank me," she added in her abrupt way. "I'm all for justice—and we've got Sally to thank for the fact that you weren't made a victim of a most terrible injustice. I don't know how to repay you, my dear."

"The only repayment I want is a smashing successful concert," laughed Sally. "And I believe I'm going to have just that."

And Sally was right.

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL will contain another enthralling story featuring Sally and her chums.